



The First Step

Complaints Policy & Procedures

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1. Complaints Policy Statement

The First Step (TFS)

- is committed to providing a good standard of quality services to clients, other agencies and organisations;
- will take seriously any concern or complaint and will look into it promptly, for resolution as quickly as possible;
- recognises that all service users, agencies and organisations have:
 - the right to raise concerns or complaints about our services;
 - access to clear information on how to voice complaints and concerns.
- will consider concerns and complaints from everyone who receives or requests a service from TFS and people acting on their behalf;
- will produce a standard leaflet outlining this policy and procedure which should be on display and available to anyone who asks for it;
- will deal with complaints in line with the TFS Confidentiality policy;
- will keep a register of all complaints, which will be reviewed regularly by the Board of Trustees.
- will use complaints data as part of the process of monitoring the quality, effectiveness and non-discriminatory nature of its services;
- will ensure all staff, volunteers and Board of Trustees members are aware they are required to read, understand and comply with this policy and its procedures.

Complaints Policy

2. Introduction

2.1 TFS strives for high standards in service delivery and welcomes feedback from individuals, users of our services, stakeholders, funding bodies and anyone who works with us, on all aspects of our services. Such feedback is invaluable in helping us evaluate and improve our work.

2.2 The objectives of the TFS complaints policy and procedures are to:

- ensure everyone knows how to make a complaint and how a complaint will be handled;
- ensure that complaints are dealt with consistently, fairly and sensitively within clear time frames;
- provide individuals with a fair and effective way to complain about our work;
- ensure that complaints are monitored to improve our services.

2.3 TFS will ensure that we:

- listen carefully to complaints and treat complaints as confidential, where possible;
- record, store and manage all complaints accurately and in accordance with Data Protection legislation;
- investigate the complaint fully, objectively and within the stated time frame;
- notify the complainant of the results of the investigation and any right of appeal;
- inform the complainant of any action that will be implemented in order to ensure that there is no re-occurrence;
- report on an annual basis, the number of complaints received, the outcomes and any actions taken.

3. Definition of a complaint

3.1 A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction by an individual, whether justified or not.

3.2 An individual may make a complaint if they feel TFS has:

- failed to provide a service or an acceptable standard of service;
- made a mistake in the way the service was provided;
- failed to act in a proper way;
- provided an unfair service.

3.3 This policy and procedure relates only to complaints received about TFS and its services.

Complaints Procedure

4. Concern or Complaint

- 4.1 It is important to establish the difference between a concern and a complaint. Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage will reduce the likelihood of their developing into formal complaints.
- 4.2 If you have any concerns about our work please tell the TFS worker or their manager as soon as possible, so they can quickly understand your concerns and try to put things right.
- 4.3 If you are not happy with the response to your concern and/or you want to make a formal complaint please follow the procedure below.

5. Complaints Procedure

5.1 Informal Stage

TFS aims to settle the majority of complaints quickly and satisfactorily by the member of staff who provides the service. The complaint may be resolved quickly by way of an apology or by an acceptable explanation to the individual. If not, progress to the formal procedure.

5.2 Formal Complaints procedure

- Stage One – the complaint
- Stage Two – investigation
- Stage Three – appeal

6. Stage One – The Complaint

- 6.1 The complaint can be written, or if the individual prefers, they can tell someone at TFS, or another person, who will write it down for them. The complainant will need to sign it. A complaint form is available to use at appendix 2.
- 6.2 Individuals wishing to make a complaint should contact the person who provided the service, or their line manager. Alternatively, contact The First Step in writing to The First Step, The Old Schoolhouse, St John's Road, Huyton Liverpool 36 0UX. We also have suggestion boxes in the First Step Centre and at the Refuge.
- 6.3 The complaint should include the complainant's name and address, the nature and date of the complaint and how they want to see it resolved. A TFS complaints form can be requested and sent to the complainant or collected by the complainant.

6.4 On receipt, each complaint will be allocated a reference number and logged on the complaints register (see appendix 3). Complainants must receive an acknowledgement within 5 working days of receipt of a signed complaint.

7. Stage Two – Investigation

7.1 All complaints at this stage should be dealt with by a service leader. If they need to meet with the complainant, they will do so within 7 working days of receiving the written complaint.

7.2 Complaints will be fully investigated and a written response provided to the complainant within 20 working days by the investigator.

7.3 The complainant will receive written confirmation of the outcome of any investigation any recommendations/remedies made, such as reviewing of policies, staff development and training or appropriate improvement to TFS services. The outcome should not refer to any individual employees or groups of employees within TFS.

7.4 Where the complaint is upheld an apology should be offered.

7.5 Occasionally investigations may take longer, particularly if the complaint is complex. The complaint investigator will brief their line manager about the delay and agree a new timescale. A letter informing the complainant of the delay will be sent before the end of the initial 20 working days timescale and a final date given for a conclusion to be reached.

7.6 If an individual remains dissatisfied with the outcome from Stage Two they can appeal within 14 working days of the date of the outcome and progress to Stage Three.

7.7 The complaints register will be updated and any pending complaints flagged so they are followed up.

8. Stage Three - Appeal

8.1 If the complaint cannot be resolved to the complainant's satisfaction at stage two, or if the service leader feels that the complaint is of a very serious nature, or concerns a service leader then it will be referred to the Chief Executive.

8.2 If the complaint is about the Chief Executive then the matter will be discussed with two Trustees.

8.3 The Chief Executive and/or Trustees will acknowledge receipt within 5 working days. The Stage Two investigation will be reviewed and one of the following actions will be recommended within 20 working days (from the date the complainant stated they wanted to move the complaint to stage 3):

- Uphold the action taken by TFS at Stage Two.
- Make changes to the Stage Two recommendation/actions.

8.4 The complainant should be informed in writing of the outcome of stage three. The decision reached about this complaint will then be final. Other options available to the complainant are listed in 8.5 below and should be detailed in the letter.

8.5 If the complainant is still not satisfied with the result after TFS has been through the 3 stages, they should be advised that there is no further right of appeal with TFS but they could approach any of the following agencies for advice:

- A solicitor
- Citizens Advice Bureau

This should be done within 1 month of receiving the outcome from the appeal.

9. Anonymous Complaints

9.1 Complaints received anonymously will be recorded and considered. However, action may be limited where further information is required to ensure a full and fair investigation.

10. Data protection

10.1 To process a complaint TFS will hold personal data about the complainant, which the individual provides, and which other people give in response to the complaint. TFS will hold this data securely and only use it to address the complaint. The identity of the person making the complaint will only be known to those who need to consider the complaint and will not be revealed to other people or made public by TFS. However, it may not be possible to preserve confidentiality in some circumstances, for example, where relevant legislation applied or allegations are made which involve the conduct of third parties.

10.2 TFS will destroy complaints files in a secure manner six years after the complaint has been closed.

11. Monitoring

11.1 Complaints are an important feedback tool alongside data provided. These can be collected by exit surveys; stakeholder surveys; user feedback, and focus groups and the information allows TFS to learn more about how individuals view our services as well as how we are serving them. To ensure TFS can learn from complaints the following data will be collected:

- Name and address
- Name of person dealing with the complaint
- Date of complaint and response
- Nature of complaint
- Action(s) taken/recommendations made in response to the complaint
- Lessons learned

11.2 Complaints information will be considered on a regular basis by the Management Team and reported annually to the TFS board of trustees. Wherever possible, the data will be used to improve and develop the service.

Summary of Complaints Procedure

Appendix 1

Informal Stage

An immediate attempt should be made, where possible, to put the matter right by explanation and/or issue an apology.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, move to the formal stage

Formal Stage One – Complaint

Ensure completion of the signed complaint form (Appendix 2)
(it can be completed by the complainant or a member of staff)

Acknowledge within 5 working days of the receipt date of the signed complaint and enter in the Register of Complaints (Appendix 3)

Formal Stage Two – Investigation

The Investigating Officer to meet complainant within 7 working days of the receipt date of the written complaint

Conduct an investigation and issue written decision within 20 working days
(If complex, write to complainant, within the 20 days, to agree a new date)

Send the outcome/recommendations in writing and include details of their right of appeal, which should be made within 14 working days of the date of the outcome letter

Update Complaints Register

Formal Stage Three – Appeal

Refer unresolved or serious complaints to the CEO (or to Board if involves CEO)

CEO or Trustee to acknowledge in writing within 5 working days of the date of the appeal

Review the Stage 2 investigation recommendations/actions within 20 working days of the date of the appeal.

(Note: The outcome will either be to uphold the appeal, or to make changes to the stage 2 recommendations/actions)

Advise complainant of the decision in writing, explaining it is final.
(Note: The response should also advise on the other options available to the complainant which the complainant must take within 1 month of the date of the decision of the appeal).

