

COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Policy Statement

Victim Support Service recognises the rights of clients and others to raise, and have resolved, complaints and disputes, and recognises the value of advocates throughout this process.

Complaints will be dealt with promptly and complainants will be kept informed of progress and where appropriate, involved in their resolution. Complaints will be treated seriously and investigated thoroughly and confidentially, whilst maintaining the individual's right to privacy and dignity. The person will not be disadvantaged in any way by raising the complaint or dispute.

Victim Support Service welcomes complaints as they have an important role in the monitoring of service provision and ensuring that the needs of clients and the community are met.

Aims

The Complaint Procedure provides an avenue for the internal resolution of complaints with respect to any aspect of service delivery, eg procedures used, decisions made, actions of staff, standards of service etc. It provides a process to lodge a complaint when other internal means have not been appropriate or the preferred choice, or have not been successful.

The Complaints Procedure should not be seen as a substitute for:

- The informal resolution of complaints that occur directly between parties on a day-to-day basis – complainants should be encouraged to raise concerns directly with the person involved.
- The existing formal internal procedures such as reporting an incident or advising an appropriate member of staff about a matter of concern.

Process

1. Receiving the Complaint

- 1.1 Any member of staff or Board member may receive a complaint which should usually be referred to the relevant manager and/or Chief Executive (CE), who may appoint a staff member to undertake an initial interview to clarify the nature of the complaint.
- 1.2 When conducting initial interviews with a person lodging a complaint the staff member should:
 - 1.2.1 Explain that their role at this stage is to clarify the nature of the complaint and not to undertake an investigation, the process to be followed and the time frames;
 - 1.2.2 Ask the person to talk about the complaint in their own words;
 - 1.2.3 Help the person clarify the issues;
 - 1.2.4 Ascertain what outcome the person is wanting; and
 - 1.2.5 Use appropriate listening and interviewing skills.

- 1.3 Where possible the complainant should be encouraged to record their complaint in writing. Where this is not possible, a record of the complaint should be made by the staff member and agreed with by the complainant.
- 1.4 At the conclusion of the initial interview a report which clarifies the nature of the complaint should be made by the staff member to the relevant manager, Chief Executive or Board member.
- 1.5 Having received the clarified complaint the manager, CE or Board member should advise staff members who are the subject of a complaint about the complaint and how the matter is to proceed (if at all).
- 1.6 All interviews should also include any person assisting, unless the complainant requests otherwise.
- 1.7 The investigating manager, CE or Board member should be aware that staff who are interviewed in the process of the investigation may require counselling and should be able to direct staff to the available processes.
- 1.8 The manager, CE or Board member should be familiar with the Discipline and Termination of Employment Policy so they are able to determine if and when a matter should follow this process.
- 1.9 The manager, CE or Board member may wish to interview a range of other people as part of the investigation. In these circumstances it will need to be ensured that confidential information about clients and staff is not revealed, eg it may be inappropriate to fully explain the circumstances of the grievance and only necessary information should be sought.
- 1.10 The manager, CE or Board member should ensure that people who are interviewed are aware of how the information they give will be used, i.e. that it may be recorded in the final report which is an official document. If information is given by a person which they request be kept confidential, they may be advised that, while this will be taken into account, it is notwithstanding any Freedom of Information request which may be lodged and upheld.

2. Resolution

- 2.1. After completing the investigation, the Manager, CE or Board member will need to reflect on the information and decide what needs to happen to resolve the matter. They may wish to consult with others in relation to this.
- 2.2. The manager, CE or Board member will need to consider:
 - If there is a basis for the complaint;
 - What the person lodging the complaint wants as an outcome and whether this is appropriate, realistic or achievable;
 - What is an appropriate level in the organisation for the resolution to occur, i.e. manager, CE or Board member. It is preferable for complaints to be resolved at the lowest level possible within the organisation;
- 2.3. Any meetings arranged for the purpose of resolution will not be attempted without the consent of all parties.
- 2.4. The person(s) responsible for attempting to resolve the complaint should consider what action needs to occur, i.e.
 - Sharing information with each party; and
 - Negotiation of acceptable outcomes between the parties.

- 2.5 The complainant will need to determine and inform the manager, CE or Board member whether or not their complaint has been resolved.. If they are not satisfied, the complainant should be provided with appropriate recommendations for further action and advised about the next stage in the complaint process.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 At the conclusion of the above process, the manager, CE or Board member should decide whether:
- The matter requires no further action as it has been resolved;
 - The complaint has been resolved and further action is required
 - The complaint is unsubstantiated and should be dismissed.

The action chosen will be determined by the nature of the complaint, the information gathered, and the success or failure of any resolution.

4. Report

- 4.1 When the process of responding to a complaint is completed, the investigating person and those involved with its resolution will prepare a brief report including:
- The nature of the complaint;
 - Details of when the complaint was lodged and by whom;
 - Relevant details of parties involved;
 - A statement of people interviewed in the course of resolution;
 - Reference to any relevant documentation;
 - A summary of any resolution strategies and whether or not these were successful;
 - A statement about whether the complainant is satisfied with the outcome, whether they are awaiting the outcome of the recommendations or whether they wish to proceed to the next stage; and
 - Recommendations.
- 4.2 A summary of the final outcome should be prepared for the complainant.