

Complaint Policy

1. Introduction

As an organisation VITAL welcomes feedback in all forms whether as a compliment, constructive feedback, an informal concern, or a formal complaint. This document is intended to provide information to anyone who wants to make a formal and / or written complaint about the work and services of VITAL, its Staff, Volunteers or Trustees. We have organised this policy into three sections that look at: types of complaints VITAL may deal with; aims and principles that VITAL will work towards, and how complaints are dealt with.

2. Types of Complaint:

This policy applies to all verbal and written communication about the work of VITAL, its Staff, Volunteers and Committee members where there is a clear indication that an individual wishes to make a formal complaint. If it is unclear whether an individual wishes to make a formal complaint; express a concern; or offer constructive comment, VITAL will endeavour to ask the person in writing how they want their communication to be treated.

This Complaints Policy covers:

- Complaints about the way we have acted, or failed to act in service provision.
- Complaints about the way we have acted in the exercise of our duties.

This Complaints Policy does not cover:

- Complaints about an issue that is already the subject of disciplinary or grievance proceedings.
- Complaints that are being pursued through legal processes.
- Complaints that are deemed to be of a vexatious nature.

It is VITAL's aim to:

- Deal with complaints fairly and effectively;
- Keep complainants fully informed of progress with their complaint;
- Achieve a resolution, which is both satisfactory and fair to all involved;
- Treat complaints as a valuable source of information and an opportunity for VITAL to develop and improve our practices.
- Treat complaints confidentially. This means that the complaint will be seen only by the people who are directly involved in processing, handling, investigating and responding to the complaint.

VITAL is committed to the principle of openness. Where it is established that a mistake has been made, VITAL will acknowledge this.

3. How VITAL Deals with Complaints

Where possible, individuals should complain to VITAL in writing either by letter or by using the form provided, so that we have a formal written record of the complaint. Complaints can be sent to us by post, email or fax. If a complainant is unable to write to us other arrangements, for example receiving the complaint over the telephone, will be made to help equality of access to the complaints process.

Complaints should be made as soon as possible, but will be acted upon if received within 6 months of need arising, outside of this period the Trustee Board will make a decision as to whether a complaint can be heard.

The first point of contact for complaints should be the Director, unless for any reason this is inappropriate (for instance the complaint is about the Director), in which case the Chairperson of the Trustee Board should be contacted. Other members of Staff are responsible for ensuring that complaints received elsewhere or by other means follow this process. Relevant details should be recorded and a decision will be made about who is most appropriate to investigate the complaint.

The VITAL complaints process has three stages.

Stage 1:

All complaints will be received by the Director, or if not appropriate the Chairperson of the Trustee Board. If the complaint involves both of these persons, the Trustee Board will decide what is most appropriate.

Under normal circumstances a letter of acknowledgement should be sent to a complainant within ten working days of the complaint being received at VITAL.

A letter containing VITAL's response will be sent to the complainant after investigation and within 30 working days of the initial complaint arriving at VITAL. If in exceptional circumstances VITAL cannot meet the deadline, we will write to explain why and give a new deadline for the response.

Stage 2:

If you are not satisfied with the decision or outcome at stage one you have a right to appeal, and can ask that the matter be raised with the Trustee Board who will make a decision to either uphold or dismiss the appeal. You will be notified in writing of the Trustee Board decision and the reasons for reaching this decision within 30 days.

- If your appeal is dismissed this decision is final.
- If an appeal is upheld the complaint may be investigated further, or re-investigated. If necessary a different investigator may be appointed at this stage. You will be notified of the outcome in writing within 30 days and this will be final.

Stage 3:

If you are not satisfied with the way VITAL has handled a complaint at stage 2, the final stage of the process is to take the complaint to an independent body perhaps another user-led organisation or funding body who may then act as arbitrators to achieve a resolution.