



## St Vincent de Paul Society

### *External Complaints Policy and Procedure*

#### *Our aim:*

The St Vincent de Paul Society is committed to providing a quality service for its clients and working in an open and accountable way that builds the trust and respect of all our stakeholders. One of the ways in which we can continue to improve our service is by listening and responding to the views of our clients and stakeholders, and in particular by responding positively to complaints, and by putting mistakes right.

Therefore we aim to ensure that:

- making a complaint is as easy as possible;
- we treat a complaint as a clear expression of dissatisfaction with our service which calls for an immediate response;
- we deal with it promptly, politely and, when appropriate, confidentially;
- we respond in the right way - for example, with an explanation, or an apology where we have got things wrong, or information on any action taken etc;
- we learn from complaints, use them to improve our service, and review annually our complaints policy and procedures.

We recognise that many concerns will be raised informally, and dealt with quickly. Our aims are to:

- resolve informal concerns quickly;
- keep matters low-key;
- enable mediation between the complainant and the individual to whom the complaint has been referred.

An informal approach is appropriate when it can be achieved. But if concerns cannot be satisfactorily resolved informally, then the formal complaints procedure should be followed.

#### *Preamble*

**Definition:** the SVP defines a complaint as “an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard or quality of service, action or lack of action, by SVP members or staff affecting an individual or group of individuals.

**Purpose:** The formal complaints procedure is intended to ensure that all complaints are handled fairly, consistently and wherever possible resolved to the complainant's satisfaction.

**SVP's responsibility will be to:**

- acknowledge the formal complaint in writing;
- respond within a stated period of time;
- deal reasonably and sensitively with the complaint;
- take action where appropriate.

**A complainant's responsibility is to:**

- bring their complaint, in writing, to the SVP's attention normally within 8 weeks of the issue arising;
- raise concerns promptly and directly with a member of SVP
- explain the problem as clearly and as fully as possible, including any action taken to date;
- allow the SVP a reasonable time to deal with the matter, bearing in mind that SVP members are volunteers;

**Confidentiality:** Except in exceptional circumstances, every attempt will be made to ensure that both the complainant and the SVP maintains confidentiality. However the circumstances giving rise to the complaint may be such that it may not be possible to maintain confidentiality (with each complaint will be judged on its own merit). Should this be the case, the situation will be explained to the complainant.

**Monitoring and Reporting:** Trustees of the SVP will receive annually an anonymized report of complaints made and their resolution.

***Formal Complaints Procedure***

**Stage 1**

In the first instance, if you are unable to resolve the issue informally, you should write to SVP National Office who will direct your complaint to the appropriate place. In your letter you should set out the details of your complaint, the consequences for you as a result, and the remedy you are seeking. You can expect your complaint to be acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt. You should get a response and an explanation within 20 working days.

Our contact details can be found on the Contact Us part of the SVP Website.

**Stage 2**

If you are not satisfied with the initial response to the complaint then you can write to the SVP's Chief Executive and ask for your complaint and the response to be reviewed. You can expect the Chief Executive to acknowledge your request within 5 working days of receipt and a response within 15 working days.

The SVP aims to resolve all matters as quickly as possible. However, inevitably some issues will be more complex and therefore may require longer to be fully investigated. Consequently timescales given for handling and responding to complaints are indicative. If a matter requires more detailed investigation, you will receive an interim response describing what is being done to deal with the matter, and when a full reply can be expected and from whom.

**Note.** If your original complaint was against the CEO then this stage will be will be handled by the chair of the HR Advisory Group.

### **Final Stage**

If you are not satisfied with the subsequent reply from the SVP's Chief Executive, then you have the option of writing to the National President, stating the reason why you are dissatisfied with the outcome. You must do this within 10 days of receiving the written response from the SVP's Chief Executive.

The National President (or their nominee) will respond normally within 10 working days to inform you of the action which will be taken to investigate your complaint, and when you can expect to hear the outcome of the investigation.

**Note.** If your original complaint was against the National President then the final stage will be handled by the Vice President.