The Neighbour Network CIC - Complaints Handling Policy

Company Number: 16566579

Our policy is:

- To provide a fair complaints procedure which is clear and easy to use for anyone wishing to make a complaint
- To publicise the existence of our complaints procedure so that people know how to contact us to make a complaint
- To make sure everyone at The Neighbour Network CIC knows what to do if a complaint is received
- To make sure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way
- To make sure that complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are repaired
- To gather information which helps us to improve what we do

This formal procedure should only be instigated when attempts to resolve the issue informally have failed or where, due to the nature of the complaint, it is not appropriate to address it with the person concerned.

Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction whether justified or not by one or more members of the public about The Neighbour Network's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of The Neighbour Network CIC
The types of complaint that will fall under this policy will include:

- Conduct of our staff or volunteers.
- A complaint relating to the projects run by The Neighbour Network CIC
- Discrimination
- Provision of inaccurate information
- Poor administration including persistent delays in responding to enquiries
- Financial mismanagement

Safeguarding Concerns

This policy is not intended to be used for raising safeguarding concerns regarding allegations of abuse against children and/or vulnerable adults at The Neighbour Network CIC events or by staff or volunteers.

All safeguarding concerns should be directed to the Designated Safeguarding Lead at hello@theneighbournetwork.co.uk

Any complaint received that contains a safeguarding concern will be dealt with in accordance with the The Neighbour Network CIC Safeguarding Policy.

Where Complaints Come From

Complaints may come from any person or organisation who has a legitimate interest in The Neighbour Network CIC.

A complaint can be received verbally, by phone, by email or in writing.

Confidentiality

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

Responsibility

Overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation lies with the Board of Directors

Review

This policy is reviewed regularly and updated as required.

Last Reviewed	01/12/2025
Last updated	16/10/26

The Neighbour Network CIC - Complaints Procedure

Publicised Contact Details for Complaints:

A complaint may be made in a number of ways - including face to face, telephone or by email or post. We would prefer that serious complaints are made in writing or by email, marked "Private & Confidential", and sent to who will acknowledge it in writing (normally within 7 days).

Complaints should be sent to Scott Olliver :

Email: scott@theneighbournetwork.co.uk

Post: 52 Roman Way, Boughton Monchelsea, ME17 4SH

Complaints regarding Scott Olliver should be sent to:

Email: hello@theneighbournetwork.co.uk

The Neighbour Network CIC will then arrange for the complaint to be investigated.

Verbal complaints may be made by phone to **0300 1027952** or in person to any of The Neighbour Network CIC staff or directors at any of our events or activities.

Receiving Complaints

Complaints may arrive through channels publicised for that purpose or through any other contact details or opportunities the complainant may have.

Complaints received by telephone or in person need to be recorded.
The person who receives a phone or in person complaint should:

- Write down the facts of the complaint
- Take the complainant's name, address and telephone number
- Note down the relationship of the complainant to The Neighbour Network CIC (for example: client, member)
- Tell the complainant that we have a complaints procedure
- Tell the complainant what will happen next and how long it will take
- Where appropriate, ask the complainant to send a written account by post or by email so that the complaint is recorded in the complainant's own words.

For further guidelines about handling verbal complaints, see **Appendix 1**

Resolving Complaints

Stage One
In many cases, a complaint is best resolved by the person responsible for the issue being complained about. If the complaint has been received by that person, they may be able to resolve it swiftly and should do so if possible and appropriate.

Whether or not the complaint has been resolved, the complaint information should be passed to the administrator within one week.

On receiving the complaint, the administrator will ensure that it is recorded in the complaints log. If it has not already been resolved, they delegate an appropriate person to investigate it and to take appropriate action.

If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a fair opportunity to respond.

Complaints should be acknowledged by the person handling the complaint within one week. The acknowledgement should say who is dealing with the complaint and when the person complaining can expect a reply. A copy of this complaints procedure should be attached.

Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within four weeks. If this is not possible because for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given.

Whether the complaint is justified or not, the reply to the complainant should describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

Stage Two

If the complainant feels that the problem has not been satisfactorily resolved at Stage One, they can request that the complaint is reviewed at Board level. At this stage, the complaint will be passed to the Board

The request for Board level review should be acknowledged within a week of receiving it. The acknowledgement should say who will deal with the case and when the complainant can expect a reply.

The member of the board may investigate the facts of the case themselves. This may involve reviewing the paperwork of the case and speaking with the person who dealt with the complaint at Stage One.

If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a further opportunity to respond.

The person who dealt with the original complaint at Stage One should be kept informed of what is happening.

Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within four weeks. If this is not possible because for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given.

Whether the complaint is upheld or not, the reply to the complainant should describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

The decision taken at this stage is final, unless the Board decides it is appropriate to seek external assistance with resolution.

External Stage

The complainant can complain to the Office of the Regulator of Community Interest Companies at any stage.

Information about the kind of complaints the Regulator can involve itself in and how to proceed with a complaint can be found here
https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/office-of-the-regulator-of-community-interest-companies/about/complaints-procedure

Variation of the Complaints Procedure

The Board may vary the procedure for good reason. This may be necessary to avoid a conflict of interest, for example, a complaint about the Chair should not also have the Chair as the person leading a Stage Two review.

Monitoring and Learning from Complaints

Complaints are reviewed annually to identify any trends which may indicate a need to take further action.

Appendix 1 - Practical Guidance for Handling Verbal Complaints

- Remain calm and respectful throughout the conversation
- Listen - allow the person to talk about the complaint in their own words. Sometimes a person just wants to "let off steam"
- Don't debate the facts in the first instance, especially if the person is angry
- Show an interest in what is being said
- Obtain details about the complaint before any personal details
- Ask for clarification wherever necessary
- Show that you have understood the complaint by reflecting back what you have noted down
- Acknowledge the person's feelings (even if you feel that they are being unreasonable) - you can do this without making a comment on the complaint itself or making any admission of fault on behalf of the organisation
  e.g. "I understand that this situation is frustrating for you"
- If you feel that an apology is deserved for something that was the responsibility of your organisation, then apologise
- Ask the person what they would like done to resolve the issue
- Be clear about what you can do, how long it will take and what it will involve.
- Don't promise things you can't deliver
- Give clear and valid reasons why requests cannot be met
- Make sure that the person understands what they have been told
- Wherever appropriate, inform the person about the available avenues of review or appeal

Last Reviewed	01/12/2025
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The Neighbour Network CIC – Whistleblowing Policy & Procedure

1. Introduction

1.1 **The Neighbour Network CIC** is committed to openness and accountability. In line with this commitment, we expect employees, volunteers or third parties who have serious concerns about any aspect of our work, to come forward and voice those concerns with the knowledge that, if made with a reasonable belief of public interest, their action will be viewed positively. This will assist us in addressing the concerns and thereby avoid more serious regulatory breaches or reputational damage.

1.2 Aims of the Policy:

- To encourage Whistleblowers to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible, in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously, investigated as appropriate and their confidentiality respected.
- To provide Whistleblowers with guidance as to how to raise their concerns.
- To reassure Whistleblowers that they can raise concerns without fear of reprisals, even if their concern turns out to be mistaken.

2. Definitions

Public Interest Disclosure: The Public Interest Disclosure Act of 1998 (PIDA) applies to individuals raising genuine concerns relating to some actual or potential danger, fraud, illegal or unethical conduct. The Act provides legal protection to prevent individuals being penalised as a result of making a qualifying disclosure.

Qualifying Disclosure: A Qualifying Disclosure is one in which the reasonable belief of the person making the disclosure, is in the public interest to disclose.

Whistleblower: An individual who raises a qualifying disclosure under this policy.

Whistleblowing: An incident where an individual discloses an alleged wrongdoing under this policy.

Wrongdoing: This includes improper, illegal, or negligent behaviour and should be the underlying consideration when investigating allegations raised.

3. Scope of this Policy

3.1 The Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure gives staff, volunteers and third parties a clear procedure on how to raise any concerns. Whistleblowing is not the same as a complaint. It is about raising concerns regarding malpractice or wrongdoing.

3.2 The Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure may not be used to re-open or review a matter already decided under other policies and procedures.

3.3 The concerns covered by the Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure are:

- actual or suspected criminal offences
- failure to comply with legal obligations
- serious health and safety risks
- damage to the environment
- financial malpractice, impropriety, or fraud
- professional malpractice
- deliberate suppression, aiding, abetting or concealment of any of the above
- other illegal behaviour or serious malpractice which cannot be raised under an alternative policy

4. How to raise a concern

4.1 Are you an employee or volunteer of The Neighbour Network CIC?

In the first instance, please contact your line manager, or another appropriate member of staff to raise your concern. If this is not possible, please contact one of the board of directors.

If the concerns relate to a member of staff, the concerns should be taken directly to a member of the board of directors. Please ensure you have first read the whistle blowing policy before making a disclosure. The steps below should be followed consecutively, and you should only move to the next step if the previous one did not result in a resolution, or if it is not appropriate. All written communication should be titled “whistle blowing”.

4.1.1 Step One: Make a disclosure in writing to your line manager or project leader (this should be a member of contracted staff). If you do not have one of the above, go directly to step two.

4.1.2 Step Two: Make a disclosure in writing to the Managing director by email (scott@theneighbournetwork.co.uk). If the concern relates to both of them, go directly to step three.

4.1.3 Step Three: Make a disclosure in writing to the Board of Directors by emailing

(scott@thneighbournetwork.co.uk).

4.1.4 Step Four: Make a disclosure to the relevant authority. These may include:HMRC, The Health & Safety Executive, The Environment Agency, The Office of the Regulator of Community Interest Companies.

4.2 Are you a supplier/contractor or organisation partner to the C.I.C.?

In the first instance, please contact your key contact. If this is not possible, please contact the C.I.C.Managing Director (scott@thneighbournetwork.co.uk) who will support and guide you through the process.

4.3 In either of the above circumstances Whistleblowers should provide a description of the concerns including where possible, precise information such as dates, names of those involved, meetings or correspondence which have taken place and reference to relevant documents or policies.

4.4 Whilst the scope of the policy accepts that majority of disclosures will be made by employees, volunteers or partners/suppliers, there is scope within the legislation for others associated with the C.I.C. to raise whistleblowing concerns. Members of the public may also feel they wish to pursue a matter they feel is in the public interest. In this case, the procedure will not differ from that of an employee. It is worthy of mention that some individuals that fall under this category may not necessarily follow the procedure as prescribed and may take other routes to disclosure; as such it is important to be vigilant when considering or taking into any account any complaint made by individuals who are not directly employed by or associated with the C.I.C..

4.5 All concerns received through the described procedure will be acknowledged, recorded, reviewed and where appropriate investigated.

5. What will happen next?

5.1 A meeting will be arranged to discuss your concerns and you may bring someone with you to this meeting, as long as that person is willing to maintain the confidentiality of your disclosure and any subsequent investigation.

5.2 Feedback will then be given as to whether the concern falls within the scope of this policy and how we plan to deal with the matter.

5.3 If there is a cause for concern, the designated person will arrange for an investigation. The designated person may appoint another person to undertake the investigation on his/her behalf.

5.4 Where there are existing procedures or policies in place for the investigation of certain allegations, the matter will be dealt with in line with that policy.

6. Process

6.1 Once a disclosure has been made **The Neighbour Network CIC** will,

6.1.1 Make a record of its receipt

6.1.2 Carry out a preliminary review as to whether the disclosure falls under the scope of this policy and whether there is prima facie evidence to suggest that it should be investigated and if so, appoint a person to investigate

6.2 Following the preliminary review, the investigating officer will make a preliminary decision and notify the Whistleblower, where it is possible and appropriate to do so, that

6.2.1 The disclosure will be investigated formally

6.2.2 The disclosure has been investigated and relevant action taken

6.2.3 The disclosure has been drawn to the attention if the person who has the authority to act on the matter

6.2.4 The disclosure has been dismissed as there are no ground for investigation

6.3 Where the initial investigation identifies that a formal investigation is required then,

6.3.1 An investigation will be carried out by someone with relevant experience and as speedily as possible, depending on the complexity of the investigation.

6.3.2 The person(s) subject of the disclosure will be informed and advised of any supporting evidence and will have the right to respond during interview

6.3.3 After the interview the investigator will report their findings with recommendations of further steps to be taken. All reports will be retained for a period of two years.

6.3.4 The Whistleblower will be informed of the progress and timescales of the investigation, where it is appropriate. All information must be kept confidential by the Whistleblower.

6.3.5 If the disclosure is deemed to be malicious or made for personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken against the individual concerned if they are staff or volunteers.

7. If the Whistleblower is not satisfied

7.1 **The Neighbour Network CIC** will deal with all concerns raised fairly and in an appropriate manner.

7.2 The Whistleblower may not ask for a review of any decision but if they have concerns about the ways in which their concern has been handled, they may contact an independent Whistleblowing charity, using the details at the end of this Policy.

8. External Disclosures

8.1 This policy is designed to provide an internal mechanism for reporting any concerns r.e. wrongdoing at **The Neighbour Network CIC**. In most cases contacting anyone externally is likely to be unnecessary.

8.2 Nothing in this policy precludes an individual from reporting a suspected crime to the police nor is it intended to remove any rights under the Public Disclosure Act of 1998.

9. Confidentiality

9.1 Where possible, the identity of the Whistleblower will be protected. There may be circumstances, however, where it will not be possible to proceed without revealing the Whistleblower's identity, for example if the Whistleblower's evidence is needed in the investigatory process, at a disciplinary or court hearing. Should this be the case, the matter will be discussed with the Whistleblower at the earliest opportunity, and they will have the opportunity to withdraw the disclosure if by continuing with the investigation their identity would be revealed to the subject of the disclosure.

9.2 Note that the need for confidentiality may prevent the designated person from providing the specific details of the investigation or actions taken, to the Whistleblower.

9.3 The Whistleblower should treat any information about the investigation as confidential.

9.4 Concerns raised anonymously will be dealt with at the discretion of the C.I.C.

10. Protection of Whistleblowers

10.1 Individuals who raise concerns that they reasonably believe are in the public interest will be protected as a whisteblower under the PIDA Act and will not be dismissed or subjected to any detriment as a result of such action, even if they turn out to be mistaken. Detriment includes unwarranted disciplinary action or victimisation.

10.2 If a Whistleblower believes that he/she has suffered any such treatment because they have raised concerns under this policy, he/she should raise the matter with the Directors in the first instance who will work with the interest of all parties to seek resolution, and this may include mediation and following the informal grievance procedure.

10.3 Any staff member/volunteer who victimises or retaliates against those who have raised concerns under this policy will be subject to disciplinary action.

11. Malicious Whistleblowing

11.1 Where it is found that the whistleblower makes allegations maliciously, and:

11.1.1 Does not act in the public interest;

11.1.2 Makes an allegation without having reasonable grounds for believing it to be substantially true;

11.1.3 Collects the information to support the allegations improperly, or;

11.1.4 Makes an allegation for personal or 3rd party gain,

They will be subject to formal disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal and in some cases may be subject to criminal investigation where illegality has occurred in order to achieve those aims.

11.2 Additionally where this criterion is met or the employee engages in improper conduct in relation to whistleblowing, they are unlikely to be protected as a whistle-blower under the PIDA Act.

12. Support and Advice

12.1 If a member of staff needs independent advice about a whistleblowing issue, they can contact Public Concern at Work, the independent whistleblowing charity, who offer a confidential helpline (020 7404 6609) or helpline@pcaw.co.uk. Please see www.pcaw.co.uk for more information.

THE NEIGHBOUR NETWORK CIC

"LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR AS YOURSELF"

Last Reviewed	05/01/2026