



Volunteer Complaints Policy & Procedures



Applicable to: All Staff and Volunteers
To be reviewed: October 2022

Introduction:

We are committed to providing the highest quality experience to our volunteers. We aim to ensure that volunteers feel comfortable in their role; that they have a good relationship with other volunteers and staff and feel that their rights and responsibilities are being respected. There may be occasions when we will fail to meet our own expectations or those of the volunteers.

Wherever possible, the comments and concerns of volunteers will be dealt with informally as they arise.

However, there will be occasions where a volunteer will be dissatisfied and will want to complain. All staff should ensure that any volunteer wishing to make a complaint is provided with a copy of this policy.

There may also be occasions where the organisation has to raise a complaint about the conduct of a volunteer.

Where a complaint is raised which could be considered a safeguarding concern, the Reporting Safeguarding Concern procedure should be followed, as outlined in the CHSS Safeguarding Policy.

The purpose of this policy is to direct the investigation of a complaint

1. raised by a volunteer
2. raised concerning a volunteer

Definition of a complaint

A complaint is an “*expression of dissatisfaction requiring a response*”.

Who can complain?

- Complaints may be made by a present volunteer or former volunteer who has left the organisation within 3 months, or a representative of any of these individuals providing the charity is assured that they have the individual’s consent to speak on their behalf
- Complaints may be raised by a member of staff about a volunteer using this policy
- We encourage individuals to identify themselves, as anonymous complaints cannot be managed fully within this policy

Policy Aim:

The purpose of investigating complaints is not to apportion blame, but to safeguard our stakeholders and improve services in line with volunteer/ service user/ customer expectations. In addressing the root cause of a complaint and sharing this learning across the charity, it should be possible to avoid other volunteers, service users and customers having the same negative experience.

Policy Application: The Volunteer Development Coordinator will train and support staff who line manage volunteers to:

- respond flexibly and sensitively to the specific needs of volunteers
- ensure quick and effective action is taken to improve the situation
- provide feedback on the action taken
- encourage and facilitate communication

The Volunteer Development Coordinator will train staff to listen to and act upon the suggestions of the volunteers within CHSS.

What is the time limit for making a complaint?

Given the difficulties that the passage of time can make to the resolution of a complaint the **recommended** timescale for accepting a complaint is up to 3 months after the event for which it is raised.

However, we may accept a complaint outwith the 3 months in extenuating circumstances.

Policy Review and Monitoring:

This policy will be reviewed annually from the date of implementation or latest review and is approved by the Volunteering Strategy Group (VSG).

The VSG will review all volunteer complaints and their outcomes annually to identify any norms and trends. This information will be shared confidentially and will not identify any individual or location.

The VSG will also review complaints and concerns and their outcomes annually to identify any norms and trends. This information will be shared confidentially and will not identify any individual or location.

Informal Procedure:

We encourage complaints and concerns to be reported to the line manager with the aim of resolving the matter as quickly as possible to everyone's satisfaction.

The following procedure should be applied:

- Staff must respond positively and appropriately if a volunteer raises a concern.
- Staff should discuss the matter of concern with the volunteer, encouraging them to speak freely. Where the answer is clear, the staff member should provide an honest and objective response.
- The response should be given verbally on the spot. The response should include an explanation, an apology where appropriate and indicate what is being done to avoid the problem happening again.
- This should be recorded and shared with the volunteer and the volunteer line manager will keep a record of the informal discussion.

- Staff should also understand that where they feel unable to respond themselves that they can call on the support of an appropriate senior member of staff.
- The complainant should be informed of this and be given an indication of the expected time delay until they will receive a response.
- If the volunteer remains unhappy after receiving an oral response, they should be advised of the next appropriate step and given a copy of this policy.
- If the volunteer has difficulty with writing this may involve staff assisting the volunteer to put their complaint in writing or, if they prefer, put them in touch with independent support to do this.

Formal Procedure:

Dealing with a Complaint

Where the complaint has not been resolved at the informal stage, or where the complaint is more serious, then the following procedure will apply:

- A formal complaint should be made in writing (by letter or email)
- Formal complaints should be addressed to the Head of Volunteering, Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland, Rosebery House, 9 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh, EH12 5EZ
- The complaint will be acknowledged in writing within 3-5 working days of receipt by the Head of Volunteering
- All communications should be marked 'Private and Confidential'
- Where the complainant wishes their identity to be kept confidential all those involved in investigating the complaint will endeavour to do so, but in some circumstances this may not be possible.
- The Head of Volunteering, in discussion with the Department Director, will identify an appropriate manager to investigate the complaint, and discuss the preliminary information
- If we receive an anonymous complaint this will be investigated by an identified departmental representative. However we will be unable to give feedback to the individual.
- It is acknowledged that sometimes the nature of the complaint will identify the complainant. In these circumstances the complainant will be made aware of this from the outset.
- In the event that the complaint investigation identifies an issue of potential misconduct by a member of staff, the information provided may be put forward for use as part of a Disciplinary Investigation and may be referred to in any subsequent Disciplinary Hearing
- Whilst it is important to ask the complainant what they want to happen as a result of the complaint, there is no guarantee that this will be the outcome of the investigation and any management action
- Where the complainant wishes to proceed, the details of the complaint should be agreed with the complainant and confirmed in a letter of acknowledgement

- If the complaint involves members of staff they should also be informed of the elements of the complaint at this point in time. The Department Director will decide who should share this information with the staff member and how they will be supported.

The Investigation

- We aim wherever possible to investigate a complaint within 20 working days
- Where it appears the 20-day target will not be met, the person making the complaint, and anyone named in the complaint, must be informed in writing of the reason for the delay with an indication of when a response can be expected
- Investigation will not normally be extended for more than 20 further days
- The volunteer making the complaint will be informed by the Investigating Officer that they can be accompanied by a friend or other supporter at any meetings
- The Investigating Officer will keep a confidential written record of all meetings and discussions
- Where the meeting has been held with the complainant they will receive a summary of this meeting. Where the person making the complaint has communication difficulties all communication must be adapted appropriate to their needs.
- The person investigating the complaint will approach the complaint with an open mind, being fair to all parties
- The investigation will be conducted in a supportive, blame-free atmosphere that demonstrates the principles of fairness and consistency
- Anyone identified as the subject of a complaint will be provided with a full account of the reasons for the investigation by the Investigating Officer
- The subject of the complaint will be given a proper opportunity to talk to the Investigating Officer, who should ensure they are kept informed of progress.
- The information gathered during the investigation should be collated by the person investigating the complaint and shared with the Head of Volunteering and Department Director.
- Together they will consider the evidence of the investigation and agree the outcomes of each element (upheld or not upheld) and any remedial action necessary.

Communicating Outcomes

- The complaints process should be completed by the Head of Volunteering issuing a letter (or adapted communication) to the volunteer making the complaint, and copied to any staff involved.
- The Head of Volunteering will store the letter and where appropriate share the outcome with the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development.

Appeal Procedure:

- If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the process they have the right of appeal to the Director of the Department within 10 working days.

The Director of the Department will review the investigative process and provide a written response informing the complainant of the outcome.

Appendix 1**Complaint Concerning a Volunteer**

Rarely, complaint allegations concerning a volunteer may be classed as an allegation of gross misconduct and such an allegation would result in the volunteer being asked to cease their role until conclusion of the investigation.

The following behaviours are examples of gross misconduct:

- Theft, unauthorised possession of, or wilful damage to, any property belonging to CHSS or any volunteer, service user, customer, patient, supporter or employee
- Disclosure of information about CHSS or its work or its officers, employees, volunteers or service users to any person other than one specifically authorised or known to be entitled to be entrusted with it
- Displaying or circulating offensive material or comments by email, mobile phone or social media sites from CHSS equipment or personal equipment
- Acceptance of gifts from clients
- Serious damage to CHSS' property
- Falsification of reports, accounts or expense claims
- Forgery, falsification or destruction of records
- Serious breach of CHSS' rules (including health and safety)
- Failure to observe any of CHSS' volunteer policies and procedures or comply with the provisions of any statutory notice served on CHSS and notified to staff and volunteers
- Offences of dishonesty
- Violent, dangerous or intimidatory conduct
- Intoxication by reason of drink or drugs
- Harassment of any volunteer, service user, customer, patient, supporter or employee. Harassment can take many forms, an illustration of which is below and may include:
 - Unnecessary and unwanted physical contact ranging from touching to serious sexual or physical assault;
 - Verbal conduct such as sexist, racist and homophobic comments or innuendo; derogatory remarks about disability or age; slogans, insults, comments of a personal nature; suggestive remarks, inappropriate jokes or language;
 - Unwanted non-verbal conduct, including sexually suggestive gestures, staring and leering;

Ratified by Volunteer Strategy Group, November 2021

- Conduct that denigrates, threatens, ridicules, intimidates or abuses, undermines or undervalues an individual because of characteristics such as gender, sexuality, disability, race, age or religion or belief including derogatory or degrading remarks or insults or offensive comments about appearance or dress;
- Unwanted sexual attention or advances;
- Unfair treatment, which might include deliberate exclusion from conversations or events at work, for reasons based on characteristics such as age, culture, disability, ethnic origin, gender, race, religion or sexuality

Cyber-Bullying (including use of social media sites)

This is the sending or posting of harmful or cruel messages or images via mobile phone, using the internet or other digital communication devices to an individual or group of people.

Examples of cyber-bullying are as follows:

- Someone continually sending messages after being asked not to
- Sending or posting messages that can be threatening or upsetting
- Setting up profiles on social media sites with the sole purpose of making fun of someone
- Posing as someone else for the purposes of publishing material in their name to cause offence, ridicule or humiliate others
- Posting rumours or gossip and instigating others to dislike or gang up on someone
- Sending abusive text messages, offensive pictures or video

This is by no means an exhaustive list and harassment may come in another form not shown here.