



PUBLIC COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

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1. Policy statement

St Nicks aims to:

- make the complaints procedure as easy and accessible as possible
- deal with any complaints in a timely and polite manner
- view critical feedback as a learning experience in order to improve St Nicks activities and services

2. Scope

- 2.1** For the purposes of this procedure, a complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a service provided by St Nicks which has made via an official communication channel (i.e. centralised mailbox or social media platform), or addressed to a St Nicks employee, including members of the Management Team and the CEO, or volunteer intern, such as a Park Ranger.
- a.** Attendees at volunteer sessions are not expected to handle complaints on behalf of St Nicks: if a volunteer is approached by a member of the public wishing to make a complaint, the volunteer(s) should immediately direct the member of the public to their group supervisor.
- 2.2** Staff may raise any grievances they have via the **grievance procedure** (please see the **HR Policy** for further details).

3. Social media

- 3.1** St Nicks will respond promptly to complaints made via social media as with complaints via other channels.
- 3.2** Complaints made via publicly visible comments will be responded to with a publicly visible message acknowledging the complaint and encouraging the complainant to discuss their complaint further to resolve it informally via private message or other means as appropriate.
- 3.3** Publicly visible comments will not be deleted unless they contain abusive language, contain defamatory/derogatory content, personally identifiable information, include significant misinformation or are excessive “spam” complaints. Social media users who continue to make such comments on St Nicks social media pages may be blocked.

4. Informal complaints

- 4.1** St Nicks will seek to resolve complaints informally wherever possible.
- 4.2** Frivolous, malicious and/or vexatious complaints will not be accepted.
- 4.3** Suitable records should be kept at each stage of the complaint, including matters considered and any agreed outcomes.
- 4.4** Complaints should be dealt with within a reasonable timeframe, avoiding any undue delay.
- 4.5** It is expected that all parties involved will act reasonably, fairly and courteously towards each other and respect the process.
- 4.6** Complainants should seek to bring their complaint to the attention of St Nicks as soon as possible following the occurrence of events leading to the complaint, ideally within one calendar month.
- 4.7** The complainant will be informed of the outcome of their informal complaint and any actions taken if appropriate to do so. Only limited action can be taken in the case of anonymous complaints and there will be no communication of the outcome.

5. Formal complaints

- 5.1 Formal complaints should only be raised if the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the informal procedure, or where the nature of the complaint is deemed too serious for an informal procedure e.g. concerns relating to safeguarding, or alleged instances of gross misconduct by a team member.
- 5.2 Formal complaints will be dealt with by the Department Manager with support from the Senior Management Team.
 - a. If the complaint relates to any member of staff, that individual will not be involved in the handling of the complaint investigation process.
 - b. If the complaint is about a member of the Senior Management Team, complaints will be dealt with by the CEO or by the Board of Trustees.
 - c. If a complaint is regarding the CEO this will be dealt with by the Chair of the Board of Trustees.
- 5.3 The CEO and Senior Management Team (or the Executive Committee from the Board of Trustees, if the complaint relates to the CEO) will appoint an investigator, who may seek information from and/or interview the complainant and any other involved parties at the investigator's discretion. They may consider use of mediation where they deem it appropriate.
- 5.4 If the complaint relates to a supplier or party with whom St Nicks has contractual terms in place, any complaint will abide by the terms of the contract and any process or mediation route required under the contract terms.
- 5.5 The investigation of a formal complaint should be completed within six weeks under normal circumstances. The timescale may vary where complexities arise in the complaint or other factors. The complainant will be informed if there is a delay in the investigation process.
- 5.6 The investigator will review all information gathered during their investigation and agree an outcome on the complaint in collaboration with the Management Team/Executive Committee as appropriate.
- 5.7 Once a final decision has been made regarding the complaint in question, this will be communicated in writing/via email to the complainant including any proposed actions where this is appropriate.
- 5.8 The investigation outcome and any required actions will be reported to the rest of the Management Team and CEO. The Management Team and CEO will discuss any lessons to be learnt from the process and may implement changes to procedure or policy if required to improve St Nicks activities or services.

6. Appeal

- 6.1 If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the formal complaints procedure, they may appeal in writing to the CEO who will review the complainant's reason(s) for the appeal and any evidence provided from the formal complaint investigation. If the appeal relates to the CEO, a Trustee will be appointed to review the appeal.
- 6.2 The appeal process should be completed within six weeks under normal circumstances. The timescale may vary where complexities arise in the complaint or other factors. The complainant will be informed if there is a delay.
- 6.3 The complainant will be informed of the outcome of the appeal and any resulting actions taken by St Nicks if appropriate to do so.
- 6.4 Lessons learnt will be discussed with the Management Team and changes to procedure or policy may be implemented to improve St Nicks activities or services.
- 6.5 If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the appeal, and depending on the nature of the complaint and/or appeal, they may consult with the following external bodies:
 - a. If the complaint relates to GDPR: Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)
<https://ico.org.uk/>
 - b. If the complaint relates to fundraising: Fundraising Regulator
<https://www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/>
 - c. If the complaint is "serious" as defined by the Charity Commission
<https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-charity>

APPENDIX A: Escalation flowchart for public complaints

