**Stronger Kent Communities**

**Compliments, Comments and Complaints** **Policy**

**Introduction**

Stronger Kent Communities (SKC) welcomes feedback from all who use our services. This compliments, comments and complaints policy and procedure applies to all services SKC provides.

We aim to respond to all suggestions, whether positive or negative, in a timely and courteous manner as part of our commitment to providing the highest standards of customer service. We are committed to taking complaints seriously by:

* Encouraging a culture of openness
* Making the process as straightforward as possible
* Carrying out a fair and thorough investigation
* Keeping the complainant informed throughout
* Using the information to improve our services and provide staff and volunteer training if required

**Policy Statement**

**Compliments and comments**

SKC welcomes feedback from all users of our services. There are a number of options available to provide compliments, comments and feedback to SKC:

* Surveys
* By emailing the Operations and Development Manager
* By compliments, comments and complaints forms available on our website

All compliments and comments submitted by email or via the website will be acknowledged and the sender thanked for their feedback. Compliments should be shared with the member(s) of staff, volunteers and their Line Managers. Sometimes, the SKC will use compliments during publications and for marketing purposes. Comments should be passed to the relevant staff who will consider any action required.

**Complaints**

SKC takes all complaints seriously and seeks to improve its service. the Operations and Development Manager will review all complaints along with the effectiveness of the procedures used to address them. Information received in complaints will be used to prevent recurrence.

SKC welcomes feedback on the services it provides, which may from time to time include dissatisfaction with an aspect of service. Anyone who feels it is appropriate to express dissatisfaction should be offered the opportunity to report the circumstances openly and confidently to SKC with full assurance that it will be received in a manner which reflects the caring philosophy of the organisation.

SKC aims to deal with each expression of dissatisfaction courteously, sympathetically, fairly and objectively and to offer an appropriate remedy to anyone who is adversely affected by a service that fails to meet its standards.

**Confidentiality**

Where possible confidentiality will be observed throughout the operation of this policy. Where a complaint relates to specific individuals, SKC may seek permission to share details with them. If permission is not given, it may not be possible for SKC to fully investigate or resolve the complaint.

**Anonymous complaints**

SKC does not normally accept or act upon anonymous complaints, due to SKC not being in a position to collect all relevant information for investigation from such complaints and respond accordingly. There may, however, be exceptional circumstances where SKC deems it appropriate to investigate a complaint from an anonymous source, which identifies a risk to the SKC community or the public.

**Vexatious and malicious complaints**

A vexatious or malicious complaint is defined as a complaint which is deemed unreasonable or untrue, having been put forward so as to abuse the complaints procedure, or an attempt to defame the name or character of another person. In cases where a complaint is considered to be vexatious or malicious, SKC reserves the right to terminate investigation of the complaint.

**Permission to disclose**

If the complainant wishes for someone else to raise concerns with us on their behalf, please note that SKC has a legal obligation under the data protection act 1998 with regard to sharing information with third parties. Therefore, in some circumstances SKC will require written permission to share information with them.

Before permission is given to share the information with others, the complainant must consider whether our response will include any sensitive information about them. The complainant is required to contact us in advance to tell us which sensitive information we can and cannot share.

**Collective/group complaints**

Collective/group complaints are expected to identify how each individual has been personally

affected by the issues which are being brought to the attention of SKC. Each individual named in the collective complaint must agree with the content of the complaint before it is submitted and individually sign to say that they are in agreement with the same. Only the nominated spokesperson will receive communications/correspondence from SKC.

**Stages of Complaint**

SKC operates three stages to a complaint: informal, formal and appeal. At any point the complaint can be satisfactorily concluded. The process is outlined below.

**Stage 1 - Informal**

Rather than let an issue of concern or an area of dissatisfaction become a complaint, we encourage you to resolve the issue informally.

SKC service users and volunteers should, in the first instance, raise the issue directly with the person who in their opinion is responsible, or with the line manager or staff member of the area concerned.

**Stage 2 - Formal**

SKC appreciates that there may be occasions where the above process is inappropriate and that a more formal approach is necessary, or where you feel that your complaint has not been satisfactorily resolved at stage 1.

Where it has not been possible to resolve matters to your satisfaction under Stage 1 you should put your complaint in writing to the Operations and Development Manager, Stronger Kent Communities, Ashford Volunteer Centre, Berwick House, 8 Elwick Road, Ashford, Kent TN23 1PF or emailed to [sue.tucker@strongerkentcommunities.org.uk](mailto:sue.tucker@strongerkentcommunities.org.uk).

If your complaint concerns the Operations and Development Manager, please address it to The Directors at the address above, or email [contact@strongerkentcommunities.org.uk](mailto:contact@strongerkentcommunities.org.uk) with Complaint FAO The Directors in the subject line.

Please outline your concerns as clearly and in as much detail as you can.

Please include your name and address, dates, locations and witnesses as appropriate.

You should outline any previous unsuccessful attempts at resolution and what reasonable steps should be taken to resolve the complaint.

You should initiate stage 2 within 10 working days of our response to stage 1; we will send an acknowledgement within 5 working days.

We aim to provide you with a formal response within 10 working days. If we are unable to do this you will be kept informed of our progress.

**Stage 3 – Appeal Procedure**

Where the complaint has not been resolved at stage 2 you may choose to progress your complaint to stage 3, which is the final stage of SKC complaints procedure. This should be made in writing within 10 working days of when you received the stage 2 response. Again you should explain why

the outcome of the stage 2 process is not satisfactory and what you would like us to do next.

Correspondence for stage 3 should be addressed to The Directors, Stroner Kent Communities, Ashford Volunteer Centre, Berwick House, 8 Elwick Road, Ashford, Kent TN23 1PF or emailed to [contact@strongerkentcommunities.org.uk](mailto:contact@strongerkentcommunities.org.uk) with FAO The Directors – Stage 3 Complaint in the subject line.

We will send you an acknowledgement within 5 working days and we aim to provide you with a response to your stage 3 (appeal) within 20 working days.

Where a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the Stage 3 process they have the opportunity to appeal to the appropriate external body, the [Regulator of Community Interest Companies.](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/605438/cic-14-1090-complaint-about-community-interest-companies.pdf)

**Linked policies/statements**

Safeguarding Policy

Data Protection Policy

Equality and Diversity Policy

[Freedom of Information Act](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/36/contents) and [Data Protection Act](https://www.gov.uk/data-protection)

**Monitoring and Review**

The procedure will be reviewed after a period of three years or earlier if required. It will be approved and monitored by the SKC Board of Directors.

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| **Date drafted** | March 2023 |
| **Date adopted by the directors** | January 2024 |
| **Date of last review** | January 2024 |
| **Next review due** | January 2025, or as required due to changes in relevant legislation |