



Complaints Procedure

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Policy and Procedure

1. Purpose

1.1 This document seeks to lay out Mermaids' policy statement and approach to complaints, and the procedure for dealing with complaints.

2. Responsibilities

2.1 Anyone, whether staff member, trustee or volunteer, may receive and need to initially respond to a complaint in the course of their work at Mermaids.

2.2 Any Manager may be asked to investigate and respond to a complaint.

2.3 The CEO and Directors may hear appeals, as may the board.

2.4 The CEO and the Board of Trustees have overall accountability for this procedure and its implementation.

3. Definitions

3.1 Complaint: Any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect of Mermaids.

3.2 Complainant: The person or organisation who has made the complaint. Complaints may come from any person or organisation who has a legitimate interest in Mermaids.

3.3 Source: How we have received a complaint. This may include verbally, by phone, by email or in writing.

4. Policy Statement

4.1 Mermaids views complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve for the future, as well as a chance to put things right for the person or organisation that has made the complaint.

4.2 Our policy is:

4.2.1 To provide a fair complaints procedure which is clear and easy to use for anyone wishing to make a complaint.

4.2.2 To publicise the existence of our complaints procedure so that people know how to contact us to make a complaint.

4.2.3 To make sure everyone at Mermaids knows what to do if a complaint is received.

4.2.4 To make sure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way.

4.2.5 To make sure that complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are repaired.

4.2.6 To gather information which helps us to improve what we do.

5. Receiving Complaints

5.1 Written complaints may be sent to Mermaids registered office, which is 167-169 Great Portland Street, London W1W 5PF

5.2 Written complaints may also be addressed by email to info@mermaidsuk.org.uk or any other Mermaids email address.

5.3 Complaints may be made by phone to 0808 801 0400

5.4 complaints may be made in person to any of Mermaids' staff, volunteers or trustees at any of our events or activities.

6. Recording Complaints

6.1 Complaints may arrive through channels publicised for that purpose or through any other contact details or opportunities the complainant may have.

6.2 Complaints received by telephone or in person need to be recorded. The person who receives a phone or in person complaint should:

6.2.1 Write down the facts of the complaint

6.2.2 Take the complainant's name, address and telephone number

6.2.3 Note down the relationship of the complainant to Mermaids (for example: service user, member of the public)

6.2.4 Tell the complainant that we have a complaints procedure

6.2.5 Tell the complainant what will happen next and how long it will take

6.2.6 Where appropriate, ask the complainant to send a written account by post or by email so that the complaint is recorded in the complainant's own words.

6.3 Once a complaint has been received, a manager must be immediately notified and the complaint logged on the Complaints Log.

7. Resolving Complaints – Stage One (investigation and response)

7.1 In many cases, a complaint is best resolved by the person responsible for the issue being complained about. If the complaint has been received by that person, they may be able to resolve it swiftly and should do so if possible and appropriate.

7.2 Whether or not the complaint has been resolved, the complaint information should be passed to the relevant Line Manager, or Director of the relevant department where appropriate within 2 working days. If the complaint is serious, it must be passed on immediately.

7.3 On receiving the complaint, it will be recorded in the complaints log. If it has not already been resolved, the Manager will delegate an appropriate person to investigate it and to take appropriate action.

7.4 If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a fair opportunity to respond.

7.5 Complaints should be acknowledged by the person handling the complaint within a week. The acknowledgement should say who is dealing with the complaint, provide their contact details and explain when the complainant can expect a reply. A copy of this complaints procedure should be attached.

7.6 Complainants should receive a definitive response within four weeks. If this is not possible because for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given

7.7 Whether the complaint is justified or not, the reply to the complainant should describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

8. Resolving Complaints – Stage Two (appeal)

8.1 If the complainant feels that the problem has not been satisfactorily resolved at Stage One, they can request that the complaint is reviewed at Board level. At this stage, the complaint will be passed to the Chair.

8.2 The request for Board level review will be acknowledged within a week of receiving it. The acknowledgement should say who will deal with the case and when the complainant can expect a reply.

8.3 The Chair may investigate the facts of the case themselves or delegate a suitably senior person to do so. This may involve reviewing the paperwork of the case and speaking with the person who dealt with the complaint at Stage One.

8.4 If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a further opportunity to respond.

8.5 The person who dealt with the original complaint at Stage One should be kept informed of what is happening.

8.6 Complainants should receive a definitive response within four weeks. If this is not possible because for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given.

8.7 Whether the complaint is upheld or not, the reply to the complainant should describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

8.8 The decision taken at this stage is final, unless the Board decides it is appropriate to seek external assistance with resolution with the Charity Commission.

9. External complaints

9.1 The complainant can complain to the Charity Commission at any stage.

9.2 Information about the kind of complaints the Commission can involve itself in can be found on their website at: www.charitycommission.gov.uk/publications/cc47.aspx

9.3 The complainant can complain to the Fundraising Regulator if their complaint relates to our fundraising practice.

10. Variation of the complaints procedure

10.1 The Board may vary the procedure for good reason. This may be necessary to avoid a conflict of interest, for example, a complaint about the Chair should not also have the Chair as the person leading a Stage Two review.

11. Reporting to the Board

11.1 Complaints are reported to the Board and reviewed quarterly to identify any trends which may indicate a need to take further action.

Appendix 1: Practical Guidance for verbal complaints

- Remain calm and respectful throughout the conversation.
- Listen - allow the person to talk about the complaint in their own words.
- Sometimes a person just wants to "let off steam".
- Don't debate the facts in the first instance, especially if the person is angry.
- Show an interest in what is being said.
- Obtain details about the complaint before any personal details.
- Ask for clarification wherever necessary.
- Show that you have understood the complaint by reflecting back what you have noted down.
- Acknowledge the person's feelings (even if you feel that they are being unreasonable) - you can do this without making a comment on the complaint itself or making any admission of fault on behalf of the organisation.
 - e.g "I understand that this situation is frustrating for you".
- If you feel that an apology is deserved for something that was the responsibility of your organisation, then apologise.
- Ask the person what they would like done to resolve the issue.
- Be clear about what you can do, how long it will take and what it will involve.
- Don't promise things you can't deliver.
- Give clear and valid reasons why requests cannot be met.
- Make sure that the person understands what they have been told.
- Wherever appropriate, inform the person about the available avenues of review or appeal.