

## Hillfields Community Garden Problem Solving and Complaints Policy and Procedure



Last updated January 2025

Date for review January 2027

### Policy overview

Hillfields Community Garden, hereinafter referred to as the charity, values and respects all our staff, volunteers and residents who are involved in our activities and we are grateful for their invaluable support. The charity is committed to providing a quality service and working in an open and accountable way that builds trust and respect.

The charity 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 and volunteers, 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 volunteers and ensure that they are treated in a fair and equal way
- To demonstrate that we respect our staff and volunteers 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 staff and volunteers 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 the charities 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 the charity and its supporters

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

The charity aims 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 seven 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 or volunteer will be fully informed about the issue by the charity senior staff or Trustees and every possible attempt will be made to resolve a concern at this stage.

The charity 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 or volunteer will be allowed sufficient time to talk and to give their perspective
- possible solutions will be 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 will cover challenges the staff member or volunteer is creating by their action or inaction, and there will be a fair right to reply for the staff member or volunteer
- any actions agreed to review the actions will be done within 14 days of the meeting

### **Unacceptable behaviour**

Where unacceptable behaviour has been reported to the Trust Board or CEO, steps will then be taken to temporarily suspend the staff member while the details are investigated. Where

extreme unacceptable behaviour is reported or suspected on grounds of breaking the openness and behaviour sections, immediate disciplinary action will be taken.

The investigation will be conducted promptly and fairly, in accordance with the Charity's disciplinary procedures, ensuring that all parties involved have the opportunity to present their accounts. If the investigation substantiates the allegations, the Trust Board may proceed with formal disciplinary measures, which are set out in the **Staff Code of Conduct policy**. Where the complaint relates to a volunteer the process will fall into the **Volunteer Policy**.

### **Definition of a Complaint**

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect of the charity. 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 or volunteer 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.

The charity 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 the charity, including the general public if something is perceived to be improper. A complaint can be received verbally, by phone, or by email. A form is included at the end of this Policy and printed copies can be found in the office.

### **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.

The charity will inform the staff member or volunteer if a complaint has been made about them or actions for which they were responsible. The charity has a duty of care to staff and volunteers complained about as well as to complainants. The charity will ensure members of staff and volunteers 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 the charity who is independent of the events complained about. Where this is not possible, the charity will consider involving an independent third party to investigate

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

- bring their complaint, in writing, to the charities attention normally within 8 weeks of the issue arising
- raise concerns promptly and directly with a member of staff or volunteer and explain the problem as clearly and as fully as possible, including any action taken to date
- allow the charity a reasonable time to deal with the matter, and
- recognise that some circumstances may be beyond the charities 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: [ceo@hillfieldscommunitygarden.co.uk](mailto:ceo@hillfieldscommunitygarden.co.uk) or to our Chair of Trustees [chair@hillfieldscommunitygarden.co.uk](mailto:chair@hillfieldscommunitygarden.co.uk) or by filling out the following form: <https://forms.gle/uCWqu7QnDgcrFPy18>

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

#### **Whistleblowing**

The charity's 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. The charity expects everyone involved in the organisation to maintain the highest standard of conduct, integrity and ethics. If a staff member or volunteer has any genuine concerns about malpractice, the charity 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.

Date of Change:	Changed By:	Comments:
December 2023	S.Rogers	Approved by Board January 2024
July 2024	S.Rogers	Changes made to define staff (paid) and voluntary roles
January 2025	S.Rogers	Refresh of policy
November 2025	S.Rogers	Digital copy of the complaints form added to Google Forms and the HCG website.

## Hillfields Community Garden

Registered Charity number: 1204254

Registered Address: Hillfields Park Community Centre, Thickett Ave, Hillfields, Bristol, BS16 4EP

### Contact details:

Email address [info@hillfieldscommunitygarden.co.uk](mailto:info@hillfieldscommunitygarden.co.uk)

Website: [www.hillfieldscommunitygarden.co.uk/](http://www.hillfieldscommunitygarden.co.uk/)

Director email address: [ceo@hillfieldscommunitygarden.co.uk](mailto:ceo@hillfieldscommunitygarden.co.uk)

## HILLFIELDS COMMUNITY GARDEN COMPLAINTS FORM

You may use this form to make a suggestion or to make a complaint about Hillfields Community Garden, its activities and/or its staff. If you would like to complete this form online please visit <https://forms.gle/uCWqu7QnDgcrFPy18>

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

Please complete this form and return it to the CEO at [ceo@hillfieldscommunitygarden.co.uk](mailto:ceo@hillfieldscommunitygarden.co.uk) or [chair@hillfieldscommunitygarden.co.uk](mailto:chair@hillfieldscommunitygarden.co.uk) if this needs to be escalated to the Trust Board.

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