



**Policy 006: COMPLAINTS POLICY &**  
**PROCEDURE**  
**May 2019**



## Complaints Procedure

### Introduction

However good the practices of an organisation, it is always possible for mistakes to be made, and there are bound to be at least a few people who feel that they have grounds for complaint. Therefore, it is important that Age UK Westminster has an effective complaints procedure.

Experience has shown that prompt and sensitive handling of complaints at an early stage can prevent an issue from becoming a formal complaint. Often these are resolved simply by listening and, where appropriate, an assurance that the same circumstances will not arise again.

### Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures

The introduction of this Complaints Procedure should not be confused with existing disciplinary and grievance procedures. The Complaints Procedure provides a mechanism for service users to register their concerns, but it should not be used by members of staff or volunteers.

Staff or volunteers wishing to register a concern should follow the existing code of practice in respect of the Grievance Procedure.

However, on occasions a complaint may highlight issues of serious concern which require the enactment of disciplinary procedures as set out in the Staff Handbook

### The Procedure

A complainant has the right to register a complaint formally if they so wish and the right to withdraw a complaint at any time.

There are three distinct stages of the procedure:

Step 1	The Informal Approach
Step 2	The Formal Approach
Step 3	The Review Panel

- Where a complaint is identified it must always be recorded in a Complaints Book (see Appendix 1 for suggested format). Action should be taken to resolve the matter quickly and informally (and certainly within 28 working days). Generally, complaints will be dealt with by the staff / Manager at the service delivery point.
- If a complaint is of a serious nature it should not be recorded in the Complaints Book but should be referred to Age UK Westminster's Chief Executive Officer <sup>1</sup> (In the absence of the CEO, it will be the Senior Manager or a Trustee) immediately.
- Any complaints received centrally by Chief Executive (In the absence of the

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<sup>1</sup> Or in their absence, the Operations Manager or a Trustee.

CEO, it will be the Senior Manager or a Trustee) about specific services will be referred to the staff or volunteer member concerned

- During staff and volunteer supervision/review, the complaints received and entries in the Complaints Book will be discussed by the Line Manager.

### **Step One - The Informal Approach:**

The complainant should contact the relevant staff/manager either by telephone (020 3 004 5610) or by writing to Age UK Westminster, Beethoven Centre, Third Avenue, London W10 4JL Email: enquiries@ageukwestminster.org.uk

If the complaint is something that can be dealt with immediately over the phone, the staff/manager will endeavour to solve the issue tactfully and efficiently within 10 working days.

### **Step Two - The Formal Approach: Registration of a Complaint**

- Where a complaint cannot be resolved locally or where the complainant is not happy with the response provided, the complainant should be informed of the opportunity to register a formal complaint with the Age UK Westminster's Chief Executive Officer. In the absence of the CEO, it will be the Senior Manager or a Trustee.
- All formal complaints will be referred to the Age UK Westminster Chief Executive Officer. In the absence of the CEO, it will be the Senior Manager or a Trustee.
- Once received, the complaint will be recorded in the Complaints Book and acknowledged in writing.
- All complaints will be investigated within 28 days of their receipt. The Chief Executive (In the absence of the CEO, it will be the Senior Manager or a Trustee) will then write to the complainant, responding to their complaint.
- If the complainant is not satisfied with the reply from the Chief Executive (In the absence of the CEO, it will be the Senior Manager or a Trustee), then s/he has the right to appeal.
- The request for a Review Panel Hearing must be put in writing within 28 days of the date on the Chief Executive's (In the absence of the CEO, it will be the Senior Manager or a Trustee) letter of reply.

### **Step Three - The Review Panel: Hearing of a Complaint**

- On receipt of the complainant's letter requesting a review Age UK Westminster will call together a review panel to hear the complaint within 28 days of the date of receipt of the complainant's letter.
- The panel will consist of three people, of whom at least one will be a Trustee of Age UK Westminster and at least one will be an independent candidate.
- Prior to the review hearing, members of the panel will have access to members of staff and all relevant background information.
- The complainant has the right to be accompanied at the Review Panel by a person of their choice who may act as the complainant's advocate, or in a supportive capacity.
- Staff members attending the Review Panel also have the right to be accompanied by a representative of their choice.
- At the Review Panel hearing both the Age UK Westminster Chief Executive (In the absence of the CEO, it will be the Manager Manager or a Trustee) and the complainant will have an opportunity to make their views known. The Review Panel will consider all the information available and reach a decision within 7 days of the hearing. The panel will then notify the Age UK Westminster Chief Executive (Executive (In the absence of the CEO, it will be the Operations Manager or a Trustee), and the complainant of their decision(s) in writing.
- The Review Panel's decisions are final.

### **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 support and assistance and it is the responsibility of managers to provide this help. The new procedures seek not to apportion blame but to establish a basis for dialogue and discussion. Staff are not personally responsible for complaints arising out of information given on Age UK Westminster policy and practice.

# APPENDIX 1

## Recommended format for local Complaints Book

The following columns should be used to record details of complaints:

Please ensure that all entries are written in biro or ink.

1. DATE

Date (of complaint) showing day, month, year and time, if applicable.

2. COMPLAINANT

Full name, address and telephone number of complainant.

3. COMPLAINT

Description of complaint and signature of complainant.

4. ACTION

Date and action taken to resolve the complaint. Signature of the complainant and the local staff member.

5. Your Complaints Book has three copies. Please give the top copy to the complainant, the second copy to the Complaints Officer and the third copy to be retained in the Complaints Book.