

COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

1. Introduction

1.1 Age UK Wigan Borough (AUK WB) believes that if a service user wishes to make a complaint, or register a concern, they should find it easy to do so.

1.2 This procedure is intended to ensure that complaints are dealt with properly and taken seriously. It covers any complaints which are received.

1.3 Nothing in this policy will contravene the effective implementation of the Equal Opportunities & Diversity policy of Age UK WB. The organisation will seek to implement all relevant legislation and develop best practice in equality and diversity and other organisation policies will support this objective.

2. Complaints Policy Statement

2.1 Age UK WB is a responsive organisation which aims to put older people at the heart of the services we provide. We welcome comments and complaints and are committed to dealing with them fairly and effectively. Whilst we aim to get it right first time, complaints can be a valuable part of quality improvement. Age UK WB sets high standards and we want to know if we fall short of achieving them.

2.2 Age UK WB will:

- Welcome complaints as a valuable means of quality improvement and improving service delivery;
- Make a distinction between informal complaints, where we can resolve the issue quickly and formal complaints which need to be looked into;
- Deal with all complaints fairly and effectively, providing explanations and resolutions;
- If a complaint is upheld, put preventable action in place so that the issue does not recur;
- Promote the complaints policy and encourage the people who use our services to use it;
- Ensure that staff are familiar with the policy and can explain it to people who wish to make a complaint;
- Review the policy and procedure on a regular basis.

3. Informal Complaints

3.1 If comments, queries or concerns are made about a service which indicate dissatisfaction with the service they should in most instances initially be dealt with by the front-line staff member or volunteer. If a volunteer picks up on a complaint they must inform a staff member as soon as possible. Such comments, queries or concerns will be regarded as informal complaints. If the matter cannot be resolved, the client should be advised that they may make a formal complaint.

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3.2 When staff and volunteers receive a complaint, they should remain polite, courteous and sympathetic. They should not accept blame, make excuses or blame other staff.

3.3 If the complaint is being made on behalf of a service user by an advocate, it should be verified that the person has permission to speak for the service user, especially if confidential information is involved. It is easy to assume that the advocate has the right to speak for the service user when they may not. If in doubt, it should be assumed that the service user's explicit permission is needed prior to discussing the complaint with the advocate.

3.4 After discussion with the service user, the member of staff/volunteer should suggest a course of action to resolve the complaint and check that this is acceptable to the service user.

3.5 The appropriate staff member/volunteer is to keep a record of these informal complaints which are to be returned to the Chief Officer.

3.6 When a complaint is received by the Chief Officer it is possible, in some circumstances, for this to be considered as an informal complaint. It is the Chief Officer who will decide in consultation with the client whether or not a complaint is dealt with informally or formally. If it is to be dealt with informally then the Chief Officer will notify the complainant of this decision and notify the appropriate staff member to ask them to deal with this within 28 days and to update the Chief Officer when it is completed.

4. Formal Complaints

a. How to complain

4.1 If required, information will be made available to clients to explain how to make a complaint, and what will happen to that complaint. Complainants will be encouraged to make a written complaint, but do not have to do so. A formal complaint may be accepted in any form.

4.2 Anyone may choose to bypass stage one and make a direct formal complaint without reference to front line staff/volunteers.

4.3 All complaints should be addressed to the Chief Officer, Age UK Wigan Borough, 68 Market Street, Wigan WN1 1HX.

4.4 Anonymous complaints are discouraged because this makes it difficult to investigate properly and impossible to respond to the person making the complaint. Anonymous complaints should be considered but on a more limited basis than one with a named complainant.

4.5 Generally complaints made later than 12 months after the event occurred are not dealt with, unless there is a good reason for not complaining earlier and it is still possible to

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investigate the complaint fairly and effectively. Complaints which are judged to be vexatious will not be considered. Complaints which are subject to legal matters may need to be deferred until after any legal proceedings are concluded and will then be considered in terms of if and how practice should be changed.

b. Registration of Complaint

4.6 In most circumstances the Chief Officer will deal with complaints (unless he or she has already been involved in the complaint). If this is not possible a member of the Board of Trustees will be asked to deal with the complaint.

4.7 Upon receiving a complaint, the Chief Officer will normally contact the complainant directly within 7 days, and advise the complainant of how the complaint is being dealt with and the timescale involved. A record will be made of the complaint in the Complaints Register.

4.8 At this stage the Chief Officer will decide whether the complaint should be investigated. A complaint cannot be deemed inappropriate by virtue of the staff member/volunteer involved.

4.9 The Chief Officer will normally ensure that a copy of the complaint is sent to any staff member/ volunteer named in it so that they have the opportunity to respond to the complaint.

4.10 The Chief Officer, in consultation with the Chair, or in their absence, either the VC or Treasurer, should consider whether it is necessary to halt or suspend a particular service in respect of the case pending investigation.

4.11 If the complainant raises potentially serious matters, it may be appropriate for legal advice to be sought before proceeding to the investigation.

c. The Investigation

4.12 The Chief Officer will conduct an investigation, interviewing the complainant and others as appropriate.

4.13 Assistance to identify independent advocacy support for complainants can be given if required.

4.14 During the investigation, the Chief Officer should consult with the Chair if it is felt that the involvement of the police, or the Disciplinary Procedures, is required.

4.15 Staff/volunteers need to be aware that it may be necessary to undertake an investigation when a complaint has been made. It is, therefore, important that staff/volunteers co-operate with the investigation and provide information to the Chief Officer as required.

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d. Action Following Investigation

4.16 Upon completion of the investigation, when appropriate, the Chief Officer will consult with the Chair about what action should be implemented. A letter, along with any agreed actions, will be sent to the complainant within 28 days. If this is not possible then the Chief Officer needs to agree a timescale for extension with the complainant. In any event this extension would not normally exceed a full response to the complainant within 3 months, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

4.17 An offer of a meeting to discuss the issues should be made. The complainant should be advised that they may, bring a friend, relative or representative such as an advocate to the meeting.

4.18 The complainant should be advised of the Review procedure.

4.19 The Chief Officer will monitor the outcome of complaint in terms of consumer satisfaction with process and eventual outcome.

e. Reviews

4.20 If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint, they may ask for the response to be reviewed within 28 days. Such a review must be undertaken by a Review Panel.

4.21 The Review Panel must be made up of 3 people as follows:

- a. An independent person who will act as Chair of the panel. This person will be selected by the Chief Officer or Chair and have relevant experience. He/she will not be an employee, a trustee or a spouse/partner of an employee or trustee.
- b. The Chair of the Board of Trustees;
- c. An additional Board member.

4.22 The Panel's recommendations should be recorded in writing within 24 hours of the completion of their deliberations and formally sent to the Chair of the Board of Trustees and to the complainant.

4.23 The Chair of Age UK WB must respond to the recommendations of the Review panel and make the decisions known to the complainant within 28 days, explaining the decision and reasons for it.

4.24 In terms of Age UK WB complaints procedures there is no further action that the complainant can take.