



## Complaints Policy and Procedure

Hope 4 ME & Fibro Northern Ireland is committed to providing an excellent service to everyone we work with, in an open and accountable way that builds trust and respect. However, the Charity recognises that this may not always happen, and so aims to make it possible for individuals to raise any issues in a manner that allows their concerns to be addressed, and for the Charity to learn and improve how we serve our members and the wider community.

The Complaints Policy and Procedure (CPP) explains our approach to receiving complaints and will ensure that any complaints are handled and responded to quickly, fairly, consistently, and effectively.

Complaints should be in relation to events no older than twelve months from the time of registering the complaint. Exceptions will be made when deemed necessary due to the nature of the complaint, and it is practically possible to do so.

Hope 4 ME & Fibro Northern Ireland may, at any stage of the complaints procedure, review a complaint and give a decision without a formal investigation where the complaint is deemed to be deliberately repetitive, vexatious, or unsubstantiated. Examples of such a complaint are: being unable to provide substantial evidence, repetitive complaints against an individual or service, or a complaint that has previously been investigated and appropriate action taken. Such complaints can have an undue burden on the time and energy of Committee members, and the Charity has a duty to protect its volunteers and members from unnecessary stress and upset.

If matters arise that warrant investigation under disciplinary proceedings, or through a criminal investigation, the complaints procedure will be suspended until those investigations are concluded. Similarly, the complaints procedure will be suspended if a complainant, the Charity, or one of its members is actively seeking legal redress.

Any Committee member or volunteer may be the first point of contact for someone who wishes to make a complaint, and they will be responsible for directing this to the Chair or Co-ordinator of the Charity. Where the complaint is in relation to both the Chair and Co-ordinator, an alternative Committee member will be appointed.

All Committee members and volunteers must therefore be familiar with the Hope 4 ME & Fibro Northern Ireland's CPP document.

Hope 4 ME & Fibro Northern Ireland recognises that some concerns raised will be informal. However, if concerns cannot be satisfactorily resolved informally, then the formal complaints procedure should be followed.

Where the complaint refers to the actions of a Committee member, group member, or volunteer, that person will be advised of the nature of the complaint.

All information will be treated as confidential so that we do not discourage people from making a complaint, and will be known only by those who are investigating the complaint.

The nature of a complaint may be such that it cannot be possible to maintain confidentiality. In this case, the situation will be explained to the complainant.

## **Making a complaint**

Hope 4 ME & Fibro Northern Ireland CPP is designed to address any specific concerns that relate to the Charity. For example this might include:

- Avoidable delays in providing information or responses
- Incorrect information or guidance issued by the Charity
- Attitudes or conduct of our volunteers or members
- Failure to follow the appropriate administrative process

The Hope 4 ME & Fibro Northern Ireland CPP **does not** cover:

- Issues that are in court or have already been heard by a court or tribunal

- Disagreement with a decision where a statutory right of appeal or other procedure for review exists
- An attempt to reopen a previously concluded complaint, or to have a complaint reconsidered where we have already given our final decision
- Matters of policy or legislation which are the direct responsibility of external bodies

Complainants should make clear what the desired outcome of their complaint is; such as an explanation, acknowledgement, apology, or practical changes.

### **Informal Procedure**

Our aim is to resolve any complaint quickly. The first thing you should do is contact Hope 4 ME & Fibro Northern Ireland by either letter or email and provide the details of your complaint. The addresses for these can be found on our website - <https://hope4mefibro.org/>. We will respond within ten working days with the aim to resolve this informally.

If you still feel dissatisfied after this approach, you may initiate a formal complaint.

### **Formal Procedure**

If you have tried to resolve the complaint informally and are still unhappy, you can make a formal complaint by either letter or email.

When making a complaint please provide as much information as possible, along with your contact details, such as your name, email address and/or postal address.

Your complaint will be acknowledged within five working days of receipt. Your complaint will be investigated and we will aim to provide a full and final written response within twenty working days of receipt.

If a full reply cannot be given within this timescale, you will be advised of progress and informed when you can expect a full response.

Any information provided will be dealt with in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

## **Charity Commission for Northern Ireland**

If you are dissatisfied with the Hope 4 ME & Fibro Northern Ireland's formal response to your complaint, you can refer your case to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland - <https://www.charitycommissionni.org.uk>. However, it is expected that you should have exhausted the full extent of the CPP before your case will be considered.

## **Getting help to make your complaint**

We understand that there may be reasons why you are unable, or reluctant, to make a complaint yourself. We will accept complaints from the representative of a complainant. We can take complaints from a friend, relative, or an advocate if you provide us with your written consent.

## **Accessibility**

We are committed to making our service easy to use for all members of the community. We will always ensure that reasonable adjustments are made for those who wish to access and use our services.

## **Data Protection Act 2018**

Hope 4 ME & Fibro Northern Ireland takes data protection, freedom of information, and environmental information issues seriously.

Hope 4 ME & Fibro Northern Ireland takes care to ensure that any personal information received from you is dealt with in a way which complies with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (2016). This means that any personal information you supply will be processed principally for the purpose for which it has been provided.