

Hillfields Community Garden Problem Solving and Complaints Policy and Procedure



Last updated December 2023

Date for review January 2025

Policy overview

Hillfields Community Garden (HCG) values and respects our staff and residents who are involved in our activities and we are grateful for their invaluable support. HCG is committed to providing a quality service and working in an open and accountable way that builds trust and respect.

For the purposes of this policy, volunteers, residents, and self-employed individuals will be regarded as 'staff'. This policy applies to all staff.

HCG views complaints and feedback as an opportunity to learn and improve for the future, as well as a chance to put things right. One of the ways in which we can continue to improve our service is by listening and responding to the views of staff, residents and stakeholders, by responding positively to complaints and putting mistakes right.

Any issues which occur are normally resolved quickly through problem solving methods, however, very occasionally there may be a situation that is more serious or requires further investigation. This policy sets out the procedure that will be followed in this instance.

Our policy is:

- To protect our staff and ensure that they are treated in a fair and equal way
- To demonstrate that we respect our staff and are committed to good practice
- To provide a fair complaints procedure which is clear and easy to use for anyone to use
- To publicise our complaints procedure and make sure it is easily accessible
- To make sure HCG staff know what to do if a complaint is received
- To make sure all complaints are investigated fairly, in a timely way and wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are repaired
- Where it is unclear whether a communication is a concern or a complaint, we will err on the side of caution and treat it as a complaint
- To minimise any disruption to HCG's work and the people involved
- To gather information from complaints to help us to improve what we do
- To review all complaints by individuals or organisations without fear of reprisals and in the knowledge that they will be protected from victimisation

Feedback from people affected by HCG and supporters

If a complaint or general feedback about a staff member is received from a person affected by HCG and/or a supporter, the member of staff should ensure this is reported to the Trust Board.

HCG aim to ensure that:

- Making a compliment or complaint is as easy as possible

- Responses and action taken is done in a timely way
- Handling the complaint is done 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 acknowledge a complaint in writing within 7 working days of receipt of the issue

Definition of Problem Solving

Some issues can be resolved informally and quickly by having a discussion, preferably in person. This discussion should be open, honest and objective and all information should be treated confidentially. The staff member should be fully informed about the issue by HCG senior staff or Trustees and every possible attempt should be made to resolve a concern at this stage.

HCG will ensure that:

- the meeting takes place as soon as possible in a quiet/neutral place and in a convenient location
- where necessary the meeting will be attended by an impartial third person to act as mediator
- the staff member is allowed sufficient time to talk and to give their perspective
- possible solutions are discussed openly and communicated in such a way as to be understood by both sides
- every effort will be made to ensure the discussion is calm and has a positive focus
- the discussion covers challenges the staff member is creating by their action or inaction, and there needs to be a fair right to reply for the staff member
- any actions are agreed and a time is arranged to review the actions within 14 days of the meeting

Unacceptable behaviour

HCGs Volunteer Conduct Policy states that HCG would temporarily suspend the staff member immediately while the details are investigated where extreme unacceptable behaviour is reported or suspected on grounds of breaking the openness and behaviour sections.

“Volunteers and Trustees should recognise that failure to follow this Code of Conduct may damage HCG and its work and will normally be viewed as a disciplinary matter. For volunteers who are not Trustees, such matters will be dealt with by the HCG Trustee Committee. For Board and Committee members, action will be considered in accordance with the HCG constitution.” - HCGs Volunteer Conduct Policy

Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect of HCG. Complaints are important to us, they help us improve the work that we do. So if you're unhappy with any of our work or activities, we'd like to know. If you as a staff member are contacted by a member of the public, this policy sets out the steps needing to be taken to report that so that it can be addressed and resolved.

HCG expects everyone involved in the organisation to maintain the highest standard of conduct, integrity and ethics.

Where Complaints Come From

Complaints may come from any individual, or organisation who has a legitimate interest in HCG, including the general public if something is perceived to be improper. A complaint can be received verbally, by phone, or by email.

Confidentiality

All complaint information will be handled sensitively, telling only those who need to know and following relevant data protection requirements.

Responsibility

Overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation lies with the board of trustees. Contact details for the Chair of Trustees can be found at the end of this Policy.

HCG will inform the staff member if a complaint has been made about them or actions for which they were responsible. HCG has a duty of care to staff complained about as well as to complainants. HCG will ensure members of staff have an opportunity to respond to the allegations made. Where necessary we will review further evidence which might include speaking to any individuals complained about as well as the complainant and any third parties involved.

Upon receiving a complaint we will:

- acknowledge receipt of a complaint, and provide a copy of this policy if the individual or organisation does not already have one
- listen to the complainant to understand the complaint and the outcome they are seeking
- explain the process that will be followed
- communicate when a decision will be made
- ensure that the complaint is investigated by someone within HCG who is independent of the events complained about. Where this is not possible, HCG will consider involving an independent third party to investigate

A complainant's responsibility is to:

- bring their complaint, in writing, to HCGs attention normally within 8 weeks of the issue arising
- raise concerns promptly and directly with a member of staff and explain the problem as clearly and as fully as possible, including any action taken to date
- allow HCG a reasonable time to deal with the matter, and
- recognise that some circumstances may be beyond HCGs control.

How to make a complaint

If you want to make a complaint about our services or activities, there are several ways you can do this. In writing to us at: hillfieldscommunitygarden@gmail.com or to our Chair of Trustees rebeccaayshajenkins@gmail.com or by phone to 07709053290.

You can ask someone to help you make a complaint and to act on your behalf if you want.

Whistleblowing

HCGs Safeguarding Policy defines Whistleblowing as when “*someone raises a concern about a dangerous or illegal activity or any wrongdoing within their organisation. Raising a concern is known as “blowing the whistle” and is a vital process for identifying risks to people’s safety. Sharing information or talking through a concern can be the first step to helping an organisation identify problems and improve their practices. HCG expects everyone involved in the organisation to maintain the highest standard of conduct, integrity and ethics. If a staff member has any genuine concerns about malpractice, HCG wishes to encourage them to communicate these without fear of reprisals and in the knowledge that they will be protected from victimisation*”. For guidance and support on [whistleblowing](#) procedure (Public Disclosure Act) or advice, you contact the [Acas helpline](#).

Complaints About Charities - What the Charities Commission Says.

You should complain to the charity in the first instance, unless you suspect illegal activity, in which case you may wish to consider calling the Police. Charities exist to help people and the vast majority will respond positively and do their best to resolve your issue. If that doesn't work, or you feel unable to, or for more serious issues many, will have a complaints procedure, which you can ask for.

How To Complain About Or Report A Charity To The Commission

Complain or report a charity to the Charity Commission if it is, for example:

1. Not doing what it claims to do.
2. Losing lots of money.
3. Harming people.
4. Being used for personal profit or gain.
5. Involved in illegal activity.

Here's what you should do to:

1. Make a [serious incident report](#), if you are a trustee.
2. [Report serious wrongdoing](#), if you're a charity worker or volunteer.
3. [Report a concern](#), if you're an auditor or independent examiner.
4. To [report a serious concern](#), for anyone else.

Contacts

Organisational contact: hillfieldscommunitygarden@gmail.com

Rebecca Jenkins, Co-Founder and Chair of Trustee Board: rebeccaayshajenkins@gmail.com

Charities Commission Number: 1204254

HILLFIELDS COMMUNITY GARDEN COMPLAINTS FORM



You may use this form to make a suggestion or to make a complaint about HCG.

We would like you to return this form as soon as possible, our guidance suggests within eight weeks of the issue arising.

Your Name:	Address or email address:	Company/organisation if applicable:
Phone number:	Date of incident:	Approximate time of incident:
Location of incident:	People present:	
Suggestion / Complaint		
What action would you like to be taken?		
What times are convenient for you to have an appointment to discuss this?		