



Policy Title: Feedback and Complaints Policy and Procedure

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Policy Statement

EPIC, Empowering People in Care (EPIC) is committed to ensuring the best services and outcomes for children and young people, their carer's, families and communities, and the professionals who support them. One of the ways we do this is by inviting feedback and properly addressing complaints about our services and/or participation and research activities.

We welcome feedback when you have found your engagement with EPIC helpful and positive, but there might also be times when we get things wrong.

It is the policy of EPIC to respond to all complaints in a prompt, fair and sensitive manner. We genuinely want to know if someone is unhappy with any aspect of our work. This Policy is not designed to apportion blame, but to learn and grow, and to make changes that will improve our services and the experiences of those who access them.

Whether providing positive feedback or making a complaint, it is important that EPIC hears from you as your thoughts, concerns and views help us to make improvements and make better decisions.

EPIC commit to:

- examine and understand any issues raised.
- resolve complaints as quickly as possible.
- support the children and people who access our services and our colleagues.
- respond to and learn from the issues raised through feedback and complaints.

Purpose of this policy

The purpose of the EPIC Feedback and Complaints Policy is to offer a mechanism for those who wish to offer feedback or make a complaint about EPIC, the services provided by EPIC, an EPIC employee or volunteer or those entities that EPIC are working in collaboration or partnership with, and to ensure that all complaints are considered and responded to promptly, fairly and sensitively. EPIC acknowledge that feedback and complaints provide us with an opportunity to learn, adapt and improve.

Scope of this policy

This policy is intended for use by any member of the public who uses, has used, or has sought to use any EPIC services or who has received or sought assistance or support from EPIC. It is also for use by individuals, private and statutory organisations, foundations, or corporations that work with, have

worked with, or have sought to work with EPIC in any capacity. Feedback and complaints are viewed by EPIC as a constructive part of the organisation's learning process and accountability for service provision.

Guiding Principles

- Those who wish to offer feedback or make a complaint should find it easy to do so.
- Complaints will be taken seriously and be dealt with promptly (within 20 working days), fairly, and sensitively.
- EPIC will be open and accountable for any decisions made in response to feedback or a complaint.
- EPIC will act consistently, fairly, and proportionately in response to feedback and complaints.
- EPIC will acknowledge mistakes where they occur, offer a sincere apology when this occurs, and will work collaboratively with the complainant to find an appropriate, and timely remedy/resolution
- EPIC will use feedback and complaints to improve and change our work when necessary.

Providing feedback and making a complaint

How to provide feedback or make a complaint

- Use our
 - [Online Feedback Form](#)
 - [Online Complaint Form](#)
- Download our feedback or complaint form and post it to us at: EPIC, Empowering People in Care, 7 Red Cow Lane, Dublin 7. D07 KX52.
 - [Download Feedback Form](#)
 - [Download Complaint Form](#)
- Email us: info@epiconline.ie
- Phone us: 01-8727661 (9am to 5pm Monday-Friday)

While some complaints can be dealt with verbally and in an informal manner, we encourage people to use our Complaint Form.

What is feedback and who can provide it?

Anyone can provide feedback to us about their experience of our services. Feedback may include:

- comments
- suggestions
- ideas
- observations
- compliments about when we get things right.

How we deal with feedback

We will acknowledge your feedback if contact details are provided and will share it with the relevant team or staff member. All feedback is recorded to help inform opportunities for improvements on EPIC's services and organisational procedures and work practices.

What is a complaint?

A complaint is when someone tells us they are not happy about something we have done or failed to do, and they feel it was unfair and/or has adversely affected them.

The law says an action is unfair or unsound if it is:

- taken without proper permission or authority
- taken for unnecessary reasons
- the result of negligence or carelessness
- based on incorrect or incomplete information
- discriminatory
- based on undesirable administrative practices
- in any other respect contrary to fair or sound administration.

These categories are taken from the Child and Family Agency Act 2013.

Who can complain?

Anyone who uses, has used, or has sought to use any EPIC's services who is, or claims to have been, treated unfairly and/or negatively affected, can make a complaint.

Children and young people can make a complaint by themselves without involving an adult, or a third party, like a Social Worker, carer or other mandated professional, can make a complaint on a child or young person's behalf if they have consent to do so.

If a person makes a complaint without the consent of the child or young person we are working with, and the child or young person does not subsequently give their consent to the lodging of the complaint, we will notify the Complainant that no action will be taken. NOTE: EPIC works for the child or young person and builds a relationship of trust with them. EPIC staff cannot take any action without the permission of the child or young person.

If a person who is entitled to make a complaint cannot do so because of age, illness or disability, the following people can make the complaint on their behalf:

- a close relative, who is recognised as being a de facto carer
- a carer of the person
- a person who by law, or the appointment of a court has the care of the affairs of the person
- a legal representative of the person

What a person can expect when making a complaint

- a fair hearing, a timely response, and a clear explanation of the outcome whether the complaint is upheld or not
- an appropriate remedy where it is found that they were treated unfairly or improperly or that the service provision was not up to standard and
- an assurance that all complaints will inform policy and practice within EPIC.

Help with making a complaint

EPIC will do all it can to support you in making a complaint through all stages of the process. It is easier for us to respond fully to complaints when they are in writing. If you need help making your complaint, you can contact us for assistance:

- By email: info@epiconline.ie
- By phone: 01 8727661

Timescale for making a complaint

A complaint must be made within 12 months of:

- the date of the action or inaction that you are complaining about, or
- the date when you become aware of the action or inaction. EPIC may extend the time limit for making a complaint in exceptional circumstances or if they consider it to be in the public interest to do so.

What Complaints are not covered by this Policy?

The law says there are some complaints we cannot deal with under this policy. They are:

- A matter that is or has been the subject of legal proceedings before a court or tribunal
- A matter that is or has been the subject of an appeal under section 15 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000
- A matter relating solely to the exercise of clinical judgement by a person acting on our behalf
- An action taken by us solely on the advice of a person exercising clinical judgement
- A matter relating to the recruitment or appointment of an employee
- A matter relating to the terms or conditions of a contract of employment
- A matter relating to the terms or conditions of a contract with a consultant or adviser under section 55 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013
- A matter relating to the Social Welfare Acts
- A matter that could prejudice an investigation being undertaken by An Garda Síochána
- A matter that has been brought before any other complaints procedure established by law.

If any part of a complaint falls into one of these categories and cannot be investigated, we will write to the person making the complaint to let them know. We will explain why this is so and help them to access the most appropriate process.

Child & Vulnerable Adult Protection

Feedback or complaints which relate to or identify a risk to the safety or welfare of a child or young person, will be dealt with under EPIC's Child and Youth Protection Policy¹.

Privacy, Confidentiality and Consent

All complaints will be treated as confidential, and information will only be shared with others on a 'need to know' basis.

We will treat all personal information and data provided to us as confidential and store it securely. We will use and keep this information to deal with the complaint. From time to time, we use complaints information for compiling statistics, writing reports, and implementing learning. We will only do so using information that does not identify anyone.

A complaint record is separate from a service user's case file or a staff member's personnel file. We will not share personal information about complaints with other agencies unless we have consent to do so, or if we are compelled to do so under law. When we process personal information, we will comply with all relevant data protection legislation and other relevant laws.

¹ [Governance | EPIC \(epiconline.ie\)](https://www.epiconline.ie)

Once a complaint is received by EPIC, we will always seek to work collaboratively with the person(s) who have submitted it. However, if someone is making a complaint on behalf of another person, we must confirm that they have the authority to act on that person's behalf.

Anonymous Complaints

In the interests of fairness and transparency, EPIC will not investigate anonymous complaints against a named member of staff. However, we will pass anonymous complaints on to the relevant manager who will consider if a risk assessment is required.

Complaints Procedure

Making a Complaint

All complaints made by individuals or organisations will be taken very seriously, heard in a fair and courteous manner, and dealt with sensitively and respectfully. Complaints can be made orally or in writing. A complaint may be made directly to the person who is the subject of the complaint, another member of staff or, if preferred, a member of the management team e.g. an Advocacy Manager/COO/CEO or to the Chair of the Board. It would be EPIC's hope that, as far as possible, complaints would be satisfactorily dealt with at the informal stage.

If the complaint cannot be solved informally, the Complainant will be offered the opportunity to make a formal complaint.

Informal Complaints Process

The purpose of the informal complaint process is to encourage any individual or organisation who wishes to try to resolve the complaint informally by speaking directly with the individual who is the subject of the complaint, another staff member or the manager of the service involved and to attempt resolve the complaint informally. It is hoped that most issues would be resolved at this stage.

Stages in the informal complaints process

1. Where an individual or organisation makes an informal complaint in person, by phone or email, relevant details must be taken and recorded by the person contacted in the first instance – even if that person is the subject of the complaint. Where possible an explanation, further information and / or an apology will be offered to resolve the complaint at this point. **ALL** feedback and/or complaints must be reported to the COO, even if resolved immediately.
2. If the complaint cannot be resolved at this point, contact details for the individual will be recorded and arrangements will be made to contact them with an initial response at a time convenient to them.
3. If the complaint relates to a volunteer, staff member or service other than the person contacted, the person taking the complaint will offer to pass on the complaint and ask the person if they wish to be contacted by the relevant party directly. If they agree, their contact details will be passed on to the relevant individual.
4. If the complainant does not wish to be contacted directly by the person against whom they have made the complaint, this will be noted and a record of their complaint will be passed to the relevant member of the management team or if appropriate, the CEO or Chair of the Board. This person will then contact the Complainant by phone or meet in person, if preferable, to hear their complaint.

5. Where possible an explanation or further information will be offered to resolve the complaint at this time. If the complaint is resolved satisfactorily at this point, no further action is required.

OR

6. Where the complaint is upheld, an apology will be offered and actions to prevent further occurrences may also be detailed.

Stages in the formal complaints process

Where an individual or organisation wishes to make a formal complaint (whether or not they have gone through the informal complaints process) they will be asked to do so in writing. The individual making the complaint will be sign-posted to EPIC's Feedback and Complaints Policy for guidance and EPIC's Complaint Form to put their complaint in writing. EPIC will provide any assistance required to complete the form. The following information should be provided on the form.

- The name and contact details of the person making the complaint.
- If the complaint is being made by a third party, such as parent, guardian, or other adult on behalf of a child or young person/adult the name and contact details of the third party will also be required.
- The nature of the complaint and required details including names, dates and specific actions.
- As much detail of the complaint as possible, including any relevant or supporting documentation/correspondence.
- In the event that the Complainant has special needs that may affect their ability to make a complaint every effort will be made to assist in whatever way is required e.g. assistance with reading and writing etc -this can be provided by an independent party if requested.

Responding to a Formal Complaint

On receipt of a formal written complaint, EPIC will **acknowledge receipt of the complaint within five working days**. Every effort will then be made to try to resolve the issue immediately. This may be by way of providing:

- An acknowledgement and/or
- An explanation and/or
- Additional information and/or
- An apology

If this is not sufficient, EPIC will contact the person making the complaint and, if agreeable, arrange to speak to or meet them within 10 working days.

If, for any reason, the relevant manager cannot deal with the complaint (for example if they are the subject of the complaint) it will be passed to the next appropriate person e.g. another manager, the CEO, the Chair of the Board etc.

- The person making the complaint has the right to be accompanied to any meeting in relation to their complaint.
- A record of all meetings and discussions in relation to any complaint will be retained on file and stored securely.
- If an apology is required from EPIC, and a resolution can be made by issuing an apology, it will be done so at such a meeting and followed up in writing within five working days.
- However, should further assessment be required this will be outlined to the Complainant.
- All complaints will be treated as confidential.

- Where necessary the person dealing with the complaint on EPIC’s behalf, may seek best advice from senior management or, if deemed necessary, a legal or HR professional.
- Having completed an assessment, the manager dealing with the complaint will write to the person, outlining the outcome of the assessment. This should take place within 20 working days of receiving the complaint. If the assessment cannot be completed within 20 working days, the person will be updated on progress and given a reasonable timeframe for the conclusion of the assessment. The person will be updated on progress at least every 20 working days thereafter, until the process is complete.
- When the assessment is concluded, a decision will be made as to whether or not the complaint should be upheld.
- Where the complaint is upheld, an apology will be offered and actions to prevent further occurrences may also be detailed.
- The decision will be communicated to the complainant outlining the reason for the decision and offering to meet with them in person to explain this if desired.

Appealing the Outcome of a Complaint

If a Complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint, they may lodge an appeal. Details of who the appeal can be made to will be given to the Complainant at that time. Any appeal should then be lodged within 10 working days of receiving an initial outcome to the complaint made.

Should the Complainant choose to appeal they will be facilitated to do so. An appeal should be made to the CEO (unless the CEO is the subject of the complaint in which case it should be made to the Chair of the Board). An assessment of any appeal will be completed within 20 working days.

It is the responsibility of the person handling the complaint assessment to:

1. to maintain all records confidentially
2. to issue an apology, explanation, or acknowledgement to the Complainant as appropriate
3. to consider and implement any changes in practice that may be required as a result of the outcome of the complaint
4. to submit a summary of the complaint and how it has been resolved to the Board of Directors and any other stakeholders as appropriate.

Right of Reply

- The subject of any complaint has a right to know that a complaint has been made against them and a right of reply.
- Any response made by the subject of a complaint will be noted and included with the record of the complaint.
- It should be acknowledged that complaints can be a source of distress, upset or embarrassment. Independent support may be offered to the subject of a complaint if this is requested or deemed necessary.

Records and areas for improvement

- A record of the complaint and the response will be maintained in a confidential file.
- Complaints will be reviewed to identify areas for improvement, training needs, resource implications or policy amendments required.

False or Malicious Complaints

All complaints will be considered based on verifiable facts and data. No assumption will be made regarding a complaint or Complainant and every complaint will be addressed in a consistent manner.

Where it is established that a complaint was either false or unfounded this will be clearly noted on the file and both the Complainant and the person/s or service against whom the complaint was made will be advised in writing.

Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour

EPIC believe that anyone making a complaint has a right to be heard, understood, and respected.

However, we expect anyone making a complaint to always treat staff respectfully and reasonably. In a small number of cases, the behaviour of a person complaining becomes unreasonable. Instances where a complainant is aggressive, threatening, makes excessive or inappropriate demands on EPIC or engages in unacceptable behaviour towards EPIC staff, will be viewed as unreasonable complainant behaviour.

EPIC acknowledge that in a minority of cases where the organisation will take all reasonable measures to try to resolve a complaint through the complainant's procedure, the Complainant may not accept these efforts.

Support for EPIC staff, volunteers and interns

We ask and expect all staff to help us to resolve complaints and to make sure we carry out full and fair complaint investigations when we need to. When a complaint is made about a staff member, volunteer, or intern, they have the right to:

- fair procedure and due process
- be treated with dignity and respect
- see the complaint that has been made about them and any other information which relates to them.

If a complaint is made about a staff member, volunteer, or intern, they have a right to respond to the complaint before we complete the complaint investigation report. They also have the right to:

- respond to any proposed findings or recommendations made relating to them.
- be supported by an appropriate person (e.g. trade union, trusted colleague or legal representative).

Throughout the complaints process, EPIC focus on resolving issues and not on assigning blame.

We recognise that being part of a complaint investigation or complaint review can be a stressful experience and we also recognise that, if warranted, the recommendations of a complaint investigation may include referral to other relevant organisational policies and procedures, e.g. grievance or disciplinary processes.

Anybody who is the subject of a complaint must be informed of support networks like the Employee Assistance Programme and about people who are available to help them through the complaints process, by their line manager.

Ver.	Amendment Description / Review information	Created / Rev / Modified By	Date	Approved by Board
1.0	New Policy Document	CEO	Aug 2018	
1.01	Annual Review	CEO	Sept 2019	
1.01	Annual Review	CEO	July 2020	Sept 2020
1.02	Periodic Review: updated for new form	COO	Sept 2022	Dec 2022
2.0	Policy updated to include Feedback mechanism and new forms	Communications Manager	Mar 2023	Sept 2023