

SNAAP Complaints Procedure

Introduction

SNAAP is dedicated to providing the best possible support for all of its families, staff and volunteers. This means having a clear, fair, and efficient procedure for dealing with any complaints so that any issues that arise can be dealt with as quickly and effectively as possible.

If there is an allegation or concern about physical or sexual misconduct towards a child, or if there is a belief that a child may be at risk of serious harm, SNAAP may immediately refer the case to our Designated Safeguarding Lead. If it is decided that there is cause for an official investigation by a statutory agency, the decision will supersede that made by SNAAP and as outlined in this document.

If it becomes necessary to alter the time limits and deadlines set out within this procedure, those involved will be advised accordingly, given an explanation, and provided with revised timescales.

This document does not apply to complaints about disciplinary issues relating to members of staff.

When an issue or concern first arises

A concern may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'. A complaint may be defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction about actions taken or lack of action'.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns, and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of this Complaints Procedure.

If you have a concern that you would like to take up with SNAAP, you may wish to approach SNAAP's Senior Play Support Lead first as they will be best placed to help you and you may be able to resolve all issues with open dialogue and mutual understanding. Alternatively, you can raise your concerns with SNAAP's Manager, over the telephone or in writing – either by email or by post. You may then be invited to an informal meeting.

If your complaint is about a member of staff, you should raise this with SNAAP's Manager in person or in writing, and a meeting can be arranged to discuss the issue.

If your complaint is about the Manager, you should raise your concern in writing with the chair of trustees.

If your complaint is about a trustee, you should raise your concern in writing with the Manager who will determine the most appropriate course of action.

Stage 1

Complaints at stage 1 do not need to be written. The Manager will record the complaint, and an investigation will be carried out by the person who received the complaint, with the aim of resolving the matter. If the complaint is resolved, a report outlining the complaint, the investigation and the resolution will be written by the person investigating the complaint, reviewed by the Manager and will be held on file for twelve months.

Stage 2

If you do not feel that your concern has been dealt with as you would like, are unhappy with the outcome of Stage 1, or feel that the issue is serious enough that it warrants it, you can make a formal complaint in writing to the Manager.

Your written complaint should provide sufficient detail of the issues to allow the Manager to investigate and respond to the complaint. You should also set out what you feel would resolve the complaint.

The Manager will decide who is best placed to investigate the complaint and will acknowledge your complaint in writing within five working days.

S/he will outline the decision if there is one to be made, and any action to be taken as a result of your complaint.

The Manager may invite you to a meeting to discuss the outcome, possible solutions, or to explain what has or will happen as a result of your complaint. You may bring a companion. The Manager will keep a record of all interactions with you and other staff and/or volunteers, meetings and decisions made in reference to your complaint.

If the complaint is against a member of staff or volunteer, the Manager will talk to that person. If it is an allegation of abuse, a formal investigation may be instigated.

The Manager will respond to you in writing within ten working days outlining their response to your concern, and any action that has or will be taken. If s/he has decided not to take any further action on the issue, s/he will explain the decision including how it has been reached, and will outline your right to take the matter further and how to do that.

Stage 3

If, having spoken to the Manager, you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint or your complaint is about the Manager, you may lodge your complaint with the chair of trustees.

The complaint must be in writing and it should explain your concern in sufficient detail and why you are accelerating the complaint to the next stage.

If the complaint is against a member of staff or volunteer, that person will be given the opportunity to write a response, which will be sent to the chair of trustees.

The chair of trustees will appoint a member of the board to investigate and the investigating trustee will respond to you in writing within ten working days outlining their response to your concern, and any action that has or will be taken.

If the investigating trustee decides not to take any further action on the issue, s/he will explain the decision and how it has been reached, and s/he will outline your right of appeal and how you can start your appeal.

Appeals Stage

If you wish to lodge an appeal following the outcome of a formal complaint at stage 3, this will be taken to SNAAP's appeals panel. You should write to the chair of trustees to exercise this right within ten working days of receiving the notification.

If no request for an appeals panel hearing is received within ten working days, it will be deemed that the decision is accepted, and the complaint will be closed.

If an appeals panel is requested, the chair will acknowledge your appeal, ask the Manager to make the necessary arrangements. The appeals panel will usually be convened within ten working days from the acknowledgement being sent. Where it is not possible to find a mutually convenient date within that timescale, SNAAP will take reasonable steps to agree a time and date mutually convenient to all parties.

The Manager will ensure that all parties to the appeal have access to the same documentation and set out a timetable to support the collation and circulation of documents.

Any supporting documentation relevant to the complaint must be submitted to the appeals panel by both parties at least five working days before the appeals panel hearing.

You are entitled to be accompanied to the appeals panel hearing and should notify the Manager in advance if you intend to bring anyone.

The Appeals Panel

The appeals panel will be made up of three members of the board of trustees. No person with former knowledge or involvement in the case can sit on the appeals panel.

The chair of the panel will be nominated from within the group of panel members.

All panel members will be familiar with and have access to the Complaints Policy.

The chair of trustees will notify the complainant of the appeal panel's decision in writing within ten working days of the appeal hearing. The letter will set out the decision together with the reasons for that decision. The letter may set out recommendations which will be made to the board of trustees. The appeals panel may:

- dismiss all or part of the complaint
- uphold all or part of the complaint
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- Evaluate all the evidence available and recommend changes to SNAAP's systems or procedures as a preventative step against similar problems arising in the future.

The panel's decision is final.

Vexatious/persistent complaints

Whilst it is hoped that this document will reduce any dissatisfaction with SNAAP, it is acknowledged that there may be rare occasions where a complainant continues to be dissatisfied with SNAAP and the outcomes achieved under the Complaints Procedure

Where a complainant attempts to re-open an issue which has already been dealt with under the Complaints Procedure, the chair of trustees will contact them to confirm that the matter has already been dealt with and that either that stage of the policy has been exhausted or that the Complaints Procedure has been exhausted and the matter is considered closed.

Where further correspondence is received on the same matter, this may be considered vexatious and SNAAP will be under no obligation to respond to that correspondence.

If the complainant subsequently contacts SNAAP again about the same issue, SNAAP can choose not to respond. The normal circumstance in which we will not respond is if:

- SNAAP has taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's needs, and our position has been clearly set out in writing together with the complainant's options
- the complainant is contacting SNAAP repeatedly but making substantially the same points each time
- SNAAP reasonably believes the aim of the contact is to cause disruption or inconvenience
- that the complainant acts or communicates in an inappropriate way towards staff

Once SNAAP has decided that it is appropriate to stop responding, the complainant will be informed in writing.

SNAAP will ensure when making this decision that complainants making any new complaint are heard, and that SNAAP acts reasonably.

Staff Complaints

Staff or volunteers who have a concern about a colleague should refer to SNAAP's *Whistleblowing Policy*.

The procedure for dealing with any other staff complaints or employment grievances is set out in SNAAP's staff *Disciplinary Procedures*.

Contacts

Manager

Carrie Wood

01227 367555

carrie@snaap.org.uk

Chair

Stephanie Swan

Stephanie.f.swan@gmail.com

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Date next review due: October 2023