

QMS07: Complaints procedure

Owner: SHEQ

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1. Purpose

This document sets out the Group’s complaints procedure to ensure any complaint received is managed to completion.

2. Objectives

The objectives of this complaints procedure are to:

- provide a framework which is simple for customers to use and is equally accessible to all
- deal with problems as close to their source and as quickly as possible
- give customers confidence that their comments are listened to and their complaints are being dealt with effectively
- ensure action is taken to solve problems and generate a positive attitude to feedback
- learn from feedback and prevent the recurrence of problems
- generate a consistent approach to complaints throughout the Norse Group
- protect the reputation and resources of Norse
- ensure compliance with ISO 9001 Standards.

2. Process

The complaints process has three stages and encompasses the addition of the **Service Improvement Notice (SIN)** procedure.

Complaints can be made in writing, by fax, by email, by telephone or in person (by appointment). Complaints can be defined as "when a customer does not feel that they have received a satisfactory response or resolution to an expression of dissatisfaction about an action or lack of action by Norse." The customer will be kept informed of what is happening to their complaint at all times.

Anonymous complaints will be dealt with on a case by case basis, as it is recognised that anonymous complaints may sometimes be vexatious in nature or origin. However, where the complaint involves an issue of a sensitive nature, as detailed in Stage 2, it will be usual practice to fully investigate the complaint.

Norse’s aim is to resolve the majority of problems as close to their source as possible (ie Stage 1) and preferably, before they are escalated to Stage 2 (formal).

Norse staff are encouraged to air any concerns internally by raising them initially with their manager or, if that is not possible, by calling an independent hotline operated by Safecall which operates on a 24/7 basis by ringing 0800 915 1571 at any time.

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3. Complaints

Service Improvement Notice – SIN

The SIN procedure is a process that is implemented where a problem has been identified (usually with a Norse process or procedure or with a supplier or supply chain) and an improvement to that process is required. Where such a problem has been identified, a Service Improvement Notice should be completed and forwarded to the relevant party/supplier in order for them to take action to rectify the problem. Where a SIN remains unresolved or persistent or anomalies and trends are identified, procedure QM6 will be implemented.

The SIN process should be implemented but not limited to:

- an issue with the quality of goods supplied by an external contractor
- an issue with the standard of work carried out by an external contractor
- an improvement to a process or procedure suggested by a member of the public or a member of staff
- an issue with a process, procedure or supply that has not given rise to a complaint but that could escalate to a complaint if processes are not adapted/adjusted.

The SIN process primarily relates to internal complaints and external supply chain issues.

4. Stage 1 complaint

Stage 1 (informal)

Complaints are considered at an operational level and it should be possible for most complaints to be resolved at Stage 1. It remains at the discretion of the relevant manager to escalate a complaint straight to Stage 2 if the situation requires it. Stage 1 complaints include but are not limited to the following:

- a minor issue that is easily rectified
- an issue that is not sensitive or serious (see Stage 2 complaints)
- where a customer wishes to make note of an issue but does not wish to escalate it to a formal complaint
- a request for a replacement;
 - item
 - grass cuttings to be removed
 - litter picked
 - bin collected
- customer calling to notify of late arrival of operative
- customer not with a product, ie taps or sanitary ware.

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Stage 1 complaints are usually resolved to the satisfaction of the customer. However, should the issue remain unresolved at Stage 1 or should the customer be dissatisfied with the solution and/or apology offered at Stage 1, it should be escalated to Stage 2.

A record of **all** complaints, including outcome, will be recorded by the service concerned, but only those complaints that progress to Stage 2 will be reported to the Senior Management Team (SMT) and considered a formal complaint for the purposes of auditing requirements.

5. Stage 2 complaint

Stage 2 complaints (formal)

Complaints are those that are of a nature that is sensitive or serious or involve a matter that has not been resolved to the customer’s satisfaction at Stage 1.

A senior manager within the department, who has not previously been involved in the complaint or originating incident, may investigate the complaint, or a complaints case manager may carry out the investigation.

In some circumstances an independent investigator (ie from another division or external investigator) may be appointed to conduct the investigation.

Stage 2 complaints include but are not limited to the following:

The complaint is of a **serious** nature. Examples would include:

- a complaint from a customer or member of the public about a member of staff’s standard of behaviour or conduct
- a complaint about late or non-delivery of a service causing the disruption or cancellation of a planned event
- a complaint about a serious health and safety allegation
- a complaint about a threat/risk to the safety of a member of the public
- a complaint about the impact of Norse operations on the environment.

The complaint is of a **sensitive** nature. Examples would include:

- the complaint concerns an allegation of theft or dishonesty
- the complaint concerns inappropriate behaviour of a sexual or racist nature
- the complaint concerns a particular manager.

Where it has not been possible to resolve a complaint at Stage 2 or where a customer is not satisfied with the solution offered by Norse, the complaint will be escalated to Stage 3.

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6. Stage 3 complaint

Stage 3 complaint (formal)

Complaints that are considered at Director and Senior Director level and are usually ongoing complaints that could not be resolved to the customer’s satisfaction at Stage 2. There may be further review or investigation. The Directors’ decision will be the final response from Norse direct to the complainant.

Norse will investigate the complaint, and if nothing further can be determined to the complainant’s satisfaction, where the decision is that no further action is necessary, they can be directed to the relevant local authority or the Local Government Ombudsman.

7. Staff procedure

The Norse Group is committed to providing a quality service and achieving the highest levels of customer satisfaction. Norse can continue to improve its services by listening and responding to the views of our customers and members of the public.

Therefore we aim to:

- make the complaint process as easy as possible
- treat a complaint as a clear expression of dissatisfaction with our service which calls for a response
- deal with complaints as promptly as possible
- respond in the right way, provide an explanation or an apology where we have not met the customer’s expectation
- learn from complaints and use them as part of the continued improvement process.

What to do:

- if the complaint is by telephone or face to face, staff should write down as many details as possible. It may be better, if the complainant agrees, to ask him or her to put the complaint in writing to obtain all the relevant details
- the service manager or the relevant operations manager must be notified as soon as possible after a complaint is received and will decide who will respond to the complaint and what action must be taken.

The service manager or the relevant operations manager will ensure that the:

- IMS and Accreditation Manager is informed of any formal complaint as soon as possible after the complaint is received by recording the actions on the QMS database.

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Responding to a complaint:

- a response must be made at the earliest opportunity. In the case of a formal complaint, this should be replied to within **15 working days** of receipt
- a response to a Stage 2 complaint will be recorded on the Quality Management System (QMS) database. Notification to specific departments will be dependent on the circumstances
- it may not be possible to respond fully to a complaint, if this is the case, communicate this to the complainant. This acknowledgement must not be later than **five working days** after receiving the complaint. This will all be recorded on the QMS database
- all complaints will be treated in confidence with details only being given to those members of management and staff who need to know in order to investigate the complaint
- if the complainant is not sure who to direct the complaint to, for example if a customer telephones the office, office administration staff will advise them whom to contact. If this is not possible, the complainant will be requested to put the complaint in writing to the IMS and Accreditation Manager, who will then ensure the correct person handles the complaint
- if a formal complaint is received, the appropriate manager will be informed and then respond to the complaint
- if the complaint requires a level of investigation in the first instance in order to locate the correct department, service or manager, the SHEQ Department (Quality) will act as the first point of contact for ensuring the complaint is recorded on the QMS database and the complaint is acknowledged within **five working days**
- the SHEQ Department (Quality) will monitor all formal complaints and will ensure that each complaint is handled correctly
- if the complainant is not satisfied with the handling of the complaint or the response to the complaint, they should write to the Director, who will examine the complaint and respond to the complainant
- if the complainant is still not satisfied, the Director will arrange for an independent review of the complaint to be carried out.

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8. Eligibility to make a complaint

The following criteria applies:

An individual or group receiving or seeking a service from Norse, or anyone acting for an individual or group unable to complain personally.

- a complaint must be made within one year of the goods or service being received, (Limitation Act 1980).

9. Confidentiality

Any complaint received will be treated in confidence. Details of the complaint will only be shared with staff members and partner organisations as part of the investigation process.

Where a vulnerable person is considered to be at risk, safeguarding will take primacy. In these circumstances external government agencies may have to be contacted.

If an organisation or individual makes a complaint public, they may forfeit their right to anonymity and the right to confidentiality.

10. Complaints submission

A complaint can be submitted using the following:

- the Norse Group website (contact us section)
- by phone - 01603 894100
- or in writing to - 280 Fifers Lane, Norwich, Norfolk, NR6 6EQ.

Final responses to complaints will be in writing, unless this format is not appropriate for the complainant.

In responding to a complaint, an acknowledgement will be made within **five working days** and a full response within a further **15 working days** from the date that the complaint was acknowledged at Stage 1.

Some circumstances, where matters are complex or where it is necessary for the complaints case manager to seek further clarification from the complainant, will see the 15 working days timescale for a response start once the summary of the complaint to be investigated has been defined and agreed with the complainant.

Where a complaint is particularly complicated and requires extensive investigation, complainants will be notified when they can reasonably expect a final response.

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11. Resolution

The approach to resolving a complaint will be based on appropriateness, timeliness and consistency of the application.

Customers are given the opportunity to resolve their complaints and, as far as possible, restore matters to a position prior to any complaint.

12. Unreasonable, vexatious or persistent complaints

Norse will treat every complaint with consideration based on severity and impact, responding to the complainant to seek an agreeable and fair resolution.

Complaints that fall in the category of unreasonable, vexatious or persistent, will if required be treated as nuisance and passed to a regulatory authority.

13. Reports

Statistical information will be presented to SET monthly. While all SINS and complaints will be recorded, only complaints at Stage 2 or above will be considered formal complaints and reported for auditing.

14. Summary

Complaints not only identify areas for improvement, but also give confidence to our customers that complaints are received and actioned to ensure that any product, good or service is delivered to the highest possible standard.

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