

Complaints Policy & Procedure

Hastings Furniture Service provides a range of services to the public including reused furniture, removals, house clearances, training and work / volunteering opportunities. This policy may be used by anyone who has a concern or complaint about any aspect of the organisation. This may include parents and carers of people who use our services, and other members of the community. Every effort will be made to resolve any complaints received.

Complaints will always be investigated so that we can ensure that all statutory duties are being met and if not address the issues raised and learn from them.

Aims & Objectives

This complaints policy aims to:

- Encourage the resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible;
- Ensure that concerns are dealt with quickly, fully and fairly and within clearly defined time limits;
- Provide effective responses and appropriate redress;
- Maintain good working relationships between all people involved with the charity.

Monitoring complaints

At all formal stages of the complaints procedure, the following information should be recorded:

- The name of the complainant
- The date and time at which complaint was made
- The details of the complaint
- The desired outcome of the complainant
- How the complaint is investigated (including written records of interviews held)
- Results and conclusions of investigations
- Any action taken
- The complainant's response (satisfaction or further pursuit of complaint)
- Records should be retained for 6 years

Upholding or not upholding complaints

At each stage of the complaints procedure, the conclusion will be either:

1 That the complaint is upheld (in part or in full) and, where appropriate, some form of action is taken.

It may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- An explanation
- An apology or admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better

- In the case of goods or services provided to the public for a fee, a full or partial refund, or store credit
- An assurance that the event complained of will not recur
- An explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again
- An undertaking to review policies in light of the complaint

Or

2 That the complaint is not upheld and reasons for this are clearly given.

The complainant may either choose to take no further action or will be advised of the option to take the complaint to the next relevant stage of the complaints policy.

Publicity and communication

This policy will be included on the HFS website or available through the head office.

Confidentiality

All conversations and correspondence will be treated confidentially. Personal information will only be shared between staff and board members on a 'need to know' basis.

Confidentiality will be maintained within the board to ensure sufficient members have no prior knowledge of the complaint to enable a complaints panel to be convened, if required, at stage 3.

Accompaniment

It is an expectation that equal respect will be granted to each person involved within the process and that differences between people will be respected and understood. This includes the complainant's right to be accompanied by a friend or relative at discussions and hearings and/or to submit formal complaints which have been written by another individual on their behalf.

Time between stages

After each stage, the complainant and the individual who is dealing with their complaint at that time should allow 10 working days as an appropriate time limit within which the next stage should be accessed, if at all. If the complaint is not submitted to the next stage within this agreed time limit it should be considered as closed.

Changes to time limits and deadlines

If and when it becomes necessary to alter the time limits and deadlines set out within this policy (for example due to staff holidays or sickness) the complainant should be told and given an explanation as to why this has been the case.

Circumstances under which this procedure should not be used-

Issues related to child protection, criminal investigations and employee grievances must also all be dealt with separately from this policy.

This complaints policy is distinct from formal staff grievance or disciplinary proceedings and this should be made clear to all concerned. There may be occasions where a complaint gives rise to disciplinary procedures which put the complaints process on hold. If and when this occurs, the complainant should be informed. Any non-disciplinary aspects of the complaint should continue to be dealt with through the usual complaints procedures.

PROCEDURES FOR HANDLING COMPLAINTS

Informal discussion

Introduction

The vast majority of concerns can be dealt with informally. There are many occasions where concerns are resolved straight away without the need to submit a formal complaint. Indeed, many concerns raised at this level might not be classified as complaints.

Who to speak to informally

Individuals may decide to raise their concerns with any member of HFS staff including tutors, support workers or whoever serves them in the store, depending on their wishes and the type of issues they want to discuss. At this level, the person who receives the concern may be able to resolve the matter for the person very quickly.

Monitoring

The members of staff receiving and dealing with the comment or complaint will complete the informal comment Log to create a brief record of the event and pass it to the Deputy Chief Executive who will monitor the nature of comments and complaints across the organisation.

Time scales

There are no specific time scales for dealing with concerns at this stage. However, as at all stages, issues should be considered and dealt with as quickly and effectively as possible.

Response

The individual who raised the issue should be informed of any action to be taken to resolve the issue. If appropriate, this might be confirmed in writing.

Options for complainant

If the individual is dissatisfied with the response they have been given and would like to take their concerns further, they should be referred to the complaints procedure.

STAGE 1: Referral to the Chief Executive

Introduction

This is the first stage of the formal complaints process and, as a result, all communications between parties need to be carefully recorded and monitored as set out in the 'monitoring complaints' section of this document.

When a complaint is made directly against the Chief Executive, stage 1 is not required and the formal procedure begins at stage 2.

Submitting a formal complaint

By this stage it must be clear that the concern is a definite complaint which will be dealt with according to this policy and should be formally submitted in writing to the Chief Executive.

Acknowledgement and time scales

The Chief Executive should formally acknowledge the complaint within 5 working days of receiving it and begin an investigation.

The investigation

The Chief Executive will need to investigate the complaint and review any relevant documentation and information. If necessary, she will take statements from those involved.

Response

The Chief Executive will provide the complainant with a full written response within 10 working days of acknowledging it. This response will determine whether or not the complaint has been upheld, the reasons why, and what action (if any) will be taken. The response will provide details of how to move on to the next stage, if the complainant is not satisfied.

STAGE 2: Complaint referred to the Chair of HFS Board

Introduction

Upon receiving a formally submitted complaint at this stage the Chair of the HFS Board or his/her nominee will seek to resolve the issue with the complainant by other means without the need for a complaints committee review at stage 3

When a complaint is made directly against the Chief Executive, stage 1 is not required and the formal procedure begins at stage 2.

Submitting a formal complaint

The complainant must submit a written request to the Chair who will investigate the complaint or arrange for his/her nominee to investigate it.

Acknowledgement and time scales

The Chair or his/her nominee should formally acknowledge the complaint within 5 working days of receiving it and begin an investigation.

The investigation

The Chair or his/her nominee will need to investigate the complaint and review any relevant documentation and information. If necessary, the Chair or his/her nominee will take statements from those involved.

Response

The Chair of Governors or his/her nominee will provide the complainant with a full written response within 10 working days of acknowledging it. This response will determine whether or not the complaint has been upheld, the reasons why, and what action (if any) will be taken. The response will provide details of how to move on to the next stage, if the complainant is not satisfied.

STAGE 3: Review by HFS Board Complaints Panel

Introduction

If the complainant remains unsatisfied following an investigation by the Chair they can ask for their complaint to be referred to a complaints panel.

The complaints panel will be clerked by a member of the staff, the clerk to the governing body or another Board member.

The Panel

The panel will generally consist of three board members who have not previously been involved with dealing with the complaint. The panel should elect its own chair.

Acknowledgement and time scales

The Chair should acknowledge receipt of the complainant's letter within 5 working days. This letter will inform them that their complaint will be heard by a complaints panel within 15 working days.

Complaints Panel Arrangements

The clerk of the panel should then formally write to the complainant, the Chief Executive and any other relevant staff or witnesses and inform them:

- Of the date, time and venue of the hearing
- How it will be conducted
- Request for any supporting documentation by either the complainant or the organisation which must be returned to the Clerk no later than 5 working days before the hearing takes place; this should include any request from supporting witnesses or representatives to attend with either party
- Of the rights of accompaniment as outlined in this document.

The clerk will ensure that all parties receive all relevant documents at least 2 working days before the date of the hearing so as to allow individuals to familiarise themselves with them.

Complaints Panel Meeting

The Chair should allow each party involved to explain their understanding or interpretation of events and for the Panel to question them for further clarification. Complainants do not have to attend the Panel meeting if they would prefer not to, and all written evidence will be considered.

Ultimately, the chair of the meeting has control over its proceedings.

After the Panel meeting

The panel will then consider the complaint and all the evidence presented and:

- Reach a majority decision on the complaint
- Decide or recommend upon the appropriate action (if any) to be taken
- Where appropriate, suggest changes to, or request a review of, the relevant systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again.

This information will be included in letters to both the Chief Executive and the complainant.

Options for complainant

This is the end of the HFS complaints process. If the complainant is not satisfied with the decision of the Panel they may contact a local, regional or national regulatory body relevant to their complaint.