

# FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS POLICY

## Introduction

- People First (PF) believes it should be easy to give feedback or make a complaint to us.
- This policy is written by PF to help you to give us feedback or make a complaint. It tells you what will happen and what you can expect as part of this process.
- This information helps us to make sure we are offering the best possible service to our customers

## What do we mean by ‘feedback’?

- PF welcomes feedback about the work that we do.
- Feedback can be both positive and negative. It is where the person who is passing on the information does not wish PF to act on the information; however, they do want PF to know about it.
- PF may choose to investigate any ‘negative’ feedback for their own use in order to inform good practice.

## What do we mean by ‘complaint’?

- A complaint can be spoken or a written statement, where the complainant wishes the matter to be investigated.
- It can be from anyone who has worked, volunteered, or received support from PF or who has had contact with PF.
- It can be about the work PF do, about a member of staff, a trustee, our business or something that PF have been involved in.

## All Complaints

- PF will deal with all complaints as quickly as possible. Equally, PF is aware that some complaints cannot be dealt with quickly and require a more formal process.
- If possible, it may be enough to address the complaint informally and agree how to resolve it quickly without having to put a formal investigation in place.
- Sometimes, however, the issue is more complex, and a formal investigation is started. If this does not lead to full resolution, then the complaint can move to the appeal stage.
- This policy is not a legal process. It is not written to consider whether PF has been negligent. It is not part of PF’s disciplinary policy.

- All complaints:
  - All complaints, no matter what the subject matter will be taken seriously.
  - All complaints will be dealt with empathetically.
  - Staff will be at all times polite, courteous and sympathetic, and will remain calm and respectful.
  - All complaints are treated confidentially. Only the officers dealing with complaints will be aware of the complaint.
  - PF aims to handle complaints fairly and honestly regardless of who makes a complaint.
  - PF treats all members of the community equally. Where appropriate, every effort will be made to make information available in a different format, or language.
  - If it is found that one or more of the operational 'procedures' of PF have failed, the Investigating Officer is responsible for making sure these failures are raised with the Senior Leadership Team and, if appropriate, Trustees in order to inform change.

### **Complaints Log**

- *PF uses a log to record complaints. The log is used to identify potential trends or concerns. The log is maintained by HR and the COO.*
- *All complaints logged in the Complaints Log contain the following information:*
  - *Date of complaint*
  - *Complainant's initials only*
  - *Brief overview of the complaint*
  - *The service/dept which the complaint is about*
  - *Initials of investigating manager*
  - *Outcome of the complaint*
  - *The date the complaint process was completed*

### **Correspondence Log**

- *All correspondence relating to each complaint is securely stored in a correspondence complaints log. The log is maintained by HR and the COO.*

### **Action Plan**

- *Any actions/learning undertaken as a result of the complaint are recorded in individual action plans.*

Complaints information is kept for a period of 7 years following the resolution date.

### **Supporting people to make comments**

- If someone would like to make a complaint to PF, but need some help to do so, PF will provide information about services which may be able to provide independent support, e.g. Citizen Advice Bureau.

## **Minor/verbal complaints – Stage 1**

- When it is appropriate to do so, PF feels it is the best approach to ask front line staff to talk to the person making the complaint and try to find a solution straight away. Staff should talk through the issue with the complainant. Staff should listen and be empathic to their concerns. Staff should not accept blame, blame others, or make excuses.
- The staff member should then agree a course of action for moving forwards with the complainant and clarify this with the complainant. It might be appropriate to put it in writing at this stage.
- It is important to identify in this discussion what it is that the complainant feels would resolve the issue they have raised, and to address this as far as is appropriate and possible.
- The member of staff should keep their line manager informed of their work with the complainant. The line manager should also inform the Chief Operating Officer (COO).
- If the suggested plan of action is not acceptable by the complainant, or the complainant is not satisfied that they have been listened to, or that the appropriate action has taken place, this would then move to a Stage 2 complaint.

## **Written/Formal Complaints – Stage 2**

All written complaints should be emailed to [HR@wearepeoplefirst.co.uk](mailto:HR@wearepeoplefirst.co.uk) marked strictly confidential for the attention of the Chief Operating Officer or by post to the Chief Operating Officer, People First, Milbourne Street, Carlisle, CA2 5XB marked strictly confidential.

When the Chief Operating Officer receives a complaint it is their job to appoint a named Investigating Officer to manage the complaint. The Investigating Officer would normally be from a different department to that to which the complaint relates.

### **CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER (COO)**

#### *Prior to an investigation*

- The COO will decide who the appropriate Investigating Officer will be and pass the complaint to this person.
- The COO will write to the complainant within 5 working days of initial receipt of the complaint. This letter can be sent by email and must include:
  - Confirmation that an Investigating Officer has been appointed, their name and contact details
  - Gain permission, where possible, from the complainant to proceed if the complaint has been made on behalf of someone else – this permission must be in writing.
  - A copy of this policy

- If a member of staff is the subject of the complaint, the COO will inform the member of staff's direct line manager within 48 hours of initial receipt of the complaint
- The COO will also inform the member of staff who is the subject of the complaint, (if appropriate to do so), within 48 hours of receiving the complaint. If the member of staff wishes to have a colleague appointed as their 'support' during the investigation, the COO will appoint a suitable colleague. The 'support' should not be the member of staff's direct line manager. The COO will also inform the member of staff the name of the appointed Investigating Officer and explain that they will be contacted directly by them in order to discuss the complaint in more detail.

## **Investigating Officer**

### *The Investigation*

- The Investigating Officer will contact the complainant and offer an opportunity to meet within 7 days of being appointed the Investigating Officer. This can be done by phone or email. An explanation of the rationale for the meeting and a planned agenda should be provided in advance.
- If not set out clearly in the written complaint, it is important to identify with the complainant what it is that they feel would resolve the issue they have raised, and to address this as far as is appropriate and possible.
- Complainants will be informed that they can bring a friend/relation/advocate/along to any meetings.
- If the complaint is about a member(s) of staff, the Investigating Officer will also offer the opportunity for the member(s) of staff to put forward their account. This can be done by phone or email. An explanation of the rationale for the meeting and a planned agenda should be provided in advance.
- The member of staff will also be informed that they can bring their 'support' or a union representative with them should they wish to do so.
- The Investigating Officer will keep a written record of all meetings, telephone phone calls and copies of any email communication.
- Within 18 days of receipt of the complaint, the Investigating Officer will inform the COO their findings of the investigation. This must be communicated in writing; however, it can also be communicated verbally.
- If the issues are too complex to be finalised within 18 days, then the complainant and the member of staff must be informed of the delay as soon as is reasonably possible.
- If the complaint raises a potentially serious matter, advice could be sought from a legal advisor, however this must be done in consultation with the COO. If legal action is taken, then the Complaints Procedure should be reviewed in line with the advice given.

## Chief Operating Officer (COO)

Following the investigation by the Investigation Officer

- Once the findings of the investigation have been reported back to the COO by the Investigating Officer, the COO, in consultation with the Investigating officer, will reach a decision as to the outcome of the complaint.
- Within 21 days of receipt of the complaint, the COO will inform the complainant of the outcome. This must be communicated in writing; however, it can also be communicated verbally.
- If relevant, the COO will also inform the member of staff the outcome, as well as their line manager.
- The COO will populate the relevant sections of the action log and pass to the relevant Manager to complete and review.

### Making an Appeal – Stage 3

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the decision reached by the COO, they can raise what is called ‘an appeal’ to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). This requires the complainant to set out in writing, their reasons for, and grounds on, which they are appealing.

When the CEO receives the appeal, he/she will convene a panel within 21 days of receiving the appeal, consisting of:

- The CEO
- One Trustee not previously involved in the investigation
- Independent External Person

Prior to the appeal hearing, the panel members will receive the following paperwork:

- Original letter/email received from complainant
- A copy of all meeting notes recorded during the original investigation
- A copy of this policy
- A copy of the outcome letter sent to the complainant
- Policies or procedures relevant to the complaint

Conduct of the Appeal Panel

- The complainant will be invited by the CEO to attend the panel hearing at a given date, time and location.
- The complainant will be informed by the CEO that they can bring a friend/relation/advocate.
- If the complaint is regarding a member of staff, they ‘*may also*’ be invited by the CEO to attend the panel hearing should the panel feel they wish clarification on a particular point. The member of staff will also be informed that they can bring their ‘support’ or a union representative with them should they wish to do so.

The CEO will inform the complainant of the outcome of the appeal panel within 7 days of the appeal hearing.

The appeal panel's decision is final.

**Agreed by Trustees – October 2020**

**Date for Review by Finance and Operations Director– October 2021**