

Complaints Handling Policy & Procedure

Organisation: Her Way Forward CIC

Approved by: Board of Directors

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Owner (*policy lead*): Shannon Lee (Director)

1. Purpose

Her Way Forward is committed to providing high-quality women's wellbeing services and to fundraising in a way that is open, respectful, and accountable. We welcome feedback and complaints as an opportunity to learn, put things right, and improve.

As a **Community Interest Company (CIC)**, we are accountable to the community we serve. This procedure ensures complaints about our services, operations, fundraising, staff, volunteers, or anyone acting on our behalf are handled **fairly, consistently, and without unnecessary delay**.

This procedure is designed to meet expectations in the **Fundraising Regulator's complaints handling guidance** and the **Code of Fundraising Practice** (*including the requirement to have a clear complaints procedure and to manage complaints involving third-party fundraisers*).

2. Scope

This procedure covers complaints about:

- **Services and programmes** (*classes, workshops, wellbeing support, communications*)
- **Fundraising** (*messages, materials, donor communications, events, processing donations*)
- **Conduct** of staff, volunteers, contractors, and **third parties fundraising on our behalf**
- **Failure to follow our policies** or expected standards

This procedure does **not** replace:

- **Safeguarding** procedures (*children/vulnerable adults*)
- **Whistleblowing** (*serious wrongdoing*)
- **HR processes** for staff grievances

Where a complaint includes safeguarding, fraud, or serious misconduct, we may pause the normal process and follow the relevant specialist procedure, while keeping the complainant informed.

3. Definition of a complaint

A complaint is an **expression of dissatisfaction**, however made (*written, verbal, online, in person*), about an action taken or a lack of action by Her Way Forward CIC or someone acting on our behalf.

If it is unclear whether something is a complaint, we will **treat it as a complaint** unless the person confirms they only want to give feedback.

4. Principles

We will handle complaints in line with these principles:

- **Accessibility:** Easy to find, easy to use. Available on our website and in alternative formats on request (large print, translated summary, phone support). We will make reasonable adjustments for disability and language needs.
- **Fairness and independence:** We investigate proportionately and fairly. Wherever possible, the investigator will not be the person complained about.
- **Confidentiality & data protection:** We handle information sensitively and in line with UK GDPR and data protection law.
- **Timeliness:** We respond promptly and keep people updated.
- **Accountability & learning:** We explain decisions, provide remedies where appropriate, and use complaints to improve.

5. Making our procedure available

This policy and the “How to complain” information will be:

- Published prominently on our website (*and available on request by email/post*)
- Shared with staff/volunteers during induction/training
- Provided to fundraising partners/third-party fundraisers who work on our behalf

6. How to make a complaint

You can complain in any of the following ways:

- **Email:** info@herwayforward.co.uk
- **Phone:** +44 7874 414615

- **Post / in person:** 66 Paul Street, London, EC2A 4NA

To help us resolve matters quickly, please tell us (*if you can*):

- What happened and when
- Who was involved (*if known*)
- Any supporting information (*screenshots, letters, dates*)
- **What outcome you are seeking** (*e.g., apology, correction, refund, change of practice*)

You do not need to use any special form.

Anonymous complaints

We will consider anonymous complaints, but it may limit what we can investigate or feedback we can provide.

7. Timescales and stages

Our overall aim (*especially for fundraising complaints*)

For **fundraising-related complaints**, we aim to provide a final outcome **within 28 calendar days (4 weeks)** of receiving the complaint. If this is not possible due to complexity, we will explain why, provide a revised date, and keep the complainant updated.

Stage 1: Early / informal resolution

- We aim to resolve straightforward issues quickly, often on first contact.
- **Target:** within **5 working days**.
- We will still record the complaint for learning purposes.

Stage 2: Formal investigation

If not resolved at Stage 1 (*or if the matter is serious*), we will investigate.

1. **Acknowledgement:** within **3 working days** of receipt
2. **Investigation:** led by a manager or appointed investigator independent of the issue where possible
3. **Written response:** within **15 working days** of acknowledgement
 - If we need more time, we will explain why and provide a new deadline, with updates at least every **10 working days** until completed.

Stage 3: Internal review / appeal

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the Stage 2 response, they may request a review.

- The request should be made within **14 calendar days** of the Stage 2 outcome.
- A Director (*or a Board panel*) not previously involved will review the process and decision.
- **Final response:** within **10 working days** of receiving the appeal request.

Note: If an appeal would take the total handling time beyond **28 calendar days**, we will explain this clearly and confirm the revised date.

8. Complaints involving third-party fundraisers

Where fundraising is carried out on our behalf by a third party (*e.g., fundraising platform, agency, venue partner, community fundraiser*):

- If the third party receives a complaint about fundraising for us, they must **notify us promptly** and share relevant records, ideally within **2 working days**.
- If the third party does not have a suitable complaints process, they must **agree to follow this procedure**.
- We will coordinate the investigation and ensure the complainant receives a clear response, while the third party cooperates fully.

We remain accountable for fundraising carried out **in our name or on our behalf**.

9. Outcomes and remedies

Our response will explain:

- Whether the complaint is **upheld, partially upheld, or not upheld**
- The key evidence and reasons for the decision
- What action we will take (*if any*) and by when

Possible remedies include:

- An apology and explanation
- Correcting inaccurate information
- Reviewing or changing a process
- Refresher training for staff/volunteers/partners
- Where appropriate, a refund or other practical remedy (*in line with law and our policies*)

10. External escalation / redress

Fundraising-related complaints

If your complaint is about fundraising and:

- We have **not resolved it within 4 weeks**, or
- You remain dissatisfied after our final response,

you can escalate to the **Fundraising Regulator**.

Time guidance (to help complainants):

- Please raise fundraising complaints with us **as soon as possible**, ideally within **3 months** of the event.
- If escalating after our final response, you should normally do so within **2 months**.

Data protection complaints

If your complaint concerns how we use or protect personal data and you remain dissatisfied after our response, you can contact the **Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)**.

CIC governance / community interest concerns

If your concern relates to **CIC regulatory matters** (*e.g., serious governance concerns or issues relevant to the community interest/asset lock*), you may contact the **Office of the Regulator of Community Interest Companies**.

Please note: the CIC Regulator is not an ombudsman for day-to-day service complaints; we encourage you to complete our internal process first wherever possible.

11. Record-keeping and learning

We maintain a central **Complaints Register** which records:

- Date received, category, and summary of the issue
- Actions taken and outcome
- Timescales met/any delays and reasons
- Learning points and improvements made

We will:

- Report complaint themes and learning to the Board **quarterly**
- Review the register **annually** to identify trends and improvements
- Retain complaint records securely for **3 years**, unless a longer period is required for legal reasons

12. Duty of care and unacceptable behaviour

We treat complainants respectfully and ask the same in return. We will not tolerate abusive, discriminatory, or threatening behaviour toward staff, volunteers, or partners. Where behaviour is unacceptable, we may:

- Set contact boundaries (*e.g., single point of contact, written communication only*)
- End a call or meeting if abuse occurs
- Continue the complaint in writing only, where appropriate

This will not affect our commitment to investigate the substance of the complaint fairly.