

Commissioned Services Complaints Policy

Applies to: All Dochas Carers Centre (DCC) services supporting unpaid adult carers across Mid Argyll, Kintyre (including the Isle of Gigha), and the islands of Islay and Jura, and any activities delivered under Contract Ref **JNCA004/2324** (Support Services to Unpaid Carers).

Related contract clause: Clause **44 – Complaints Procedure** (Contract Period: 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024, with option to extend).

Effective from: 17 March 2026

1) Purpose

DCC is committed to providing a high-quality, accessible and safe service. This Policy sets out our governance commitments for receiving, handling, learning from, and reporting on complaints, in line with our contract and Scottish good practice.

2) Scope and definitions

- **Who can complain:** Any Supported Person (carer), their Carer(s), representatives or advocates, volunteers, partners, referrers, or members of the public affected by our service.
- **Complaint:** Any expression of dissatisfaction about our action/inaction, the quality of service provided, or a lack of service. (Aligned with Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) definitions.)
- **Representative:** Anyone authorised by the Supported Person/Carer to act for them, or (where capacity/consent is not possible) permitted via law or DCC policy.

3) Policy statements (contractual commitments)

1. **Clear, written procedure** – DCC will maintain and comply with a clear written Complaints Procedure and provide it to the Council on request. (*Clauses 44.1 & 44.1.3*)
2. **Information before service** – Before support starts, Supported Persons and their Carers will be informed how to complain, receive the procedure in accessible formats, and receive a copy within their **Support Plan**. Representatives will also receive a copy. (*Clauses 44.1.1 & 44.2*)
3. **External routes (appropriate to our service)** – We will inform Supported Persons and Carers that they may escalate complaints through:
 - **Argyll & Bute Council** – relevant because our contract is commissioned by them.
 - **Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO)** – final stage for public service complaints after internal and Council stages.

- **Mental Welfare Commission (MWC)** – where complaints relate to treatment/care of individuals with mental illness, learning disabilities, dementia, or related conditions (rarely applicable to us).

These are the only relevant bodies for Dochas Carers Centre. We do *not* reference the Care Inspectorate, as DCC is **not a registered care service**.

1. **Complaints Register** – DCC will maintain an accurate, up-to-date Complaints Register. We will provide an annual summary to the Council (and more frequently if required) and submit the Register during service/contract reviews. *(Clauses 44.3–44.4)*
2. **Notification to the Council** – We will notify the Council of **all complaints** upon receipt. The **Council decides significance**. *(Clause 44.8)*
3. **Outcomes and external investigations** – We will immediately inform the Council of complaint outcomes, including cases involving **NHS, Police, OSCR, SSSC**, or where the MWC or SPSO is involved. Verbal notifications will be confirmed in writing within **3 working days**. *(Clause 44.9)*
4. **Record-keeping** – DCC will maintain full written details of all complaints, actions, outcomes, and learning, and provide them to the Council upon request. *(Clause 44.10)*
5. **No detriment** – No individual will be disadvantaged for raising a complaint.
6. **Data protection** – All complaint records will be managed in line with UK GDPR and DCC privacy procedures.

4) Roles and responsibilities

- **Board of Trustees:** Approves Policy; monitors quarterly reports; reviews annual summary; ensures learning is implemented.
- **Centre Manager (Complaint Manager):** Oversees Procedure; ensures staff competence; maintains Complaints Register; manages Council notifications.
- **All staff and volunteers:** Recognise and record complaints; follow the Procedure; support accessibility; provide signposting.

5) External complaints routes (clean, accurate, applicable)

Dochas Carers Centre is **not** a registered care provider. Therefore, external routes relevant to our service are:

a) Argyll & Bute Council

For complaints linked to our commissioned support service or where a complainant wishes an external local authority review.

b) Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO)

For complainants who remain dissatisfied after:

- 1) DCC's internal process, and
- 2) Argyll & Bute Council's response.

SPSO is the **final stage** for public service complaints in Scotland.

c) Mental Welfare Commission (MWC) (only where relevant)

Where complaints relate specifically to the rights, treatment, or care of a person with mental illness, learning disabilities, dementia, or related conditions.

Complaints Procedure (Operational)

A) Overview and principles

- Aim for **early resolution**.
- Provide **fair, proportionate investigations** where required.
- **Notify the Council** of all complaints at receipt and all outcomes.
- Ensure accessibility and support (interpreters, advocacy, alternative formats).

B) Channels for complaints

- **Verbal:** in person or phone.
- **Written:** email, letter, webform, Complaints Form.
- **Digital:** SMS or other secure methods.
- **Anonymous complaints:** accepted, though action may be limited.
- **Third-party complaints:** accepted with consent or where lawful.

C) Immediate actions (Day 0–1)

1. Log complaint in the **Complaints Register**.
2. Notify the Council. (*Clause 44.8*)
3. If involving risk/harm/criminal concerns, escalate via safeguarding and notify the Council.

D) Acknowledgement & triage (by Day 3)

- Acknowledge within **3 working days**.
- Clarify scope, desired outcome.
- Assign Complaint Lead.
- Assess risk; Council determines significance.

E) Handling routes & timescales

1. Early resolution

- Target: **within 5 working days**.
- Notify Council of outcome immediately; confirm in writing within 3 days if verbal.

2. Investigation

- Plan investigation; target completion **within 20 working days**.
- Regular updates to complainant.
- Outcome letter includes findings, actions, appeal rights, and external routes (Council → SPSO).
- Notify Council of outcome immediately.

F) Appeals

- Appeal within **14 days** of outcome.
- Independent Appeal Manager concludes within **14 working days**.
- Final decision includes SPSO signposting.

G) Notifications to external bodies

- **Council:** All complaints at receipt; all outcomes immediately (verbal acceptable, written follow-up within 3 days).
- **SPSO:** For unresolved complaints after Council stage.
- **MWC:** Only for mental-health-related matters.

H) Complaints Register (minimum dataset)

- ID, dates, intake method, complainant role, consent.
- Summary of issues; service/location; staff involved.
- Risk and significance assessment.
- Actions taken, dates of resolution steps.
- Notifications to Council and any relevant external bodies.
- Outcome category; remedies; learning; closure date.
- Appeal details and outcomes.

I) Reporting & governance

- **Quarterly** thematic analysis to Management/Board.
- **Annual summary** to Council; Register submitted at reviews.
- Optional public summary on website.

J) Accessibility

- Procedure included in **Support Plan**.
- Accessible formats available.
- Interpreters, BSL, advocacy signposted.

K) Data protection

- UK GDPR compliance; restricted access.
- Lawful sharing with Council/SPSO/MWC/other authorities as required.
- Retained per DCC Retention Schedule.

Public summary

- You can complain verbally or in writing; we acknowledge within **3 working days**.
- We aim to resolve quickly and will explain if an investigation is required.
- You may use a representative/advocate.
- If you remain unhappy, you can complain to **Argyll & Bute Council** and then to the **Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO)**.
- If your complaint relates to mental-health care or rights issues, you may contact the **Mental Welfare Commission (MWC)**.

References / Authorities

- Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Act 2002.
- SPSO Model Complaints Handling Procedures (Local Authority/Social Work).
- Argyll & Bute Council – Complaints Handling Procedure.
- Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland – Complaints Guidance.

This Policy & Procedure fully reflects Contract Clause 44 and applies only the external routes relevant to DCC's role as a **carer support** (non-regulated) service.