

## **Complaints Policy of Voluntary Sector North West (VSNW)**

VSNW 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 VSNW 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.

### **Definition of a Complaint**

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect of VSNW.

### **Where Complaints Come From**

A complaint can be received verbally, by phone, by email or in writing. Formal complaints must be raised in written form and will be addressed according to formal procedures. Concerns raised through alternative channels are considered informal complaints, which may not necessarily elicit a formal response.

### **Confidentiality**

All complaint information will be handled sensitively, telling only those who need to know and following any relevant data protection requirements.

### **Responsibility**

Overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation lies with the VSNW Board of Trustees.

### **Review**

This policy is reviewed annually and updated as required.

**Reviewed and approved: June 2025**

**Date of next review: June 2027**

## **Complaints Procedure of VSNW**

### **Publicised Contact Details for Complaints:**

Written complaints may be sent to VSNW at St Thomas Centre, Ardwick Green N, Manchester M12 6FZ or by e-mail to [info@vsnw.org.uk](mailto:info@vsnw.org.uk).

Verbal complaints may be made by phone to 0161 276 9300.

### **Informal Complaints**

Informal complaints include verbal complaints made by phone, and any other complaints received through any other contact details or opportunities the complainant may have.

It is always better to resolve problems quickly and as near to the source of the problem as possible. So it is helpful to discuss the complaint fully with the person concerned, or with their manager. Please feel able to discuss any concern as soon as possible with the person you have been dealing with at VSNW. They will deal with your enquiry promptly, and do their best to put things right.

All members of staff are aware that at times things can (and do) go wrong and staff are encouraged to deal with such matters. In most cases, this should be sufficient to sort the matter out.

The VSNW staff member responding to the complaint should offer the complainant the chance to discuss the issue privately, and hopefully it will be resolved at this stage.

The VSNW staff member should record that an informal complaint has been made.

Complaints received by telephone or in person need to be recorded.

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

- Write down the facts of the complaint
- Take the complainant's name, address, email address and telephone number
- Note down the relationship of the complainant to VSNW (for example: client, member)
- 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.

For further guidelines about handling verbal complaints, see **Appendix 1**.

## **Resolving Formal 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 Operations Director or Chief Executive within one week.

On receiving the complaint, the Operations Director or Chief Executive records it in the complaints log. 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.

Complaints should be acknowledged by the person handling the complaint within 10 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 complaints procedure should be attached.

Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within four weeks. 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 Chair.

The request for Board level review should be acknowledged within 10 days of receiving it. The acknowledgement should say who will deal with the case and when the complainant can expect a reply.

The Chair 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.

If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a further opportunity to respond.

The person who dealt with the original complaint at Stage One should be kept informed of what is happening.

Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within four weeks. 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***

The complainant can complain to the Charity Commission at any stage. Information about the kind of complaints the Commission can involve itself in can be found on their website at: [www.charitycommission.gov.uk/publications/cc47.aspx](http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/publications/cc47.aspx)

### **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 the Chair should not also have the Chair as the person leading a Stage Two review.

### **Aggressive or Obsessive Complaints**

VSNW wants to deal fairly and honestly with complainants and ensure that other service users, staff, volunteers or the Organisation as a whole do not suffer detriment from persons making vexatious complaints. A VSNW Solicitor will write to vexatious complainants to inform them that their behaviour is considered to be unacceptable.

### **Monitoring and Learning from Complaints**

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

## **Appendix 1 - Practical Guidance for Handling Verbal Informal Complaints**

- Remain calm and respectful throughout the conversation
- Listen - allow the person to talk about the complaint in their own words.
- Sometimes a person just wants to "let off steam"
- Don't debate the facts in the first instance, especially if the person is angry
- Show an interest in what is being said
- Obtain details about the complaint before any personal details
- Ask for clarification wherever necessary
- Show that you have understood the complaint by reflecting back what you have noted down
- Acknowledge the person's feelings (even if you feel that they are being unreasonable) - you can do this without making a comment on the complaint itself or making any admission of fault on behalf of the organisation e.g "I understand that this situation is frustrating for you"
- If you feel that an apology is deserved for something that was the responsibility of your organisation, then apologise Ask the person what they would like done to resolve the issue
- Be clear about what you can do, how long it will take and what it will involve.
- Don't promise things you can't deliver
- Give clear and valid reasons why requests cannot be met
- Make sure that the person understands what they have been told
- Inform the person that if they want the complaint to be formal, they will have to put this in a written format.