

Complaints Policy and Procedure

Last reviewed: 12th December 2024

Introduction:

HTSI 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.

Overview of the HTSI policy:

- To provide a fair complaints procedure which is clear and easy to use for anyone wishing to make a complaint
- To publicise the existence of our complaints procedure so that people know how to contact us to make a complaint
- To make sure everyone at HTSI knows what to do if a complaint is received
- To make sure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way
- To make sure that complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are repaired
- To gather information which helps us to improve what we do

Definition of a Complaint:

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect of the Highland Third Sector Interface or its hosted activities and posts. We may also receive a complaint in connection with contracted services through the *Third Sector Interface* functions within the TSI delivery model in Highland.

Where Complaints Come From:

Complaints may come from any person or organisation who has a legitimate interest in HTSI, or from someone or an organisation working with one of the HTSI Partner Organisations.

A complaint itself can be received verbally, by phone, by email or in writing.

This policy does not cover complaints from staff, who should use the grievance process where necessary, to address their concerns.

Confidentiality:

All complaint information will be handled sensitively, telling only those who need to know and following any relevant data protection requirements.

Responsibility:

Overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation lies with the board of trustees for the HTSI but this is delegated on a day-to-day basis to the HTSI Chief Officer.

Complaints Procedure:

Publicised Contact Details for Complaints:

Written complaints may be sent to HTSI at Thorfin house, Bridgend Business Park, Dingwall, IV15 9SL or by e-mail at enquiry@highlandtsi.org.uk

The HTSI can only process through this procedure complaints received in writing, if however this presents you with a difficult we would be happy to discuss reasonable adjustments to support your ability to raise your concern or complaint.

Receiving Complaints:

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

If a complainant attempts to pass on their complaint via the telephone the person who receives a phone or in person complaint should:

- Write down the facts of the complaint
- Take the complainant's name, address and telephone number
- Note down the relationship of the complainant to HTSI (for example: client, member)
- Tell the complainant that we have a complaints procedure which requires complaints to be submitted in writing and advise them to send a written account by post or by email so that the complaint is recorded in the complainant's own words.

Resolving Complaints

Stage One

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.

Whether or not the complaint has been resolved, the complaint information should be passed to the HTSI Chief Officer within three working days.

On receiving the complaint, the HTSI Chief Officer, records it in the complaints log. If it has not already been resolved, they delegate an appropriate person to investigate it and to take appropriate action.

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

Complaints should be acknowledged by the person handling the complaint within a week. The acknowledgement should say who is dealing with the complaint and when the person complaining can expect a reply. A copy of this complaints procedure should be attached.

Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply 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.

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 because of the complaint.

Stage Two

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 HTSI Chair.

The request for Board level review should 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.

The HTSI 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.

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

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

Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply 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.

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.

The decision taken at this stage is final, unless the Board decides it is appropriate to seek external assistance with resolution. This decision will be made by the HTSI Chair or any other director who has not to date been involved in the investigation of the complaint.

The complainant can complain to OSCR at any stage.

Variation of the Complaints Procedure

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.

Monitoring and Learning from Complaints

Complaints are reviewed annually to identify any trends which may indicate a need to take further action.

Internal Document

Appendix 1 - Practical Guidance for Handling Verbal Complaints

1. Remain calm and respectful throughout the conversation
2. Listen - allow the person to talk about the complaint in their own words. Sometimes a person just wants to "let off steam"
3. Don't debate the facts in the first instance, especially if the person is angry
4. Show an interest in what is being said
5. Obtain details about the complaint before any personal details
6. Ask for clarification wherever necessary
7. Show that you have understood the complaint by reflecting back what you have noted down
8. 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"
9. If you feel that an apology is deserved for something that was the responsibility of your organisation, then apologise
10. Ask the person what they would like done to resolve the issue
11. Be clear about what you can do, how long it will take and what it will involve.
12. Don't promise things you can't deliver
13. Give clear and valid reasons why requests cannot be met
14. Make sure that the person understands what they have been told
15. Wherever appropriate, inform the person about the available avenues of review or appeal