



# External Complaints Policy

|                                       |                                                                                                                               |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Purpose of Agreement                  | The purpose of this policy is to describe the Veterans Outreach Support procedure regarding managing concerns and complaints. |
| Document Type                         | Policy                                                                                                                        |
| Version                               | V4                                                                                                                            |
| Operational Date                      | June 2026                                                                                                                     |
| Document Review Date                  | June 2028                                                                                                                     |
| Document Author (Job Title)           | Head of Care                                                                                                                  |
| Document Manager Approval (Job Title) | CEO                                                                                                                           |
| Location                              | VOS Shared Drive                                                                                                              |

## **1. Purpose**

Veterans Outreach Support (VOS) is committed to providing high-quality, safe and responsive services. We welcome all forms of feedback, including complaints, as an essential way to improve our services and ensure we meet the needs of beneficiaries, partners and stakeholders.

This policy outlines how external complaints are received, managed and resolved in a fair, transparent and timely manner.

## **2. Scope**

This policy applies to:

- Beneficiaries
- Partner organisations
- Funders, donors and supporters
- Members of the public

This policy covers complaints only. Compliments and general feedback are recorded separately for service improvement purposes.

## **3. Definition of a Complaint**

A complaint is:

*“An expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect of VOS services, staff, volunteers, or activities.”*

## **4. Principles**

VOS will ensure that all complaints are:

- Taken seriously and treated respectfully
- Managed fairly, consistently and without bias
- Handled confidentially and in line with data protection requirements
- Resolved as quickly as possible
- Used to inform learning and service improvement

We are committed to openness and honesty when things go wrong and will act with integrity in resolving concerns.

## **5. Accessibility and Support**

We recognise that some individuals may need support to make a complaint and VOS will endeavour to provide this wherever practicable.

We will:

- Accept complaints in multiple formats (written, verbal, online, phone)
- Provide reasonable adjustments (e.g. large print, support completing forms)
- Allow complaints to be made via an advocate or representative
- Offer additional support for individuals with mental health needs, literacy barriers, or language difficulties

## **6. How to Make a Complaint**

Complaints can be made via:

- Website: [www.vosuk.org](http://www.vosuk.org) (“Contact Us” form)

- Email: admin@vosuk.org (FAO Head of Care)
- Post: Veterans Outreach Support  
c/o Royal Maritime Hotel  
75–80 Queen Street  
Portsmouth, PO1 3HS
- Telephone on 02392 731767
- Or in person to any staff member

Complaints may be raised anonymously; however, this may limit our ability to investigate or respond fully. If an anonymous complaint is received, it should be brought to the attention of the Head of Care who will determine how to proceed with it.

## **7. Roles and Responsibilities**

- All Staff and Volunteers - must record and report any complaint received to their Line Manager and the Head of Care.
- Head of Care - oversees complaint handling and ensures compliance with this policy.
- Investigating Officer (Stage 2) - conducts independent reviews of escalated complaints, to be nominated by the Head of Care or CEO
- Trustees (Stage 3) - provide independent oversight at final escalation stage.
- Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) - manages safeguarding concerns arising from complaints.

## **8. Complaints Procedure**

VOS operates a three-stage complaints process:

### **Stage 1: Local Resolution**

- Complaints will be acknowledged within 2 working days
- Wherever possible, issues will be resolved promptly and informally by the relevant manager
- If the manager is involved, an alternative manager will be assigned by the Head of Care
- Resolution aim: within 10 working days
- If delays occur, the complainant will be informed of the delay and provided with an updated timeframe
- On completion of the internal review / investigation, the complainant is to be informed of the Charity's decision

Safeguarding: Any safeguarding concerns raised through a complaint will be treated as a priority and will be escalated immediately under the Safeguarding Policy.

### **Stage 2: Appeal (Formal Investigation)**

If the complainant is dissatisfied with Stage 1:

- An appeal must be submitted within 14 days
- An independent staff member, not involved with the initial complaint, will be nominated by the CEO and will review the appeal and the original incident/issue
- Dependent on the outcome of that review, a formal investigation may be undertaken based on the recommendation of the reviewer

We will:

- Confirm whether an investigation is required and what action we are taking as a result
- Provide regular updates (at least every 10 working days if ongoing) to the complainant
- Aim to issue a written response within 25 working days

### **Stage 3: Escalation (Trustee Review)**

If dissatisfaction remains:

- A request for escalation must be made within 7 days of receipt of the appeal review
- The complaint will be reviewed by a panel of three Trustees, nominated by the Chair
- This represents the final stage of the VOS internal process

## **9. Timescales**

We aim to resolve complaints within the timeframes outlined above.

Where complaints are complex:

- We will keep complainants informed regularly
- Provide revised timescales where necessary

## **10. Anonymous and Unreasonable Complaints**

Anonymous Complaints:

- Will be considered where sufficient information is provided
- May limit the Charity's ability to investigate fully

Unreasonable or Vexatious Complaints VOS reserves the right to log, but take no further action on, complaints that:

- Are persistently repeated without new evidence
- Contain abusive or threatening language
- Place unreasonable demands on staff

Should new evidence be presented or come to light, the complaint may be re-investigated if the Head of Care and CEO agree that such action is merited based on the impact of the new information. Such cases will be handled fairly and proportionately.

## **11. Learning and Improvement**

VOS is committed to learning from complaints and will undertake an annual review of all complaints to ensure that lessons identified have been implemented where appropriate.

We will:

- Maintain a central complaints log
- Review complaints regularly to identify trends
- Report findings to senior management (via a standing Agenda item on the monthly Managers' Meeting) and Trustees (via the Quarterly Board Meetings)
- Use insights to improve service delivery, training and policy

## **12. Confidentiality and Data Protection**

- Complaints will be handled in accordance with UK GDPR and Data Protection legislation
- Information will only be shared where necessary to investigate and resolve the complaint

- A summary of the complaint and all supporting documentation will be stored securely until five years after the initial complaint when they will be destroyed, in accordance with VOS' data retention policy
- Where applicable, records may be added to beneficiary files
- Anonymised data may be used for service improvement

### **13. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

This policy complies with the Equality Act 2010 and supports VOS's commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion.

### **14. External Escalation Options**

If a complainant remains dissatisfied after completing all stages of the VOS complaints process, they may contact:

#### **Charity Commission**

For serious concerns about charity governance or misconduct: <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-charity>

#### **Fundraising Regulator**

For complaints relating to fundraising practices:  
<https://www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/complaints>

#### **Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)**

For concerns about data protection: <https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/>

### **15. Record Keeping**

All complaints must be:

- Recorded using the VOS Complaint Form
- Logged centrally in SharePoint
- Retained in line with VOS' data retention policies

Complaint data will be reviewed periodically by the Head of Care to identify trends and inform service improvements. This will be monitored through governance processes and shared with Trustees as part of a quarterly review.

### **16. Duty of Candour**

In addition to the principles outlined above, VOS is committed to a culture of openness, honesty and transparency.

Where something goes wrong in the delivery of our services that causes harm, distress, or has the potential to do so, we will act in line with the principles of Duty of Candour.

We will:

- Be open and honest with individuals when an incident or error has occurred
- Provide a clear explanation of what happened, in a timely and sensitive manner
- Offer a sincere apology where appropriate
- Take responsibility for investigating the issue thoroughly
- Keep the individual informed throughout the process

- Identify and implement learning to prevent recurrence

Our approach ensures that:

- Individuals are treated with respect and compassion
- Concerns are addressed promptly and transparently
- Trust is maintained through accountability and integrity

Where a complaint relates to a safety or clinical concern, this will be prioritised and may be managed alongside safeguarding or incident reporting procedures.

**Review Date:** July 2028

**Review Cycle:** Biennial (every 2 years) or sooner if required due to legislative or organisational change.

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |  |                                                 |  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Appendix A</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |  |                                                 |  |
| <b>Veterans Outreach Support Complaint Form</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |  |                                                 |  |
| <p>This form is to be completed for all complaints received by whatever means (including in writing, by email, in person or by phone). Please attach copies of any written correspondence to this form when complete and send it to Sharon Wemyss, Head of Care.</p> |  |                                                 |  |
| <b>Part 1: Complainant Details</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |  |                                                 |  |
| Name                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |  | Job Title                                       |  |
| Organisation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |  | Phone Number                                    |  |
| Address                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |  | Email Address                                   |  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |  |                                                 |  |
| Complaint Received by                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |  | Date Received                                   |  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |  | Received via                                    |  |
| Is this a safeguarding concern: Yes/No                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |  | Has the Safeguarding Lead been informed: Yes/No |  |
| <b>Part 2: Details of problem:</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |  |                                                 |  |
| <i>Please provide full details of the nature of the problem (ensure you include all facts clearly).</i>                                                                                                                                                              |  |                                                 |  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |  |                                                 |  |
| <b>Part 3: Details of problem resolution:</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |  |                                                 |  |
| <i>Please detail how we plan to resolve the issue with the customer.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                             |  |                                                 |  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |  |                                                 |  |
| <b>Completed by (name):</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |  | <b>Dates Completed:</b>                         |  |