

Customer Services Policy

(Supporting the management of complaints,
concerns, comments and compliments)

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1. Policy Statement

Help & Care endeavours to provide the best services it can. Sometimes clients, carers, families and/or their representatives may have concerns about services provided and it is important that there should be a clear and effective Policy and Procedure for such matters. Help & Care views complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve for the future, as well as a chance to put things right for the person (or organisation) that has made the complaint.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 This document sets out the ways in which Help & Care encourages feedback and responds to comments, concerns and complaints in respect of the services it provides.
- 2.2 To enable help & Care to provide a responsive, quality service it is essential to actively seek the view of those people who use our services and to respond appropriately when things go wrong. Complaints handling is a good proxy for an open, transparent and learning culture – which must be evident in a well-led organisation.
- 2.3 Making the process of feedback easy is essential; Help & Care recognises that complaints might only arise as a culmination of a number of experiences, so actively encouraging feedback and apologising for a negative experience is important.
- 2.4 Dealing with feedback in a transparent and responsive way demonstrates a commitment to improving people's experience of services and to ensure they receive the best possible support.
- 2.5 Complaints matter because every concern or complaint is an opportunity to improve and well-handled complaints will improve the quality of services for other people. Failure to deal with complaints appropriately presents a risk to the organisation – a missed opportunity to improve services as a consequence of feedback and could have an adverse effect on Help & Care's reputation.

3. Purpose and Scope

- 3.1 People who use Help & Care's services have a right to have their views heard and acted upon. Help & Care has given commitment through its mission and values to put the person first and centre and to be honest, open and transparent in all its dealings.

3.2 Help & Care has adopted a person centred approach to ensure that issues are dealt with in a way that people are empowered and able to make choices about how their concerns are dealt with. This approach has been further strengthened through the adoption of the framework which sets out best practice in 5 steps which is reflected in this Policy:

- Considering a complaint – ensuring people are given information about how to complain, that they will be supported to do so and services will not be compromised.
- Making a complaint – ensuring all staff can help, and making a complaint is easy and convenient.
- Staying informed – keeping people up-to-date and making the response personal.
- Receiving outcomes – resolving complaints and achieving the appropriate outcome.
- Reflecting on the experience – ensuring complaints are handled fairly and consistently and people understand how their feedback has helped to improve services.

Every member of staff is responsible for supporting people who wish to provide feedback or raise concerns and helping to resolve issues at service level wherever possible. All staff should be able to advise customers, carers, relatives and visitors to Help & Care on how to make a complaint. Staff assigned to investigate complaints should be supported to take action as appropriate in accordance with Help & Care's Policy and Procedures and in highlighting necessary learning.

The commitment to learning from people's experiences includes:

- Staff empowered to support customers, their relatives and carers in giving feedback and to resolve issues promptly and locally wherever possible.
- The use of insight gained from complaints, concerns and compliments and other forms of feedback to improve services provided.
- Thorough and timely investigation of complaints and concerns, and an open and conciliatory response.
- Fair treatment for people who make complaints, and assurance that services will not be compromised in any way.
- Feedback used as an essential element of Help & Care's approach to Governance.

4. Definitions

For the purpose of this Policy, feedback is defined across 4 categories:

4.1 **Compliments**

Positive feedback received regarding services received by customers, their relatives or carers.

4.2 **Comments (Service Issues)**

A comment is a matter that is not about an individual service received. It is something that is a cause for concern to the complainant, e.g., they may be unhappy with parking arrangements at a dementia roadshow, or that the choice of venue for a coaching session is not hospitable. Relevant information will be recorded and passed to the Governance Team.

4.3 **Concerns**

A concern is a matter which an individual wishes to be considered on an informal basis. All staff are expected, on a routine basis, to deal with customers concerns as presented to them. Wherever possible, staff are encouraged to achieve speedy resolution of the concern by either resolving it personally or establishing a dialogue between the complainant and their Line Manager. The objective will be speedy, informal resolution of the concern without recourse to correspondence/formal procedure.

4.4 **Complaints**

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about an act, omission, decision or a service provided by Help & Care.

5. **Other Forms of Feedback**

A range of approaches are in place across Help & Care to obtain feedback from people who use our services, which taken together provide a framework for gathering insight into customer experience.

6. **Compliments**

6.1 Compliments can be provided to any member of staff by any member of the public, customer, other members of staff or partner organisations. If a compliment is provided in writing, the Manager responsible for the service will respond to acknowledge the compliment.

6.2 Each compliment is to be logged with the Governance Team.

7. **Roles and Responsibilities**

7.1 All staff are responsible for ensuring that they comply with the Complaints Policy.

- 7.2 Managers are responsible for answering complaints and ensuring that this Policy is followed.
- 7.3 Governance is responsible for maintaining a record of complaints and providing annual reports to the Board of Trustees.
- 7.4 The Board of Trustees is responsible for hearing appeals when they arise.

8. Policy Principles

8.1 Confidentiality

It is important that strict confidentiality is maintained throughout the complaints process. We will only disclose the complainants' details to the parties involved in the complaint. We will never disclose the complainants' details to a third party without their consent to do so.

8.2 Fairness and Impartiality

We will ensure that every complaint we receive is treated with fairness and impartiality throughout the investigation and decision-making process. We will allow the complainant to put their case forward and be heard.

8.3 Timeliness

Help & Care will endeavour to resolve all complaints at the earliest stage of the complaints process. This is based upon the principle that the complainant will value the opportunity to share their complaint and have it resolved to their satisfaction without undue process. This means that staff must listen carefully and understand what it is that might resolve the complaint.

9. Safeguarding

Complaints that involve abuse or neglect will be dealt with under the Help & Care safeguarding procedures and may also be dealt with under the Complaints Policy, depending on the circumstances and desired outcome of the complainant.

10. Business Disputes

All business disputes fall outside the scope of the Complaints Policy, and will be dealt with under the individual, relevant service level agreement or contract.

11. Anonymous Complaints

Whilst recognising the reasons that people may wish to remain anonymous, the lack of personal information may hamper an investigation into the concerns raised. The response to an anonymous complaint will be at the discretion of the assigned Manager.

12. Contact from Councillors or MPs

Representations from elected members will be directed to the Chief Executive.

13. Persistent and/or Vexatious Complaints

There may be occasions where a person persistently makes a complaint that is without foundation, complaints that are malicious, repetitive in nature or unreasonable. In these circumstances, the responding Manager, in consultation with the relevant Help & Care Director and Head of Governance, will consider whether communication with this person should be ended.

14. Staff Complaints

Should a member of staff wish to make a complaint, they should do so using the correct procedure. Complaints or concerns about colleagues or services will not be taken under this policy.

15. The Complaints Process – Stage 1

- 15.1 It is hoped that through good communication, staff can resolve any concerns at the earliest opportunity, however, if this is not possible, a complaint should be submitted in writing to the Service Lead or via governance@helpandcare.org.uk. The staff member should provide the client with this Policy, a complaints form and the complaints Procedure in a format that suits them.
- 15.2 All complaints will be acknowledged by the Governance Team within 3 working days and provide details of the investigation officer.
- 15.3 As a general principle, if a complaint is about the conduct of a member of staff or volunteer, the investigation officer will be their Line Manager. Under no circumstances should a member of staff complete an investigation into their own practice.

- 15.4 The investigation officer will make contact with the complainant to gather further information as required and establish the desired outcome of the complaint. The investigation officer will interview the staff member involved and if applicable, any third parties.
- 15.5 The investigation officer will complete the investigation within 28 days of the original complaint.
- 15.6 Feedback will be provided to the complainant, in writing, at the end of the investigation, outlining what the findings of the investigation were, any learning or intended improvements, and how the complainant can escalate their complaint to Stage 2 if they remain unsatisfied.

16. The Complaints Process – Stage 2

- 16.1 It is expected that the majority of complaints can be dealt within Stage 1, however, there may be occasions where a person is unsatisfied with the response they have received. In these circumstances, they should put their concerns in writing to the Director responsible for service/function or Head of Governance.
- 16.2 Acknowledgement will be given to the complainant within 3 working days, detailing the Stage 2 officer.
- 16.3 All Stage 2 complaints will be referred to the Chief Executive, who may assign a Director to respond to the complaint.
- 16.4 The Stage 2 officer will make contact with the complainant to establish the reasons that they remain unsatisfied and what their desired outcomes are.
- 16.5 The Stage 2 officer will complete their investigation within 15 working days of the Stage 2 complaint being raised.
- 16.6 Feedback will be provided to the complainant, in writing, at the end of the Stage 2 investigation, outlining what the findings of the investigation were, any learning or intended improvements, and how the complainant can escalate their complaint to Appeal if they remain unsatisfied.

17. The Complaints Process – Appeal

- 17.1 In the exceptional circumstance that a person remains unsatisfied following Stage 2, they can lodge an Appeal in writing to the Chair of the Board of Trustees.

- 17.2 The Appeal will be acknowledged within 3 working days.
- 17.3 The Chair of the Board of Trustees will appoint a 3-person panel from the Board to hear the Appeal. The timescales for this will be agreed between the Chair of the Trustees and the complainant.
- 17.4 The Chair of the Board of Trustees, or a member of the Board, will make contact with the complainant to establish their reason for dissatisfaction and their desired outcome.
- 17.5 Once the Appeal has been heard, feedback will be provided to the complainant in writing.
- 17.6 The decision of the Appeal Board is final and there are no further rights to appeal.
- 17.7 Serious complaints about a charity can be reported to the Charity Commission.

18. Recording

All complaints will be recorded on the CRM, including the outcome and response to the complainant. It is the responsibility of the investigating officer, Stage 2 officer or Appeal Board to complete this recording.

19. Learning & Development

- 19.1 Induction programmes and Manager development programmes include modules on comments, complaints and compliments.
- 19.2 It remains the responsibility of staff within individual services to identify whether they can learn from the complaints received by Help & Care and create an action plan.
- 19.3 Responsibility for ensuring that all appropriate actions have been implemented will rest with the Service Lead with support from Organisational Development and Governance Team.

20. Implementation, Monitoring & Review

The Head of Governance is responsible for the monitoring compliance with this Policy. This will be achieved through monitoring:

Minimum requirement to be monitored	Lead	How	Reporting Arrangement	Lead for acting on recommendations
Number of concerns received	Governance Team	Audit	Board of Trustees	Leadership Team
Number of compliments received	Governance Team	Audit	Board of Trustees	Leadership Team
Number of complaints received – stages	Governance Team	Audit	Board of Trustees	Leadership Team

This Policy and Procedure will be subject to review every 2 years, with review instigated in the event of policy change.

21. Equality Impact Statement

Help & Care recognises its responsibility to ensure that no-one is discriminated against or disadvantaged in relation to a protected characteristics. As such, an Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on this Policy to ensure equality of access to the complaints process.

The Equality Impact Assessment is available upon request. Please contact governance@helpandcare.org.uk.