



Providing a safe space for refugees and asylum seekers in Swindon
Reg. charity 1171368

Complaints Policy

Introduction

The Harbour Project for Swindon Refugees and Asylum Seekers (The Harbour Project) 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 give fair consideration to all complaints
- 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 The Harbour Project knows what to do if a complaint is received
- To make sure all complaints are investigated fairly, openly 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, about any aspect of The Harbour Project.

Where Complaints Come From

Complaints may come from:

- Anyone receiving or requesting a service from The Harbour Project;
- Anyone supporting someone who has a complaint;
- Volunteers who support the Harbour Project
- Anyone else, including members of the public or organisations, who come into contact with the Harbour Project.

A complaint can be received orally by phone or in person, or by written letters, texts or emails.

This policy does not cover complaints from staff, who should use The Harbour Project's Discipline and Grievance policies.

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 Board of Trustees.

Review

This policy is reviewed annually and updated as required.

Complaints Procedure

Publicised Contact Details for Complaints:

Written complaints may be sent to The Harbour Project at:

St Luke's Hall
Broad Street
Swindon, SN1 2DS

or by e-mail at info@harbourproject.org.uk

Complaints may be made by phone to 01793 611 682 or in person to any of The Harbour Project's staff, volunteers or trustees at the drop-in or at any of our events or activities.

Receiving Complaints

Complaints may arrive through channels publicised for that purpose or through any other contact details or opportunities the complainant may have.

Complaints received by telephone or in person must be recorded.

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

- Write down the facts of the complaint
- Acknowledge that their complaint is being received and heard
- Take the complainant's name, address and telephone number
- Note down the relationship of the complainant to The Harbour Project e.g. visitor, referrer
- 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 oral complaints, see Appendix 1

Resolving Complaints

Stage One – Informal Stage

Most cases of concern can be dealt with by the person responsible for the issue being complained about, or by a member of staff on site at the time. 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.

Stage Two - Investigation

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response of the person who has first responded, or a member of staff (if involved at the informal stage), then the matter will be passed to the Project Manager within 24 hours.

On receiving the complaint, the Business Manager will ensure a record is made. This record will be updated as the investigation progresses. If it has not already been resolved, the Business Manager and Project Manager appoint an appropriate person to be the investigating officer (not a Trustee), who will act fairly and independently to investigate the complaint and make recommendations as appropriate.

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 5 working days of receiving it. 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, more time is needed to complete the investigation, a progress report should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given.

Whether or not the complaint is justified, 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 Three – Trustee Investigation

If the complainant feels that the problem has not been satisfactorily resolved at Stages One or Two, they can request that the complaint is reviewed at Board level. At this stage, the complaint will be passed to the Chair of Trustees, who will appoint a Trustee to investigate. If the CEO believes the circumstances of the complaint require trustee involvement the issue may be escalated to Stage Three without first completing the earlier stages.

The request for Board level review should be acknowledged within 5 working days of receiving it. The acknowledgement should say who will deal with the case and when the complainant can expect a reply.

The Chair of Trustees may investigate the facts of the case themselves or delegate a Trustee to do so. This may involve reviewing the documentation of the case and speaking with the person who dealt with the complaint at Stage Two.

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, more time is needed to complete the investigation, a progress report should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given.

Whether or not the complaint is upheld, 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, for example from Voluntary Action Swindon.

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: <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-charity>

If the complaint relates specifically to the immigration advice provided by the Harbour Project, it should be noted that the Harbour Project has Professional Liability Insurance to meet any relevant claims.

In the event that the complainant is not satisfied with the response from the Harbour Project to the complaint, then the matter can be taken at any time to the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC).

The OISC can be contacted at:

Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner
Complaints Team
5th Floor
21 Bloomsbury Street
LONDON
WC1B 3HF

Oisc.gov.uk

Complaints against Staff

If the complaint amounts to or includes an allegation against a member of staff, this may need to be considered under staff disciplinary procedure, rather than the complaint procedure. The complainant will be advised if these procedures are to be used in dealing with the complaint.

Monitoring and Learning from Complaints

Following the conclusion of a complaint (whether or not it is upheld) The Project Manager shall evaluate any problems identified as a result of the complaint and look for ways to ensure that these are not repeated. This may include, for example, the identification of additional training needs or changes to policies or processes. Complaints are also reviewed annually by the Board of Trustees to identify any trends which may indicate a need to take further action

DATE: September 2019

Appendix 1 - Practical Guidance for Handling Oral 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 – check whether the complaint is about Harbour (staff and/or volunteers) or about another agency/organisation or individual
- 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. 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, whether they wish to register this as a formal complaint, and what a good outcome would look like
- 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
- Wherever appropriate, inform the person about the available avenues of review or appeal.