



East Clayton Farm

**ECF Complaints Policy  
September 2019**

# COMPLAINTS POLICY



**East Clayton Farm**

Version 2.0 – September 2019

Policy number		Policy owner		
ECF/CP08		The Trustee Board of East Clayton Farm		
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Related ECFLDC policies				

# East Clayton Farm Dignity and Diversity at Work Policy

East Clayton Farm views complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve, as well as a chance to put things right for the person or organisation that has made the complaint.

## Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect of East Clayton Farm's Learning and Development Centre

## Where Complaints Come From

Complaints may come from any person or organisation who has a legitimate interest in the work of East Clayton Farm. A complaint can be received verbally, by phone, by email or in writing.

This policy does not cover complaints from staff, who should use East Clayton Farm's Discipline and Grievance policies.

## Our Standard for handling complaints

- We will accept complaints in writing, by email or letter.
- We will treat all complaints seriously.
- We will treat you fairly and courteously.
- We will make every effort to resolve a complaint informally, at an early stage, in a spirit of partnership.
- We will apologise wherever necessary. An admission that the Farm could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence.
- We will deal with your complaint promptly.
- We will acknowledge initial receipt of a written complaint within five working days.
- We will send you a full reply within 20 working days of receipt of the complaint.
- If we cannot respond fully within 20 working days of receipt of the complaint we will tell you, explain why, and tell you when we will be able to reply in full.
- All complaints will be logged so that we can monitor the types of complaints received, the time taken to respond to them and identify the best way of dealing with them.
- We will deal with all complaints in line with the procedure as laid down in the East Clayton Farm Learning and Development Centre Policies and Procedures document.

## Confidentiality

We will handle your personal information in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018.

## Responsibility

Overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation lies with the East Clayton Farm Board of Trustees.

## Review

This policy is reviewed annually.

## Publicised Contact Details for Complaints

Written complaints may be sent to East Clayton Farm, Storrington Road Washington, West Sussex, RH20 4AG.

Verbal complaints may be made by phoning 01903 741011 or in person to any of East Clayton Farm's staff or trustees at any of our events or activities.

### **Receiving Complaints**

Complaints may arrive through channels publicised for that purpose or through any other opportunity the complainant may have.

Complaints received by telephone or in person need to be recorded. The person who receives a complaint should:

- Write down the facts of the complaint.
- Take the complainant's name, address and telephone number.
- Note down the relationship of the complainant to the Farm (E.G. volunteer, service user etc.).
- Clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.
- Advise the complainant about our complaints procedure.
- Tell the complainant what will happen next and how long it will take.
- Where appropriate, ask the complainant to send a written account by post or by email so that the complaint is recorded in the complainant's own words.
- For further guidelines about handling verbal complaints, see Appendix 1.

## **Resolving Complaints**

### **Informal resolution**

Our intention is that the vast majority of concerns can be raised and dealt with informally. Complainants are encouraged to make their concerns known informally at an early stage so that they can be addressed in the spirit of partnership. In the first instance, a concern should be raised with the member of staff most closely involved. If that does not provide a satisfactory outcome, then an informal complaint should be made to the Farm's CEO with a view to resolving the issue informally before moving to the formal stages.

### **Stage One**

In many cases, where appropriate, the person responsible for the issue is the best person to resolve the complaint. They should do so swiftly and notify the Farm Manager of the outcome.

When we receive written complaints, we will acknowledge initial receipt within five working days.

The acknowledgement will say who is dealing with the complaint and when the person complaining can expect a reply. A copy of this complaint procedure should be attached.

The complaint's information will be passed to the Farm Manager.

Upon receipt, the complaint will be recorded in the ECF Complaints Log..

The CEO will investigate and deal with all formal complaints. If the complaint is about the CEO it will be managed by the Chair of Trustees.

### **In carrying out an investigation, the CEO will:**

- Establish what has happened so far and who has been involved.
- Clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved.
- Meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary).
- Clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

- Interview those involved in the matter and/or against whom the complaint has been made. They may be accompanied to the meeting by a person of their choice, if they wish.
- Conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning.
- Keep notes of the interview.

The complainant will receive a definitive reply from ECF within 20 working days of receipt of the complaint.

If ECF cannot respond fully within 20 working days of receipt of the complaint we will tell you, explain why, and tell you when we will be able to reply in full.

If you ask for our response to be reviewed in line with Stage two of our Complaints Procedure, we will acknowledge this within 5 working days of receipt and respond fully within 20 working days.

All complaints will be logged so that we can monitor the types of complaints received, the time taken to respond to them and identify the best way of dealing with them.

## **Stage Two**

If the complainant feels that the problem has not been satisfactorily resolved at Stage One, they can request that the complaint is reviewed at Board level. At this stage, the complaint will be passed to the Chair of the Board.

If the Chair of Trustees has been involved at Stage 1, the complaint will be looked at by another Trustee.

The request for Board level review should be acknowledged within five working days of receiving it. The acknowledgement should say who will deal with the case and when the complainant can expect a reply. This may involve reviewing the paperwork of the case and speaking with the person who dealt with the complaint at Stage One.

If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a further opportunity to respond.

The person who dealt with the original complaint at Stage One should be kept informed of what is happening.

Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within four weeks. If this is not possible because for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given.

Whether the complaint is upheld or not, the reply to the complainant should describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

The decision taken at this stage is final, unless the Board decides it is appropriate to seek external assistance with resolution.

## **Variation of the Complaints Procedure**

The Board may vary the procedure for good reason. This may be necessary to avoid a conflict of interest, for example, a complaint about the Chair should not also have the Chair as the person leading a Stage Two review.

At each stage in the procedure East Clayton Farm will want to keep in mind ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It may be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- An apology.
- An explanation including a rejection of the complaint if not valid.

- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better.
- An assurance that the event complained of should not recur.
- An explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it should not happen again
- An undertaking to review policies in light of the complaint.

### **Monitoring and Learning from Complaints**

Complaints are reviewed annually to identify any trends, which may indicate a need to take further action.

## Appendix 1 - Practical Guidance for Handling Verbal Complaints

- Remain calm and respectful throughout the conversation.
- Listen - allow the person to talk about the complaint in their own words. Sometimes a person just wants to "let off steam".
- Don't debate the facts in the first instance, especially if the person is angry.
- Show an interest in what is being said.
- Obtain details about the complaint first and only then take down any personal details.
- Ask for clarification wherever necessary.
- Show that you have understood the complaint by reflecting back what you have noted down.
- Acknowledge the person's feelings (even if you feel that they are being unreasonable) - you can do this without making a comment on the complaint itself or making any admission of fault on behalf of the organisation e.g. "I understand that this situation is frustrating for you".
- If you feel that an apology is deserved for something that was the responsibility of your organisation, then apologise on behalf of the organization.
- Ask the person what they would like done to resolve the issue.
- Be clear about what you can do, how long it will take and what it will involve.
- Don't promise things you can't deliver.
- Give clear and valid reasons why requests cannot be met.
- Make sure that the person understands what they have been told
- Wherever appropriate, inform the person about the available avenues of review or appeal.