



## 13. Complaints Procedure

### **Aims and Purpose**

Washington Mind is committed to providing the best possible service it can. The complaints procedure is a way for Washington Mind, our service users and the general public to make known any concerns they may have about the operation of Washington Mind and the services we provide.

The procedure is available to all those who seek to benefit from the services of Washington Mind and for any member of the public who feels that they may wish to raise a complaint about any matter in relation to the practice, policies or conduct of any Washington Mind staff member, either paid or unpaid, at any level of the organisation. Disputes between service users will generally be covered within the code of conduct that applies across all Washington Mind services.

It is the policy of Washington Mind to provide a fair, effective, transparent and structured mechanism to investigate complaints or concerns about Washington Mind and the services we provide. It is our aim to achieve a solution to any complaint that is satisfactory to the complainant and that this solution is fair, ethical, legal and prompt.

Washington Mind recognises that making a complaint can be difficult and stressful for the person who is raising the complaint therefore appropriate assistance will be offered to the complainant. At any stage a complainant may seek the help of an independent advocate and Washington Mind will provide information on this on request.

A complaint can also be stressful for a person against whom a complaint is made and that person may also need assistance and support. Any member of staff or volunteer against whom a complaint is made will be given the fullest opportunity to answer any criticisms.

Some complaints have or may have financial or legal consequences for Washington Mind. In such cases Washington Mind will take direction from its insurers.

Washington Mind will make efforts to ensure that every user of its services is aware that this procedure exists. The procedure is described below. Copies of this policy and procedure will be available on request at all Washington Mind projects and making a complaint is included in FAQ section of our website <http://www.washingtonmind.org.uk/about-us/faq>



### **The following principles are used**

- Washington Mind recognises that compliments and complaints are an important part of customer feedback.
- The procedure is **fair** to people using services or experiencing Washington Mind's work, complainants and to staff
- The procedure is **accessible** to all regardless of age, disability, gender, ethnicity, belief or sexual orientation
- Making a complaint will not harm or prejudice the service that is given to the complainant
- Concerns and complaints are dealt with efficiently and are properly investigated
- Complainants are treated with respect and courtesy and receive appropriate support throughout the handling of the complaint
- Complainants receive a timely and appropriate response, identifying the outcome of any investigation, wherever possible
- Action is taken where necessary in the light of the outcome of the complaint
- Learning from complaints will be used to improve Washington Mind's work.
- If the complainant is not happy with the result of the response to the complaint, she or he will have the right to appeal.

### **In line with these, in responding to complaints, Mind will**

- Provide a thorough explanation
- Accept shortcomings and apologise where appropriate
- Identify actions and reduce the risk or re-occurrence.

### **Procedure**

#### **Stage One (Informal).**

Washington Mind aims to deal with any complaints or concerns as quickly as possible. Anyone wishing to make a complaint or raise concerns can speak directly to a staff member or the project co-ordinator of the service they wish to complain about. The complaint/concern will hopefully be resolved on the spot with an explanation, action or apology. This complaint will be acknowledged by the member of staff to whom the complaint was made within 7 days and the outcome recorded. At this point the complainant will be advised they have 21



days to raise a formal complaint with regard to this issue. The Line/Project Manager will be informed of this complaint.

### **Stage Two (Formally registering a complaint)**

If a complainant is not satisfied with the response they have received at Stage One (informal), or would prefer their complaint to be formally investigated, they should then outline the details of their complaint in writing or electronically and send it to the Manager of the project or the Services Manager.

A Manager will be assigned to investigate their complaint and they will receive a full written response in 20 working days. The response will be recorded and include

- Details of the investigation and what has been found
- A decision about whether the complaint was upheld or not
- Details of the changes Washington Mind will make to prevent a recurrence of the issue/s which led to the complaint
- The reason for the decision
- The redress, if appropriate, which will be offered e.g. an apology, additional help or directing to other sources of advice or support
- If it is not possible to provide a full answer to a complaint within 20 working days, the investigating officer will, in any event, write at 20 working days to provide a progress report explaining the reasons for delay and give a date of when it is expected the investigation will be completed

If they are not satisfied with the response to the complaint, the complainant will be given the opportunity to speak to the Services Manager or a Trustee and the option to appeal.

### **Stage Three (Appeal)**



To appeal please outline the reasons for their dissatisfaction in writing to the Services Manager or Chairperson. An appeals panel of a staff member and trustee with no previous involvement in the complaint will be convened to consider the appeal. The final decision about the complaint and action that may be taken in light of the complaint will be confirmed in writing within 30 days.

### **Charity Commission**

If a complaint remains dissatisfied, there is recourse to the Charity Commission which will be able to advise on whether they may be able to assist. The charity Commission can be contacted at:

[http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/About\\_us/Contacting\\_us/default.aspx](http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/About_us/Contacting_us/default.aspx)



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