



Complaints Policy

Aligned to the HSC Model Complaints Handling Procedure
(MCHP) – NIPSO

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Complaints Policy

1. Statement of commitment

We aim to provide safe, respectful, high-quality services. We welcome complaints as feedback and an opportunity to put things right and improve.

You will not be treated differently or disadvantaged for raising a complaint.

This policy follows the HSC Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP) issued by the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO).

2. Scope – which complaints are covered

This policy must be used for complaints about publicly funded / HSC-commissioned services delivered by Lighthouse, including actions by staff, volunteers, contractors or anyone delivering on our behalf.

3. What is a complaint?

We use the NIPSO definition: *“An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about an organisation’s action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of an organisation.”*

Examples include concerns about access to services, staff conduct, communication, decisions, delays, or quality of care/support.

Not handled under this complaints policy: safeguarding matters, police investigations, staff grievances/disciplinary issues, fitness-to-practise referrals, or serious adverse incidents. These may run alongside a complaint where appropriate, and we will explain the correct route and help you access it.

Service requests vs complaints: A first-time routine request is not a complaint, but if the issue persists or you remain dissatisfied, it should be treated as a complaint and recorded under this policy.

4. Who can complain?

Any service user, former service user, or person affected by our services can complain.

A representative (family member, advocate, elected representative, etc.) may complain on your behalf with your consent wherever possible. Where you cannot give consent, we will consider legitimate interest and confidentiality.

5. How to complain and support available

Complaints can be made verbally or in writing to The Deputy Director, either in person, by phone 02890755070, by email sharon@lighthousecharity.com, or by letter, Sharon Quinn, Deputy Director, Lighthouse, 187 Duncairn Gardens, Belfast, BT15 2GF.

Contact details for Paul Finnegan, Executive Director of Lighthouse and the Chair of the Board of Directors (Board) are available from the Deputy Director

You do not need to use a form. If you want one, we can provide it.

The complaint letter should contain as much detail as possible and should state that this is a formal complaint.

The following details are the minimum required:

- Their name, address and contact details, so we can respond to them;
- Their preferred method of communication – by letter, email or phone;
- The individual(s)/ occurrence you wish to complain about;

- What they believe went wrong;
- The date(s) the issue occurred;
- How they and/or others were impacted.

We will support you to complain and remove barriers, for example: help to explain your concerns, advocacy/signposting, interpretation/translation, accessible formats (easy-read, large print, etc.), and a suitable venue/time for meetings.

6. Time limits

We normally accept complaints made within 6 months of the event, or of you becoming aware you had reason to complain. We will use discretion where there are good reasons for delay.

7. The two-stage complaints process

Stage 1 – Frontline Response

Stage 1 focuses on quick, compassionate resolution close to the point of service delivery.

Receipt date:	If received after hours, at weekends or on bank holidays, the receipt date is the next working day.
Timescale:	We will resolve the complaint or provide a Stage 1 response within 5 working days. We may extend once by up to 5 additional working days in exceptional circumstances, telling you why and the new date (maximum 10 working days total).
Resolved at Stage 1:	If resolved, we do not have to write to you unless you request this. We will still record what happened and what was agreed.

Unresolved at Stage 1:	<p>If not resolved or you remain dissatisfied, we will send a written Stage 1 response explaining the outcome, reasons, any actions, and how to request Stage 2.</p> <p>You have a minimum of 30 days to request Stage 2, with discretion for longer where appropriate.</p>
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Stage 2 – Investigation

Stage 2 investigates complaints where you remain dissatisfied after Stage 1. Only in exceptional agreed cases may we start at Stage 2, and we will record a clear rationale.

Acknowledgement:	We will acknowledge Stage 2 complaints within 3 working days and confirm the issues to be investigated and the outcome you seek.
Timescale:	We will provide a full Stage 2 response within 20 working days of receipt for investigation (including the 3-day acknowledgement). Where necessary, we may extend by up to a further 20 working days. If extended, we explain why, give a new date, record approval and rationale, and update you at least every 20 working days until closure.

Stage 2 final response will address all issues, explain conclusions, include apology where appropriate, set out actions/learning, confirm final position, and signpost to NIPSO where applicable.

8. Signposting to NIPSO

When Stage 2 is complete, if you remain dissatisfied, we will signpost you to NIPSO in the same letter (or within 2 weeks).

NIPSO contact details: Progressive House, 33 Wellington Place, Belfast BT1 6HN. Tel: 02890 233821 / 0800 34 34 24. Email: nipso@nipso.org.uk. Web: nipso.org.uk.

9. Anonymous complaints

Anonymous complaints will be considered and recorded. If there is enough detail, we will investigate. If not, a decision not to proceed will be authorised and recorded.

10. Unacceptable behaviour

We recognise people may be distressed when complaining. We will respond with empathy and respect.

If behaviour becomes abusive, threatening, or unreasonably persistent, proportionate restrictions may be applied for the minimum time necessary, with a review mechanism. Restrictions will not stop the complaint being handled or responded to.

11. Conflicts of interest / independence

Where a complaint involves senior staff, multiple staff, or a breakdown in trust, we will consider using an independent investigation approach to ensure impartiality, while staying within MCHP timescales and with your consent where personal data is shared.

12. Post-closure contact

After you receive our final Stage 2 response, you may contact us for clarification. This does not reopen the complaint. If you remain

dissatisfied, we will reiterate our final position and signpost you to NIPSO.

13. Recording, reporting, learning, publishing

We will record all complaints (including Stage 1 resolved complaints). The minimum record for each complaint includes: date received and stage; complainant details; nature of complaint; service involved; handler; actions/outcomes at each stage; extensions and dates; outcome category; underlying cause; remedial actions; and learning identified.

We will report internally to senior management/Board at least quarterly on performance and themes.

We will publish anonymised complaints information annually in an accessible format and share learning.

Learning actions from complaints will be tracked to completion with a named owner and target date.

14. Monitoring and review

This policy will be reviewed annually or sooner if NIPSO/HSC guidance changes.