

Complaints Policy and Procedure (7.17)

1. Background

This Complaints Policy and Procedure aims to cover all possible grievances that may occur in the workplace e.g. management decisions, workplace safety, the work environment, bullying, harassment and discrimination.

2. Policy

Home-Start considers swift and effective resolution of all Complaints essential for a healthy, happy, supportive and harmonious workplace.

Home-Start management of complaints will be in accordance with procedural fairness, substantive fairness, and with confidentiality.

Openness to comments and complaints provides information about how Home-Start's work is carried out. It can assist the volunteers, staff and board of trustees to be more sensitive to a family's needs.

Where a complaint is upheld, appropriate action will be taken which may include disciplinary procedures or legal action.

3. Application

This policy and procedures apply to all Home-Start clients and volunteers.

4. Responsibility

The CEO is responsible for:

- Ensuring implementation and monitoring of this policy throughout Home-Start.
- Ensuring access to information and/or training to all workers about their rights and responsibilities.
- Bringing serious, recurring or unresolved grievances to the attention of the Board of Management.
- Seeking support and advice for an external management consultant (Jobs Australia)

Objects of the Complaints Procedure

The Complaints Procedure enables families being supported by Home-Start to make complaints about the service and to have their complaints considered.

A complaint, in the context of the Procedure, means:

‘the expression of dissatisfaction with the service provided and the wish to have that dissatisfaction recorded and/or considered for improvement of the service and for the removal of dissatisfaction’.

Relationship with the grievance and disciplinary procedures

The Complaints Procedure is separate and distinct from the Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures.

The Grievance Procedure enables employees and volunteers to raise grievances in connection with their condition of employment and other employment-related matters. The Disciplinary Procedure is used by the employer when an employee may be in breach of the terms of employment.

However, an investigation of complaints may lead to disciplinary issues.

Who may complain?

Any member of a family being visited or a representative on behalf of any member of a family being visited may make a complaint. Each family should be given a Home-Start brochure or Booklet which outlines the support Home-Start offers and gives information about what to do if dissatisfied with it.

Responsibility of staff and volunteers

Home-Start staff and volunteers need to be sensitive and helpful to families, and those acting on their behalf, who express a concern. This is part of Home-Start’s commitment to a high quality service. Staff should give information about the Complaints Procedure and help complainants to understand and use it.

Staff and volunteers must advise families who feel that they may have been subject to racial discrimination that they also have the right to use the provisions of the Race Relations Act. There should be no delay in giving this information since there is a three-month time limit for making applications under the Act. However, it is up to the person concerned to decide whether to use that process and it is advisable for them to take specialist advice before proceeding.

The Home-Start CEO is responsible for ensuring the smooth working of the Complaints Procedure.

Home-Start has a standard complaint form that will be used to log and document complaints.



Home-Start Family Services

To be completed by the complainant.

Home-Start:	Complaint No:
Name and Address of Complainant	If the Complainant is acting on behalf of an adult member of a family, please give the name and address of that person.
Name:	Name:
Address, including post code:	Address, including post code:
Telephone No:	Telephone No:
Details of complaint (continue on a separate sheet if necessary)	

Signed: _____

Date: _____

When completed this form should be sent to:

.....
.....
.....
.....



Process

Stage One

a) A complaint must be made in writing, either by letter or by completion of the *Complaints Form* by the complainant with help if necessary from a member of staff/board/volunteer. If this is the case the complainant will be asked to agree the content of the complaint and details on the form

Staff must not refuse to accept a complaint, which must then be forwarded to the National CEO.

b) The letter or completed *Complaints form* should be sent to the CEO at the Home-Start National Office.

c) On receipt of the complaint, the CEO shall acknowledge receipt of it, and shall send a copy to the chairperson. If the complaint is a letter, attach to a *Complaints form* and complete details on the form. A *Record of complaint form* should also be started and given the same Complaint Number.

d) The CEO shall consider what steps are appropriate in responding to the complaint; these may include problem-solving, conciliation and/or mediation. The chairperson shall be informed of the proposed response and shall agree to it or discuss alternative responses with the CEO. A response to the complainant should be given without delay and the expectation is that this stage of the Procedure should be completed in most cases **within two weeks**.

e) The details of the response and the outcome of the way in which the complaint was considered shall be recorded with the written complaint.

f) Written responses must be sent **in all** cases to the complainants. Further information shall be included in the written response outlining the further steps which can be taken if the response is not satisfactory to the complainant.

If the complainant is satisfied with the outcome, no further action need be taken as far as the complainant is concerned.

Stage Two

If the complainant is not satisfied or wishes from the start when making the written complaint to have it more formally considered, the following procedure shall apply:

a) On receiving a reply to the response that it does not satisfy the complainant, or on receipt of the written complaint that the complainant wishes to go straight to this stage, the CEO shall acknowledge receipt of the reply or of the written complaint, send a copy to the chairperson and record the date it was received on the *Record of complaint form*.

b) The chairperson decides on a member of the Board who shall further investigate the complaint independently of the CEO and chairperson. Depending on the nature of the



complaint and its seriousness, s/he may be joined in the investigation by another member of the Board

Committee or by another person nominated by Home-Start National, who may be a member of the Home-Start National staff.

c) A written report of the independent investigation shall be made and recorded with the written complaint and a copy sent to the chairperson. A copy will also be added to the Home-Start Complaints Register

d) A further response to the complainant shall be drawn up taking into account the report of the investigation and shall be made in writing by the chairperson to the complainant.

e) If the complainant is satisfied with the result of the investigation and the further response, no further action need be taken as far as the complainant is concerned.

Stage Two shall be completed within four weeks of the commencement of the Stage.

Stage Three

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response drawn up after the investigation, the following procedure shall apply:

a) The continued dissatisfaction of the complainant should be submitted in writing and should be recorded. If sufficient reason for the dissatisfaction is not included in the written paper, more details of the reasons should be sought from the complainant and recorded.

b) A Special Meeting of should be called with at least 3 Board members and at least one member of the Home-Start National staff shall be present at the meeting. Each person shall receive a file of all the written papers concerning the complaint. The chairperson, National CEO and those engaged in the investigation shall attend for the purpose of reporting and giving information but, in the interests of natural justice, shall leave the meeting before any decision is taken. In these circumstances, the chair for the meeting should be taken either by the vice chairperson or another person elected for the purpose.

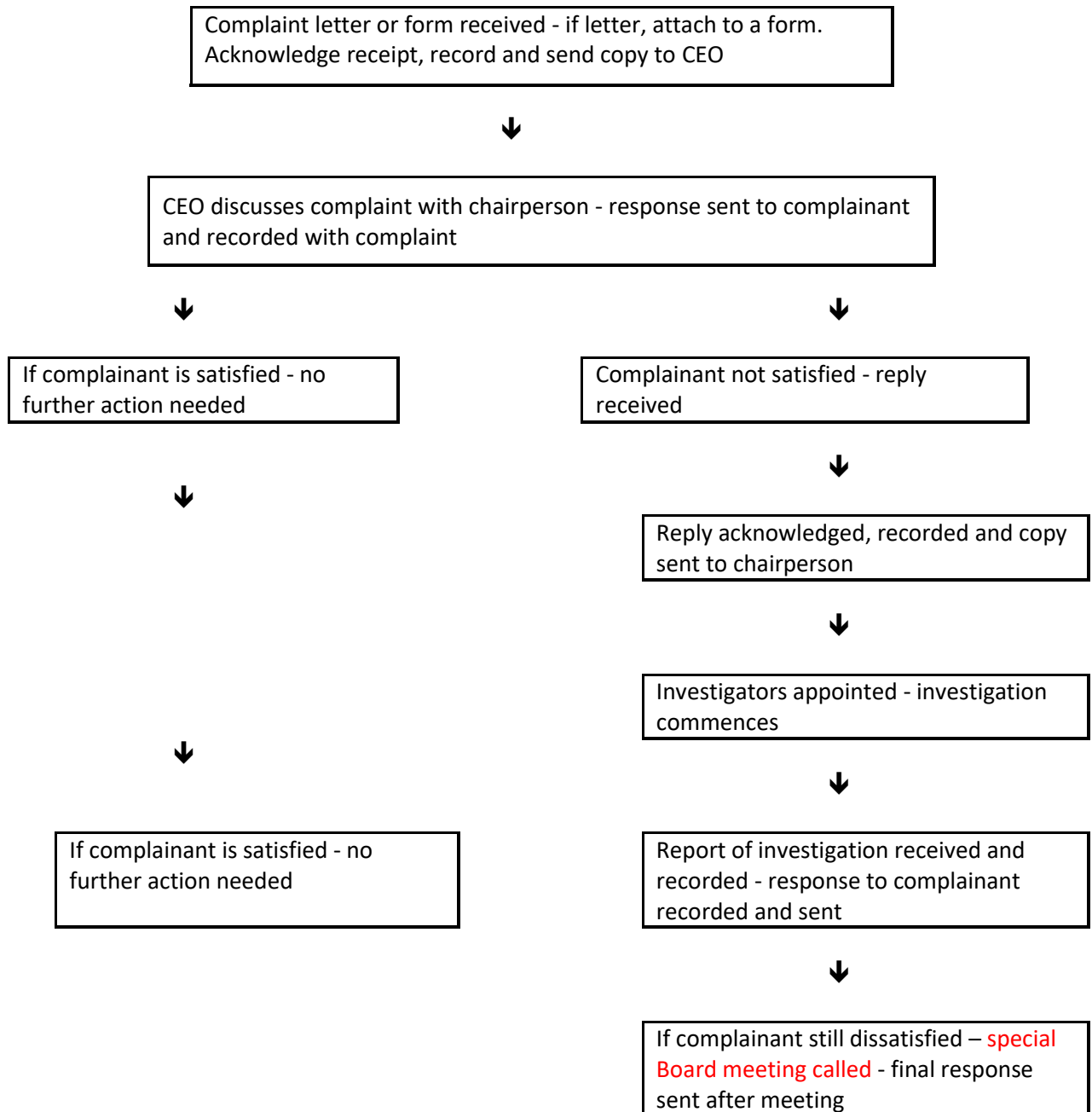
c) A written response shall be drawn up as a result of any decision taken at the Special Meeting by the person who chaired the meeting and that response shall be recorded with the written complaint and sent to the complainant.

d) The Special Meeting shall **be called within four weeks of the commencement of this Stage and the response shall be sent to the complainant within one week after the meeting.**

This marks the end of the *Complaints Procedure* and if the complainant remains dissatisfied, she/he should be informed by the Scheme Manager, of any other separate procedure which may be appropriate to the case.



Complaints procedure flow diagram





6. Related Documents

7.2 Recruitment and Appointment Procedures – Employees

7.3 Recruitment and Appointment Procedures – Volunteers

7.4 Statement of Professional Ethics and Code of Conduct

7.8 7.10 Disciplinary Procedures

7.11. Preventing Bullying and Harassment

7.14 Grievance Procedures

9. Document Control Details

Document Name	7.17 Complaints Policy and Procedures
Associated Docs	Nil
Authorised By	Chair of Board of Management
Authorisation Date	February 2016
Review Date	February 2018