

Northern Ireland



NORTHERN IRELAND SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL

COMPLAINTS POLICY

*(Includes the Social Care Council's Unacceptable
Actions Policy)*

Final v4.0

Title	Social Care Council Complaints Policy
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Version History

Document Version	Date	Status	Reviewed by	Document Revision History
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Approvals

Date	Document Version	Approver Name and Title
01/02/17	Final v2.0	Jim Perry, Chair, Council
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NORTHERN IRELAND SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL

COMPLAINTS POLICY

1. Introduction

1.1 The Northern Ireland Social Care Council (Social Care Council) was established in 2001, under the Health and Personal Social Services Act (NI) 2001. It is an Arms' Length Body, sponsored by the Department of Health in Northern Ireland. It is responsible for the registration and regulation of the Social Care Workforce which comprises around 45,000 people who work in a range of social care services (social work, social care, and also people studying for a Degree in Social Work). The Social Care Council delivers its programme of work across four strategic themes which are –

- Delivering effective regulation;
- Developing the capability of the workforce;
- Leading with influence; and
- Innovating and improving.

1.2 The Social Care Council is based in James House, 4th Floor, 2 Cromac Avenue, Belfast. It employs around 60 staff, a number of whom work on a part-time basis. All staff are required to apply and demonstrate the Social Care Council's values and behaviours which underpin delivering a high quality service to all its stakeholders, including registrants, people who use services and carers (these can be found on its website at www.niscc.info).

2. Complaints Management

2.1 The Social Care Council strives at all times to deliver high quality services in all aspects of its business and works to identify how improvements can be made on an on-going basis. The organisation recognises that sometimes things can go wrong and when this happens it is in everyone's best interest to resolve concerns and complaints at the earliest possible stage. This Policy is therefore designed to encourage early and local resolution of complaints at the front line but also puts in place a system to investigate and resolve complaints where local resolution has not worked, for whatever reason.

2.2 It is also important that the Social Care Council learns from its experiences and mistakes and uses the feedback from complaints in a positive way to improve its services for everyone. The Social Care Council therefore uses this Policy to embed learning from complaints into its processes, culture and development for all staff.

- 2.3 Complaints can come from a range of sources and may be related to processes, systems, or staff. The Social Care Council also has an important role to play in investigating concerns raised in relation to the social care workforce ('registrants') however this Policy does not extend to complaints about the social care workforce. Such complaints should be raised under the Fitness to Practise procedures. Information on how to do this and who to contact can be found on our website at www.niscc.info including the leaflet 'Raising a Fitness to Practise Concern'. If you do not have access to the Internet, copies can be obtained by contacting the Social Care Council's Fitness to Practise team (see contacts at the end).
- 2.4 The Social Care Council is continually evolving and values complaints as a way in which it can learn and develop and improve its services across all parts of its business. The Social Care Council uses not only complaints but other forms of feedback to ensure it is delivering the right services in the right way. This Complaints Policy is part of that system and provides a clear, accessible and accountable system for ensuring complaints are managed in a timely, consistent and effective manner.

3. Responsibilities for Complaints Management in the Social Care Council

- 3.1 All staff within the Social Care Council have a responsibility for the effective and efficient resolution of complaints in support of this Complaints Policy and to respond to complaints in a positive way. In addition, there are also designated roles and responsibilities to support complaints management within the organisation –

Complaints Officer – this is the Executive Assistant to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). All complaints go to the Complaints Officer in the first instance so that they can be registered. The Complaints Officer will also acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 2 working days. They will also triage¹ the complaint so that it is forwarded to the right person in the organisation to respond.

Complaints Manager – this is the Head of Business Services. They are responsible for investigating complaints escalated by the Complaints Officer – or complaints that have not been resolved at stage 1 of this Policy. They are responsible for reviewing the Complaints Policy and providing quarterly data to the Senior Leadership Team, Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) and the Board. They are also responsible for reporting on complaints management on an annual basis to the Department of Health (DoH) and in the organisation's Annual Report. The Complaints Manager is responsible for the review of complaints, and ensuring the implementation and operation of the Complaints Policy, including ensuring administrative errors are put right and flaws in processes are remedied.

Head of Function – complaints registered by the Complaints Officer are sent to the Head of Function to investigate and reply. If the issue is not resolved to the satisfaction of the individual then they may raise the issue with the Complaints Manager. Head of

¹ Triage – see section 5 of this Policy for a full explanation.

Function is responsible for updating the Complaints Manager, ensuring lessons learnt are put in place and ensuring all team members are up to date with their training in relation to complaints management.

Director of Registration and Corporate Services - the Director of Registration and Corporate Services has been designated by the Chief Executive to be responsible for the overall management of the complaints arrangements in the Social Care Council. They will also investigate complaints escalated by the Complaints Manager where the individual is unsatisfied with the Complaints Manager's response or investigation

Chief Executive - the Social Care Council's Chief Executive has overall responsibility for the Complaints Policy and ensuring its effective application and providing assurance to the Board in this regard;

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee – the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) is responsible for providing assurance and challenge in relation to the application and compliance of the organisation in respect of complaints management;

Board – the Social Care Council's Board are responsible for ensuring there is an effective complaints policy in place and that complaints are monitored, reported on, and lessons learnt;

All staff – all staff are responsible for undertaking their roles and responsibilities in line with the procedures and processes in line with the organisation's values and behaviours. All staff must be familiar with this Policy and how complaints are managed within the organisation.

3. What is a Complaint?

- 3.1 The Social Care Council considers that ***a complaint is any oral or written expression of dissatisfaction by any person, however made, about the service, actions or inactions of the Social Care Council or its staff which requires a response.*** The Social Care Council also recognises the benefits of getting it right first time and this applies to how concerns are dealt with across the organisation.
- 3.2 As explained above, complaints or concerns in relation to the social care workforce are not covered by this Policy and are instead managed through the Fitness to Practise procedures.
- 3.3 Normally complaints should be submitted within 6 months of the event occurring however delayed complaints may be considered by the Social Care Council depending on the nature of the complaint and the reasons for the delay.
- 3.4 Any person, or organisation/body, who raises a request under Social Care Council's Access to Information Policy who is unsatisfied with the response under that Policy can appeal in line with the guidance in the Access to Information Policy. The Complaints Policy does not cover complaints in relation to Freedom of Information or

the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) as the Access to Information Policy includes scope for appeal/further resolution including raising concerns with the Information Commissioner. A copy of this Policy can be found on the Social Care Council's website at www.niscc.info.

- 3.5 It is important that the person impacted by the service/incident (in whichever form) is the person who makes the complaint to the Social Care Council, however sometimes that may not be possible and a third party may need to make a complaint on the person's behalf. In those circumstances it is important for data protection purposes that the aggrieved individual provides clear written authority to the Social Care Council that they have designated a person to act on their behalf or, if relevant, a copy of the Power of Attorney.
- 3.6 Social Care Council staff who have concerns should raise these internally through already existing Social Care Council policies including the Grievance Procedure and Whistleblowing Policy rather than the Complaints Policy.

4. Policy Aims

- 4.1 The Social Care Council's Complaints Policy aims to –
- Seek to resolve problems/provide redress by informal means at an appropriate level wherever possible, and provide a straightforward and accessible means of resolution where informal means do not work;
 - Assist the Social Care Council in improving its services by learning from the feedback, experiences and concerns of its stakeholders, customers and others;
 - Protect the rights and confidentiality of those who raise concerns with the Social Care Council;
 - Ensure that senior management are informed of issues being raised through complaints so that services can be improved;
 - Provide consistent equal treatment of all persons who raise concerns through this Policy with the Social Care Council.

5. Complaints Procedure

Informal Complaints

- 5.1 The best way to resolve most complaints, feedback or concerns is informally and directly with the member of staff in the Social Care Council who is providing the service. Most often these complaints/feedback take the form of phone calls, face to face contact or email. Social Care Council staff have been trained in managing complaints including the benefits to all parties of resolving concerns quickly and efficiently at local level.
- 5.2 If the informal complaint is about the behaviour of a member of staff, a line manager or more senior manager may deal with the individual directly. A line manager assisting

with the complaint at local level might also occur if the staff member is on leave or if the person raising the concern would rather speak to another member of staff.

- 5.3 It is important that lessons learnt through this informal process are shared and changes made where these are relevant. For this reason, Social Care Council staff are required to note any informal complaints as an '*expression of dissatisfaction*' so that outcomes from these complaints continue to inform service delivery and are not repeated. Managers must inform the Complaints Officer of any '*expression of dissatisfaction*' so that these can be recorded together with any lessons learnt. This also helps the organisation identify if there are any trends.

Formal Complaints

- 5.4 There may be times when an individual is not satisfied with how their concerns or feedback were managed under the informal complaints procedure (above) or it may be that they wish to elevate their concern directly under the formal complaints procedure.

- 5.5 There are **2 stages** in the Social Care Council's formal complaints procedure –

Stage 1

- 5.6 If an individual wants to raise a complaint under the formal complaints procedure they can do so in a number of ways –

- They can inform the Social Care Council staff member who they have been dealing with under the informal stage above in which case the member of staff will supply the individual with the Social Care Council's Complaints form (by email or hard copy). A copy of this Policy will accompany the Complaints form;
- The individual can email the Social Care Council directly at NISCC.Business@hscni.net and detail their complaint by email.
- The individual can write to the Social Care Council.

- 5.7 Complaints in the Social Care Council are managed by the **Complaints Officer, Maureen Martin**. The Complaints Officer will ensure that the complaint is acknowledged within **2 working days** and immediately transferred to the relevant senior manager (the head of function) in the organisation to investigate.

- 5.8 The senior manager will aim to respond to the complaint within **20 working days**. A number of complaints can be responded to sooner than this and the Social Care Council will try to resolve formal complaints as quickly as possible.

- 5.9 The **Complaints Manager is Sandra Stranaghan**. The Complaints Manager is responsible for –

- Investigating complaints that are not resolved at stage 1 of the formal procedure;
- Reviewing the outcome of complaints received under the informal procedure;
- Ensuring compliance with the Complaints Policy;
- Ensuring lessons learnt are shared as relevant across the Social Care Council;
- Ensuring changes to process/systems take place as relevant;
- Reporting the outcome of complaints to the Senior Leadership Team on a regular basis;
- Ensuring the outcome of complaints are reflected if required in the Social Care Council Risk Register.

5.10 To resolve complaints the senior manager may need to contact the individual directly for additional information or clarity. This will be within the 20 working day timeframe. In addition, the senior manager may decide that an alternative form of resolution is required depending on the nature of the complaint e.g. mediation, face to face meeting.

5.11 It is important that formal complaints to the Social Care Council are made in writing and contain the detail of the issue being raised. This is so complaints can be fully understood and the matters investigated promptly. There may be times however that due to reasons such as disability that a complaint cannot be made in writing. In these circumstances the senior manager will work with the individual (this may include a meeting) to best understand the issues being raised. In these circumstances the senior manager may not be able to provide an immediate response at this meeting as these discussions are about information gathering. The senior manager will also agree the best way to provide a response to the individual.

5.12 No employee of the Social Care Council will be involved in investigating or determining a complaint in relation to their own acts, omissions or decisions.

5.13 In addition, if the complaint is in relation to the senior manager then the Complaints Manager will investigate (likewise if the complaint is in relation to the Complaints Manager then this will be automatically be dealt with by the Director of Registration and Corporate Services).

Stage 2

5.14 Should the individual remain unsatisfied with the response they receive from the senior manager under Stage 1 (above) they have a right of review by the Complaints Manager The senior manager will inform an individual of their right for a review by the Complaints Manager when replying to the complaint.

5.15 Should an individual wish to avail of their right for a review they should email or write to the Complaints Manager (see Contacts at the end).

- 5.16 The review will be acknowledged within **2 working days** and again the Complaints Manager will seek to reply to the individual within **20 working days**, or sooner where possible. In addition, the Complaints Manager may decide that an alternative form of resolution is required depending on the nature of the complaint e.g. mediation, face to face meeting.
- 5.17 To ensure the independence of the review the senior manager will not be involved in the stage 2 Complaints Procedure but will be required to supply the Complaints Manager with copies of the original complaint, any additional material received or sought to inform the investigation and a copy of the final response to the complainant.
- 5.18 Should the complainant remain dissatisfied following the review by the Complaints Manager they will be advised in the response that they may raise the complaint with the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (see contacts at end). There are three ways in which a person may raise a complaint with the Ombudsman – by completing an online complaint form, downloading and returning a complaint form, or by contacting their office by phone, email or in writing.
- 5.19 While every effort will be made to investigate and reply to formal complaints within 20 working days there may be times when additional time is needed. If this happens the complainant will be advised at the earliest possible opportunity and within the 20 days. The complainant will be advised of why additional time is required and how long it will take to provide a full response.
- 5.20 At any stage of an investigation of a complaint, it may become apparent that the Disciplinary Procedures should be invoked. If this is the case the Complaints Manager will refer the matter to the Director of Registration and Corporate Services in the first instance for those matters to be considered.
- 5.21 Where the complaint was investigated by the Complaints Manager in the first instance – and not a senior manager, then the individual may raise any unsettled issues with the Director of Registration and Corporate Services.

6. Support for Staff

- 6.1 All Social Care Council staff will be trained in managing complaints and managing difficult conversations. New staff will also receive this training as part of their induction. In addition, Social Care Council staff who are the subject of complaints may experience anxiety and stress. The Social Care Council will ensure that such staff are supported and that they have access to support (e.g. Trade Union, Inspire, etc.) and if necessary, to appropriate counselling.

7. Exceptions

Legal Correspondence

- 7.1 In accordance with the directions issued by the Department of Health a complaint about which the complainant has stated that they intend to take legal proceedings will not be considered under this Policy.

Anonymous Complaints

- 7.2 The Social Care Council does not accept anonymous complaints for investigation. Such complaints can be difficult to investigate and appropriately respond to. However where an anonymous complaint is received and it identifies systemic issues of concern it will be referred to the Complaints Manager in the first instance to determine whether the matters raised can be investigated.

Unreasonable, Vexatious or Abusive Complaints

- 7.3 While the Social Care Council aims to provide a service which is accessible to all complainants, and to treat those complainants fairly, honestly, consistently and appropriately, it has arrangements in place to deal with complaints which it considers to be unreasonable or vexatious, or in the instance of a complainant becoming abusive or aggressive. Staff are advised under the Social Care Council's Zero Tolerance Policy and the Guidance on Verbal Abuse that they should be able to undertake their duties without fear of abuse and may terminate calls politely after giving due warning and may report calls that are abusive to their line manager. This Complaints Policy also includes a copy of the organisation's Unacceptable Actions Policy.

8. Potential Outcomes

- 8.1 Due to the varied nature of complaints the potential outcomes can vary considerably, however in general outcomes of upheld complaints can result in –

- An apology;
- An explanation;
- Correcting the error;
- Undertaking service improvement;
- Training for staff;
- A change in policy or procedure.

- 8.2 This is not a definitive list and a complainant is encouraged to explain the potential outcome they seek when making the complaint.

9. Policy Monitoring and Reporting

- 9.1 It is essential that the Social Care Council monitors the outcome of complaints (both formal and informal) to ensure that complaints are treated seriously and agreed action is delivered in a timely manner. Monitoring complaints in this way can also identify trends, common issues, whether the Policy is accessible and working as defined in this Policy, and to ensure effective reporting to senior management and the Board.

9.2 To support this the Social Care Council –

- Reviews its Complaints Policy every three years (or sooner if required);
- Reports on complaints and outcomes to the organisation's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) on a quarterly basis;
- Reports on complaints and outcomes to the Board of the Social Care Council on a quarterly basis;
- Engages Internal Audit to review its complaints handling;
- Reports to the SLT and the Board on any appeals to the NI Public Service Ombudsman;
- Reports on its complaints management in its Annual Report and Accounts;
- Elevates risks where relevant to its risk register.

10. Equality Screening

10.1 This policy has been screened for equality implications as required by Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Equality Commission guidance states that the purpose of screening is to identify those policies which are likely to have a significant impact on equality of opportunity so that greatest resources can be devoted to these.

10.2 Using the Equality Commission's screening criteria, no significant equality implications have been identified. Similarly, the policy has been considered under the terms of the Human Rights Act 1998, and was deemed compatible with the European Convention Rights contained in the Act.

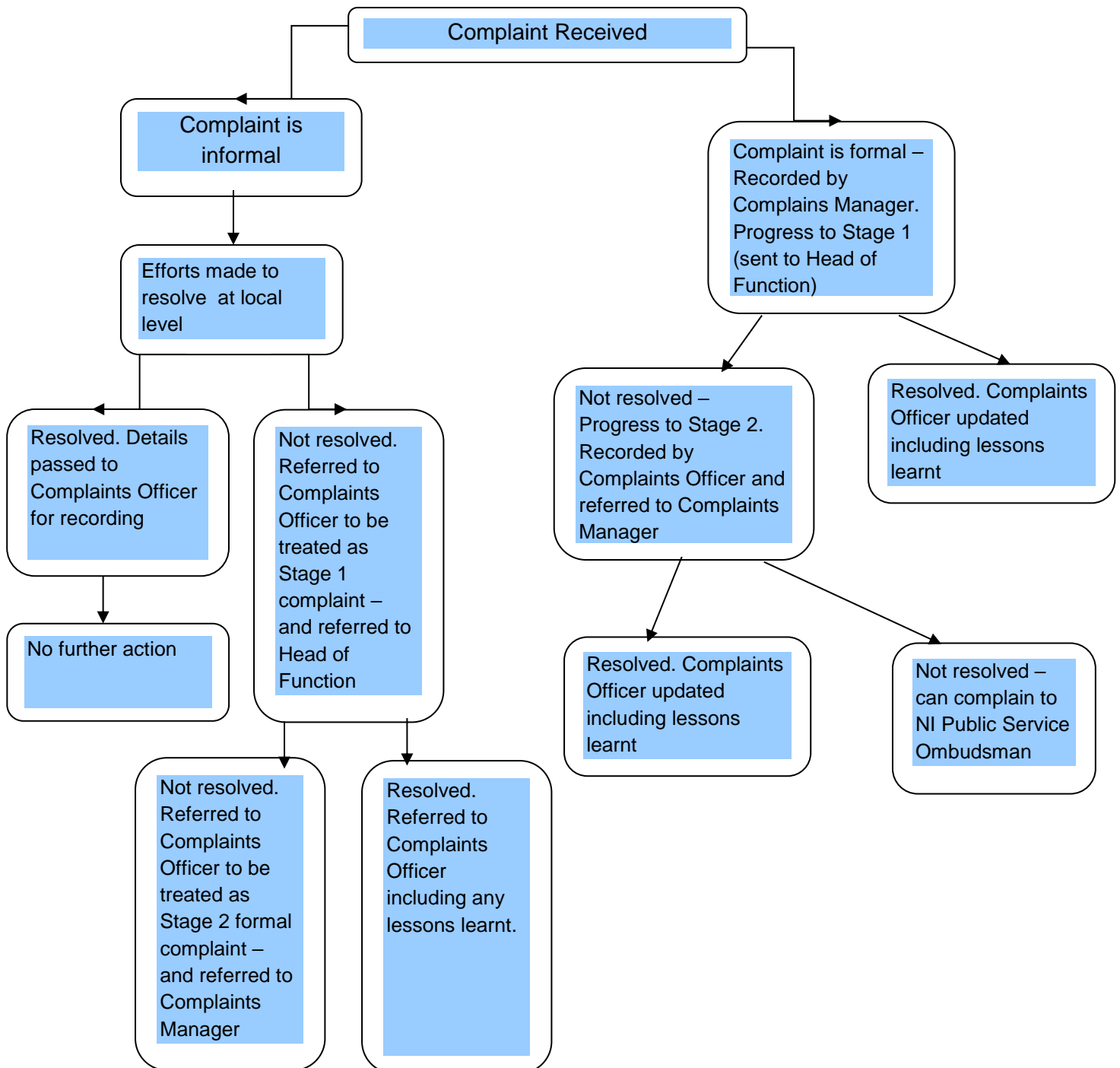
11. Endorsement and Review

11.1 This Policy was endorsed by the Board in December 2023 and is due for review by December 2026.

NORTHERN IRELAND SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL

COMPLAINTS POLICY

OVERVIEW



NORTHERN IRELAND SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL

COMPLAINTS POLICY

USEFUL CONTACTS

- **Sandra Stranaghan, Complaints Manager**

Northern Ireland Social Care Council,
4th Floor, James House
2 Cromac Avenue
Belfast, BT7 2 JA
Tel. 028 9536 2600 email – Sandra.stranaghan@niscc.hscni.net

- **Declan McAllister, Director of Registration and Corporate Services**

Northern Ireland Social Care Council,
4th Floor, James House
2 Cromac Avenue
Belfast, BT7 2 JA Tel. 028 9536 2600 email
declan.mcallister@niscc.hscni.net

- **Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman**

Progressive House
33 Wellington Place
Belfast, BT1 6HN
Tel. 028 9023 3821 email – nipso@nipso.org.uk
Website – www.nipso.org.uk

- **Northern Ireland Social Care Council**

4th Floor, James House, 2 Cromac Avenue
Belfast, BT7 2 JA Tel. 028 9536 2600 email – info@niscc.hscni.net
Or NISCC.Business@hscni.net

Website – www.niscc.info

Northern Ireland



Northern Ireland Social Care Council

Unacceptable Actions Policy

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Social Care Council is committed to executing its responsibilities to the highest standards possible and wishes to hear about and address any concerns or complaints regarding the way in which it has carried out, or failed to carry out, any of its functions.
- 1.2 The Social Care Council values complaints and views them as a significant source of learning, enabling the organisation to continually improve the quality of its services.
- 1.3 However, on extremely rare occasions, the Social Care Council may receive a complaint which it considers to be unreasonable or vexatious, or may deal with a complainant whose actions or behaviour it deems to be unacceptable. This policy sets out the approach which the organisation will follow on these occasions.
- 1.4 This policy is based on Department of Health guidance: Complaints in Health and Social Care – Standards and Guidelines for Resolution and Learning (April 2009).
- 1.5 The term complainant includes anyone acting on behalf of a complainant or anyone who contacts the Social Care Council in connection with a complaint.
- 1.6 This policy should be read in conjunction with the Social Care Council's Complaints Policy.

2 Policy Aim

The key aims of this policy are:

- 2.1 To make it clear to all complainants, both at initial contact and throughout their dealings with the organisation, what the Social Care Council can or cannot do in relation to their complaint. In doing so, the Social Care Council aims to be open and not raise hopes or expectations that cannot be met.
- 2.2 To deal fairly, honestly, consistently and appropriately with all complainants, including those whose actions are considered unacceptable. All complainants have the right to be heard, understood and respected. Social Care Council staff have the same rights.
- 2.3 To provide a service that is accessible to all complainants. However, the Social Care Council retains the right, where it considers a complainant's actions to be unacceptable, to restrict or change access to the service.
- 2.4 To ensure that other complainants and Social Care Council staff do not suffer any disadvantage from complainants who act in an unacceptable manner.

3 Defining Unacceptable Actions

- 3.1 People may act out of character in times of distress. There may have been upsetting or distressing circumstances leading up to a complaint which can affect their behaviour.
- 3.2 The Social Care Council does not view behaviour as unacceptable just because a complainant is assertive or determined. In fact, the organisation recognises that being persistent can be a positive advantage when pursuing a complaint.
- 3.3 However, the actions of a complainant who is angry, demanding or persistent may result in unreasonable demands on the Social care Council or unacceptable behaviour towards its staff.
- 3.4 It is these actions which the Social Care Council considers unacceptable and aims to manage under this policy.
- 3.5 The Social Care Council has categorised these actions under the following headings.

Aggressive or Abusive Behaviour

- 3.6 The Social Care Council expects its staff to be treated courteously and with respect. Violence of any kind and physical or verbal abuse is unacceptable and a zero tolerance approach will be adopted.
- 3.7 Aggressive or abusive behaviour is considered to be behaviour or language (whether verbal or written) that causes a staff member to feel afraid, threatened or abused – examples of this include threats, physical violence, personal verbal abuse, derogatory remarks and rudeness.
- 3.8 The Social Care Council also considers that inflammatory statements and unsubstantiated allegations can be abusive behaviour.
- 3.9 The anger felt by many complainants involves the subject matter of their complaint. It is not acceptable, however, when anger escalates into aggression toward Social Care Council staff. Staff will undergo specific training to understand the difference between anger and aggression.

Unreasonable Demands

- 3.10 Complainants may make what the Social Care Council considers to be unreasonable demands through the amount of information they seek, the nature and scale of service they expect or the number of approaches they make. What amounts to unreasonable demands will always depend on the individual circumstances surrounding the behaviour and the seriousness of the issues raised by the complainant.

3.11 Examples of this would include:

- demanding responses within an unreasonable timescale;
- insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular member of staff;
- continual telephone calls, letters or emails;
- repeatedly changing the substance of the complaint;
- raising unrelated concerns

This list is not exhaustive.

3.12 The Social Care Council considers these demands as unacceptable and unreasonable if they start to impact substantially on the work of the organisation, such as taking up an excessive amount of staff time to the disadvantage of other complainants or functions.

Unreasonable Persistence

3.13 It is sometimes the case that some complainants will not or cannot accept that the Social Care Council is unable to assist them further or provide a level of service other than that provided already. Complainants may persist in disagreeing with the action or decision taken in relation to their complaint or contact the Social Care Council persistently about the same issue.

3.14 Examples of this would include:

- Persistent refusal to accept a decision made in relation to a complaint;
- Persistent refusal to accept explanations relating to what the Social Care Council can do or cannot do;
- Continuing to pursue a complaint without presenting any new information.

The ways in which these complainants approach the Social Care Council may be entirely reasonable, but it is their persistent behaviour in continuing to do so that is not.

3.15 The Social Care Council would consider the actions of persistent complainants to be unacceptable when they take up what the organisation regards as being a disproportionate amount of time and resources.

4 Managing Unacceptable Actions

4.1 There are relatively few complainants whose actions the Social Care Council consider unacceptable. How we manage these depends on their nature and extent. If it adversely affects the Social Care Council's ability to do its work and provide a service to others, the organisation may need to restrict complainant contact in order to manage the unacceptable action.

4.2 The Social Care Council will do this in a way, wherever possible, that allows a complaint to progress to completion through the complaints process.

- 4.3 The Social Care Council may restrict contact in person, by telephone, fax, letter or electronically or by any combination of these. The Social Care Council will try, however, to maintain at least one form of contact.
- 4.4 In extreme circumstances, the Social Care Council will inform the complainant in writing that their name is on a 'no contact' list. This means that we may restrict contact to either written communication or through a third party.
- 4.5 The threat or use of physical violence, verbal abuse or harassment towards Social Care Council staff is likely to result in the ending of all direct contact with the complainant. All incidents of verbal and physical abuse will be reported to the police.
- 4.6 The Social Care Council does not deal with correspondence (letter, fax or electronic) that is abusive to staff or contains allegations that lack substantive evidence. When this happens, the organisation will tell the complainant that it considers their language to be offensive, unnecessary and unhelpful. The Social Care Council will ask the complainant to stop using such language and state that it will not respond to their correspondence if it continues. The Social Care Council may require further contact through a third party.
- 4.7 The Social Care Council will end telephone calls if the caller is considered aggressive, abusive or offensive. The staff member taking the call has the right to make this decision, tell the caller that their behaviour is unacceptable and end the call if the behaviour continues.
- 4.8 Where a complainant repeatedly phones, visits the Social Care Council, sends irrelevant documents or raises the same issues, the Social Care Council may decide to, for example:
- only take telephone calls from the complainant at set times on set days;
 - put an arrangement in place for only one member of staff to deal with calls or correspondence from the complainant in future;
 - require the complainant to make an appointment to see a named member of staff before visiting the Social Care Council;
 - require the complainant to contact the Social Care Council in writing only;
 - return the documents to the complainant or, in extreme cases, advise the complainant that further irrelevant documents will be destroyed;
 - take other action that the Social Care Council considers to be appropriate.

The Social Care Council will inform the complainant of the action it is taking and why.

- 4.9 Where a complainant continues to correspond on a wide range of issues and the action is considered excessive, the complainant will be informed that only

a certain number of issues will be considered in a given period and asked to limit or focus their requests accordingly.

4.10 Complainant action may be considered unreasonably persistent if all internal review mechanisms have been exhausted and the complainant continues to dispute the Social Care Council's decision relating to their complaint.

4.11 In this instance, the complainant will be told that no future phone calls will be accepted or interviews granted concerning this complaint. Any future contact by the complainant on this issue must be in writing. Future correspondence will be read and filed, but only acknowledged or responded to if the complainant provides significant new information relating to the complaint.

5 Deciding to Restrict Complainant Contact

5.1 Social Care Council staff who directly experience aggressive or abusive behaviour from a complainant have the authority to deal immediately with that behaviour in a manner they consider appropriate to the situation in line with this policy.

5.2 With the exception of such immediate decisions taken at the time of an incident, decisions to restrict contact with the Social Care Council will only be taken after careful consideration of the situation by a member of the Senior Leadership Team.

5.3 Wherever possible, the Social Care Council will give the complainant the opportunity to modify their behaviour or action before a decision is taken.

5.4 Complainants will be told in writing why a decision has been made to restrict future contact, the restricted contacts arrangements and, if relevant, the length of time that these restrictions will be in place.

6 Appealing a Decision to Restrict Contact

6.1 A complainant can appeal a decision to restrict contact. A member of the Senior Leadership Team who was not involved in the original decision will consider the appeal. The complainant will be advised in writing that either the restricted contact arrangements still apply or a different course of action that has been agreed. There is no further internal appeal. An individual retains the right, having explored this mechanism, to raise the issue with the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman.

7 Recording and Reviewing a Decision to Restrict Contact

7.1 The Social Care Council will record all incidents of unacceptable actions by complainants. Where it is decided to restrict complainant contact, an entry noting this is made in the relevant file and on appropriate computer records in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation.

- 7.2 A decision to restrict complainant contact may be reconsidered if the complainant demonstrates a more acceptable approach.
- 7.3 A senior member of staff will review the status of all complainants with restricted contact arrangements on a regular basis.
- 7.4 An annual report of this activity will be submitted to the Senior Leadership Team and the Board alongside the annual report for complaints.