

The Bridge Counselling Service Complaints Policy

The Bridge seeks to provide services of the highest quality and welcomes clients' involvement in the development and monitoring of services. Each person who uses our services has a right to comment or to complain about all aspects of the service design and delivery. The Bridge will actively respond to complaints in an effort to ensure continual improvement of, and satisfaction with, the Bridge services. The Bridge staff and volunteers should empower a client to register a formal complaint, either verbally or in writing. Details of independent support and advocacy are provided at the end of this policy.

1. Notification of Complaints Procedures

- 1.1 At the first counselling appointment a contract between the Bridge and the person requesting counselling will be signed. This contract states that the Bridge has a complaints procedure should the client be dissatisfied with the service.
- 1.2 The client will receive a copy of this counselling contract to retain for future reference.
- 1.3 The time limit for complaints to be accepted and investigated is one year from the date of allegation.
- 1.4 The Bridge will consider anonymous complaints provided that enough evidence is supplied to enable us to take further action.
- 1.5 The Bridge will consider complaints from third parties (those who have not personally received counselling) who have been directly and adversely affected by the service. In order for the Bridge to handle such a complaint, we may need to seek consent from the client who has or continues to receive support from our service.
- 1.6 The Bridge will accept complaints from those who represent someone who is using or has used the service, consent may be required from the client
- 1.7 Complaints made under this procedure may cover paid staff, volunteer counsellors or receptionists and other volunteers or contractors acting for or on behalf of the Bridge.

2. Stage One – (Informal Complaint)

- 2.1 If a concern/complaint is brought to the Bridge Counselling Service's attention regarding any aspect of our service, we will try to resolve the complaint quickly and in an informal way.
- 2.2 If no satisfactory response is received at Stage One then the complaint should move to Stage Two at which time we will ask you to write to our Interim CEO..

3. Stage Two – (Formal Complaint)

- 3.1 A volunteer / counsellor with the Bridge Counselling Service can explain the formal complaints process to any potential complainant or their representative if this is necessary.
- 3.2 The details of the complaint should be put in writing to the Interim CEO, Maria Lavery, 20 Shairps Business Park, Livingston, EH54 5FD. (If the complaint is about the interim CEO then it should be passed to the Chair of Trustees). If the complainant needs, then a member of staff or volunteer can assist with the complaint. The complainant should ensure that they agree with what has been

written, sign the document to this effect and obtain a copy for reference. This record will then be passed to the interim CEO who will appoint independent investigators from out-with the organisation.

- 3.3 The interim CEO will appoint independent investigators from out-with the organisation.
- 3.4 The complaint will be acknowledged by a letter from the interim CEO within seven days of the date it was received. The letter will contain the following information:
 - Who is investigating the case & when the investigation will start.
- 3.5 The investigation will be confidential, impartial and all parties involved in the complaint and its investigation must declare any conflicts of interest. This should be declared to the interim CEO.
- 3.6 Should the investigators be required to interview anyone involved in the complaint, evidence will be taken from each party separately and in a manner which means the parties involved will not come into contact with each other. Anyone interviewed regarding the complaint is entitled to be accompanied by a supportive person of their choice, however this person must be independent of the complaint.
- 3.7 The complainant will receive a response, in writing within 21 days of the start of the investigation. The response will include the following information:
 - 3.7.1 Details of the investigation
 - 3.7.2 A decision on whether the complaint was upheld or not
 - 3.7.3 The redress, if appropriate, which will be offered e.g. an apology
 - 3.7.4 Any other action that will be taken as a result of the complaint
 - 3.7.5 If it has not been possible to complete the investigation within 21 days, the reasons why and the expected completion date
- 3.8 All investigations will be completed and responded to within a maximum of six months.

The investigators may halt the complaint at any stage if it emerges that legal action is under way, pending or intended. The complaints procedure can be halted until any legal process is complete. The Complaint Manager will be responsible for ensuring that any redress or recommendations/sanctions are applied and fulfilled.

4. Stage Three (Appeal)

- 4.1 If the complainant is not satisfied with the response to the complaint, then the reasons should be given in writing within 10 working days in the same fashion as above. This will then be passed on to an Independent Appeals Panel. The Appeals Panel will consist of two independently appointed people, who have had no previous involvement in the complaint, one of whom will be designated to chair.
- 4.2 The members of the Appeal Panel will make a final decision after reading any necessary papers and speaking to relevant individuals involved with the complaint. Any interviews will be conducted under the same terms as those for Stage Two.
- 4.3 The Chair of the Appeals Panel will write to the complainant within 28 days of receiving the appeal to confirm the decision about the complaint which will be final. The letter will include: -
 - The reason for the decision
 - The redress, if appropriate, which be offered e.g. an apology
 - Any action which may be taken in light of the complaint
 - If it has not been possible to complete the investigation within 21 days, the reasons why and the expected completion date

The Appeals Panel may halt the complaint at any stage if it emerges that legal action is under way, pending or intended. The complaints procedure can be halted until any legal process is complete. The Complaint Manager will be responsible for ensuring that any redress or sanctions are applied and fulfilled.

5. Stage Four (Reporting)

Because the Bridge Counselling Service is an Organisational Member of COSCA (see below for details) the results of any formal complaints against the service in relation to the Counselling Service will be submitted to COSCA within 1 month.

6. Getting Further Support

You may approach COSCA for assistance if you are unsatisfied with the outcome of a complaint you have made against our Counselling Service as we are covered under COSCA's Complaints Procedure. This must be done within 1 month of our complaints procedure being exhausted.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after the decision of the appeals panel or remains dissatisfied about the content of the investigator's report he/she will be advised that they can submit a complaint to COSCA under their Complaints Procedure.

Contact with COSCA, and access to their Complaints Procedure, can be found here:

COSCA
16 Melville Terrace, Stirling FK8 2NE
Telephone: 01786 475140
Website: www.cosca.org.uk

7. Other formats

This document can be made available in other languages or formats upon request.

Signed: Maria Lavery
Interim CEO

Date April 2024

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