



Making a complaint about Hampshire SENDIASS

Hampshire SENDIASS (Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service) is provided by Polaris Children's Services. Complaints relating to the service are dealt with in accordance with the Polaris Complaints, Representations and Compliments procedure.



Complaints, Representations & Compliments Procedure

Adoption Services

Child and Family Services

Supported Accommodation Services

This Complaints and Representations Procedure is integral to the work of our agencies, which will ensure that complaints are dealt with in a manner that can be demonstrated to be open and fair.

This procedure outlines the process to be followed in the event of a complaint or representation being made. It also allows children/young people and families to have a right to have their views listened to and taken into account.

This procedure forms part of the Polaris Quality Management system ISO 9001.

Procedure Owner:	Quality Assurance
Approved by:	QA Meeting
Date approved:	16/12/2020
Next review date:	16/12/2023
Version No:	09
Associated documents:	

All companies are detailed in the current legal structure

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Purpose

The Polaris community regard complaints, representations and compliments as an important tool to help monitor, evaluate and improve the quality of the service we give to children, young people, their families, prospective adoptive parents, adoptive parents and placing local authorities/trusts.

This Representations and Complaints Procedure has been designed to:

- 1 Be clear and easy to use.
- 2 Ensure that the people who use services are treated with dignity and respect, are not afraid to make a complaint, and have their concerns taken seriously.
- 3 Ensure complaints are dealt with in a fair and impartial manner.
- 4 Ensure that any concerns about the protection of children are referred immediately to the relevant Children's Social Care team or to the Police.
- 5 Ensure that as many complaints as possible are resolved swiftly and satisfactorily at a local level.
- 6 Ensure a fair process and adequate support for everyone involved in the complaint.
- 7 Ensure that the child or adult making the complaint receives a full response without delay.
- 8 Provide information about the child or adult's rights of access to other means of redress, such as Registering Bodies, Local Authorities/Trusts, or the relevant Ombudsman.
- 9 Ensure that the organisation monitors performance in handling complaints, delivers what they have promised, learns from complaints and uses this learning to improve services for everyone who uses them.

Complaints may be made about any person who completes work on behalf of the agency, about the services provided, or about a failure to provide services that are reasonably expected.

The Representations and Complaints Procedure is open to children/young people and their families, a person acting on behalf of a child, young person, prospective adoptive parents and adoptive parents, commissioners of services, and anyone else for whom the agency has agreed to provide a service. This procedure is not open to members of staff, who have access to grievance procedures, or others who carry out work on behalf of the agency as workers or self-employed individuals.

Compliments

The Polaris community values feedback of any positive experiences. It is important for us to know how well each agency is performing on a local and strategic level. We take into consideration feedback obtained in planning and reviewing service delivery. If you would like to pay us a compliment, this can be done in a number of ways, including but not limited to; phone call or via letter or e-mail to the person who you wish to compliment and copy this to their Line Manager. All compliments are collated and reported in monthly management meetings.

Pre complaints guidance

The Polaris community hopes that many of the issues that someone may be concerned about can be settled and resolved at the earliest opportunity and responded to by the manager prior to embarking into the Complaints process, through discussion with the person they would ordinarily have most contact with, or through discussion with their line manager. It is strongly recommended that the Head of Service or Senior Manager endeavours to resolve any concerns or issues raised at the earliest opportunity to resolve the matter without the need for it to be considered as a complaint and investigated via the complaints process.

Adopters for Adoption only

Any issues dealt with without the need to escalate to a complaints process must still be recorded along with any actions and outcomes using the progress action 'Representation' on Charms.

Supported Accommodation/Polaris Children's Service's only

Any issues dealt with without the need to escalate to a complaints process must still be recorded along with any actions and outcomes within the Contact Log and Young Person's file.

Where a concern has been raised, in the event that such discussion does not resolve the matter, a copy of the Representations & Complaints Procedure should be provided to the complainant.

Definition of a Complaint / Representation

A complaint may generally be defined as something that is 'formally complained about' and which requires a response. This might be an appropriate service, a decision making process, the standard or quality of service, no service or inadequate service.

Enquiries or comments about the availability, delivery or nature of a service, which are not criticisms but may be considered as a concern, are likely to constitute a Representation, e.g. comments about the service provision, allocation of resources or the nature of the services. This will enable the agency to consider their delivery of services, and are welcomed by the

agency. It requires a response and could involve making some changes to how a service is delivered. If feedback or comments indicate that, the agency may not have followed correct procedure or regulation this will be considered as a complaint rather than a representation.

Representations may need to be considered as a complaint where this is an expression of dissatisfaction in relation to an individual child/young person, which requires an investigation to provide a response, but may also be a comment or question about service provision.

In deciding whether an issue is an allegation or complaint, advice can be sought from the relevant Head of Service/ Complaints Manager. This will determine whether the complaints procedure should be invoked, and an appropriate response provided.

If the complaint is against a member of staff HR should be consulted and kept informed.

Flowchart Process for Representations & Complaints

Representations & Pre-complaints process

The Head of Service or Senior Manager will make every effort to resolve any concerns or issues raised at the earliest opportunity and will only initiate the complaints process where appropriate.

Complainant satisfied with outcome?

YES → Resolved

NO → Complainant advised of option for next stage.

decision whether to accept the complaint and within 3 working days of being informed will provide written acknowledgement to the complainant about their complaint and of their decision to take the complaint forward or not.



Stage One

Formal Problem Solving – completed locally

The Complaint – recorded on database and allocated by local Manager from the service.

Attempt to resolve locally - clarification, explanation, negotiation, mediation, practical action by allocated person in consultation with complainant

Response – determined within 10 working days of complaint being made, (or maximum of 20 working days by agreement with complainant) and outcome letter sent to complainant

Complainant satisfied with outcome?

YES → Resolved and recorded on database

NO → Discussions with the Complainant on how the complaint can be resolved at Stage 1. The next stage will not automatically be considered unless there are specific reasons as to why it cannot be resolved at Stage 1.

Stage 2 will be authorised by the Complaints Manager and involve discussions with the relevant Head of Service



Stage 2 – Formal Independent Investigation

Independent investigation (by person who has been identified by Complaint Manager and who had no prior involvement with the complaint nor management responsibility for the service in question).

Complainant notified by local Manager (in agreement with Complaints Manager) that complaint will be considered at Stage 2 (within 5 working days).

Independent Investigator is allocated who reports to the Complaints Manager. The Investigation is undertaken and report completed (within 20 working days from the date the statement of complaint is agreed with the complainant. The complainant is kept informed and their agreement sought if more time required). Report shared with complainant and other parties (local Manager and Head of Service), in writing to complainant within further 5 working days.

Complainant satisfied with outcome?

YES → Resolved and recorded on database

NO → Discussions with the Complainant on how the complaint can be resolved at Stage 2. The next stage will not automatically be considered unless there are specific reasons as to why it cannot be resolved at Stage 2

Stage 3 Complaints Review Panel

Independent Investigators report provided to panel members Complainant attends to make representation to panel

Panel makes initial response to complainant within 24 hours Written response to complainant within 5 working days

Outcome of Complaints Review Panel is the final response

Record all documentation and actions onto Complaints Log.

Procedure Details

It should be noted that this complaints procedure does not replace child protection/allegations, grievance or disciplinary procedures. **Any complaint which indicates that a child may have been harmed, or placed at risk of harm, must be dealt with under Child Protection/Allegations procedures.** If you are unsure whether to use the allegations procedure or the complaints procedure, advice can be sought from the Complaints Manager or Senior Manager and/or the Designated Officer for Child Protection in the Local Authority/Trust.

Serious complaints of a safeguarding nature regarding an prospective adoptive parent/adopter will be notified to the relevant placing Local Authority/Trust, to the DO (Designated Officer) in the Local Authority/Trust in which the prospective adoptive parent/adoptive parent resides and to Ofsted.

If the matter relates to a Child Protection issue or impacts on a child's health or immediate safety, this should be reported without delay to the relevant office during office hours, or to the Out of Office Duty Social Worker and to the Police.

Interaction of this procedure with other procedures or court/tribunal proceedings

Children/Young People placed with prospective adoptive parents/supported accommodation are 'Looked After' by Local Authorities /Trusts who have their own complaints procedures. It is therefore important to note that this Complaints Procedure is not intended to replace the complaints procedures already established by Local Authorities/Trusts, and that placing Local Authority/Trust procedures may take precedence. Complainants will be consulted about which procedure will be used if more than one may be invoked.

If the complaint concerns any matter about which action is being taken or contemplated under child protection/allegations, grievance or disciplinary procedures, or through any court or tribunal (including the criminal court), (known as 'complaints subject to concurrent consideration') and the agency decides that these actions may be affected by the consideration of the matter through the complaints procedure, the matter will not be progressed as a complaint.

The child or adult making the complaint will be informed of this decision in writing, with an explanation of the reasons, and may resubmit the matter for consideration within one year of the conclusion of the other proceedings. The complaints procedure cannot be used to consider or investigate matters that have been dealt with by the Courts or via other procedures.

Eligibility and Timescales

Who can make a complaint or representation?

- Children/Young people placed with the prospective adopters and care leavers previously placed with the agency
- Prospective adoptive parents/adopters, staff members (making a complaint on behalf of a child), Local Authorities/Trusts or any other person who has had involvement with the Agency;
- Birth parents, relatives or significant others on behalf of children/young people, as considered by the agency to have sufficient interest in the child or young person.
- Applicants to adopt (the Complaints Procedure cannot address the question of the applicant's suitability to adopt, but only whether or not due process has been followed).

A complaint can be made up to 12 months from the event giving rise to it. This time limit can be extended at the discretion of the Complaints Manager /Head of Service for the agency.

Factors which will be taken into account in this decision include:

- Whether or not it was reasonable to expect the complainant to have made their representations within this timescale, and
- Whether or not it is still possible to consider the complaint effectively and fairly, despite the passage of time.

This decision and the reasons for such a decision will be provided in writing to the person making the complaint. Where the complainant is a child/young person, or was a child/young person at the time of the matters cited, the discretion to refuse to consider the complaint is unlikely to be applied.

If the complainant wishes to remain anonymous, then the agency may be unable to investigate the situation. If there is any indication of a child being at risk, the information will be passed on to the relevant Local Authority /Trust/ Ofsted .

Information about how to complain

A copy of the Representation and Complaints Procedure must be given to:

- Children/Young people upon placement via the Guide for Children/Young People
- Applicants to adopt
- Adoptive Parents on approval by the adoption agency
- Local authority/trust social services staff on placement of a child/young child .
- On request, parents of children/young people placed.
- On request, an identified individual acting on behalf of a child/young people placed or previously placed.

Complaints by Prospective Adoptive Parents/ Adoptive Parents

The Complaints Procedure cannot address the question of the applicant's suitability to adopt, but only whether or not due process has been followed.

Complaints about an assessment of suitability to adopt discontinued at the end of Stage 1

Applicants to adopt who receive written notice that the agency has decided that they are not suitable to adopt, and has therefore discontinued their assessment, may make a complaint under this procedure if they believe that a particular aspect of their assessment has not been conducted appropriately.

Complaints about Refusal or Amendment of Approval as an Adoptive Parent

This is a separate process to the complaints procedure and is governed by Adoption Services Regulations. Applicants to adopt who receive written notice that the agency does not propose to approve them are able to submit written representations to the relevant identified Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for his/her determination following further consideration by the relevant adoption panel,, to request a review by an independent review panel, through the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).

The same options are available to approved adoptive parents who receive written notice that the agency proposes to change the terms of their approval (number, age range and needs of children to be placed) contrary to their wishes, or to terminate their registration as adoption parents with the agency because it is considered that they are no longer suitable to adopt.

Complaints by Children/young people

It is important that children/young people who are being looked after by the adoptive parents, or within a placement in supported accommodation or are receiving a service from Polaris Children's Services are satisfied with the service they receive.

The complaint has to be about services provided by the Agency. The complaint can be made either by:-

- a. Children looked after or previously looked after

Or it can be made on behalf of the child/young person by:-

- b. A parent;
- c. Any person who is not a parent of him/her but who has parental responsibility;
- d. Any other person the Local Authority/Trust with responsibility for the child considers has a sufficient interest in the child's welfare to warrant his/her representations being considered.
- e. A member of staff

Some children/young people may be unsure as to whether they wish to complain or not. It may be something in the home/placement that is worrying them and therefore they can share it with or feel uncomfortable sharing it with anyone. Our Children's/Young Person's Guide provides information about how to make a complaint. The Guide also contains contact information for children/young people to enable access to independent support and advice.

Where a child/young person may not be able to easily access such written information, it is the responsibility of the agency Supervising Social Worker/ staff member to ensure that alternative modes of communication regarding this information are implemented to enable all children/young people to make a complaint or make representation should they wish to do so.

Where a child/young person uses a complaints and representation procedure, the agency shall ensure that they are aware that they can call upon independent support. A child/young person may elect for an advocate to accompany them to any meetings in relation to their complaint or representation.

When a complaint is made directly to the Agency by a child/young person in placement the agency will respond appropriately and the placing authority/trust social worker will be informed. An early decision shall be taken as to whether to follow the Local Authority/Trust Complaints Procedure or the Agency Complaints Procedure. The agency will endeavour to ensure that each child/young person has a copy of their own local authority's/trust's Complaints Procedure.

A complaint or representation should be made to the placing authority's/trust's Complaints Manager under the following circumstances:

- Decisions or plans made by the child's/young person's placing Local Authority/Trust;
- A failure by the Local Authority/Trust to implement such decisions or plans;
- Regarding an employee of the Local Authority/Trust.

A complaint or representation should be made to The Agency under the following circumstances:

- Decisions or plans made by the Agency;
- A failure by the Agency to implement such decisions or plans;
- Regarding employee of the Agency or the Agency adoptive parent.

Children/young people will always be assured that their complaint or representation is being taken seriously and their views are being listened to. The same applies to anyone making a complaint. No one who lodges a complaint shall be subject to any reprisal for making a complaint or representation. The Agency will be particularly aware of the vulnerability of any child who complains and will make every effort to ensure that they are not subject to any pressure or reprisal.

It is clearly understood and accepted that a child/young person may need and wish for some assistance and support in making his/her complaint and, where appropriate, the agency will seek to arrange this, through advocacy or other appropriate services. It will be clearly and carefully explained to a child that the agencies attitude toward him/her will not be negatively influenced by virtue of a representation or complaint having been made and that standards of service provision will be unaffected.

Every opportunity shall be made for any complaint or representation to be resolved at an early stage. At the outset, the complainant should be asked for their desired outcome. If the 'pre complaints process' hasn't resolved the issue and the complaint has been accepted as grounds for investigation the following formal process will then begin:

Stages of complaints

Stage 1: Local Problem Solving

A complaint is considered as made on the date on which it is first received by the Agency. Complaints may be submitted in writing or given verbally. Where given verbally, this must be recorded in writing by the recipient, dated and a copy sent to the complainant and this action recorded.

The recipient of the Complaint is required to immediately inform the Line Manager (or other appropriate manager for the service) who will take a decision whether to accept the complaint and within 3 working days of being informed will provide written acknowledgement to the complainant about their complaint and of their decision to take the complaint forward or not.

Complaints will in the first instance be investigated by someone within the service area department in an attempt to resolve the complaint informally. The Head of Service or other appropriate manager for the service will identify the most appropriate person to respond to the Complainant (if not themselves) and that person will then lead on the complaint at this stage and will inform the Complaints Manager /Head of Service/Senior Manager.

The Head of Service or other appropriate manager should conclude complaints being dealt with at Stage 1 within 10 working days of being notified of the complaint. This timescale may however be extended by mutual agreement by a further 10 working days if it is felt the Complaint can be satisfactorily dealt with but more time is needed.

If the matter is resolved the Complaints Manager /Head of Service/Senior Manager will be duly informed. The Head of Service or other appropriate manager will provide a clear written response to the complainant. This should, as far as possible, answer all issues raised by the complainant, be as helpful as possible and apologise for any shortcomings in the service found and what action the Agency intends to take as a result of the investigation into the complaint,

the clear content of this letter will be instrumental in minimising complaints progressing to Stage 2 and this will be copied to the Complaints Manager.

The next stage will not automatically be considered unless there are specific reasons as to why it cannot be resolved at Stage 1. Stage 2 will be authorised by the Complaints Manager and involve discussions with relevant Head of Service/Senior Manager.

If the Complaint is considered to be sufficiently serious to warrant a more formal investigation, if there are a number of complaints, or it is particularly complex and/or indications suggest that an Independent Person should be appointed due to potential or actual conflict of interest Stage 2 of the Complaints process will be considered.

All documentation associated with the complaint must be uploaded to the relevant section of Charms/Complaints Log by the person that dealt with the complaint.

Stage 2: Formal Investigation

NB: Only when a complaint cannot be considered at stage 1, due to the complaint being about senior managers, will a complaint progress straight to stage 2. The Head of Service will contact the Complainant to explain that an Independent Person will be appointed to proceed to Stage 2 and agree next steps within 5 working days of receiving the request.

The Head of Service/Complaints Manager will also identify the appropriate person to act as the 'investigating officer'. This will be somebody who has had no previous involvement with the matter concerned. This may be an appropriate manager from within the agency or an external contracted individual with relevant qualifications and experience. The Complaints Manager/Head of Service will determine who should be assigned to investigate. Any such appointment will be made known to and discussed with all parties prior to the commencement of the investigation. In appropriate circumstances, local authority/trust social workers will be informed of the complaint and of the progress of the investigation and outcome.

No one who is the subject of, or who has been involved in seeking to resolve, the complaint at Stage 1 will be responsible for any investigation conducted under Stage 2.

The chosen Investigating Officer once appointed will respond to the complainant within 5 working days to establish the specific detail of the complaint and to agree the specifics of their complaint as a 'statement of complaint'. They will also advise the complainant of their right, in some circumstances, to have their complaint investigated under local authority representations and complaints procedures. The beginning of the 'Stage 2' timescales begin when the 'statement of complaint' is agreed by the complainant.

In some circumstances the task of an independent investigator may be one of ensuring that the complainant is aware of his/her right to complain under other non-agency procedures. Where appropriate this could include making the complainant aware of their right to seek advice from a solicitor, member of parliament, local Councillor, local government ombudsman and various voluntary organisations which seek to represent the interests of children in public care and their parents.

The independent investigator will have access to:

- Content and context of the complaint made;
- The agency policies and procedures;
- Relevant file records (written consent to be provided by the complainant where the investigating officer is external to the Agency).

The complainant may bring a support person to any meeting convened and they should confirm in advance that they will be doing so providing details of who they will be bringing. The role of the support person is to listen and provide support to the complainant and not to ask questions. In the case of a child, they may attend with an advocate. The Complaints Manager should ensure that the person leading the investigation is briefed to ensure that the complainant is adequately supported in the meeting and that notes are taken and kept.

All persons relevant to the complaint should be informed of the complaint and interviewed by the investigating officer in order to provide explanation of their account of the matters complained against.

A meeting may be proposed involving both those complaining and those complained against, should this be deemed helpful in resolution of the complaint received. However this is not recommended where any persons involved are likely to feel intimidated.

On conclusion of the investigation a written report will then be prepared by the person undertaking the investigation (the investigation & report completed within 20 working days where possible from the agreement of the statement of complaint), and sent to the Complaints Manager which will incorporate the process of the investigation, findings of each point of the complaint (i.e. whether upheld or not upheld) recommendations of any actions required and learning outcomes.

The Complaints Manager will review the draft report for quality purposes and provide feedback to the investigating officer as appropriate and seek to understand any areas that require further clarification. Once finalised the Complaints Manager will share with the appropriate manager who will review and provide their response, including whether or not they accept the findings and agree with any recommendations. The Complaints Manager will

then provide a written response to the complainant outlining the findings and summarising outcomes and recommendations within including a copy of the investigation report (this should be completed within 5 working days from report being received from the investigating officer). This should, as far as possible, answer all issues raised by the complainant, be as helpful as possible and apologise for any shortcomings in the service found and what action the Agency intends to take as a result of the investigation into the Complaint. The response to the complainant will state whether each aspect of the complaint has been **upheld, partially upheld** or **not upheld**. **The next stage will not automatically be considered unless there are specific reasons as to why it cannot be resolved at Stage 2**

Fully Upheld

The investigation of the complaint has found that:

- All elements of the complaint are found to be accurate and there is sufficient and/or consistent evidence to support this
- The standard of service provided to the complainant fell below agency and/or regulatory requirements and/or has had a negative impact upon the complainant
- Recommendations are made to lead to service improvement and to capture learning

Partially upheld

The investigation of the complaint has found that:

- On the balance of information a proportion/number of elements of the complaint are found to be accurate and there is sufficient and/or consistent evidence to support this
- On the balance of information a proportion/number of elements of the complaint are not upheld and this is due to absence of evidence or because information has been found to be factually inaccurate
- In relation to some aspects of the complaint, the standard of service provided to the complainant fell below agency and/or regulatory requirements and/or has had a negative impact upon the complainant
- Where complaints are partially upheld consideration is given to the relative weight of the elements of the complaint that are upheld
- Recommendations are made to lead to service improvement and to capture learning

Not upheld

The investigation of the complaint has found that:

- On the balance of information there is insufficient evidence to support the complaint and/or the complaint has been found to be factually inaccurate
- On the balance of information there is insufficient evidence that the standard of service provided to the complainant fell below agency or regulatory requirements
- Consideration is given to recommendations for service improvement and learning is captured

Where the Complaint is in regards to the conduct of an employee of the Agency, the HR Business Partner should be consulted during the investigation.

Stage 3: Review Panel

If the complainant continues to feel that their complaint has not been dealt with to their satisfaction, Stage 3 may be considered by the Complaints Manager and Senior Manager. The Complaints Manager will then explain the option of progression to stage 3 to the complainant. The complainant should inform the Complaints Manager preferably in writing, that they wish to progress their complaint to Stage 3, within 20 working days of receipt of written confirmation of the outcome of Stage 2, providing clear reasons why they are not satisfied with the outcome of Stage 2 of the procedure.

The Complaints Manager will acknowledge this request within 7 working days, with an explanation of the Stage 3 process of independent investigation. The Complaints Manager/Senior Manager will notify the Chief Executive Officer, Managing Director, Head of Service, Responsible Individual in writing of the complaint.

The Complaints Officer will liaise with the complainant with potential dates for the Panel Meeting subject to reasonable availability.

The Complaints Panel and Meeting will be convened within 30 working days, comprised of three people, the panel will consist of a senior manager from the Operations Board to chair the meeting, another senior manager who has no connection with the complaint, and someone who is independent i.e. an individual with a relevant background and expertise who is not an employee of the agency.

Complainants should be provided with information about the panel members in advance of the panel i.e. names, roles and relevant experience.

Consideration should be given to the venue and whether this needs to be neutral whilst also establishing any specific requirements linked to mobility.

The Complaints Panel will consider any oral or written submissions and the process to date. All written materials and agenda must be made available to the members of the Complaints Panel a minimum of 5 working days in advance of the Panel Meeting.

The complainant may bring someone with them to support them at the Panel Meeting. A child may bring an advocate who would also have the right to speak at the Panel.

The Panel will arrange for other relevant parties concerned with the complainant to attend. When the Panel has considered all information and views presented the Meeting will end.

The Panel will reach a decision within up to 24 hours of the meeting. The Panel will complete a written report of their findings, which will include:

- The process and adequacy of the investigation prior to Stage 3;
- Findings on each of the complaints being investigated;
- Conclusions / outcomes reached;
- Recommendations of actions required / learning outcomes to be considered.

The Panel will communicate its decision and conclusions in writing to the Complainant, Complaints Manager and Head of Service within 5 working days.

The Complaints Manager will consider any recommendations regarding practice.

Completion of Complaints Procedure

Completion of Stage 3 marks the end of the Complaints Procedure. In the event that the complaint cannot be resolved through the above processes, to the satisfaction of all, the complainant may refer the matter to Ofsted (for AfA only). It should be noted that the complainant has the right at any point throughout the complaints process to contact the regulatory body and this is not restricted to the completion of the complaints process. The Complaints Manager will provide guidance and advice in this respect as required.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

The complaint may be withdrawn either verbally or in writing by the complainant. The agency must write to the complainant to confirm the withdrawal of the complaint. In such circumstances, it is good practice for the Agency to give consideration as to whether it wishes to continue to consider the issues that gave rise to the complaint and any consequent learning outcomes.

Monitoring and Quality Assurance

The Complaints Manager and Head of Service shall keep a register of all complaints that records details of complaints and their resolutions.

Details of any investigation into a complaint or representation that is upheld regarding a prospective adoptive parent/adoptive parent /member of staff will be made available for information to the Agency Adoption Panel/HR as appropriate.

Protected Disclosure (Whistleblowing)

The Agency aims to nurture an environment for children, prospective adopters/adopters parents and staff and all others relevant to the care of children placed to feel able to raise issues and draw attention to gaps in service provision without fear of reprisal. The Agency has a Whistleblowing Policy for reporting circumstances that may arise where individuals/employees feel unable to raise concerns because they feel there is reasonable doubt that these would be dealt with sufficiently.

Guidance on Abusive, Unreasonable, Persistent or Vexatious Complainants

The Polaris community is committed to working with all complainants equitably, fairly and objectively within the specified Stages of the Complaints and Representations Policy and Procedure.

We do not expect staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour by complainants. Unacceptable behaviour is behaviour which is abusive, offensive or threatening which may include:

- Using abusive or foul language on the telephone or face to face;
- Sending multiple e-mails*
- Leaving multiple voicemails*

*the term 'multiple' here denotes receiving either form of contact consistently and over a period of time.

In the event that the relevant Stages of complaint have been adhered to and fully completed and this has been relayed to the complainant, the Complaints Manager should consider whether the complainant is now 'inappropriately persistent or vexatious'.

Features of a persistent or vexatious complainant may include:

- A person who makes the same complaint repeatedly (with minor differences) but never accepts the outcomes;
- A person who seeks an unrealistic outcome and persists until it is reached;
- A person with a history of making other unreasonably persistent complaints. 1

1 'Getting the Best from Complaints – Social Care Complaints and Representations for Children, Young People and Others' – DfES 2006

The same standard of response must always be provided to the complainant, and the agency will always be committed to anti-discriminatory practice.

Where a situation becomes unworkable, or the Complaints procedure has been fully implemented, the Complaints Manager/Senior Manager will advise the complainant of the applicable reason that they may be considered as an unreasonably persistent complainant and why the behaviour falls into this category and any other recourse to action that may be available to the complainant.

Where the complainant's Complaint is closed, and the complainant persists in communicating about it, the Complaints Manager may decide to terminate contact with the complainant in agreement with the Head of QA & Safeguarding/Managing Director.

Reflect on practice

The Polaris community welcomes the opportunity to reflect on practice and service provision and share learning across the Polaris community to provide a safe and positive experience for children/young people and families. The complaints procedure should offer a useful tool for indicating where our services may need improving; conversely, compliments can indicate to us what we are doing well.

Contact Details

Please use the email address or phone number below to contact us and you will be directed to the appropriate person:

Email: contactus@polariscommunity.co.uk

Telephone: 01527 556480