



External Complaints Policy

Effective Date: 22.06.2020

Version	Purpose	Owner	Approval	Int / Ext
1.	New draft policy	PR		Int
2.	Board approval		22.06.2020	Ext
3.	2020 version	PR		Int
3.1	Annual review 2021. No changes proposed.			Int
3.2	Annual review 2022. Rebranded to focus scope onto external complaints to avoid overlap with internal complaints (addressed by Grievance/HR Policy)	PR	16.1.2023 - Board Approval	Ext
4	Review - insert ECC VCS requirements	PR	20.11.23 board	Ext

Next Review: 1st August 2024

Purpose

The national Code of Governance for the Voluntary and Community Sector in June 2005 said that charities should have a procedure for dealing with feedback and complaints from stakeholders, staff, volunteers and the public. Even the smallest charities were advised to set up fair ways of dealing with complaints and disputes and to make sure everyone knows about the procedures and how to use them.

This policy sets out how HHE meets that requirement in respect of complaints from external parties as explained below.

Overall policy statement

Hearing Help Essex (HHE) views complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve for the future, as well as a chance to put things right for the person (or organisation) that has made the complaint.

Our policy is:

- To provide a fair complaints procedure which is clear and easy to use for anyone wishing to make a complaint
- To publicise the existence of our complaints procedure so that people know how to contact us to make a complaint
- To make sure everyone at HHE knows what to do if a complaint is received
- To make sure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way
- To make sure that complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are repaired
- To gather information which helps us to improve what we do

Scope

For this purpose, a complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect of HHE – encompassing both our fund raising and our hearing assistance work – received from a party other than an employee, volunteer, or trustee. Therefore, this policy's scope includes complaints received from: service users; other members of the public; vendors and tradespeople; funders or donors.

Complaints from internal parties i.e., employees, volunteers or trustees are addressed under the Internal Complaints & Grievances section of our Human Resources Policy.

Audience

This policy will be shared with all staff and volunteers and will also be made available on the HHE website and to any complainant as part of the complaint handling process.

Policy statements

Publicised Contact Details for Complaints

Written complaints may be sent to HHE at **Suite 2, 158 Moulsham Street, Chelmsford, CM2 0LD** or by e-mail at **info@hearinghelpessex.org.uk**. Verbal complaints may be made by phone to **01245 496347** or in person to any of HHE's staff or trustees at the same address as above or at any of our events.

Receiving Complaints

Complaints may arrive through channels publicised for that purpose or through any other contact details or opportunities the complainant may have, such as social media. Complaints received by telephone or in person need to be recorded. Where it is unclear whether a communication is a concern or a complaint, it is generally best to err on the side of caution and treat it as a complaint.

The person who receives a phone or in person complaint should:

- Write down the facts of the complaint
- Take the complainant's name, address and telephone number
- Note down the relationship of the complainant to HHE, e.g., donor, sponsor, service user relative
- Tell the complainant that we have a complaints procedure
- Tell the complainant what will happen next and how long it will take
- Where appropriate, ask the complainant to send a written account by post or by email so that the complaint is recorded in the complainant's own words

Resolving Complaints

Stage One

In many cases, a complaint is best resolved by the person responsible for the issue being complained about. If the complaint has been received by that person, they may be able to resolve it swiftly and should do so if possible and appropriate. Whether or not the complaint has been resolved, the complaint information should be passed to the HHE CEO within one business day.

On receiving the complaint, the CEO records it in the Complaints Logbook. If it has not already been resolved, they delegate an appropriate person to investigate it and to take appropriate action. If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a fair opportunity to respond. If the complaint relates to the CEO, it is passed directly to the Chair of the Board of trustees, or their alternate.

Complaints should be acknowledged by the person handling the complaint within five working days. The acknowledgement should say who is dealing with the complaint and when the person complaining can expect a reply. A copy of this complaint's procedure should be attached. Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within a month. If this is not possible because for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given.

Whether the complaint is justified or not, the reply to the complainant should describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

Stage Two

If the complainant feels that the problem has not been satisfactorily resolved at Stage One, they can request that the complaint is reviewed at Board level.

At this stage, the complaint will be passed to the Board of Trustees. The request for Board level review should be acknowledged within five working days of receiving it. The acknowledgement should say who will deal with the case and when the complainant can expect a reply.

The Board of Trustees may investigate the facts of the case themselves or delegate a suitably senior person to do so. This may involve reviewing the paperwork of the case and speaking with the person who dealt with the complaint at Stage One. The person who dealt with the original complaint at Stage One should be kept informed of what is happening.

If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a further opportunity to respond. Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within a month. If this is not possible because for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given. Whether the complaint is upheld or not, the reply to the complainant should describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint. The decision taken at this stage is final, unless the Board decides it is appropriate to seek external assistance with resolution.

External Stage

As HHE is a registered charity, the complainant can complain to the Charity Commission at any stage. Information about the kind of complaints the Charity Commission can involve itself in is set out in their publication Complaints about Charities which can be found on their website at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-charities/complaints-about-charities>.

Complaints about HHE's fundraising activity can also be addressed to the Fundraising Regulator. Information in that regard can be found at <https://www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-07/Complaints-handling-guidance.pdf>

Variation of the Complaints Procedure

The Board may vary the procedure for good reason. This may be necessary to avoid a conflict of interest, for example, a complaint about a Chair or trustee should not also have the Chair and/or trustee involved as a person leading a Stage Two review.

ECC VCS Contract Service Complaints

In the event of a complaint arising in relation to a service provided under HHE's contract with Essex County Council for sensory support we should ensure that:

- i) our response includes that the service is being provided by HHE on behalf of the Council, and;
- ii) in the event that any Service User or member of the general public is dissatisfied with the manner in which or the standard to which the service is being provided we should state that they may (after exhausting HHE's complaints procedure above) make a formal complaint to the council, and provide the address and telephone number of the council's Authorised Representative.

Reporting requirements

All complaints and their resolution will be reported at the next meeting of the Board of trustees, this will include a nil report if there are no complaints in that period.

Complaints are also reviewed annually to identify any overall trends that may indicate a need to take further action.

Related documents

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/284733/rs11text.pdf

<https://www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-07/Complaints-handling-guidance.pdf>