**AGE UK**

**CARLISLE AND EDEN**

**COMMENTS/COMPLIMENTS**

**AND**

**COMPLAINTS**

**POLICY/PROCEDURE**

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**AGE UK CARLISLE AND EDEN**

**A POLICY AND PROCEDURE FOR DEALING WITH**

**COMMENTS/COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS**

1. **INTRODUCTION**
   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.
   2. 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 if possible in a timely manner.
   3. A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction; however, it is expressed, that requires acknowledgement.

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

-to resolve the reported complaints.

-to provide 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. 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.
  2. "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.

1. **GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF THE COMMENTS/COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE.**

The General principles of a complaints procedure are that it:

* 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. Age UK Carlisle and Eden need to be sensitive to the different ways of making information accessible.

* 1. **Is understood by staff and volunteers**

It is important that Board Members, employees, and Volunteers are fully conversant with the principles of the Comments/Compliments and Complaints procedure. Issues of confidentiality and what constitutes a complaint need to be addressed with both staff and volunteers in training sessions.

* 1. **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 in a timely.

* 1. **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. The objective is not to apportion blame but to resolve the problem; not to find fault with people, but to try and ensure Age UK Carlisle and Eden deliver a quality service.

1. **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:**

1. They can help to influence the policy decisions of the Organisation
2. They help to maintain the standards of our services
3. 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.

1. **COMPLAINTS**
   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.

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
* policy of the organisation which affects your service provision
  1. **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

* 1. **Who can make a complaint?**

Anyone, including users of services, carers, the 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.

1. **THE PROCEDURE**

**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.**

* + 1. All complaints should be received by the relevant department or ultimately the Chief Executive.
    2. Normal good practice should sort out small queries to the satisfaction of all parties involved.
    3. It is important to listen carefully and to find out what the complainant wants to achieve as a result of the complaint.
    4. If the problem cannot be solved immediately the complainant should be advised and assisted where necessary.
    5. Wherever possible the problem should still be resolved through good practice and with an understanding of the complainant's views.
    6. To formalise the Complaint, it will need to be put in writing, either by the complainant themselves or someone else on their behalf.
    7. 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.
    8. A full investigation of the complaint will be undertaken, taking on board the views of all parties involved. The complainant will be informed of the outcome of the investigation.

1. **CONFIDENTIALITY**

All aspects of the Procedure will be dealt with in line with the Confidentiality Policy and adhere to the Data Protection Policy.

**8. STATISTICAL INFORMATION**

* 1. Occasionally statistical Information will be produced relating to the complaints received and the way in which they are handled this information will be made available to members of the Board, and used to influence policy decisions and improve service provision
  2. 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**

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

1. **MAKING THE PROCEDURE ACCESSIBLE**

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.