



# High Trees Complaints Policy

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## 1. Statement of intent

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High Trees aims to provide its users with a fair and high-quality service and welcomes feedback from service users, other individuals, and organisations we work with so that we can continually improve our provision.

The purpose of this Complaints Policy is to:

- Provide a formal means by which complaints can be dealt with
- Ensure that everyone knows how to make a complaint
- Ensure that complaints are dealt with consistently, fairly, and quickly
- Ensure that complaints are monitored and contribute to changes to improve our services

Our policy covers complaints about:

- The standard of service you should expect from us
- The behaviour of our staff and volunteers in delivering that service
- Any action, or lack of action, by our staff or others engaged on High Trees' business

A short table of where to direct complaints is included at the end of this policy

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## 2. Legal definitions

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A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by anyone using our services, whether justified or not. An individual or other organisation may make a complaint if they feel that High Trees has:

- Failed to provide a service or an acceptable standard of service
- Delayed in providing a service
- Made a mistake in the way it has provided a service
- Provided an unfair or discriminatory service
- Failed to act in a proper way

There may be occasions when we are required by law to refer a complaint to law enforcement or statutory agencies, or we are informed about a complaint by a law enforcement agency, solicitors, or bodies with statutory powers of investigation. At all times, legal, statutory, or professional investigations will take primacy over the Complaints Policy and we will not undertake any actions that may compromise any external investigations. In such cases:

- The Complaints Policy will be initiated and the governing body may take action to protect clients, users, or this organisation through suspension of a member of staff or volunteer until such a time as any legal procedures or investigations are completed to the satisfaction of the external agencies concerned. If the complaint involves a paid member of staff, then the Disciplinary and Grievance Policies will be invoked
- Once immediate actions have been taken, the process set out in the Complaints Policy will be suspended until such a time as any legal procedures or investigations are completed to the satisfaction of the external agencies concerned
- High Trees will keep full and accurate records of its actions in respect of such a complaint
- In situations where a complaint may have financial or legal consequences for High Trees, our insurers may require us to cease direct contact with the complainant. It may then be necessary, in the best interests of the complainant, to refer them to a third party, both for assistance with the complaint and to ensure that their service needs are met

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### **3. Informal Resolution**

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High Trees recognise it is important to have a formal process in place, with clear steps in place including who is accountable for investigating and resolving complaints. We also realise that this must be balanced with ensuring that the process is not off putting to people who wish to raise concerns or minor dissatisfaction informally and ensuring we do not close off avenues for constructive feedback by over-formalising a process unnecessarily.

Should a service user raise a concern or complaint informally, the Head of Service from the team concerned will contact them - either by telephone, email or in person dependant on how this complaint is received, to see if the individual would like to resolve the issue on this basis if it is possible or whether they would prefer to follow our formal Complaints process which should be shared with them if they wish. No pressure should be put on individuals to resolve things informally if they prefer to follow a formal process.

If the complaint involves the Head of Service, one of the CEO's should contact the Service User to have the initial conversation.

If the issue appears to have been resolved informally to the satisfaction of the service user, a note of the issue should be made on the High Trees concerns log which will be regularly reviewed by the CEOs for the purpose of improving standards and ensuring different teams are handling concerns and complaints consistently. The CEO's will also produce a yearly report to the Trustees on all concerns and complaints received.

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### **4. Describing and implementing the policy and its procedures**

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We deal with formal complaints about the standard of our service and complaints about members of staff or volunteers slightly differently, as described below.

#### **4.1 Making a complaint about the standard of our services**

##### **Making a complaint in writing**

Your letter should be addressed to the Co-CEOs, High Trees, 220 Upper Tulse Hill, Brixton, London SW2 2NS and marked "Private and Confidential". If you prefer you can also email [anna.coffey@high-trees.org](mailto:anna.coffey@high-trees.org). Please include your name, a contact address and telephone number and, if necessary, the name of the organisation you represent. We cannot respond to anonymous complaints. If you need assistance to put your complaint into writing, then we can signpost you to someone outside High Trees who can support you to do this.

If your complaint directly concerns the Co-CEOs, then you can send your complaint to the Chair at the same postal address marked "Private and Confidential".

### **Making a verbal complaint**

If you would prefer to make a verbal complaint, then the person who receives the verbal complaint must record the details on the Complaints Form (see Appendices), which you will be asked to sign.

### **Processing complaints (stage 1)**

On receiving a complaint, either via a letter, email or via a Complaints Form, we will ensure that it is logged on to the complaints register.

The Co-CEO's will contact you within 10 working days with written confirmation that your complaint has been received and that an investigation has begun.

The Co-CEOs may be able to resolve the complaint quickly by way of an apology, by providing the service required or by providing an acceptable explanation. The CEOs will complete a Complaint Investigation Report (see Appendices) and send a copy of this to you.

If it is not possible to resolve the complaint quickly then the CEO's will fully investigate the complaint by interviewing any relevant staff or volunteers. They may seek advice from our insurers and/or from external advisers. Notes will be taken of any interviews and the interviewees will receive a copy. The CEOs will list any evidence seen (e.g. files, emails etc.)

You will receive a copy of our Complaint Investigation Report within 21 days. This will be in writing, unless you have requested that we use another medium. It will include a summary of what has been done to investigate the complaint and any proposed action to remedy the situation. Having received the report, you then need to complete the return slip indicating if you are satisfied with the outcome of the investigation or not.

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome the return slip provides the organisation with details of your intention to move to Appeal.

### **Appealing against the CEO's decision (stage 2)**

If you are dissatisfied with the decision that has been made, then you can appeal. This must be done within 10 working days of having received the Complaint Investigation Report. You make your appeal by completing the return slip indicating that you are not satisfied and wish to move to Stage 2 of the Complaints procedure. If you wish you may also submit further written information at this stage.

Once we have received your return slip, all the documentation concerning your complaint will be passed to the Chair of the Board to review. The Chair will carry out a full review and send you a copy of their findings within 21 days. If the Chair is not available, the Vice-Chair will deal with the matter. If both are unavailable, another Board member will deputise.

If you are unhappy with the outcome of Stage 2 of the complaints procedure you should write to the Chair confirming you wish to move to Stage 3 of the procedure.

### **Final Appeal Stage against the Chair's decision (stage 3)**

Appealing against the Chair's decision must be done within 10 working days of receiving the outcome.

You will be invited to make your appeal in person to an Appeals Panel comprising three High Trees board members who have not been involved in the investigation. They will have been given a copy of the Complaint Investigation Report and the Chair's outcome but will not have discussed the matter with the investigator or the staff involved.

The role of the Appeals Panel is to see if your complaint has been dealt with properly and fairly and whether an appropriate decision has been reached, rather than to re-investigate the complaint. Where the complaint is against a member of staff or volunteer, that person will be given the opportunity to submit a written statement to the Appeals Panel. This will be considered alongside the original complaint, the investigation report and any action suggested to remedy the situation.

You will be given at least 7 days' notice of the date, time and venue of the Appeals Panel meeting and all reasonable efforts will be made to hold the meeting at a time convenient to you. You may bring someone to assist you, or to witness the meeting.

The Appeals Panel will write to you within 7 days to notify you of its decision and any actions to be taken to address the complaint. The Appeals Panel's decision will be final, and no further correspondence will be entered into.

## **4.2 Making a complaint about a staff member or volunteer**

### **Making a complaint in writing**

Sometimes a complaint might be made about a staff member or volunteer who is believed to have done something wrong. In these instances, a written complaint rather than a verbal complaint will be needed.

Whilst it is not uncommon for people to look for someone to blame when things go wrong, the person being complained about will be assured that this is not the aim of investigating a complaint. It will be made clear that the investigation of a complaint is to establish facts to try and find out what, if anything has gone wrong and identify any learning from the situation.

If the complaint is made against:

- A member of staff or volunteer, it should be addressed to the Co-CEOs
- A service user, it should be addressed to the Co-CEOs
- One or both Co-CEOs, it should be addressed to the Chair of the Trustees
- A Trustee, it should be addressed to the Chair of the Trustees

- The Chair of Trustees, it should be addressed to the Trustees via the Co-CEOs

### **Investigating a complaint**

The organisation will treat the person against whom a complaint has been made as fairly as the complainant. They will be given a copy of the complaint made, which may be anonymised to protect the confidentiality of the complainant, within 3 working days of receiving the complaint.

The staff member will be reassured that the investigation does not form part of a disciplinary procedure, but that a separate disciplinary process could take place if this was found to be appropriate. In the case of volunteers, including Trustees this would be via the Volunteer Policy, Diversity and Equality Policy or the Trustee Code of Conduct.

The person being complained about will be given the fullest opportunity to answer any criticisms and assistance and support will be available for them if required; this may be an individual who is identified to provide a listening ear and practical support in terms of helping them to complete a written response and explaining the process. They will be asked to provide a written statement responding to the complaint, including identifying any witnesses to the event.

### **Adjudicating a complaint**

The person being complained about will be kept informed of progress throughout the process and both the person making the complaint and the complainant will receive a copy of the Complaint Investigation Report from the Co-CEOs or the Chair within 21 days of the complaint.

### **Appealing against the decision**

If you are dissatisfied with the decision that has been made, then you can appeal. This must be done within 7 working days of having received the Complaints Investigation Report. You make your appeal in writing to the Chair of High Trees. You will then be required to follow the process outlined in Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure above.

In reference to all of the above steps, if your complaint is in relation to the Chair of Trustees, the Vice Chairs will fulfil this role.

### **4.3 Complaints about other service users**

Where the complaint is about a service user/client who is not a member of the organisation then its Service User Code of Conduct and Equality and Diversity Policy will be used.

### **4.4 Publicising the learning outcomes of complaints**

As well as informing all those involved of the outcomes of complaints and any recommendations that arise, the organisation will let all staff and service users/clients know about the way in which we deal with complaints and how we have learnt from the experience in terms of changes in recommended conduct or changes in policies. The organisation is aiming for a culture where reporting a complaint and action taken is seen as a positive act in that it assists organisational learning and contributes to better services. We will not publicly share details of any complaints made.

All parties involved in the investigation will be required to keep the matter private and confidential, except that staff may seek the advice of trades unions or other advisers if they consider that the High Trees Disciplinary or Grievance Procedures will need to be invoked.

#### **4.5 Repeated complainants**

It is possible that a service user or partner who uses High Trees services over a longer period of time could potentially have multiple unlinked complaints, and each of these should be investigated fully on their own individual merits. We also recognise that as a small organisation, having a thorough and robust formal process necessitates complaints taking a much higher proportion of staff time than would be the case in a larger organisation. The board reserves the right to vary this process if it is felt that numerous complaints are being received by the same individual and on balance it is likely that these complaints are vexatious, if this is the case the Chair will write to this individual explaining the decision.

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### **5. Responsibility for and frequency of review of the policy**

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With the support of our Management team, our Co-CEOs have responsibility for the day-to-day implementation of this policy and its annual review.

It will be brought to a Trustees' meeting annually so that Trustees can oversee the organisation's progress against the identified actions.

Date policy was agreed: 1<sup>st</sup> March 2022

Date of last review: 25<sup>th</sup> October 2025

Next review date: 25<sup>th</sup> October 2026

## Appendix 2: Directing Complaints Table

<p>An informal conversation if you would not like to make a formal complaint, or are not sure whether you would like to make a complaint</p>	<p>The Head of Service:</p> <p>You can ask to have this conversation in person, or can write to us at:</p> <p>Children, Young People and Families / The Tulse Hill Adventure Playground:  <a href="mailto:naomi.howgate@high-trees.org">naomi.howgate@high-trees.org</a></p> <p>Education and Training:  <a href="mailto:morgana.zuccoli@high-trees.org">morgana.zuccoli@high-trees.org</a></p> <p>Employment and Welfare:  <a href="mailto:andrew.rose@high-trees.org">andrew.rose@high-trees.org</a></p> <p>Community Action:  <a href="mailto:hana.riazuddin@high-trees.org">hana.riazuddin@high-trees.org</a></p> <p>Research and Development:  <a href="mailto:hana.riazuddin@high-trees.org">hana.riazuddin@high-trees.org</a></p> <p>Operations, including venue hire:  <a href="mailto:mohammed.meho@high-trees.org">mohammed.meho@high-trees.org</a></p>
<p>A written complaint about a member of staff or volunteer</p>	<p>High Trees Co-CEOs</p> <p><a href="mailto:Anna.Coffey@high-trees.org">Anna.Coffey@high-trees.org</a> / <a href="mailto:Grace.English@high-trees.org">Grace.English@high-trees.org</a></p> <p>Anna Coffey &amp; Grace English, High Trees, 220 Upper Tulse Hill, London, SW2 2NS</p>
<p>A written complaint about a service user</p>	<p>High Trees Co-CEOs</p> <p><a href="mailto:Anna.Coffey@high-trees.org">Anna.Coffey@high-trees.org</a> / <a href="mailto:Grace.English@high-trees.org">Grace.English@high-trees.org</a></p> <p>Anna Coffey &amp; Grace English, High Trees, 220 Upper Tulse Hill, London, SW2 2NS</p>
<p>One or both Co-CEOs</p>	<p>High Trees Chair of Trustees:</p> <p>Ewa Pawliczko High Trees, 220 Upper Tulse Hill, London, SW2 2NS</p>
<p>A Trustee</p>	<p>High Trees Chair of Trustees:</p> <p>Ewa Pawliczko High Trees, 220 Upper Tulse Hill, London, SW2 2NS</p>
<p>The Chair of Trustees</p>	<p>The Trustees via the Co-CEOs</p> <p><a href="mailto:Anna.Coffey@high-trees.org">Anna.Coffey@high-trees.org</a> / <a href="mailto:Grace.English@high-trees.org">Grace.English@high-trees.org</a></p>

	Anna Coffey & Grace English, High Trees, 220 Upper Tulse Hill, London, SW2 2NS
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## **Appendix 2: High Trees' Complaints Form**

This form should be completed by any member of staff who receives a verbal complaint about the delivery or quality of High Trees' services.

Before completing the form, please notify the complainant that they can send a written account by post or by email if they would prefer so that the complaint is recorded in their own words. Complaints should be emailed to: [anna.coffey@high-trees.org](mailto:anna.coffey@high-trees.org)

If the complaint is about a member of staff or volunteer, then this should be submitted by letter rather than given verbally and recorded on this form.

The form should be completed as fully as possible to enable the complaint to be investigated and resolved. We cannot accept anonymous complaints.

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**Date:**

**Complaint received by:**

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**Name of complainant:**

**Address of the complainant:**

**Telephone number of the complainant:**

**Relationship of the complainant to High Trees:**

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**Facts of the complaint:**

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When this form is complete, please tick the following boxes to show that you have shared the right information with the complainant.

- I have told the complainant that we have a complaints procedure
- I have told the complainant that someone will be in touch with them to follow up within 10 days

### **Appendix 3: High Trees' Complaints Investigation Report Template**

**Name of the complainant:**

**Date of the complaint:**

**Facts of the complaint:**

**Name of investigator:**

**Date of the Complaint Investigation Report:**

**What was done to investigate the complaint?**

**What is the proposed action to remedy the complaint?**

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**Return slip**

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I confirm that I have received a copy of the Complaint Investigation Report dated xx/xx/xxxx and that (please tick one of the following boxes):

- I am satisfied with the proposed resolution of the complaint.
- I am not satisfied with the proposed resolution of the complaint and I wish to appeal
- I have enclosed further information about my complaint that I would like reviewed with the appeal

Name:

Date:

Signature: