



Comments & Complaints Policy

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Please note that a record of the changes made to the original issue of this document can be found at Schedule 1 after any Appendices to the Policy/Procedure.

Version Number:	Publication Date:	Nature of, and Reason for, Change(s)
1	February 2022	Original
2	September 2024	Reviewed and updated

Introduction

1.1 Howgill Family Centre (Howgill) views comments, suggestions and complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve for the future, as well as an opportunity to put things right for the person or organisation where a complaint has been made. Howgill is committed to do all that it can to respond to ideas and suggestions from its users, resolve any concerns and ensure that everyone who is associated with the organisation is happy with all aspects of the services provided.

The aim of this policy is to ensure that Howgill will:

- provide a fair process which is clear and easy to use for anyone:
 - wishing to offer constructive comments or suggestions
 - wishing to make a complaint.
- publicise the existence of the complaints procedure so that people know how to make a complaint.
- make sure that:
 - everyone at Howgill knows what to do if a comment or complaint is received.
 - all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way.
 - complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are repaired.
- gather information to aid improvement of its practices.

This policy does not cover comments or complaints:

- about child abuse – Howgill's Safeguarding policy applies.
- from employees, volunteers or agency staff about employment matters - Howgill's Grievance policy applies.

1.2 This policy does not form part of any employees' contract of employment and may be amended from time to time.

1.3 The Board of Trustees is responsible for the policy and will conduct regular reviews to ensure that it is maintained, particularly in relation to its legal responsibilities, and amendments will be made, as necessary. The Howgill Manager has responsibility for ensuring that the policy is implemented and that appropriate procedures are established to ensure compliance.

1.4 All employees have an obligation to familiarise themselves with this policy.

2 Comments and suggestions

2.1 It is acknowledged that any person or organisation who has a legitimate interest in Howgill's activities, such as service users, donors, partners, members of the local community, may offer comments and suggestions in the course of their attendance at Howgill events or activities.

2.2 Howgill encourages feedback from its users and may request:

- completion of a feedback questionnaire
- an informal discussion.

All feedback will be treated as confidential, in accordance with Howgill's Confidentiality policy.

2.3 Howgill aims to ensure that all comments and suggestions are reviewed and assessed and incorporated into its practices where appropriate.

3. Complaints

3.1 Howgill defines a complaint as any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect relating to the organisation.

3.2 Complaints can be made verbally, by phone or email or in writing. All complaint information will be handled sensitively, telling only those who need to know and following any relevant data protection requirements, in accordance with Howgill's Data Protection policy and Confidentiality policy.

3.3 Howgill expects that concerns and complaints will be brought to its attention as quickly as possible. Any matter referred to Howgill under this policy after three months from the date of any incident will be deemed 'out of time' unless there are exceptional circumstances.

3.4 The complainant can be accompanied at any meetings. Interpreting facilities will be made available if required.

3.5 Howgill will prepare a complaint form to record:

- details of the complainant
- type and nature of the complaint.
- comments and follow up procedure.
- feedback from complainant and date of resolution.

This document will form part of the evidence for any formal meeting to be held and a copy will be provided to the complainant if requested.

• **Complaints resolution - informal**

4.1 Howgill encourages anyone with a concern to raise the matter initially on an informal basis with their usual contact e.g. key worker in Early Years, Home Visitor, group organiser or another worker or professional. Concerns often develop through conflict between individuals and that informal discussion or meetings between the relevant parties can often lead to a more satisfactory resolution.

4.2 Howgill will advise on the use of a mentor where this could be beneficial to resolving the issues under discussion.

4.3 Howgill will always seek to resolve complaints as quickly as possible and, to enable this, will first seek to resolve matters informally. If this approach does not succeed, then the formal approach set out in section 5 below may be followed.

• **Complaint's resolution - formal**

5.1 Where the informal approach outlined in section 4 above does not resolve the issue, or where the complaint concerns a senior manager or Trustee a formal complaint should be put in writing to the Howgill Manager stating the desired outcome:

Where the issue relates to the Howgill Manager, the formal written complaint must be made to the Chair of the Board of Trustees.

5.2 Acknowledgements of complaints will be made in writing within 3 days of receipt explaining the complaint's procedure, related investigation and target dates for responding which will be no later than 28 days.

5.3 All meetings will be followed up with a letter summarising the outcome of the meeting. Copies of any meetings records may be given to the individual concerned, although in certain circumstances some information may be withheld, for example to protect a witness.

5.4 Howgill will retain all records detailing the nature of the complaint raised, Howgill's response, any action taken and the reasons for it, including written records of meetings, telephone conversations, witness statements and any other documentation.

These records will be kept confidential and retained in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 which requires the release of certain data to individuals on their request.

- **Complaint's resolution - appeal**

6.1 Where the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome, they may appeal to the Chair of the Board of Trustees in writing, stating the reasons for continued dissatisfaction.

6.2 An appeal meeting will be arranged within fifteen working days to discuss the issues raised and a decision on the appropriate action to be taken will be made following assessment of all the facts. This decision will be final.

- **Resolving dissatisfaction with the outcome**

7.1 Howgill cannot guarantee to respond to all matters in the way that an individual might wish but will try to handle the matter fairly and properly.

7.2 If the investigation finds the allegations unsubstantiated and all internal procedures have been exhausted, but the complainant is not satisfied with either the organisation's response or the outcome of the investigation, Howgill recognises the rights of the complainant to make disclosures to external regulatory bodies, including issues relating to:

- Data Protection – Information Commissioner's Office (ICO):
 - for advice and general help, the ICO can be contacted on 0303 123 1113 (local rate charged)
 - other contact details, including for complaints, see <https://ico.org.uk/global/contact-us/>
- Early Years/child development – Ofsted can be contacted on 0300 1231231 or see <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school> .
- Charity concerns – Charity Commission or Fundraising Standards Board – see <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-charity>
- Safety of a child - Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership – see <https://cumbriasafeguardingchildren.co.uk>

- **Rights of Howgill employees**

Howgill endeavours to ensure that its employees are protected from abuse or harm while carrying out their duties. Employees are required to make it clear to service users that violence, threats, abuse or harassment to employees or volunteers are not acceptable.

Where a complaint is made about an employee or volunteer or the organisation, which is judged to be inappropriate or malicious, Howgill reserves the right to refuse the complainant and related individuals' access to its services. Where harassment or threatening behaviour is evident, Howgill may take legal action as appropriate to ensure that it can continue its work safely and securely.