

CSSC Complaints Handling Policy and Procedure

1. Purpose

CSSC is committed to providing high quality services and to treating people fairly, respectfully, and consistently. We value complaints and use them to improve how we work.

This procedure explains how CSSC handles complaints, what complainants can expect, and how CSSC ensures learning and accountability.

2. Definition of a complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about CSSC's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of CSSC.

3. What you can complain about

You can complain about issues such as:

- failure or refusal to provide a CSSC service
- unreasonable delay in providing a service
- poor quality or standard of service
- failure to follow agreed policies, procedures, or guidance
- failure to apply decisions or processes properly
- conduct, treatment, or attitude of staff or representatives acting on behalf of CSSC
- dissatisfaction with how a decision was administered

4. What is not covered by this procedure

This procedure does not deal with:

- staff grievances or employment-related matters
- whistleblowing concerns
- requests made under data protection legislation
- matters where there is a statutory right of appeal or review
- matters that are currently being considered by a court or tribunal
- attempts to reopen a complaint that has already completed this procedure

Where a concern falls outside this procedure, CSSC will explain why and will signpost the complainant to the appropriate process.

5. Who can make a complaint

Any person or organisation that receives, requests, or is directly affected by CSSC's services may make a complaint. Complaints may be made by a representative, advocate, or adviser where appropriate. Where a complaint is made on someone's behalf, consent will be sought where this is reasonably required.

6. How to make a complaint

Complaints may be made in the following ways.

- In person at our offices.

- By telephone on 028 9531 3030.
- In writing to:

Corporate Services,
Controlled Schools' Support Council,
2nd Floor Main Building,
Stranmillis University College,
Stranmillis Road, Belfast,
BT9 5DY.

By email to info@csscni.org.uk.

CSSC does not require complaints to be submitted using a specific form.

When making a complaint, complainants should provide their full name and contact details, clear details of what has gone wrong, and as much information as possible about the complaint.

Where a complaint is made in person or by telephone, CSSC will record the key issues raised and confirm them with the complainant. Complaints should be made as soon as possible to allow early resolution.

7. Accessibility and support

CSSC is committed to making its complaints process accessible. Reasonable adjustments will be made to support individuals who may find it difficult to raise a complaint. This may include accepting complaints verbally, providing information in alternative formats, or allowing a representative to assist.

8. Time limits

Complaints should normally be made within 6 months of the issue arising or from when the complainant became aware of the issue. CSSC may consider complaints outside this timeframe where there are good reasons for delay.

9. The complaints process

CSSC operates a 2-stage complaints process.

Stage 1: Frontline response

Stage 1 aims to resolve complaints quickly and informally where possible.

Complaints at Stage 1 will normally be handled by an appropriate manager or a member of the Senior Management Team. Where possible, the complaint will be handled by someone who was not directly involved in the issue.

CSSC aims to provide a response within 5 working days of receiving the complaint.

If the complaint is resolved at Stage 1, the outcome will be recorded and the complaint closed. The complainant will be advised of their right to escalate the complaint to Stage 2 if they remain dissatisfied.

In exceptional circumstances, the Stage 1 timescale may be extended by up to a further 5 working days. Where this happens, the complainant will be informed of the reason and the revised timescale.

Stage 2: Investigation

Stage 2 applies where the complainant remains dissatisfied after Stage 1, or where the complaint is complex or serious and requires investigation.

CSSC will acknowledge receipt of a Stage 2 complaint within 3 working days.

An investigating officer will be appointed who is independent of the issue, normally a member of the Senior Management Team or the Chief Executive.

At the start of Stage 2, CSSC will confirm the issues to be investigated, the outcome the complainant is seeking, and any matters that cannot be considered under this procedure.

CSSC aims to provide a full written response within 20 working days.

If more time is required, the complainant will be informed of the reason and the revised timescale and will be kept updated.

The final response will address each issue raised, explain the findings, explain that this is the final stage of CSSC's procedure, and advise the complainant of their right to contact the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman.

10. Complaints involving senior roles

Complaints involving a member of the Senior Management Team will be investigated by the Chief Executive.

Complaints involving the Chief Executive will be overseen by the Chair of the Council. Where appropriate, the Chair may appoint an independent investigator to ensure fairness and objectivity.

11. Confidentiality and data protection

Complaints will be handled sensitively and confidentially. Information will be shared only where necessary to investigate and respond to the complaint, and in line with data protection legislation.

Where full disclosure of information is not possible, this will be explained to the complainant.

12. Recording and monitoring complaints

All complaints will be recorded in a central complaints log. Records will include the nature of the complaint, the stage reached, the outcome, and any learning identified.

13. Learning from complaints

CSSC will use complaints to identify trends, risks, and opportunities for improvement. Actions arising from complaints will be monitored to ensure they are implemented. Learning will be shared with relevant staff and, where appropriate, with Council.

14. Governance and oversight

Overall responsibility for complaints management rests with the Chief Executive.

The Council has oversight of the effectiveness of the complaints handling process. The Chief Executive will provide periodic reports to the Council on complaints received, key themes, actions taken, and learning identified. Routine reporting will not identify individual complainants.

15. Referral to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after completing CSSC's complaints handling procedure, they should be referred to the:

The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman
33 Wellington Place
Belfast
BT1 6HN
Freephone: 0800 34 34 24

Email: nipso@nipso.org.uk

Website: www.nipso.org.uk

CSSC will include details of how to contact the Ombudsman in its final response and inform the complainant that their complaint should be referred within 6 months of the final response from CSSC.