



Complaints Policy

1. Introduction

Cumbria CVS aims to provide a service of a standard which is acceptable to all our users. If we fail to do this, we want to know about it. This will enable us not only to deal with the specific problem, but also to avoid it happening again. This policy is designed to make it easier for the general public and others to obtain a response to their concerns and for the Organisation's staff to respond in an open and constructive manner.

2. The Policy

This policy sets out the procedures to follow when a complaint is received from users of the service, an organisation or a member of the public. It does not address complaints made by staff or volunteers (dealt with through grievance and disciplinary procedures) or job applicants (recruitment procedure).

This procedure is meant to provide a means to resolve a dispute between Cumbria CVS and any complainant. It requires staff and management at every stage to resolve the complaint. Complaints are likely to be in one or more of the following areas:

- dissatisfaction with our service, such as inadequate work, unacceptable delay or failure to deliver a service etc
- disputes between users and the organisation regarding policy, procedures or activities
- discourtesy or unhelpfulness on the part of the staff

3. The Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is ***“An expression of dissatisfaction about the Organisation's action or lack of action or about the standard of a service, whether the action taken or the service was provided by the Organisation itself or by a body acting on its behalf”***

4. Who can make a complaint?

Any member of the public or their representatives, employees, businesses, public and voluntary bodies can make a complaint about Cumbria CVS.

5. The Procedure

When someone wishes to register a complaint, the following procedure should be adopted. Where the complaint is against a senior staff member, the same procedure will be followed, but with the Chief Officer of the organisation substituting for that senior staff member's role at all stages.

Preliminary Stage

The complaint should be received either by letter or by a request to make a verbal complaint.

Stage 1

The complainant should be invited to speak to the line manager, the member of staff designated to dealing with the complaints or the most senior manager to discuss the complaint with them. This can be done by telephone. The person handling the complaint should keep a record of the conversation on the complaints monitoring sheet. The person handling the matter will endeavour to resolve it.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, or where it is not possible to use Stage 1 above (for example if it is not convenient for them to telephone) then refer to Stage 2 below.

Time Limit

Stage 1 should be completed within 3 working days of receiving the complaint.

Stage 2

The complainant should be asked to put their complaint in writing to the staff member dealing with the complaint marking it Private & Confidential, providing as much detail of the complaint as possible.

The staff member dealing with the complaint will then investigate the complaint and attempt to resolve it. S/he may delegate any aspect of the investigation to a nominee. If the complaint involves a member(s) of staff the staff member dealing with the complaint should offer the opportunity for the member(s) of staff to put forward their account, either by written statement or by presentation to the nominated person.

Time Limit

The staff member dealing with the complaint will ensure that all complainants receive a response in writing ideally within 5 working days of the letter/complaint notes being received. This letter will summarise what investigations will be carried out and what action, if any, is proposed to resolve the matter. A copy of this letter should be attached to the complaint form.

Stage 3

Where the matter is not resolved by Stage 2, the staff member dealing with the complaint should immediately refer the complaint to the Chief Officer, sending copies of all written correspondence to The Complaints Panel which will comprise the Chair and a designated member from the Board of Directors. The complainant will be informed immediately by the Chief Officer, or Chair that this is being done. The Panel will also contact the staff member(s) against whom the complaint is made. The Panel will review the decision made at Stage 2 and may seek further clarification from any of the parties involved.

Time Limit

The Complaints Panel will notify the complainant of its reasons and decisions within 15 working days of having received notice of the complaint. The Panel's decision will be final. The Chair is responsible for ensuring records of the meeting are kept and that the Complaints Monitoring form is completed.

6. Confidentiality

All complaints are treated confidentiality. Only officers dealing with complaints in each service area will be aware that a complaint has been received and is being dealt with.

7. Aggressive or Obsessive Complaints

Cumbria CVS wants to deal fairly and honestly with complainants and ensure that other service users, staff, volunteers or the Organisation as a whole do not suffer detriment from persons making vexatious complaints. A Cumbria CVS Solicitor will write to vexatious complainants to inform them that their behaviour is considered to be unacceptable.

8. Equalities Statement

Cumbria CVS aims to handle complaints fairly and honestly regardless of who makes a complaint. Cumbria CVS treats all members of the community equitably and will not show bias to any particular individual or group. Where appropriate, information will be made available in an alternative format where possible and in community languages if required.

9. Recording and Monitoring Complaints

All complaints will be recorded and kept on file, including those, which were resolved without being put in writing. The Complaints Monitoring Form shall be used to do this. All complaints shall be treated with regard to the Confidentiality Policy.

10. Publicising the Procedure

The Chief Officer is responsible for ensuring that information is available to explain clearly the procedure for making the complaint.

11. Ensuring the Effectiveness of the Procedure

All Directors will receive a copy of the complaints procedure. Existing and new workers will be introduced to the complaints procedure via induction and training.

12. Conclusion

This complaints policy is a practical means by which Cumbria CVS can demonstrate its determination to effectively deal with complaints, in a fair and honest way, for all members of the community.