

Complaints Procedure

1. Policy Control

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1.0	Created	08/2016
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	For Review	TBC

2. Introduction

CFW takes complaints seriously. Complaints give us the opportunity to put things right and the lessons learned can often influence our practices. We know we are not perfect, but seek to demonstrate continuous improvement. That is why we have a Complaints Procedure. Sometimes we can put things right; sometimes we can only explain ourselves and apologise. But we do want to learn from our mistakes. What you tell us helps us to improve our service.

It is hoped that customer and third party dissatisfaction can be remedied locally on an informal basis. Some people, however, prefer to pursue their complaint on an official footing. The organisation, therefore, has a structure to ensure that all complaints are handled within the same framework. Further review and independence is also built into the system.

The complaints process is for all complaints - or expressions of dissatisfaction - from customers and third parties, including those who have tried, but failed, to access our service.

3. Complaints procedure

The Complaints Procedure is available in a written document and also on the CFW website. If a written complaint arrives it will be passed on to the CEO. In many cases, customers phone and speak to Trustee Board members or other staff who should pass the complaint to the CEO immediately. The person making the complaint will be informed by the CEO that this has happened. Each stage is the responsibility of a different individual and each stage has a timetable.

- Stage One: review by CEO
- Stage Two: review under direction of Trustee Board

4. Stage One: review by CEO

Once a complaint has been received, a letter of acknowledgement must be sent to the person making the complaint within 5 working days. The person making the complaint must be told who is dealing with the complaint, what action is being taken, and when s/he can expect to receive a full reply - the target time for responding in full to a complaint is 20 working days.

The HR officer will maintain a separate complaints monitoring file. Everything related to the complaint should be kept apart from any other notes (if any), and all correspondence and notes relating to the complaint should be attached to this separate file. The "complaints file" is strictly private to HR and the CEO.

The CEO should undertake the investigation - or oversee the investigation where carried out by another member of staff. Where the complaint is against the CEO, the Chair or a designated member of the Trustee Board will investigate, in effect jumping straight to Stage Two. This may require an interview with the person making the complaint or a member of staff or volunteer.

Once the investigation is complete, a letter detailing its findings should be sent to the person making the complaint. If the matter is complex and will take longer than originally indicated, the person making the complaint should be informed, explaining the reasons including an indication of when a response can be expected.

The full response must contain sufficient information to assure the person making the complaint that their complaint has been taken seriously. If the complaint is upheld, the person making the complaint must be given a full apology for their experience and given details, as far as possible, of what is being done to prevent a recurrence of the situation.

The letter must also inform person making the complaints of their right to ask for a review of the investigation if they are not satisfied with the outcome of Stage One and how to access this second stage.

5. Stage Two: review under direction of Trustee Board

Customers who reject the CEO's reply and seek a further response should be asked to explain their points of disagreement to facilitate a comprehensive assessment

The process to be followed in reviewing the complaint at Stage Two is similar to Stage One but now the lead person conducting the review will be the Chair of the Trustee Board or a designated sub-committee. The same target timetable applies.

Stage Two referrals may mean that the initial investigation has not addressed the pivotal point of the complaint. The Chair of the Trustee Board must be sure that

the review takes this into account and should ensure that the crux of the problem has been addressed..

Once again, the response to the person making the complaint must contain an explanation, apology if required, information about remedial actions, and satisfactory assurances that the complaint has been investigated fully. The decision of the Board being final.

6. Checklist for good investigative practice

- Check if there have been any previous complaints from this person.
- Contact the person making the complaint to clarify the complaint and outcome sought, and to explain the limitations of the outcomes available to the person making the complaint from the procedure at each stage.
- If financial loss has been incurred, the advice of the relevant insurance company must be sought. Customers who claim that the advice given them has resulted in financial loss should be advised to seek independent legal advice. A complaint cannot be handled by CFW at the same time as a legal action is being pursued against it. However, once any legal action is resolved, there may be aspects of the original complaint that remain to be addressed.
- Check whether the person making the complaint needs support - for example, interpretation and language services, advocacy, access to induction loops etc.
- Brief yourself on the background to the complaint and obtain relevant documents. Ask the customer if there is anything they wish to add.
- Consider whether CFW needs to seek legal advice before proceeding.
- Conduct any interviews in as informal and relaxed a manner as possible.
- Separate hearsay from fact.
- Draft a report setting out the evidence together with your conclusion.
- Ensure that the person undertaking the investigation is not implicated in the complaint.

7. Third-party complaints

These may come from variety of sources - for example, a funder, trader or an organisation, with the complaint deriving from advice, action or behaviour by CFW.

These complaints are expected to be managed by and within CFW (on the lines of Stage One and Stage Two of the Complaints Procedure and following the guidelines set out in Section 6. good investigative procedure) with the decision of the Trustee Board being final.

8. Complaints by staff or volunteers against their treatment by the organisation

Should be dealt with under CFW's Grievance Policy and Procedures for staff and volunteers.

9. Complaints by staff or volunteers about the quality and safety of services

Sometimes, staff and/or volunteers are concerned about practices which give rise to grave concern about the quality and or safety of services provided or a situation which has the potential to bring the organisation into disrepute.

Staff who raise such concerns have the right to make a protected disclosure (sometimes known as "whistleblowing"). See the CFW Whistleblowing Policy for more Detail.