



THE CARES FAMILY

COMPLAINTS AND FEEDBACK POLICY

1. Introduction

The Cares Family always seeks to engage our neighbours, volunteers, partner organisations, funders and other stakeholders with kindness, professionalism and trust. We understand that without the support of those many partners we cannot achieve our mission.

However, we appreciate that there may be times when we do not meet our own high standards. It is therefore imperative that we have a process by which our neighbours and volunteers, members of the public, funders, partners or other stakeholders can communicate their complaints and feedback and be assured that these will be treated seriously and managed in a confidential, non-judgemental, timely and appropriate manner.

The Cares Family welcomes complaints and feedback on our programmes and other stakeholder engagements. We recognise that learning from these helps improve the quality of our work. We are also committed to supporting complainants and staff through the process. We recognise that making complaints or providing feedback is rarely easy, but it is valuable in helping us to get better.

2. Definitions and scope

This policy applies to all that The Cares Family does, in all of its constituent parts, and to all staff and Board members. Neighbours and volunteers can be both complainants and individuals against whom complaints can be made.

- A **complaint** is where someone tells us they are unhappy about the standards of our programmes, actions or lack of action by the organisation, our staff and/or volunteers, or any individual working on our behalf.
- **Feedback** is an expression of praise or dissatisfaction: it could be an opinion, reaction, comment, compliment, suggestion or remark.

This policy does not apply to staff making complaints about colleagues – this is managed through the Grievance Procedure.

A complainant might also raise a concern. A **concern** is a disclosure or allegation about possible or potential abuse), wrongdoing, risk, illegal activity or poor practice in any area of our work. Where a concern is raised, the Whistleblowing Policy will apply. Where a concern is related to a safeguarding issue, it must be treated with due urgency and in accordance with the Safeguarding Policy. The Complaints and Feedback Policy does not apply to concerns.

3. How complaints or feedback can be made

Complaints or feedback can be made in person, in writing, by e-mail, by telephone or by social and digital media. On each of The Cares Family's local websites, there is a Contact form, with an option to submit feedback or a complaint. This is received by the Head of Programmes.

In cases where a complaint is made on behalf of another person care must be taken not to disclose personal information to the complainant without first seeking the permission of the person who is the subject of the complaint. If the latter has died or does not have the capacity to give permission, a complaint can be made by someone acting on their behalf.

A complaint should be raised as soon as possible after the event and normally will only be considered within 12 months.

How complaints or feedback are handled

When a complaint is made or feedback is given, it will be acknowledged promptly, politely and openly, with reassurance given that it will be treated seriously, and information will be shared about our complaints procedure. The Cares Family staff will not seek to engage in lengthy debates about the causes of a particular complaint. Rather, we will seek to understand the situation with empathy and sensitivity, in order to come to an acceptable resolution.

It is important to confirm whether the complainant is happy for their complaint to be handled and resolved informally by the staff involved (at the branch or projects level) or they wish for it to be addressed through the formal complaints procedure.

It is essential that staff clarify if there are any immediate risks to the complainant or others. If these relate to safeguarding matters, staff should refer to the Safeguarding Policy. Any other matter of risk should be addressed with due urgency by the staff involved and referred to more senior staff if of more than minor severity.

Negative comments shared on our website or social media accounts should not be deleted, unless they are defamatory, illegal, inappropriate, break the confidentiality of an individual, or are spam. Following the initial public response, all discussions relating to complaints should be taken out of a public forum by offering or using direct messaging, email or phone communication.

Whether an informal or formal procedure is followed, any complaint or concern should be logged on Salesforce in accordance with The Cares Family's Incident Management Procedure.

There may be discretionary circumstances in which The Cares Family does not choose to respond to a complaint at all. These circumstances may include:

- When someone pursues a complaint that we have already responded to reasonably;
- When a complaint is obviously abusive, prejudiced or unfounded;
- When a complainant is harassing a The Cares Family employee, volunteer or neighbour;
- When a complainant is incoherent, illegible or aggressive (this does not equate to simply inaccurate English);
- When a complainant is not specific or has clearly been sent to complain to other organisations simultaneously as part of a coordinated campaign.

Handling an informal complaint

Most informal complaints can be heard and resolved by frontline staff at the time at which they are raised. This is usually the most appropriate route for issues that do not indicate serious misconduct, negligence, or a serious incident, and where the complainant agrees.

The relevant Head of Programmes/Projects will acknowledge receipt of the complaint at the earliest opportunity, ideally at the time and no later than within two working days of the complaint having been made. They will then seek to speak to the complainant at the earliest opportunity (ideally within one working day, but no later than within five working days) to understand the nature of the complaint.

Where it is a clear and straightforward matter, and where appropriate, they will offer an immediate apology and explain any remedial action that will be taken. This should be logged on the Salesforce record. If this is acceptable to the complainant, the matter will be considered closed.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the explanation given or proposed action or the Head of Programmes/Projects considers the nature of the complaint requires that further information is gathered, then the formal complaint procedure should be followed.

4.1 Handling a formal complaint

A complaint will always be handled formally and according to the relevant Cares Family Policy where there is:

- an allegation or suspicion of abuse, serious neglect or serious misconduct;
- an incident appears to have resulted in serious harm;
- a possible criminal case;
- potential public interest; or it is
- at the request of the complainant.

When a formal complaint is received, the staff member must inform their line manager or, in their absence, their Director immediately. The complaint should be logged on Salesforce no later than the next working day.

As per The Cares Family Scheme of Delegation, complaints will be handled by:

- Head of Programmes/Projects: Minor complaints at branch/project-level
- Directors: Significant complaints, or where a complaint relates to a Head of Programmes/Projects, or other Head of Department
- Chief Executive: Complaints relating to a Director, or which risk causing reputational damage
- Chair of the Board: Complaints relating to the Chief Executive or another member of the Board of Trustees

The complaint handler will formally acknowledge receipt of the complaint at the earliest opportunity and no later than within two working days of the complaint having been made. In this acknowledgement, they will share information about our complaints procedure, including the response time.

Investigation

Every formal complaint will be investigated to resolve it speedily and effectively and in a way that is proportionate to its seriousness and complexity. Investigations must be completed within 21 working days of receipt of the complaint.

The complaints handler will seek to speak to the complainant at the earliest opportunity (ideally within one working day, but not longer than within five working days) to understand the nature of the complaint, to solicit their opinion and establish facts. They will then investigate all of the relevant information and evidence regarding the complaint, from whichever parties were present or otherwise involved.

Complete and accurate records must be kept and added to the Salesforce log. This includes:

- the original complaint and other relevant information
- the issues considered
- decisions or action taken
- discussions/correspondence with complainant
- staff responses and other information collected during the investigation

If not the complaints handler, the Chief Executive will be notified immediately if the investigation identifies that the complaint requires action in respect of any of the following:

- a disciplinary procedure
- an investigation of a criminal offence
- a public relations incident

Response and resolution

A written response must be provided by the complaint handler to the complainant within 21 working days of receipt of the complaint.

The response will summarise the findings of the investigation addressing all issues raised in the complaint. It will state whether the complaint has been upheld and, if appropriate, apologising and identifying lessons learnt and actions that have been or will be taken to minimise a similar event arising. It may be appropriate to offer the complainant the opportunity to discuss the content of the letter with a relevant manager. The response letter should include how the complainant can take the complaint further if they are dissatisfied with The Cares Family's response.

If it is not possible to provide a full response to the complainant within 21 working days, contact must be made with them to agree a revised deadline at least five days before the due date. This must be documented. If the complainant does not agree to an extension and the original due date is not met, the complaint response is considered overdue. A holding letter must explain the reason for the delay and give an indication of when a response will be available.

If the complainant is satisfied with the outcome, evidence of this should be logged on the Salesforce record. Notwithstanding outstanding remedial actions, the matter will be considered closed.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome, they can request the Chair of the Board to review the management of the complaints process. They also have a right to [complain to the Charity Commission](#).

4. Actions arising

Where a complaint is upheld in relation to the conduct, action or inaction of a staff member, it will be managed with reference to The Cares Family's Disciplinary Procedure.

Where a complaint is upheld in relation to a Board member, it will be managed with reference to The Cares Family Trustee Code of Conduct.

Where a complaint is upheld in relation to a volunteer or neighbour, the Director of Programmes or Director of Development will decide – dependent on the severity of the incident and other factors such as intent and remorse – whether that individual can continue to be a member of The Cares Family network. In extreme cases, it may be necessary to involve the police.

5. How we use feedback to improve our work

At The Cares Family, we are committed to improving the quality and effectiveness of our work. We are very grateful for positive feedback and we are determined to learn from complaints. We will only use the information given to us by complainants to investigate their complaint, and we will look to learn from and improve through analysis of anonymous case studies.

We recognise that being implicated in a complaint can be distressing for staff. Staff can solicit support from their line manager or our HR support team for advice on the process, such as writing statements. Our Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) service is available for counselling support.

Additionally, it is important that staff who are the subject of a complaint perceive the investigation as fair and transparent. Staff must have the opportunity to see the complaint and response. If other staff are also involved, or if the complainant has requested anonymity, information that identifies them should be removed. If staff feel they have been unfairly treated, they have a right to raise a grievance under the Grievance Procedure.