



Complaints Policy and Procedure

For all Managers, Staff, Volunteers, Clients and organisations working with us.

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Document Information

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2 Statement of policy

Sunderland Counselling Service (SCS) recognises and values its clients, funders and other partners, and is determined to build good and productive relationships with them. The organisation aims to include all stakeholders in designing, delivering, reviewing and assessing the service in order to meet their needs and ensure quality. While the organisation hopes that its services will be received favourably by those who use them, SCS recognises that comments and complaints will arise from time to time. SCS believes that feedback from service users and other partners is a crucial way for the organisation to become aware of shortfalls in service design or delivery or in the conduct of members of staff or volunteers. To this end, all clients are asked to complete a service evaluation questionnaire and provide additional narrative feedback when they end counselling.

However, in situations where this is not sufficient or where more serious issues arise, the complaints procedure therefore exists as a way for clients and other partners to make known any concerns they may have about the operations of SCS. The procedure is available to all those who use the services of SCS and for any member of the public who feels that he or she wishes to raise a complaint about any matter to do with the practice or policies of SCS or to do with the conduct of SCS personnel, whether paid or unpaid at any level of the organisation.

It is the policy of SCS to achieve a solution to any complaint that is satisfactory to the complainant and can be seen to be fair, ethical, legal, prompt and complete.

3 Procedure

1. If your problem is with an individual, a member of staff, a volunteer or another service user, you can try talking to this person first to see if you can resolve the problem together. If you do not wish to do so or if this is not possible, go to step 2.

2. If your problem cannot be dealt with in this way, ask the Chief Executive for a private meeting or submit your complaint in writing to the Chief Executive. If the Chief Executive is not available please leave your contact details with either the Office Manager, Service Manager or Clinical Lead and the Chief Executive will respond to you directly to arrange a meeting. This meeting will take place within three working days of your request wherever possible. When you go to your meeting, you can take

someone of your choosing to support you. Your complaint will be heard in privacy and confidence.

3. The Chief Executive will then undertake any necessary investigations into your complaint and respond to you in writing within seven working days of the date of your meeting or written complaint. If the complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction, you can request that further action should be taken, as described in step 4.

4. If you decide to take further action, your complaint must be addressed in writing to the Chair of Sunderland Counselling Service Management Committee. In the absence of the Chair, please address your complaint in writing to the deputising officer of SCS Management Committee.

5. The Chair (or deputy) will acknowledge your complaint in writing within seven working days and will give you a timeframe for the investigation of your complaint. If the matter is not resolved within this time frame, the Chair (or deputy) must write to you giving reasons for the delay.

6. If necessary, the Chair will take qualified legal advice on the procedure to adopt for the investigation of the complaint where there may be legal implications or the responsibilities of the Management Committee / Trustees are concerned. The Management Committee / Trustees may appoint an external tribunal who will manage the investigations and make recommendations. The tribunal may, if they see fit, seek a second legal opinion. The Management Committee / Trustees will act upon the recommendation of this tribunal.

7. All other investigations will be made under the guidance and management of two members of the Management Committee who do not have direct responsibility for the matter about which the complaint is made. Their recommendations will be acted upon within the time frame set.

8. At the end of the investigation, and after decisions for action have been taken, the Chair will write to the complainant giving full details of the conclusions of the investigation, decisions for action taken and details of action taken.

9. Any complainant who still feels aggrieved after following the Complaints Procedure or at any point during the operation of the procedure has the right to complain to the Charity Commission whose address will be provided by SCS Honorary Secretary on request.

4 Recording and reporting

At every stage of the complaint and any investigation, full notes will be kept of all conversations, interviews, discussions and other matters to do with the complaint and the operation of the Complaints Procedure.

All complaints will be reported to the Management Committee by the Chief Executive at the monthly board meetings.

All complaints are recorded on the complaints register which is maintained by the Chief Executive. The complaints register includes:

- Categorisation of complaints by source of complaint and which service within SCS the complaint relates to;
- Relevant dates – including date complaint was received and date a resolution was achieved;
- The person responsible for investigating the complaint;
- The outcome of the complaint.

5 Notes

If the matter is to do with the conduct of a worker, the Disciplinary Procedure may be invoked.

This procedure will be displayed publicly within SCS premises and is available to any client on request.