



HACKNEY SEND
PARENT CARER FORUM

Complaints, Grievance, Internal Disciplinary and Procedures Policy

1. Purpose

This policy provides a clear and structured approach for addressing complaints and grievances within the Hackney SEND Parent Carer Forum (HSPCF). It also outlines the framework for implementing internal disciplinary actions when necessary, ensuring fairness, confidentiality, and prompt resolution to keep the Forum's integrity and collaborative environment.

This policy governs the internal operations of Hackney SEND Parent Carer Forum while hosted by City & Hackney Carers Centre. Legal and financial responsibilities held by the Host remain subject to the Hosting Agreement.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all HSPCF members, including parents, carers, steering group members, volunteers, and any individuals associated with the Forum's activities.

3. Definitions

Complaint: An expression of dissatisfaction with the Forum's services, actions, or decisions requiring a response.

Grievance: A formal concern about the treatment or conduct of an individual within HSPCF.

Disciplinary Action: Measures taken to address breaches of HSPCF policies or misconduct.

4. Designated Officer

The Complaints Officer (CO) is the designated officer responsible for overseeing and managing all complaints, grievances, and internal disciplinary matters within HSPCF.

The CO will ensure that:

- All concerns are handled fairly, consistently, and confidentially.
- Restorative and trauma-informed practices are applied where appropriate.
- Investigations are conducted impartially and transparently.
- Outcomes focus on restoring trust, repairing harm, and strengthening collaboration.
- Records of all complaints, grievances and disciplinary actions are securely kept.

Where conflicts of interest arise, the Chair and Vice-Chair may jointly appoint an independent restorative or impartial individual to ensure fairness and neutrality.

Where the Complaints Officer has an actual or perceived conflict of interest, they must formally recuse themselves and an alternative designated officer or independent individual shall be appointed following this policy.

5. Principles

- **Fairness:** All complaints and grievances will be managed with impartiality. No one will face repercussions for raising a concern in good faith.
- **Confidentiality:** All matters will be handled with respect and discretion. Information will only be shared with those directly involved (unless a safeguarding issue is raised and it may be necessary to share more widely).
- **Timeliness:** Issues will be addressed promptly to ensure efficient and effective resolution.
- **Restorative Justice:** All processes will be conducted in the spirit of restorative justice. Focusing on understanding harm, repairing relationships, and supporting the wellbeing of everyone involved.

6. Complaints Procedure

Throughout complaints procedures the primary aim is reconciliation wherever possible. The Complaints Officer will fulfil all required roles (mediator, investigator, liaison) unless either party requests an external restorative and impartial practitioner, in which case one will be jointly agreed to ensure fairness and satisfaction for all parties.

6.1 Informal Resolutions

Members are encouraged to raise their concerns with the individual informally as a first step. Should this informal approach not resolve the issue then the member may seek aid of the designated forum representative to facilitate mediation.

However, if the member feels it is not appropriate to address the concerns with the individual directly then it may go straight to mediation with the appointed designated forum representative appointed by the Chair or Vice Chair, in this case the person will be the Complaints Officer (CO).

6.2 Restorative Resolution

The default formal approach to conflict resolution will be Restorative Justice practices, including supported dialogue, acknowledgement of harm, and collaborative agreement-building.

Restorative Practitioner external to HSPCF will be engaged where:

- Any party requests external support.
- The complaint concerns a member of leadership.
- Trust, neutrality, or trauma-informed approach is needed.
- Any agreements reached will be documented, with clear actions and follow-up support.

6.3 Formal Complaint Submission

If an informal resolution is unsuccessful, complaints should be submitted in writing to the Chair or Vice Chair of HSPCF within 14 days of the incident or informal discussion.

The written complaint must include:

- Complainant's name and contact details.
- A clear description of the issue.
- Relevant dates, evidence, or supporting details.
- Any prior attempts at resolution.
- The desired outcome or resolution.

6.4 Acknowledgment and Investigation

Complaints will be acknowledged by the CO within 5 working days. A thorough investigation, which may involve reviewing documents and interviewing involved parties, will be conducted by the CO and completed within 20 working days.

- a) If in any case that the investigation is not completed within 20 working days, then a holding letter will be issued to outline the reasons for the delay. In the case of formal investigation, the Chair may appoint an independent investigator where necessary. The Complaints Officer (CO) will keep oversight of due process in accordance with this policy.
- b) This person will not be a member of the HSPCF to ensure impartiality and fairness. The stated timeframes are target timeframes and may be extended where necessary to ensure a fair and thorough investigation. Any extension will be communicated in writing with reasons provided.
- c) If the complaint concerns the Chair, the Vice-Chair will appoint a CO. If the complaint concerns the Vice-Chair, the Chair will appoint a CO.
- d) Where a complaint concerns the Steering Group collectively, the matter shall be referred to the Host Organisation for oversight. The Host Organisation may determine the appropriate course of action, including the appointment of an independent external investigator where necessary to ensure impartiality and procedural integrity.

6.5 Outcome

The Complaints Officer will provide a written response to the complainant, outlining the findings of the investigation and any actions taken as a result. If the complaint or grievance is upheld, appropriate measures will be implemented to address the issue.

The outcome letter will be clear and may include one or more of the following:

- A restorative agreement (e.g., apology, actions to repair harm)
- Training, reflective practice or supervision.
- Changes to policy / processes (if necessary)
- No further action (with justification)

Disciplinary escalation only if restorative options are exhausted or inappropriate.

All outcomes will prioritise:

- Relationship repair.
- Prevention of repeat harm.
- Support for all affected parties.

6.6 Appeal

If dissatisfied with the outcome, the complainant may submit an appeal in writing within 14 days.

The Complaints Officer will review the appeal to determine whether:

- A material procedural defect occurred; or
- Relevant new evidence has emerged that could reasonably affect the outcome.

The appeal will be completed within 20 working days of acknowledgement.

If neither threshold is met, the matter shall be considered concluded. Where a material procedural defect is identified, the Complaints Officer may recommend proportionate corrective action.

The decision following the appeal shall be final in accordance with the HSPCF Constitution.

6.7 Management of Unreasonable Persistent or Vexatious Complaints

a) HSPCF is committed to handling all complaints fairly, respectfully and in accordance with restorative principles. However, where a complaint becomes unreasonably persistent, repetitive, overlapping, or vexatious in nature, and continues after completion of the formal process (including any appeal), the Forum may take appropriate steps to protect its resources and the wellbeing of its members.

b) Such steps may include limiting communication to written correspondence, declining to revisit matters that have been formally concluded, or setting reasonable boundaries around further engagement.

c) Any decision to apply such measures will be evidence-based, proportionate, and recorded in writing.

d) The aim of this clause is not to restrict legitimate concerns, but to ensure the effective and fair functioning of the Forum.

e) Matters that have been formally concluded, including any appeal, shall not be reopened unless a material procedural defect is demonstrated following the HSPCF Constitution.

7. Grievance Procedure

Throughout grievances procedures the primary aim is reconciliation wherever possible. The Complaints Officer will fulfil all required roles (mediator, investigator) unless either party requests an external restorative and impartial practitioner, in which case one will be jointly agreed to ensure fairness and satisfaction for all parties.

7.1 Informal Procedure

Where appropriate, concerns should first be raised informally.

This may involve:

- Directly discussing the issue with the individual(s) involved
- Raising the concern with the Complaints Officer, Chair or Vice-Chair.

If the issue cannot be resolved informally, or if informal resolution is not appropriate due to the seriousness or nature of the grievance, the formal procedure below should be followed.

7.2 Mediation

Before any formal investigation, the forum will offer mediation as a first formal step. Mediation is a confidential and impartial process facilitated by the Complaints Officer or Chair to help parties explore the issues and work toward a mutually acceptable resolution.

Key points:

- Participation in mediation is voluntary but strongly encouraged.
- Mediation will be arranged within 14 working days of the grievance being acknowledged.
- Any agreements reached will be recorded in writing.
- If mediation resolves the grievance, no further formal action will be taken.

If mediation is declined or unsuccessful, the grievance will proceed to the investigation stage.

7.3 Raising a Grievance

Grievances should be submitted in writing to the Chair or an appointed designated Complaints Officer (CO) within 14 days.

Submissions must include:

- Complainant's name and contact information
- A clear description of the grievance
- Relevant supporting details and desired outcomes.

7.4 Transparency and Identity Disclosure

a) In the interest of transparency, accountability and a fair investigation process, individuals raising a grievance must consent to their name and the nature of their grievance being disclosed to the relevant parties involved and to the Steering Group members. Anonymous grievances will not normally be investigated unless there are exceptional circumstances (e.g., safeguarding, or legal concerns) where anonymity must be preserved for the protection of the individual.

b) If a complainant does not agree to their identity being shared the grievance may not go ahead through the formal process, unless the Chair or Vice-Chair determines that the matter is of such seriousness that an investigation is required regardless of anonymity.

7.5 Acknowledgment and Investigation

a) Grievances will be acknowledged within 5 working days. A comprehensive investigation will be completed within 20 working days, including interviews with relevant parties if needed.

b) If a grievance concerns the Chair, the Vice-Chair will appoint a CO. If the grievance concerns the Vice-Chair, the Chair will appoint a CO.

c) Where a complaint concerns the Steering Group collectively, the matter shall be referred to the Host Organisation for oversight. The Host Organisation may determine the appropriate course of action, including the appointment of an independent external investigator where necessary to ensure impartiality and procedural integrity.

7.6 Outcome and Appeal

a) A written outcome will be provided within 5 working days of the investigation's conclusion. If dissatisfied with the outcome, the complainant may appeal in writing within 14 days of receiving the outcome.

b) The appeal will be acknowledged within 5 working days.

c) *The Complaints Officer will review the appeal to determine whether:*

- A material procedural defect occurred during the investigation; or
- Relevant new evidence has emerged that could reasonably affect the outcome.

d) The appeal review will be completed within 20 working days of acknowledgement.

e) If neither threshold is met, the matter shall be deemed concluded. Where a material procedural defect is identified, the Complaints Officer may recommend proportionate corrective action.

f) The decision following appeal shall be final in accordance with the HSPCF Constitution.

g) Steering group Members including Wider Forum members should submit a grievance within 2 months of the issues arising, providing it relates to their time as a member. Grievances submitted after that period or from individuals with no direct involvement in the forum, may not be investigated unless they raise serious safeguarding or legal concerns.

8. Disciplinary Procedures

8.1 Grounds for Disciplinary Action

Disciplinary measures may be started for:

- Breaches of HSPCF policies
- Harassment, discrimination, or unprofessional behaviour.
- Misuse of HSPCF resources or funds.
- Failure to fulfil agreed responsibilities.
- Fraud or serious misconduct.

8.2 Disciplinary Process

a) Upon receipt of a misconduct report, the Complaints Officer (CO) shall conduct a preliminary review within 10 working days to determine whether there is sufficient basis to proceed.

b) Where sufficient evidence is identified, a formal disciplinary hearing shall be convened. The individual concerned shall receive no less than 5 working days written notice of the hearing.

c) The individual shall have the opportunity to present their case and may be accompanied by a support person.

d) *Possible outcomes include:*

- Verbal warning
- Written warning
- Suspension
- Termination of involvement with HSPCF

e) The decision shall be confirmed in writing within 5 working days of the hearing.

f) In exceptional circumstances where impartiality cannot reasonably be maintained, the non-conflicted Steering Group Members may appoint an independent external investigator to ensure fairness and procedural integrity.

8.3 Appeal

a) Appeals must be submitted in writing within 14 working days of the decision.

b) The Appeal shall be reviewed by the Complaints Officer, or where the Complaints Officer has been involved in the original decision, by an independent reviewer appointed by the non-conflicted Steering Group members.

c) *The appeal will consider whether:*

- A material procedural defect occurred; or
- Relevant new evidence has emerged that could reasonably affect the outcome.

d) If neither threshold is met, the matter shall be deemed concluded.

e) Appeal review will be completed within 20 working days of acknowledgement.

f) The decision following appeal shall be final in accordance with the HSPCF Constitution.

9. Confidentiality

- a) All complaints, grievances and disciplinary matters will be treated with strict confidentiality. Information will be shared with individuals directly involved in the investigation and resolution processes. However, in cases where transparency and accountability are necessary, information will also be shared with the members of the Steering Group.
- b) Confidentiality will not prevent the sharing of information where required by safeguarding, legal obligation, or governance accountability.

10. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness in supporting HSPCF's operations and values.

11. Additional Guidelines and Support

11.1 Support for Complainants and Respondents

- **Emotional Support:** Both complainants and respondents will be provided with information on emotional support services to help them cope with the stress of the process.

Support will be provided through:

- Peer supporters, Pastoral volunteers, or Wellbeing signposts.
- Pre- and post-restorative meeting check-ins.
- Trauma-informed facilitation (if needed)
- Guidance: Clear guidance will be provided to all parties on the procedures and their rights throughout the process.

11.2 Training and Awareness

- **Training Programs:** Regular training sessions will be conducted for all HSPCF members to ensure they are aware of the policies and procedures.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Awareness campaigns will be organised to promote a culture of openness and accountability within the Forum.

11.3 Monitoring and Reporting

- **Regular Monitoring:** The implementation of this policy will be regularly checked to ensure compliance and effectiveness.
- **Reporting Mechanisms:** Clear reporting mechanisms will be established to track the number and nature of complaints, grievances, and disciplinary actions.

12. Roles and Responsibilities

12.1 Chair and Vice Chair

- **Oversight:** Ensure the policy is implemented effectively and fairly.
- **Support:** Provide support to the Complaints Officer.

12.2 Complaints Officer (CO)

The Complaints Officer's role is procedural in nature and is limited to overseeing compliance with this policy and confirming that due process has been followed, unless otherwise specified with this policy.

- **Investigation:** Conduct thorough investigations of complaints, grievances, and preliminary investigations of misconduct reports.
- **Communication:** Communicate findings and outcomes to the complainant and relevant parties. Communicate final decisions to the appellant and relevant parties.
- **Hearing:** Organise and conduct formal hearings.
- **Appeals:** Review appeals in accordance with Section 6.6, 7.6 and 8.3 and determine whether the matter is concluded or requires proportionate corrective action.

13. Documentation and Record-Keeping

- **Records:** Maintain detailed records of all complaints, grievances, and disciplinary actions.
- **Confidentiality:** Ensure all records are kept confidential and secure.