



NO LIFE HALF LIVED

External Complaints and Compliments Policy

Status: Approved

Policy Lead	Head of Operational Support Services
Owned By	Director of Finance and Corporate Services
Date Approved	November 2025
Next Review Date	November 2028
Regulatory / Legislative Considerations	This Policy and complaint route may be viewed as a prelude to a complaint to OSCR (the Scottish Charity Regulator) or the Scottish Fundraising Adjudication Panel in respect of the complaints that each body are empowered to deal with.
Other documents to be read in conjunction with this policy	Grievance and Whistleblowing Policies are available for colleagues. The Volunteer Complaints Policy is available for our volunteering population (as defined later in this document).

Policy Title	External Complaints Policy
Approval source	Board of Trustees
Aim of policy	<p>The aim of this policy is to enable the charity to listen to and act on comments, concerns or complaints received. Our emphasis must be on putting people, their views and experiences at the centre of how we deliver our activities. This includes how we plan and deliver local services; tackle the issues that concern the people who use our services; proactively address any comments or concerns individuals may have about the service they have received; and how we undertake our fundraising activities. We must also learn from what individuals say has worked well for them.</p> <p>The complaint process must be a central plank of our ambitions for continuous improvement within the charity, and we need to manage each one with care and respect, they should be viewed as an opportunity for reflection and learning.</p>
Scope of Policy	This policy applies to anyone external who interacts with the charity, including customers, service users, supporters, and external stakeholders.
Definitions	<p>Complaint – an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about CHSS’s action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of CHSS.</p> <p>Compliment - any expression of positive feedback by a customer, service user or external stakeholder</p>
Equality impact assessment	The policy takes account of accessibility and support provisions recognised by our EDI and associated policies. Complaints handling should recognise and respect the different needs of people and be flexible and responsive to those needs as far as possible and appropriate.
Risk implications	Failure to follow a fair process in a consistent manner exposes the charity to reputational risk and potentially to adverse findings within the public domain.

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This policy:

- Covers complaints about:
 - the standard of service or interaction you should expect from us
 - the behaviour of our colleagues in delivering that service or activity
 - any action, or lack of action, by our colleague or others engaged on CHSS business
- Relates only to complaints received by CHSS from external stakeholders:
 - Colleague complaints will be dealt with in accordance with CHSS' Grievance Policy
 - CHSS' Duty of Candour Policy will also apply where a complaint is received as a result of a clinical service provided
- Does not cover:
 - comments about our policies or policy decisions
 - dissatisfaction or complaints expressed with our policies or decisions about individual cases, funding, or requests for legal advice and assistance
 - matters that have already been fully investigated through this policy
- Follows the No Life Half Lived Strategy: *"To be effective and accountable in all that we do."*
- May be amended or updated at any time

Statement of Intent

We expect to deliver the highest quality of service possible across all our activities. However, in the interactions between the charity and the people we serve or the people who support us, there will inevitably be occasions when we will fail to meet our own expectations or those of the people who we interact with.

This policy outlines how we will manage complaints received from service users, customers, donors, supporters and external stakeholders with the aim to learn from any comments, concerns or complaints.

The aim of this policy is to listen to, act on and learn from comments, concerns or complaints received. Our emphasis must be on putting people, their views and experiences at the centre of how we deliver our activities. This includes how we plan and deliver local services; tackle the issues that concern the people who use our services; proactively address any comments or concerns individuals may have about the service they have received; and how we undertake our fundraising activities. We must also learn from what individuals say has worked well for them.

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

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Expected Behaviours

We expect all colleagues to behave in a professional manner and treat complainants with courtesy, respect and dignity. We also ask anyone bringing a complaint to treat our colleagues with respect. We ask complainants to engage actively with the complaint handling process by:

- Telling us their key issues of concern and organising any supporting information they want to give us (we understand that some people will require support to do this).
- Working with us to agree the key points of the complaint when an investigation is required.
- Responding to reasonable requests for information.

Compliments

A compliment is any expression of positive feedback by a customer, service user or external stakeholder. Compliments are valuable, welcome and important. They let us know when the services we provide are good, influence development of our activities and quality assurance and let our people know when they've done well.

We welcome compliments in person, on the phone, by letter or email.

Concerns and Complaints

People often don't want to formally complain but equally don't want others to have the same negative experience they had. This reluctance to complain can be further influenced by the feeling that their relationship with the service or organisation may be damaged by their raising a complaint.

It is important to the charity that we hear from you about any concerns you have. In raising a concern, we will treat it positively and constructively to reflect on where we can improve.

It is also important to us that when something is serious and you do want to formally record an expression of dissatisfaction about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of CHSS, you feel able to do that and that we will listen.

Complaints are taken seriously and will be responded to in a timely, fair and consistent manner.

Complaints allow CHSS to identify when the services we provide or activities we undertake don't meet the standards expected by our customers, service users, supporters or stakeholders. They help us do better and influence the development of our service delivery and wider charitable activities.

Raising a Complaint or Concern Informally

Most complaints or concerns can be resolved quickly and informally through discussion with us. We encourage you to follow an informal process in the first instance however, the formal process can be utilised at any point, particularly if you feel the complaint is serious in nature.

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If you have an engagement with the organisation, you should contact the person you normally speak to. They will discuss your complaint or concern, establish your desired outcomes from the process (including whether these are practicable), make discrete investigations and attempt to resolve the matter speedily and fairly with you.

If this does not resolve the issue, you should follow the formal procedure.

Anonymous Compliments and Complaints

We will record and consider any compliments and complaints that are received anonymously.

Our ability to act may be limited if fuller information is needed to conduct a full and fair investigation, to make improvements or to ensure the right people receive positive feedback so we would encourage anyone wishing to give a compliment or make a complaint to let us know who they are.

Formal Procedure

Compliments or complaints should be marked for the attention of Eleanor Rooke, Director of Finance and Corporate Services, and made through the following means:

- Online at CHSS's [website](#)
- In person or by letter: Hobart House, 80 Hanover Street, Edinburgh, EH2 1EL
- By phone on 0131 225 6963
- By email to admin@chss.org.uk

We will be alive to complaints that come through other channels, such as our Advice Line, and where we believe the nature of the communication constitutes a complaint, we will route it through the formal complaints procedure. This is to ensure consistency of approach.

Where relevant the details of any complaints that require communications advice will be shared with the Director of External Engagement & Service Development where there may be a reputational risk to the charity internally and/or externally.

We aim to acknowledge all complaints within 5 working days and provide a full response within 20 working days. If we expect to exceed these timescales, we shall ensure the complainant is notified of this and the reasons for extended timescales.

When a complaint is received, it will be logged on to our complaints management system and acknowledged promptly. An appropriate colleague will be allocated to investigate the complaint (investigating officer). The investigating officer will become the key point of contact for the complainant and will ensure the complainant is kept informed of progress. The Director of Finance & Corporate Services will retain oversight of the process.

Once a complaint has been fully investigated, the investigating officer will determine what action may be taken to resolve the complaint and will communicate the outcome to the complainant.

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Responses will be fair, respectful and proportionate to the nature of the complaint. Action may be:

- To uphold the complaint
- To partially uphold the complaint
- To dismiss the complaint

Copies of all relevant communications and records of the investigation relating to a complaint will be held on our complaints management system, against the complaint record. The completion of allocated actions and the outcome of the complaint will be documented on our complaints management system.

Complaint about an Employee

The Director of Finance & Corporate Services, in conjunction with the Director of People & Culture, will allocate an employee, with appropriate seniority, to carry out an investigation where the complaint is against an employee.

Complaint about a Director

A modified procedure will be applied. The complaint should be sent for the attention of Jane-Claire Judson, Chief Executive and marked “Private & Confidential” in the communication. The Chief Executive will investigate the complaint and determine what action may be taken to resolve the complaint.

Where necessary, the Chief Executive may use the information gathered during the investigation to apply management actions.

Complaint about the Chief Executive

A modified procedure will be applied. The complaint should be sent for the attention of the Chair and marked “Private & Confidential” in the communication. The Chair (or designated Trustee) will investigate the complaint and determine what action may be taken to resolve the complaint.

Where necessary, the Chair may use the information gathered during the investigation to apply management actions.

Complaints about Contracted Services

Where we use a contractor to deliver a service on our behalf, we recognise that we remain responsible and accountable for ensuring that the services provided meet CHSS’s standard. We will do so either by:

- Ensuring the contractor complies with this policy, or
- Ensuring the contractor has their own procedure in place, which fully meets the standards in this policy.

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CHSS has discretion to investigate complaints about organisation's contracted to deliver services on its behalf even where the policy has normally been to delegate.

Complaints Involving more than one Area or Organisation

If a complaint relates to the actions of two or more areas within our organisation, we will tell the customer who will take the lead in dealing with the complaint and explain that they will get only one response covering all issues raised.

If a customer complains to us about the service of another organisation or public service provider, but we have no involvement in the issue, the customer should be advised to contact the appropriate organisation directly.

If a complaint relates to our service and the service of another organisation or public service provider, and we have a direct interest in the issue, we will handle the complaint about CHSS through this policy. If we need to contact an outside body about the complaint, we will be mindful of data protection.

Volunteer Complaints

Complaints from, and about, volunteers are addressed under the CHSS Volunteer Complaints policy.

A volunteer is defined as an individual who has been on-boarded to a CHSS volunteer role and has an assigned volunteer manager. Individuals who have expressed an interest in volunteering and have not completed the on-boarding process, or support CHSS in an informal capacity, are within the scope of this External Complaints policy.

Appeals

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint, they can request an appeal. The appeal should be submitted to the Chief Executive within five working days of receipt of the conclusion.

The appeal should identify why the complainant feels the original decision was flawed. The Chief Executive will appoint someone to review the complaint and prepare a response within twenty days.

If the complaint is about the Chief Executive, the appeals panel will comprise of two Board of Trustee members excluding the original Trustee who considered the complaint.

This is the final stage of the internal process.

External Review

Where a complaint relates to a service that is funded by a public sector body through a Service Level Agreement (NHS, Local Authority or joint board), the complainant has the right to raise the complaint with the funding body through their complaints process.

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In some cases, the funding body prefers the internal complaints process to have been completed before the complaint is referred to them.

Contact details for submitting complaints to funding bodies will be added to the resolution letter.

Where the complaint relates to our fundraising practices, once the internal process has been exhausted this can be escalated to the Scottish Fundraising Adjudication Panel; [Submit A Complaint – Scottish Fundraising Adjudication Panel](#).

Certain concerns can be submitted to the Office for the Scottish Charity Regulator; [OSCR | Raise a Concern](#).

Complaints and Disciplinary or Whistleblowing Processes

If the issues raised in a complaint overlap with issues raised under a disciplinary or whistleblowing process, we still need to respond to the complaint.

Our response must be careful not to share confidential information (such as anything about the whistleblowing or disciplinary procedures, or outcomes for individual colleagues). It should focus on whether CHSS failed to meet our expected standards and what we have done to improve things, in general terms.

Colleagues investigating such complaints should take extra care to ensure:

- We comply with all requirements of this policy in relation to the complaint as well as meeting the requirements of other processes.
- All complaint issues are addressed.
- Records retained in relation to the complaint investigation and resolution are sufficient, whilst maintaining confidentiality.

Complaints and Duty of Candour

If the issues raised in a complaint relate to or partially overlap with the principles of the Duty of Candour policy, the Duty of Candour policy will take precedence over the Complaints policy. The complaint should be recorded, and any aspects that can be dealt with through the Complaints policy should be. If all or some of the complaint will be dealt with under the Duty of Candour policy, the complainant shall be made aware of this and the process that will be followed.

Maintaining Confidentiality and Data Protection

Confidentiality is important in complaints handling. This includes maintaining the complainant's confidentiality and confidentiality in relation to information about colleagues, contractors or any third parties involved in the complaint.

This should not prevent us from being open and transparent, as far as possible, in how we handle complaints. This includes sharing as much information with the complainant (and, where appropriate, any affected colleagues) as we can. When sharing information, we should be clear

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about why the information is being shared and our expectations on how the recipient will use the information.

We must always bear in mind legal requirements, for example data protection legislation, as well as internal policies on confidentiality and the use of customer information.

Role of Directorates

Each Directorate is responsible for the application of this policy and its associated procedure, dealing with complaints timeously. In addition, each Directorate should ensure that any formal complaint is properly recorded on the complaints management system to ensure central oversight and control.

The Director of Finance & Corporate Services is available to give advice and interpretation on any aspect of this policy. Although the Director of Finance & Corporate Services can advise the investigating officer on individual cases, it is the investigating officer who will make appropriate decisions relating to this policy and its associated procedure.

Monitoring and Review

The Director of Finance & Corporate Services will undertake a monthly spot check to ensure complaints recorded on the complaints management system are being managed and responded to within the policy timescales, have all necessary documentation attached to the complaint record, and are being responded to in an appropriate manner. Aspects of this review may be delegated to suitable members of the Finance & Corporate Services directorate. Where there are instances of non-compliance with this policy or poor complaints handling, refresher training will be provided.

The Director of Finance & Corporate Services will prepare an annual summary of all formal complaints received and present to the Executive Team and People Governance Committee for their information. They will provide a quarterly internal update to the Operational Delivery Group and Directors Group to identify trends and any development required. The summary will include:

- Trends in complaints
- The effectiveness of local complaints handling
- The lessons learned and shared and the result in terms of service improvement

The summary will not identify any individuals in accordance with CHSS' Policy on Confidentiality & Data Protection.

The policy will be reviewed every three years or earlier if deemed appropriate. If this policy is not reviewed within the above timescale, the latest approved policy will continue to apply.

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Complaints Management Flowchart

