



Complaints Policy

1 Purpose

- 1.1 This policy sets out our approach to managing both formal and informal complaints.
- 1.2 This policy is not contractual, but aims to set out how we normally deal with such issues.

2 Scope

- 2.1 This policy applies to anyone working for us in any capacity, i.e. employed, contracted, trainee voluntary or sessional.
- 2.2 Clients may be given a copy of this policy should they wish to make a formal complaint.

3 General Principles

- 3.1 The key principles of this policy are:
 - Complaints should be treated seriously and must be dealt with promptly
 - Clients should be treated fairly and with complete confidentiality
 - Clients should be kept informed of the progress of their complaint
 - Complaints will be recorded, logged and reported upon appropriately
 - The complaints procedure should be outlined to mediation clients during the first mediation meeting
 - Complaints about the content of mediation discussions cannot be investigated
 - The Service is committed to high standards and appreciates complaints, comments and feedback to help us monitor and improve our service

4 Confidentiality

- 4.1 Unless the complainant requests to remain anonymous, Norfolk Family Mediation Service will record complainant details internally and Service staff, volunteers and other personnel may be informed of the complaint so that the complaint can be investigated and addressed.

- 4.2 Unless the complaint is related to a Safeguarding issue, the complaint and complainant will remain confidential to the Service and will not be shared with a third party.
- 4.3 Clients must be aware that whilst mediation is a privileged and confidential process, the safety of children and vulnerable adults overrides principles of confidentiality and parental decision-making. Any complaints relating to a Safeguarding issue may therefore be disclosed to a third party in line with Norfolk Family Mediation Service's Safeguarding Policy.

5 Procedures

The organisation categorises complaints into Formal Complaints and Informal Complaints.

5.1 Informal Complaints

- 5.1.1 Informal complaints are those that consist of feedback and comments that express dissatisfaction with the Service.
- 5.1.2 In the first instance all clients expressing dissatisfaction with the Service will be invited to speak to the Office Manager or other appropriate member of staff who will seek to resolve the matter at this stage.
- 5.1.3 If the Office Manager is not available to speak to the client for any reason and if the client would like to speak to a senior member of staff before the Office Manager becomes available, the Chief Executive will contact the client.
- 5.1.4 If the complaint relates to a mediator, for example, if the client is unhappy with the mediator allocated to his/her case, the Office Manager may arrange for another meeting to take place with either a different or an additional mediator. Before doing so, the Office Manager must discuss this procedure with the mediator and the other party, whose consent must be given. Where the couple were initially seen by two mediators, only one may be changed.
- 5.1.5 All efforts will be made to resolve the complaint at the time. However, where more investigation is needed, Norfolk Family Mediation Service will provide a holding response and aims to respond in full within 10 working days. If this is not achievable, for example due to staff absence, or if more information needs to be gathered, Norfolk Family Mediation Service may take up to 20 working days to respond. In this instance, the complainant will be informed of the extended response time.
- 5.1.6 If the complaint cannot be resolved informally, the complainant should be asked if they wish to make a formal complaint.

5.2 Formal complaints

- 5.2.1 Formal complaints must be received in writing, either by letter or email.
- 5.2.2 When a formal written complaint has been received, the Office Manager, or other appropriate member of staff, will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within two working days.
- 5.2.3 Complaints will be investigated, and a response given within 10 working days. If this is not achievable, for example due to staff absence, or if more information needs to be gathered, Norfolk Family Mediation Service may take up to 20 working days to respond. In this instance, the complainant will be informed of the extended response time.
- 5.2.4 Where a complaint relates to a member of staff, where appropriate, the member of staff should be informed and given a copy of the complaint.
- 5.2.5 If a complaint relates to a mediator, the complaint may also be discussed with the PPC.
- 5.2.6 Once the complaint has been investigated, a written explanation and/or apology should be sent to the complainant.
- 5.2.7 If the complainant is not satisfied by the action, s/he will be invited to write a further letter which will be escalated to the Chief Executive, or a nominated Trustee.
- 5.2.8 The Chief Executive/ Trustee will arrange an interview with the complainant within 15 working days. Where the complainant is unable to meet in person, the interview will be scheduled over the telephone. If the complainant is unwilling or unable to be interviewed, the matter will be investigated based on the evidence to hand.
- 5.2.9 Where appropriate, the Chief Executive/ Trustee will also arrange to interview the mediator/ staff member concerned.
- 5.2.10 The Chief Executive/ Trustee's decision as to any action to be taken following the interviews is final.
- 5.2.11 A final response should be given to the complainant within 15 working days of their interview.

5.3 Recording complaints

- 5.3.1 All complaints, formal, or informal are recorded according to a three-tier system as follows:
- Level One – minor dissatisfaction or negative feedback with our Service
 - Level Two – areas that need investigation and may require a change in process

- Level Three – complaints of a serious nature against a member of staff, or reflecting breaches of a regulation or procedure

5.3.2 Details of complaints are recorded on a Complaints Register, and in the case of complaints from the client, also on the Client's file.

5.3.3 It is recognised that both an informal and formal complaint could fall into any of the above three categories and the Service considers the recording of all complaints important.

5.3.4 Complaints are reported to the Trustees at Board Meetings to ensure that complaints are appropriately monitored at strategic and governance level as well as at operational and management level.

5.3.5 Where the complaint identifies errors or areas of improvement, these will be addressed at the earliest opportunity to prevent a recurrence.

5.3.6 Where a complaint relates to a breach in the management of personal data, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) the breach will also be recorded on the organisation's Breach Register, as well as being recorded as a complaint.

5.3.7 Complaints will be held on the Client's file in accordance with the Service's retention schedule for up to seven years. After this time, details will be anonymised. Complaints will be held on the Complaint Register for up to seven years, after which time they will be anonymised.

6 Monitoring and review

6.1 The Chief Executive will monitor and review this policy and procedures on an annual basis, or at an earlier opportunity should the need arise.

7 Policy review date

Date last reviewed: 22/05/2018