

Complaints Procedure

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v1.0	CEO / Board of Trustees	TBC	Not dated in source	TBC

The Somerville Complaints Procedure

Policy owner: CEO / Board of Trustees

Approved by: Board of Trustees

Date approved: [insert date]

Review date: [insert date]

1. Purpose

Somerville Youth Club and Adventure Playground is committed to providing a safe, welcoming, respectful and high-quality service for children, young people, families, staff, volunteers, partners and the wider community.

We recognise that sometimes people may be unhappy with something we have done, or failed to do. We welcome feedback and complaints because they help us improve our practice, strengthen accountability, and maintain trust with our community.

This procedure explains how complaints can be raised, how Somerville will respond, and what people can expect from us.

2. Who can make a complaint?

A complaint may be made by:

- a young person
- a parent, carer or family member
- a staff member, volunteer or trustee
- a partner organisation
- a hirer or visitor
- a neighbour or member of the local community
- anyone directly affected by Somerville's work

Young people will be supported to make complaints in a way that feels safe, accessible and appropriate to their age, communication needs and circumstances.

3. What counts as a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about Somerville's work, conduct, decisions, communication, facilities, services or standards.

This may include concerns about:

- the quality of activities or youth provision

- how someone has been treated by staff, volunteers, trustees or other young people
- poor communication or lack of response
- behaviour, respect or professionalism
- access, inclusion or discrimination
- use of Somerville's building, playground or facilities
- decisions made by Somerville
- failure to follow agreed policies or procedures

4. What is not covered by this procedure?

Some concerns may need to be handled under a different policy or process.

Safeguarding concerns about a child, young person or adult at risk must be dealt with under Somerville's Safeguarding Policy and reported immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

Staff employment issues, grievances or disciplinary matters should normally be handled through Somerville's HR, grievance or disciplinary procedures.

Serious concerns about wrongdoing, cover-up, abuse of power, financial misconduct, legal breaches, serious safeguarding failure or danger to young people may need to be handled under Somerville's Whistleblowing Procedure.

Where Somerville receives a concern, we will decide which procedure is most appropriate and explain this to the person raising it wherever possible.

5. Complaints and whistleblowing

Complaints and whistleblowing are related but not the same.

A complaint usually means someone is unhappy with a service, decision, behaviour or experience and wants Somerville to respond or put something right.

A whistleblowing concern usually involves serious wrongdoing or risk, such as:

- a safeguarding failure being ignored or covered up
- financial mismanagement, fraud or theft
- criminal activity
- serious breaches of law, regulation or charity duties
- serious health and safety risks
- bullying, harassment or abuse of power
- deliberate concealment of wrongdoing
- actions that place children, young people, staff, volunteers or the charity at serious risk

If a complaint raises serious issues of this kind, Somerville may treat it as a whistleblowing matter, safeguarding matter, serious incident or disciplinary matter.

Trustees are responsible for deciding whether a serious incident report should be made to the Charity Commission. The Charity Commission requires charities to report serious incidents where there has been, or may be, significant harm to beneficiaries, staff, volunteers, assets, services or reputation.

6. How to make a complaint

Complaints can be made:

- in person to a member of staff
- by phone
- by email
- in writing
- through a parent/carers, advocate, support worker or trusted adult
- directly to the CEO
- directly to the Board of Trustees where the complaint is about the CEO or senior leadership

Contact details:

1. **The Somerville**
Email: **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**
Phone: 0207 732 1403
Address: The Somerville, 260 Queen's Rd, London SE14 5JN
2. CEO
Kirsty Collander-Brown
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Complaints about the CEO should be sent to the Chair of Trustees or another nominated trustee:

1. **Chair of Trustees / Complaints Trustee:**
Name: Jacqui Shimidzu
Email: **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**

7. Support for young people to complain

Somerville will make sure young people know they have the right to speak up if they are unhappy, worried or feel they have been treated unfairly.

We will explain this through:

1. welcome information for young people and families
2. conversations during sessions
3. posters or accessible information in the building
4. youth worker check-ins
5. our safeguarding and participation practice

Young people can make a complaint to any trusted member of staff. They do not need to use formal language or put anything in writing. Staff will listen carefully, take the concern seriously, and explain what will happen next.

Where appropriate, a young person may be supported by a parent, carer, advocate, youth worker or other trusted adult.

8. Stage 1: Informal resolution

Where appropriate, Somerville will try to resolve complaints quickly and informally.

This may involve:

1. listening to the concern
2. apologising where something has gone wrong
3. explaining a decision or misunderstanding
4. agreeing practical action
5. arranging a conversation with the relevant person
6. making changes to practice where needed

Many complaints can be resolved at this stage.

Informal complaints should usually be acknowledged within 5 working days and resolved within 10 working days, where possible.

9. Stage 2: Formal complaint

If the issue cannot be resolved informally, or if the complaint is serious, the complaint should be put into the formal complaints process.

The complaint should include, where possible:

1. what happened
2. when it happened
3. who was involved
4. what impact it had
5. what the person would like Somerville to do
6. any relevant evidence or supporting information

Somerville will acknowledge the complaint within 5 working days.

The CEO, or another appropriate senior person, will investigate the complaint. This may include:

1. speaking to the person making the complaint
2. speaking to staff, volunteers, young people or others involved
3. reviewing records, emails, incident forms or relevant documents
4. checking relevant policies and procedures

5. considering whether safeguarding, HR, whistleblowing or serious incident procedures apply

Somerville will aim to provide a written response within 20 working days. If more time is needed, we will explain the reason and provide a revised timescale.

The response will normally include:

1. a summary of the complaint
2. what was considered
3. the outcome
4. any action Somerville will take
5. whether the complaint is upheld, partly upheld or not upheld
6. how to request a review if the complainant remains dissatisfied

10. Stage 3: Review by trustees

If the complainant is not satisfied with the formal response, they may request a review by the Board of Trustees.

A request for review should be made within 10 working days of receiving the formal response.

The review will usually be considered by the Chair of Trustees or a small panel of trustees who have not been directly involved in the matter.

The trustee review will consider whether:

2. the complaint was handled fairly
3. the investigation was reasonable
4. the outcome was appropriate
5. relevant policies were followed
6. further action is needed

The trustees will aim to respond within 20 working days of receiving the review request.

The trustee review decision will usually be Somerville's final internal response.

11. Complaints about trustees

Complaints about an individual trustee should be sent to the Chair of Trustees.

Complaints about the Chair of Trustees should be sent to another trustee, normally the Vice Chair or another nominated trustee.

Where a complaint concerns governance, trustee conduct, serious mismanagement or risk to the charity, trustees will consider whether legal, regulatory or Charity Commission advice is required.

12. Confidentiality

Somerville will handle complaints sensitively and confidentially.

Information will only be shared with people who need to know in order to understand, investigate or respond to the complaint.

However, confidentiality cannot always be guaranteed. Somerville may need to share information if:

1. a child, young person or adult may be at risk of harm
2. a crime may have been committed
3. there is a serious risk to health and safety
4. there is a legal, regulatory or safeguarding duty to share information
5. the issue may need to be reported to the Charity Commission, police, local authority, funder or another relevant body

Where possible, we will explain when and why information needs to be shared.

13. Safeguarding concerns

If a complaint includes a safeguarding concern, it must be passed immediately to Somerville's Designated Safeguarding Lead.

Somerville will follow its Safeguarding Policy and may need to contact children's social care, the police, the Local Authority Designated Officer, or another relevant safeguarding body.

Safeguarding concerns will not wait for the complaints process to finish.

14. Fairness and respect

Somerville will treat people who complain with respect and will not penalise anyone for raising a genuine concern.

We expect complaints to be made respectfully and honestly. We understand that people may be upset, angry or distressed, but abusive, threatening or discriminatory behaviour towards staff, volunteers, trustees, young people or others will not be accepted.

If a complaint is found to be malicious, knowingly false or abusive, Somerville may take appropriate action.

15. Anonymous complaints

Somerville will consider anonymous complaints where enough information is provided to understand and respond to the concern. However, it may be harder to investigate or resolve a complaint if we cannot contact the person who raised it.

Anonymous complaints involving safeguarding, serious risk, financial misconduct or wrongdoing will still be taken seriously and referred through the appropriate process.

16. Recording and learning from complaints

Somerville will keep a record of formal complaints, including:

1. the nature of the complaint
2. the date received
3. who handled it
4. the outcome
5. any actions taken
6. any learning or changes made

Complaint records will be stored securely and in line with data protection requirements.

The CEO will report complaints and learning to the Board of Trustees, while protecting confidentiality as appropriate.

The Board will review complaints to identify patterns, risks, training needs or improvements to Somerville's services.

17. External routes

Somerville aims to resolve complaints fairly and constructively through this procedure.

However, some concerns may also be raised with external bodies where appropriate, including:

1. the Local Authority, for safeguarding or commissioned services
2. the Local Authority Designated Officer, where there are concerns about an adult working with children
3. the Charity Commission, where there are serious concerns about charity governance, misconduct, mismanagement or risk
4. the police, where a crime may have been committed
5. funders or regulators, where relevant

Workers and volunteers can also report serious wrongdoing at a charity directly to the Charity Commission where appropriate.

18. Review

This procedure will be reviewed at least every two years, or sooner if there are changes in law, regulation, safeguarding guidance, organisational structure or learning from complaints.