

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. West View Advice and Resource Centre (WVARC) recognises that suggestions, constructive criticism and complaints are valuable aids to management in maintaining and developing better standards of service. It is important that anyone who is entitled to make a valid complaint should not be inhibited and must have full confidence that they will be given full, proper and speedy consideration.
- 1.2. The procedure following is based on principles and guidance in the document UK Advice Membership criteria – complaints procedure.

2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The main principles to be observed are as follows: -

- 2.1 Clients and those concerned should know how they may complain. All staff in contact with clients should be briefed on the complaints procedure. Appropriate notices should be displayed in all WVARC premises, including outreach.
- 2.2 Complaints should be dealt with promptly. They should be acknowledged on the day of receipt, by a letter or email, if possible but always by the next working day. They will then be passed to the Centre Manager for investigation. The complaint should be dealt with and a written response provided to the complainant within twenty-five days. If further, or more prolonged investigations are required, an interim report should be sent within twenty-five working days.
- 2.3 Complaints should be investigated thoroughly. It should always be the intention to get to the root of the complaint and satisfy the complainant if at all possible. For that reason it is often helpful to offer the complainant an interview with the person dealing with the complaint. In the case of WVARC this person will be the Centre Manager, unless the Centre Manager is the subject of the complaint, in which case the most appropriate person would be the Chairperson.
- 2.4 Any member of staff who is the subject of a complaint should be fully informed of any allegation at the outset. He/She should be given a copy of the complaint and invited to respond to the person investigating the complaint. He/She should be advised of his/her right to seek help and advice of his/her professional association or trade union before commenting on a complaint and should be informed that he/she may be accompanied by a representative of his/her organisation or a friend if he/she is interviewed in connection with the complaint.

3. PROCEDURE FOR HANDLING CRITICAL COMMENT

- 3.1 If a client has a minor criticism, every effort should be made to provide an acceptable answer or explanation verbally. If action has been, or is to be taken to put something right, this should be explained to the client. However, if the client is dissatisfied and indicates the matter should be further investigated, it should be referred to the Centre Manager.

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4. PROCEDURE FOR HANDLING COMPLAINTS

- 4.1 Complaints may be received either through an oral or a written communication. Clients who wish to make an oral complaint should be referred to the Centre Manager, or, in the absence of the Centre Manager, the Senior Advice Worker who will note the complaint and refer it to the Centre Manager at the earliest opportunity. A written communication may be from, or on behalf of, a client or from a member of the general public.
- 4.2 The Centre Manager will be the recipient of formal complaints made by or on behalf of clients and will be accountable for the investigation of complaints. All complaints must be registered with the administrator, and the date of receipt, and nature of complaint recorded.
- 4.3 A complaint should be handled in the following stages:-
 - 4.3.1 The complaint will be received by the Centre Manager, acknowledged in writing no later than the following day, and entered into the complaints register.
 - 4.3.2 The Centre Manager will carry out an investigation into the complaint.
 - 4.3.3 The Centre Manager will provide a written response to the complaint no later than 25 working days after receipt of the complaint. If, for untoward reasons the response can not be provided within this time then a written explanation for the delay will be forwarded to the client.
 - 4.3.4 The written reply should contain an offer that if the complainant is still dissatisfied, an interview will be offered or further consideration of the complaint will be carried out.
 - 4.3.5 The complainant if still dissatisfied should be informed of how to progress the complaint further.
 - 4.3.6 The complainant may ask for the complaint to be considered by the Company Chairperson in which case the time rules for response are the same as for other levels. i.e. 25 working days.
 - 4.3.7 Should the complainant remain dissatisfied, then Advice UK will be requested to carry out arbitration.
 - 4.3.8 Should the complaint be in relation to financial advice received, the Financial Ombudsman Service can be contacted within 6 months of the final response issued by the Centre should the complainant remain un-satisfied
 - 4.3.9 There is no further level of appeal.
 - 4.3.10 Complaints will be reported to the Board, by the Centre Manager, on an exception basis.

5. IMPLEMENTATION

- 5.1 All staff should be aware of this complaints procedure and their responsibility toward receipt and handling of complaints. It is the Centre Manager's responsibility to ensure staff receives training in the management of complaints.
- 5.2 Posters should be displayed in the centre advising clients how they may complain.

NOTE:

- 1. When the term client is used it relates to all persons who may justifiably make a complaint.
- 2. If the Centre Manager is the subject of a complaint then the Chairperson will carry out the investigation. In the event of an unsatisfactory resolution, the second level of appeal will be to a panel of two directors.

3. The third level of appeal stays with Advice UK or the Financial Ombudsman Service should the complaint be in relation to financial advice.
4. Contact Details of Advice UK - PO Box 70716, London EC1P 1GQ. **Tel:** 0300 777 0107 **or** 0300 777 0108
5. Contact Details of Financial Ombudsman Service – South Quay Plaza, 183 Marsh Wall, London E14 9SR. **Tel:** 0800 023 4567

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