

# 37 Complaints and Feedback

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"An organisation that truly welcomes, values and uses complaints to inspire and guide improvement will deliver better public services than one that does not" Professor Alice Brown

## 1 Our Commitment to handling Complaints

Cyrenians regards the handling of complaints as a vital means to improve our service delivery and ensuring satisfaction from all of our stakeholders, service users and partners. Therefore the organisation takes all complaints very seriously and is committed to handling them professionally in order to achieve the following benefits:

- creating a second chance to provide service and satisfaction to dissatisfied service users.
- identifying service areas that require change / improvement
- providing opportunities to strengthen public support for our work
- assisting in the planning and allocation of resources

The aims of this policy are:

- i. To provide a fair complaints process which is easily understood and accessible for anyone who wishes to make complaints, suggestions and requests for services.
- ii. To ensure clarity and support for all involved in the handling of complaints, including complainants and those responding to complaints.
- iii. To ensure that dissatisfaction is, wherever possible, resolved and that there is conciliation.
- iv. To generate and use complaints data which supports continuous improvement in all of the Charity's work.

This policy does not include complaints and suggestions from staff, who should access the Charity's Discipline and Grievance policies.

## 2 Definitions

Cyrenians adopts the following definition of a complaint:

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about the Charity's action or lack of action, or about the standard of a service.

In addition, this complaints policy includes the handling of all suggestions, requests, and expressions of dissatisfaction made by anyone engaged with the charity.

### **3 A staged approach to complaints handling**

Any information handled through this policy should follow this four staged approach. Principles for dealing with all complaints at every stage:

- Receipt of feedback should be acknowledged to the complainant immediately.
- Those giving feedback should be treated courteously and be kept informed of the progress.
- All feedback will be addressed in an equitable, objective and unbiased manner.
- Feedback will be collated in writing centrally and used to inform continuous improvement of all activity.

More guidance for staff on how to handle feedback is provided in Appendix 1. Forms for staff to use when receiving feedback are included in Appendix 2

#### **Stage A Information Resolution**

If a complaint is made, the person receiving the feedback should try to resolve the issues raised informally. At this stage, the complaint can be verbal and does not need to be provided in writing. This involves:

- Empathising with the person with the complaint
- Where possible, apologising
- Finding out what will enable a difficulty to be redressed and seeking the authority to take relevant action
- Recording the complaint for internally purposes to be used to drive improvement

Informal resolution should be achieved in up to 3 working days of the complaint being received.

A written record of the complaint should be logged within 5 days of the complaint being received.

#### **Stage B. Formal Internal Investigation**

If it is not possible to enable resolution at the first stage, the complaint can then be internally investigated. This stage involves:

- A person who is “once removed” from the situation (eg the line manager of the person about whom the complaint has been made) undertaking an investigation which is impartial
- Provision of the complaint in written form. However if this is not possible (eg the person making the complaint does not feel able to produce a written account) a short meeting can take place to gather the relevant details. Complaints may be made anonymously or provided by a third party such as a relative, friend or advocate.

- Conducting an investigation which is flexible and proportionate to the complaint provided. This may include interviews with relevant internal and external parties.
- Finding out what will enable a difficulty to be redressed and seeking the authority to take relevant action
- Providing a written record of the outcome of the investigation to the person who has given feedback (this is not possible in the case of anonymous complaints).
- Recording the complaint for internal purposes to be used to drive improvement

A formal investigation should be conducted and concluded in 10 working days of the complaint being received.

A written record of the complaint should be logged within 15 days of the complaint being received.

### **Stage C. Appeal**

If the person providing feedback is not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint, they can appeal to the line manager of the person who has undertaken the actions outlined stage B. This involves:

- Reviewing the investigation and, where necessary, discussing the content of the investigation with relevant internal and external parties.
- Finding out what will enable a difficulty to be redressed and seeking the authority to take relevant action
- Providing a written record of the outcome of the appeal to the person who has provided the feedback
- Recording the complaint for internally purposes to be used to drive improvement

A formal investigation should be conducted and concluded in 10 working days of the appeal being received.

A written record of the complaint should be logged within 15 days of the appeal being received.

### **Stage D. Referral to an External Body**

If the person providing feedback is not satisfied with the outcome of the appeal, they can take this to a relevant external body eg the local authority or the Care Commission. The person who has dealt with the appeal will provide relevant contact details.

Contact information should be provided with the written response (ie within 10 working days of the appeal being received.)

## **4 Confidentiality**

All feedback will be handled in such a way as to:

- safeguard the confidentiality of all affected parties
- avoid victimisation and or reprisal

This will be achieved through use of the Charity's Confidentiality policy and Data protection policy .

## **5 Linking complaints with the planning cycle**

Feedback from service users and stakeholders provides extremely valuable information for the charity in continuously improving all activity. As such, all feedback information will be collated and reviewed each year as part of the Charity's annual planning cycle as follows:

- All complaints records and subsequent reports will be held centrally in company files.
- During the review phase of the planning cycle, teams will examine and discuss complaints. A log of numbers of complaints will be included in each team's annual report along with actions to be taken as a result of complaints.
- Details of activity resulting from complaints will be included in team operational work plans.

Throughout the year, there will be circumstances where complaints lead to changes in service delivery more quickly. Teams should discuss and agree any changes with relevant managers and communicate this through existing regular reporting mechanisms.

A summary of complaints from the year and resulting recommendations for action will be included in the charity's overall annual review and made available to the public.

## Appendix 1 Practical guidance for staff on handling feedback

- Give a pleasant greeting and remain calm and respectful throughout the conversation
- Listen - allow the person to talk about the complaint in their own words and express their dissatisfaction - don't intervene too quickly as sometimes a person just wants to "let off steam"
- Listen - use good listening skills and give encouragement e.g. nod, maintain eye contact, adopt open body language and show an interest in what is being said
- Always acknowledge the person's feelings and any anger (even if you feel that they are being unreasonable) - you can do this without making a comment on the complaint itself e.g. "I understand that this situation is frustrating for you"
- Show that you have understood the complaint - paraphrase and summarise what the person has said by picking out key points and using key words to mirror those used by the complainant
- Apologise - if you feel that an apology is deserved for an action or omission that was the responsibility of your organisation then feel empowered to do so
- Listen for statements that you can agree with e.g. "I agree, it would be frustrating to wait two hours for someone to see you". This sort of agreement does not involve any admission of fault on behalf of the organisation
- Don't debate the facts in the first instance, especially if the person is angry
- Avoid using jargon and complicated language and make sure that the person understands what they have been told
- Obtain details about the complaint before any personal details
- Lead the person back to the point of their complaint if they go off track e.g. "So, your complaint is about....."
- Ask for clarification wherever necessary and make clear your understanding of the complaint, concern or request
- Ask the person what they would like done to resolve the issue
- Provide a clear choice of options wherever possible
- Be clear and direct about what you can do, how long it will take and what it will involve
- Ensure that you give the person an opportunity to participate as fully as possible in deciding how best to deal with their complaint
- Give clear and valid reasons why requests cannot be met
- Wherever appropriate, inform the person about available avenues of review or appeal.

## Appendix 2 Feedback Form

Please tell us about your experiences with Cyrenians. All feedback will be treated confidentially, using our Complaints and Feedback Policy.

What took Place

Who was involved

When did it happen

Where did it happen

Your contact details – email, phone or address – so that we can contact you if necessary for more details and feedback to you about the outcome of your complaint.

Name

Address

Postcode

Email

Phone

You can send this form to us by:

**Emailing** it to us via our website (we have provided an online form or you can email [admin@cyrenians.org.uk](mailto:admin@cyrenians.org.uk))

**Posting** this form to us addressed to "Complaints and Feedback; Edinburgh Cyrenians; Norton Park; 57 Albion Road, Edinburgh, EH7 5QY)

**Phoning** us on 0131 475 2354 in Edinburgh or 01506 205413 for Falkirk and West Lothian. You may be directed to a specific staff member who will take details of your complaint by going through with you the questions highlighted on this form.

You will receive confirmation of receipt of your feedback within 3 working days. Formal investigations will be conducted and communicated to you within 10 working days of us receiving your feedback.

All feedback is included in our annual review of our activity and will contribute to our commitment to continually improve our work.

We will receive feedback from you, from a third party such as a friend, relative or appointed advocate/supporter. We will also respond to anonymous feedback.

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