

Complaints and Feedback Policy

This policy applies to service users of Parenting Special Children (PSC) as well as to volunteers who wish to raise a concern or make a complaint.

Service users have the right to choose where, when, how and with whom in the organisation they will raise concerns about how they have been treated. Any staff member or trustee who is approached should be aware that the person may have no idea that there is a procedure for handling complaints. The initial response should therefore be:

- to listen and clarify the issues at stake without sounding bureaucratic or formal
- explain that PSC does want to hear their views and that in the interests of fair play a procedure has been set up to make sure people's complaints are dealt with properly. A copy of this policy outlining PSC's complaints procedure and how to access it should be provided if it hasn't already.
- establish whether or not the person wants to use the procedure (in which case proceed to Stage 1).

It is important to recognise that it is at this stage some concerns or complaints may be resolved. Depending on the gravity of the complaint, it may be that the simple act of listening is satisfaction enough for the complainant. Alternatively, it may be that a basic misunderstanding about what PSC can offer is cleared up. If, having talked through their concern, the person is still unhappy then every encouragement to move to Stage 1 should be given. It is clear, however, that PSC cannot formally take up the complaint if the person does not wish to take it further.

Stages of the Complaints Procedure

There are three stages in the complaints procedure, and each complaint should start at the first stage and progress through until it has been resolved. However, the CEO and Chair together have the discretion to bypass stages if they both consider it warranted.

If any formal complaints are made about the CEO or a trustee of PSC, the process should start at stage 2, with the Chair of Trustees of PSC performing the role normally undertaken by the CEO.

If any formal complaints are made about the Chair of Trustees PSC, the process should start at stage 2, but with both the CEO and another nominated trustee performing the role normally undertaken by the CEO.

Stage 1 – Senior staff level

A stage 1 complaint begins as soon as PSC has received notification of it. The staff member who receives the complaint should immediately notify the CEO. The CEO will pass the complaint onto the staff member with responsibility for the sub-section of PSC which is the subject of the complaint.

The CEO has the discretion to refer the investigation of the complaint to another appropriate member of staff, including himself/herself. This will particularly be the case if the complainant perceives the investigating staff member to be inappropriate, or the complaint is about conduct of the person responsible for this stage of the investigation.

The investigating member of staff has responsibility for:

- Investigating the complaint thoroughly
- Responding to the complainant within 10 working days
- Ensuring that an accurate record of the nature and progress of the complaint is kept. This should be in writing and agreed by the complainant.
- Storing the record of the complaint securely either electronically on Charitylog or in a locked cabinet in the PSC office.

Investigating the complaint

Firstly, the staff member responsible will investigate the complaint. This should involve finding out what happened, why it happened and what can be done now. It can involve talking to staff, looking at files and records, checking whether policies and procedures were followed or were inadequate, and drafting a response to the complainant.

This response should address the points raised by the complaint. It will explain whether PSC felt the complaint to be justified or not. Even if was not justified the complaint will still be investigated because the complainant had felt aggrieved. It will detail what investigation was undertaken and the outcome of this. The response should also detail any remedial action to be taken by PSC, and offer an apology where appropriate.

Satisfaction

At each stage in the process, the person responding to the complainant should ask them to state whether they are satisfied with the response to their complaint or not. They should advise the complainant of the next stage in the procedure if they are not satisfied and wish to take the complaint further.

Right to be accompanied

At any stage of making a complaint, an individual has the right to the help of a friend or supporter in making his/her case. In particular, this includes the right to be accompanied to any meetings. The investigating member of staff should make sure that the complainant is aware of this right.

Stage 2 – Manager Level

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response at stage 1, they should then submit a stage 2 complaint, which will be responded to by the CEO. The complaint should be made in writing to the CEO or the Chair of Trustees as appropriate. The registration of a complaint at this level will

be acknowledged by correspondence on the same working day. It will then be the responsibility of the Manager to investigate the complaint and respond within ten working days.

The CEO must inform any staff, volunteers or trustees who are involved in the complaint that the complaint has progressed to stage 2 as soon as possible.

In investigating the complaint and responding to the complainant, the CEO should consider whether an apology is required, remedial action is necessary, any reprimand or disciplinary action may be necessary against any member of staff, and whether and changes need to be made to PSC's policies, practices and procedures.

Stage 3 - Complaints Panel

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response at stage 2, they should submit a stage 3 complaint. This should be in writing and addressed to the Chair of Trustees or the CEO, if the complaint is about the Chair of Trustees.

A complaints panel will be established, to which the complainant will be invited. The panel should meet within one month of the complaint reaching stage 3. The complaints panel will consist of three nominated trustees.

If the complainant wishes, they may request that they make their appeal to the Panel in person. They may bring a friend or supporter to help them put their case.

The role of the Chair is to ensure that the complaint is fully re-investigated and the response is not just a reproduction of previous responses. When the Panel has discussed the complaint they will respond to the complainant within 7 days.

Monitoring of complaints:

The CEO should regularly inform the Board of Trustees of the number, nature and outcome of any complaints. Complaints should be regarded as a source of learning and improvement.

It is PSC's policy to retain data relating to complaints for a maximum of 5 years. After such time any personal data will be anonymised but details of the nature of the complaint and any action taken will be retained for monitoring purposes.

A log of complaints will be kept securely in a locked cabinet in the PSC office so that any trends can be tracked.

Feedback should be provided to the trustees on the lessons learnt as a result of any complaints and state any changes they have made to prevent the problem recurring.

Associated PSC documents and policies

This policy is to be read in conjunction with the following PSC policies:

- Safeguarding policy
- Confidentiality policy
- Grievance policy and procedure
- Disciplinary policy and procedure
- Volunteer policy
- Whistleblowing policy

Resources used to draw up this policy

As well as the relevant legislation, this policy was drawn up with reference to the RVA Complaints and Feedback Policy.

Review of this policy

This policy will be reviewed by the PSC board of trustees every two years.

This policy was adopted by the trustees in July 2016 and reviewed in April 2019 and March 2022

Review date: March 2024