

# Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy and Procedure (for people who use our services)

## Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy and Procedure

**Who is responsible:** CEO, trustees, all managers, all employees

**People involved:** service users, staff / all employees, volunteers, managers, trustees

**Document Number:** 7

**Status:** final document

**Reviewed by** Sigal Avni

**Date:** February 2026

**Date of next review:** February 2028

**Ratified:** Gwen Williams (Chair of the Trustees)

**Replaces document:** February 2024

**Summary of main changes since last review:**

**Added:**

- a specific category for the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO), including contact information.
- the Charity Commission for England and Wales as an external recourse option.
- a specific principle for handling anonymous complaints (under Principle 2)
- a new Principle 9 detailing the Time Limit for Submission of a formal complaint
- an explicit commitment to acknowledge receipt of a formal (Stage 2) complaint within 3 working days.
- a new chapter - F. EXTERNAL RECOURSE AND CONTACT INFORMATION

**Time Limit amendments:**

- **Stage 1** timeline for arranging an informal meeting amended to "**within 5 working days.**"
- **Stage 2** decision timeline in the Summary Table amended to "**Within 10 working days**" of the final meeting.
- **Stage 3** submission timeline amended to "**Within 7 days**" of receiving the Stage 2 decision.
- **Stage 4** submission timeline amended to "**Within 7 days**" of receiving the Stage 3 decision.
- **Stage 5** submission timeline amended to "**Within 14 days**" of receiving the Stage 4 decision.

- **Stage 5** final decision timeline amended to "**28 days**" after submission or "**21 days**" after the final panel meeting.

Added flow charts

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## A. INTRODUCTION

Islington Mind believes that the opportunity to make a complaint or grievance is an essential right for all those who use our services. We also appreciate that complaints, comments, and compliments can be a valuable way of evaluating and improving our services and of ensuring they are responsive to the needs and preferences of our service users.

This procedure is primarily for complaints, comments and compliments made against/towards Islington Mind's staff/employees, trustees or volunteers.

Although there will be occasions when it will be appropriate to use this procedure to provide a framework for an investigation of a dispute or machinery for an appeal, disputes between service users is covered by other policies.

Definitions:

- **Complaint:** A formal or informal expression of dissatisfaction about the services, staff, or volunteers.
- **Complainant:** The person making the complaint.
- **Complaint Handler:** The individual assigned to manage and investigate the complaint, usually a manager or team leader.
- **Investigation:** The process of gathering evidence, interviewing parties, and reviewing records to address the complaint.

- **Confidentiality:** The obligation to protect the privacy of all parties involved, as per Islington Mind's Confidentiality Policy.

## B. THE COMPLAINT PROCEDURE'S PRINCIPLES

Islington Mind's complaints procedure aims to be clear, effective and easily understandable.

The complainant: When making a complaint, comment or compliment it can be helpful to think about what you want to happen as a result. This may be: an apology, someone to explain what has happened, changes or improvements to be made to the service, to make sure people recognise their mistakes and/or to make sure the same thing does not happen again.

**Islington Mind: Managers are responsible for ensuring that Islington Mind's Complaints Procedure follows the below principles at every stage:**

1. **The 'Complaint Handler'** - Each complaint is being dealt by a named manager or a team leader identified as the "Complaint Handler." They are responsible for ensuring that everyone concerned with the complaint is kept informed and updated of all developments during the process. The 'Compliant Handler' is usually the manager of the employee you complained about. To ensure fairness, the Complaint Handler will be someone who was not directly involved with any incident relating to the complaint. The Complaint Handler is responsible for ensuring that Islington Mind's Head of Service and Quality and Islington Mind's CEO are informed about any complaint made and are updated on the process and on any decision made. They are also responsible for the accurate monitoring and recording of the process (see below in 6.)
2. **Protection of confidentiality** - The Compliant Handler is responsible to ensure that the confidentiality of both the complainant and any person complained about are respected as per Islington Mind's Confidentiality Policy. Confidentiality may be breached if it is revealed during the investigation that the welfare of the complainant or other people are seriously at risk - as is indicated in the Confidentiality Policy. We will always endeavour to seek the permission and consent of the complainant, but in some case we may have to breach confidentiality even if that permission is withheld. We will accept and investigate anonymous complaints where there is sufficient information to do so, while ensuring the privacy of all parties is maintained in line with the Confidentiality Policy.

3. **Fair Hearing** - In all complaints, the Compliant Handler is responsible to ensure that a fair hearing is given to the complainant as well as to the staff/employees against whom the complaint was made. Managers are responsible to ensure that no person representing Islington Mind is defensive when complaints are made.
4. **Fair, objective investigation** - The Complain Handlers must be a manager who is not involved with any incident related to the complaint is carrying it out. They should use the Complaint Investigation Form in Appendix 2 to record the investigation.
5. **Support, Encouragement And Advocacy** - Islington Mind recognises that making a complaint can be stressful. Appropriate assistance will be offered to the complainant. At any stage a complainant may seek the help of an independent advocate. Islington Mind will provide information on this on request. Any individual making a complaint has the right to be represented and/or supported by an advocate (this is a person of the individual's choice to help them) at any stage during the procedure, and Islington Mind will provide information on this on request. We recognise that a complaint can also be stressful for a person against whom a complaint is made. Managers are responsible to ensure support and assistance is provided to any member of staff or volunteer against whom a complaint is made, and that they are given the fullest opportunity to answer any criticisms.
6. **Recording And Reporting** - The Complaint Handler is responsible for ensuring that all details regarding any complaint are fully recorded:
  - **In Stage 1** – the Complaint Handler must ensure that the summary of the complaint, the Stage 1 informal conversation, and its outcomes are recorded on clients' files on CharityLog and in our Complaints Log allocated in Teams (SMT).
  - **From Stage 2** – the Complaint Handler must ensure that the Complaint Investigation Form (see below) is completed for each stage and uploaded to clients' files on CharityLog. These reports should also be uploaded to the complaints folder on Teams. Details of each stage should be added to the Complaints Log and to clients' files on CharityLog. All reports should be made available to the complainant at any stage during the procedure. The outcomes of all complaints and investigations and further actions agreed should be reported in writing to the complainant and recorded in the complainant's file on CharityLog. Our Complaints Log is shared

in confidence with our Board of Trustees and should be made available to funders of Islington Mind on request as part of the evaluation of these services. Monitoring and Transparency of Complaint Outcomes: In addition to recording individual complaints, Islington Mind is committed to monitoring trends in complaints over time to identify recurring themes, systemic issues, or areas for service improvement.

- **Trend Analysis:** Head of Service is responsible to conduct periodic reviews of the Complaints Log and CharityLog data to track patterns in complaints, including the frequency, type, and resolution of complaints.
  - **Reporting to Management and Trustees:** The Head of Service presents regular reports summarising complaint trends and outcomes to the CEO and the senior management team. The CEO reports the trends to the Board of Trustees. These reports will include recommendations for changes or improvements based on the analysis.
  - **Service Improvements:** Insights from the monitoring process will inform staff training, policy updates, and other service development initiatives, ensuring continuous improvement based on feedback.  
**Managers and team leaders are responsible for ensuring that these monitoring and reporting practices are followed and for integrating findings into service planning and evaluation processes.**
7. **Protection from Retaliation** (Non-Retaliation Policy): Islington Mind strictly prohibits any form of retaliation against individuals who make complaints, provide information during an investigation, or otherwise participate in the complaints process.
- **Complainants:** Complainants will not be denied access to services, treated unfairly, or subject to any adverse actions as a result of filing a complaint.
  - **Staff and Volunteers:** Staff or volunteers who report concerns or participate in the complaints process are protected from retaliation, including changes in roles, unfair treatment, or other punitive measures.

- **Accountability:** Any concerns about potential retaliation should be reported immediately to a senior manager, who will address the matter promptly and confidentially.

8. **Accessibility and Language Support:** Islington Mind is committed to ensuring that the complaints procedure is accessible to everyone.

- **Ensuring Equity:** Staff and managers are responsible for identifying and addressing accessibility needs to ensure fair and equitable access to the complaints process for all service users.
- **Language Barriers:** Support will be offered to individuals who require help due to language barriers, including the provision of interpreters or translated materials where necessary.

9. **Time Limit for Submission** - Complaints should be made as soon as possible.

The general

time limit for making a formal complaint (Stage 2) is 12 months from the date the event happened or from when the complainant became aware of the matter. The Head of Service may extend this limit if there are special circumstances, such as illness, bereavement, or diminished capacity at the time of the event, and will communicate this decision in writing within 5 working days of the request.

## C. THE COMPLAINT PROCEDURE

Our complaint procedure has five stages, and it is our hope that problems are resolved in the very first stages.

The quick summary of these steps below can help you navigate the process.

### STAGE 1 - Informal Conversation With the Person Concerned

In the first instance you should raise the problem with the person concerned immediately and try, together, to resolve the matter informally; this can be a team leader, a volunteer or a manager. A staff member or a manager may be asked at this stage to help resolve the complaint informally.

- **Timescale:** You must raise the issue as soon as you feel dissatisfied. A private meeting must be arranged within **5 working days** of your request, unless you specifically agree to a longer timeframe.

### STAGE 2 – A meeting with a team leader

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your informal conversation with the person concerned or if you feel that it is not possible or that you are unable to

discuss the problem with the person concerned, then you should ask a team leader (or a senior manager, if the complaint is about a team leader) for a private meeting. Tell them that you would like to discuss a complaint.

- **Timescale:** This meeting must be arranged within **5 working days** of your request unless you agree to a longer timeframe. A decision must be communicated to you within **10 working days** of the final meeting.

You may wish to have someone with you, of your choice, who can help explain your complaint.

- **Complaint against a volunteer:** If your complaint is against a volunteer ask to speak with a staff member: If your complaint is against a volunteer – you can ask to speak with your ‘Point of Contact’ or the project’s team leader / Service Coordinator e.g. Lizzie Hughes – Outcome Team Leader, Satoko Fujishiro for the Hand in Hand project). If you are not sure – you can approach any member of staff who will help you identify the relevant team leader to discuss your complaint against a volunteer.
- **Complaint against a member of staff:** If your complaint is against a support worker – ask to speak to a team leader as above. If your complaint is against a team leader, ask to speak with a manager. If your complaint is against a manager or if it is **against the Outcome Team Leader** then request to speak with Islington Mind’s Head of Services and Quality. If you are not sure – please approach any manager who will help you identify the relevant team leader or manager to discuss your complaint.

You can also make your Stage 2 complaint in writing rather than meet or speak with the relevant team leader or manager. You can do this in an email or post a letter and/or use the Complaint Form in Appendix 1. You should address the email or letter to the relevant team leader or manager as detailed above.

This member of staff will be the “Complaint Handler”.

It is the Complaint Handler’s responsibility to carry out an investigation, using Islington Mind’s Complaint Investigation Form (see in Appendix 2.) The investigation methods include meeting with the complainant and other people involved in the situation, including service users, staff and volunteers, to hear their experience, perspective and views about what happened, analysing our records, requesting information and evidence from other agencies etc.

**Acknowledgment of Receipt of Complaints:** Once a formal complaint is submitted, it is the Complaint Handler responsibility to acknowledge in writing receipt of the complaint. **This acknowledgement will be sent within 3**

**working days of receiving the written complaint.** The acknowledgement letter/email will provide the name and contact details of the assigned Complaint Handler, and outline the next steps in the process. This ensures transparency and helps set clear expectations for the complainant regarding timelines and responsibilities.

**Right to Support and Representation** At all times you will be entitled to bring a person of your choice with you to any meeting you are invited to. This person can help you put your point across.

The Complaint Handler will try to resolve the complaint to your satisfaction as speedily as possible, and you will be informed of any decision of your meeting with her/him. If there are more than one meeting scheduled, the Complaint Handler will inform you of the decision within ten working days from the final meeting, unless you specifically agree to a longer period.

## STAGE 3

If you are not satisfied with the result of Stage 2 you can proceed to Stage 3 and refer your complaint to Islington Mind's Head of Service and Quality. You must do this either in writing or by signing a written confirmation of a verbal complaint. It is perfectly acceptable for someone else to write this for you. You can use the Complaint Form in Appendix 1.

On receipt of your Stage 3 complaint, Head of Service and Quality will arrange to meet with you. S/he will carry out further investigation. This may involve similar meetings to those described in stage 2.

Head of Service must inform you in writing of any decision about your complaint. This letter or email will also explain the reasons for the decision.

- **Timescale:** You must submit the Stage 3 complaint within **7 days** of receiving the Stage 2 decision. The Head of Service must arrange a meeting with you within **10 working days** of receiving your complaint unless you agree to a longer timeframe. A decision must be communicated within **2 weeks** of this meeting or the final investigation.

## STAGE 4

If you are not satisfied with the results of Stage 3 you can further refer your complaint, either in writing or by signing a written confirmation of a verbal complaint as followed:

- **Complaint against any member of staff or volunteer: to the CEO, except: complaint against the Structure Intervention and Specialist Services Manager: to the Chair of trustees.**
- **Complaint against the CEO: to the Chair**
- **Complaint against a trustee: to the Chair**
- **Complaint against the Chair: to the CEO, for the attention of the trustees**

The CEO or the chair will carry out further investigation(s), or, where appropriate, appoint someone else to do so. This may include arranging another meeting with you and other similar meetings to those described in stage 2-3.

The CEO or the chair must inform you in writing, within four weeks of the meeting with you, or if a meeting with you was not arrange – within four weeks of your submission of your Stage 4 complaint of any decision about your complaint. This letter will also explain the reasons for the decision.

- **Timescale:** You must submit the Stage 4 complaint within **7 days** of receiving the Stage 3 decision. A decision must be communicated within **4 weeks** of the final meeting or submission of your complaint.

## STAGE 5

You can further refer your complaint to the 5th and final Stage, if you are not satisfied with the outcome of Stage 4.

This request must be made in writing to the Chair of Islington Mind, Unit 4, Archway Business Centre, Wedmore St, Archway, London N19 4RU within **fourteen days** of receiving the Stage 4 decision. After this date, the matter will be considered closed.

On receiving the complaint the Chair will further investigate your complaint.

The chair may decide to that it is appropriate to set up a panel to consider your complaint. The panel will generally consist of three people, one of whom will be a service user, and one may be independent of Islington Mind. The panel will invite to the meeting the complainant and the person or persons against whom the complaint has been made. Any such person may be accompanied to the meeting by a friend or supporter, or by an independent advocate. You will also be able bring evidence and witnesses forward to the panel. The panel will report their decision and any recommendations in writing to the complainant and to any

persons against whom the complaint was made within **21 days** of the meeting with you.

- **Timescale:** You must submit the Stage 5 complaint within **14 days** of receiving the Stage 4 decision. The Chair must respond within **28 days** of receiving your complaint or within **21 days** of the final meeting, if applicable.

The decision of the chair or the Panel is final.

If at this stage you feel that your complaint has not been satisfactorily resolved you can approach outside agencies to ask them to help you address the issues.

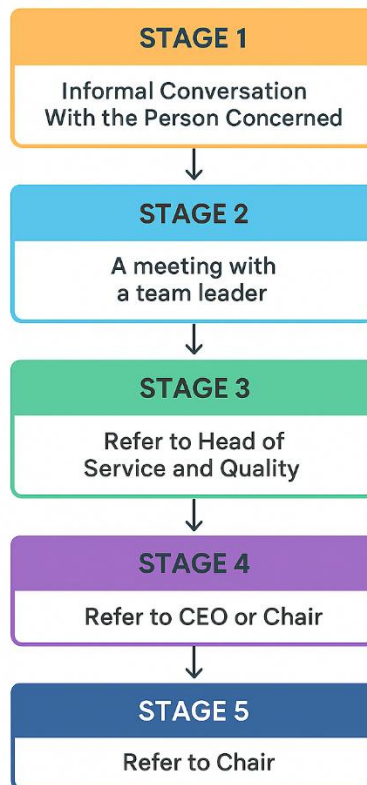
**Summary Of The Five Steps**

Stage	Who	How	Time Limit to Raise Issue (From Event/Awareness)	By when must the meeting be arranged	When will the decision be made	What can I do next if I am not satisfied	By when should I do this
1	Person immediately concerned or their line managers	Informally; ask for a private meeting	As soon as you feel dissatisfied.	They must arrange this within <b>5 working days</b> .	We hope that the issue will be resolved in this meeting.	<b>Stage 2</b> – escalate the complaint to the staff member’s or the volunteer’s manager	<b>As soon as possible</b>
2	The line manager ( <b>Complaint Handler</b> )	<b>In writing</b> (email, letter, or Appendix 1 form)	<b>Within 12 months</b>	Within <b>5 working days</b> of request (if meeting is required)	Within <b>10 working days</b> of the final meeting with you.	<b>Stage 3</b> – escalate the complaint to the Head of Service	Within <b>7 days</b> of receiving the decision from the

Stage	Who	How	Time Limit to Raise Issue (From Event/Awareness)	By when must the meeting be arranged	When will the decision be made	What can I do next if I am not satisfied	By when should I do this
							manager
<b>3</b>	Head of Service	In writing – you can use the Complaint Form (see in Appendix 1)	N/A (follow up from Stage 2)	Within <b>10 working days</b> from receiving Stage 2 decision	<b>2 weeks</b> from when you submitted Stage 3 complaint or from the final meeting with you	<b>Stage 4</b> – escalate the complaint to the CEO (or the Chair if the complaint is against the CEO)	Within <b>7 days</b> of receiving the decision from the manager
<b>4</b>	<b>CEO (or Chair</b> if the complaint is about the CEO/Manager/Trustee/Chair)	In writing	<b>N/A (follow up from Stage 3)</b>	<b>N/A</b> (investigation/meeting with you arranged as needed)	<b>4 weeks</b> after the final meeting with you or the submission of your complaint	<b>Stage 5</b> – escalate your complaint to the Chair	Within <b>14 days</b> of receiving the decision from the Head of Service
<b>5th And Final Stage</b>	<b>Chair (or a Panel constituted by the Chair)</b>	In writing	<b>N/A (follow up from Stage 4)</b>	<b>N/A</b> (meeting/panel arranged as needed)	<b>28 days</b> after the submission of your Stage 5 complaint or <b>21 days</b>	This is the final stage of investigation within Islington Mind. You can	<b>NA</b>

Stage	Who	How	Time Limit to Raise Issue (From Event/Awareness)	By when must the meeting be arranged	When will the decision be made	What can I do next if I am not satisfied	By when should I do this
					after the final meeting with you/Panel	approach external organisations, see in F.	

**C. THE COMPLAINT PROCEDURE SUMMARY**



**D. COMPLAINT ABOUT A TRAINEE THERAPIST / COUNSELLOR**

Most of our counsellors / therapists are volunteers. Some are fully qualified, while many are trainee therapists in their final year of study.

If a service user wishes to make a complaint against a therapist, they should follow the principles and five-stage process above, taking the following steps and timelines:

- **Stage 1: Informal Resolution** If possible, discuss the matter directly with your therapist to attempt an informal resolution.
- **Stage 2: Formal Complaint** If the issue remains unresolved, submit a formal complaint to the Counselling Service Coordinator or Team Leader. They will contact you and arrange a meeting within **5 working days**. A decision will be made within **10 working days** after the meeting.
- **Stage 3: Escalation to Senior Management** If you are not satisfied with the response, you may escalate the complaint to the Structured Intervention Manager (or Head of Service in their absence). They will contact you within **10 working days** and make a decision within **2 weeks**.
- **Stage 4: Review by Senior Leadership** If further review is needed, the complaint will be escalated to the Head of Service or CEO. A final decision at this stage will be made within **4 weeks**.
- **Stage 5: Final Appeal** If the issue remains unresolved, you may request a final review by the Chair of the Board. A decision will be made within **28 days** or **21 days** after a meeting with you, if a meeting is arranged.

## E. OUTCOMES AND APPEALS

Possible Outcomes at Each Stage At each stage of the complaints process, the possible outcomes are designed to ensure fairness and transparency.

These outcomes include:

- **The complaint being upheld:** If the complaint is fully upheld, this means the organisation recognises the validity of the issue raised. Actions taken after an upheld complaint could include:
  - Implementing corrective measures to address the issue (e.g., modifying organisational policies or procedures).
  - Providing additional staff training to prevent recurrence of similar issues.
  - Taking disciplinary action, if necessary, against individuals responsible for the problem.
  - Offering an apology or other remedial actions to the complainant, if appropriate.

- **The complaint being partially upheld:** In some cases, parts of the complaint may be found to have merit, while other aspects may not. For example:
  - Specific concerns raised by the complainant may be acknowledged and addressed, while others may be found unsubstantiated.
  - Partial resolutions could involve focused changes, such as addressing gaps in communication or updating specific practices without broader policy shifts.
  - A clear explanation will be provided to distinguish which aspects of the complaint have been upheld and which have not, along with the corresponding actions taken.
- **The complaint not being upheld:** If the complaint is not upheld, it means that after a thorough investigation, the organisation has determined there was insufficient evidence to support the claim or that the actions taken were deemed appropriate.
  - A detailed explanation will be provided to the complainant, outlining the reasons for the decision and the evidence or considerations that led to this conclusion.
  - The organisation will ensure transparency by clearly articulating why the complaint was not upheld, aiming to maintain trust in the process.

## Final Appeals and External Recourse

The complaints process within Islington Mind is intended to be thorough and fair. However, if a complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome after exhausting all internal stages, external avenues (e.g. external regulatory bodies) may be available.

- **Appeal to an External Body:** Depending on the nature of the complaint, the complainant may seek further review from external regulatory bodies.
- **Guidance and Support:** At the conclusion of the internal complaints process, the organisation will provide information to the complainant about available external recourse options, including contact details and steps required to escalate the complaint externally.

## F. EXTERNAL RECOURSE AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Organisation	Contact Details
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)	PO Box 4771, Coventry, CV4 0EH. Telephone: 0300 061 0614. (The LGSCO investigates complaints about local councils and services (including charities) commissioned by local authorities to provide care and support services).
The Charity Commission for England and Wales	PO Box 211, Bootle, L20 7YX. Telephone: 0300 066 9100. (The regulator of charities in England and Wales. They will generally only investigate if there is evidence of criminal activity or serious mismanagement that has not been resolved by the charity's internal process).
National Mind	2 Redman Place, London, E20 1JQ. Telephone: 020 8215 2243. (Provides advice and support on mental health, but does not handle complaints against local Minds. They can offer guidance on your rights).
The North London Mental Health NHS Partnership	Service User Experience & Engagement Team, Apple – Entrance I St Ann's Hospital, St Ann's Road, London, N15 3TH. Phone: 020 8702 4700. Email: beh-tr.patient.experience@nhs.net. Complaint Procedure: <a href="https://www.northlondonmentalhealth.nhs.uk/download.cfm?doc=docm93jijm4n3417.pdf&amp;ver=4621">https://www.northlondonmentalhealth.nhs.uk/download.cfm?doc=docm93jijm4n3417.pdf&amp;ver=4621</a> . (Relevant for complaints regarding services commissioned by the NHS).

## G. COMMENTS AND COMPLIMENTS

Islington Mind believes that our service users are the best people to determine how their needs should be met, therefore service users' feedback is at the centre of everything we plan, develop and do.

Managers are responsible to encourage staff to seek service users' feedback about services. All staff are responsible to forward any feedback, comments, suggestions, and compliments received from service users to their line manager. Staff should seek clients consent to share their comments, compliments and quotes.

Managers should forward feedback, comments and compliments to Head Of Service and Quality who will share them internally with our teams for internal learning and externally with commissioners and funders. The Head of Service and

Quality will ensure compliments are acknowledged in writing within 5 working days of receipt.

**Appendix 1**

**Complaint Form**

Service users can use this form to make a formal complaint.  
You can also write a letter, phone, or come to the office in person.

Name:

Address:

Contact No:

Date:

Please give details of your complaint below:

What action have you taken to resolve this matter?

Who have you spoken to about your problem?

What action would you like us to take regarding this complaint?

Please hand this to a member of staff or email it to [gemma.watts@islingtonmind.org.uk](mailto:gemma.watts@islingtonmind.org.uk) Alternatively, complaints may be posted to:

Sigal Avni, Chief Executive Officer, Islington Mind Unit 4, Archway Business Centre, 19-23 Wedmore Street, London N19 4RU

**Appendix 2**

**COMPLAINT INVESTIGATION FORM**

Date:  
 Complaint Handlers name:  
 Investigator’s name: Role:

About the complaint
Date complaint received
Complaint received through/by
Complaint against
Who else was/is involved Service users: Staff: Volunteers: External organisations/ agencies:
<b>Summary of the Complaint</b>
<b>Summary of Stage 1 – informal conversation</b>

About the investigation
Name of Investigator
Investigation dates
Method used: 1. 2. 3.

**Method 1 – Interviews**

**Interview 1**

Date:

Name of interviewee:

Attended with:

**Summary of Interview 1:**

**Interview 2**

Date:

Name of interviewee:

Attended with:

**Summary of Interview 2:**

**Interview 3**

Date:

Name of interviewee:

Attended with:

**Summary of Interview 3:**

**Method 2: Review of records**

**Outcomes and conclusions**

(Please ensure to clarify why you have reached these conclusions)

**Recommendations**

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**Further actions and recommendations**

Action	To be followed up by	By when