

# Handling complaints with care

## Learning from experience

### Quick-view guide for staff and contractors to the new NHSScotland Model Complaints Handling Procedure

For more information about the new NHSScotland Model Complaints Handling Procedure, go to:

Valuing Complaints, SPSO: <http://www.valuingcomplaints.org.uk/wp-content/media/NHS-Model-Complaints-Handling-Procedure-3-October-2016.pdf>

Little Things Make a Big Difference, NES: <http://www.knowledge.scot.nhs.uk/making-a-difference/resources.aspx>

NHSScotland organisations will be required to monitor Complaint Handling data, which will be regularly reviewed by senior management. A publicly-accessible report will be published annually.

Organisations must ensure that all staff receive appropriate training and that support is available from a local Feedback and Complaints team.

When a complaint is received, it is important to:

- apologise for any distress caused and express empathy
- decide whether the complaint is suitable for early resolution
- decide whether the complaint needs to go straight to investigation stage due to its complexity
- ensure all complaints are recorded appropriately on your organisation's complaints reporting system
- inform the person making the complaint of the outcome and any changes made as a result of their input

A complaint may be made to **any** member of staff.

Simple issues should be resolved within **five** working days. Where a person remains unhappy at the end of stage 1 they may escalate the complaint to stage 2.

More complex issues that require investigation should be handled immediately at stage 2 and resolved within **20** working days.

In exceptional circumstances, extensions may be made to these timescales.

All investigation responses to the person making the complaint must inform them of their right to contact the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) if they remain unhappy, and include details of how to contact the SPSO.

This resource can be made available, in full or summary form, in alternative formats and community languages. Please contact us on 0141 223 1435 or email [altformats@nes.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:altformats@nes.scot.nhs.uk) to discuss how we can best meet your requirements.

# The NHS Model Complaints Handling Procedure

Feedback from service users is vital. It tells us where we excel, and indicates areas for improvement. Complaints are a rich source of learning, and NHSScotland has streamlined the process for complaints handling to make that learning easier.

The new Model Complaints Handling Procedure is swift, straightforward and supports early resolution wherever possible. It respects the rights of all involved, and promotes the principles of compassion, openness and honesty, fairness and transparency.

The new NHSScotland Model Complaints Handling Procedure replaces the former one-stage process with a two-stage process – allowing early resolution followed by investigation, if required.

There are clear timescales for resolving complaints at both stages and local performance is monitored and regularly reported.

It aligns with complaints handling procedures for all other Scottish public sector organisations, providing consistency and clarity around the handling of complaints relating to integrated services.

## Early Resolution 5 days

**For issues that are straightforward and easily resolved, requiring little or no investigation.**

‘On-the-spot’ apology, explanation, or other action to resolve the complaint quickly, in five working days or less, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Complaints addressed by any member of staff, or alternatively referred to the appropriate point for **Early Resolution.**

Complaint details, outcome and action taken recorded and used for service improvement.



## Investigation 20 days

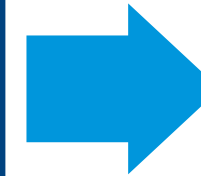
**For issues that have not been resolved at the frontline or that are complex, serious or ‘high-risk’.**

A definitive response provided within 20 working days following a thorough investigation of the points raised.

Ability to extend the timescale exists in the Complaints Handling Procedure.

Responses signed off by senior management.

Senior management/Board has an active interest in complaints and use information gathered to improve services.



## Independent External Review Ombudsman

**For issues that have not been resolved.**

Complaints progressing to the Ombudsman will have been thoroughly investigated by the Board.

The Ombudsman will assess whether there is evidence of service failure, maladministration and issues in respect of clinical judgement. The Ombudsman will also assess how the complaint has been handled by the Board.