

COMPLAINTS POLICY

The SOFT Project aims to provide high quality services to our members and service users and to other agencies and individuals in the voluntary and community sector. We are committed to providing a high standard of service and to continuously improving and extending what we can offer.

However, we recognise that there may be occasions when things go wrong. It is important that you tell us when this happens so that we can deal speedily with the problem you have raised. Feedback really does help us to improve the quality of our work.

This is the policy that SOFT will follow if your complaint is about someone's conduct or behaviour, or about any of our services. This could be because you think that someone has behaved in a way that is unsafe, unprofessional, discriminatory, offensive or intimidating. It could be because someone has broken important rules or policies. Or if you have an issue with our services.

You have the right to complain

We take complaints seriously. You should not be harassed, bullied or put at a disadvantage because of making a complaint.

Equality

You should receive a proper response to your complaint, regardless of your age, gender, disability, race, religion, nationality, social status, sexual orientation or political persuasion.

Fairness

We believe that complaints should be dealt with fairly and openly. Unless it would put other people at risk, those affected by a complaint should have a chance to contribute and respond to any investigation.

Safety and welfare take priority

We will always give priority to concerns that affect safety and welfare. Issues affecting children will be treated very seriously.

Confidentiality:

We treat complaints as confidentially as possible. Sometimes we have to discuss complaints with other organisations. If we are worried about a risk to a person or to the public, we might need to pass on our concerns to the right authorities. If necessary, we will get advice from other organisations such as the PSNI and Social Services.

General complaints procedure

If you are unhappy about any of our services, we undertake to deal quickly and effectively with the matter. As a first step, we suggest that you contact the member of staff concerned to see if the problem can be resolved to your satisfaction. SOFT staff will do everything they can to put things right, including reviewing procedures to stop problems happening again.

If you are not happy with the response, or if you do not know which member of staff to contact, please follow the steps outlined:

1. All complaints should be made to the Project Manager in their absence in writing by letter or email. This will be acknowledged within three working days. Contact details are at the end of this page.
2. The Project Manager will investigate the issues raised and let you have SOFT's response to the complaint normally within ten working days. Should the investigation require further time, an acknowledgment letter will be sent to you in the first instance, followed by a full response.
3. If you do not feel that the Project Manager's response is acceptable, you have the right to ask for your complaint to be referred to a complaints panel. The panel consists of the chair or vice-chair of

the SOFT Management Committee and one member of Speedwell Trust' Board. You will be advised of the date the panel meets and you may attend the meeting to make representation. You may also bring someone with you if you wish for personal support.

4. You will be notified of the panel's decision within five working days of its meeting.

5. In the case of a complaint from an individual or organisation that is not a member/service user of SOFT, the panel's decision is final.

What are the possible outcomes or results of my complaint?

In many cases, we are able to resolve problems informally. This might include:

- A change in arrangements for particular activities or services
- An explanation or apology
- An agreement to communicate or act differently in future. If an informal resolution is not suitable, then a small committee of senior officials will look at the information about the case. We will try to make sure that this committee does not contain anyone directly involved with your complaint. They might decide to take the following action:
 - Formal disciplinary action under the Rules of the organisation
 - Formal disciplinary action against a member of staff
 - Changes in formal contracts or arrangements put in place by the organisation
 - A decision to refer the case to another organisation such as the Police or Social Services.
 - Closure of your complaint without action.