

**AGE UK  
CARLISLE AND EDEN**

**COMMENTS/COMPLIMENTS  
AND  
COMPLAINTS  
POLICY**

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**AGE UK CARLISLE AND EDEN**

**A POLICY FOR DEALING WITH  
COMMENTS/COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS**

	<b>PAGE</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. THE GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF A COMMENTS/COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. COMMENTS/COMPLIMENTS</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4. COMPLAINTS</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>5. THE PROCEDURE</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>6. ORGANISING THE PROCEDURE - "THE ROLE OF THOSE INVOLVED"</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>7. CONFIDENTIALITY</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>8. STATISTICAL INFORMATION</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>9. TRAINING FOR EXECUTIVE BOARD STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>10. MAKING THE PROCEDURE ACCESSIBLE</b>	<b>11</b>

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1** Comments and complaints are part of the process of empowering users and protecting their interests. Many users find it difficult to express worries, problems and concerns and it is therefore necessary to ensure that there is a climate which assures people that these will be listened to, taken seriously, and responded to speedily and fairly.
- 1.2** Having a Comments/Compliments and Complaints procedure is likely to ensure quality when it stems from a recognition of users' (Board Members, staff and volunteers and users) knowledge about the Comments/Compliments and Complaints procedure and is committed to the principle of empowerment that it embraces.
- 1.3** A complaints procedure acknowledges the unequal balance of power between users and providers of services, and assures people they will be listened to, taken seriously responded to fairly and quickly.
- 1.4** A complaint is any expression of client dissatisfaction, however it is expressed, that requires action.

### **Some of the reasons for introducing a complaints procedure are:-**

- to resolve problems before they become complaints.
- to be provided a procedure for dealing with them.
- to protect the interest of the users and to enable them to challenge what they may see as arbitrary decisions.
- to improve the quality of service by recognising users' rights and needs, and by being responsive to their views.
- to provide an additional means of monitoring the service.
- to protect staff and volunteers from the consequences of allowing unresolved problems to escalate.

- 1.5** Older people are often afraid to complain in case the service is taken away from them, or because they do not want to make trouble. It is important to introduce a positive element into the procedure and to make the user comfortable about using it. The spirit in which a complaints procedure is implemented will largely determine its effectiveness.

- 1.6** It is also important that positive comments and suggestions are received in an appreciative manner. We must encourage our users to tell us what we are doing right as well as what we are doing wrong.
- 1.7** "Ownership" of the philosophy behind the procedure by all staff and volunteers is essential. It is most likely to be achieved through the provision of training on a regular basis.
- 2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF THE COMMENTS/COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE.**

The General principles of a complaints procedure are that it:

**2.1 is accessible**

Users should be encouraged to know where to go and who to ask for further advice, information comes in a variety of ways. For example, some users may have problems with a written procedure through partial sight, or illiteracy; a tape may be more appropriate or large type. Age UK Carlisle and Eden need to be sensitive to the different ways of making information accessible.

**2.2 is understood by staff and volunteers**

It is important that Board Members, paid Staff and Volunteers are fully conversant with the principles of the Comments/Compliments and Complaints procedure, that they are made aware in a user friendly way, that such procedures work well and do no harm; that complaints procedures improve the service, and the quality of life of the users. Issues of confidentiality and what constitutes a complaint need to be addressed with both staff and volunteers in training sessions.

**2.3 provides a prompt and considered response**

It is important that users of Age UK Carlisle and Eden's Services know what they say is taken seriously, and that the organisation has listened to them, even if they cannot resolve the problem. For this reason it is important to reply promptly, so that the user is not left in suspense for weeks and months wondering what is happening.

Each Age UK organisation needs to work out the shortest reasonable time scale, for each part of the procedure and to publish these. The complainant should be told what the times scale is and the organisation should maintain its deadline.

## **2.4 has a strong solving element**

Most complaints pose problems, often small ones, which can be resolved immediately, by staff and volunteers. Sometimes these complaints are presented as comments. If everyone concerned knows there is a simple procedure, and follows it, an escalation of the problem into a major complaint can be avoided. The objective is not to apportion blame but to resolve the problem; not to find fault with people, but to give older people a better Age UK service.

## **2.5 safeguards confidentiality**

All those involved in processing the complaints - Board members, paid Staff and Volunteers - must ensure that it is treated in confidence, and that the person making the complaint feels secure in the knowledge that their views will not be made known to others. All complaints must be kept secure from casual perusal. Serious complaints against paid staff may be more appropriately dealt with under the disciplinary procedure than the Comments/Compliments and Complaints procedure described below. For further reference please see the Policy of Confidentiality for Age UK Organisations in Cumbria.

## **3. COMMENTS**

It is always helpful to hear what people think about our Organisation and the services we provide. People are always encouraged when they are complimented for their work. If a positive comment is received about any aspect of the Organisation it should be shared with all those involved.

### **Comments are welcome because:**

- i) They can help to influence the policy decisions of the Organisation
- ii) They help to maintain the standards of our services
- iii) They can raise issues of real importance and can lead to change for the better.

Comments should, therefore, be recorded in the relevant book, shared with those involved, and used appropriately.

## **4. COMPLAINTS**

### **4.1 What is a complaint?**

A Complaint is often couched in terms of a comment or suggestion, or it presents as a problem in the first instance. It can relate to many different things and appear to be quite small. However, all users' comments should be listened to seriously and sometimes a "trivial" complaint needs to be acted upon, because it reveals a hidden problem.

Complaints may relate to:-

- the quality or nature of the service provided
- the conduct of the staff/Volunteer
- administration within the organisation
- discrimination
- provision of accurate information
- failure to follow agreed policy and procedure
- unreasonable delays
- policy of the organisation which affects your service provision

### **4.2 Definition of a Complaint**

- a Complaints are about individual instances, and policy issues, but not generalisations
- b A Complaint is not a comment or suggestion. (which is often positive)
- c A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction

### **4.3 Who can make a complaint?**

Anyone, including users of services, carers, the general public and shoppers. Complaints by paid employees and volunteers of Age UK Carlisle and Eden will be dealt with under the terms of their individual contracts of employment, or as laid down in the Grievance procedure.

## **5 THE PROCEDURE**

**5.1** There will be three stages to the procedure.

1. The informal or Problem Solving Stage
2. The formal stage
3. The review stage.

**It should be made clear to all concerned that the purpose of a Complaints Procedure is to solve problems and come to an agreement as quickly as possible, and every effort should be made to ensure that this happens.**

**Throughout the whole procedure, the complainant will have the right to be accompanied by a friend or advisor and Age UK will help identify a person to act as advocate if the complainant so wishes.**

### **1- The informal or problem solving stage**

**5.1.1** All complaints should be received by the Chief Executive. Before the procedure is implemented, the Complaint will be recorded by the Chief Executive, who will designate a complaints investigator.

**5.1.2** Normal good practice should sort out small queries and grumbles to the satisfaction of all parties involved, without taking the issue to the next stage. It is important that complaints that can be resolved at this stage are seen to be taken seriously and not dismissed as trivia, they could highlight a more serious problem for the future.

**5.1.3** Resolving complaints at this stage is the quickest way and avoids the more lengthy process of the formal stage. It should not be used as a means of dissuading the complainant from making a formal complaint.

**5.1.4** Stage 1 gives everybody involved with the Organisation the opportunity to express their views and dissatisfaction. It is therefore important to listen carefully and to find out what the complainant wants to achieve as a result.

**5.1.5** If the problem cannot be solved at stage 1 the complainant should be advised, and assisted where necessary, to take the problem to stage 2, the Formal Stage.

## **2-The Formal Stage**

- 5.2.1** Simply taking the Complaint to stage 2 does not imply that problem solving activities will be abandoned. The problem can still be resolved through good practice and with an understanding of the complainant's views.
- 5.2.2** To formalise the Complaint it will need to be put in writing, either by the complainant themselves or someone else on their behalf, to the Chief Executive. Many people will need help and advice from someone they know and trust, either from within or outside the Organisation. Some people will need help in writing their complaint. Anyone who gives such assistance must ensure that they have reflected fully what the complainant wished to say.

The Complainant will be sent written confirmation on receipt of their complaint within 7 days.

- 5.2.3** The significance of this stage is that it enters a process where other people are openly involved in the consideration, discussion and possible investigation, of the complaint.
- 5.2.4** If the complainant or the matter for complaint are subject to a contractual agreement with an outside agency then they too must be informed of the complaint and given the opportunity for their own investigation.
- 5.2.5** The Designated Complaints Officer will make a full investigation of the complaint, taking on board the views of all parties involved. The complainant will be informed, within 28 days, of the outcome of the Investigating Officer's investigation. If the outcome is not to their satisfaction they will be advised that they may take the complaint to stage 3, the Review Stage.

## **3-The Review Stage**

- 5.3.1** If the complaint has not been settled at the formal stage and the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome then the complaint can be considered by the Review Panel (see 6.3)
- 5.3.2** The purpose of the Review Panel is to give the complainant the opportunity to have their complaint heard by a group of people who have not been involved at any other stage of the process. The Panel will re-examine the complaint and the decision taken by the Designated Complaints Officer. The Review Panel will meet within 28 days of the complaint being referred to them.



**5.3.3** The panel will have access to all the information and people involved, in order to come to a decision, which may consist of conciliatory action such as changes in practice or procedure.

**5.3.4** The decision of the Review Panel will be sent to the complainant within 2 weeks of the meeting.

**5.3.5** If the complainant is still not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint then they will be advised to seek advice independent of the Organisation.

## **6. ORGANISING THE PROCEDURE - "THE ROLE OF THOSE INVOLVED"**

### **6.1 The Chief Executive is to:**

- i) Implement the procedure
- ii) Monitor the procedure
- iii) Supervise the investigation
- iv) Produce statistics for the Annual Report
- v) Provide training programmes for Board, Staff and Volunteers as appropriate.
- vi) Collect data for Board

### **6.2 The Chief Executive is to:**

- i) receive complaints
- ii) instigate investigation of complaints
- iii) inform the complainant of progress
- iv) maintain and monitor the timetable for dealing with complaints
- v) offer the complainant an independent advocate who can give advice and support
- vi) maintain adequate records of all complaints
- vii) service the review panel
- viii) prepare statistics for the Chief Executive
- ix) maintain records of training

- x) confer with outside Agencies when required by contractual agreements

### **6.3 The Review Panel**

Will consist of two members of the Board of Age UK Carlisle and Eden, an independent person recruited by the Designated Complaints Officer, and a minute secretary,

#### **And is to:-**

- i) examine all the evidence, written or oral
- ii) decide on a course of action
- iii) refer decision to Chief Executive for implementation

## **7. CONFIDENTIALITY**

All aspects of the Procedure will be dealt with in line with the Confidentiality Policy of the Organisation.

## **8. STATISTICAL INFORMATION**

**8.1** Statistical Information will be produced relating to the complaints received and the way in which they are handled

**8.2** this Statistical Information will be made available to members of the Board, and used to influence policy decisions and improve service provision

**8.3** All statistical information will be completely confidential in line with the Organisation's Confidentiality Policy, and will not, under any circumstances, identify individuals.

## **9. DISSEMINATION TO BOARD MEMBERS, STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS**

**9.1** The Chief Executive will ensure that everyone in the Organisation is conversant with the Policy and Procedure and their role in it, ensuring that all Complaints are dealt with quickly and efficiently, with training given as appropriate.

**9.2** All Board Members, Staff and Volunteers will be informed of any subsequent changes to the Comments/Compliments and Complaints Policy

## **10. MAKING THE PROCEDURE ACCESSIBLE**

- 10.1** The full Comments/Compliments and Complaints document will be made available to all Board Members, Staff, Volunteers. Statutory Authorities, other founders and anyone else who wishes to view the document in its entirety.
- 10.2** In order to simplify the process for those people wishing to make a complaint, a leaflet has been produced with a step by step guide of "How to Complain". The leaflet is available at all Age UK outlets in Carlisle and Eden and will be freely offered to people who make a complaint.

In implementing this policy Age UK Carlisle and Eden will ensure it complies with the spirit and principles of our Age UK Carlisle and Eden Equality and Diversity Policy.