

SOSRC

Complaints Policy

Title	Complaints Policy		
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Introduction and Purpose

At SOSRC, it is essential to maintain high standards of practice and work performance in order to:

- Ensure the smooth running of the service
- Protect the well-being of all those involved
- Ensure that complainants, staff, and volunteers know what procedure will be followed in the event of a complaint
- Ensure that the process of investigation is open, thorough, and fair to all parties

Staff and volunteers work closely with young women, adults, and vulnerable individuals, often in partnership with agencies providing information, education, and welfare services. To deliver an effective service, staff and volunteers must establish confidential and trusting relationships with service users.

SOSRC is committed to taking seriously any complaint made against:

- Its employees (including volunteers, trustees, consultants, students, etc.)
- The delivery of services
- Service users

All complaints will be properly investigated and, where possible, resolved at the lowest appropriate level. The complaints procedure is designed to ensure fair treatment for service users who feel that an employee's actions are:

- In breach of the service user contract; or
- Below the standards expected of them

It also provides protection for staff against malicious or unfounded complaints. This procedure may also be used when service users feel they have been treated unfairly, in line with SOSRC's Equal Opportunities Policy.

Making a Complaint

Where a service user has a grievance or complaint about any individual or issue listed above, they should put the complaint in writing. No action will be taken unless the complaint is received in writing.

The written complaint should include:

- Details of the complaint
- The date and time of the incident(s)
- Names and contact details of any witnesses

If the complainant has literacy difficulties, an advocate may assist or act on their behalf in making the complaint.

Complaints made more than three months after the alleged incident will only be considered if an acceptable reason for the delay is provided.

Written complaints should be addressed to:

Operations Manager

Southend-on-Sea Rape Crisis

Clarence House

20–24 Clarence Road

Southend-on-Sea, Essex SS1 1AN

Or by email:

info@sosrc.org.uk

The Operations Manager will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within **7 working days** and will begin an investigation within **7 working days** of receipt. The results of the investigation will normally be communicated to the complainant within **21 days**. If there is an unavoidable delay (e.g. due to annual leave or ill health), the complainant will be informed and updated as soon as possible.

The Operations Manager will determine whether the matter is a **minor** or **serious** complaint (a serious complaint being one that could lead to dismissal or criminal proceedings). Where appropriate, they may convene a meeting with the service user to discuss the complaint. The service user may be accompanied by a friend or advocate.

The Operations Manager will also provide the employee(s) concerned with a copy of the complaint and inform them of their right to seek advice or representation.

If the Operations Manager is **unable to resolve the complaint**, it will be escalated to the **Chief Executive Officer (CEO)** for further consideration and resolution.

If the complaint **concerns the Operations Manager**, the complaint should be made **directly to the CEO in the first instance**. If the CEO is unable to resolve the matter, or if the complaint **concerns the CEO**, it will be **escalated to the Chair of Trustees**.

In such cases, the same investigation and communication process outlined above will apply.

Investigation Process

The investigating manager (Operations Manager, CEO, or Chair of Trustees, as appropriate) will:

1. Review all relevant information and determine the nature and seriousness of the complaint.
2. Interview the staff member(s) concerned, and where necessary, other individuals or witnesses.
3. Gather and review all relevant documentation.
4. Where appropriate, convene an informal meeting between the complainant and the staff member concerned, with the consent of both parties, to attempt an early resolution.

A file will be maintained detailing the complaint, actions taken, and notes of all interviews or meetings. These notes will be shared with the service user and their advocate.

Investigations should normally be concluded within **six weeks**. If this is not possible, all parties will receive updates at least every **four weeks**.

When the investigation is concluded, both the complainant and the staff member(s) will be advised in writing of the outcome and any proposed actions.

If, during the investigation, evidence of misconduct or incapability arises, the matter will be pursued separately under **SOSRC's Disciplinary Procedure**.

Satisfactory Conclusions

Where a satisfactory conclusion is reached, this will be recorded in the meeting notes, and no further action will be necessary.

If the Conclusion Is Unsatisfactory to the Service User

If the service user is not satisfied with the outcome, they may write to the **Chair of Trustees** stating the reasons for their dissatisfaction and enclosing a copy of their original complaint. If necessary, an advocate may assist.

The Chair of Trustees will:

- Acknowledge receipt of the complaint within **7 working days**
- Arrange a meeting with the service user within **10 working days** to discuss the matter
- Allow the service user to be accompanied by a friend or advocate
- Take notes of the meeting and share them with the service user and their advocate

If a satisfactory conclusion is reached, this will be recorded, and no further action will be necessary.

Taking the Complaint Further

If the service user remains dissatisfied, they may request that the matter be reviewed by **representatives of SOSRC's Management Committee**.

The Chair of Trustees will convene a **panel of three trustees** (including the Chair) within **15 working days** to meet with the service user and hear their concerns. The service user may be accompanied by a friend or advocate.

Following the meeting, the panel will review all evidence and determine whether the original investigation and conclusions were sound. This is not a re-hearing but a review of process and evidence.

The service user will be informed in writing of the decision within **10 working days**, and the staff member(s) will also be notified.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, the Chair may convene a **new panel**, with the power to co-opt external members for advice. The same procedure will then be followed again.

If a complaint is made unreasonably or repetitively, the committee reserves the right to take no further action.

If the complainant still remains dissatisfied, SOSRC will assist them in identifying their rights beyond this policy — for example, through external bodies such as the **Equality and Human Rights Commission**, **ACAS**, or through **legal action**.

Complaints About Outside Agencies

If a complaint concerns the actions of an external agency, SOSRC will support the complainant in registering their concern with the appropriate authority, or refer them to the **Citizens Advice Bureau** for assistance.

Action by the Agency

- Where a complaint against an employee is upheld, SOSRC will take appropriate action in line with its **Disciplinary Procedure**.
- Where a complaint about service delivery is upheld, SOSRC will take all necessary steps to support the service user and remedy the situation.

Service User Information

Information about how to make a complaint is available in the SOSRC office or by requesting it from a staff member.

Record Keeping

- Written records of all interviews and meetings will be maintained in sufficient detail to enable the appeals process.
- No documentation relating to a complaint will be kept on a staff member's personal file unless disciplinary proceedings result.
- Where a complaint is unfounded, a summary and resolution will be retained by the CEO for a minimum of three months and a maximum of one year.
- Where a complaint is founded but does not lead to disciplinary action, the investigation report and related documentation will be retained by the CEO for an appropriate period (normally at least three months, up to one year) considering any potential civil implications.

Review Statement

This policy forms part of the SOSRC annual review cycle and will be reviewed annually, or sooner if required by legislative, organisational, or operational changes.

END OF POLICY