

A NEW HOPE, CUMBRIA C.I.C

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Reviewed by Louise Ritson 25/03/2026

Next Review March 2027

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the setting. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to A New Hope, Cumbria C.I.C about any provision of facilities or services that we provide.

The difference between a concern and a complaint

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 however made, about actions taken or a 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 the complaints procedure. A New Hope, Cumbria C.I.C takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, the Safeguarding Officer, will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Safeguarding Officer will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, A New Hope, Cumbria C.I.C will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Concerns should be raised with either the Safeguarding Officer or the Safeguarding Lead. If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Complainants should not approach individual Directors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis, and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 of the procedure.

Complaints against staff (except the Manager) should be made in the first instance, to the Manager***.***

Complaints that involve or are about the Manager should be addressed to the Directors via the Directors email.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the organisation. You can also ask third party organisations like the Citizens Advice to help you.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Manager or Directors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Time scales

You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by A New Hope, Cumbria C.I.C, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
• Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).
• Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. Volunteer staff who have concerns about our organisation should complain through the organisations complaints procedure.

• Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the organisations internal grievance procedures.
• Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the organisations internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.
• Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use organisation premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams, or Tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

If a complainant commences legal action against A New Hope, Cumbria C.I.C in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, A New Hope, Cumbria C.I.C wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review organisation policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

Stage 1

Formal complaints must be made to the Manager (unless they are about the Manager). This may be done in person, in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form), or by telephone.

The Manager will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 14 days.

Within this response, the Manager will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Manager can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

Note: The Manager may delegate the investigation to another member of the organisations senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the Manager (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the Manager will provide a formal written response within 30 working days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the Manager is unable to meet this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions A New Hope, Cumbria C.I.C will take to resolve the complaint.

The Manager will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

If the complaint is about the Manager, or a member of the Board of Directors (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled Director will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1.

Complaints about the Manager or member of the Board of Directors must be made via the Directors email.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire Board of Directors or

- the majority of the Board of Directors

Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the Board of Directors or. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

Stage 2

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2 – a meeting with members of the Board of Directors' complaints committee, which will be formed of the first three, impartial, governors available. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Directors email, within 14 working days of receipt of the Stage 1 response.

The Directors will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 10 working days.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Directors will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 14 working days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Directors will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Directors will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

The complaints committee will consist of at least three Directors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three governors from A New Hope, Cumbria C.I.C available, the Directors will source any additional, independent persons through another local organisation, in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 2.

The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.

If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

For instance, if an organisation employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 14 working days before the meeting, the Directors will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time, and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 7 working days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 4 working days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the organisation's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and A New Hope, Cumbria C.I.C with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 14 working days.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or

- the entire Board of Directors or
- the majority of the Board of Directors

Stage 2 will be heard by a committee of independent persons.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions A New Hope, Cumbria C.I.C will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

Next Steps

If the complainant believes the organisation did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties, complaints can be raised with any relevant statutory body, including but not limited to:

- Council or Council Complaints Officer
- The Charity Commission
- The Fundraising Regulator
- Information Commissioner's Office

Relevant Email Addresses

Directors - directors.newhopecumbria@gmail.com

Manager – info@newhopecumbria.co.uk

Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the Manager, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Child/young person's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the child/young person (if relevant):
Address: **Postcode:** **Day time telephone number:** **Evening telephone number:**
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the organisation about it.

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.
Signature: **Date:**
Official use
Date acknowledgement sent:
By whom:
Complaint referred to:
Date:

Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the organisation in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent, and fair consideration of the complaint through:
    - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
    - interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
    - consideration of records and other relevant information
    - analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the Manager or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions, and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The Manager or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Complaints Co-ordinator (this could be the Manager / designated complaints Director or other staff member providing administrative support)

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, Manager, and Board of Directors (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
  - sharing third party information
  - additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- keep records.

Committee Chair

The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.

  If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting
- both the complainant and the organisation are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made

- the committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted

Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so
- No Director may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the organisation and the complainant
- We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.
- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting
- Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.
- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting
- Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.
- The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.
- If the child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.
- However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.
- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.