

Ref: GEN/7

COMPLAINTS & IMPROVEMENT POLICY

Purpose and scope of this policy

This policy intends to provide guidance to any individuals or agencies seeking to make a complaint about Solace and its services. Solace staff who wish to raise complaints should do so via the Grievance Policy. It outlines the processes and the principles by which Solace staff seek to investigate and resolve concerns. It does not cover how Solace manages or processes general feedback, enquiries or service user disputes.

Related policies and procedures

- Appeals Process Guidance Note
- Confidential Reporting (Whistle blowing) policy
- Equality and Diversity policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Grievance Policy
- Harassment Policy
- Adult Safeguarding policy
- Child safeguarding policy
- Fundraising code of practice
- Media and Online Communications policy

Policy statement

Solace prioritises providing excellent support and delivery of services. We address complaints in a trauma-informed way: as a valuable source of information about services and processes that can contribute to continuous improvement.

We define complaints as feedback via any means of communication, from anyone, who has been negatively impacted by a Solace service, which warrants a full investigation and response. We will listen to and aim to respond to all informal and formal complaints received.

Copies of this policy will be made available to all Solace service users and staff. Staff will determine which process is most suitable for resolving and responding to an incoming concern or complaint and will discuss and agree this approach with the complainant.

Service standards

In handling your complaint, we will:

- Treat your concerns seriously and respectfully
- Resolve issues quickly for you, work to resolve concerns informally in the first instance, where possible
- Remain objective in our approach
- Investigate fully
- Make contact to discuss your concerns with you
- Acknowledge and respond promptly within our stated or agreed timelines
- Provide reasons for our outcomes and findings
- Treat your complaint confidentially. When we need to share information in order to investigate, we will do so on a need to know basis and with relevant people only.

While managing your complaint we ask that you:

- Treat our staff with respect and behave in a reasonable manner
- Allow us the opportunity to investigate and respond within our procedures before escalating to 3rd party agencies
- Provide us with clear desired outcomes to your concerns
- Be open to meeting or discussing your complaint or concern in person or on Zoom
- Where needed, provide us with any additional information required in order to investigate your concerns,.

1.0 Informal resolutions

We will always try to resolve any issues and concerns quickly and effectively, as we appreciate early and simple resolution benefits everyone. In these instances, and where minimal investigation is required, staff may use an Informal Resolution process to resolve the situation. To do this we will:

- Discuss your concerns with you and agree to progress informally
- Log and document the issue on our systems
- Make an effort to resolve the issue as soon as possible and this will usually be within 5 working days
- Provide you with an outcome either by phone or in writing (as agreed)

If you are satisfied with how an informal issue was resolved you may utilise the Formal Complaints process to escalate your concern.

2.0 Formal complaints

Solace defines a complaint as any issue, dissatisfaction with or concern about access to or quality of a service provided by us which warrants an investigation and a response. Making a complaint will not affect the services you receive from Solace.

2.1 How do I make a complaint?

Anyone can make a complaint to Solace, whether they are an individual service user, client, partnering agency or general member of the public. Where we receive an anonymous complaint we will investigate to the best of our ability but cannot respond.

You should address your concerns to the member of staff who is your key point of contact, in the first instance. If your complaint is about a member of staff you should address it to their line manager or to complaints@solacewomensaid.org

Those who make complaints will not be victimised - Solace encourages people (both service users and others outside of the organisation) to discuss any concerns with staff as early as possible. Although there is no timeframe within which you must make a complaint, raising concerns as soon as possible will help ensure the matter can be dealt with promptly.

Complaints will be accepted in writing (email, letter, comments box or a complaints form) and/or verbally (in person face to face, by telephone, house meeting). If a complaint is made verbally, we will provide you with a written record of the discussed complaint for you to agree.

Solace will provide interpreting/translating facilities for anyone requesting support. If you require additional support to fully access the complaints process, please inform a member of staff.

You may at any stage be accompanied by a friend/advocate or support worker to discussions relating to that complaint. If you are making a complaint on behalf of someone, we must receive written and signed consent from them, which we may follow up via phone call.

2.2 What happens when I make a complaint?

Once we receive your complaint, it will be fielded to the most appropriate person for investigation. We aim to resolve all of our complaints within the **investigation stage**.

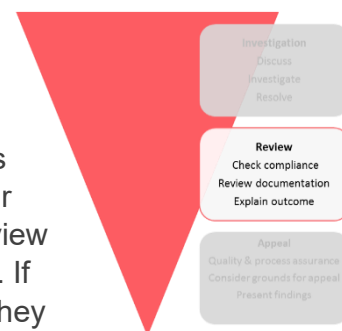
- They will acknowledge your complaint within 3 working days.
- They will discuss your issues with you to determine your preferred outcome
- They will then investigate and respond within 10 working days of receiving your complaint. If the issue is complex and further investigation time is required they will contact you to inform you of the revised timescales.
- They may contact you for further information or clarification.
- They may contact other organisations or agencies to investigate.



- They will provide you with a full written response to your complaint.

What if I am unhappy with the outcome?

- If you are unhappy with the outcome, you have 10 working days from receiving your response letter within which to escalate your complaint to **review stage**. A more senior manager will then review and respond within 10 working days of you making your appeal. If the issue is complex and further investigation time is required, they will contact you within 5 working days of receipt and inform you of the revised timescales.
 - Occasionally, the initial first stage investigation may need to be undertaken by a senior manager or Executive Team member. In these situations, if you are unhappy with the outcome of the initial investigation any appeal investigation will be undertaken by an Executive Management peer or an external independent complaints investigator. The decision will be made by the Chief Executive's Officer and you will be notified of how your complaint will be dealt with.
- If a complaint identifies any child or adult safeguarding issues, appropriate action will be taken by Solace.



2.3 Appealing the review decision

If you are unhappy with your complaint outcome following senior management review, you are able to take your complaint to **appeal stage**. We ask that you specify what outcome you are hoping for and why you feel the previous investigation and review did not meet expectations. An appeal will **not** be considered without this. A nominated member of the Executive Team (who has not been involved in your complaint) will decide the best approach for your appeal. It may involve one of the following:



- A document review of your complaint by the CEO. This will always be the case when no new evidence is submitted at appeal.
- A face-to-face meeting with a member of the Executive Team or the CEO. You may bring someone with you in a support capacity - not as legal/formal advocacy.
- We may decide it is appropriate for an independent external complaints advisor to be involved in either of the above options.

On requesting an appeal, further guidance on the process will be sent to you.

Following this, the internal Solace complaints process will have been exhausted. There are a number of external agencies and bodies you may write to. Details of these can be found in the appendix to this policy.

2.4 Complaints about the Executive Team or CEO

- Complaints about the Executive Team or CEO maybe investigated by an independent external complaints investigator or a member of the Solace Board.

The decision will be made by the Chair of the HR Sub Committee, and you will be notified of the outcome.

- If you are unhappy with the outcome, you have 10 working days from receiving your response letter within in which to escalate your complaint to appeal stage. The approach followed will be as outlined in 2.3 above. An Independent Complaints Investigator will then review and respond within 10 working days of you making your appeal, and will report to the Chair of the Board, who will make the final decision. If the issue is complex and further investigation time is required, they will contact you within 5 working days of receipt and inform you of the revised timescales.

Following this, the internal Solace complaints process will have been exhausted. There are a number of external agencies and bodies you may write to. Details of these can be found in the appendix to this policy.

2.5 Complex multi-agency complaints

Where a complaint is complex and involves multiple agencies and organisations, we may require significantly more time to investigate than our standard timescales. In such circumstance we will write to you to inform you of revised timescales. Depending on the situation we will either:

- a) Investigate elements of the complaint within Solace's remit. Solace will notify you in writing of the outcome of our investigation and where agreed copy this to the other agencies involved.
- b) Work with the other agencies to investigate the matter thoroughly, and the nominated lead agency will provide you with a coordinated response;
- c) If you complain about a service that Solace is not responsible for, we will share the concerns with the correct organisation(s) if we have your permission to do so. If you prefer that the complaint is not shared with other organisation(s) we will signpost you to the right organisation and provide their contact details.

○ Multiple complainants

If a complaint is made by multiple complainants e.g. a group of housemates, we will ask the group to nominate a lead complainant and liaise primarily with them. Any written response will be copied to all complainants involved.

○ Vexatious and persistent complaints policy

If we believe a complaint is without any merit or the complainant is behaving in a vexatious manner, we may deem it necessary to write to you to end the complaints process. In these instances, complaints will be reviewed by the Chief Executive, who will reach a final decision, and write explaining the reasoning for doing so.

If a complainant has made unreasonable complaints in the past, we will not assume their next complaint will be unreasonable and it will not affect their right to use the complaints process in the future. Each issue will be considered on its own merits. All relevant correspondence will be evaluated to consider the circumstances, including:

- Whether the demands are unreasonable
- If the complainant displays behaviour which is abusive or threatening to staff or making excessive communication
- Whether there is a strong likelihood that complaints are being made to intentionally cause harassment, divert resources or to disrupt the proper workings of Solace
- Where complaints have been adequately investigated previously and there is nothing further to be gained from continued use of the process.

Deviating from policy

Solace intends to be consistent in the application of its policies. However, we may deviate from this policy if the situation warrants it. In these circumstances a member of the Executive Team will oversee the decision.

3.0 How we use your complaints to improve

Solace is committed to learning from complaints. As such, we monitor and report on complaints and resolutions as part of our performance monitoring framework. Each quarter we collate both qualitative and quantitative analysis of complaints and report to the senior management team as well as Board of Trustees.

Trends and learning from these reports feed into service improvement and service development through dissemination to managers. As part of investigating complaints, we ask managers to identify where practice has been good as well as where practice could be improved. We also ask managers who investigate complaints to identify ideas for improvement. Where possible, we update our service users through our publications on improvements that have been made as a result of feedback.

4.0 Confidentiality

All complaints will be dealt with in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations 2018 and Freedom of Information Act 2000. All personal and sensitive organisational information is treated as confidential, including:

- Personal information that is not a matter of public record about a service user
- Sensitive organisational information.

Staff will ensure that they only involve other agencies and share information with the consent of the service user concerned, unless Solace is required to by law or the information is necessary for safeguarding purposes.

Last reviewed: May 2025

Date of next review: May 2028

APPENDIX I

BARNET	Local Authority Violence Against Women and Girls(VAWG) service	London Borough of Barnet, 2 Bristol Avenue, Colindale, NW9 4EW 020 8359 2000
	Barnet Homes	Barnet House, London Borough of Barnet, 2 Bristol Avenue, Colindale, NW9 4EW 0800 389 5225 talk2us@barnethomes.org
	Notting Hill Genesis	1 Sussex Place Hammersmith W6 9EA
BEXLEY	Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence Strategy Manager	London Borough of Bexley, Community Safety Services, 2nd Floor East, 2 Watling Street, Bexleyheath, Kent, DA6 7AT
CAMDEN	Camden Supporting People Camden Safety Interventions Manager	London Borough of Camden, 5 Pancras Square, London, N1C 4AG 020 7974 4444
	Clarion Housing	Level 6, 6 More London Place, Tooley St, London SE1 2DA
	Origin Housing Association	St Richards House, 110 Eversholt Street, London, NW1 1BS 0800 040 7989 or 020 7209 9222
ENFIELD	Enfield Supporting People	London Borough of Enfield, Freepost NW 5036, PO BOX 59, Civic Centre, Silver Street, EN1 3XL 020 8379 5055 Supportingpeople@enfield.gov.uk
	Christian Action Housing Association	Christian Action Housing Association, Benedict House, 61 Island Centre Way, EN3 6GS 01992 765900 info@christianaction.org.uk
	Enfield VAWG Coordinator	Enfield Civic Centre, Silver Street. Enfield , EN1 3XA 020 8379 4969
HARINGEY	Haringey Local Authority VAWG Coordinator	River Park House, 225 High Road, London, N22 8HQ Tel: 020 8489 0000
	Homes For Haringey	020 8489 5611 customerservices@homesforharingey.org
	L&Q Housing Association	10 Grove Crescent Road, Stratford, London, E15 1BJ 0844 406 9000
ISLINGTON	Islington Supporting People	Islington Supporting People, 338-346 Goswell Road, London, EC1V 7LQ 020 72571000
	Islington VAWG Coordinator	Community Safety Partnerships Unit, Ground Floor, Islington Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD 020 7527 5707
LAMBETH	Lambeth Supporting People Lambeth VAWG	London Borough of Lambeth, Supporting People, Phoenix House, 10 Wandsworth Road, London SW8 2LL
WALTHAM FOREST	Waltham Forest Local Authority	Waltham Forest Town Hall, Forest Road, London, E17 4JF 0208 496 3663
WALTHAM FOREST OFSTED - London North Regional Centre, 2nd Floor, Royal Exchange Buildings, St Annes Square,	Waltham Forest Community Safety Programme Manager	Rowan House, 1 Cecil Road, Leytonstone, London, E11 3HF 0208 496 6944
	Ashiana	Greater London House, 547-551 High Road, London, E11 4PB 020 8539 0427 info@ashiana.org.uk

Manchester, M2 7LA		
INDEPENDENT HOUSING OMBUDSMAN - Norman House, 105-109 The Strand, London WC2R 0AA		
OFFICE OF THE IMMIGRATION SERVICES COMMISSIONER COMPLAINTS TEAM 5th Floor, 21 Bloomsbury Street London WC1B 3HF 0345 000 0046		

APPENDIX II

COMPLAINTS FORM

Completed by:

STAFF

☐

COMPLAINANT

☐

Date:

Name of complainant:

Preferred contact details:

Which service do you use?

Please provide details of your complaint using as much detail as possible. Eg, Who, what and when.

Please let us know be specific as to what you would see as being a satisfactory outcome.

Complainant signature

For use by Solace staff:

Name of Staff recipient:			
Investigating Manager (if different from above)			
Date received:			
Date outcome sent to complainant:			
Does this complaint involve Adult Safeguarding			
Does this complaint involve Child Safeguarding			
Does this complaint involve discrimination relating to one or more protected characteristic?			
AGE		RACE	
DISABILITY		RELIGION	
GENDER REASSIGNMENT		SEX	
		PREGNANCY/MATERNITY	
		SEXUAL ORIENTATION	

Agreed process being applied

Informal Resolution

☐

Formal Complaint

☐

Other (specify)

Investigating Managers findings and outcome – Include what documents and sources were viewed, who was spoken to.

Looking at this complaint – what did we learn and do you have any recommendations of improvements we can make?

Please identify areas of good practice and things that Solace did well