

Complaints and Feedback Policy: Investigation and Improvement

		POLICY	
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Appendix A Complaints response process Appendix B Example investigation and response report Appendix C Local resolution meeting process. Appendix D Expectations PHSO Appendix E Equality Impact Assessment Form (EQIA)	All updated at the same time as this policy
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Patient Experience Team is led by the Associate Director of Nursing, Patient Experience and Complaints and the Chief nurse. The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) & Complaints Office are at the forefront of gaining feedback and being a point of contact for our patients and their carers to seek advice and give their views.

The patient Experience Team works in partnership to enhance the services we provide to the community and actively seeks the views of patients and the public about the quality of our services and feeds back the information to Sherwood Forest Hospitals staff and ensure appropriate action is taken to improve services.

Sherwood Forest Hospitals encourages compliments, comments, complaints and suggestions from patients, carers and the public. Should patients, carers or the public be dissatisfied with the care provided they have a right to be heard and for their concerns to be dealt with promptly, efficiently and courteously. Sherwood Forest Hospitals is committed to ensuring that there is a culture where under no circumstances should patients, relatives or carers be treated negatively as a result of making a complaint or raising a concern.

We welcome all forms of feedback and use this to improve the service we provide. The Local Authority Social Services & National Health Services Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 places an emphasis on personal contact with the complainant so that the complaint can be fully understood and that the response sought by the complainant can be identified. However, any agreed resolution must be proportionate to the content of the complaint, realistic and achievable.

The Complaints Office under the leadership of the Chief nurse are to identify lessons learned from complaints and disseminate them through the organisation as part of 'shared learning'. All complaints are entered on the Trust Incident Reporting System (Datix) - which generates reports that are shared on a quarterly basis through Patient Engagement Committee.

The Trust Complaints and Concerns Policy is based on "The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009", CQC Regulation 16, and the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, (PHSO) Complaint Standards.

1.1 The NHS Constitution and patients' rights

The NHS Constitution sets out the following rights concerning complaints and redress:

- The right to have a complaint you have made about NHS services to be acknowledged within three working days and to have it properly investigated.
- The right to discuss the way you want the complaint to be handled and to know the period within which the investigation is likely to be completed, and the response sent.
- The right to be kept informed of progress and to know the outcome of any investigation

into your complaint including an explanation of the conclusions and confirmation that any action needed in consequence of the complaint has been taken or is proposed to be taken.

- The right to take a complaint to the independent Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman or Local Government Ombudsman, if not satisfied with the way the complaint has been dealt with by the NHS.
- The right to make a claim for judicial review if directly affected by an unlawful act or decision of an NHS body or local authority.
- The right to compensation where there has been harm by negligent treatment.

The NHS Constitution also makes the following pledges:

- To ensure treatment with courtesy and to receive appropriate support throughout the handling of a complaint and the fact that a complaint has been made will not adversely affect future treatment.
- To ensure that when mistakes happen or if harm occurs whilst receiving health care there will be an appropriate explanation and apology, delivered with sensitivity and recognition of the trauma experience and to know that lessons have been learned to help avoid a similar incident occurring again.
- To ensure that organisations learn lessons from complaints and claims and use these to improve NHS services.

1.2 CQC Regulation 16

CQC regulation states that people who use services or others acting on their behalf should:

- Be sure that their comments and complaints are listened to and acted on effectively.
- Know that they will not be discriminated against for making a complaint and that providers will comply with the regulations and ensure:
- There are systems in place to deal with comments and complaints including providing people who use services with information about that system.
- Support people who use services or others acting on their behalf to make comments and complaints.
- Consider fully, respond appropriately and resolve, where possible, any comments and complaints.

1.3 Legislation governing NHS complaints

The NHS complaints system is designed to provide explanations of what happened and where appropriate apologies and information about actions taken to ensure similar incidents do not happen again. The legislation governing NHS complaints is the Local Authority and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2008. The 2009 regulations set out various obligations on NHS bodies; for example, regulation 14 imposes a duty on NHS bodies to provide a written response to complaints. Advice for patients on the two stages of the standard NHS complaints process (introduced in 2009) is set out on the NHS Choices website:

1. Ask your hospital or Trust for a copy of its complaints procedure which will explain how to proceed. Your first step will normally be to raise the matter (in writing or by speaking to them) with the practitioner, e.g., the nurse or doctor concerned, or with the organisation which will have a complaints manager. This is called local resolution, and most cases are resolved at this stage.
2. If you are still unhappy you can refer the matter to the Parliamentary and health service Ombudsman, independent of the NHS and Government.

1.4 The Parliamentary Health Service Ombudsman

The remit of the Office of the Health Service Ombudsman is set out in the Health Service Commissioners Act 1993 (as amended) which gives the Ombudsman power to investigate in certain circumstances including:

- A complaint made by or on behalf of a person that has sustained injustice or hardship in consequence of:
- A failure in a service provided by a health service body
- A failure of such a body to provide a service which it was a function of the body to provide
- Maladministration connected with any other action taken by or on behalf of such a body
- Any failure or maladministration that may have arisen from the health service body, a person employed by that body, a person acting on behalf of that body, or a person to whom that body has delegated responsibility.

2.0 POLICY STATEMENT

Sherwood Forest Hospitals is dedicated to listening to the perspectives of patients and the public regarding the care we provide, and we highly value feedback on patient experiences.

The Patient Experience team actively engages with patients and the public to gather insights on the quality of our services. This feedback is shared with the Trust and staff to ensure necessary actions are taken to enhance service delivery. In line with the NHS Constitution, individuals have the right to expect their complaints to be handled efficiently. Compliments, concerns, and complaints from patients, carers, and the public are encouraged and welcomed.

Every patient has the right to raise any concerns or dissatisfaction regarding their treatment and care with Trust management. They are entitled to a thorough and timely investigation, a transparent explanation, and an apology if warranted. Those who make complaints expect to be treated with dignity, and they seek reassurance that their concerns are taken seriously. Patients, relatives, and carers should never be treated differently for raising a concern or making a complaint. The Trust also acknowledges its responsibility to ensure fairness toward staff involved in the complaint investigation.

Effective complaints handling relies on robust internal processes, including the investigation of complaints, taking appropriate action, monitoring outcomes, supporting staff, and enhancing complainant satisfaction. This process also feeds into the Trust's clinical governance framework, helping to improve the quality of care and ensuring lessons are learned.

The themes emerging from complaints will be integrated into the Trust's Patient Safety Incident Response Plan as part of the broader Patient Safety Incident Response Framework (PSIRF).

The Trust's policy:

- Regards complaints positively as an aid to improving services
- Ensures easy accessibility for persons who wish to complain
- Ensures clear guidance and consistency
- Provides fairness for both staff and complainants and ensures communication on all sides
- Promotes the speedy resolution of complaints at the most appropriate level in the organisation
- Ensures an approach that open, honest and robust evidenced based explanations with the primary aim of resolving the complaint satisfactorily
- Embeds reflection and learning as a result of upheld and partially upheld complaints and concerns.

3.0 DEFINITIONS/ ABBREVIATIONS

Definitions for specific terms used in the policy or procedure should be clarified e.g.

The Trust

means Sherwood Forest Hospitals, including three sites.

Staff

means all employees of the trust including those managed by a third-party organisation on behalf of the Trust.

Concern is an issue raised by a patient, their relative or carer that can be resolved to the complainant's satisfaction not later than the next working day after the day on which the concern was made in line with The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009. When a concern takes longer than one working day to resolve that this is investigated, and a written response is sent to the person raising the concern, via email, or letter.

Complaint

is an expression of dissatisfaction requiring a response. A formal complaint can be in writing or verbal and is made within 12 months of the incident/episode of care, reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

Patient Experience

is the department that manages all methods of patient feedback including complaints, concerns, and compliments.

Advocacy Services

are provided by PohWer and are free, independent and offer confidential services to people throughout the NHS complaint process.

Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO)

provide a service to the public by undertaking independent investigations into complaints that government departments, a range of public bodies in the UK, and the NHS in England have not acted properly or fairly or have provided poor service.

Care Quality Commission (CQC)

is the independent regulator for all health and social care services in England, whether they are provided by the NHS, local authorities, private companies, or voluntary organisations.

Unreasonable complaint conduct

is any behaviour by a current or former complainant which because of its nature or frequency raises substantial health, safety, resource, or equity issues for the party to a complaint.

Complaint is Founded/Partially Founded

if: we did not get things right, we were not patient-focused, we were not open and accountable, we did not act fairly and proportionately, there is organisational learning to be implemented.

Compliment: A compliment is positive feedback that may be provided in writing (often in the form of a thank-you card) or verbally regarding the service received by patients, their relatives, and carers.

PSIRF:

Patient Safety, Incident, Response Framework sets out the NHS's approach to developing and maintaining effective systems and processes for responding to patient safety incidents for the purpose of learning and improving patient safety.

4.0 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Chief Executive Officer/Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Nurse has responsibility for complaints and fulfils the role of the responsible person/s under the regulations. The Chief Executive is accountable for:

- Demonstrating that there is a robust process for the management of complaints and ensuring that complaint responses are signed by authorised personnel.
- Ensuring compliance with Regulation 16 of the Care Quality Commission Regulations.
- Signing off letters responding to complaints, particularly when they relate to serious care failings, ensuring Executive oversight of complaints.

4.1 Chief Medical Officer/Deputy Chief Medical Officer

The Chief Medical Officer will independently review any complaint regarding medical care which may require scoping as a patient safety incident. All independent review requests will be reviewed and facilitated by the Chief Medical Officer/Deputy Chief Medical Officer.

4.2 Chief Nurse

The Chief Nurse has executive responsibility within the Trust for complaints, including informing the Trust Board of performance and compliance status.

4.3 The Trust Board

The Board is required to receive assurance that robust systems are in place to enable feedback to be heard, actioned, and lessons learned to provide the best possible care leading to an improved patient experience or service. The Quality Committee receives quarterly and annual reports on complaints and the actions taken, including an evaluation of the effectiveness of the actions. These reports should be available to the Chief Inspector of Hospitals. Board-level scrutiny of complaints should regularly involve lay representatives. The Trust will publicise an annual complaints report, which provides information of complaints that have been made and what improvements have been implemented.

4.4 Director of Nursing Quality and Governance/Associate Director of Nursing Patient Experience and Complaints

The Director of Nursing Quality Safety and Governance and Associate Director of Nursing Patient Experience and Complaints is responsible for managing the procedures for handling and considering complaints in accordance with the arrangements made under these Regulations, with the support of the Patient Experience Manager, including:

- Providing guidance and templates for Investigation Officers, (IOs) including training sessions related to complaints handling, and provide advice were requested to IOs, and Senior Managers of the organisation, on complex cases, and points of policy or regulations.
- Ensure that where complaints are received which relate to other organisations, joint working protocols are used and managed effectively, providing Divisions to do so, where leading complaints.
- Produce a quarterly and annual report in compliance with the Regulations, and reports complaints, concerns, and compliments to the Patient Experience Committee, Nursing Midwifery and AHP Committee, and the Quality Committee. Including themes, trends and actions because of complaints, and including evidence of actions taken, along with response times.
- Liaise with the Director of Nursing for Quality, Governance, and Safety and Governance Support Unit to share any concerns/complaints that may require investigation, including a rapid review or a Patient safety incident investigation (PSII) report, under, Patient Safety Incident Response Framework, (PSIRF.)
- Frequent communication and with the Clinical Governance team and Trust Solicitors to review complaints linked to investigations and Coroners, to triangulate the learning for the Trust.

4.5 Divisional Patient Experience Leads

The Team manages all contacts made within the Patient Experience Team to ensure that all concerns are dealt with in the correct way according to the policy, ensuring that the

needs of the patient are met where possible and assistance is provided according to the needs of the patient at the time of contact. All written complaints correspondence is read upon receipt and assigned to the correct pathway for investigation.

- Supports all Divisions to co-ordinate complaint investigations, ensuring timeliness of responses.
- Meet with Divisional teams regularly to support with the complaints process.
- Facilitate Local Resolution Meetings to support resolution of concerns between staff members and complainants.
- Monitor the stage of the formal complaints process, confirms the integrity of the electronic data stored and used for reporting and produce regular reports for Trust and divisional meetings.
- Support Patient Experience Officers to establish the relevant aspects of concerns/complaints received for investigation.
- Support Divisions to co-ordinate action plans and monitors the learning implemented as a complaint outcome, liaising with the Divisional teams to capture evidence of actions completed.
- Assist the Parliamentary Health and Service Ombudsman (PHSO) with the management of investigations and liaise with the clinical teams to co-ordinate formal correspondence.
- Provide training and support to staff members in complaint handling.

4.6 Patient Experience Officers

The Officers action all contacts made with the Patient Experience Team:

- Assisting patients/relatives/carers to ensure that their concerns are managed and responded to in the appropriate way.
- Contact patients/relatives/carers who have made contact to discuss their concerns and advise of the process for responding.
- Assist the Divisional Patient Experience Leads in the management of the complaint process, including updating the complaints database as necessary.
- Contact patients/relatives/carers to discuss ongoing complaints as necessary, assist in the meeting process where meetings are arranged to respond to the complaint.
- Monitor all informal concerns to enable a response is made to the client within the timeframe that was agreed with the client at the time of the call.

4.7 Divisional Directors of Nursing / Deputy Divisional Directors of Nursing/Clinical Chairs

The Divisional Directors of Nursing, Deputy Divisional Directors of Nursing and Clinical Chairs are responsible for ensuring that:

- The Patient Experience team has an up-to-date record of staff and contact details relating to complaints handling.
- Read each complaint relating to the division and sends out to the designated persons handling complaints in Division, this can include Deputy Directors of Nursing, Matrons or Ward Sisters/ Charge Nurses.
- Ensure each complaint is investigated fully within the required timescale by the Division

leading on the complaint.

- All complaints responses are reviewed and signed off at a Divisional level, before proceeding to Executive sign off.
- The complaint response fully addresses the concerns raised to avoid the complaint being referred to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman for investigation.
- Responses apologising where necessary and providing an open and honest explanation, including links to any supporting policies or guidance.
- The investigation report and any supporting documents are supplied to the Patient Experience team, to ensure this can be sent to the complainant within the required timescale.
- They, or the most appropriate members of staff, are available to meet with complainants to resolve their issues.
- Responsible for ensuring effective and timely responses to complaints and ensuring that actions as a result of action plans are implemented and followed up.
- Liaise with the Governance Support Unit when complaints are managed parallel to Investigations.
- Escalate serious complaints to the Director of Nursing Quality, Safety and Governance and Medical Director where appropriate.

4.8 Investigating Officers (IO's)

IOs will investigate complaints as requested by Divisional Directors/ Deputy Divisional Directors Matrons/Clinical Chairs and Specialist Doctors as follows:

- They will conduct a full investigation following the process for investigating an incident, where this is a proportional means of responding to the complaint.
- All supporting statements will be saved into the complaints file attached to the Datix system and the Patient Experience Team will ensure it is saved in the individual complaints file.
- Ensure that staff involved in a complaint are included in the investigation process and made aware of the findings and the outcome.
- The IO will write an action plan within the response and will be shared with the Patient Experience Team, to enable the gathering of evidence of completion.

4.9 Consultant Staff

Consultant staff will:

- Should a member of junior medical staff be involved, discuss the complaint with the doctor concerned at the outset and at subsequent stages in the investigation, as necessary.
- As clinical leads for care, consultants should take every opportunity to resolve potential complaints and concerns at an early stage and are recognised as providing valuable contributions and a key role in resolution meetings.
- Consultants and specialist doctors as required must demonstrate leadership in complaints handling, including investigation and developing responses.
- Provide responses to complaints as required, ensuring the responses are clear, open,

honest and transparent and in line with Complaints standards.

4.10 All staff

All staff members are responsible for understanding and adhering to the guidance on front line responses to complaints, comments concerns and compliments as follows:

All staff have a responsibility to understand this policy and its impact on their area of work. Specifically, staff responsibilities include:

- Listening and responding and where possible resolving any voiced and unvoiced expressions of dissatisfaction by patients and carers.
- Reporting immediately to the person in charge of the ward/ department or consultant in charge of the patient's treatment at the time when a complaint or concern is made.
- Acting promptly when requested to assist in investigating a complaint, to ensure the complainant receives a response within the agreed timescale.
- Ensuring patients are not discriminated against as a result of making a complaint, i.e., their care does not suffer or attitudes to them become negatively affected.
- Immediately notify line managers of any instances of discrimination arising from a complaint or concern.
- Ensuring staff receives the appropriate level of training in complaints handling.

5.0 APPROVAL

Patient Safety Committee 12th May 2025.

6.0 DOCUMENT REQUIREMENTS

A complaint is described as 'an expression of dissatisfaction requiring a response' and can be made verbally or in writing. In the case of a verbal complaint the complainant will be asked to verify the facts of the complaint in a summary statement sent to them with the acknowledgment letter.

- If the complainant is not the patient, written consent, and identification is required from the patient or next of kin, including any evidence from the executor of estates or Lasting Power of Attorney, (LPA).
- All complaints must receive a written or telephone acknowledgment within three working days and formal response within an agreed timescale dependent on the complexity of the complaint or a timescale agreed upon with the complainant, from the Chief Executive or a nominated responsible person.
- The primary responsibility on receipt of a complaint is to ensure that the patient's immediate health care needs are being met.

6.1 Concerns

Staff have a responsibility to deal with any initial concern rapidly, and in a professional and sensitive manner. This will very often prevent the complainant's concerns from escalating into a formal complaint.

- Whoever receives the concern should demonstrate understanding of the situation and make efforts to resolve the concern there and then.
- Where the recipient is unable to investigate at that time or feels unable to provide the assurances that the complainant is seeking, the complainant should be referred to their immediate line manager or Matron or the concern escalated to the Patient Experience Team and a decision will be made with the agreement of the complainant whether to escalate to a formal complaint investigation.
- Concerns, which are recorded on Datix, and where they have been escalated to formal complaints, are linked for reporting purposes.
- All Trust staff can record concerns directly on Datix and any unresolved concerns will be addressed by the Patient Experience Team following discussion with the relevant staff member/s.
- Divisional/Specialty Datix dashboards have been developed for all divisions/specialties to access Patient Information Feedback.

6.2 Compliments

In order to provide a balanced picture compliments are recorded on Datix and reported to the Trust.

- Compliments are recorded on centralised Datix system by the Patient Experience Team and reported to the patient Experience Committee, quarterly, the Nursing Midwifery and AHP Committee, biannually and the Quality Committee via a quarterly and annual update.
- All staff are able to record compliments directly onto Datix which will be included in Patient Experience reporting.
- Divisional/Specialty Datix dashboards have been developed for all divisions/specialties to access Patient Information Feedback.

6.3 Who can make a complaint?

Complaints and concerns can be made by former or existing patients of the Trust or by a person acting on their behalf with their consent.

- A person can complain if they have been affected by an action or decision of the Trust.
- A complaint can be made by someone acting on behalf of a former or existing patient if that person:
 - Is a child: If a minor is considered to be 'Gillick competent', attempts should be made to obtain their consent prior to disclosing sensitive clinical information to the parents or guardian. Advice should be sought from the Legal Services Manager and Specialist Safeguarding Team.
 - Is unable to make the complaint themselves because of physical incapacity or lack of capacity within the meaning of the Mental Capacity Act 2005.

Mental Capacity. If the patient is unable to give consent due to a lack of mental capacity, a check needs to be made to determine if the complainant is a significant person in the patient's life who is considering their best interests. Consideration needs to be given to any instructions the patient has made when they had capacity with regard to disclosure of information, or if they have appointed an Attorney with a Health & Welfare - Lasting Power of Attorney. This should be considered in conjunction with the Trust policy for the Mental Capacity Act. If it is considered the complainant is an interested party in a patient's life and care, in order to maintain confidentiality any information disclosed must be focused on the complaint and not involve issues outside of the scope of the complaint raised.

- Next of kin' has no definition in law and if the patient is still alive holds no relevance in complaints handling.
- Has died: the relationship of the complainant to the deceased patient must be clarified and confirmed as the next of kin or Executor of the Estate.
- Has requested the representative to act on their behalf. The Trust has a duty to preserve and uphold patient confidentiality and at the same time have a realistic approach to answering third-party complaints. Unless the patient has given consent the only factors that will be included in such responses are those required to enable the Trust to adequately answer the complaint, excluding reference to clinical details. For many reasons it may not always be possible to obtain a patient's explicit authority, however, reasonable steps must always be taken to obtain this.
- In the event, the patient's consent or appropriate authorisation is not available the Trust will need to consider its response in respect of the inclusion of any of the patient's clinical details.
- The timescale for responding to complaints will only start when consent has been established.
- Some complainants instruct solicitors to act as their advocates in respect of their complaints. The appropriate authorisation from the patient should be provided. The correspondence from the solicitors must be explicit that they are acting in respect of a complaint and not with the intention of commencing a claim against the Trust. If there are any doubts advice should be sought from the Legal Services Manager.
- If a Member of Parliament (MP) makes a complaint on behalf of a constituent and states, in writing, that they have the patient's consent to access confidential patient information this will be accepted without further resort to the patient. (NHS Confidentiality Code of Practice, 2002).
- Independent Advocacy Services are available for anyone who requires support to make a complaint about NHS Services. Details of the Advocacy Services are available from the PRT or in the case of Prisons provided on the individual Healthcare Concern Form. Appendix 5 contains advocacy information.

6.4 Complaints excluded from investigation

Complaints that are not required to be dealt with under the NHS Complaints Regulations 2009 and this policy are:

- A complaint made by a Local Authority, NHS body, Primary Care Provider (Clinical Commissioning Groups), or an independent provider.
- A complaint made by an employee of a local authority or NHS body about any matter relating to employment.
- A complaint where the subject matter is the same as that of a complaint previously made by this complainant and previously investigated and resolved.
- A complaint arising out of the alleged failure of the Trust to comply with a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

6.5 Confidentiality

- Complaints and concerns will be handled in the strictest confidence. Information will only be disclosed to those who have a demonstrable need to access it.
- Care must be taken in cases where the patient's records contain information provided in confidence by, or about, a third party who is not a health professional.
- Letters, statements, and other documentation relating to the complaint will be kept at all times separate from the patient's medical records.

6.6 Record Keeping

Details about all complaints received, formal, and concerns will be entered into Datix and given a reference number.

- Complaints will be coded with national codes (KO41a for Department of Health returns) and with locally agreed codes to enable reporting and identification of trends.
- All correspondence received by the Patient Experience Team in relation to any complaint or concern will form part of the electronic complaints file, which is potentially disclosable to the Ombudsman, to legal representatives and to the complainant.
- Complaints, Concerns, and Compliments will be reported to the relevant Trust governance meetings.

6.7 Duty of Candour (Being Open)

From April 2013 all NHS organisations are required to comply with the Duty of Candour and inform patients if their safety has been compromised.

The Trust will ensure that patients/relatives/carers receive a prompt apology for any incidents when this has occurred, whether or not a complaint has been made or information has been requested and ensure that lessons are learned to prevent them from being repeated. This will be led and reported by the Director of Nursing Quality, and Governance.

6.8 Collaboration with other organisations

The Trust will work with other organisations to comply with the complaint regulations and to provide an efficient and effective complaints-handling process including:

- The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 require NHS Trusts to work with other NHS trusts and local authority Social Services departments when handling complaints that cross these organisational boundaries, to provide the complainant with a single combined response where possible.
- When a complaint is received in one organisation that applies to two or more organisations, the Patient Experience Lead will support the individual Divisional Lead who will liaise to agree on who will lead the response and provide a single letter of response.
- When a complaint is received in one organisation and it relates to another organisation in totality, then the complainants' consent will be requested, and, if given, the complaint will be transferred to the other organisation to deal with in its entirety by the Patient Experience Team.

6.9 Stages in Resolving Complaints Local Resolution

The first stage of the Complaints Process is entitled, Local Resolution. The intention of Local Resolution is to resolve the complaint to the complainant's satisfaction at the earliest opportunity, providing a quick resolution. In doing so, our approach should be open, honest, fair, flexible, and conciliatory. The objective is to provide the fullest possible opportunity for investigation and resolution as quickly and sensibly as circumstances allow, aiming to satisfy the complainant whilst also being fair to staff.

The Trust will endeavor to achieve local resolution through the investigation of the complaint, writing letters, and through meeting with complainants.

- The method of resolution is decided in discussion with the complainant when the Patient Experience Team contacts the complainant, or during discussion with the Divisional Complaints Lead; this may for example be a meeting, phone call, or a letter.
- It is important that everything is done to resolve the issue as soon as possible to investigate appropriately and with compassion and respect. A complaint that is delayed in responding to causes increased anxiety.
- Complainants will be kept updated frequently with regards to any delays on the progress of the complaint, this will be done initially within the Patient Experience, any subsequent contact will be made by Investigating Officers, within Division.
- Anonymous complaints will be logged onto Datix and investigated as far as is possible though anonymity can result in challenges to do so thoroughly.
- In instances when a complaint and claim are brought at the same time the complaints process will still apply unless contrary to the Trust's legal advisers or insurers.
- Where a complaint relates to a logged incident the complaint response timescale may be extended pending completion of the internal investigation.

If the relevant Divisional Directors of Nursing and the Associate Director of Nursing for Patient Experience and Complaints are satisfied that all reasonable measures have been taken to manage the complaint investigation and response, then this should be stated and the option for them to pursue an independent review by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman should be highlighted. The Trust should ensure the public are aware of the purpose and what can be achieved through the complaints process from the outset. It may be necessary to signpost members to the most appropriate organisation if outside of the scope of the trust.

6.10 Independent Review by the Parliamentary & Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO)

If a complainant remains dissatisfied following local resolution, they can ask the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) to undertake an independent review of their case. The Ombudsman will not investigate a complaint until the complaint's procedure has been invoked and exhausted, unless, in the circumstance of a particular case, he/she judges that these conditions would be unreasonable.

When an Ombudsman decides to investigate a complaint, the Divisional Complaints Leads will liaise with the Ombudsman for the complaint. The Ombudsman is appointed by the Crown and is responsible to Parliament. He/she is therefore independent of the NHS and of government. The Ombudsman has jurisdiction to investigate any complaints made by or on behalf of NHS patients and to instruct where changes are required to be made or redress offered. All complaints referred to the PHSO will be monitored by the Patient Experience Manager and when action plans are necessary these will be reported to the Divisions.

6.11 Discrimination

Patients and complainants should not feel discriminated against for raising a concern, complaint, or making an enquiry. In order to avoid this complaint letters and investigation correspondence must not be stored or held in patients' medical records; however, if a patient or family member raises a concern or complaint during a care episode it may be documented that they had done so, and it had been reported for investigation or action.

Any instances of discrimination arising from a complaint or concern should be immediately notified to the Associate Director of Nursing for Patient Experience and Complaints and Director of Nursing Quality, Governance and Safety to take the appropriate steps to remedy this.

6.12 Complaint Management

The investigation process and response will take account of any special needs of the complainant, including those whose first language is not English. The process for dealing with formal complaints is time limited and will be managed corporately by the Patient Experience Team, timeliness to responses will be based around complexity, timeframes identified.

All formal complaints will be recorded and acknowledged within 3 working days of receipt, which will include the Trust's complaints information leaflet and information relating to PohWer advocacy services

- The Patient Experience Team will request consent where required. Where the complaint is made by a third party, consent from the patient will be obtained in accordance with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulations 2018, before a response is sent.
- If the patient is still an inpatient at the time the complaint is received the investigator will make direct contact with them, visiting inpatient areas or with their representative to discuss their concerns. A written response may still be provided.
- In cases where the investigating officer has contacted the complainant and has addressed, and answered, their concerns to their satisfaction, the outcome of that conversation will be recorded and sent to the Divisional Complaints Lead for the complaints file. A closing letter will be approved at Divisional level and sent from the Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive Officer or Chief Nurse.
- All complaint investigations will be sent to the designated Investigating Officer (IO) within the Division for investigation with the relevant information and report template, Appendix B.
- The Divisional Director of Nursing will be copied into all correspondence relating to the complaint, and is responsible for the response, and for ensuring that it is done within the timescales and fully addresses the complaint.
- The IO will investigate the complaint relating to the relevant division using the Trust's investigation processes and templates provided.
- The Lead will take responsibility for liaising with the other divisions and will compile the final response for the complainant.
- If another organisation is involved, the Patient Experience team will seek consent to share the complaint with that organisation and, if consent is given, will liaise with the other organisation about which organisation will lead the response, and collaborate with them on a single response to the complainant.
- The IO will be responsible for identifying and contacting the relevant individuals who need to provide statements to answer the complaint.
- The IO is responsible for obtaining the medical records and will make them available to any clinician required to provide a response, including copies of relevant records with the completed investigation report.
- The IO will keep the Patient Experience Team informed in the event of a delay in responding to the complaint within the agreed timescale, and the reason for the delay. The Patient Experience team will keep the complainant informed about any delay, in the first instance. If the IO is absent for any reason a nominated Matron must ensure that the investigation is not delayed.

- The IO or nominated person in Division will forward the completed investigation, completed letter of response and action plan where relevant to the Patient Experience Team who will send to the Chief Executive/ Deputy Chief Executive or Chief Nurse for sign off.
- The IO will ensure all completed relevant documents are attached to the individual datix file and are emailed to the Divisional Complaints Lead, in Patient Experience, who will be save them in the complaints file.

Step	Time frame	Patient Experience Department	Divisional Matrons/Assistant Directors/Investigating Officer	Divisional PE Lead/HOPE	Additional comments
Receipt and review	Day 1	<p>Patient Experience Officers to triage whether formal complaint or concern, resolve where possible.</p> <p>Review Datix systems for incidents/inquests if complaint relates to deceased patient/potential SI/Safeguarding Team.</p>			<p>If considered a concern, resolve and confirm the agreed action with complainant and record as concern.</p> <p>If complaint relates to potential media interest/or regulatory bodies, escalate to Divisional Directors of Nursing for the involved division/Executives/communications Team.</p>
Acknowledge	Day 1-3	Establish the need for consent, record onto Datix and create acknowledgement for Patient Experience Manager Signature.		Call complainant, (when consent is provided) apologise for concerns, establish context, reassure being addressed, agree complaint response and inform who their main contact.	If no contact details retrieve from CareFlow-if not patient and no contact number/email address written acknowledgment requesting, contact details.

Agree complaint investigation points and resolve where possible.		Scan in complaint documents, complete relevant information to the investigation report template recording onto Datix Email to relevant Divisional Lead Record on internal PE complaints spreadsheet Draft acknowledge-ment letter to complainant to confirm details, timeframes and contacts for Patient Experience Manager sign off Manage consent as indicated.		Review complaint file and contact relevant divisional Matron if complex Liaise with GSU if scoping necessary. Liaise with external agencies as required Email the investigation report and supporting documents to the relevant investigating officer copying to Divisional Director of Nursing/Deputy Divisional Director/ Safeguarding teams as required.	
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		Create file.			
Investigate			<p>Full investigation commenced by individual divisions including a review of medical/nursing records including interviews with relevant staff</p> <p>All evidence to be copied and included with the complaint's investigation template, ensuring all sections of the report are completed.</p> <p>shared with</p>	<p>Divisional Leads/IO to contact complainant to introduce themselves as IO and to request information if required, providing assistance to resolve any aspects of complaint that can be remedied and advise of any delays in a timely manner.</p>	<p>Investigation Officer to inform the Patient Experience Manager and raise Datix as required if initial investigation findings identify serious risk for the Trust, escalating to own Divisional Director of Nursing.</p>
Resolution Meeting (where agreed)			<p>All completed investigation reports are provided to the Divisional PE Lead</p>	<p>Support meeting setups, book room, establish attendees and invitations.</p>	<p>Divisional PE lead, Family Liaison Officer, Patient Experience and Engagement Officer or the Patient Experience Manager to support all resolution meetings.</p>

			prior to the resolution meeting to enable thorough review of case for all attendees	Arrange and support pre-meet. Accurately record meeting. Post meeting recording and summary letter drafted for complainant	
			Relevant DD to edit/approve/assure letter ready for exec sign-off. Ensure learning points identified and included in the letter.	Draft response and identification of learning points. Confirm complaint outcome Develop action plan for sharing with complainant.	
Sign off		Scan final signed off response Complete action tracker and email relevant documents to relevant PE lead		Obtain Exec sign-off Action any instructions following exec review. Send copy of final version of letter to all involved. Update DATIX.	

6.13 Information / medical records

Only those investigating the issues would access a patient's personal information. A member of staff requested to provide a statement or answer issues raised in the complaint should be given access to the relevant information if necessary to aid the investigation. A complaint should only be made known to those directly involved in responding to or investigating the issues raised. Complaints records must be kept separate from health records and no reference to a complaint made within the health records. All staff must comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018.

6.14 Answering the issues within the complaint

Staff responding to questions and issues within the complaint will be provided with a copy of the investigation template where the issues are detailed in the first section. These will then be highlighted to indicate where staff are required to respond. They will enter their response into the relevant sections and the corresponding learning or actions to prevent recurrence or share learning. Divisional Leads will complete the final letter of response, ensuring a full investigation has taken place and has included all relevant services as required.

6.15 Investigation Process

The Patient Experience Team will assist with the administration involved with complaints handling.

The procedures for managing incidents and claims for negligence are dealt with under separate policies. However, if during the course of investigating an incident, a complaint is received, the incident procedure should take precedence in terms of investigation. If the investigation of a complaint reveals the need to take action and undertake a rapid review aligned with the incident procedure, the IO should inform the lead deputy director and again the incident procedure should take preference in terms of investigation and will include answering any concerns raised during that process by the complainant, ensuring two processes are not taking place.

It may not always be clear whether a complainant is intending to make a claim for litigation. It may be that an open and sympathetic approach will satisfy the complainant. A hostile or defensive reaction is more likely to encourage the complainant to seek information or remedy through the courts.

Complaint's correspondence and accident/adverse incident reporting information will **not** be regarded by the courts as privileged. This means that all correspondence and papers generated in the course of a complaint investigation, including staff statements etc. will have to be disclosed to a claimant if they later pursue a claim for negligence through the courts. From October 2001, the Data Protection Act classified complaints and untoward incident documentation as personal data.

Patients are able to request copies of complaints and risk management files in the same way as they do for their health records. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 is entirely separate and does not relate to personal information.

If an investigation of a complaint reveals a possibility that there may have been negligence on the part of the Trust, the Investigating Officer should immediately inform the Divisional Director of Nursing and the Associate Director of Nursing for Patient Experience and Complaints. The existence of negligence does not prevent a full explanation being given and if appropriate, an apology. An apology is not an admission of liability.

If at any time it becomes clear that the complainant is intending to take formal legal action, a copy of the complaint and response will be sent to the Legal Team for review prior to CEO sign-off. If it is necessary to delay the response while the legal process takes its course, the complainant will be informed of a revised timescale and kept updated with progress.

During the investigation, those involved must inform their Divisional Patient Experience Lead of any delays and the reasons for this, so they can provide appropriate updates to the complainant. It may be appropriate for the Patient Experience Lead to contact the complainant to keep them informed of progress and if there are any delays and the reason(s) for this.

Where a complaint identifies junior members of staff this should be drawn to their attention by their manager/consultant, and they should be given the opportunity to reply. Staff involved may need to be interviewed to ascertain the facts.

Where staff have been specifically identified, they will need to respond to the issues raised within the investigation template and report their facts and position. Such information must include the background to the event where relevant, factual detail of the staff member's involvement in the situation, an explanation of what did happen and why it happened, and details of any mitigating circumstances and must address all relevant issues raised by the complainant; the aim of the response is to answer the complainant's questions and issues. The manager/consultant of the junior member of staff should also provide their comments/response.

Staff involved in a complaint should be given the necessary support during the investigation process, and the process should be a mechanism for learning and improving practice.

All members of staff directly involved, or contributing to the complaint should be informed of the outcome of the investigation through their line manager and be provided with a copy of the response being sent to the complainant.

6.16 Investigation detail

The Divisional Director of Nursing/Clinical Chair is responsible for ensuring a full and thorough investigation takes place and the following points should be considered:

- A review of the relevant patient documentation, policies, and guidance documents must be undertaken.
- The cause of a complaint needs to be established to enable appropriate action to be taken to prevent reoccurrence.
- The investigation template provides a structured approach, and it is important that as well as responding to the points raised there are accompanying actions and learning points.
- Ensure that the aim of the investigation which is to identify the true cause of the problem is clearly understood by the staff involved.
- Ensure that the investigation is independent from the staff directly involved but inclusive, i.e., if a Clinical Lead has a complaint about them as an individual, the Medical Director will have oversight of this investigation report, and responses provided, or a nominated representative made by the Medical Director. This is not about believing the individual but about providing assurance to the complainant that we have been open and balanced.
- Ensure that all staff involved in the complaint are aware of the complaint and are involved as appropriate. Staff who have been complained about should be made aware of the situation, be given the opportunity to respond and their views taken into account.
- Ensure that all correspondence and documentation are retained by the Patient Experience Lead or coordinator.
- All key documentation must be retained electronically on the complaints database. (e.g., complaint letters, response letters, investigation template returns, correspondence with complainant).
- Staff should use the investigation template.

6.17 Documentation

The complaint templates are included as appendices within this policy.

6.18 Approval Process

The proposed response from the division will be provided to the Divisional Complaints Lead after Divisional sign off by the Divisional Director of Nursing, Clinical Chair or nominated individual.

The proposed draft response will be sent for approval to the CEO for final sign off.

This will be checked regarding:

- All queries have been investigated and answered.
- All relevant staff have had the opportunity to contribute.
- Documentation guidelines have been followed particularly that the investigation template is legible, and appropriately edited and that the executive response has been drafted using the template.

- Actions have been identified.
- All grammar and language used is correct and appropriate, using the correct format.

If requested, the signed final copy may be circulated to relevant staff involved in the complaint – **though this must not be placed in any of the patient records, unless mitigating circumstances.**

Complainants will be provided with 10 working days to respond to the Patient Experience Team should they remain dissatisfied with the investigation findings. This advice is included in the final letter of response, along with details for PHSO for independent advice.

6.19 Police / Legal Involvement / Escalation

Police Investigations

When a complaint is also the subject of a police investigation; wherever possible, copies of the medical records should be obtained to allow the internal Trust investigation to be conducted as usual if permitted by the Police. Discussion on how to proceed will need to be considered on an individual basis together with the Chief Nurse. Refer to the Guidelines for the NHS in support of the Memorandum of Understanding 2006, regarding police investigations.

Coroner Inquests

Where it has been identified that the complaint is also the subject of an inquest, discretion will be applied to determine when a response will be provided in relation to the inquest. The Patient Experience Manager will liaise with the Trust Solicitor and agree sharing or response/LRM.

Any concerns raised by family members with the Bereavement Centre will be managed in the first instance by the Bereavement Centre and escalated to the Governance Support Unit and Patient Experience Team when required for review and further action.

Legal Claims

Where a clinical negligence claim is being pursued through legal processes, these cases should be discussed with the Legal Services Team and agreement made on the process to be followed, recognising that it may be legal services that will coordinate an investigation.

External Reviews

Complainants may ask for an external review of their complaint or treatment as part of the process of resolving their complaint. Any external review will be initiated by the Medical Director and Chief Nurse.

Patient Safety Incident Investigation

Some complaints will already have been reported and investigated under the Trust's patient safety incident investigation process.

The incident investigation may be ongoing when the complaint is received therefore all correspondence will be directed to the relevant Governance Facilitator.

The Patient Experience Team will liaise closely with the Governance Support Unit and where appropriate the scope of the incident will include the complaint and answer any points raised.

The complainant will be informed that the patient safety incident will supersede the complaint investigation and subsequent communications will be made by Divisional Leads.

The signed-off report will be shared with the complainant by the Family Liaison Officer, and any subsequent meetings will be coordinated by GSU, and the Family Liaison Officer.

Escalation Procedure

During a complaint or concern investigation, any concerns identified by the Patient Experience Team or Investigating Officer relating to a serious organisational risk must be escalated immediately to the Director of Nursing Quality and Governance, the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Nurse.

Remedy

The remedy of a complaint should be suitable and proportional when there has been injustice or hardship resulting from poor administration or poor service for example non-financial remedies, in the form of apologies or actions to change decisions about care or a service provided to an individual.

Where a complainant requests financial remedy or reimbursement, the Patient Experience Manager, Associate Director of Nursing for Patient Experience and Complaints and Trust Solicitor will assess each case following investigation. They will determine whether to refer the case to the NHS Resolution if negligence is identified, decline to offer the financial reimbursement, or remedy, or make an offer based on poor quality care, experience, or complaint handling when there is no clear negligence.

This, in turn, will need to be agreed with the relevant operational management team and budget holder responsible for the service that was involved, with authorisation in line with the financial authorisation matrix. Financial remedy will always be a monetary sum paid directly to the relevant party as an ex-gratia payment. This will adhere to the Trust's financial standing orders. The giving of gifts is not permitted.

6.20 Habitual or Unreasonably Persistent Complainants

Regardless of the manner in which the complaint is made and pursued, its substance should be considered carefully on its objective merits.

Complaints about matters unrelated to previous complaints should be similarly approached objectively and without any assumption that they are bound to be frivolous, vexatious, or unjustified.

It is accepted that complainants or others coming into contact with the Trust may act out of character. They may show signs of habitual and unreasonable behaviour for several reasons and may be unaware that their attitude/behaviour is causing unnecessary distress to others. Unacceptable behaviour that continues through several contacts, however, should be considered against this procedure.

Trust staff should not be faced with verbal aggression or abuse. Staff encountering such abuse by telephone, are encouraged to politely explain the situation to the caller and advise that, if the behaviour continues, they will bring the call to a close. It is inappropriate for any member of staff to tolerate objectionable behaviour in the course of their work, and meetings with aggressive, abusive, or excessively confrontational complainants may similarly be terminated or refused.

- One definition of habitual and unreasonable behaviour is to harass, distress, annoy, tease, cause trouble, agitate, disturb, or pursue issues excessively.
- Behaviour exhibited by a person (and/or anyone acting on their behalf) may be deemed to be habitually demanding or unreasonable where previous or current contact with them shows that they meet any of the following criteria:

a) persisting in pursuing a complaint where the NHS complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and exhausted, but no appeal has been made to the Parliamentary Health Service Ombudsman.

b) seeking to prolong contact by continually raising further concerns or questions upon receipt of a response. (Care must be taken not to discard new issues, which are significantly different from the original issue. These might need to be addressed as separate issues).

c) unwilling to accept documented evidence as being factual or denying receipt of an adequate response in spite of correspondence specifically answering their questions or does not accept that facts can sometimes be difficult to verify when a long period of time has elapsed.

d) does not clearly identify the precise problem, despite reasonable efforts of the Trust staff and, where appropriate, the Independent Advocacy Service, to help them specify their concerns, and/or where the concerns are not within the remit of the Trust to investigate.

e) focuses on a matter to an extent, which is out of proportion to its significance and continues to focus on this point.

- f) has threatened or used actual physical violence towards staff or their families or associates.** This will, in itself, cause personal contact with the person and/or their representatives to be discontinued and the issue will, thereafter, only be pursued through written communication. In these cases, consideration will be given to contacting the Police.
- g) has harassed or been personally abusive or verbally aggressive on more than one occasion towards staff dealing with their issue** or their families or associates. However, staff must recognise that people may sometimes act out of character at times of stress, anxiety or illness and should make reasonable allowances for this.
- h) has had, in the course of addressing an issue, an excessive number of contacts with the Trust,** or an unreasonable amount of points to be addressed, placing unreasonable demands on staff time or resources. (A contact may be in person, or by telephone, letter, fax or e-mail).
- i) has electronically recorded meetings or face to face/telephone conversations** without the prior knowledge or consent of the other parties involved.
- j) displays unreasonable demands or expectations** and fails to accept that these may be unreasonable (e.g. insists on responses to enquiries being provided more urgently than is reasonable or normally recognised practice).

This list is not exhaustive and other examples of unreasonable behaviour or conduct may be deemed to be habitually demanding or unreasonable.

Options for dealing with habitual or unreasonable behaviour:

Where people have been identified as exhibiting habitual or unreasonable behaviour in accordance with the above criteria, the Patient Experience Manager, the Corporate Matron for Patient Experience, Chief Executive, and the relevant Director (or their deputy) will decide what action to take. The Patient Experience Manager will then implement the action and will notify complainants in writing of the action that has been taken and the reasons for it, following the stages below:

Stage 1:

Once it is clear that an individual meets the criteria above, it may be appropriate to inform them, in writing, that their conduct is unacceptable and that, if it continues, they may be classified as habitual or unreasonable. The letter should state clearly which Elements of their behaviour are causing problems and be accompanied by a copy of the Policy for receiving, investigating, responding to and learning from Complaints, Concerns and Compliments.

Stage 2:

It may be appropriate to try to resolve matters by drawing up a signed agreement with the person, which sets out a code of behaviour for the parties involved, if the Trust is to continue communication or to process a complaint. If these terms are contravened consideration will be given to implementing Stage 3 of the procedure.

A code of behaviour could include the following:

- An agreement relating to appropriate behaviour and conduct. Any such agreement should normally not extend beyond six months.
- Restricting contact to one of two individuals within the Trust.
- Restricting the method of communication (e.g. by letter only, not fax/e-mail).
- Offering a meeting to attempt to resolve outstanding issues.

Stage 3:

Where the Trust has responded fully to the points raised by the person and has tried to resolve the issues, without success, and continuing contact on the matter would serve no useful purpose, the individual will be notified by the Chief Executive that the contact is at an end and that further contact will be acknowledged, filed, but not responded to.

In extreme cases, or where the safety of staff is at risk, the individual will be informed that the Trust reserves the right to pass habitually unreasonable behaviour to the solicitors. All contact with the person and/or investigation of the complaint will be suspended whilst seeking legal advice or other contact with other relevant agencies.

Any further complaints received from a person who has been designated as habitually demanding or unreasonable, under this policy, will be subject to a reasonable investigation as deemed necessary by the Patient Experience Manager and Associate Director of Nursing Patient Experience and Complaints in conjunction with advice received from staff dealing with complaints.

The Chief Executive (or deputy), in conjunction with a nominated Director, may, at their discretion, choose to omit one or two of the above stages.

Withdrawing habitual or unreasonable status

When individuals have been classified as habitual or unreasonable, the status will continue to apply for six months, at the end of which period habitual or unreasonable status will automatically be withdrawn. In exceptional circumstances, the Trust will consider withdrawing this status earlier if, for example, the person subsequently demonstrates a more reasonable approach. The status of habitual or unreasonable will only apply to specific issues, not general. If a new issue comes to light, an individual may not be deemed habitual or unreasonable unless their behaviour demonstrated this relating to the new issue. Where it appears to be appropriate to withdraw habitually or unreasonable behaviour status, the approval of the Chief Executive and relevant Director (or their deputy) will be required. Subject to this approval, normal contact with the person will be resumed.

6.21 Meetings with Complainants

It can be helpful to offer complainants the opportunity to meet relevant clinicians or a manager to discuss the outcome of the investigation. This also enables the complainant the opportunity to ask additional questions and seek clarification on points and aid the local resolution. This meeting is held as the Trust's response to a complaint.

The arrangements for such meetings should be timely; and aim to be held within the timeframe agreed with the complainant, however, it is acknowledged that it can be difficult to arrange a meeting due to the availability of clinicians. Clearly, the investigation must continue so that all findings are available for the meeting, and the Patient Experience Team will maintain communications with the complainants during this time.

Meetings can be electronically recorded (unless the complainant/patient/staff participating does not consent to this and written notes will be taken). This will be sent together with details of any relevant action/s to be taken. POhWER independent advocates recommend "that all local resolution meetings be recorded as this avoids any doubt or future discrepancies and allows the patient to listen to the recording and hear what was said, not what they thought was said.

A recording helps the advocate focus the client / patient on the responses actually received rather than an interpretation on written notes. This also helps get across the empathy given by service provider staff during the meeting which helps support any written apology.

All Trust staff must attend a complaint meeting if required. However, it should be noted that attendance by complainants is voluntary, and it is their right to decline an invitation to meet. An appropriately trained and experienced member of staff should chair the meeting to ensure issues are addressed and all attendees are supported.

However, when a meeting has been suggested to resolve a complaint when the written response has not achieved this, the Trust must clearly inform the complainant that if a meeting is declined written responses cannot be provided indefinitely and will be offered 3 meeting dates. Should a complainant remain dissatisfied following receipt of a written response, any request for a meeting will be reviewed and decided by the Divisional Director of Nursing for the Divisions involved. Each complaint case will be reviewed, and a decision taken on a case-by-case basis.

6.22 Possible Claims for Compensation

Where a complainant has expressed a wish to claim for compensation in their letter of complaint, the acknowledgement letter from the Trust will detail the way in which this will be taken forward. If, following investigation, financial remedy is the best option this will be discussed by the Patient Experience Manager and the Trust Solicitor to determine the best course of action. Once agreed the way forward will be discussed with the relevant Divisional Directors of Nursing. If it is agreed that compensation should be paid, the amount will be determined and agreed by the aforementioned people.

The authorisation of payment will need to be agreed with the relevant budget holder and in line with the financial authorisation matrix in place.

If a complainant explicitly indicates an intention to take legal action, the complainant will be advised that their letter will be passed to the Legal Services Team review.

6.23 Complaints and Disciplinary Procedures

This procedure is concerned with resolving complaints and not with investigating disciplinary matters. The complaints procedure is not designed to apportion blame amongst staff; however, some complaints may identify information about serious matters, which may lead to a disciplinary investigation and in these cases the appropriate manager should inform the Human Resources department to ensure their involvement. There should be no reason to delay responding to the complainant because of disciplinary procedure.

6.24 Concerns Reporting

- Any concern received throughout the Trust that cannot be resolved locally by the relevant staff should contact the Patient Experience team for reporting and formal investigation.
- The concern will be logged on to Datix and investigated by the Patient Experience Officers.
- The Patient Experience Officers are responsible for keeping the patient/relative/carer informed of the progress/outcome of the concern and feeding back to the relevant ward/department.
- Any concern unresolved will be escalated to a formal complaint with the consent of the patient/relative or carer.
- Datix dashboards providing complaints, concerns, and compliments feedback is available for divisions to retrieve real-time data. The Patient Experience Manager will provide data to Divisional Directors of Nursing via the Ward Assurance, the Patient Experience Committee, quarterly and the Nursing and Midwifery and AHP Committee biannually.
- Provide an identifiable and accessible service to the community served by the Trust.
- Provide assistance in the resolution of issues and concerns raised by service users through negotiation and liaison with Trust staff, other local NHS staff, health and health-related organisations and, where appropriate, other Patient Experience Teams in organisations or Trusts.
- Give accurate and appropriate information to individuals wishing to access the NHS complaints procedure.
- Refer where appropriate to independent advice and advocacy services.
- Monitor concerns and trends and highlight information needs, including identifying gaps in services or problems with systems or processes with the relevant manager.
- Support staff at all levels of the Trust to foster a responsive culture through positive support, sharing good practice and providing swift advice to staff when difficulties occur.

6.25 Action Planning and Learning

An action plan will be completed for each complaint when the complaint is founded/partially founded. The plan must be designed to address both individual and systemic issues. A copy of the final written response and the proposed action plan developed by Divisional Leads will be sent to the Patient Experience Lead the following actions will be undertaken:

- Progress against the Action Plan will be reported to the Patient Experience team within four weeks of the response. This is the responsibility of the Divisional Lead. Ensuring an Action owner is identified and a time for completion is provided.
- Actions will be captured within the action tracker on Datix and shared on the weekly Patient Experience tracker.
- The Associate Director of Nursing will report via the Patient Experience Committee, considering actions and improvements that have taken place, with escalation to the Quality Committee.
- Good complaint handling is not limited to providing an individual remedy to the complainant. Feedback and lessons learnt from complaints contribute to service improvement.
- Complaints are one way in which the Trust can learn from the experiences of patients. Changes to service and practice will be identified by the Divisional Matrons/Assistant Directors and Managers, and action plans developed to implement and monitor outcomes, seeing examples reporting quarterly through the Patient Experience Committee.
- The Divisions will report on progress against the action plans to the Patient Experience Team and include the outcomes in their Divisional governance reports.
- The Trust will publish examples of changes to service and practice in the Annual report.

The investigation template includes a section for actions and learning identified. These entries will be copied and pasted into a running action log spread sheet action tracker) for use within divisional meetings and for monitoring progress, analysis and onward reporting. Actions will also be entered into Datix by the Patient Experience Team.

A bi-annual internal audit of complaint files will include a sample of complaints made across the organisation. The content of the audits will include:

- the management of complaints in respect of acknowledgment and following policy and procedures
- response rates
- the effectiveness of local resolution for reopened cases
- appropriate risk grade
- appropriate identification and action for serious incidents, safeguarding issues, information requests

User Satisfaction

Satisfaction surveys are included in the final response to complainants and changes to processes are considered and made as a result of these surveys where necessary and communicated to the divisional teams.

External Reporting

- Annual report for the commissioner and for this to be available to any public request and available on the Trust website
- The KO41a return.

7.0 MONITORING COMPLIANCE AND EFFECTIVENESS

Minimum Requirement to be Monitored (WHAT – element of compliance or effectiveness within the document will be monitored)	Responsible Individual (WHO – is going to monitor this element)	Process for Monitoring e.g. Audit (HOW – will this element be monitored (method used))	Frequency of Monitoring (WHEN – will this element be monitored (frequency/ how often))	Responsible Individual or Committee/ Group for Review of Results (WHERE – Which individual/ committee or group will this be reported to, in what format (eg verbal, formal report etc) and by who)
A. duties	Associate Director of Nursing Patient Experience and Complaints Patient Experience Facilitator	Timescale performance reported via PET Dashboard	Quarterly Weekly Dashboard	Nursing Midwifery and AHP Committee. Divisional Leads
B. how the organisation listens and responds to concerns and complaints from patients, their relatives and carers	Patient Experience Manager Patient Experience Involvement and Engagement Officer	Audit of complaint files. Other modes of patient feedback (FFT, national surveys)	Quarterly Quarterly/ Bi-annually	Patient Experience Committee Nursing Midwifery and AHP Committee Patient Experience Committee Quality Committee
C. how the organisation makes sure that patients, their relatives and carers are not treated differently as a result of raising a concern or complaint	Patient Experience Manager	Audit of complaint files. Complaints satisfaction survey	Monthly	Patient Experience Team
D. how the organisation makes improvements as a result of a concern or complaint.	Divisional Teams	Complaint action plans	Quarterly	Patient Experience Committee Quality Committee

8.0 TRAINING AND IMPLEMENTATION

The Trust is committed to training its staff in how to handle complaints. It is the responsibility of the Chief Executive to ensure that all employees of the Trust are conversant with the Trust's Policy for receiving, investigation, responding to and learning from complaints, concerns, and compliments.

- The policy will be published on the Trust's intranet and internet sites.
- Staff training on how to deal with complaints will be carried out on a regular basis.
- All new employees will be given a short presentation on the Trust's policy at their induction course.
- Training needs analysis within the Divisions will identify key members of staff who require training related to complaints investigation and management. This training will be incorporated into staff development and ongoing management courses.
- Trust staff to complete the PHSO training on complaints handling.

9.0 IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

This document has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment, see a completed form in Appendix E

This document is not subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment

10.0 EVIDENCE BASE (Relevant Legislation/ National Guidance) AND RELATED SFHFT DOCUMENTS

Evidence Base:

There have been significant national developments in relation to complaints handling over the last 18 months, particularly in light of the report into failings at Mid Staffordshire Hospitals. The following key documents have been used to provide the framework and principles for SFH complaint and concerns management:

Report of the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Enquiry – 'The Francis Report'. HM Stationary Office. February 2013.

NHS Hospital Complaints Standards, Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman. December 2022.

A Review of the NHS Hospitals Complaints System; Putting Patients Back in the Picture. Rt. Hon Ann Clwyd MP and Professor Tricia Hart. October 2013.

NHS Constitution – March 2012, updated 2015.

Statutory Instrument 2009/309 - Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 ('the Regulations')

Review into the Quality of Care Provided by 14 Hospital Trusts in England” Sir Bruce Keogh - July 2013.

Key words

Resolution, Litigation, Format, Feedback, Improve.

Related SFHFT Documents:

Duty of Candour Policy

PSIRF

11.0 APPENDICES

Appendix A Complaints response process

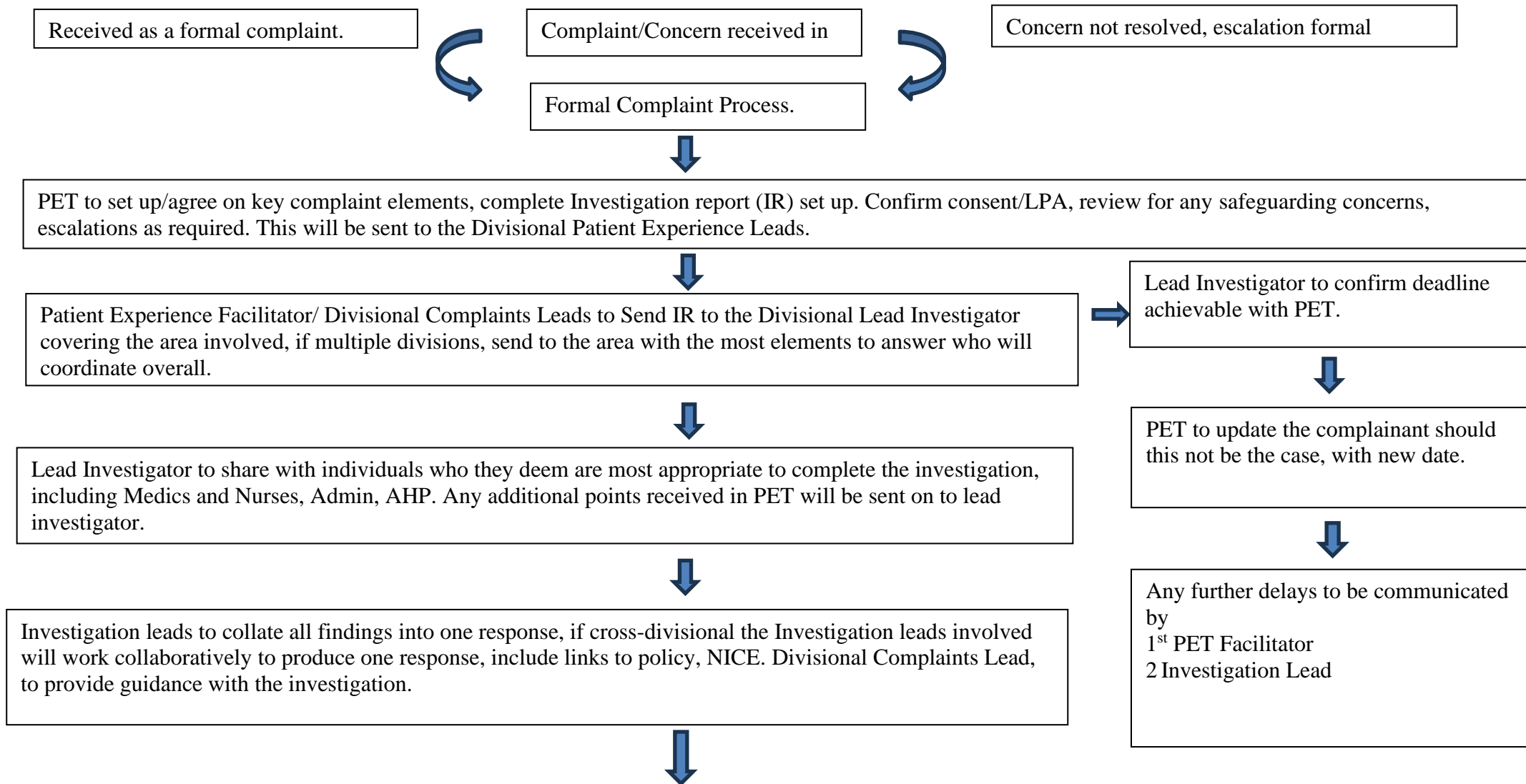
Appendix B Example investigation and response report

Appendix C Local resolution meeting process.

Appendix D Expectations PHSO

Appendix E Equality Impact Assessment Form (EQIA)

Appendix A Complaints Process



Lead Investigator to send the completed response to the linked Patient Experience Lead, who will put into the Quality Assurance process. Lead Investigator to ensure it is finalised. PET to escalate any concerns at this point to the DDN.



Patient Experience Leads will send any correspondence with regards to updates to the Lead Investigator to allow them to make contact and discuss with complainants in good time, should they be unhappy with the final response, (10 days given), extended if complainant on a back log.



Patient Experience Leads will liaise with the Lead Investigator for evidence of actions and learning of founded and partially founded complaints, all will be saved within individual complaints files and will be shared with the complainants before closure on datix.



Lead Investigator to review any returned for further work up or referral to the PHSO with guidance from the Patient Experience Leads.



Patient Experience Leads will continue to attend Governance meetings for linked division, monitor for themes and trends and present individual cases at the meetings for learning as agreed with the Divisional Directors of Nursing. PET will continue to manage PHSO cases overall and report KO41 annually.

Appendix B Example Report

Complaints Investigation Report

Complaint reference	
Complainant Name	
Name of Patient, If not complainant	
Hospital Number	
Division/s	
Speciality/s	
Desired outcome of the complainant	

Date Opened	
Division Deadline Date	

Please begin by following the below flow chart step by step, which will feed into a written response. There is a template written response included with this guide.

Lead Investigator Name.....

		Yes	No	N/A
Prior to the investigation				
1	Is there are a delay in deciding which team/division is leading on the complaint investigation? If so, it is important that the complainant is reassured that the Trust is aware of their concerns and are taking them seriously. It would therefore be helpful in the meantime if a member of your directorate contacts the complainant to let them know it's been received. Please ensure that you note and share this information with the appointed investigating officer.			
At the start of the investigation				
2	Contact the complainant to hear more about the concerns and introduce yourself as Investigating Officer. If you are unable to make contact or you feel that it is inappropriate to do so please notify the Complaints Team immediately. Brief summary of discussion and key concerns raised during contact: a) b) c)			
3	Offer to meet with the complainant, if appropriate.			
4	Do you feel you fully understand the nature of the complaint?			

5	Ask for statements from staff or make plans to meet with them, ensuring they are clear on the deadline date. Please use the template in this guide for written statements and also for notes of verbal discussions.			
6	Ensure that you have all relevant medical records available to you.			
During the investigation				
7	Are you confident that you can meet the response deadline?			
8	Are you keeping the Complaints Team updated of progress?			
9	Are there any challenges in meeting this deadline that you need to escalate to the Complaints Team?			
10	If there is a challenge to meeting the Trust's deadline have you informed the complainant?			
11	Do you feel that the complaint investigation requires input from Safeguarding/Patient Safety/Information Governance/Legal Services? If so, is a datix required, escalate as required.			
At the conclusion of the investigation				
12	Read the anonymised example of a good complaint response letter in this guide to familiarise yourself with the format			
13	Are you confident that each aspect of the complaint has been satisfactorily resolved?			
14	Has there been a full explanation and apology offered as appropriate?			
15	Has there been a full explanation of any changes, improvements and actions?			
16	If the complaint concerns a member of staff, have they been supported appropriately?			
17	Write a response in this document using the template in this guide			
18	If the complaint concerns a member of staff, have they seen the response?			
19	Schedule the complaint for discussion at the appropriate Clinical Governance and ensure that it is specifically minuted.			
20	Complete the action plan in this guide.			
21	Attach all statements gathered to this guide.			
22	Return this completed guide by email to PET@sfh-tr.nhs.uk			

Complaint / Communication Detail

Strictly Private & Confidential

List any contacts and route, i.e. email, telephone call.

Complaints Investigation

Interview report			
Name of Staff member.		Job Title	
Department/Service		Date of Completion	
<p>Please answer the questions below clearly, honestly, as fully as possible and to the best of your recollection. The purpose of investigation is to determine the facts and pertinent information, and to gather relevant perspectives, which may help to give an accurate and rounded picture of the situation and enable us to provide the complainant with a full and open response to their complaint.</p>			
Statement details			
Background			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Please include a chronology of how the patient came into your care and any relevant background information regarding the complaint and care and treatment this patient has received. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This should include dates, times and names of people involved to support your response. 			
Responsible investigator in service / specialty	Questions raised by the Complainant		
	<p><i>(Insert question/issue)</i></p> <p>Response:</p> <p>Concluding Remarks:</p> <p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there something we need to put right? / Is there something we can learn from this complaint in order to seek continuous improvement 		
	<p><i>(Insert question/issue)</i></p> <p>Response:</p> <p>Concluding Remarks:</p>		

	<p>Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there something we need to put right? / Is there something we can learn from this complaint in order to seek continuous improvement
<p>Please enclose any documents which may be relevant to the investigation. (Statements, Policies, Procedures, NICE Guidance, Standard Operating Procedures)</p>	
<p>Any other information you feel relevant, statements, notes of discussion.</p>	
<p>Once your investigation has been completed, please respond using the below format, ensure on Trust headed paper.</p>	

Response Template

Reference: xxxx

Date xxxx

Name xxxx

Address xxxx

Division/Area

Kings Mill Hospital
Mansfield Road
Sutton in Ashfield
Nottingham
NG174JL

Tel: 01623 622515

Dear ... ,

Further to your email/letter of xxxx, I am now in a position to respond to your concerns. Your complaint has been investigated by xxxx and my letter is based on the results of his/her investigations.

I would like to begin by apologising that you were disappointed with your experience of xxxx Department, particularly regarding xxxx . In order to answer your concerns xxxx we have thoroughly investigatedincluding statements....

Break complaint letter down into individual concerns and address each in turn with evidence based responses, apologising where necessary in a meaningful way and saying what action will be taken where changes can be made.

A note on SFH House Style for response letters:

1. Letters always in a Trust template, with font Arial in size 12
2. Staff names - must always use the surname and appropriate title
3. We refer to the patient as 'you'. Where they are complaining on behalf of someone else we refer to the specific relation (e.g. your father, your friend, your brother, etc)
4. All abbreviations must always be explained the first time that they are used
5. All clinical terminology must always be explained in layman's terms
6. For all medications, it must always be explained what their clinical purpose is
7. If quoting the original complaint, quote it verbatim and put it in bold font. No spelling corrections to be made to the quoted text, the exception being staff names, which must be corrected.
8. Dates and times must be in the following example 24-hour format (e.g. 09:45 on the 28 August 2020)
9. Include links to policy, NICE/appropriate guidance.

xxxx has listed below the lessons learnt from their investigation of your concerns:

1. X
2. X
3. X

xxxx explains that the xxxx Department strive to uphold the Trust values of Communicating and working together, Aspiring and Improving, Respectful, Inclusive and Caring, and Efficient and Safe. Please accept our apologies that, in your case, they did not meet those expectations, but they will ensure that they implement and communicate the lessons learnt, as described above. These lessons will be shared in three ways within the xxxx Department:

1. Through the xxxx Department's Clinical Governance meeting on xxxx
2. X
3. X

I hope I have been able to address all of your concerns however, if you feel this is not the case please contact the Patient Experience Team, within 10 working days of receiving this letter which is in accordance with the Trust's complaints policy.

Alternatively, if you remain dissatisfied, you also have the right to refer your concerns to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) to review your case. I do however hope that you will give us the opportunity to review our response first.

The PHSO is an independent body established to promote improvements in health care through the assessment of performance of those who provide services. You can contact the PHSO on 0345 015 4033 or write to them at:

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London, SW1P 4QP
 or email: phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk

Feedback is very important to us at Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and we take any complaints we receive seriously. May I thank you again for raising this issue with us and giving us the opportunity to review and where appropriate improve the services we provide.

We value all feedback as this helps to drive continuous improvements. We would therefore be grateful if you would take a few minutes to complete our satisfaction survey. This can be accessed via the QR code below, a paper version is also available on request. Please be assured that all feedback is anonymous unless you provide your details to us to enable us to contact you to develop a patient story.



If you would like this letter or information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please contact a member of the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.pet@nhs.net

Yours sincerely

Once your investigation has finished, please complete the below, send evidence of actions to the Complaints Team, within one month of completion.

Action Plan

In the Investigating Officer's opinion, this complaint was (cross next to one option):	
Well Founded	
Partially Founded	
Unfounded	

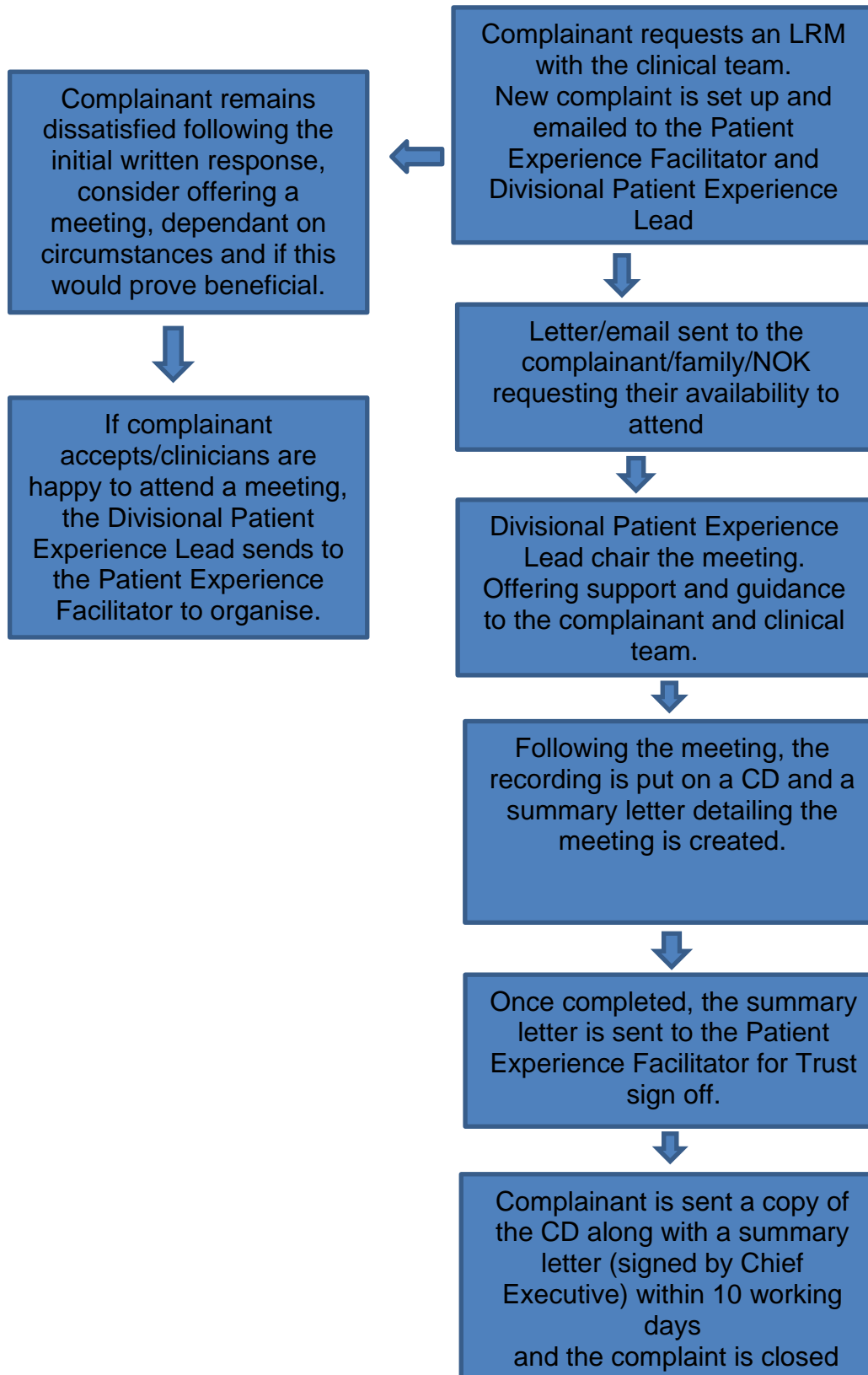
Action	Owner	Due date
EG. Scheduled for discussion at Clinical Governance		

Appendix C

Local resolution meeting process

At the point of a complainant's initial contact with the Patient Experience Team a local resolution meeting (LRM) can be offered as an alternative to a written response (please see complaints policy)

The complainant is advised this can take up to 8 weeks to arrange



Appendix D - Expectations PHSO

Local Government
OMBUDSMAN

healthwatch

Parliamentary
 and Health Service
Ombudsman

A user-led vision for raising concerns and complaints



Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Form (Please complete all sections)

EIA Form Stage One:

Name EIA Assessor: Sally Whittlestone		Date of EIA completion: 29/04/2025
Department: Governance Support Unit/ Patient Experience		Division:
Name of service/policy/procedure being reviewed or created:		
Name of person responsible for service/policy/procedure: Candice Smith/ Sally Whittlestone		
Brief summary of policy, procedure or service being assessed: Complaints, concerns, compliments, feedback and patient engagement.		
Please state who this policy will affect: Patients or Service Users, Carers or families, Commissioned Services, Communities in placed based settings, Staff, Stakeholder organisations, Others (give details) (Please delete as appropriate)		
Protected Characteristic	Considering data and supporting information, could protected characteristic groups' face negative impact, barriers, or discrimination? For example, are there any known health inequality or access issues to consider? (Yes or No)	Please describe what is contained within the policy or its implementation to address any inequalities or barriers to access including under representation at clinics, screening. Please also provide a brief summary of what data or supporting information was considered to measure/decipher any impact.
Race and Ethnicity	No	Data Considered for completion of the EIA: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Staff or patient surveys - Patient Experience data - Local population demographics - Legislation Several steps are taken to ensure that this policy and the complaints processes are accessible and equitable these include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Translation Services available to patients - Availability of documentation digitally and in written format, other formats may also be requested such as larger print and braille. - Multi Faith prayer rooms and chaplaincy support - Induction loop system - Feeding Pod access
Sex	No	
Age	No	
Religion and Belief	No	
Disability	No	
Sexuality	No	
Pregnancy and Maternity	No	
Gender Reassignment	No	

		<p>The process outlined with the Complaints and Feedback Policy ensures that all complaints are handled appropriately and equitably. The policy clearly outlines steps to be taken in any instances where discrimination arises from a complaint and what steps should be taken to prevent this risk.</p> <p>The policy clearly states the rights of patients to make a complaint and the process which should be followed for complaints associated to the care of a child, or person unable to make the complaint themselves due to physical incapacity or lack of capacity.</p>
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Marriage and Civil Partnership	No	
Socio-Economic Factors (i.e. living in a poorer neighbour hood / social deprivation)	No	

If you have answered 'yes' to any of the above, please complete Stage 2 of the EIA on Page 3 and 4.

What consultation with protected characteristic groups including patient groups have you carried out?

As far as you are aware are there any Human Rights issues be taken into account such as arising from surveys, questionnaires, comments, concerns, complaints or compliments?

On the basis of the information/evidence/consideration so far, do you believe that the policy / practice / service / other will have a positive or negative adverse impact on equality? (delete as appropriate)

Positive			Negative			
High	Medium	Low	Nil	Low	Medium	High

If you identified positive impact, please outline the details here:

EIA Form Stage Two:

Protected Characteristic	Please explain, using examples of evidence and data, what the impact of the Policy, Procedure or Service/Clinical Guideline will be on the protected characteristic group.	Please outline any further actions to be taken to address and mitigate or remove any in barriers that have been identified.
Race and Ethnicity		
Gender		
Age		
Religion		
Disability		
Sexuality		
Pregnancy and Maternity		
Gender Reassignment		
Marriage and Civil Partnership		
Socio-Economic Factors (i.e. living in a poorer neighbourhood / social deprivation)		

Please send the complete EIA form to the People EDI Team for review.
Please send the form to: sfh-tr.edisupport@nhs.net

Signature:

S. Whittlestone

I can confirm I have read the Trust's Guidance document on Equality Impact Assessments prior to completing this form

Date:

24/2/2025