



External Complaints Policy



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1.0 SCOPE

This policy explains how Blythswood handles complaints from supporters, donors, customers, beneficiaries, volunteers, partner organisations and members of the public about our services, activities or the conduct of our staff and volunteers.

This policy does not apply to employment related matters, which are dealt with under Blythswood's Grievance, Whistleblowing, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Disciplinary and other internal HR policies, found in our Staff Handbook.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Blythswood is committed to working in an open and accountable way that secures the trust and respect of stakeholders, and as such recognises the role of an effective complaints policy in fostering transparency, fairness, and a culture of continuous improvement.

Blythswood is committed to listening to, investigating and responding appropriately to all legitimate complaints or comments received about our services or staff, and to resolving any matters of concern promptly.

2.2 This policy describes our overall arrangements for dealing with complaints. It is supported by procedures and complies with current good practice adopted by public and charitable organisations.

2.3 We will, where necessary, assist those who are unable to make or lodge their complaint/comment independently, e.g. due to illness, physical or mental disability or because their first language is not English. We will also accept a complaint or comment made by a third party on someone's behalf, e.g. by an advocacy service, provided there is clear evidence that the person wishing to contact us has given their permission for the third party to act on their behalf.

2.4 Blythswood seeks to resolve any dissatisfaction as close as possible to the point of service delivery and seeks to conduct thorough, impartial and fair investigations of complaints so that, where appropriate, we can make evidence-based decisions on the factors of the case.

2.5 Blythswood recognises the value of complaints or comments in:

- giving staff a 'first-hand' account of the person's views and experience
- giving us valuable information we can use to improve customer satisfaction and prevent the same problems that led to the complaint from happening again, and
- highlight and address problems we may otherwise miss

2.6 We also recognise that resolving complaints quickly, and sorting them out as close as possible to the point of service delivery

- can save costs and create better relations with supporters, clients, customers, staff and volunteers
- means they are less likely to escalate to the next stage of the procedure
- can minimise the overall workload involved in dealing with complaints, and
- can enhance the public's perception of Blythswood



3.0 RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 Board of Directors

- To ensure that Blythswood has approved and implemented a Complaints Policy that complies with current regulations and guidance
- Where appropriate, to agree any action required as a result of complaints received, and monitor the implementation of that action

3.2 Management

- Chief Executive
 - To ensure that appropriate processes are in place for recording the receipt, progress and outcome of each complaint
 - To ensure that all staff are aware and have access to the Complaints Policy, that they follow the approved complaints procedures and that any action agreed is implemented
 - To submit a report on complaints to the Executive Team and Board of Directors when requested to do so
 - To ensure that the Complaints Procedure is made available on the Blythswood website
- Executive Team
 - To ensure that their staff are aware of what should be recorded as a complaint
 - To review current complaints regularly to ensure current response targets are met
 - To identify any action required and ensure it is implemented

3.3 Staff

When dealing with complaints, to ensure they comply with this policy and the procedures within it, so that all complaints are recorded accurately, investigated thoroughly and responded to promptly within the target timescales.

4.0 DEFINITION & STAGES

4.1 Definition

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about our action, lack of action or about the standard of service provided either by Blythswood, or on our behalf, where the person making the complaint expects it will be investigated, acted on where appropriate, and a response given. For further details, and information on what is not a complaint, see the supporting procedures.

A comment is either a positive expression of thanks or that something was done well, or a constructive suggestion that something could have been done better or differently, where the person making the comment does not wish it to be treated as a complaint.

4.2 How to make a complaint

By email to info@blythswood.org with 'complaint' in the subject line.

Complaints may also be made in person or by telephone to any member of staff, who will ensure they are recorded and passed to the appropriate manager.



We hope that the majority of complaints can be dealt with informally, but in cases in which the formal procedure is more appropriate, we request that they are submitted in the following format:

In writing, addressed to the Chief Executive's Office, Blythswood Care, Highland

Deephaven, Evanton, Ross-shire IV16 9XJ. Please mark your correspondence clearly with 'complaint' **or**

By email to info@blythswood.org with 'complaint' in the subject line. It should include a full explanation of the problem, how it occurred, and the effect on you. Describe what you think we should do to put things right. If you are unable to submit your complaint in writing please phone 01349830777.

4.3 Stages of Complaint

There are two stages for handling complaints

Stage 1: Frontline resolution

Stage 2: Investigation & reply

Stage 1 complaints will normally be:

- a) issues that are straightforward and easily resolved, requiring little or no investigation;
- b) dealt with at the frontline, i.e. by any appropriate staff member who can deal with the complaint quickly;
- c) replied to with an apology, explanation or other action to resolve the complaint, either right away by the person handling it or within 5 working days, unless there are exceptional circumstances and an extension is agreed with the complainant.

Stage 2 complaints will be:

- a) issues that have not been resolved at Stage 1;
- b) issues that are complex, serious or high risk, normally requiring thorough investigation (these will include complaints against the attitude or behaviour of staff or volunteers);
- c) passed to the relevant Executive Team member, or Chief Executive if appropriate, for investigation and reply;
- d) acknowledged in writing within 5 working days* and replied to in 28 working days*, unless there are exceptional circumstances and an extension is agreed with the complainant.

4.4 Appeals

If the complainant is still dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigation they may appeal. Letters must be received within twenty one working days of the date on the correspondence notifying you of the outcome of the first investigation. The Appeal will be dealt with by the Chief Executive or a member of the Board, as most appropriate. The appeal will be considered by a person who has not previously been directly involved in investigating the complaint.

The complaint will be reinvestigated and you will be informed of the outcome within 10 working days*



**unless the complaint is particularly complex or time-consuming, in which case the complainant will be kept informed of the progress of the investigation and notified of the expected date of completion.*

Organisations including the Information Commissioner's Office, the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator or the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland can be contacted if the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the appeal. They will normally only consider a complaint once the person making it has been through

Blythswood's complaints stages first. We will provide the relevant contact information to the complainant.

4.5 Assessing satisfaction

When a complaint is closed we will assess and record the level of satisfaction, both with the outcomes and with how we have dealt with the complaint.

5.0 REDRESS

Where a complaint is upheld, either in whole or in part, and we accept that we have not achieved the desired standards, Blythswood will offer appropriate redress. This will normally be an apology and action to remedy any fault or failing, but this may also include recompense for actual loss or damage incurred.

6.0 VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS

We recognise that when making a complaint, there may be upsetting or distressing circumstances which can result in people acting 'out of character'. Where someone making a complaint is forceful or determined this will, in itself, not be a reason to view the behaviour as unacceptable. Being persistent may be a positive factor in pursuing a complaint.

However where the actions of those making a complaint result in unreasonable demands on our facilities and resources – e.g. through repeated complaints about the same issue, and/or unacceptable behaviour towards our employees, we will regard such actions as unacceptable.

Where correspondence contains abusive, threatening or offensive language, or where behaviour becomes unreasonable, Blythswood may limit or cease communication while ensuring any substantive issues have been appropriately considered.

Please be aware that during the investigation of any complaint, consideration will be given as to whether Blythswood has a duty to report the matter to a relevant regulator, such as the Information Commissioner's Office, or the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator. Where appropriate, complaints will be escalated to one of these bodies.

7.0 DATA PRIVACY STATEMENT

We collate and analyse data about complaints so that we can improve the services we provide. We will collect personal information which may include your name and contact details, including postal address, telephone number, email address and social media contact information, in order to be able to communicate with you about your complaint.

We will also collect sufficient information about the situation that you are contacting us



about to be able to understand what has happened. We may need to request further information depending on the nature of your complaint. We have a legitimate interest in holding this information in order to be able to monitor and improve our services

Information gathered is accessed by Blythswood employees and may be shared with advice agencies or professional services firms only if appropriate, where there is a legitimate reason for doing so, and only to the extent necessary.

8.0 MONITORING AND REVIEW

The Chief Executive will ensure that the Complaints Policy is made available to staff, volunteers and the public through our handbook and website.

The Executive Team will review complaint trends periodically and report significant themes or learning points to the Board.