



Policy Document 2.3 COMPLAINTS

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Policy Statement

CHANGES understands that complaints are part of the feedback the organisation receives from service users and this feedback can be invaluable in helping the charity to improve its services.

Policy Basis – CHANGES aims to provide service users with the best possible service. However, from time to time there are occasions when users of our services may feel that the quality or level of service provided falls short of what can reasonably be expected.

Complaints are part of the feedback the organisation receives from service users and this feedback can be invaluable in helping us to improve our services. We want to handle complaints as effectively and positively as possible.

Principles

Principles that inform the charities management of complaints are as follows -

- ✦ CHANGES acknowledges that complaints do happen
- ✦ We have a commitment to investigating all complaints fully and fairly
- ✦ We recognise that complainants have a right to appeal
- ✦ We perceive complaints to be a valuable and important part of customer feedback
- ✦ We will ask complainants what they want the outcome of their complaint to be or if they can suggest solutions to the issue raised

- ✦ We will deal with complaints in confidence – the only exception to this is when others could be put at risk by matters referred to in the complaint

What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, either written or spoken. A complaint may be made by an individual or a group. It can relate to the way in which a person has been treated, to the service which they have received or the policies and procedures of CHANGES.

Complaints can be made to CHANGES in a number of different ways – in person, by letter, email, audiotape, phone, fax or other mutually suitable means.

Who is this procedure for?

This procedure should be used by any member of the public utilising any aspects of the CHANGES services who wishes to comment on, complain about or compliment the agency, its staff or services.

The purpose of the procedure is not to apportion blame amongst staff but to investigate the complaint in a fair and consistent manner, in order to satisfy complaints and concerns and to learn lessons for CHANGES ongoing service improvement and organisational development.

Should a member of the staff or volunteer team wish to raise a complaint or make a formal comment, they should use the Grievance Policy, or grievance procedure within the Volunteer Handbook respectively.

Complaints may be made by a “third party” – a person authorised to act on the service user’s behalf – for example, an advocacy service. Any complaint made in this way will be considered carefully to ensure that our response in no way breaches the confidentiality of the service user.

Complaints procedure

There are three stages to the procedure and we undertake to resolve any issues at the lowest level, wherever possible.

Where possible, Line Managers will be involved at Stage 1, Operations Manager at Stage 2 and the Chair of Directors and a specially convened panel at Stage 3. In the event that a complaint involves an individual whom would normally be involved in the complaints procedure, then they will play no part in any Stage of the procedure, except as a witness, for example. Changes will

ensure that a suitably senior member of the Management Team will substitute during the course of the complaint.

Stage 1 – Making an informal complaint - The service user/s should speak to the individual concerned, e.g. coordinator/trainer etc. or their line manager in order to pass on comments, compliments, concerns or complaints. In the case of a complaint about a particular service area, service users should be able to raise it with any staff member, paid or voluntary, who will pass it on to their line manager.

If service users prefer, or if the complaint is about an individual and they would find it difficult to address it with them, then the issue can be taken up with the relevant line manager directly. The complaint will be forwarded by the HR Manager to the relevant line manager who will talk to or write to the complainant and see if there is a simple solution that meets their needs without a formal investigation taking place. We will respond to all informal complaints within 24 hours of receipt. Where possible, we aim to resolve informal complaints within 24 hours of the initial response. However, to satisfactorily respond to the informal complaint, the line manager may need to talk to other people and ascertain certain facts. In such an event the informal complaint will be resolved as quickly as reasonably possible and without undue delay.

Where an informal complaint is made we aim to resolve it promptly and satisfactorily in order to prevent it leading to a formal complaint. If service users are not satisfied with the results of this stage they can go on to Stage 2 (see below). They may also, if they wish, go straight to the formal stage (Stage 2) without using Stage 1.

Even though it is an informal complaint, a written record should be kept of all communication relating to the complaint. A template for recording complaints received is available from your line-manager. Once completed, these should be returned to the relevant manager so that they have a complete record should the complaint escalate.

If you feel that the complaint is of a sensitive nature, or involves third party individuals - especially other staff or volunteers - then you should inform your line-manager as soon as is reasonably practicable, and seek advice on how to proceed.

Stage 2 – Formal complaint - If service users are not satisfied with the response they receive at Stage 1, or if they feel that they wish to make the complaint formal from the start, they should outline their complaint by letter, fax, e-mail, audio tape or other permanent form of media, and send it to the Operations Manager, marked “private and confidential”. If the complaint is about the Operations Manager then it should be addressed to the CEO, marked “private and confidential”. If the complaint relates to the CEO, it should be addressed to the “Chair of Board of Directors”, also marked “private and confidential”.

Complaints will be acknowledged by letter or email within 24 hours from the date they are received. The letter will advise complainants of -

- ✦ The name, address and telephone number of the person who is dealing with the complaint
- ✦ An invite to provide further information, or to discuss the complaint, whether in person, by telephone, email or other. We will also seek to discover what outcome is desired.
- ✦ An explanation of what will happen next, and an approximate time-frame.
- ✦ Details of the support the complainant can receive during the process of the complaint e.g. access to interpreters, contact details of external agencies, and ability to be accompanied by a friend or relative.

The Operations Manager, or the relevant person dealing with the complaint, may need to seek further information, which may involve speaking to other individuals. At the end of the process, the complainant will receive a written response to the complaint, which will also outline any action to be taken, if necessary. It will also explain what to do if dissatisfied with the response.

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the response received by the Operations Manager (or other relevant person) they may appeal the decision (Stage 3).

Stage 3 - Appeal

A complainant who is dissatisfied with the response received at Stage 2 may request that a appeal - including a formal investigation be carried out. They must make this request, within 7 working days of receiving the Stage 2 response, by letter, fax, e-mail, audio tape or other permanent form of media, and send it to the Chair of Directors, marked “private and confidential”. The complainant should set out the main reasons as to why they are dissatisfied with the previous response(s).

Within 24 hours of receiving the request to proceed to Stage 3, the Chair will write to the complainant to advise of:

- ✦ The name, address and telephone number of the person who is dealing with the appeal.
- ✦ An invite to provide further information, or to discuss the complaint in person. We will also seek to discover what outcome is desired.
- ✦ An explanation of what will happen next, and an approximate time-frame.
- ✦ Details of the support the complainant can receive during the process of the complaint e.g. access to interpreters, contact details of external agencies, and ability to be accompanied by a friend or relative.

The Chair will select a representative panel (normally consisting of at least 1 Board Member) to investigate the complaint and will arrange to meet the complainant to get a better understanding of the circumstances surrounding the complaint and establish any possible outcomes that the complainant is hoping for. The Chair may appoint a member of staff, or Board member, not connected to the complaint, to assist with the appeal investigation. Notes of the meeting will be made of the complainant's statement and the Chair of the Appeals Panel and complainant will both sign these notes. If a resolution is reached as a result of the meeting this will be confirmed in writing to the complainant and any other individuals concerned.

If no resolution is reached, written statements will be taken from all parties involved. Once written statements have been collected, the Panel may interview all those involved in the complaint and take notes from each interview that will be written up, signed and dated. Relevant supporting documentation will also be collected at this stage and all those interviewed will be entitled to have a union representative, colleague or friend with them at the time of interview.

All statements and interviews will be treated in the strictest confidence. Once the appeal investigation is complete the complainant will receive a full response to their complaint within 28 working days from the start of the investigation, in writing, from the Chair of the Appeal Panel.

The response will include the following information:

- ✦ Details of the investigation and what it has entailed
- ✦ A decision about whether the complaint was upheld or not
- ✦ The reasons for the decision

- ✦ The redress, if appropriate, which will be offered to the complainant e.g. an apology, an explanation, an assurance that the same thing will not happen again and the practical steps to be taken to back up this commitment, action that can put things right.
- ✦ Any other action that may be taken in the light of the complaint.
- ✦ What steps the complainant can take if they are still dissatisfied.

If it is not possible to provide a full answer to complaints within 28 working days, the letter will outline the reasons why and give a date by which a full answer is expected.

Review of the Process

If the complainant has been through Stages 1 to 3 of the Complaints Procedure outlined above and is not satisfied that CHANGES has followed the process properly and dealt with their complaint fairly (e.g. by giving them insufficient opportunity to represent their view or ensuring all the relevant people are involved in the investigation), then they can outline the reasons for their dissatisfaction with the complaints process by letter, fax, email, audio tape or other permanent media within 14 working days of receiving the Appeals Panel decision to the CEO (or Chair Board of Directors) to request a review of the complaints handling process, not a further investigation of the complaint.

The CEO will make arrangements for review of the complaint handling process, and will inform the complainant of how the review will be carried out. The decision of the review process will be final.

The CEO will communicate in writing within 28 working days of receiving the expression of dissatisfaction from the complainant -

- ✦ Whether or not the procedure has been followed properly and fairly
- ✦ The reason for the decision
- ✦ The redress, if appropriate, which will be offered to the complainant
- ✦ What action may be taken in the light of the review

Involvement of third party organisations

In the event of continued dissatisfaction with the outcome of a complaint the complainant has the right to take their complaint to an external body/third party organisation. Any involvement would be limited to a review of the complaints handling process, not an investigation of the complaint.

Limitations of the Complaints Procedure

This procedure does not cover complaints made by staff, volunteers and Directors who need to follow the agreed grievance, disciplinary or other internal procedures within CHANGES.

A complaint must be made within 12 months of the occurrence of the event being complained about. This is to enable us to complete a thorough and fair investigation. This time limit may be extended in certain circumstances, where it is equitable to do so, and at the sole discretion of the CEO (or the Chair of Directors if the complaint relates to, or involves, the CEO).

Training in complaints management

Training will be provided to staff, volunteers and Directors on a regular basis on complaints handling, customer care and how to resolve issues.

Complaints Reporting

CHANGES keeps a record of all complaints received, including details of complaints, summaries of investigations undertaken and remedies offered. An analysis of complaints received by the organisation is presented to the Directors on an annual basis to capture any necessary organisational learning. The information about the number, nature, outcome of complaints received and improvements made as a result of complaints may be published (anonymously) in the annual report each year.

Signed on behalf of Committee: _____



Print Name: _____

ERNEST JOHN HOWS

Date: 15th February 2022