Volunteer Concerns, Complaints, and Conduct Policy

People Directorate

Policy number: VOL 6	Date issued: January 2020
Issue number: 002	Date last reviewed: July 2026
Issued by: Volunteering Team	Review date: July 2028

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1. Equity Statement

Sue Ryder designs and implements policies, procedures and ways of working that meet the diverse needs of our clients, service users and employees. We ensure that our policies not only don't discriminate but also consider the unique needs of certain identities and communities. This document has been reviewed to ensure that no one receives less favourable treatment on the protected characteristics of their age, disability, sex, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity. We consider the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 whilst going above and beyond to protect people who aren't protected in the act, for example, non-binary people.

2. Introduction

Volunteers generously contribute their time, skills, and enthusiasm to support Sue Ryder, playing a vital role in helping us be there when it matters. In return, we are committed to providing a safe, meaningful, and rewarding experience.

This policy outlines how to address concerns and complaints. It applies to:

- Concerns raised **by volunteers** about their experience, treatment, or another volunteer.
- Concerns raised **by staff** regarding a volunteer's conduct or performance.

3. General Principles

Legal Context

- Sue Ryder must ensure the safety of volunteers and comply with data protection laws.
- Volunteers do not have employment contracts and are not covered by employment law. However, Sue Ryder provides a clear, fair process to ensure volunteer concerns are addressed properly. We aim to meet the timeframes listed in this policy, but complex cases may take longer to resolve.
- Volunteers are not subject to the disciplinary procedures applicable to paid staff.

Communication and confidentiality

- Template letters are available for communicating about complaints and concerns. These **must** be used by staff to ensure consistency.

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- All complaints are kept confidential and are discussed only with those directly involved in finding a resolution.

Wellbeing and Expected Behaviours

- The wellbeing of everyone involved is essential. Anyone who feels their wellbeing is affected during a process should inform a staff member. Wellbeing support options for volunteers are available on the Volunteering Hub.
- Dealing with concerns can be hard, but everyone involved must consider the wellbeing of others. Behaviour that breaches our values and standards won't be tolerated.

Pausing or Ending Roles

- A volunteer may be asked to pause their activities temporarily while an investigation takes place. If a situation cannot be resolved, the placement may be ended.

4. Eligibility

A volunteer is anyone who freely offers their time to support Sue Ryder freely and without payment. This includes individuals on work experience or community programmes. This policy applies to all volunteers and staff members across Sue Ryder.

Former volunteers have one month after leaving to share feedback or raise concerns.

5. Responsibility

Volunteers: Raise concerns promptly, participate in planned discussions, and maintain open communication.

Staff: Listen to concerns, investigate issues fairly, and record details accurately on DCIQ. Managers conducting investigations must complete the appropriate training.

People Team: Lead formal investigations when a complaint involves a paid member of staff.

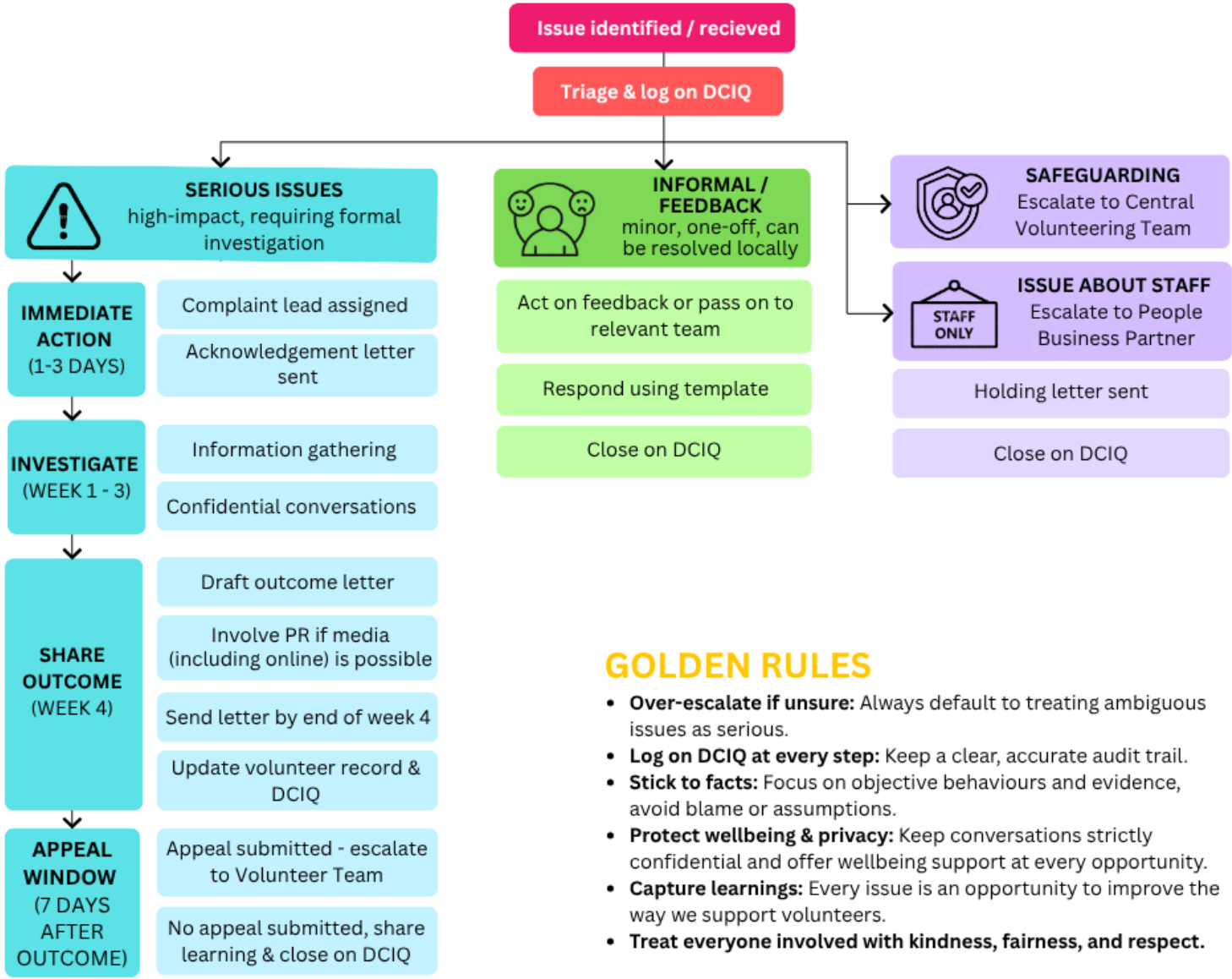
Central Volunteering Team: Oversee complaints, handle safeguarding escalations, manage appeals, carry out any agreed actions and improvements, and keep records updated.

Everybody is expected to engage with this process in good faith. Where a complaint or concern is found to be frivolous or malicious, the investigation may be stopped. If a volunteer repeatedly raises concerns that are not supported by evidence, or does not accept reasonable outcomes, Sue Ryder may review their ongoing volunteering role.

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6. Procedure

All issues - whether raised as a complaint by a volunteer or identified as a conduct issue by staff - follow the same core stages.



GOLDEN RULES

- **Over-escalate if unsure:** Always default to treating ambiguous issues as serious.
- **Log on DCIQ at every step:** Keep a clear, accurate audit trail.
- **Stick to facts:** Focus on objective behaviours and evidence, avoid blame or assumptions.
- **Protect wellbeing & privacy:** Keep conversations strictly confidential and offer wellbeing support at every opportunity.
- **Capture learnings:** Every issue is an opportunity to improve the way we support volunteers.
- **Treat everyone involved with kindness, fairness, and respect.**

6.1 Submission and Triage

6.1.1 Submitting complaints or concerns

Complaints and concerns can be submitted in four ways:

1. Via the Volunteer Helpline volunteering@sueryder.org
2. Volunteers can speak directly to a member of their local team
3. Via our anonymous online feedback portal, Speak Up - www.sueryder.org/hub/your-voice-matters/speak-up/

   While open communication is always encouraged to resolve issues quickly, individuals can raise concerns anonymously if they prefer. Anonymous reports will be triaged and investigated in line with standard procedures as far as the provided details allow.

6.1.2 Triage

When a concern / complaint comes in, it should be categorised by looking at the impact and the risk of harm.

	Informal / feedback - These are minor, isolated incidents that can be resolved quickly and locally.	**Serious concerns -** These are high-impact issues that require formal investigation and escalation.
Characteristics	One-off mistakes, minor inconveniences, or misunderstandings.	Repeated patterns of failure, systemic issues, or breaches of policy.
Impact	Low risk to health, safety, or privacy. No financial or legal implications.	High risk to health, safety, wellbeing, or data security. Potential legal, financial, or reputational damage.
Resolution	Can usually be sorted out immediately with a quick apology, explanation, or simple fix.	Must be logged formally and escalated immediately.

The Golden Rule: If staff are ever unsure, they should always default to treating the issue as serious. It is better to over-escalate than to let a major issue slip through the cracks.

6.2 - Stage 1: Informal Concerns & Low-Level Conduct Issues

Most day-to-day issues, minor misunderstandings, or low-level conduct problems can be resolved locally.

All concerns should be raised with a member of the local Volunteering Team, or the Volunteer's line manager.

Examples: Struggling with role requirements, wellbeing concerns, minor punctuality issues, mild interpersonal friction, or concerns about volunteering environment.

- **Approach:** Managers should hold an informal, supportive discussion with the volunteer to address the concern and agree on practical solutions. Below you'll find some examples.
    - **Conduct issues:** Set clear expectations for improvement, outline agreed behaviour changes, and ensure consequences for a lack of progress are understood.
    - **Minor personal disagreements:** Facilitate a structured chat to clear the air, agree a compromise, or adjust working patterns/rotas where appropriate.
    - **Environment, process, or policy issues:** Provide extra training, update local resources, or adapt the physical space/equipment.
- **Next steps:** Where appropriate, pass feedback or concerns to the relevant team or colleague to take action. Always check back with the person who originally raised the issue to ensure they feel it has been resolved satisfactorily.
- **Mandatory Documentation:** Record every conversation, agreement, and action, no matter how small. Having a history of previous issues is essential if further problems arise. The relevant Volunteering team member must log these notes directly in DCIQ.

6.3 Stage 2: Formal Process & Serious / Gross Conduct Issues

When an issue is serious, high-impact, or remains unresolved after informal steps, it enters the formal process.

Examples: Disruptive, aggressive, or violent behaviour; bullying or harassment; discrimination; breach of confidentiality; being under the influence of drugs or alcohol; serious health and safety breaches; illegal activity or bringing Sue Ryder into disrepute.

6.3.1 Immediate escalation routes:

- **Complaints about staff:** Complaints about staff should immediately be handed over to the local People Business Partner to manage, supported by the Volunteering Team where needed.

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The volunteering team will send a holding letter to explain the case is being handled by a People Business Partner. They will use the letter template provided (see Useful Links section).

The People Business Partner (PBP) will open a separate case on DCIQ to manage their investigation. The Volunteering will close their case on DCIQ, including the new PBP case number to ensure both records are easily linked.

- **Safeguarding Concerns:** All suspected safeguarding cases must be handed over immediately to the Central Volunteering Team. From this point, they will take full responsibility for the case and follow the standard organisational safeguarding process to ensure everything is handled correctly and safely.

6.3.2 All other serious concerns / complaints:

Days 1–3 (Immediate Action):

- Complaints should be raised through the Volunteering Team on volunteering@sueryder.org, who will log it on DCIQ.
- All volunteer complaints and incidents must be handled by the most appropriate team member, usually the local team manager. It should be clear who is ultimately leading the case and will see it through to resolution. The Volunteering Team must *always* be involved to provide guidance, assist with communication, and keep DCIQ updated throughout the process.
- An acknowledgement letter/email to the person who made the complaint should be issued within 3 working days using the template provided (see Useful Links section).
- Where an issue involves potential risks to health, safety, data security, or wellbeing, a risk assessment must be carried out promptly. This is usually done by the appropriate team leader or manager. Based on the findings, temporary measures may be put in place during the investigation, such as changing volunteer duties, providing closer supervision, or pausing volunteering activities.

Weeks 1–3 (Investigation):

- The most appropriate local member of staff will conduct confidential conversations with the relevant individuals and gather factual evidence. These may take place in

person, virtually or over the phone.

- Depending on the severity and scope of the complaint, a member of the Volunteering Team may need to be present for these meetings; this will be decided by the Volunteering Team.

- Factual notes must be passed on to the Volunteering Team for DCIQ recording.

Week 4 (Outcome):

- A formal outcome letter/email should be sent to the person who made the complaint within 4 weeks of the complaint being raised using the template provided (see Useful Links section).

- If a situation could affect Sue Ryder's reputation, or a volunteer says they may share their experience with the media or on social media, contact the PR team as soon as possible. Involving them early helps protect the organisation and ensures sensitive issues are handled properly.

  In these cases, any written messages sent to the volunteer must be written with the PR team and approved by them before being sent. Delivering outcomes or speaking to the volunteer in person is still fine if appropriate, but you must agree the approach and key points with the PR team beforehand.

  To report a PR risk or ask for help, email volunteering@sueryder.org.

- In some cases, the outcome may need delivering through an in-person conversation. In these instances, two members of staff should be present at the meeting, and a follow up letter/email should be sent using the template provided (see Useful Links section).

Accompaniment at Formal Meetings: When invited to a formal investigation meeting or an outcome discussion, the volunteer may bring a companion (such as a friend, relative, or fellow volunteer) for support. The role of the companion is to offer moral support and take notes. Staff conducting the meeting should be informed in advance if an accompanying person will be attending.

Sharing learning: Valuable lessons can almost always be found in every volunteer complaint or concern. This offers opportunities to improve the complaints process, smooth out the volunteer journey, or guide staff interactions with volunteers. Sharing key learnings is a crucial

part of the process, and staff are strongly encouraged to share insights for growth before the case is closed on DCIQ.

6.4 Appeals

An appeal allows a volunteer to request a review or reconsideration of a decision or action taken regarding a complaint if they feel the issue was not properly addressed or the outcome was unfair.

Step 1: Submitting an appeal

Appeals must be submitted within 7 calendar days of the volunteer receiving the original complaint outcome. The request, along with as much detail as possible, should be emailed to: volunteering@sueryder.org

Step 2: Confirmation of Receipt

Within 10 working days of receiving the appeal, a confirmation email is sent to the volunteer outlining the next steps.

Step 3: Impartial Review

To ensure complete objectivity, the appeal is assigned to an Appeal Hearing Manager from the Central Volunteering team who has had no prior involvement in the case.

The complaint is reviewed fairly, thoroughly, and promptly within 4 weeks of receiving the appeal.

Regular updates are provided to the volunteer throughout this stage, including details on expected investigation timelines, findings, and next steps.

Step 4: Final Outcome

Once the Appeal Hearing Manager reaches a decision, the final outcome is communicated to the volunteer.

This decision is final, and the complaint process is formally closed.

1. Useful Links

Complaints and Concerns Letter Templates

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