



Volunteer Concerns, Issues and Complaints Procedure

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1 Scope

- 1.1. South East Coast Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (the Trust) is committed to providing high quality patient care, providing the tools to assure the quality of care and further improving governance and quality systems across the organisation.
- 1.2. This procedure is applicable to all volunteers within the Trust. From herein, the term Volunteer will be used to refer to all groups.
- 1.3. Volunteers are not afforded the same rights a paid staff. As such they are not able to raise a formal grievance or complaint through the usual Trust processes. However, volunteers should have a formal process to follow should they feel aggrieved or wish to raise a formal complaint.
- 1.4. Volunteers are valued members of the SECAMB community. From time-to-time concerns may be raised by Volunteers themselves, or by someone else about a Volunteer. It is essential for the Trust to have procedures that ensure a fair and consistent approach to resolving concerns that arise, and protect the health, safety, and wellbeing of the SECAMB community and patients.
- 1.5. This procedure should be applied where:
 - 1.5.1. A Trust Volunteer raises concerns regarding their volunteering experience within SECAMB or the behaviour/conduct of another member of SECAMB (volunteer or staff).
 - 1.5.2. A complaint is raised about the conduct or performance of a Trust Volunteer (including, but not limited to, concerns raised by another volunteer, a member of SECAMB staff or a patient).
- 1.6. A concern may be raised informally (e.g., verbally) or formally (e.g., via a Datix report or Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) complaint).
- 1.7. The principles of this procedure will apply to the resolution of both informal and formal concerns relating to Volunteers. Formal complaints may be subject to additional requirements relating to timescale or reporting, and in these circumstances other relevant policies and procedures should also be consulted.
- 1.8. This procedure aims to encompass best practice for handling volunteer concerns as recommended by the National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO).
- 1.9. The procedure applies from the period that a concern is reported until the conclusion of the matter, and in cases where an outcome is appealed, until the conclusion of the appeal.
- 1.10. This procedure will apply to **all** Trust Volunteers.

2 Principles

- 2.1. SECAMB values the contribution of its staff and volunteers and aims to create a safe, supportive and friendly working environment where everyone feels valued and respected.
- 2.2. All members of the Trust (staff and volunteers) should feel safe to speak up when they have a concern and be supported when doing so in good faith. This could be to their team leader, PALS or the Freedom to Speak up Guardian(s) (FTSU).
- 2.3. Minor issues should, where possible, be dealt with informally in the first instance.
- 2.4. There may be some instances where a formal approach must be taken to protect the safety or wellbeing of SECAMB staff, volunteers, or patients. Further detail regarding formal resolution is provided later in the document.
- 2.5. All Trust managers who are made aware of a concern, issue or complaint regarding a Volunteer should inform the volunteers relevant departmental manager in in the first instance.
- 2.6. The departmental lead or manager will be able to offer guidance and support with process and may assign an investigating manager who will have experience and be a subject matter expert on managing volunteers.
- 2.7. At all stages, the Trust will look to address concerns, issues, and complaints in a fair, proportionate manner, and seek to bring the matter to a conclusion that is in the best interests of the organisation, its patients, and its staff and volunteers.
- 2.8. Trust volunteers are entitled to withdraw their offer to volunteer at any time. Likewise, SECAMB may choose to withdraw the opportunity to volunteer from an individual or group at any time without reason or notice. This action may be taken following a full investigation where it is identified that an individual's conduct or performance has fallen below the standards expected by the Trust.
- 2.9. In the interest of fairness and consistency, it is important for all parties that information relating to proceedings remains confidential. There may be occasions where the Trust may break confidentiality to prevent further harm, and these are detailed in section 9.3

3 When a volunteer has a concern

- 3.1. The Trust recognises that there may be circumstances when volunteers have issues or concerns regarding their volunteering experience.
- 3.2. Volunteers should endeavour to resolve minor issues or disagreements directly and informally with the other party where this is appropriate.

- 3.3. Volunteers may seek advice and support from their manager to assist in resolving an issue informally. Informal resolution may include:
- Facilitated discussion where both parties can air their views
 - Mediation
 - Resetting of boundaries
 - Identification of lessons learned
- 3.4. There may be occasions where a volunteer has a concern that cannot be resolved informally, for example where:
- The volunteer does not feel confident or able to raise the concern with the other party directly
 - Attempts to resolve the situation informally have been unsuccessful
 - The concern relates to bullying, harassment, intimidation or abuse
 - The concern relates to a group
 - There is a concern for patient safety
 - There is a concern for the health, safety, or wellbeing of a member of the public or the Trust
 - The volunteer believes their concern is of a sufficiently serious nature to require formal investigation or action by the Trust
- 3.5. In these circumstances the volunteer should raise a formal concern by contacting their Lead or if appropriate manager.
- 3.6. The volunteer raising the concern should provide sufficient detail regarding their concern and any redress they are seeking.
- 3.7. The manager will advise the volunteer of any information or action required and the next steps. The manager may offer support to facilitate informal resolution if this is appropriate and agreed by all parties or seek to address the concern formally.
- 3.8. Where a concern is to be addressed formally, the lead or manager will ensure the concern is recorded and assign an investigator.
- 3.9. Formal resolution will include a fact-finding investigation to fully understand the concerns raised. This will usually include the collection of statements from all parties. Following this, the individual raising the concern will be advised in writing of the outcome (e.g., upheld/not upheld) and if appropriate, any action recommended or taken.

- 3.10. The manager will ensure that volunteers who raise a concern are supported by a designated lead or manager throughout the investigation and resolution of the matter.
- 3.11. The Trust will handle all concerns seriously and endeavour to conclude the matter as soon as possible for the benefit of all parties.
- 3.12. Volunteers should have no fear of recourse because of raising a concern in good faith. The correct application of this procedure will ensure that all members of SECamb are supported to speak up when they have a concern.
- 3.13. Volunteers can choose to raise a concern to the Trust's Freedom to Speak Up Guardian. Volunteers should refer to the [Freedom to Speak Up \(Whistleblowing\) policy](#) for further information. This also includes information regarding how to raise a concern anonymously.
- 3.14. Concerns raised by volunteers that are found to be intentionally malicious may result in formal action from the Trust, which may ultimately lead to withdrawal of the opportunity to volunteer.
- 3.15. The individual raising the concern has the right of appeal should their complaint not be upheld. Further information regarding appeals is detailed later in the procedure.

4 When a complaint is received about a volunteer

- 4.1. From time to time the Trust may receive a complaint about a Trust volunteer, for example, from another volunteer, staff member or a patient.
- 4.2. The lead or manager must be notified of any complaint relating to a Trust volunteer.
- 4.3. Where minor issues are raised informally, the Trust will endeavour to resolve these in an informal and practical manner.
- 4.4. Where a complaint is raised formally or is deemed to be of a serious nature, this should be logged on Datix and an investigation commissioned in accordance with the appropriate policy or procedure.
- 4.5. Formal investigation will take place where there are allegations of:
 - Bullying and/or harassment
 - Dishonesty or fraud
 - A breach of confidentiality of the person or the Trust
 - A breach of Trust policies and procedures
 - A criminal offence
 - A breach of patient or public safety

- A breach of the SECAMB volunteer agreement
 - Behaviour or actions likely to damage the reputation to the Trust
- 4.6. The lead or manager will appoint an independent investigator and may decide to temporarily withdraw the opportunity to volunteer whilst an investigation takes place.
- 4.7. The investigator will complete a fact-finding investigation, collecting statements from all parties, and will submit to the department manager. Where possible this will happen within 28 days. However this is not always possible due to annual leave and other unavoidable delays.
- 4.8. The department manager will review the investigation report and decide, based on the information available, whether to uphold the complaint.
- 4.9. If a complaint is not upheld, the volunteer will be notified of the outcome and support will be offered to the volunteer to continue in their volunteering.
- 4.10. If a complaint is upheld, the lead or manager will notify the volunteer of the outcome and any remedial action. This may include:
- Development of an action plan produced to address any identified deficiency in knowledge or behaviour
 - Redeployment of the volunteer to an alternative role
 - Withdrawal of volunteering opportunity
- 4.11. Volunteers may be accompanied to any formal meetings by another Trust volunteer providing that there is no perceived conflict of interest. The chairing manager's decision will be final.
- 4.12. A note taker may accompany a Trust manager to formal meetings.
- 4.13. Regardless of outcome, a written report will be kept on the volunteers personal file in accordance with Trust policy.

5 Appeals

- 5.1. Volunteers may request an appeal where:
- A complaint raised about them is upheld
 - A concern raised by them is not upheld
- 5.2. In the above circumstances, the Manager will write to the volunteer detailing the outcome of the investigation and will include the name of an appeal manager. This will be a manager independent to the investigation, and of Operating Unit Manager or Head of Department level.

- 5.3. A volunteer who wishes to appeal should notify the appeal manager in writing within 10 working days of the date of the letter. The appeal letter must specify the grounds for appeal and should include as much information as possible to support their case.
- 5.4. The appeal manager will consider the appeal and may consult further on the issue. If there appears to be enough grounds to hear an appeal, the appeal manager will request a meeting or a telephone call with the volunteer as soon as is reasonably practicable.
- 5.5. The appeal outcome will be sent in writing to the volunteer within 5 working days of the appeal meeting and this decision will be final.

6 Safeguarding

- 6.1. Managers or leads involved in resolving complaints, issues or concerns should have received up to date training in safeguarding and should refer to the safeguarding policy and procedure. Any safeguarding concerns must be raised through a safeguarding referral. Advice can be sought from the safeguarding team.

7 Support to individuals

- 7.1. Managers should ensure that all parties are provided with means of accessing support. This may include support from the Wellbeing Hub, or from a named welfare officer.

8 Code of Conduct

- 8.1. All volunteers are expected to uphold the standards set out in the Volunteer Agreement and Handbook.

9 Confidentiality

- 9.1. All parties are expected to maintain confidentiality relating to a concern.
- 9.2. Complainants may request that their anonymity from the subject of the complaint be protected. The Trust will ensure anonymity is maintained as far as possible while allowing for the effective investigation of the complaint. The complainant will be advised if it is likely that the nature of the complaint will reveal their identity to the subject of the complaint during any investigation.
- 9.3. There are times where it may be necessary for confidentiality to be broken. In these circumstances the Trust will make every attempt to inform the discloser and gain consent if this is appropriate. However, where this is considered inappropriate or not possible, the Trust may need to disclose confidential information without consent. Such circumstances include:
 - Where not to do so would risk the safety of the discloser or others

- Where a disclosure may be necessary for the prevention, detection and prosecution of serious crime
- Where the Trust is legally required to do so

10 Definitions

- 10.1. A **Volunteer** is a person who freely offers their time to the Trust without pay.
- 10.2. A **concern** (for the purposes of this procedure) is when a volunteer notifies the Trust of something they don't feel is right.
- 10.3. An **issue** (for the purposes of this procedure) is a minor difficulty requiring resolution.
- 10.4. A **complaint** (for the purposes of this procedure) is an allegation received about a volunteer.
- 10.5. **Datix** is the Trust incident management system.
- 10.6. The term **Manager** relates to the departmental manager or lead the volunteer sits under.

11 Responsibilities

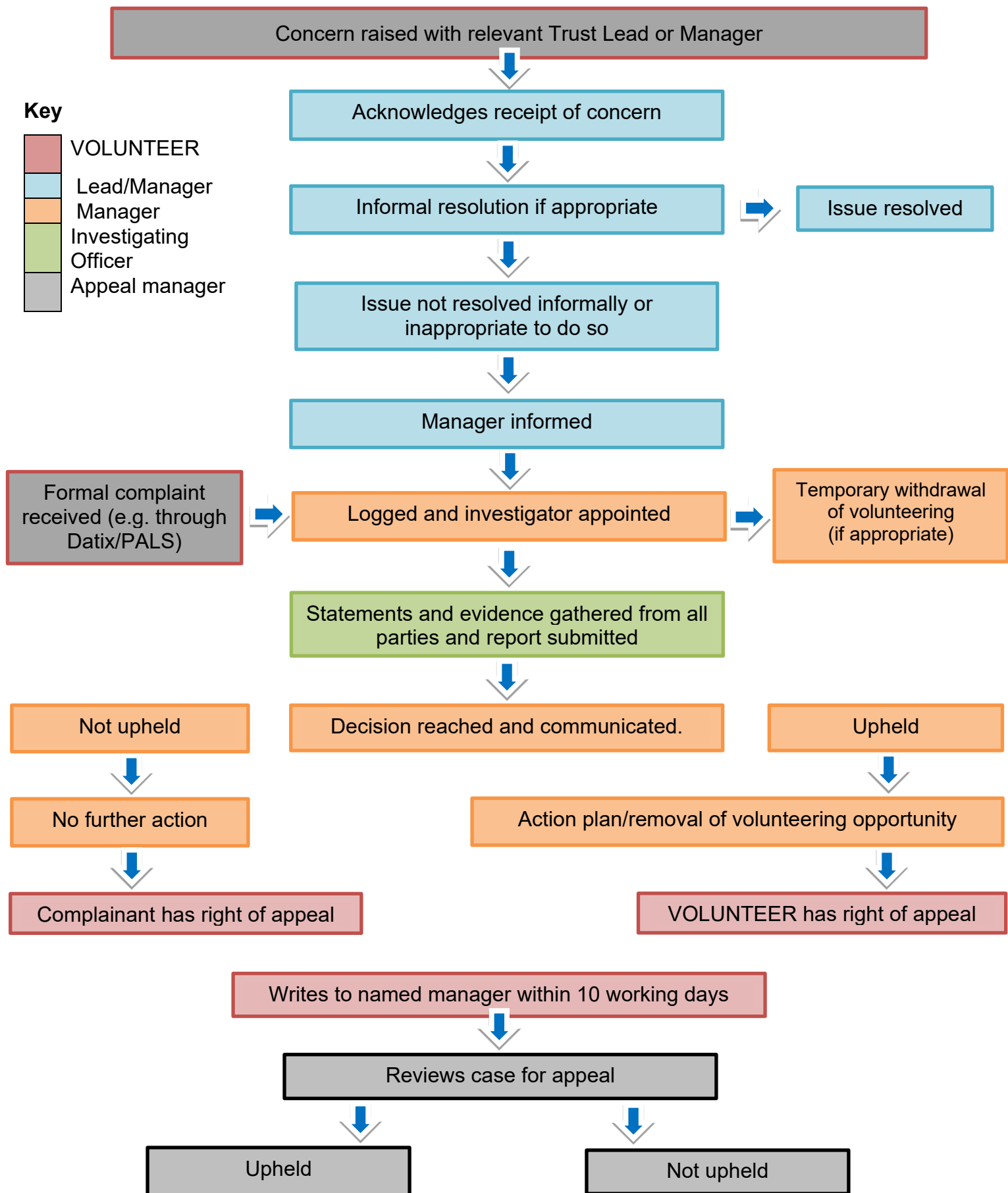
- 11.1. The **Chief Executive Officer** has overall responsibility for this procedure.
- 11.2. The **Executive Director of Operations** is responsible for managing and implementing this policy and procedure within the Trust and this is devolved to him by the Chief Executive Officer.
- 11.3. The **Deputy Director of Operations** will ensure that an appropriate assurance process is conducted to review the effectiveness of this procedure.
- 11.4. The **Head of Community Resilience** is responsible for the development and monitoring of this procedure.
- 11.5. **Departmental Managers** are responsible for implementation of this procedure and for supporting and advising other Trust managers in its use.
- 11.6. **Departmental Leads** are required to adhere to this procedure when handling volunteer concerns.
- 11.7. **All volunteers** are required to follow this procedure when raising concerns.

12 Audit and Review (evaluating effectiveness)

- 12.1. All procedures have their effectiveness audited by the responsible Management Group at regular intervals, and initially six months after a new policy is approved and disseminated.

- 12.2. Effectiveness will be reviewed using the tools set out in the Trust's Policy and Procedure for the Development and Management of Trust Policies and Procedures (also known as the Policy on Policies).
- 12.3. This document will be reviewed in its entirety every three years or sooner if new legislation, codes of practice or national standards are introduced, or if feedback from employees indicates that the policy is not working effectively.
- 12.4. All changes made to this procedure will go through the governance route for development and approval as set out in the Policy on Policies.

Appendix A: Concerns, Issues and Complaints flowchart



Appendix B: Concerns, Issues and Complaints – information for Volunteers

If you have a concern during your volunteering

1. Try not to let irritations build up too much when they may be easily solved. First of all, talk with your departmental Lead.
2. If you feel unable to approach the person who supports you because the problem is caused by them, then contact the person who manages them.
3. The departmental Lead will listen to your concerns and consider how best to resolve them. They may suggest an informal meeting, mediation or provision of additional training. In more serious cases, they may need to arrange for your concerns to be investigated. In this case, an investigator will be appointed, and you may be asked to attend a meeting or provide a statement.
4. Once all necessary information has been gathered, the investigator will advise of any further action necessary to resolve the matter and notify you of the outcome.
5. You may have the right to appeal the outcome. Refer to appendix A for further information.

If a complaint is made about you

1. The Trust will notify you as soon as possible and provide a brief overview of the concerns that have been raised. Every effort will be made to resolve issues informally where this is appropriate – in these cases, your team leader or manager will speak with you and look to seek a prompt resolution for all parties.
2. In some cases, the Trust may need to undertake an investigation to establish the facts. In this case, an investigator will be appointed, and you will be assigned a welfare officer. Your welfare officer will be independent from the investigation and can support you during the process if you would like them to. Occasionally, the Trust may need to temporarily withdraw the opportunity to volunteer during an investigation. If this occurs, this decision is taken in your best interests, and should be seen as a neutral act to conduct a fair and thorough investigation without putting you, the Trust or others at any risk.
3. An investigator will arrange to call or meet with you to discuss the concerns that have been raised.
4. The investigator will provide you with the opportunity to respond to any concerns and may speak to other relevant parties to establish facts.
5. The investigator will present the facts to the departmental Manager who will review the case and decide on any action to be taken.
6. The relevant Manager will notify you, in writing, of the outcome of the investigation, and any further action to be taken. You may have the right to appeal the decision or action taken. More information is available in appendix A.