



External Complaints/Compliments Policy

1. Introduction:

Essex Family Forum is committed to demonstrating respect, inclusion and transparency in all our activities. The perspectives of SEND families, their best interests, and Essex Family Forum demonstrating ethical behaviour are at the heart of all our activity and we aim to work with others that share these principles.

2. Policy Scope:

This policy is available to be used people and organisations that come in to contact with Essex Family Forum, who will be referred to as 'external stakeholders' for the purposes of this policy from here-on-in. This policy is also available to be used by any person working for Essex Family Forum in an unemplyed capacity, e.g., volunteers who will be referred to as 'internal stakeholders' for the purposes of this policy from here-on-in.

Employees of Essex Family Forum should utilise the Essex Family Forum Grievance Procedure if they have a concern or complaint.

3. Policy Purpose:

To provide a structured and equitable process for resolving any concerns or complaints raised by any external or internal stakeholders within the scope of this policy regarding the activities of Essex Family Forum or one of its representatives. Equally, positive feedback (compliments) made under this policy will be used to embed and acknowledge good practice with regards to the activities of Essex Family Forum.

4. Policy Background:

4.1 The following legislation and guidance under-pins this policy:

- Companies (Audit, Investigations and Community Enterprise) Act 2004
- Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Guidance on Making Complaints about Community Interest Companies May 2016

- NCVO (National Council for Voluntary Organisations) Guidance on Solving Volunteer Problems

This list is not exhaustive.

5. Policy Guidance:

- 5.1** This policy should be read in conjunction with Essex Family Forum's Data Protection Policy, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and any other Essex Family Forum policy available to the public that may be relevant to the nature of your concern or complaint.

6. Policy Wording:

- 6.1** Essex Family Forum is committed to embedding good practice, but also to investigating and resolving concerns and complaints by external and internal stakeholders where it is within the Forum's power to do so.

Many concerns or complaints can be resolved informally, and this approach will always be encouraged in the first instance, however it is recognised that in some situations this may not be appropriate, and a more formal approach may be required.

Complaints will be handled with sensitivity and with due regard to confidentiality; but we may need to disclose details of your complaint either to members of staff or to any advisor or regulator of any member of the organisation in order to investigate and respond to your complaint or to comply with our duties to our regulators.

Please be aware that Essex Family Forum may not be able to address and resolve your complaint where the reasons for the response are due to a legal requirement or duty, or where the matter is outside of Essex Family Forum's control.

Where Essex Family Forum is contacted by a party to raise concerns or a complaint about an organisation that the Forum works with, we will not be able to address that complaint. We will, however, do our best to help signpost that party to the relevant organisation, information, or person to whom you could raise your concerns. In most cases it would generally not be appropriate for Essex Family Forum to become involved in a complaint regarding a third-party organisation.

Sections 7.1 to 7.7 contains the procedure for complaints made to Essex Family Forum. Section 7.8 contains the procedure for compliments made to Essex Family Forum.

7. Policy Procedure:

7.1 Making the Complaint:

If as either an external or internal stakeholder, you wish to make a complaint under this policy you should do this in writing by emailing hello@essexfamilyforum.org.

Alternatively, where email contact is not at all possible, you may write to Essex Family Forum at our registered address which is: Essex Family Forum CIC, County Hall, Market Road, Chelmsford. CM1 1QH.

Please note: Essex Family Forum is a fully remote-working organisation. Therefore, letters sent by post are likely to take significantly longer timescales to be received and resolve. If email is possible, this is preferable to ensure you receive a timely response.

7.2 What Should be Included:

The email or letter should set out the following:

- i. Your name, if the complaint is personal; or the name of your organisation if the complaint is by an organisation. If you are writing on behalf of your organisation, please confirm that you are authorised by that organisation to raise the complaint on their behalf;
- ii. Brief details about the circumstances giving rise to your complaint such as the subject matter, the dates of relevant events, who was involved;
- iii. Brief details of the outcome that you would like to see to resolve your complaint;
- iv. Your contact details.

7.3 Complaints About the Chairperson:

If your complaint is about the Chairperson of Essex Family Forum, your complaint should be sent directly to the Human Resources Lead: tori@essexfamilyforum.org

Dependent upon the nature of the complaint, the process will resemble that described below, however the parties involved in resolving the complaint may vary in order to ensure a fair and transparent process. You will be advised of proposed actions with regard to your complaint and relevant timescales.

7.4 Receiving the Complaint

Once the complaint is received it will be directed to the most appropriate person to investigate and respond, dependent upon the nature of the complaint. Please allow ten working days to receive this initial response.

7.5 Actioning the Complaint

Where matters may be resolved informally through dialogue, this will be the first course of action.

Where dialogue is not successful or where the nature of the complaint is sufficiently serious, you will be contacted and notified of the next steps: formal investigation and response.

In most cases an investigation and response should be issued within fifteen working days from acknowledgement of your complaint. If it is not possible to meet this deadline, you will be kept informed of any delay, the reason for it and projected timescales within which you may receive a response.

7.6 Appealing a Decision

Where you are dissatisfied with the response to your complaint you may escalate this to the Management Committee of Essex Family Forum within ten days of receiving your response.

You should set out the reasons for escalating and appealing the outcome of your complaint. Your appeal will be responded to within ten working days. Any delay in meeting this timescale will be communicated to you.

The Management Committee's decision will be final.

7.7 Follow Up

If an external complaint is upheld Essex Family Forum will take appropriate action to ensure higher standards in the future.

All complaints will be retained on file and will be reviewed periodically by the Management Committee.

7.8 Compliments

Compliments can be made under this policy using the same contact details and methods in section 7.1.

Your feedback will be acknowledged within ten working days.

Where details are shared identifying the member of staff, volunteer, or activity, Essex Family Forum will ensure that the compliment is shared with the appropriate person(s) and it will also be used to shape the future activities of Essex Family Forum.

8. Approval and Review Dates:

Approved on: 11/07/2023

Approved by: 11/07/2023
Date for Review: 11/07/2024