

## Complaints Policy

### Introduction

Freeport East takes complaints very seriously and whilst we try to provide a good service, we know that sometimes things go wrong. A complaints procedure has been developed in response to this.

### Policy Aims

The aims of this policy are to:

- provide a means for members of the public/third parties to express legitimate concerns and have them addressed
- ensure that issues are resolved quickly and satisfactorily in order to protect the users of our services.

We aim to sort out complaints quickly and fairly and we will try to sort out any mistake or misunderstanding straight away. Sometimes it may take longer, but we will let you know how long it will take.

*Employees, board members and contractors should refer to the Whistle Blowing Policy.*

### Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, action or lack of action by Freeport East, its staff, or directors which affects an individual, a company or organisation.

This policy also covers concerns which are in the public interest and could include:

- financial malpractice or impropriety or fraud
- failure to comply with a legal obligation or statutes
- dangers to health & safety or the environment
- criminal activity
- improper conduct or unethical behaviour
- attempts to conceal any of these

### What we Learn from Complaints

We keep records of all the complaints received and monitor them regularly. This helps us to:

- identify areas of service where we need to make changes and improvements
- make sure we are dealing with complaints effectively and consistently

### Procedures (Stage One)

The people who can best deal with a complaint are those you have been dealing with. You should speak or write to the member of the team and explain the reasons you are unhappy. We will acknowledge your complaint in three working days and we can usually sort out mistakes and misunderstandings quickly and informally at this stage.

Please be aware that all complaints will be treated with the utmost discretion. However, if an individual wishes to make a confidential complaint, they may do so by using the complaints form on our website. Whilst anonymous complaints will still be processed and addressed in accordance with this policy, we will not be able to provide a response to the complainant.

Freeport East will respond to concerns raised by an individual who must not forget that testing out concerns is not the same as either accepting or rejecting them. Where appropriate, the matters raised may:

- be investigated by management or through the disciplinary process
- be referred to the police
- be referred to the external auditor and/or
- form the subject of an independent inquiry

In order to protect individuals and those accused of misdeeds or possible malpractice, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. The overriding principle that Freeport East will have in mind is the public interest. Concerns or allegations that fall within the scope of specific procedures (for example, discrimination issues) will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures.

Usually within 10 working days of a concern being raised, the responsible person will write to the complainant:

- acknowledging that the concern has been received
- indicating how Freeport East proposes to deal with the matter
- giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response
- telling them whether any initial enquiries have been made
- supplying them with information about staff support mechanisms and
- telling them whether further investigations will take place and if not, why not.

The amount of contact between the person considering the issues and the complainant will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved, and the clarity of the information provided. If necessary, Freeport East will seek further information from the complainant.

When the matter is resolved, all those involved in the issue should be informed of the outcome. In any case, the matter will be dealt with promptly and confidentially. Immediate steps should be taken to remedy the situation and a final solution should be reached within 28 days.

If no further correspondence is received from the complainant within 7 calendar days of the response being issued, or if the complainant responds confirming acceptance of the initial outcome, the complaint will be closed as resolved.

### **Appeal (Stage Two)**

If you are unhappy with the way your complaint was dealt with, or the outcome that was delivered, please contact our Chief Executive Officer, Steve Beel [steve.beel@freeporteast.co.uk](mailto:steve.beel@freeporteast.co.uk) and/or our Chair, Mark Lemmon [marklemmon@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:marklemmon@blueyonder.co.uk).

It is best to let the Chief Executive Officer and/or Chair know which parts of our response you are unhappy with. We will investigate your complaint and the Chief Executive Officer or Chair will respond to you within 30 calendar days. An investigation may take longer than this, but if it does we will explain the reasons why and let you know when you can expect a full reply.

### **Stage Three**

If you're still dissatisfied, or feel you cannot raise the matter with Freeport East, you can report it directly to our Government Lead, Emily Wright at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities - [emily.wright@levellingup.gov.uk](mailto:emily.wright@levellingup.gov.uk). It will help the investigation if you explain why you are not satisfied and what you expect from a further review.

At this stage the response and outcome will be final.

### **Anonymous Allegations**

Freeport East takes all complaints and concerns raised by members of the public and third parties seriously. We will investigate anonymous allegations. However, we remind complainants that when people put their names to an allegation the ability to investigate and therefore reach firm conclusions is strengthened. Concerns expressed anonymously will be considered at the discretion of Freeport East. In exercising this discretion, the factors to be considered would include:

- the seriousness of the issue raised
- the credibility of the concern, and
- the likelihood of confirming the allegation from other sources.

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities may request information arising from this process if they have concerns regarding a freeport or have been approached with similar complaints. The expectation is that this information will be provided on an anonymous basis. However, it may be necessary to provide personal details to progress a complaint.

Where details are gathered, Freeport East will put in place appropriate data protection arrangements in line with the Data Protection Act 2018.

### **Are There any Occasions when we Can't Help / Investigate Your Complaint?**

Unfortunately, we cannot investigate your complaint if it is something you knew about more than 12 months before contacting us for the first time. However, we may make an exception in some circumstances.

The above process covers the general complaints procedure for Freeport East. Complaints in relation to specific funding programmes which you may be involved in will, generally, follow the same process as outlined above. However, there may be some differences to this procedure, including the relevant evaluation panel reviewing your complaint and in these cases, if there are differences to the above procedure, the appropriate process for complaints will be notified in the relevant guidance document for the funding stream to which you are applying.

Complaints or enquiries in relation to Freeport East's Accountable Body (East Suffolk Council) will need to follow standard Local Authority procedures. This will include enquiries such as Freedom of Information Requests. Further details on East Suffolk Council's policies can be found at: [www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk](http://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk).

Freeport East's Board of Directors, Members and governance framework adhere to the Articles of Association of Freeport East.

Any enquiry or complaint in relation to the conduct of Directors, Members or associated governance processes should be directed to: Steve Beel, CEO Freeport East on [steve.beel@freeporteast.co.uk](mailto:steve.beel@freeporteast.co.uk).

Who can help me make a complaint? If you would like help making a complaint, you can contact your local councillor or MP. You can also get help from a specialist advice agency or organisation which represents people, such as a Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB).