



COMPLAINTS

Policy No:

Policy Statement

Together We Make a Difference 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 – We aim 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 management of complaints are as follows – Together We Make a Difference 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. An individual or a group may make a complaint. 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 Together We Make a Difference.

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

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Who is this procedure for?

This procedure should be used by any member of the public utilising any aspects of our 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 or service users but to investigate the complaint in a fair and consistent manner, in order to satisfy complaints and concerns and to learn lessons for Together We Make a Difference ongoing service improvement and organisational development. Should a member of the team, colleagues or volunteers wish to raise a complaint or make a formal comment, they should use the Grievance Policy.

A “third party” may make complaints – a person authorised to act on someone else'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 person concerned.

Complaints procedure

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

Where possible, the operations manager will be involved at Stage 1 and at Stage 2. The Directors and a specially convened panel. 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. Together We Make a Difference will ensure that a suitable member of the team will substitute during the course of the complaint.

Stage 1 – Making an informal complaint – The volunteers should speak to the individual concerned, e.g. manager in order to pass on comments, compliments, concerns or complaints. In the case of a complaint about a particular service area, volunteers should be able to raise it with any Director.

If preferred, or if the complaint is about an individual and they would find it difficult to address it with them, then the issue could be taken up with a Director. They 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. This may involve the Director talking to other people to gather information and in normal circumstances this should

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take less than 14 days to complete. It would be hoped that a satisfactory outcome could be achieved through informal discussion. 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 the person is 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 the Director. Once completed, these should be returned to the relevant Director 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 colleagues or volunteers - then you should inform the Director as soon as is reasonably practicable, and seek advice on how to proceed.

Stage 2 – Formal complaint - If the volunteer/colleague is 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 Directors, marked "private and confidential". If the complaint relates to the Directors it should be addressed to the "Chair of Board of Directors", also marked "private and confidential".

Complaints will be acknowledged by letter within 7 working days 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.

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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 an 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, audiotape or other permanent form of media, and send it to the 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 7 working days of receiving the request to proceed to Stage 3, the Director 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 Director 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. They may appoint a 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

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the start of the investigation, in writing, from the Chair of the Appeals 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 Together We Make a Difference 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 Directors to request a review of the complaints handling process, not a further investigation of the complaint.

The Directors 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 Directors 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 to the complainant.

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

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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 Together We Make a Difference.

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

Together We Make a Difference 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.

Signed by: Trevor Molloy, Marvin Molloy (Directors)

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Last reviewed December 2025

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