

# Complaints

## The policy



### 1. Policy Statement

Age UK Horsham District ('the Company') is committed to providing quality services for older people that are equitable, accessible and effective. We are always keen to hear what is working well for customers and value all feedback.

As part of the on-going vision, mission and strategy of the Company and service improvement, all services provided by the Company will carry out accessible satisfaction surveys and hold regular customer meetings and act on any issues raised.

The Company recognises that at times customers may be unhappy with services provided and that such concerns and complaints are a valuable tool for improving the quality of these services. Early resolution of any complaint is vital to ensuring safe, high quality care and identifying areas of risk.

This policy outlines the principles to be adhered to during the process for handling complaints where a customer expresses dissatisfaction with the way they have been treated or a service has been delivered. The Company aims to provide a complaints process which is easy to access and is supportive and open and which results in a speedy and fair resolution. Thus, ensuring that complaints are investigated promptly and proportionately and that apologies are given and services are improved when necessary. The policy aims to promote a culture of openness and transparency for the benefit of all stakeholders, including customers, employees and volunteers in which all forms of feedback are valued, listened to and acted upon.

### 2. Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction (written or verbal) about a function, decision or service commissioned or delivered by the Company.

The type of complaints this procedure is designed to deal with are likely to be in one or more of the following areas:

- Dissatisfaction with the quality of service provided, including unacceptable delay or failure to deliver a service;
- Incorrect adherence to procedures and good practice;
- Behaviour of an employee, volunteer or another client (where the behaviour of an employee is concerned, the appropriate HR policy will be adhered to e.g. disciplinary policy).

If your concern relates to fundraising practice you can escalate your concerns to the Fundraising Regulator in the event that internal consideration is not possible.

### 3. The purpose of the Company's Complaints Procedure is to:

- Protect the interests of individual customers;
- Create equality of access to the Company complaints procedure regardless of race, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, caste or culture;
- Provide responses that are clear and easy to understand and offer employees support to enable understanding where required;
- Improve the quality of services provided by being responsive to the views of customers;
- Enable customers, potential customers and carers to challenge what may appear to be arbitrary decisions;
- Protect employees and volunteers from the consequences of what may otherwise appear to be arbitrary procedures for dealing with complaints on an ad hoc basis;
- Provide an additional means of monitoring the performance of the organisation;
- Maintain and enhance the customer care philosophy within this organisation.

### 4. General principles of complaints handling

- Complaints must be investigated in an open, honest, fair and efficient way within the shortest possible timescale;
- Complaints are best dealt with as soon as they arise;
- Confidentiality must be maintained at all times. All employees and volunteers should be aware of their legal and ethical duty to protect personal information about customers of services provided by the Company;
- The approach to resolving complaints should be flexible and conciliatory and should encourage communication and negotiation to reach a fair resolution;
- Lessons learnt should be identified and incorporated into practice as quickly as possible;
- Where an employee is being investigated, the complaint will be handled in line with our HR/employment policies, e.g. disciplinary;
- The Company will follow the principles of fair blame and staff and volunteers will be treated with respect and offered support throughout the investigation. The approach will be open, positive and non-punitive;
- Where an apology is required it will be offered openly and positively and given at the earliest opportunity;
- Customers should be reassured that making a complaint will not affect their eligibility for, or the nature of, current or future treatment by the Company employees or volunteers and all employees and volunteers should take care to demonstrate this;
- Complaints must be made within six months of the event to ensure that proper investigations can be carried out.

### 5. Procedure for handling a complaint: listening, learning and improving

- A complaint can be made orally, electronically or in writing;
- When a complaint is made in writing or electronically, it should be acknowledged within 2 days by a Manager or trained employee wherever possible and the complainant should be given information about what will happen next and how long the investigation is likely to take. They should be kept in touch with the investigation particularly where it is taking longer than expected and be given an explanation for any delay;
- A complaint should be investigated in an **appropriate** and **proportional** way to ensure it is resolved speedily and efficiently;

- All employees who have received complaints training are empowered by the Company to investigate and resolve complaints and where resolution is not possible to refer on to the appropriate Manager;
- Where appropriate, alternative methods of responding to complaints should be considered whether through immediate response from front-line staff, a meeting, or an investigation by a senior person;
- Where a meeting is set up the complainant should be advised that they may bring a friend or advocate to support them;
- The purpose of the investigation is not only resolution but to establish the facts, to learn, to detect poor practice where this is the case and to improve services;
- Where immediate resolution is not possible or the complaint is of a serious nature the investigation should be undertaken by a suitably trained and authorised person with delegated authority from the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and should be conducted in a manner that is supportive to all those involved, without bias and in an impartial and objective manner;
- The investigation must not be adversarial and must uphold the principles of fairness and consistency. Where an employee is being investigated, the complaint will be handled in line with our employment policies, e.g. disciplinary policy ;
- The complainant and those identified as the subject of the complaint should be advised as soon as is practicable of the process, what will be investigated and what will not, those who will be involved, the roles they will play and the anticipated timescales. All those involved should be kept informed of progress throughout and receive support as required;
- On completion of the investigation a written response should be sent signed by the CEO. This responsibility may be delegated to the Manager leading the investigation;
- It is the expectation that all complaints will be fully responded to within 28 days of receipt and sooner wherever possible. Delays in responding to complaints can cause anxiety and stress for complainants and staff and can adversely affect the outcome;
- A full record should be made on the standard Compliments, Comments and Complaints (CCC) form;
- All correspondence and notes relating to the complaint should be stored in a locked cabinet or password protected computer file and retained for 10 years.

## **6. Responses to complaints**

- The response should be clear, accurate, balanced and easy to understand;
- It should offer an explanation of how the complaint has been considered;
- Address the concerns expressed by the complainant and show that each element has been fully and fairly investigated;
- Report the conclusion reached including anything that requires remedial action;
- Include an apology where things have gone wrong;
- Consider appropriate remedy;
- Report the action taken or proposed action to prevent recurrence;
- Indicate who to contact for clarification;
- Advise that if dissatisfied with the outcome the complainant can appeal initially to the CEO of the Company and that there is a further stage of appeal involving a panel of Trustees.

## **7. Recording of Complaints**

- All complaints should be recorded and should include the subject matter of the complaint, who handled it and the outcome;

- All complaints should be managed confidentially and only those directly involved should have access to the information;
- Complaints reports will be provided on a quarterly basis to the CEO and on a half yearly basis to the Board;
- Reports should include the number of days taken to acknowledge complaints, the number of days taken to resolve complaints and the number of complaints upheld as well as the number unresolved;
- An anonymised annual report will be produced and form part of the formal Board papers and will include the number of complaints received, the number of complaints considered to be well-founded, a summary of the subject matter of the complaints and identify any remedial action or service improvement that has taken place as a result of the complaints;
- Any serious complaints that are upheld or any trends identified will be drawn to the attention of the CEO as soon as possible rather than waiting for the reporting dates;
- This anonymised report will also be made available to HDC and WSCC (where appropriate) as part of their monitoring of contracts.

## **8. Complaints about other organisations**

Complaints about the National Health Service, Social Services or other statutory authorities should not be dealt with by the Company, but referred to the authority concerned.

Complaints about another Age UK member organisation should be referred to the CEO who will refer the matter to the organisation concerned.

## **9. Compliments & Suggestions**

All compliments/comments and/or suggestions about the Company are to be passed to the appropriate Manager and recorded in a special "Comments/Suggestions Book". These will be reviewed and considered at the Managers' meetings on a monthly basis and actions taken as appropriate actions will be publicised through, e.g. posters or customer group meetings.