

Concerns, Complaints and Compliments Policy

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1. Introduction

1.1 Age UK Lewisham & Southwark (AUKLS) recognises that providing a high standard of service delivery is essential. AUKLS welcomes feedback from volunteers, service users and other external individuals, whether it be positive or to tell us where we haven't met expectations. The proper handling of complaints is therefore one of AUKLS's highest priorities. Staff members are trained to understand that complaints are a valuable source of information about services and processes and that handled in the correct manner can assist the organisation in continuous improvement.

1.2 To ensure that this policy meets the support needs across AUKLS's diverse range of service users, it has been written in consultation with the Principles of Good Complaint Handling (Parliamentary & Health Service Ombudsman, 2008), and the PHSO Complaints Standard, 2021.

1.3 Complaints and the complaints process are managed by the Director of People, with oversight by the CEO.

2. Aims & Objectives

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 To deliver a complaints service that meets AUKLS's service standards.
2.1.2 To facilitate organisational learning from complaints.
2.1.3 To identify good practice.

2.2 Objectives

2.2.1 To work collaboratively internally, and with partner organisations and other agencies where necessary, to coordinate comprehensive outcomes to complaints.
2.2.2 To facilitate the effective and early resolution of complaints.
2.2.3 To use the analysis of compliments, concerns and complaints to help improve services and reduce the level of complaints.
2.2.4 To manage all complaints in an open and accountable way.

3. Compliments

3.1 We value and encourage all kinds of feedback. Anyone who has a relationship with AUKLS can compliment a member of staff, a team, or the organisation. Compliments are passed on to staff and their line manager, and are used to

identify areas of good practice that AUKLS can learn from and further develop.

3.2 Compliments can be submitted verbally to any member of staff who will record and share this or can be submitted through the AUKLS website Online Contact Form, via email to information@ageuklands.org.uk or in writing to Stones End Centre, 11 Scovell Road, London SE1 1QQ.

3.3 Compliments are used to enable service development and as part of individual performance development. Employees receiving compliments will be recognised appropriately.

4. Concerns & Complaints

4.1 A concern or complaint can arise from a number of issues including:

4.1.1 A failure to comply with policy, procedure, or standards of service delivery.

4.1.2 A decision which the complainant believes is not fair or clear to them.

4.1.3 The behaviour of AUKLS's staff, volunteers, associates, or contractors.

4.2 Concern or Complaint

4.2.1 It is important to establish the difference between a concern and a complaint. Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest stage will reduce the likelihood of their developing into formal complaints.

4.2.2 If you have any concerns about our work please tell a staff member or their manager as soon as possible, so they can quickly understand your concerns and try to put things right.

4.2.3 If you are not happy with the response to your concern and/or you want to make a formal complaint please follow the procedure below.

4.3 Complaints Procedure

4.3.1 In order to help us help us deal effectively and quickly with your complaint: Contact us as soon as possible giving clear details. Specify clearly what aspect of the service you wish to make the complaint about.

Including the following details will help us to effectively and quickly investigate your complaint:

- The specific area or service to which the complaint applies.
- Your name and contact details: this is essential as we cannot investigate anonymous complaints.
- Outline the nature of your complaint as precisely as possible, this will help us to investigate further and hopefully to resolve the issue. Please include details such as the place and time the incident occurred.

- Please let us know if you have already reported the complaint, and if any action was taken previously.
- Depending on the nature of the complaint or concern raised, our Safeguarding procedure may also be followed.

AUKLS operates a complaints process with up to two stages:

4.3.2 Stage 1: Internal investigation of complaint. The target time for completing the investigation is 20 working days, though it sometimes takes longer. If this is the case, any delay will be communicated and explained.

4.3.3 If the complaint remains unresolved at Stage 1, it will move to Stage 2.

4.3.4 Stage 2: Appeal. Review of Stage 1 decision in response to an appeal made with specific grounds. A full written response will be provided to the complainant within 14 working days.

4.4 A complaint can be made in a number of ways to AUKLS:

- In writing via letter or email to complaints@ageuklands.org.uk
- Through the Online Contact Form on the AUKLS website.
- By telephone: 020 7701 9700
- In person to any member of staff.
- If the complaint is about the CEO, please make your complaint by letter marked confidential and for the attention of the Chair of the Trustees of AUKLS at the following address: Stones End Centre, 11 Scovell Road, London SE1 1QQ.
- If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint response following stage 1 please request, within 14 working days, for an appeal to be sent to our CEO stating the reasons for dissatisfaction. (In the event of a complaint against the CEO, this will be considered by a member of the Board of Trustees not involved in stage 1).
- If after AUKLS has been through the Stage 2 appeal process and you are still dissatisfied with the result, you should be advised that there is no further right of appeal with AUKLS but please see point 5 - *External Complaints Resolution Bodies.*

4.5 AUKLS has an effective complaints management system in place through the following actions (where given timescales are not practically possible, AUKLS will give reasons and agree new timescales with the complainant):

4.5.1 Ensuring that all service users, volunteers and other external individuals know how to complain.

4.5.2 Making personal contact with complainants, ideally by telephone, to understand their complaint, attempt resolution and update them.

4.5.3 Acknowledging all complaints in writing within 5 working days.

4.5.4 Responding to stage 1 complaints within 20 working days following receipt of the complaint.

4.5.5 Reviewing and responding to stage 2 complaints within 14 working days following receipt of the escalation request.

4.5.6 Supporting vulnerable individuals through the complaints process and, where appropriate, referring them to alternative services that may be able to assist them in making their complaint.

4.5.7 Providing alternative avenues to seek support when the service requested is outside AUKLS's remit where appropriate and where possible.

4.5.8 Recording all complaints on a central register, which is reviewed and managed by senior management, with updates made quarterly to the Board of Trustees.

5. External Complaints Resolution Bodies

5.1 On the rare occasions when AUKLS is unable to conclude its complaints process to the satisfaction of the complainant, they will be advised of their right to approach a designated person such as an MP, Councillor or a recognised resolution body.

5.2 Complainants making complaints relating to services commissioned by the Local or Health Authorities retain their right to complain to these bodies directly at any stage.

5.3 The Charity Commission does not accept standard complaints about UK charities, such as those about poor customer service, but they will investigate significant risks that threaten a charity's integrity or beneficiaries, such as serious harm to people or illegal activity. You can also complain to the Fundraising Regulator, or Advertising Standards Authority for issues that fall within their jurisdiction. You can find more details on the Government website here.

5.4 AUKLS respects the rights of service users to complain to these statutory bodies and will work openly with partner agencies to resolve any legitimate concerns that service users raise.

6. Persistent or vexatious complaints

6.1 If a complainant has made unreasonable complaints in the past, we will not assume that their next complaint is unreasonable. Each case will be considered on its merits. All relevant correspondence will be evaluated to consider the circumstances, including:

6.1.1 whether a complainant has made persistent or unreasonable demands.

6.1.2 whether there is a strong likelihood that complaints are being made to intentionally cause harassment, divert resources or to disrupt the proper workings of AUKLS.

6.1.3 whether the complainant or their representative has been abusive or threatening to staff or has produced excessive correspondence.

6.1.4 whether the complainant displays vexatious behaviour.

6.1.5 AUKLS reserves the right to withdraw services from individuals who are proved to be making vexacious complaints. Please see our *Withdrawal of Services Policy* for further details.

7. Confidentiality

7.1 Under the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Human Rights Act 1998, all personal and sensitive organisational information, however received, is treated as confidential, including:

7.1.1 anything of a personal nature that is not a matter of public record about a service user, member of staff, volunteer or trustee.

7.1.2 sensitive organisational information.

7.2 We will ensure that the members of staff managing the complaint only involve

other agencies and share information with the consent of the individual concerned, unless:

7.2.1 AUKLS is required to share information by law.

7.2.2 The information is necessary for the safeguarding of vulnerable adults or children.

8. Monitoring and Reporting

8.1 Complaints and compliments will be monitored by AUKLS's Senior Management Team and the findings will be regularly shared with our Board of Trustees and delegated subcommittees as part of a documented cycle of reporting. Significant exceptions will be reported immediately.

8.2 In line with best practice recommended by the Principles of Good Complaint Handling (Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, 2008) AUKLS seeks continuous improvement through using feedback and lessons learnt from complaints to improve service design and delivery.

Appendix 1
Legislation, Regulation and Guidance

Government legislation has an impact on how Age UK Lewisham & Southwark can implement its Complaints and Compliments Policy. Listed below are the key regulatory standards and statutory Acts that have been acknowledged.

- The Care Act 2014
- Mental Health Capacity Act 2005
- Equality Act 2010
- Principles of Good Complaint Handling (Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, 2008) & Complaints Standard (Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, 2021)