



Complaints Policy

Please note this Complaints Policy is for service users only.

Introduction

We are committed to delivering a high-quality service to all our customers and clients, and to provide the highest clinical standards of service in everything we do. We welcome all feedback from our customers, whether positive or providing us with opportunities to improve.

We view feedback and complaints constructively, as they inform service improvement and, by sharing any lessons learned, act as a valuable contribution to the development of better-quality service provision.

Our aim is to ensure that concerns and complaints are handled effectively and without delay, and to provide a satisfactory response to the complainant, whilst being fair and open to all those involved.

We are committed to promoting equality and diversity. No person who raises a complaint, or is involved in its investigation and resolution, will receive unfair treatment as a result on the grounds of age, race, colour, ethnic or national origin, religious or equivalent belief system, political beliefs, gender, marital or partnership status, sexual orientation, disability, learning disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity status, trade union membership or non-membership, social class, domestic circumstances or any other condition or requirement which cannot be justified and which causes disadvantage. Appropriate assistance including reasonable adjustments will be offered to any person who may be at a disadvantage for any of these reasons.

Our process for dealing with complaints and our escalation process

Complaints management system

Our Compliance Manager oversees all complaints, whether received from clients directly, or via officers within the customer organisation, and acts as our Investigating Officer.

Upon receipt of a complaint, our Compliance Manager will contact the complainant within 1 working day to acknowledge the complaint and send a copy of the Complaint Form, if requested, advise them of our procedure. If the Compliance Manager is not available, a senior member of the Operations Team will acknowledge that the complaint has been received.

Complaints are investigated internally, with feedback provided to the complainant upon completion of the investigation. We will acknowledge all complaints within one working day of receipt, and all complaints shall be investigated and resolved within 5 working days, where achievable, depending on the level of investigation required and availability.

This document includes our internal guidance notes and appendices for managing complaints whether received from a client and/or a customer organisation.

How and when we will inform the customer organisation

Following acknowledgement of the complaint, we will access the client's case and ascertain its status. Our immediate priority is to address the client's issue or concern. For example, the complaint may have been received from a manager or HR about access to the service, or a client who is dissatisfied with their referral and the waiting time to be matched to a counsellor.

The client's wellbeing is our priority, and we will do everything to resolve an issue as quickly as possible. This may involve a call to a client, and/or a re-referral to an alternative counsellor as a matter of importance. As soon as the actions are complete and the client supported, the complaint will continue to be investigated. The undertaking of the investigation may involve reviewing our operations, call logs, or speaking to the client's counsellor. Following the investigating we will implement corrective measures and put actions in place to ensure such occurrences are mitigated against taking place again.

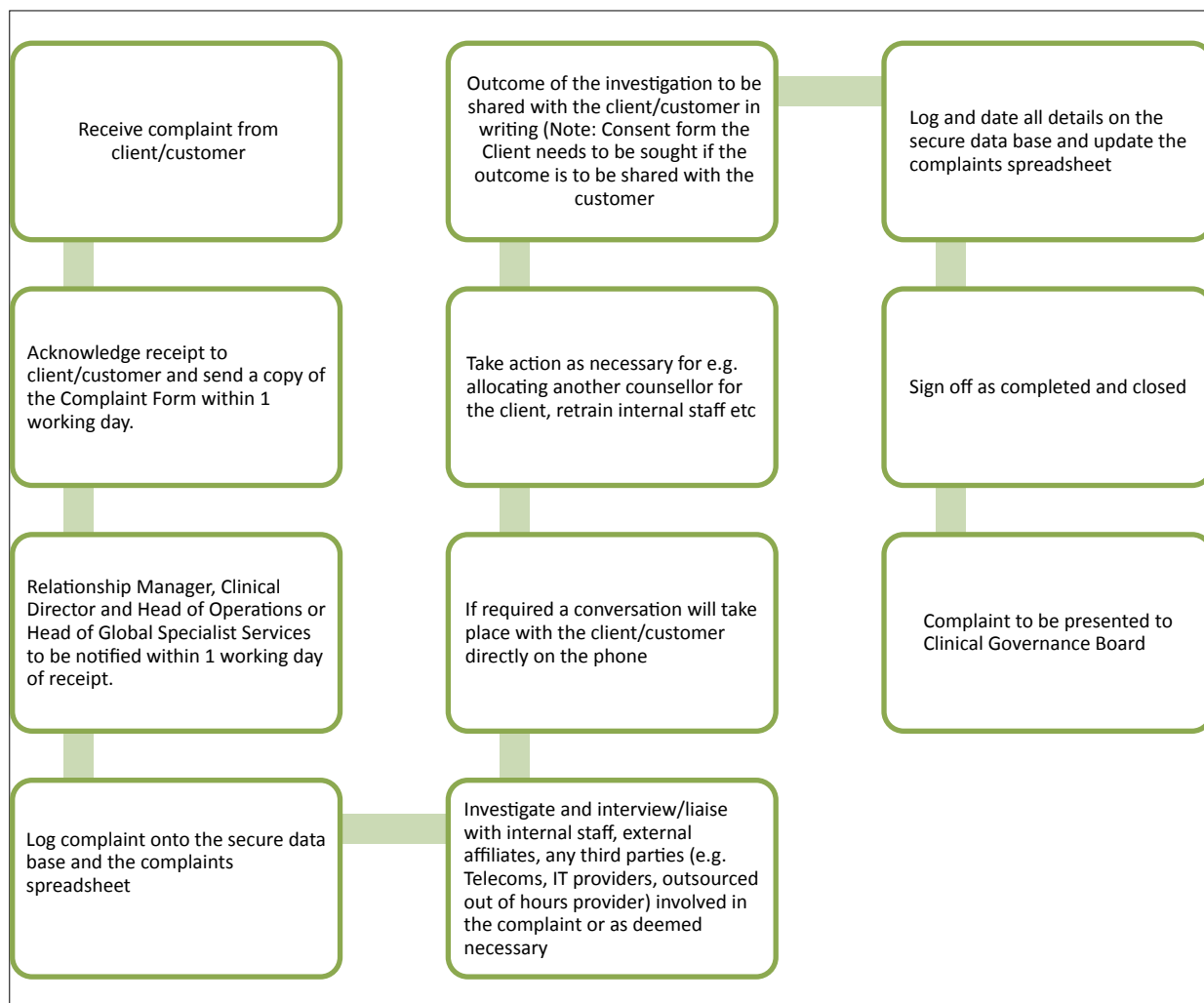
Once the investigation is complete, feedback will be provided to the complainant, this will include at a minimum any actions taken to resolve the situation. In the event of a complaint being received from a customer organisation or their representative (e.g., manager or HR) on behalf of an employee, the employee's written consent must be obtained, due to confidentiality of the service, before feedback can be provided to the customer.

Our Escalation Process

We have a three stage complaints process, the Compliance Manager is responsible for managing and overseeing all complaints received. Stages 2, 3 are escalation points should a complaint not be resolved at Stage 1.

Escalation to an appropriate governing body, for example the BACP, by the client or customer can take place at any point during the investigation and complaints management process.

➤ **STAGE 1:** Upon receipt of complaint the Compliance Manager, who acts as the complaint investigator at the initial stage, will contact the complainant to acknowledge the complaint and advise them of our complaints procedure. This will take place within 1 working day of the complaint being received.

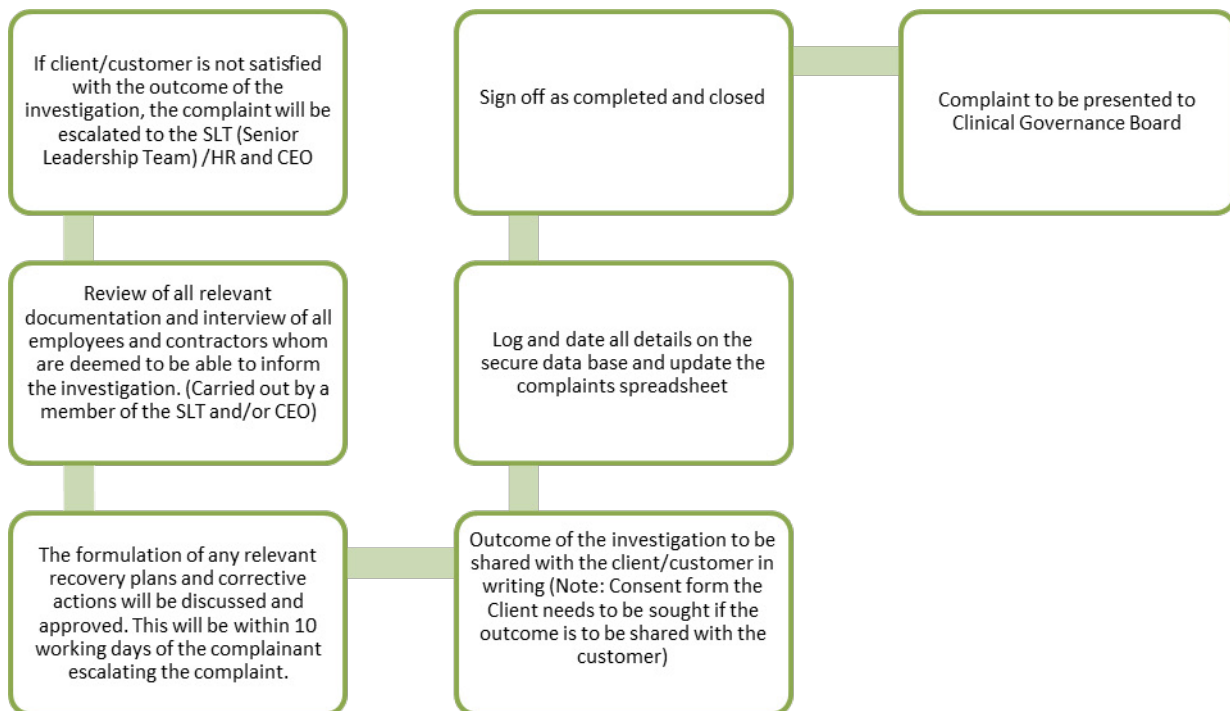


Note: we will advise of the nature of the complaint, but the identity of the complainant will remain confidential, unless they have provided their written consent to disclose.

➤ STAGE 2: In the event of the complainant being dissatisfied with the outcome at stage 1, it will be escalated to members of our Senior Leadership Team (SLT). The Head of Operations and the Clinical Director will be informed.

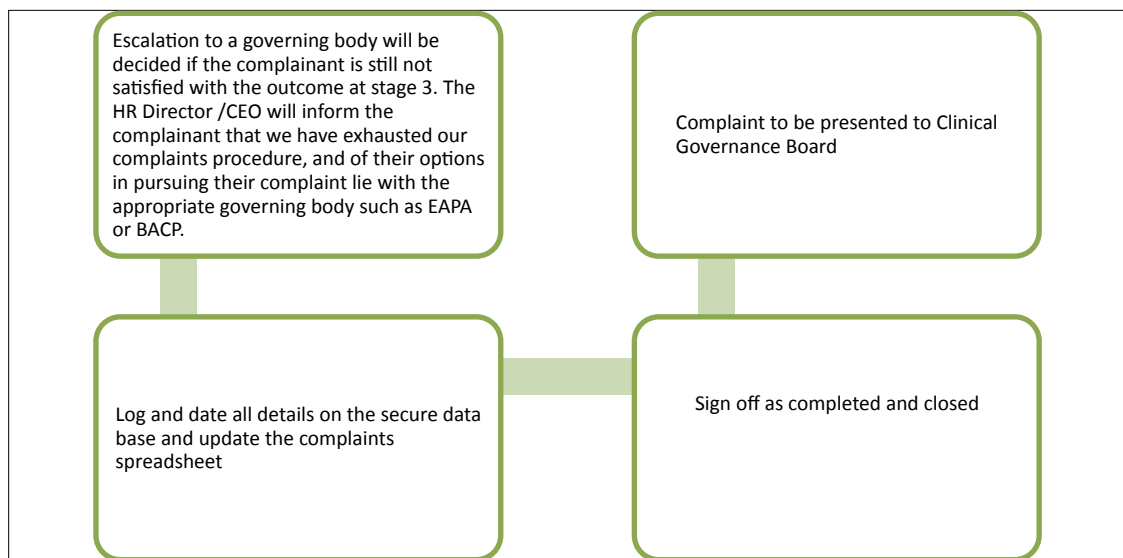
A nominated member of the SLT will review the complaint, with consideration being given to the following:

- the order in which the investigation is carried out
- gaining further information from the complainant
- listening to any relevant call recordings
- checking customer contracts
- gathering any relevant, available documentation
- looking for misunderstandings and confusion
- our operating procedures
- our complaints policy.



➤ **STAGE 3:** In the event of the complainant being dissatisfied with the outcome at stage 2, matter will be escalated to the Risk and Controls Manager, and our Chief Executive Officer (CEO) for further investigation.

- Serious professional misconduct may be reported to relevant professional bodies such as the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP).
- Appropriate actions most likely to lead to a positive outcome for all parties will be listed, such as a face-to-face meeting, suitable restitution, a review of policy, a recommendation for disciplinary action.



How we report outcomes to the customer organisation

The outcome of an investigation will be fed back via email to the complainant, along with the actions taken to resolve the complaint, and where appropriate, those taken to prevent recurrence of the issue.

In line with our standard reporting process, the customer will receive management information reports, which will include a section on complaints to include:

- Total number of complaints received.
- Number of complaints broken down by category, e.g.:
 - Level of service received when initially accessing the service.
 - Satisfaction with their case management
 - Implementation of policy
 - Complaint status, e.g., where in the process a complaint is

- Resolutions and action taken – whether the complaint is un-substantiated, partly substantiated, fully substantiated.
- Any lessons learned.

Due to clinical confidentiality, we cannot reveal any detail which might identify individuals, unless with their expressed written permission. If permission is granted, we will only share the information that the client has agreed to share.

For complaints made by the customer on behalf of a staff member, we will make the customer aware of the status of any complaint but will not provide any personal information regarding the member of staff, without their permission.

How we will handle complaints relating to a member of staff

In the event of a complaint about a member of staff, the Compliance Manager will speak to the member of staff concerned to gain their insight into the allegation or complaint.

As we record all calls on our Adviceline, we can therefore listen to calls relating to a complaint. This forms part of the investigation and may also contribute to a resolution, for example by indicating the staff member may need additional training on call handling.

If the investigation does highlight a training need, this will be escalated to the line manager of the member of staff, who will ensure that the requirement for training is satisfied. If, on investigation, the complaint reveals grounds for disciplinary action, our HR team and the individual's manager will decide on the course of action. The complainant will be kept informed of the steps taken to resolve their complaint and actions taken as a result.