

# COMPLAINTS POLICY & PROCEDURE

**Policy Review:**

This policy will be reviewed on a bi-annual basis, with any changes approved by the Board of Trustees and the Management Team.

The review will consider:

- Changes in the law
- Changes within the organisation
- Changes relating to any learning as a result of cases or case reviews

<b>Version:</b>	V2
<b>Issue Date:</b>	11/09/2020
<b>Revised:</b>	04/11/2021 03/11/2022 01/11/2023 April 2024
	April 2026
<b>Review Date:</b>	April 2028
<b>Author:</b>	HS
<b>Category</b>	Risk Management

### **Our Commitment**

STARS Dorset is committed to delivering efficient and high-quality services. We aim to be open to answer for our actions and to respond to enquires in an effective and professional manner. This complaints procedure builds upon our commitment to equal opportunities and data protection. We are members of the Fundraising Standards Board, The Survivor's Trust (TST) and the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP). STARS Dorset strives to be a learning organisation, where we invite all feedback from clients and stakeholders. It is essential that our workforce including sessional and contracted staff, volunteers and trustees can identify, receive and direct any concerns about the services we provide.

### **Helping us to put things right**

STARS Dorset is always keen to hear views of the people we are in contact with about our performance, including things that we are doing well and areas for improvement. We recognise that things may go wrong and, as a result, we may not provide the standards of service that we have set ourselves. We are especially keen to know when this happens as it gives us an opportunity to put things right and to learn from our mistakes. That way, we can get it right next time. Below we provide time frames for our complaints. If for any reason we will not be able to meet this time frame we will contact you, to agree a new time frame.

### **What is a complaint?**

STARS Dorset defines a complaint as any issue, concern or problem with an aspect of the service, member of staff, volunteer, self-employed contractor or Trustee, that leaves a client feeling dissatisfied.

### **How do you go about complaining about us?**

You can make a complaint to any member of our staff or volunteer. You can make a complaint:

- In person
- By phone
- In writing by post or e-mail

Once a complaint has been received, we will:

- Treat the complaint seriously, however it is made
- Investigate all complaints regardless of when the incident happened, although we may be restricted in any investigation of an event/incident that happened over one year ago
- Do our best to deal with it professionally and within the agreed time frames
- Apologise when we have got things wrong
- Explain our position or any action we take

- Give explanations which are clear and easy to understand
- Give you a contact phone number for enquiries
- Tell you how to take your complaint further if you wish to do so
- Consider (with your input) how to avoid the same/similar issue arising, if applicable
- Resolve the complaint to our mutual satisfaction

### **Complaints Procedure**

The investigation will include some or all the following:

- Phone call/meeting with you to ensure we have all relevant information
- Clarification of your desired outcome
- Review of any relevant paperwork/case notes/policies
- Interview with staff/volunteers
- Record of all actions taken
- A written outcome, detailing any action/learning

### **Stage One – Informal Complaint**

We will always try to resolve any concern or complaint informally in the first instance. It is always best practice for the complainant and the member of staff or volunteer to attempt to resolve the issue directly. If this is not appropriate or not possible, the complaint should progress to stage two.

### **Stage Two – Formal Complaint**

If it is not appropriate or possible for the complaint to be resolved informally, it will then be passed to the relevant Head of Service. They will then investigate the complaint and respond to you in writing according to the stated time frames. If the complaint concerns more than one service or relates directly to actions of a Team Leader, it will be investigated by another designated Head of Service.

If the complaint is about the Head of Service, it will be escalated to the CEO. If the complaint is about the CEO, it will be passed to the Chair of the Board of Trustees to investigate. The stages outlined here may be contracted, as a result.

### **Stage Three – Escalated Complaint**

If you are unhappy with the outcome or investigation of your complaint, you can ask for your complaint to be escalated to the CEO.

The CEO will respond to your complaint according to our time frames and will review the documentation collected during the initial investigation, in addition to any additional evidence. You can contact the CEO via email: [ceo@starsdorset.org](mailto:ceo@starsdorset.org)

If there is still concern regarding the outcome or investigation of your complaint, you can ask the Board of Trustees to review. The Board will assess any reasons you give for being unhappy along with any supplementary evidence. They will inform you in writing if they feel that your letter warrants an additional investigation. You can contact the Chair of Trustees via email: [chair@starsdorset.org](mailto:chair@starsdorset.org)

**Stage Five – External Review**

If you remain unsatisfied with the way that STARS Dorset has treated you then we will support you to take your complaint to one of our professional membership organisations. For therapeutic support this is the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) or The Survivor’s Trust (TST) for support provided by our Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA) team.

Stage/Process	Time frame for response from STARS Dorset
Complaint received	
Acknowledge and send copy of policy	5 working days after complaint received
Stage One – Resolve informally between complainant directly with relevant STARS Dorset staff/volunteer, if appropriate. If not appropriate or resolution not possible, move to:	15 working days after complaint received
Stage Two – Head of Service to investigate	30 working days after date passed to Stage Two
Stage Three – CEO to investigate or review	15 working days after dated passed to Stage Three
Stage Four – Chair of Board of Trustees to investigate or review	15 working days after passed to Stage Four
Stage Five – British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) or The Survivors Trust (TST)	<a href="https://www.bacp.co.uk/about-us/protecting-the-public/professional-conduct/how-to-complain-about-a-bacp-member/">https://www.bacp.co.uk/about-us/protecting-the-public/professional-conduct/how-to-complain-about-a-bacp-member/</a>  <a href="http://www.the-survivors-trust.org/">The Survivors Trust - Rape &amp; Sexual Abuse Services UK</a>

Whilst we do not put a time frame on any complaints received (you can complain about something irrespective of how long ago it happened), we will be limited in our ability to carry out an investigation where something happened over a year ago, and the longer ago, the more

restricted we will be in our ability. It may be that a complaint relates to an incident that happened such a long time ago that we will not be able to investigate at all.

Sometimes, we may define a complaint as an unreasonable complaint, and in these circumstances, we may decide not to investigate a complaint. This decision is only taken on very rare occasions and will always be taken as a joint decision by more than one person to include the CEO and/or the Chair of Trustees.

### **Monitoring and Reporting**

All complaints will be recorded. You can view our [privacy policy](#) here.

STARS Dorset is obliged to report on complaints received (anonymised) to its commissioners and funders as part of the quarterly contract review reports and meetings. Complaints are also reported to the charity's Board of Trustees at its regular Board meetings.