

PUBLIC COMPLAINTS POLICY

Comhlámh views complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve for the future, as well as a chance to put things right for the person or organisation that has made the complaint. 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 ensure everyone at Comhlámh knows what to do if a complaint is received.
- To ensure all complaints are investigated promptly and fairly.
- To ensure that complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are repaired.

What is a Complaint?

- A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction about any aspect of Comhlámh. Complaints may come from any individual or organisation who has a legitimate interest in Comhlámh.
- A complaint can be received verbally, by phone, by email, via social media or in writing.
- All complaint information will be handled sensitively, telling only those who need to be involved and following any relevant data protection requirements.
- This policy covers complaints about: how you or others have been treated by Comhlámh; the behaviour of Comhlámh staff, board, and its members; any concerns about Comhlámh policies and legal obligations.
- Concerns raised by Comhlámh employees are dealt with under our Whistleblowing Policy.
- It may be the case that we receive correspondence that in our view does not fall under our definition of a complaint or does not raise any issue that calls for in depth investigation. This may apply, for instance, to objections to certain steps, recommendations, or decisions we have taken in compliance with a legal requirement; disapproval of Comhlámh's refusal to act in a matter where we have no legal power to act; malicious, repetitive, or vexatious claims such as harassment of staff or repeated submissions of a complaint to which a response under section three of our complaint procedure has been provided.
- We will not reply to rude or abusive emails, calls, or letters. In all other cases we will give brief reasons for our views but having done so once will not normally engage in further correspondence on the merits of the position we have taken.

We will treat any expression of dissatisfaction about our conduct as a complaint. However, we ask you to contact us in writing as set out in the next section, so that we can consider the matter properly.

Making a Complaint

- Comhlámh's contact details are available on our website.
- A complaint may be emailed to elena@comhlámh.org or sent by post to: Head of HR, Comhlámh, 12 Parliament St, Dublin 2
- A telephone complaint can be received at +353 (01) 4783490
- It will help us to deal quickly and fully with your complaint if you can state that you are making a complaint, set out your concern in writing as clearly as possible, and provide your contact details.

Responding to Your Complaint

- If you have supplied your contact details, we will send an acknowledgment of your complaint within five working days. Your complaint will then be passed to our complaints committee.
- We will aim to respond as soon as possible, and in any event within 21 working days. We may need to contact you to ask for more information or clarity before making a final response.
- When we provide you with a final response, we will clearly set out the steps we took in investigating the complaint along with our views and reasons for this. Where we identify mistakes in our approach we will acknowledge those mistakes, set out details of remedial steps or changes we think are appropriate in the circumstances, and explain what we will do to prevent the problem from reoccurring. We will also indicate your right to request a review of your complaint if you are not satisfied with our response.

Receiving a Complaint – Guidance for Staff

- 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, telephone number and email address.
 - Note the relationship of the complainant to Comhlámh.
 - Inform the complainant that we have a complaints procedure.
 - Inform 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.

You should:

- Remain calm and respectful throughout the conversation.
- Listen - allow the person to talk about the complaint in their own words.
- Don't debate the facts in the first instance, especially if the person is upset/angry.
- Show an interest in what is being said.
- 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".
- Be clear about what you can do, how long it will take and what it will involve.
- Make sure you double check the person's contact details before ending the conversation.

Handling a Complaint – Guidance for Complaints Committee

- On receiving the complaint, the complaints committee should record it in the complaints log located on the Share-Drive (accessible only to the complaints committee).
- Complaints should be acknowledged in writing within five working days. The acknowledgement should say who is dealing with the complaint and when the person complaining can expect a reply. A copy of the complaint procedure should be attached.
- Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within 21 days. 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.
- If the complainant feels that the problem has not been satisfactorily resolved, they can request that the complaint is reviewed at CEO and Board level. This request should be acknowledged within five working days of receiving it. The acknowledgement should say who will deal with the case review and when the complainant can expect a reply.
- The CEO and Board should then review the complaint and keep the complaints committee informed so the Complaint Log is updated accordingly.
- Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within five working days. 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 review 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.