

# BRISTOL FOLK HOUSE

Title of policy/procedure	Complaints Policy & Procedure
Short summary of the policy or procedure which outlines its purpose, objectives and intended outcomes	This document outlines the Bristol Folk House's commitment to managing complaints in relation to the service provided by the Charity. It also provides information about how we manage, respond to and learn from complaints made about our services.
The anticipated audience (staff, students, volunteers etc)	Everyone
The 'owner' of the policy or procedure which, in this case, is likely to either be the Board or management team (or similar)	BFH BOARD OF TRUSTEES
The author of the document	Anna Naylor, Head of Operations
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## **1. Purpose**

We recognise that occasionally service users, volunteers, donors, and their representatives may be dissatisfied or concerned about their interactions with the Charity or the services it provides, and we hope that problems can be reconciled between the parties concerned. If not, we will manage any complaint promptly, thoroughly, impartially, and sympathetically as per the details and procedures contained within this document.

## **2. Introduction**

All complaints will be dealt with in strict confidence.

The Charity will treat complaints seriously and ensure that complaints, concerns, and issues raised by service users, volunteers, donors, and their representatives are properly investigated in an unbiased, non-judgemental, transparent, timely, and appropriate manner.

The Charity aims to learn from complaints, feedback, and praise.

## **3. Definition of a complaint or concern**

A complaint or concern is an expression of dissatisfaction about an act, omission, or decision of the Charity, either verbal or written, and whether justified or not, which requires a response.

## **4. Scope of the Policy**

This policy applies to all staff and Trustee Board members who may find themselves required to receive, initially respond to, investigate, and/or resolve a complaint and ensure that learning is acted upon and procedures revised and implemented to avoid further complaints in the future.

## **5. Who can make a complaint?**

A complaint may be made by the person who is affected by the action, or it may be made by a person acting on behalf of the service user.

## **6. Complaints That Cannot Be Dealt With Under This Policy**

The following complaints will not be dealt with under this policy:

- A complaint made by an employee about any matter relating to their employment (this must be handled via the internal Grievance Policy).
- A complaint, the subject matter of which has previously been investigated under these or previous policies and/or guidelines.
- A complaint which is made orally and resolved to the complainant's

- satisfaction no later than the next working day.
- A simple request for removal from any of the Charity's databases.
- A request for other data markers to be removed or corrected.
- A comment or remark with no response expected or required.

## 7. The complaint process

### 7.1 Stage 1 (Initial Management)

A complaint can be communicated to the Charity by any channel including telephone, mail, email, social media message, or in person.

Upon receiving a formal complaint, the Charity will send an acknowledgement within 5 working days [2]. A full investigation will be conducted, and a formal written response will be issued within 20 working days [2]. If an extension is required due to the complexity of the case, the complainant will be notified of the delay and given a revised date.

When handling verbal complaints, the Charity will aim to:

- Remain calm and respectful throughout the conversation.
- Listen – allowing the complainant to “let off steam” in their own words, though the Charity will not accept abusive language.
- Not enter into a debate or discussion about the merits of the complaint.
- Show an interest.
- Ask for clarification, if needed.
- Show that the Charity has understood the complaint by confirming it back.
- Acknowledge the strength of feeling of the complainant without forming a judgement about its merits before it has been investigated.
- If it is obvious that an apology is warranted, then the Charity will apologise.
- Ask the person what they would like done to resolve the issues, though we cannot make promises that the same will be met.
- Be clear about the procedure, how long it will take, and what is involved.
- Not promise anything that cannot be delivered.
- Thank the person for taking the time to contact the Charity and stress how seriously we treat all feedback.

The Charity will always engage with complaints constructively and aim to make necessary improvements or put in place required training in order to prevent similar issues occurring in the future.

A key consideration is to ensure that each case is treated according to its individual nature with a focus on satisfactory outcomes, organisational learning, and those lessons which should lead to service improvement.

The Charity is committed to quality responses and hopes at this point the issue will have been satisfactorily resolved for all parties concerned. However, if the complainant is dissatisfied with the response or with the way the complaint has been handled, the response will make clear that they should then contact the Charity again and proceed to Stage 2.

If at any time during the complaint process the complainant or their representative or advocate decides they would like to withdraw the complaint, this request can be made either verbally or in writing. The withdrawal of a complaint will be acknowledged in writing.

The Charity is committed to resolving complaints and therefore will carry out regular reviews of complaints handled.

## **7.2 Stage 2 (Escalation to CEO)**

If the complainant is unhappy with the outcome of the investigation and final outcome, they may at this stage escalate the complaint to the Charity's CEO, with copies of all correspondence and case documentation. The CEO will then decide whether to uphold the response of the initial response.

Within 14 days the CEO will write to the complainant with their decision and the reasons for it. Whether the complaint is upheld or not, the reply to the complainant should describe what action will be taken as a result of the complaint.

If the complainant is still not happy, then the case may be escalated to Stage 3, detailed below, and the complainant should be informed that this is the case.

## **7.3 Stage 3 (Escalation to the Board)**

At this stage, the complaint will be escalated to the Chair of the Trustees Board with copies of all correspondence and case documentation. The Chair of the Trustees Board will consider all the facts afresh and then decide what the final response of the Charity will be.

Within 28 days the Chair of the Trustees Board will write to the complainant with this final decision and the reasons for it.

This decision marks the end of the Charity's internal complaints procedure. If the

complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome, they may escalate the matter to the appropriate external regulatory body, depending on the nature of the complaint:

- The Charity Commission for England and Wales: If the complaint relates to a serious governance failure, a breach of trust, a risk to the charity's assets, or a significant safeguarding concern, the complainant can report the matter to the Charity Commission. Please note that the Charity Commission does not investigate individual disputes, personal grievances, or handle complaints regarding customer service standards.
- The Fundraising Regulator: If the complaint relates specifically to the charity's fundraising practices, methods, or communications, the complainant can contact the Fundraising Regulator. The complainant must escalate the matter within two months of receiving our final Stage 3 response]. The Fundraising Regulator will investigate whether the charity has breached the Code of Fundraising Practice

## **8. Confidentiality**

Complaints will be handled in the strictest of confidence in accordance with the Charity's Data Protection Policy and will be kept separately from service user records. Care will be taken that information should only be disclosed to those who have a demonstrable need to have access to it.

Suitable arrangements are in place for the handling of service-user-identifiable data to meet compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and other legal obligations such as the Human Rights Act 1998 and the common law duty of confidentiality.

Confidentiality will be maintained in such a way that only the investigating officer and employee/s who are part of the investigation will know the contents of the case. Any employee/s disclosing information to others who are not directly involved in the complaint will be subject to the charity's formal disciplinary procedures.

## **8. Malicious Complaints**

The Charity will accept any complaint in good faith. However, complaints made on the basis of discrimination, or malicious or vexatious complaints will not be tolerated.

In order to protect its employees, the Charity will investigate such complaints in a manner so as to expose such malicious intent. This will not apply to genuine complainants.