



Comments, Complaints and Suggestions Policy

Adopted: September 2017
Last Review: December 2020
For Review: December 2023

Purpose and Introduction

This policy applies to all employees and volunteers (staff) of Age UK Oxfordshire and Action for Carers Oxfordshire (hereafter known as the Charity).

The Charity is committed to maintaining high standards of openness, honesty, clarity, accountability and learning. In line with this commitment the Charity encourages service users, partners and members of the public to come forward and utilise this policy to drive standards up.

The Comments, Complaints and Suggestions Policy is part of the process of empowering people who use our services and protecting their interests. Many people find it difficult or are reluctant to express worries, problems and concerns and it is therefore necessary to ensure that there is a climate which assures them that these will be listened to, taken seriously and responded to.

Having a Comments, Complaints and Suggestions Policy is likely to improve quality when it stems from a recognition of people's needs and rights. For this reason it is important that everyone involved in the Charity knows about the Policy and procedure and are committed to it and embrace it in a positive way. The spirit in which this Policy is implemented will largely determine its effectiveness. We must encourage people who use our service to tell us what we are doing right as well as what we are doing wrong.

All staff will be made aware of the Policy at induction.

It is important that Age UK Oxfordshire has an effective policy and procedure so that:

- we can resolve problems before they become complaints
- any complaints made are recognised and a procedure for dealing with them is provided
- the interests of people who use our services are protected and decisions can be challenged
- the quality of service can be improved by recognising people's rights and needs and by being responsive to their views
- an additional means of monitoring is available
- staff and volunteers are protected from the consequences of allowing unresolved problems to escalate
- areas of good practice are highlighted and recognised
- the Charity can improve and learn

General principals of the Policy

- **Is accessible:** The Policy will be made available via the Charity's website in a clear and obvious place. It will also be available in written format at any time and can be requested by either calling Kerry Tuson on 0345 450 1276 or emailing kerrytuson@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk Some people may have problems with a written procedure, staff should be sensitive to the different ways of making information accessible. Staff should be encouraged to know where to go, by their Senior Manager and who to ask for further advice and information. If this is unclear, please contact the HR department.

- **Is understood by staff and volunteers:** It is important that all members of staff including the Board of Trustees are fully conversant with the Policy and its procedure. GDPR and Privacy Policy's need to be observed in conjunction with this Policy.
- **Should provide prompt and considered response:** There will be clear timescales which will be communicated to the complainant. The organisation will seek to maintain these deadlines and where it isn't possible a clear reason will be given.
Comments and Suggestions should be acknowledged in a prompt manner
- **Has a strong problem-solving element:** Most complaints pose problems, often trivial ones which can be resolved immediately by staff and volunteers. Sometimes these complaints are presented as comments or suggestions. 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 clients and their families or carers a better service.
- **Data Protection:** All those involved in processing the complaint must ensure it is treated in line with the Charity's GDPR and Privacy Policy's. All Comments, Complaints and suggestions will be logged and kept secure on a virtual log.
- **Safeguarding:** All complaints that appear to indicate possible abuse (as defined in the Care Act 2014) will be checked against our safeguarding policy and procedures and will be brought to the attention of the CEO.
- **Will provide continuous learning and development:** All Comments, Suggestions and Complaints will be reviewed regularly by the Senior Management Team and used to help improve and develop our services. **The Senior Manager will communicate with their members of staff as appropriate.**
The Board of Trustees will be appraised of situations via their regular Trustee meetings unless a more urgent intervention is required. Trustees will take the opportunity to learn, improve and evaluate our services and responses on a regular basis.

1. Comments and Suggestions

The charity welcomes all comments **and suggestions**, it is always helpful to hear what people think about our organisation and the services we provide. All comments and suggestions should be recorded in the virtual log by emailing kerrytuson@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk (even if received by other parts of the Charity).

All comments and suggestions will be shared with the relevant Senior Manager and the Chief Executive. Any positive comments and suggestions received about any aspect of the organisation it should be shared with all involved by their Senior Manager. All comments and suggestions are used to inform the service and to learn from.

If an acknowledgment is required this will usually be completed by the Senior Manager of the service unless directed otherwise, but always within a prompt timescale.

Trustees will be appraised of all comments via their bi-monthly report.

2. Complaints

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

Complaints can relate to but not limited to:

- The quality or nature of the service provided
- The conduct of the staff
- Administration within the organisation
- Discrimination
- Provision of accurate information
- Failure to provide information
- Unreasonable delays
- The Policy of the organisation

Definition of a complaint

- Complaints are usually about individual instances
- A complaint is not a comment or suggestion (which is often positive)
- A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction

Who can make a complaint?

Anyone including people who use our services, carers, volunteers and the general public.

Complaints by staff will be dealt with under the terms of their individual contract of employment or by the Grievance Procedure. Under certain circumstances it would be appropriate for staff to make a whistleblowing complaint – please see relevant policy for more information.

2a. The procedure

There will be three stages to the procedure:

1. The informal or problem-solving stage
2. The formal stage
3. The review stage

The purpose of the complaints procedure is to solve problems and come to agreement as quickly as possible. Throughout the whole procedure the complainant has the right to be accompanied by a friend or advisor.

The whole process is recorded in the virtual Complaints Log and reported to the Senior Manager/Chief Executive as appropriate.

The informal or problem solving stage (stage 1)

Before the procedure is implemented the complaint will be recorded in virtual complaints log (secured in the Senior Management folder). Normal good practice should sort out small grumbles

and queries to the satisfaction of all involved without taking the issue to the next stage. Some complaints will go to Stage 2 if the complaint is sufficiently serious or cannot be resolved at the informal stage.

This stage gives everybody involved the opportunity to express views and dissatisfaction.

In the event of an oral complaint:

- Listen to the complainant, notes should be carefully taken and checked back for accuracy.
- Clarification to be sought from the complainant on how they think the situation can be resolved or put right and what their desired outcome would be.
- The complaint should be entered onto the Virtual Complaints log by emailing the details to kerrytuson@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk
- The member of staff who receives the complaint should inform the Senior Manager of the relevant service. The Senior Manager may delegate to a senior team member (if deemed appropriate) to investigate the complaint.
- Within 5 working days the Senior Manager will contact the complainant, acknowledge their complaint and set out timescales and what they can expect.
- The relevant member of staff will investigate and provide a written response within 28 working days. A written response can only be sent out if an address (email or postal) but a copy is filed online regardless.

If a written complaint is received:

- On receipt of their correspondence:
 - Within 5 working days the Senior Manager will contact the complainant, acknowledge their complaint and set out timescales and what they can expect. At the same time they will seek clarification from the complainant on how they think the situation can be resolved or put right and what their desired outcome would be.
 - A copy will be emailed to kerrytuson@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk to enter into the virtual complaints log
- The relevant member of staff will investigate and provide a written response within 28 working days. A written response can only be sent out if an address (email or postal) but a copy is filed online regardless.

In the case of both and oral or written complaint, 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).

In the event that there is a complaint about the Chief Executive this will be escalated to the Chair of Trustees immediately. They can be contacted by kerrytuson@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk or nigelgowing@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk

The Formal Stage (stage 2)

Taking the complaint to stage 2 doesn't imply that problem solving activities will be abandoned. The problem can still be resolved through good practice and with understanding. At stage 2 other people are openly involved in the consideration, discussion and possible investigation.

To formalise the complaint, it will need to be put in writing by the complainant (or their representative if this is required) and an acknowledgement will be sent back within 5 working days upon receipt.

The Service Manager (escalating to Senior Manager and Chief Executive if it requires) will make a full investigation of the complaint taking on board the views of all parties involved. The complainant will be informed within 28 working days the outcome of the investigation. If there is a delay then this must be informed in writing. The whole process from initial registering of complaint to the outcome of stage 2 should not exceed 3 months. If the outcome is not to their satisfaction they will be advised to take the complaint to stage 3.

The Review Stage (stage 3)

If the complaint has not been settled at the formal stage and the complainant is not satisfied either with the outcome or the way the investigation was carried out then the complaint can be considered by further escalation at the review panel.

To move to the review stage the complainant must write to the Chief Executive seeking a review and outlining the reasons for this, no more than 28 days from the date on which they were informed of the outcome at Stage 2.

The purpose of the Review Panel is to give the complainant the opportunity to have their complaint heard by a panel who haven't been involved at any other stage of the process. The panel will re-examine the complaint and the decision taken. The Panel will consist of three people; one will be a trustee of Age UK Oxfordshire who has no recorded conflict of interest (either personal or business)

The Review Panel will meet within the designated time of the complaint being referred to them. This should not exceed 28 working days.

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

The Chair of the Review Panel will write to the complainant within 24 hours of the decision being taken. The decision of the Panel is final.

3. Fundraising Complaints

The charity works hard to ensure that all of our fundraising activities are planned, prepared and executed properly, however we recognise that sometimes this might not happen. If a complaint has not been resolved satisfactorily by the internal review process (as detailed above) it is possible to escalate the complaint to the Fundraising Regulator. Age UK Oxfordshire is a member of the Fundraising Regulator and agrees to fundraise in accordance with the Code of Fundraising Practice and the Fundraising Promise.

Staff Reassurance

The Complaints procedure can provide practical benefits to staff by providing a clear and understandable mechanism for the resolution of disputes. Staff have the right to expect management help, support and assistance throughout the process. These procedures seek not to apportion blame but to establish a basis for dialogue and discussion.

Signed: 

Date: 06/12/2020

Name: Penny Thewlis

Position held: Chief Executive