

Low Farm Therapy Centre Complaints Policy

Written October 2015 by Ruth Lo

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Low Farm Therapy Centre (hereafter known as the Centre) must establish and publicise procedures for dealing with complaints relating to the Centre, other than those that are covered by legislation and formal procedures elsewhere. Low Farm Therapy Centre has the primary responsibility in law for dealing with all other complaints received.

The Centre's Complaints policy is sent to parents/carers when their child begins attending the Centre, and is on the Low Farm Therapy Centre website. Hard copies are also available in reception. All staff are made aware of the complaints procedure and the various stages involved.

Safeguarding and child protection issues, criminal investigations and employee grievances will need to be handled differently. The complaints procedure is distinct from formal disciplinary proceedings for staff and this needs to be made clear to all concerned. There may be occasions where a complaint gives rise to disciplinary procedures which put the complaints process on hold. If so, the complainant should be informed of this, while any non-disciplinary aspects of the complaint should continue to be dealt with through the usual complaints procedures. If another procedure is more appropriate than the complaints procedure for a given situation then the complaints procedure should not be used.

The procedure may be used by anyone who has a concern or complaint about the Centre. This may include (but is not limited to) the children/young people accessing therapy at the Centre and their parents/carers, members of staff, neighbours of the Centre, representatives of local businesses or members of the local community.

An effective complaints procedure is designed to:

- Encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible;
- Be easily accessible and well-publicised;
- Be simple and easy to use;
- Ensure that concerns are dealt with quickly, fully and fairly, within clearly defined time limits;
- Provide effective response and appropriate redress;
- Confirm good working relationships between all people involved with the Centre

The proper recording and communication of complaints and actions is a vital part of the process. The aim is not to create a bureaucratic record of complaints but to deal with the genuine concerns of the complainant at the lowest level of formality that is appropriate. A written record of complaints and the actions that result from their resolution is an important management tool. Low Farm Therapy Centre and, if necessary, Lo and Lo Education, will keep accurate written records to ensure that they can demonstrate that their decisions have been arrived at properly and impartially; these records will show at which stage the complaint was resolved and actions taken by the Centre (whether or not the complaint was upheld).

All correspondence, statements and records of complaints will be kept completely confidential, at all stages of the process.

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The Centre welcomes feedback, both positive and negative, about how it is doing. Where someone has a concern or complaint the Centre will endeavour at all times to deal with the issues responsively and reasonably and if necessary put things right as quickly as possible.

STAGE 1: Dealing with concerns and complaints informally

The vast majority of concerns and complaints can be resolved informally. There will be many occasions where concerns are resolved straight away through discussion with staff, without the need to resort to a formal complaints procedure, and this is preferable for all concerned.

Although this stage involves dealing with the issue informally it may prove helpful later, although not essential at this stage, for the person responding to make a basic record of the issue or complaint raised, which may include brief notes of conversations (face to face or over the telephone), and the responses made.

The person who raised the issue should be informed of the action to be taken to resolve the issue. It may be helpful to confirm undertakings given about future action or monitoring in writing.

If the person is dissatisfied with the response they have been given, they should be provided with a copy of this complaints procedure and informed about how to take their complaint to Stage 2, by referring it to the Head of Centre.

STAGE 2: Referral to the Head of Centre

The issue is referred to the Head of Centre for investigation, by the complainant in writing. It is generally at this or the previous stage that it will become clear whether it is appropriate for the complaint to be dealt with under this procedure or whether other processes may be more appropriate. If the latter is the case, the Head of Centre will need to inform the complainant of this and the way in which the complaint will be handled.

At this stage it will have become clear that the concern is a definite complaint. Any complaint received by the Head of Centre under this stage of the process should be acknowledged within 5 working days, with a full written response within 15 working days. Complainants should also be given the opportunity to meet with the Head of Centre, accompanied by a relative or friend if they so wish, to discuss their complaint. Written records of interviews with complainants and with staff or witnesses carried out in the course of the investigation should be kept by the Head of Centre.

In the letter conveying the outcome, the complainant should be informed of the process for referral to the Stage 3 process if they wish to take their complaint further. Any such referral should be made by the complainant within 10 working days after receipt of the Head of Centre's letter.

STAGE 3: Review by a Panel consisting of a Director of Lo and Lo Education and two independent panel members with no connection to the Centre (who have senior experience in the fields of education or therapy).

- i) The complainant requests a review of their complaint by writing to Pascale Lo (Director of Lo and Lo Education) making it clear why they are complaining, who they have already spoken to and

what they want to happen as a result of their complaint. Complaints received by Lo and Lo Education should be acknowledged within 7 working days with a substantive response within 20 working days. The Panel may need to hold interviews with the Head of Centre and other members of staff, and notes should be kept of those meetings.

- ii) The procedures for the panel hearing are outlined in Appendix A.
- iii) A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations should be provided to the complainant and the Head of Centre. Where relevant, a copy should also be provided to the person complained about.
- iv) The letter conveying the Panel's findings should include details of the next stage of the procedure.
- v) This stage should also serve as the first point at which complaints should be considered which are specifically about the Head of Centre.
- vi) In acknowledging any complaint, the Panel may need to explain their powers in the matter in question and the extent to which it may or may not be possible to achieve the outcome desired by the complainant. In such instances it is important that the complainant is made aware at the outset of the scope of the investigation. However, where it is not within the remit of the Panel to change a decision, it may make a recommendation for the Head of Centre to consider.

FURTHER RECOURSE

The Association of Speech and Language Therapists in Independent Practice (ASLTIP) and the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC)

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome they can contact ASLTIP or the HCPC. They can also contact these organisations at any stage of the complaints process. More information can be found here: <http://www.helpwithtalking.com/> or <http://www.hcpc-uk.org/complaints/raiseaconcern/>.

Appendix A: OUTLINE OF PROCEDURES FOR PANEL HEARINGS

Before the hearing

- The complainant and the Head of Centre should be provided with details of the way in which the hearing will be conducted.
- If necessary support for the complainant should be arranged, for example, translation of any of the papers, provision of an interpreter or any arrangements necessary to give the complainant full access to the proceedings, for example if the complainant has a disability.
- The members of the Panel should elect one of their number to act as Chairman for the hearing.

The hearing

- The complainant and the Head of Centre should simultaneously be invited into the room where the hearing is being held. At this point the Chairman may wish to reiterate the scope of the Panel's powers and clarify the aims of the hearing; to resolve the complaint, reconcile differences between the complainant and the Centre and to help identify the way forward.
- The Chairman should introduce all those present and ensure that all parties have been advised of the way in which the hearing will be conducted.
- The complainant should begin by explaining the basis of their complaint and the Head of Centre should then state the reasons for the Centre's response.
- The Centre should ask the complainant any questions regarding their complaint and the complainant should raise questions with the Head of Centre about the Centre's response.
- Members of the Panel should have the opportunity to ask questions of either the complainant or the Head of Centre.
- The complainant and the Head of Centre should be given the opportunity to make any final statement.
- The Chairman should confirm that a decision will be issued within 5 working days.

- The complainant and the Head of Centre should then leave the hearing.

The decision making process

- The Panel should then consider a decision based on the information and evidence presented to them. It should decide whether or not to uphold the complaint, suggest any actions which may be taken to resolve the complaint and consider whether it would be appropriate to suggest a review of any policies in the light of issues raised in the course of the complaint. The Panel should reach a unanimous or majority decision on the complaint.

Communicating the decision

The findings of the Panel should be notified to the complainant, the Head of Centre and, where appropriate, the person being complained about in writing within 5 working days of the hearing.