

Reviewed On	February 2024
Next Review Date	February 2026 or when a change to legislation and guidance occurs
Related Policies/Procedures	Complaints Flowchart
	Data Retention Guidance
	Service User Complaint Procedure
Responsible Function	Quality
Version	2024-1
Overview of Changes	Data Retention & Storage updated in line with current practice

Organisational Responsibilities

The Board of Directors are responsible for the operational management of Colebrook (SouthWest) Limited's policies and procedures.

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is the designated officer, on behalf of the Board of Directors, responsible for the implementation of the policies and procedures across Colebrook (SouthWest) Limited.

Contact Details

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Introduction

Colebrook is committed to providing a high quality, accessible and responsive service for service users and working in an open and accountable way that builds the trust and respect of all our stakeholders.

We are always pleased to receive comments about our work from anyone inside or outside the organisation. It is useful for us to know when we have done a good job, as well as when things have gone less well. This helps us maintain and enhance our service to all our stakeholders.

One of the ways in which we can continue to improve our services is by listening and responding to the views of our stakeholders, and in particular by responding positively to complaints, and by putting mistakes right.

Scope

This policy and the accompanying procedures apply to service users and clients (or prospective service users / clients) and external stakeholders. Where employees have complaints the Grievance Procedure should be used. There is a separate Complaints Policy for volunteers.

Communication

This Policy will initially be communicated to staff and volunteers via their Induction process where it applies to their role. It will be shared with anyone raising issues. Any future changes or updates will be communicated to all staff via team meetings and/or supervision sessions.

All staff will acknowledge having read and understood the policy summary document provided by their Line Manager.

Stakeholders can be given sight of the policy as part of a funding application and / or contract monitoring process, where requested or by request to the CEO giving a minimum of 14 days' notice.

The Complaints Policy will be offered and shared with external stakeholders on request or as part of a discussion about any issues raised.

Core Principles

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, either written or spoken. A complaint can be made by an individual or a group. It may relate to the way a client or stakeholder feels they have been treated, or the service they have received from Colebrook. Colebrook considers something to be a complaint if it is a criticism that expects a reply and requires action or changes to be made.

When responding to a complaint Colebrook will aim to ensure that:

- Making a complaint is as easy as possible and support is available for the complainant.
- We treat a complaint as a clear expression of dissatisfaction with our service which calls for a prompt response.
- We respond to complaints in a helpful and courteous manner.
- We respond in the right way - for example, with an explanation, information on any action taken or an apology where we have got things wrong.
- We learn from complaints, use them to improve our service, and regularly review our Complaints Policy and Procedures.
- Each complaint is treated with respect.

Confidentiality

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

Complaints Process

Stage 1 - Informal Resolution

Many concerns will be raised informally, and can be 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 and should always be the starting point to resolving issues. If concerns cannot be satisfactorily resolved informally, then the Formal Complaints Procedure (Stage 2) should be followed.

Stage 2 - Formal Complaint

- If you would like to make a formal complaint, please do this in writing for the attention of the CEO and include full information about the nature of the complaint, date(s) the complaint relates to, how you have tried to resolve it, how this has affected you and what you would like to see happen. Please mark it 'Private and Confidential'.

- Wherever possible the complaint should be recorded using the appropriate complaint form or in writing.
- Verbal complaints can be considered formal if recorded by a third person and after ensuring the complainant agrees with the statements.
- The CEO may, at their discretion, delegate the investigation, or the management of the complaint to another manager within the organisation.
- Formal complaints will be acknowledged in writing, within 10 working days of receipt by the appropriate manager.
- The Manager will then clarify any ambiguity and assess the seriousness of the complaint. If the complaint is of a sufficiently serious nature and informal resolution is not possible then an investigation will be initiated.
- We will carry out an investigation (provided the complaint is made to us within 8 weeks of the incident taking place) and we will advise the complainant of the outcome of the investigation in writing within 4 weeks of acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint.
- Any formal investigation of a complaint shall be carried out thoroughly and impartially.
- Following the completion of the investigation of the complaint an outcome letter will be provided to the complainant and other relevant parties will be informed of the outcome.
- The letter will confirm if the complaint was upheld or not; give a reason for the decision and outline any actions taken as a result.
- Whatever the outcome, information will be given concerning the appeals procedure.

Stage 3 – Appeal Procedure

Appeal can be made to the CEO / Chair of Board within 4 weeks of the date of the outcome letter. They will investigate the matter, having read all relevant material, and respond within 4 weeks of receiving notification of the appeal.

- This decision will be final.
- Service users may also have the right of appeal through their funders / commissioners procedures.

Anonymous Complaints

Where a complaint is made anonymously and it is not possible to involve the complainant in the process, or ask them any further questions, investigation will only take place where it may be possible to corroborate a particular incident by talking to staff, clients, volunteers or a third party. Where this is not possible the complaint will be taken as feedback about the service concerned.

If the complaint refers to a specific service or incident this will be dealt with by the manager of that service and reported to the board. If it refers to a named or identifiable member of staff it will be dealt with by their line manager and reported through line management structure.

Third Party Complaints

Where a complaint comes from a third party, it will be investigated fully following the above procedures, however, the investigating manager will respect all relevant client and staff confidentiality as part of the process. The manager will assess the need and options to deal with any complaints with clients and ensure the third party is aware of Colebrook policies on confidentiality. Where we cannot share information about a client with a third party, we will

respond as much as we can using general information about our work as an organisation and the challenges and work we do with our clients, which forms part of our marketing information.

Monitoring and Review of the Complaints Process

- Complaints monitoring will be undertaken quarterly as part of the Quality Effectiveness Monitoring tool (QUEMT) report to Board.
- Monitoring of all complaints will include a learning and changes to practice reflection, which will be logged and fed into the QUEMT.

Data Retention & Storage

Complaints will be stored securely in locked cabinets, or electronically on password protected systems, by the CEO and/or the Central Services Team in accordance with Colebrook's Data Retention Guidance.

Implementation, Monitoring and Review of this Policy

The CEO has overall responsibility for implementing and monitoring this Policy, which will be reviewed regularly following its implementation and additionally whenever there are relevant changes in legislation or to our working practices. Any queries or comments about this policy should be addressed to the CEO.