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Approved by:	To be ratified by Board	
Version No:	02	
Issue date:	21/11/2022	

## COMPLAINTS POLICY

### Objectives and Scope of the Complaints Policy

#### The objectives of this policy are:

- a. To provide an effective means of allowing stakeholders (A person, group, or business that has a share or an interest in a particular activity or set of activities) to complain about the quality or nature of services; Examples of Stakeholders relevant to Stepping Stones are: funders, trainees, staff, parents/carers, volunteers, Health and Social Services, Health Trusts.
- b. To ensure those complaints are acted upon and recorded;
- c. To seek to resolve complaints quickly and as close to the point of service as is acceptable and appropriate;
- d. To ensure that responses to complaints are informative and comprehensive;
- e. To give management an additional tool to monitor the overall performance of Stepping Stones NI and the extent to which its service objectives are being met;

All staff will receive a copy of the policy and it will be included in the staff handbook and be covered at induction for new staff.


### Formal and Informal Complaints

Complaints will be classified as informal or formal. A formal complaint is defined primarily as one received in writing although in some circumstances it may be appropriate to treat a verbal complaint as formal, e.g. where the person responding to or investigating an informal complaint considers that the complaint is of sufficient seriousness to warrant a written reply.

### Type of Complaints

Generally complaints received by Stepping Stones NI fall into 1 of 2 categories:

1. A complaint from a stakeholder about a service or lack of service, e.g. trainee, customer
2. A complaint from a statutory or non statutory body about a Stepping Stones NI employee.

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As each type of complaint may require slightly different procedures this complaints policy addresses each category of complaint in turn.

## **Complaints about a Service or Lack of Service**

### **Stage 1 – Informal Complaint**

The majority of complaints about a service will be handled by the department concerned. For example, a complaint about the time it is between ordering food to its arrival, missing envelopes with cards etc.

1. If the problem is not resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant he/she may put his/her complaint in writing to the Director of Social Enterprise and Operations who will decide who is the most appropriate person to deal with the complaint.
2. The person directed to investigate the complaint should file a copy in the complaints file.
3. On receipt of a written complaint an acknowledgement will be forwarded to the complainant within 1 calendar week, giving an indication of how long the investigation will take and when they can expect a response.
4. The investigation of the complaint should be completed within 28 calendar days of the written complaint being received unless there are extenuating circumstances.
5. When the person delegated to investigate the complaint has discussed the matter with all relevant parties, he/she will write to the complainant informing him/her of any action to be taken as a result of the investigation. This letter should be approved by the Chief Officer before issue. A copy of approved this letter should be in the complaints file.

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## **A Complaint from a Statutory or Non-Statutory Organisation about a Stepping Stones Employee**

### **Stage 1 – Informal Complaint**

1. A complaint received by telephone about a member of staff will be transferred at the earliest opportunity to the staff member's line manager or Director of Social Enterprise and Operations
2. The line manager will listen to the complaint and attempt to bring about a resolution through discussion and negotiation.
3. A complaint received initially in writing will be treated as formal.

### **Stage 2 – Formal Complaints**

If discussion and negotiation do not bring about a resolution, the complainant may put his complaint in writing.


The member of staff about whom the complaint has been made should be given details of the complaint and careful attention paid to his/her support needs.

On receipt of a written complaint, an acknowledgement will be forwarded to the complainant within 1 calendar week.

The investigation of the complaint should be completed within 28 calendar days of the written complaint being received unless there are extenuating circumstances.

The complaint will be handled by the relevant line manager in conjunction with the Director of Social Enterprise and Operations and a representative from We Go Beyond, our external HR company, if necessary or appropriate.

7. The line manager /Deputy Chief Officer (with support from We Go Beyond if appropriate) will investigate the complaint by interviewing all the relevant persons and by collecting any written information relevant to the complaint.
8. The member of staff who is the subject of the complaint may be accompanied by a colleague when she is being interviewed about the complaint.

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9. When the line manager has completed his/her investigation he/she will write to the complainant informing him/her of the outcome of the investigation. This letter should be approved by the Chief Officer before issue. A copy of this approved letter will be filed in the complaints file, and a copy given to the line manager of the staff member undertaking the investigation.

10. The staff member concerned will also be informed of the outcome of the investigation.

The Board of Stepping Stones NI will be informed by way of a complaints report by the Chief Officer when they arise.

It is hoped Stepping Stones NI will be able to resolve any complaint through the complaints procedure. If however a customer remains dissatisfied with the outcome, they have the right to raise the matter with the Northern Ireland Charities Commission.

<https://www.charitycommissionni.org.uk/about-us/making-a-complaint/>