



## Complaints Policy

Owner: Sam Best - Chief Operating Officer

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Everyone who uses or who works in partnership with SWEDA has the right to express dissatisfaction, disquiet or concern about their experience of SWEDA and its services and should feel that their views are listened to and acted upon. The complaint may be about a service, a particular individual (paid or unpaid) working for SWEDA or on SWEDA's behalf, or about material produced by SWEDA. (Paid employees and volunteers working for SWEDA should raise their concerns through our grievance procedure).

### At SWEDA we believe that complaints are resolved by:

- apologies sincerely given and received.
- respecting and protecting individuals' rights.
- accepting responsibility.
- correcting mistakes.
- making changes that show learning.

SWEDA staff should encourage discussion and action on issues raised by service users (including contractors, partners etc) before they develop into complaints. However, when complaints arise, service users should feel they can bring them to the notice of SWEDA staff or management without concern of victimisation.

We want to learn from people who use our services about ways in which we can improve them. We therefore welcome complaints as well as compliments. Most complaints can be resolved informally. However, we recognise that some people may not feel able to discuss a complaint with staff or may feel that this approach has not produced a satisfactory result. For such situations, we have a formal Complaints Procedure.

A copy of our complaints procedure will be displayed at our offices, in our counselling rooms, on our website and also will be produced on request. Staff will explain how and to whom to complain and how complaints are dealt with.

Complaints will always be dealt with in the strictest confidence. If others need to be informed, this will be discussed beforehand with the person making the complaint.

Complaints should be dealt with informally within four weeks. If it is likely to take longer, SWEDA will keep the complainant informed by letter. All complaints will be recorded, with details of findings, actions and outcomes.

### Complaints procedure

#### Stage One

If you are a service user and have a problem with your counsellor then you should in the first instance raise your concern with our Clinical Lead who will support you with the complaint process.

If you have a problem with any other part of our service or a member of staff, then please tell a staff member of your choice, who will support you with the complaint process. This enables us to understand your concern, and helps us reach a satisfactory solution for all concerned. Details of the complaint and the solution will be recorded and kept in a locked cabinet in the office.

If this informal process does not resolve your issue, or if you feel you would rather speak to someone who is not part of the staff team, then the complaint should be escalated to stage two.



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### Stage Two

If informal discussions are unsuccessful in resolving your complaint, and you remain dissatisfied, you can make a formal complaint in writing to our Chief Executive Officer at:

SWEDA, The Coach House, Harvest Court, Park Road, Shepton Mallet, BA4 5BS.

On receiving your letter, the Chief Executive Officer will reply within seven days, explaining the process that will follow. The Chief Executive Officer will undertake an investigation into your complaint. This may involve a meeting with you at a time and place convenient to yourself. The Chief Executive Officer will produce a report of the investigation and will then inform you in writing what action is proposed to resolve the complaint.

The whole process – from the Chief Executive Officer's receipt of your letter to reaching a proposed solution – should not take more than four weeks.

If you do not feel that a satisfactory conclusion has been reached, then the complaint should be escalated to the final stage.

### Final Stage

If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of your formal complaint, you can appeal in writing (using the same address above) to SWEDA's Board of Trustees within ten days of you being advised of the previous decision. It must outline the detail of your complaint and the reason why you are dissatisfied with the outcome.

The Board of Trustees will review the way your complaint has been handled and carry out their own investigation. Their decision will be made in writing to you within four weeks of receipt of your appeal. This decision will be the final one from SWEDA; there are no further in-house procedures. You would need to get advice from an organisation such as the CAB or a solicitor as to any further steps you may be able to take.

You may have a supporter to help you during any part of the complaints procedure. This may be a friend or advisor helping to write a letter, accompanying you to any interview or meeting, or any other help you need. Advocacy services, the CAB, and other voluntary organisations offer this kind of help. It is not possible for anyone in SWEDA to help you in these ways when you are making a complaint about SWEDA.