



Norfolk Factsheet 5

Making a complaint

Contents

An introduction to making a complaint	p.2
Goods & Services	p.3
Housing	p.4
Council housing and other services	p.6
Adult Social Care	p.7
Transport	p.8
Health	p.9
Private Dentists	p.11
Employment	p.12
Solicitors	p.13
Police	p.14

For details of all Age UK Factsheets, go to
www.ageuknorfolk.org.uk

Last updated September 2017

If you would like Age UK Norfolk to search any of the websites listed in this factsheet on your behalf, please contact the advice line on 0300 500 1217

Introduction

It can feel difficult to make an official complaint, especially if emotions are running high and you feel angry or upset about the way you, or someone else, has been treated. However, it is always worth remembering that most organisations will want to know if you have a complaint and will be willing to help you to resolve it.

Registering an official complaint should never make things worse or prejudice the care, treatment or service which is being received. By registering a complaint, you have the chance to make a real difference, not only for yourself, but for others who may be using the organisation or service in the future.

Complaints procedures:

Most organisations have complaints procedures, which should be made available to anyone who wishes to lodge a complaint. These procedures oblige organisations to deal with complaints in a standard way, in accordance with formal guidelines they have set out. So, at the outset, it is advisable to voice a complaint through a complaints procedure before reaching out to other organisations able to give independent help with complaints.

'Watch dogs' are regulatory bodies which exist outside an organisation you wish to complain about. They will usually ask you to follow an organisation's complaints procedure before they are willing to offer help.

Tips for making a complaint:

Take the time to find out your basic rights in a situation of conflict. If in doubt, ask your local advice services. This will help you to feel confident and realistic about what can be achieved.

In order to be able to back up what you are saying, keep a record of dates on which communications take place between yourself and the body to which you are making the complaint, so that there can be no doubt about what has been said, and what was agreed between you and when.

It is advisable to begin by registering a complaint at the source of the problem before approaching an outside organisation. Try to keep calm and, in this way, you will feel more in control.

While a telephone or personal call is often effective, but unless this resolves your complaint immediately, follow it up in writing. Keep details of all conversations and copies of all correspondence relating to your complaints.

Goods & Services:

When you buy goods or services, the law protects your consumer rights. Citizens Advice can give you help and advice – they can also refer your complaint to local Trading Standards offices who will then investigate on your behalf.

Citizens Advice Consumer Service:

This is a national consumer helpline, funded by the Government and run by the National Citizens Advice Bureau. They provide expert and impartial consumer advice by phone and online and share intelligence with Trading Standards who will only contact you if they need more information.

For information, contact the Citizens Advice Consumer Service on 03454 040506 or go to www.citizensadvice.org (online enquiry form) which includes an A-Z of online advice (including Trading Standards Information). For information about Trading Standards, go to www.norfolk.gov.uk (consumer advice section).

The Consumer Ombudsman:

The Consumer Ombudsman provides an independent, impartial and cost-effective means of resolving disputes. They can help with following services: Communications; Copyright; Energy; Property & Home Improvement; Retail & Other Sectors.

The ombudsman should be used when complaints procedures with the company or organisation involved have been exhausted.

For information, go to www.ombudsman-services.org where there is a downloadable quick guide 'About Ombudsman Services' – general enquiry and complaint forms may be completed online.

To contact the Consumer Ombudsman schemes, call their helplines as follows:

Communications complaints: Tel: 0330 4401614

Copyright licensing complaints: Tel: 0330 4401601

Energy complaints: Tel: 0330 4401624

Property & home improvement complaints: Tel: 0330 4401634

Retail & other sectors: Tel: 0333 3001620

Dispute resolution Ombudsman: Tel: 0333 2413209

Housing:

Sheltered Accommodation (rented):

To complain about rented Sheltered Accommodation, the first step is to approach the manager of the Housing Organisation, who should inform you about the complaints procedure to follow. If, after you have followed their procedure, you do not feel satisfied with the way your complaint has been dealt with, you may contact the Housing Ombudsman service (see page 8 for details).

Sheltered Accommodation (for buyers):

The Manager of the Housing Company is the first person you should contact who is required to inform you of their Company's complaints procedure. For more serious complaints about a sheltered home, you may contact ARHM which is a useful organisation for people that own, manage and run retirement properties.

ARHM:

The Association of Retirement Housing Managers represents most organisations which manage retirement properties. For more information, go to www.arhm.org

You can contact ARHM on 020 74630660 or submit your complaint in writing to the Housing Managers (ARHM), c/o EAC, 3rd Floor, 89 Albert Embankment, LONDON. SE1 7TP. Email: enquiries@arhm.org

Private landlords:

If you are not satisfied, after complaining directly to your landlord about a problem concerning the condition of the place you live in or its state of repair, you should contact the Environmental Protection Team at your local district council.

If you are not satisfied, after complaining directly to your landlord about the safety of the property you rent or about the safety of the gas and electricity appliances, you should contact the Health and Safety Executive.

For information, go to www.hse.gov.uk You can contact them online or call the local office on 01603 828000 at HSE Norwich, Rosebery Court, 2nd Floor, St.Andrews Business Park, NORWICH. NR7 0HS.

Care Homes:

It is your right to complain, and making a complaint should in no way prejudice the level of your care. At the outset, complaints should be made to the Manager or Proprietor of the care home. Care homes are obliged to have a procedure for making complaints. If the complaint cannot be resolved via this procedure, you should contact the Care Quality Commission.

Care Quality Commission:

The Care Quality Commission is the independent regulator of health and adult social care in England and is responsible for making sure that care service providers meet the regulations and standards that apply to them and to use its powers and procedures to investigate complaints. For information, including details of actions you can take if you are complaining about an NHS service, a Social Care service or a GP, go to www.cqc.org.uk

You can contact them via their online contact form or call their England-based National Customer Service Centre on 03000 616161. Alternatively, write to their regional office at CQC National Customer Service Centre, Citygate, Gallowgate, NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE NE1 4PA

Domiciliary care complaints can also be referred to the CQC.

Home Care Agencies:

First, address your complaint to the Agency which provides the home care. The Agency is required to inform you of their complaints procedures. If you are not satisfied with the way the Agency handles your complaint, you may contact UKHCA for help and support.

UK Home Care Association (UKHCA):

UKHCA is the professional association of home care providers which helps organisations which provide social care (which may include nursing services) to people in their own homes - promoting high standards of care, and protecting the welfare of users.

For information, go to www.ukhca.co.uk You may contact UKHCA's helpline on 020 86618188; by email helpline@ukhca.co.uk or write to UKHCA, Sutton Business Centre, Restmor Way, WALLINGTON, Surrey SM6 7AH.

Council Housing and other Council Services:

To complain about any council service, contact the department or the Area office concerned, and ask for information about their official complaints procedure. If, after following this procedure, you are unhappy with the way the Council has dealt with your complaint, you should then contact the Local Government Ombudsman.

Local Government Ombudsman:

The Local Government Ombudsman examines complaints about most Council matters including housing. For information, go to their website www.lgo.org.uk which includes an online complaint form.

If you believe your complaint has not been managed effectively by the Council, you may contact LGO's national advice team on 0300 0610614 or send your complaint to the LGO, PO BOX 4771, COVENTRY. CV4 0EH.

Housing Ombudsman Service:

All residents in homes owned or managed by a provider of housing services registered with HOS can make a complaint to the Ombudsman. All social landlords (housing associations) registered in England are included, as are many private landlords and management agents. All member organisations must have a formal procedure for dealing with complaints. Before contacting HOS you should normally have followed these complaint procedures.

For information, go to www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk (online complaint form) or call on 0300 1113000, or email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk or write to them at Exchange Tower, Harbour Exchange Square, LONDON. E14 9GE.

Complaints about public housing (i.e. councils and local authorities) have to be made to the Local Government Ombudsman (see page 8).

Adult Social Care:

If you would like to make a complaint about Norfolk Adult Social Care, the first step is to make an informal complaint to the person or the department involved. If you have further cause for complaint, you should contact the department and ask for details of its complaints procedure.

For information, go to Norfolk County Council's website at www.norfolk.gov.uk or call the Adult Social Care enquiries line on 0344 8008020. You may complain via their online Social Care enquiry form or email information@norfolk.gov.uk or in writing to Customer Service Centre of Expertise, PO BOX 3210, NORWICH. NR2 1ET.

Benefits:

If you wish to make a complaint about Benefits payments, you should first contact the Customer Service Manager at the office you have been dealing with for information on their complaint procedures.

For information, go to www.gov.uk (DWP Complaints Procedure section).

You can get independent advice from the Citizens Advice Consumer Service (see page 5) or online at www.citizensadvice.org.uk 'Complaining about the service you've received – benefits and tax credits'.

Transport:

Rail Services:

To make a complaint about the railway or the services you have received from a train company, contact the Customer Services department of the company operating the service, train or station which you wish to complain about. Most complaints can be resolved by dealing directly with the company responsible. If you are unhappy with the outcome, you should contact Transport Focus.

Transport Focus (previously Passenger Focus) is an independent passenger watchdog, set up by the Government, to represent the interests of passengers. They can take up your complaint with the company involved. For information, go to www.transportfocus.org.uk – their ‘Advice and complaints’ section covers complaints from rail passengers, bus or coach passengers, tram passengers and road users. If you wish to complain about any aspect of these services, you may contact them online (use their webform) or call their helpline for passengers and road users on 0300 1232350 or write to them at RTEH-XAGE-BYKZ, Transport Focus, PO BOX 5594, SOUTHEND-ON-SEA SS1 9PZ.

Bus & Coach Services:

When you wish to complain about a bus service or company, the first step is to find the operator of your service. A bus timetable should give you this information, or you can contact Traveline East Anglia on 0871 2002233, (which is a council-run service for information on all bus and coach services in this area). For information, go to www.travelineeastanglia.org.uk which includes an online contact form. To complain about a commercial company, contact their Company’s Customer Services Department or complain via their website.

Bus Appeals Body (BAB):

If Bus Users UK is unable to resolve your complaint, they can refer the matter to the Bus Appeals Body. For information, go to www.bususers.org or call Bus Users UK on 0300 1110001; email enquiries@bususers.org or write to their Head Office, Terminal House, Shepperton TW17 8AS.

For driving and transport information, go to www.gov.uk

Health:

NHS England Complaints Procedure:

Anyone who is receiving, or has received, NHS treatment or services can complain. If you are unable to complain, then someone else, such as a relative or friend can complain on your behalf with your consent. Wherever possible you should tell someone in the practice, hospital, clinic or pharmacy of your complaint. In many cases it will be possible to sort the problem out straight away. This is called Local Resolution.

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS):

PALS offers confidential advice, support and information on health-related matters. They provide a point of contact for patients, their families and their carers. You can find officers from PALS in your local hospital. PALS can help with the NHS complaints procedure, including how to get independent help if you want to make a complaint. You can find your nearest PALS office on the NHS Choices website www.nhs.uk or you can ask your GP surgery, hospital or call the NHS on 111 for details.

East Anglia Area Team Complaints Service:

Since April 2013, complaints have been processed nationally at the NHS England Central Contact Centre.

Complaints, enquiries and PALS issues are taken by the Call Centre and, where possible, responded to by them. Complaints are directed to Area Teams, where the Area Team Complaints Service picks up the cases and co-ordinates the investigations. This may be with GP practices, dental practices, pharmacies and NHS Opticians.

For information, call the East Anglia Area Team Complaints Service on 01603 289684 or email england.ea-cservice@nhs.net

Health (cont):

The NHS Complaints Advocacy Service:

This service is available to anyone who is unhappy with the service they have received from the NHS, including services or treatment provided by a doctor, dentist, hospital, ambulance service, pharmacist, optician or mental health service. The service is free, confidential and completely independent of the NHS. For information, go to www.nhscomplaintsadvocacy.org

The NHS Complaints Advocacy Service is here to make the NHS complaints process clearer and to provide support for people who are making, or thinking of making, a complaint about their NHS care or treatment. You can also make an NHS complaint on someone else's behalf.

In Norfolk, the NHS Complaints Advocacy service is provided by a partnership of Age UK Norfolk, Equal Lives, Norfolk RCC and POhWER and is funded by Norfolk County Council.

Their advocates can help you to make a complaint and support you through the NHS complaints process. This can include explaining your options and supporting you with things like writing a complaint letter, attending a complaint meeting or signposting to other organisations if appropriate.

For information, go to www.pohwer.net/our-services/nhs-complaints-advocacy or to talk to one of the team, call on 0300 456 2370 or write to POhWER, POB 14043, BIRMINGHAM. B6 9BL.

Health Service Ombudsman for England (HSO):

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your complaint, then you can contact the HSO for an Independent Review.

For information, go to www.ombudsman.org.uk which includes a downloadable complaints form. Before making a complaint, they recommend that you contact their Helpline on 0345 0154033 for information and advice. Your complaint must be made in writing to them at HSO for England, Millbank Tower, 30 Millbank, LONDON SW1P 4QP.

See also Age UK Factsheet No.66:

'Resolving problems and making a complaint about NHS Care'

Private Dentists:

The NHS complaints procedure does not cover private dental treatment even if the dentist concerned also offers NHS treatment. Dental practices have their own complaints procedure for private treatment. If you wish to make a complaint about private dental services, contact the person responsible for the practice complaints procedure. Your dentist will try to resolve your complaint. If you're not happy with the way your dental practice deals with your complaint and it is not resolved to your satisfaction, contact the Dental Complaints Service.

Dental Complaints Service:

This is an independent dental complaints service funded by the General Dental Council (which regulates all dental professionals in the UK).

For information, go to www.gdc-uk.org.uk which includes an online complaint form and a downloadable leaflet 'Making a complaint about private dental care'. You may contact them on 020 82530800; email info@dentalcomplaints.org.uk or write to them at the Dental Complaints Service, Stephenson House, 2 Cherry Orchard Road, CROYDON. CR0 6BA.

Oral Health Foundation:

This independent charity (formerly the British Dental Health Foundation) offers a free advice and guidance service on all aspects of oral health.

For information, go to www.dentalhealth.org Their Dental Helpline can help on a range of dental subjects, including complaints procedures, and can be contacted online; by email helpline@dentalhealth.org; call on 01788 539780 or write to them at Smile House, 2 East Union Street, RUGBY CV22 6AJ.

Employment:

There are a number of organisations you can contact for information and advice on your rights under the law:

ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation & Arbitration Service)

ACAS offers free, confidential and impartial advice to assist in resolving employment rights issues in the workplace. For information, go to www.acas.org.uk (which includes a helpline online tool and a downloadable leaflet 'ACAS guide on discipline and grievances at work') or call their helpline on 0300 1231100.

Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABx):

There are four ways to access CAB services for free and impartial advice:

- Online – go to www.citizensadvice.org.uk
- By phone – for Norfolk general advice call on 03444 111444
- By email – using their secure online form system or public@ncab.org.uk
- In person – some CABs run drop-in sessions. You do not need an appointment, but you must be prepared for a long wait at busy times.

For local information, go to www.norfolkcab.org.uk

The main Citizens Advice Bureaux in Norfolk are in Attleborough, Fakenham, Great Yarmouth, King's Lynn, North Walsham, Norwich and Wymondham. They also have additional outreach locations and drop-in centres throughout Norfolk.

www.gov.uk

This government website includes sections on 'Raise a grievance at work', 'Solve a workplace dispute', 'Discrimination' and 'Your Rights'.

You are legally protected from discrimination by the Equality Act 2010 providing protection against age discrimination in employment for people of any age. It is important that people with possible age discrimination cases seek expert legal advice.

Trade Unions

Trade Unions can offer help, advice and support if you are a member.

Age UK provides advice and guidance for complaints in the following factsheets:

FS59 'How to resolve problems and make a complaint about Social Care'

FS66 'Resolving problems and making a complaint about NHS Care'

FS74 'Challenging welfare benefit decisions'

Single copies of Age UK fact sheets and a factsheet index are available on request from Age UK Norfolk. Call on 0300 5001217 (Monday to Friday 10am to 4pm) or email advice@ageuknorfolk.org.uk or write to us at the address below.

Solicitors:

If you are not happy with the service you receive from a solicitor, you should complain to them first. Give them a fair chance to sort out the complaint before you take it any further. All firms of solicitors have a procedure for handling complaints. If you feel that your solicitor has failed to deal with the problem, then contact the Legal Ombudsman.

See the Law Society's guidance at www.lawsociety.org.uk on 'Complaining about a Solicitor'.

The Legal Ombudsman has official powers to resolve complaints about solicitors. Their service is open to all members of the public, very small businesses, charities, clubs and trusts and is free to these consumers. For information, go to www.legalombudsman.org.uk (which includes an online complaints form and a useful guide 'Be clear, be bold, be fair') or call their helpline on 0300 5550333. You may write to them at PO BOX 6806, WOLVERHAMPTON. WV1 9WJ. Email: enquiries@legalombudsman.org.uk.

Police:

You can complain about police officers of any rank or other members of police staff. If a friend or relative has been treated badly by the police, you can complain if you are distressed as a result. You can also complain if you personally saw someone you didn't know being treated badly by the police. A friend or relative or member of a community group can make a complaint on your behalf as long as you agree in writing that you are happy for them to complain for you. You can ask a solicitor or your MP to make a complaint on your behalf. If you would prefer, complaints can also be made via your local advice services e.g. Citizens Advice Bureaux. For information, go to www.norfolk.police.uk 'Compliments and Complaints' section. Most complaints will be dealt with by your local police.

Norfolk Constabulary:

Complaints about anyone working for the Police should be made direct to Norfolk Constabulary in one of the following ways:

In person: go to a police station and ask to be seen by a supervisory officer – usually an Inspector or Sergeant.

By telephone: 101

By email: psd@norfolk.pnn.police.uk

In writing: write a letter giving a full account of your complaint to:

The Professional Standards Department, Norfolk Constabulary, Jubilee House, Falconers Chase, WYMONDHAM NR18 0WW.

Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC):

If you have made a complaint against the police and you are unhappy with the way it has been handled, you may be able to then complain to the IPCC

which investigates serious complaints and allegations of misconduct against the police and handles appeals. The IPCC does not operate face-to-face services.

For information, go to www.ipcc.gov.uk which includes an online guide 'How to make a complaint'; call on 0300 0200096 or send an email to enquiries@ipcc.gsi.gov.uk

A complaint/appeal form is available online – this may be completed and posted to IPCC, PO BOX 473, SALE. M33 0BW.

Age UK Norfolk has been in existence since 1947

The mission of the charity is

“To support older people in Norfolk to enjoy the opportunities and meet the challenges of later life”.

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We hold the Advice Quality Standard which provides you with assurance that we have met certain criteria that demonstrates a commitment to quality.