

No.32 Complaints Policy

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Approved by	Stephen Edmonds
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1. Introduction

Scope

The purpose of this document is to set out for all parties concerned The Lowdown's policy and procedures for dealing with complaints.

2. Policy Statement

The Lowdown continually strives to improve the quality of its service delivery and the environment for service users, staff and volunteers. As such, if you are unhappy with any aspect of the service you have received or with a member of the Lowdown team, whether you are a service user or a team member, we welcome the opportunity to rectify the situation effectively and are committed to reaching a fair and speedy resolution.

We value feedback both positive and negative on all aspects of our policies, work and services because we see this as important information to use to develop and change the way we do things. Positive feedback shows when we are doing things well and negative feedback can show where we are falling short of meeting needs.

We recognise that sometimes individuals may feel that the service they have received from us, or tried to receive from us, is unsatisfactory. If any team member, organisation or individual is unhappy they have the right to complain, either formally or informally.

The Lowdown takes complaints seriously. Each complaint is treated equally, will be investigated, and dealt with sensitively. The Lowdown will respond to complaints quickly.

3. Responsibility

It is the responsibility of The Lowdown Board of Trustees to ensure that quality services are delivered in accordance with agreed standards and that The Lowdown seeks and responds to feedback. The Chief Executive Officer of The Lowdown is responsible for ensuring that the policy and the procedures in this document are implemented efficiently and effectively. All other staff and volunteers (including voluntary Trustee Board members) are expected to facilitate this process.

4. Eligibility

A complaint can be submitted to The Lowdown by any individual, including any staff or volunteer of The Lowdown; a service user (or their representative); a member of a statutory or non-statutory voluntary organisation or a representative from funders or other stakeholders.

However, The Lowdown does not respond to anonymous or abusive complaints.

5. Informal Complaints

Informal complaints are usually verbal complaints made by phone or face-to-face but can be made via email or letter. It is hoped that most complaints can be resolved at this level.

The Lowdown will try to resolve informal complaints by talking to or meeting with the complainant to listen to and respond to the concerns raised. This will be the responsibility of the most appropriate worker or manager for the complaint. On some occasions further investigation will be needed. If this is the case the complainant will be informed of the timescales involved before the outcome is fed back to the complainant. This should not take longer than **3 weeks** unless there are specific circumstances, which delay investigation.

The Lowdown staff should always inform their manager of all informal complaints received and refer complaints to their manager when appropriate.

A record should be kept of the complaints received using The Lowdown Complaint Record Form, for discussion at Team meetings and other The Lowdown meetings as appropriate. All records must have date and time.

Staff should ensure that a complaint record form is completed and filed in the appropriate place in the filing system. This will hold details of what the complaint was and how it was resolved. These records are kept helping the organisation learn from complaints.

At any point in this process the complainant can make a formal written complaint.

6. Formal Complaints

Formal complaints should be written down in detail. If a complainant wishes to make a formal complaint staff should advise them of the complaints policy and ask them to write to the Chief Executive Officer of The Lowdown. If the complainant does not feel able to write such a letter for whatever reason staff should ask them if they wish to make a formal complaint and make written notes of the conversation/ complaint including the complainant's name address and telephone number. This should then be passed to the Chief Executive Officer who will write to the complainant acknowledging receipt of the complaint and promise to investigate.

A letter acknowledging receipt of the complaint and advising of timescales for investigation and response will be sent to the complainant within **7 days**.

The Chief Executive Officer of The Lowdown will investigate the complaint. If this is not appropriate because the Chief Executive Officer is involved in the matters being investigated a representative from the Trustee Board will be called to lead the investigation.

A response will normally be made within **3 weeks** unless there are specific circumstances, which delay or cause a longer investigation.

The Chief Executive Officer or Trustee Board member will send a response to the Complainant.

7. If the Complainant is not Satisfied with the Response

If a complainant is dissatisfied with the response to their complaint, they can write to the Chair of The Lowdown's Trustee Board outlining their concerns. If the complainant does not feel able to write down their concerns a member of The Lowdown staff can help with this.

The Chair will carry out further investigation or make a final response as appropriate.

Formal complaints and their outcomes should also be summarised on The Lowdown complaint record form and stored appropriately.

8. How The Lowdown Learns from Complaints and Compliments

Issues raised through complaints and comments to The Lowdown are discussed at an operational level in staff meetings so that they can inform practice.

The Lowdown Trustee Board is informed of all complaints and compliments received.

9. Feeding Back on The Lowdown Service

The Lowdown has in place several ways for users of our services to provide feedback (both positive and negative):

- Letting everyone know they can raise issues with members of staff
- Periodic surveys and feedback forms.

The information gained is used in discussions around service delivery and planning.

10. Volunteers

Volunteers should not be expected to deal with either informal or formal complaints. If a someone (an individual or a group) speaks to a volunteer with a comment or complaint about the service, the volunteer should direct them to the member of staff supervising them.

Volunteers should acknowledge the complaint or concern and take it seriously but recognise that responsibility for dealing with complaints lies with members of staff.

11. Staff

Staff members are expected to acknowledge any complaints or concerns and take them seriously.

Complaints should not be a threat, and The Lowdown should not appear to be defensive.

Staff should refer the complainant to the most relevant member of staff if possible. However, if this staff member is not available, they should listen to the complaint, give the complainant details of The Lowdown's complaints policy and make a record of the complaint and take the contact details of the person making it. Complaints should be recorded on The Lowdown's Complaints record form, which

are filed in the filing system when the complaint is concluded. These records are kept helping The Lowdown learn from complaints.

If the complaint relates to you or to work you are involved in, advise the complainant that you are not the most appropriate person to deal with it. Tell them who is and either get your manager or arrange for your manager to contact the complainant.

12. Contact Details

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