

Complaints Policy

Version history

Version	Date Adopted	Facilitator	Note
1.0	17/11/2025	Lesley Barrett	

Document controls

Action	Responsibility
Approval of document	Secretariat and Plenary
Implementation	Secretariat, Plenary, Staff and Supervisory Working Group
Review	Secretariat
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South Dublin County PPN Complaints Policy

1. Purpose and Scope

South Dublin County Public Participation Network (SDC PPN) is committed to dealing with complaints fairly, openly and in a timely way.

If we get something wrong, we will apologise and, where possible, put things right. We also aim to learn from complaints and use them to improve how we work.

This policy explains how complaints about SDC PPN are handled and what you can expect from us.

2. When to use this policy

This policy applies to complaints about:

- the services provided by SDC PPN
- the conduct of SDC PPN staff, representatives or governance processes
- how SDC PPN decisions or actions have affected you

This policy does not apply to:

- employment or HR matters relating to staff
- internal processes or decisions of the host organisation
- services provided by South Dublin County Council or other statutory bodies
- matters that are more appropriately dealt with by another organisation

Where a concern falls outside the scope of this policy, we will explain this and, where possible, signpost you to the appropriate body.

3. Governance and Responsibilities

SDC PPN operates as a hosted organisation. Clear separation of roles is maintained at all times.

Staff are responsible for the day-to-day handling of complaints, including receiving, acknowledging and progressing them in line with this policy.

The Secretariat has collective governance oversight of the complaints process. This includes oversight of investigations, consideration of serious or escalated complaints, and oversight of appeals.

4. Informal resolution

Where possible, we encourage concerns to be raised and resolved informally.

If you have a concern, you may raise it with the person you are dealing with. They will try to resolve the issue promptly and directly. In some cases, they may need up to five working days to investigate the matter.

If the issue cannot be resolved informally, or if you are not satisfied with the response, you may make a formal complaint.

5. Making a formal complaint

You can make a complaint in any of the ways below:

- You can ask for a copy of our complaint form from the person with whom you are already in contact.
- You can use the form on our website at www.sdcpn.ie.
- You can e mail us at info@sdcpn.ie.
- You can write a letter to us at the following address: Complaints, South Dublin County Public Participation Network, Ace Enterprise Park, Bawnogue Rd, Clondalkin, Dublin, D22 P6E8.

Copies of this policy and the complaint form are available on our website www.sdcpn.ie. Physical copies of this policy and the complaint form are available upon request from info@sdcpn.ie.

6. What should you include in your complaint

To help us deal with your complaint, please include:

- your name, address and telephone number (and email, if applicable)
- whether you are acting on behalf of someone else
- a briefly describe what your complaint is about stating relevant dates and times, if applicable
- list your specific concerns starting with the most important concern
- be clear about what you are hoping to achieve (for example an apology, explanation, etc.)
- state your preferred method of communication

South Dublin County PPN Complaints Policy

It will assist the Complaints Officer if extra information and/or copies of relevant documents are attached to your complaint.

7. Dealing with your complaint

We will formally acknowledge your complaint within 5 working days and let you know how we intend to deal with it.

We will ask you to tell us how you would like us to communicate with you and establish whether you have any requirements for example, if you have language difficulties.

We will deal with your complaint in an open and honest way.

We will make sure that your interactions with us in the future do not suffer just because you have made a complaint.

If you are making a complaint on behalf of somebody else, we will need their agreement to you acting on their behalf.

8. Investigation

We will tell you who is responsible for investigating your complaint.

Straightforward complaints may be handled by staff. More serious or complex complaints may be escalated to the Secretariat for oversight or investigation. In some cases, if the complaint is serious, we may ask someone from outside the organisation to investigate.

We will confirm our understanding of your complaint and may ask you to clarify the outcome you are seeking. The person looking at your complaint will usually need to see the files we hold relevant to your complaint. If you don't want this to happen, it is important that you tell us.

If there is a simple solution to your problem, we may ask you if you are happy to accept this.

We will aim to resolve most complaints within thirty working days of the Secretariat meeting that directly follows receipt of the complaint.

If a complaint is complex and will take longer, we will:

- explain why

South Dublin County PPN Complaints Policy

- tell you how long we expect it to take
- provide updates at least every twenty working days

The person who is investigating your concerns will aim first to establish the facts. The extent of this investigation will depend on how complex and how serious the issues you have raised are.

In complex cases, we will draw up an investigation plan.

In some instances, we may ask to meet you to discuss your complaint. Occasionally, we might suggest mediation or another method to try to resolve disputes.

When investigating your complaint, we will look at relevant evidence. This could include files, notes of conversations, letters, emails or whatever may be relevant to your complaint.

If necessary, we will talk to the staff or others involved and look at our policies and any guidance.

9. Outcome

If we formally investigate your complaint, we will let you know what we have found in keeping with your preferred form of communication. This could be by letter or email, for example.

If necessary, we will produce a longer report. We will explain how and why we came to our conclusions.

If we find that we got it wrong, we will tell you what and why it happened. If we find there is a fault in our systems or the way we do things, we will tell you what it is and how we plan to change things to stop it happening again.

If we got it wrong, we will always apologise.

10. Putting things right

If we didn't do something well, we will aim to put it right. If you have lost out as a result of a mistake on our part, we will try to put you back in the position you would have been in if we had got it right.

11. Appeal

If we formally investigate your complaint and you are not satisfied with the outcome you may request an optional local appeal which will be dealt with by persons not involved in the original handling of your complaint.

12. Department of Rural and Community Development

If we do not succeed in resolving your complaint, you may complain to the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD). The DRCD is the Government Department responsible for the oversight of Public Participation Networks and can investigate your complaint if you believe that you personally, or the person on whose behalf you are complaining have been treated unfairly or received a bad service through some failure on our part.

The DRCD expects you to bring your complaint to our attention first and to give us a chance to put things right. You can contact the DRCD by:

- telephone: 076 106 4900
- email: ppn@drcdg.gov.ie
- writing to: Department of Rural and Community Development, Trinity Point, 10-11 South Leinster Street, Dublin 2, D02 EF85

13. Learning Lessons

We take your complaints seriously and try to learn from any mistakes we have made. The Secretariat considers a summary of all complaints on a regular basis as well as details of any serious complaints.

Where there is a need for change, we will develop an action plan setting out what we will do, who will do it and when we plan to do it by. We will let you know when changes we have promised have been made.

14. What if you need help

Our staff will aim to help you make your complaint known to us. If you need extra assistance, we will try to put you in touch with someone who can help. You may wish to contact your local Citizens Information Centre who may be able to assist you.

15. What we expect from you

In times of trouble or distress, some people may act out of character. There may have been upsetting or distressing circumstances leading up to a complaint. We do not view behaviour as unacceptable just because someone is forceful or determined.

We believe that all complainants have the right to be heard, understood and respected. However, we also consider that our staff have the same rights. We, therefore, expect you to be polite and courteous in your dealings with us. We will not tolerate aggressive or abusive behaviour, unreasonable demands or unreasonable persistence.

Everyone involved in a process under this policy are expected to respect the confidentiality of the matter and of everyone involved throughout the process.