

# External Complaints Policy & Procedures

## Summary version

Version	4
Status	Live
Policy Owner	EA to the CEO
Date last updated	October 2023
Date for review	October 2026
Approved by	SLT
How policy will be disseminated	Saved on <a href="#">Safer London website</a>
Does policy require training for implementation	No
Linked /related policies / procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* External Complaints Policy</li> <li>* Complaints about the PLHR Policy</li> <li>* Managing Allegations Policy</li> <li>* Data Protection policies and procedures</li> <li>* Internal Investigations Toolkit</li> </ul>
Document control	A controlled version of this document is available on the <a href="#">Safer London website</a> <sup>1</sup> .

---

<sup>1</sup> By an 'uncontrolled' version we mean that if any version other than the version saved on SharePoint is used as the basis for a complaint the process may be dismissed on the grounds of not having followed the current policy and procedures.

# Contents

<b>Section</b>		<b>Page</b>
Policy Statement		3
1.	Introduction	3
2.	Scope	3
3.	What is not covered by this policy	3
4.	Time limits for making a complaint	4
5.	The complaints process	5
6.	Timescales	6
7.	Vexatious complaints, unreasonable or abuse behaviour	7
8.	Continuous learning	7
9.	Reporting	7
10.	Equity statement	7
11.	Data protection	8
12.	Review	8
Appendix 1 - Vexatious or repetitious complaints, unreasonable or abuse behaviour		9

# Policy Statement

- i. Safer London is committed to providing a high quality, transparent and accessible service to everyone we deal with. In order to do this we welcome people telling us when we get things wrong and will aim to resolve problems as quickly as possible.
- ii. We will listen to all complaints, treat them seriously and learn from them so that we can continuously improve our services.
- iii. All complaints are treated confidentially and only those people who genuinely need to know will be kept informed of both the detail and the management of any complaints.

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that, if any person coming into contact with Safer London reports that they have not had an excellent experience, their feedback or complaint is taken seriously and dealt with empathetically and efficiently.
- 1.2. Feedback from service users, partners and third parties is invaluable in helping us to continuously improve. Negative feedback and complaints are particularly helpful in pinpointing what we need to do better.

## 2. Scope

- 2.1. This policy covers how Safer London deals with complaints from or on behalf of service users, associates and third parties and explains what steps need to be taken to ensure effective complaint handling.
- 2.3. This policy covers complaints about:
  - standards of service that are not up to what people should expect from Safer London;
  - the behaviour of Safer London employees, whether this is an individual or a team;
  - any action by a Safer London employee in response to a situation in which they might reasonably have been expected not to act, or any failure to act in a situation where they might reasonable have been expected to act.

## 3. What is not covered by this policy

- 3.1. This policy **does not** cover:
  - complaints about a partner organisation or any employee of a partner organisation working with Safer London – these should be directed to the relevant organisation;

- complaints by a Safer London employee about another Safer London employee – these are logged and managed in line with our Grievance policy and procedures;
- complaints by a Safer London volunteer about a Safer London employee or about another Safer London volunteer – these fall under the Volunteer Policy;
- allegations about employee behaviours that have harmed or may harm a child, young person or adult – these should be raised and managed under the Managing Allegations Policy;
- concerns that certain behaviours are placing the organisation, its employees or stakeholders at risk – these should be raised and dealt with under the Whistleblowing Policy;
- anonymous complaints – while these will be logged and any learning taken from them they will not be investigated.

### 3.2. *Complaints about the PLHR*

This policy also **does not** cover complaints relating to the Pan-London Housing Reciprocal, which will in first instance be dealt with in line with the **Complaints About the PLHR Policy**.

### 2.5. *Anonymous complaints*

Safer London understands and accepts that there may be times when a complainant does not wish to be identified and lodges a complaint anonymously. If the complaint is a substantive one and the complainant has provided enough credible evidence and detail we will investigate to the fullest extent possible. Where it is not possible to investigate we will log the complaint and ensure that any relevant learning is taken from it.

## 4. **Time limit for making a complaint**

- 4.1. The time limit for making a formal complaint within the scope of this policy is six months from the date of the event which triggered the complaint.
- 4.2. This time limit may be extended at the absolute discretion of Safer London, and any decision to accept a complaint about something more than six months in the past will be made by the Deputy CEO in consultation with relevant senior managers for the area of the organisation to which the complaint relates.

**Example:** if an incident took place on 28 January the latest date on which someone may lodge a complaint about the incident will be 27 July of the same year.

- 4.3. Any decision on extending the time limit will depend on factors including:
  - reasons why it was difficult or impossible for the complaint to have been raised earlier;

- whether it is still possible to investigate the complaint effectively and fairly – e.g. if relevant employees have since left the organisation it may not be possible to investigate what happened;
- the seriousness of the issue being complained about.

## 5. The complaints process

5.1. Complaints about any aspect of Safer London’s work or about a Safer London employee may be submitted verbally, by telephone or in person, by email to [complaints@saferlondon.org.uk](mailto:complaints@saferlondon.org.uk), or by writing to Safer London, Skyline House, 200 Union Street, London SE1 0LX – letters should be clearly marked as a complaint so that they are passed to the correct person as quickly as possible and to ensure that the contents are not seen by anyone other than employees authorised to respond to complaints.

5.2. To help us to resolve complaints more quickly complaints should provide as much clarity and detail as possible and include any documents and correspondence that support the complaint.

### 5.3. *Representation by a third party*

While we encourage individuals to complain on their own behalf there may be instances where someone is unable or unwilling to do so and asks a third party to either make the complaint or to represent them while the complaint is being deal with.

A third party in this context is any person or organisation acting on behalf of or making enquiries for the complainant. Third parties may include, for example:

- advice organisations such as the Citizens’ Advice Bureau;
- professionals such as social workers, community psychiatric nurses, doctors or solicitors;
- family members or friends.

We will need written consent from the complainant to allow us to deal with the third party. Once we have received this we will take all possible steps to keep the third party informed of progress on the complaint.

5.2. Regardless of how a complaint reaches Safer London, the following procedure will be followed:

*Step 1 – The complaint will be passed to the Complaints Manager<sup>2</sup> if they are not the person receiving the complaint.*

The Complaints Manager will record the details of the complaint on the central Complaints Register and assign the complaint to a member of Safer London’s Leadership Group to deal with as appropriate.

---

<sup>2</sup> This role is held by the EA to the CEO

### *Step 2 - Dealing with the complaint*

The Complaints Manager will assign the complaint to one of the Leadership Group managers. This manager will attempt to resolve the complaint informally in the first instance (Stage 1 Complaint – informal resolution), and the process for this will be explained to the complainant.

If this is not possible we will conduct an investigation (Stage 2 Complaint - investigation) which will conclude whether the complaint is upheld and make recommendations for response. The process will be explained to the complainant where a complaint is escalated to this stage. The outcomes of the investigation will be shared with the complainant. If they are happy with the outcomes the complaint will be closed.

### *Step 3 - Review*

If the complainant is not happy with the way their complaint has been managed or with our response in either of the stages set out above they may escalate it to Stage 3 – Review. In order to do this the complainant will need to put their request for a review, setting out the reasons why they are unhappy with the outcome, in writing to the CEO within 10 working days of receiving our response under either Stage 1 or Stage 2. This may be done by sending an email to the central complaints email address - [complaints@saferlondon.org.uk](mailto:complaints@saferlondon.org.uk) – stating in the subject line that it is a request to the CEO for a review of a complaint, or by writing to The CEO, Safer London, Skyline House, 200 Union Street, London SE1 0LX.

## **6. Timescales**

- 6.1. We will always make every effort to deal with complaints as quickly as possible, and will work to the timescales set out below where possible – it should be noted that this may not always be possible as key people or information may not be immediately available. Where we cannot meet these timelines the complainant will be informed and provided with alternate timings.
- 6.2. *Stage 1 complaints (informal resolution)* will, where possible be resolved **within 10 working days** of receipt of the complaint by the Complaints Manager.
- 6.3. *Stage 2 complaints (formal investigation)* will, where possible, be resolved **within 15 working days** of (i) receipt of the complaint by the Complaints Manager or (ii) the decision being made to escalate the complaint to Stage 2 following a failure to resolve it at Stage 1.
- 6.4. *Stage 3 complaints (review)* will, where possible, be dealt with **within 8 working days** of the complaint being escalated to Stage 3.

## **7. Vexatious or malicious complaints**

- 7.1. We reserve the right to refuse to accept or deal with any complaint considered to be unreasonable, abusive or vexatious. See Appendix 1 for further information about what we would consider to be a vexatious or malicious complaint.
- 7.2. Likewise, we reserve the right to refuse to engage with or respond to anyone who is abusive towards our employees, engages in threatening behaviour or in any way discriminates against any employee involved in a complaint, whether they are the subject of the complaint or assigned to deal with the complaint. Where such behaviour is encountered we reserve the right to close the complaint and take no further action.

## **8. Continuous learning**

- 8.1. Safer London is committed to learning from complaints and to this end all complaints will be logged by the EA to the CEO. Relevant information – suitably anonymised to ensure that complainants cannot be identified – will be extracted from both the original complaint and the organisation’s response to enable us to:
  - identify trends and address recurring problems, whether with an individual, a team or any of our processes;
  - identify learning to ensure improvements are made and embedded in response to a complaint, including for example changes to policies and procedures, or providing additional learning and development for relevant staff members.

## **9. Reporting**

- 9.1. An annual complaints report is provided to the Senior Leadership Team and to the Board of Trustees, summarising the number and nature of complaints received, demographic details of complainants where available, outcomes and learning.

## **10. Equity statement**

- 10.1. Safer London is committed to ensuring that everyone it works with is treated fairly and equitably. If necessary, particularly in situations where diversity issues may be a factor, an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) may need to be carried out to ensure that these are fully considered and that the process is not impacted by conscious or unconscious bias on the part of any participant.

## **11. Data protection**

- 11.1. Safer London processes personal data collected as part of its work in accordance with its Data Protection policy.
- 11.2. Specifically, any data collected during and in relation to any process under this policy, including any HR process arising from non-compliance, is held securely and accessed by, and disclosed to, only to those individuals who genuinely need access to this data.
- 11.3. Inappropriate access or disclosure of personal data constitutes a data breach and should be reported in accordance with Safer London's data protection policy immediately. It may also constitute a disciplinary offence, which will be dealt with under the organisation's disciplinary procedure.

## **12. Review**

- 12.1. This policy will be reviewed every two years or any time if:
  - it is invoked and use suggests that amendments are needed;
  - organisational restructures lead to changes in reporting lines or other processes;
  - legal requirements or good practice guidance around the management of complaints changes.
- 12.2. The designated policy owner is responsible for ensuring that the policy and procedures are reviewed and updated as needed, including when there are changes to any of the individuals or roles mentioned in the policy or procedures.



# Appendix 1 - Vexatious complaints, unreasonable and abusive behaviour

## 1. Vexatious or repetitive complaints

- 1.1. A *vexatious* complaint is one where the complainant does not have a valid grievance, or only has a very minor grievance, but wishes to make life difficult for the organisation or for an individual employee.
- 1.2. A *repetitive* is one that has already been dealt with but the complainant continues to submit it, or to submit similar complaints.
- 1.3. When deciding whether a complaint is *vexatious* we will consider the following issues in particular:
  - whether the complaint is deliberately intended to harass or cause distress to one or more employees;
  - whether the complaint is designed to cause disruption or annoyance to Safer London as a whole;
  - whether the complaint has any serious purpose or value;
  - the tone adopted by the complainant in correspondence or conversations: where is confrontational, angry, rude or takes the form of ranting
  - whether the complainant is willing to engage in any process aimed at resolving the complaint.
- 1.4. However, a complaint will not automatically be considered vexatious just because a complainant may have submitted an earlier complaint. This is particularly the case if the new complaint seems to be specific and stand-alone and unrelated to any previous complaint.
- 1.8. When deciding whether a complaint is *repetitive* we will take the following considerations into account:
  - whether the complaint could reasonably be seen as being obsessive;
  - if the complaint includes requests for information which has already been provided;
  - if the complaint, viewed as a whole, appears to be intended simply to re-open issues which have been disputed several times before, and is, in effect, the pursuit of an earlier complaint by alternative means.
- 1.9. Although we recognise that people are not always satisfied with the responses they receive, continuing to complain after the original complaint has been addressed goes beyond the reasonable pursuit of a satisfactory or acceptable resolution and will be considered to be a repetitive complaint.
- 1.10. If a complaint is considered to be vexatious or repetitive the complainant will be notified in writing **within 2 working days** of receipt of the complaint that no

further correspondence or conversations will be entered into on the matter in question.

## **2. Unreasonable or abusive behaviour**

- 2.1. Safer London does not view behaviour as unreasonable just because a complainant is forceful or determined, and our employees will always make reasonable allowances for a complainant's behaviour, including taking into account factors such as stress.
- 2.2. However, the situation between a complainant and Safer London employees can sometimes escalate to the point where the behaviour of the complainant becomes unacceptable, for example becoming abusive, aggressive or threatening. Such behaviour may mean that we need to restrict or bring to an end communication and – where applicable - access to our premises or employees.
- 2.3. Safer London has a duty to protect the welfare and safety of its employees, and they have the right to undertake their work free from abuse, threats and harassment.
- 2.4. We expect our employees to treat complainants with courtesy, respect and fairness and expect the same consideration from anyone submitting a complaint to the organisation.
- 2.5. Complainants who behave in an unacceptable manner towards our employees - directly or indirectly - will be considered unreasonable and we reserve the right to refuse to deal with anyone behaving in such a manner. Unacceptable behaviour includes:
  - making explicit or implied threats;
  - verbal abuse;
  - derogatory or obscene remarks;
  - rudeness;
  - racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, disablist or other abuse based on someone's personal characteristics;
  - repeatedly demanding disciplinary action be taken against an employee.
- 2.6. Any threats or acts of violence will lead to direct contact with the complainant being stopped. Violence includes behaviour or language (whether in writing or in a conversation, and whether explicit or suggested by tone) that may cause the person being addressed to feel afraid, threatened or abused.
- 2.7. We also consider that inflammatory statements and unsubstantiated allegations can amount to abusive behaviour and will treat this as such.

- 2.8. If an employee considers behaviour to be unreasonable they are advised in the first instance to refer it to their manager who may seek advice and guidance before deciding on future contact with the complainant.
- 2.9. Although we will inform a complainant when their behaviour is unacceptable and ask them to change it, if they fail to do so the meeting, conversation or correspondence will come to an end and no further action taken on their complaint unless and until they agree to behave in a more acceptable manner.
- 2.10. If this is the case the complainant will be notified in writing that Safer London employees will have no further contact with them and, if appropriate, a no-contact period specified. If contact is necessary this will be through a Director or other senior manager.
- 2.11. All incidents of harassment or aggression will be documented and referred to senior staff. If the behaviour breaks any laws, including those relating to discrimination or assault, the complainant may be referred to the police and Safer London may consider taking appropriate legal action without prior warning.