



north west
regional college
Derry-Londonderry • Limavady • Strabane

FE SECTOR

CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS POLICY

Author/Responsibility	Document Version	Date Reviewed	Next Review Due
Sector Complaints Working Group	QE0009 Vr.7	February 2023	February 2026

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1. Policy Statement

- North West Regional College (“the College”) is committed to providing the highest quality of service to all our customers. If a customer is not satisfied with the quality of service provided by the College or College staff, they have the right to complain.
- A complaint may be defined as ‘A statement that something is unsatisfactory or unacceptable’.
- The raising of complaints and the provision of feedback provides the College with an opportunity to improve its services. The College monitors complaints and the outcomes in order to improve the quality of our provision. This policy advises customers of the College's commitment to ensuring that any issues or problems are resolved quickly and as close to the source as possible, to the satisfaction of all concerned.

2. Data Protection

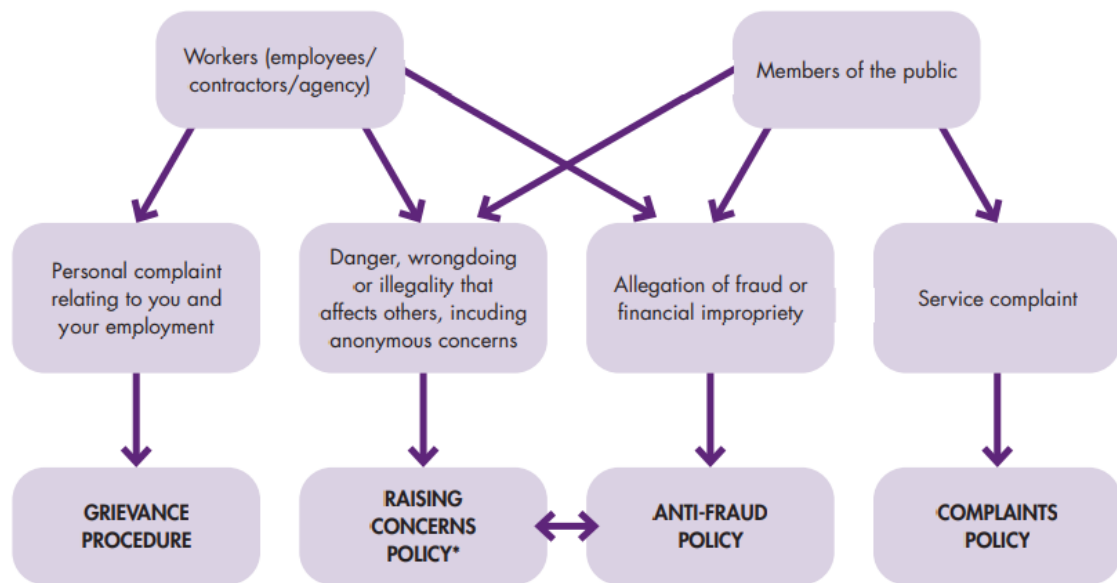
- 2.1 Information gathered in the management of complaint and compliments will be processed within the provisions of current Data Protection legislation. The College is permitted to process personal data where there is a ‘lawful basis’ to do so. This processing is necessary for the performance of a public task or in the exercise of official authority vested in the College as a Data Controller, e.g., Public Authorities are accountable to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO).
- 2.2 The customer’s information may be shared with relevant College staff for the purpose of investigating the complaint (this may include the member of staff who is the subject of the complaint or compliment). The customer’s information may also be shared with authorised third parties such as NIPSO, legal professionals where there is a lawful basis to do so. Further information on data protection and the individual’s rights are available on our website.

3. Scope

- 3.1 For the purposes of this policy, a customer may be a student, member of the public or third party stakeholder.
- 3.2 This policy should be read in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Audit Office Guide ‘*Raising Concerns - A good practice guide for the Northern Ireland public sector*’. See Figure 1 below and link to full document - [NIAO Good Practice Guide \(niauditoffice.gov.uk\)](https://niauditoffice.gov.uk)

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Figure 1: Summarises the types of issues that may be raised and the relevant policies which should apply:



3.3 The College will comply with the Service Standards for Complaint Handling in the Public, ensuring that:

- There are clear lines of accountability for the handling and consideration of complaints within the College;
- Complainants have open and easy access to the College’s complaints policy and information required to enable them to complain about any aspect of service;
- Complaints are dealt with through an efficient and effective process;
- All investigations are conducted promptly, thoroughly, openly, honestly and objectively;
- Complaints are responded to as promptly as possible and all issues raised are addressed;
- The College promotes a culture of learning from complaints so that, where necessary, service, processes and practices can be improved;
- The organisation monitors the effectiveness of its complaint handling and responsiveness.

The College also adheres to the service standards of the Northern Ireland Public Sector Ombudsman (NIPSO) – at all times the College aims to treat you with respect and courtesy.

3.4 In addition, the College will:

- Ensure that all compliments are passed on to the relevant staff members;
- Process all complaints in a fair, consistent and unbiased manner;
- Endeavour to communicate with the customer within agreed timeframes throughout the process;
- Ensure no customer is disadvantaged as a result of making a complaint;

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- Promote equality of opportunity and good relations in line with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998);
- Monitor and review complaints and compliments for quality assurance and equality monitoring purposes;
- Respect confidentiality and protect customers' data in line with Data Protection legislation.

3.5 Exemptions to this policy include:

- Anonymous complaints, which will not usually be investigated, but will be recorded;
- Matters where another policy or procedure applies; for example, academic appeals¹
- The right of the College not to investigate unreasonable or vexatious complaints;
- The right of the College to request the complainant to refrain from using inappropriate or derogatory language in relation to the College or College staff in accordance with the Student Code of Conduct;
- Staff complaints which fall under separate employment policies and procedures

4. Procedure

4.1 Compliments

If a customer feels that the College has exceeded the expected standard of service or wishes to leave a compliment, they can either:

- Complete a 'Customer Compliments Form' (Appendix 2). Forms may be downloaded from the College website or are available at reception;
- Email the College at info@nwrc.ac.uk
- Advise a member of staff in person of the positive experience.

4.2 Informal Complaint

If there is an occasion where a customer is not satisfied with the service we provide; they have a right to complain.

We would encourage customers in the first instance to seek to resolve any issues informally with the relevant member of staff e.g. face-to-face discussion, as soon as possible and no later than three months from the date of the issue arising. In exceptional circumstances, the College may exercise discretion with this timescale.

4.3 Formal Complaint

Where a resolution cannot be found or if the complaint is sufficiently serious, the customer may submit a formal complaint in writing.

¹ Please refer to NWRC Academic Assessment Appeals Policy for information on academic appeals

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If a customer wishes to make a formal complaint, they can either:

- Complete a 'Customer Complaints Form' (Appendix 1). Forms are downloadable from the College website or available at reception.
- Email the College at complaints@nwrc.ac.uk

If the complaint relates to an academic matter, students have the right to contact and engage with the relevant awarding body directly, however awarding organisations will normally only consider a complaint after it has been managed in accordance with the College's Complaints Policy.

If a customer wishes to complain verbally, they will be asked to confirm details of their complaint in writing.

If assistance is required with the completion of or the submission of a complaint, customers may contact the Data Protection & Information Compliance Officer at complaints@nwrc.ac.uk.

Complaints should be submitted to the College no later than three months from the date of the issue arising. In exceptional circumstances, the College may exercise discretion with this timescale.

Complaints may be submitted on behalf of someone else, for example a person under the age of 13 or a vulnerable adult. If you are making a complaint on behalf of another person, consent of the individual may be required.

All formal complaints will be forwarded to the relevant Responsible Owner² for an open and objective investigation.

The investigation will be based on the information provided by the complainant at the time of making their initial complaint, together with any supplementary evidence obtained through the investigation.

Upon completion of the investigation, a written response will be issued to the complainant.

The College will endeavour to adhere to the timeframes detailed below in Table 1.

Table 1

Communication	Response Time
Complaint acknowledgement letter/email to customer	Within 5 working days* from receipt of complaint
Letter/email issued to complainant if further information required to progress complaint	Clarification information to be returned within 10 working days of receipt. <i>Please note this may affect the complaint response timeframe.</i>
Complaint response letter/email to customer	Within 20 working days** from date acknowledgement letter/email issued, or from date clarification information is received (if applicable)

² Responsible owners are defined as the individual(s) appointed to investigate the complaint

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*Working days are those days on which the College is open. Weekends, statutory days, Bank Holidays and other College closures are classed as 'non-working' days. Complaints specific to course admissions will be acknowledged within 2 working days from receipt of complaint.

**Complaints specific to course admissions will be responded to within 5 working days from date acknowledgement letter/email is issued.

5. Appeals

- 5.1 If a customer is dissatisfied with the College response to their complaint, they have the right to appeal. Appeals should be submitted in writing, with full details of the grounds for appeal, to the Data Protection & Information Compliance Officer.
- 5.2 The individual(s) appointed by the College to consider the appeal will only review the information contained within the scope of the original complaint and investigation and will not consider any additional or new information which may be introduced by the appellant at this stage of the process.
- 5.3 Following receipt of an appeal, the College will endeavour to adhere to the timeframes detailed below in Table 2.

Table 2

Communication	Response Time
Complainant submits appeal to the College	Within 10 working days from date customer receives complaint response
Appeal acknowledgement letter/email to customer	Within 5 working days from receipt of appeal from customer
Appeal response letter/email to customer	Within 20 working days from date of acknowledgement letter/email issued

- 5.4 Appeals will be considered by an individual(s) with no previous connection to the original complaint. The individual(s) appointed to consider the appeal request will depend on the nature of the complaint and appeal lodged.
- 5.5 If, for reasons beyond the College's control, the complaint/appeal investigation and outcome exceeds the timeframe or is likely to exceed the timeframe, the customer will be notified in writing, as soon as is practically possible.
- 5.6 The appeal outcome is final. If a customer remains dissatisfied, refer to Section 7 of this policy.

6. Records of Communications

Complaint meetings and phone calls are confidential. If a meeting is required to resolve the issue, minutes will be taken and made available upon request to those in attendance. If the complainant identifies any inaccuracies, the minutes will be reviewed, and where an amendment is agreed, a revised minute will be issued.

College employees have a reasonable expectation of privacy in the workplace and to protect their privacy the College does not consent to conversations being recorded, unless express consent has been obtained in advance.

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7. If a Customer remains dissatisfied

- 7.1 It is hoped that the College will be able to resolve any complaint through the complaints procedure. If the customer remains dissatisfied with the outcome they have the right to raise the matter with NIPSO (in his/her role as Commissioner for Complaints).
- 7.2 Awarding organisations will normally only consider a complaint where the internal process within the College has first been exhausted. It is the responsibility of the student to pursue any further appeal with the relevant awarding body. Awarding bodies and universities have varying procedures in place for dealing with appeals, students will be told when they have completed the College's internal processes and what, if any, next steps are available to them.
- 7.3 The customer can complain to NIPSO, however, NIPSO will normally only consider a complaint after it has been managed in accordance with the College's Complaints and Compliments Policy, and where it is received within six months of completing the College's complaints process. Contact details for NIPSO are:

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman

Progressive House
33 Wellington Place
Belfast
BT1 6HN
www.nipso.org.uk

- 7.4 Higher Education (HE) students may have the right in certain circumstances to raise the matter with the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA). Contact details for the CMA are:

Competition and Markets Authority

Victoria House
Southampton Row
London
WC1B 4AD
www.gov.uk/government/organisations/competition-and-markets-authority

- 7.5 For data protection matter, the customer can contact the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). Contact details for the ICO are:

Information Commissioner's Office – Northern Ireland

3rd Floor
14 Cromac Place
Belfast
BT7 2JB
<https://ico.org.uk/about-the-ico/who-we-are/northern-ireland-office/>

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8 Monitoring Complaints and Compliments

- 8.1 The College welcomes and values all feedback from customers. The College analyses feedback and areas of complaint in order to improve services. All complaints will be dealt with sensitively and in all cases, the documentary evidence gathered and stored remains confidential to those involved. Statistical information will be made available for Quality and Equality monitoring purposes.

9 Communication

This policy is available at www.nwrc.ac.uk and is accessible in house via the staff and student portals on A-Z documents/policies.

The College will provide this policy in alternative formats on request where reasonably practicable, e.g., Braille, Large Print, Audio formats, etc., and/or an alternative language.

The College is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and good relations in accordance with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. This policy should be interpreted in a manner consistent with the aforementioned legislation.

10 Review

- 10.1 This policy will be reviewed (and amended if necessary) every three years, or sooner if required, to reflect changes in legislation or circumstances.

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NWRC CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS FORM

Appendix 1

If you require assistance with making a complaint, please contact the Data Protection & Information Compliance Officer.

Please provide details in Section 1A of the contact method you would prefer to be contacted on in respect of your complaint. If you provide both an email address and postal address, we may contact you via either method.

If you are submitting a complaint on behalf of someone else, please provide their details in Section 1B. We may need to contact the individual for permission to discuss the issue with you.

This form should be returned to the Data Protection & Information Compliance Officer, North West Regional College, Strand Road, Derry~Londonderry BT48 7AL - Email: complaints@nwrc.ac.uk

SECTION 1A – Complainant Details

Title:	Miss / Mr / Mrs / Ms		Other:			
Name:						
Contact Address:						
Tel Number:						
Email:						
Student ID (if applicable)						
Status (please tick relevant box)						
Student (up to and including level 3) <input type="checkbox"/>	Student (level 4 and up) <input type="checkbox"/>	Parent or Guardian <input type="checkbox"/>	Staff <input type="checkbox"/>	Member of the Public <input type="checkbox"/>	Employer <input type="checkbox"/>	Organisation <input type="checkbox"/>

SECTION 1B – Details of person on whose behalf you are submitting complaint, if different to above

Title:	Miss / Mr / Mrs / Ms		Other:			
Name:						
Contact Address:						
Tel Number:						
Email:						
Student ID (if applicable)						
Status (please tick relevant box)						
Do you have their consent to raise this matter?: Y/N						
Student (up to and including level 3) <input type="checkbox"/>	Student (level 4 and up) <input type="checkbox"/>	Parent or Guardian <input type="checkbox"/>	Staff <input type="checkbox"/>	Member of the Public <input type="checkbox"/>	Employer <input type="checkbox"/>	Organisation <input type="checkbox"/>

SECTION 2

Details of Complaint: Please ensure that all details are provided, including (if relevant) date, time and place of the event; and names of those involved. You may attach additional sheets if necessary.

Have you attempted to resolve this issue informally? Yes / No
If Yes, please summarise any action taken to resolve your issue/s to date.

Section 3

What do you see as a suitable remedy to address the issue or matter raised?

PRIVACY NOTICE: Information gathered on this form will be processed within the provisions of the UK General Data Protection Regulations (UK GDPR) and used for the purpose of investigating your complaint. The College is permitted to process personal data where there is a 'lawful basis' to do so. This processing is necessary for the performance of a **public task** or in the exercise of official authority vested in the College as a Data Controller, e.g. Public Authorities are subject to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO). Your information may be shared with relevant College staff for the purpose of investigating your complaint. It may also be shared with authorised third parties such as NIPSO, legal professionals where there is a lawful basis to do so. All personal data will be held in line with the Sector Retention & Disposal Schedule. For further information on your individual rights and to access our Data Protection Policy, please visit www.nwrc.ac.uk/policies

I agree to be contacted by any contact method provided on this form, in respect of my complaint.

I realise that if I choose not to agree to these terms, the College will be unable to investigate my complaint.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Date Received:
Received By:

Office Use Only

Date Acknowledged:
Responsible Owner:

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CUSTOMER COMPLIMENTS FORM

Appendix 2

If you require assistance with submitting this form please contact the Data Protection & Information Compliance Officer.

If we have done something well, we value and appreciate your positive feedback. If you would like us to acknowledge your compliment, please provide either an email or postal address. If you provide both an email and postal address, we may contact you via either method.

This form should be returned to the Data Protection & Information Compliance Officer, North West Regional College, Strand Road, Derry~Londonderry BT48 7AL - Email: complaints@nwrc.ac.uk

Title:	Miss / Mr / Mrs / Ms Other:					
Name:						
Contact Address:						
Tel Number:						
Email:						
Student ID (if applicable)						
Status (please tick)						
Student (up to and including level 3)	Student (level 4 and up)	Parent or Guardian	Staff	Member of the Public	Employer	Organisation
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Details of Compliment: Please ensure that all details are provided, including (if relevant) date, time and place of the event; and names of those involved if known. You may attach additional sheets if necessary.						

PRIVACY NOTICE: Information gathered on this form will be processed within the provisions of the UK General Data Protection Regulations (UK GDPR) and used for the purpose of investigating your complaint. The College is permitted to process personal data where there is a 'lawful basis' to do so. This processing is necessary for the performance of a **public task** or in the exercise of official authority vested in the College as a Data Controller, e.g. Public Authorities are subject to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO). Your information may be shared with relevant College staff for the purpose of investigating your complaint. It may also be shared with authorised third parties such as NIPSO, legal professionals where there is a lawful basis to do so. All personal data will be held in line with the Sector Retention & Disposal Schedule. For further information on your individual rights and to access our Data Protection Policy, please visit www.nwrc.ac.uk/policies

I agree to be contacted by any contact method provided on this form, in respect of my complaint.

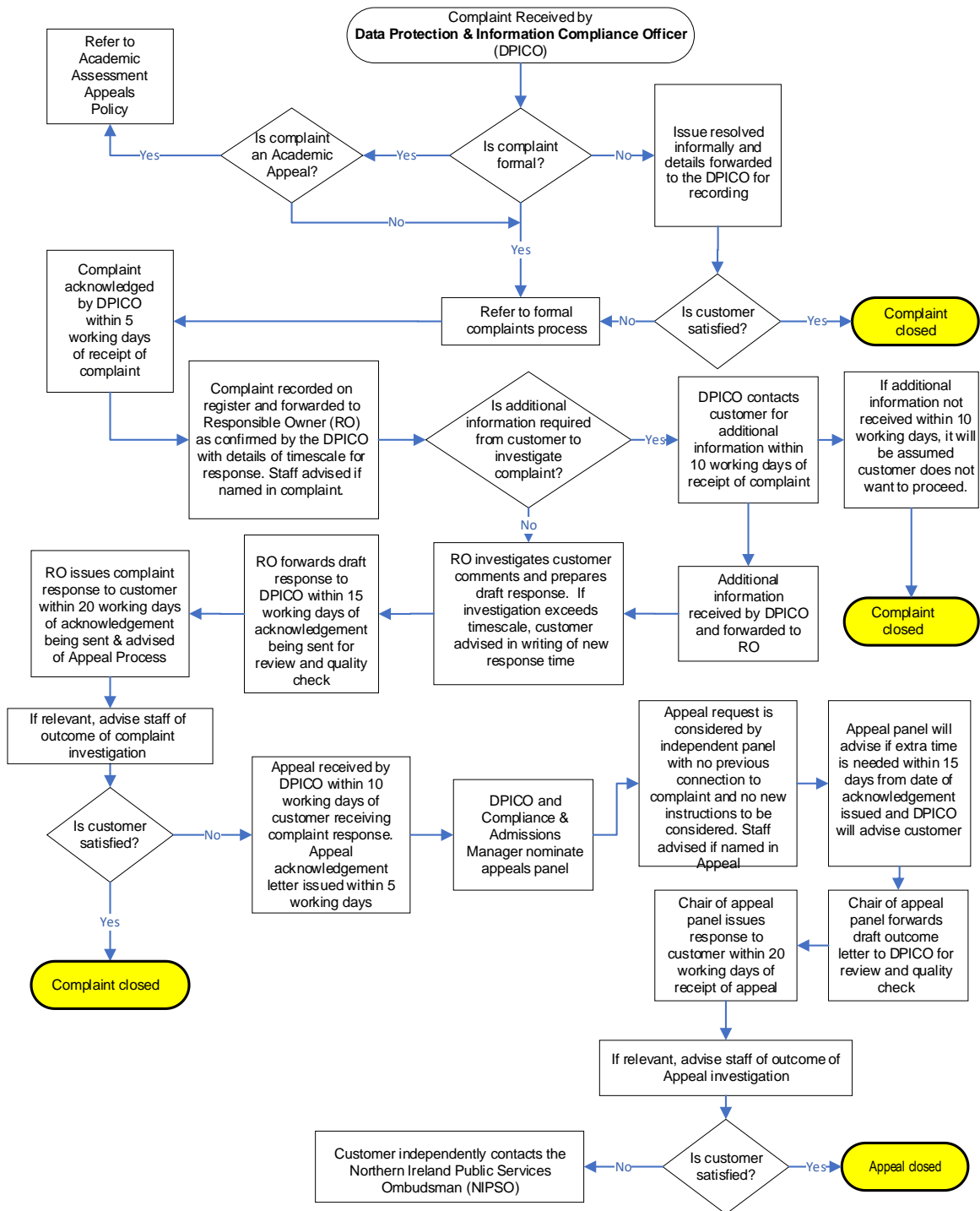
I realise that if I choose not to agree to these terms, the College will be unable to investigate my complaint.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

<i>Office Use Only</i>	
Date Received:	Date Acknowledged:
Received By:	Responsible Owner:

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Complaints Process



Note : Any recommendations and follow up actions are recorded and monitored

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RECORD OF CHANGES

Modifications made since the last review are as follows:

Record of Changes				
Review Date	Page No.	Change Comment	Date of Change	Initials
14.11.24	Throughout Policy	Change in text from “Quality Manager” to read “Data Protection & Information Compliance Officer”	09.12.24	LMcK
14.11.24	13	Change in Complaints Process Flowchart from “Quality Manager” to read “Data Protection & Information Compliance Officer”	09.12.24	LMcK
14.01.25	5	Duplication of Exemption	14.01.25	LMcK
14.01.25	Throughout Policy	Minor editing and typo corrections	14.01.25	LMcK

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