



Complaints and Feedback Policy

Policy statement

Healthwatch Cumbria believes that if an individual wishes to make a complaint or register a concern it should be easy to do so.

Complaints are welcomed and looked on as an opportunity to learn, adapt, and improve all the services we offer.

This policy is not designed to apportion blame; to consider the possibility of negligence or to provide compensation. It is NOT part of the organisations disciplinary policy.

Complaints will be dealt with early, openly and honestly, in the hope that a successful outcome will be reached by the complainant and the organisation. Failure to listen to or acknowledge complaints will only aggravate problems.

Definitions

A complaint - shall be deemed to mean any written or verbal statement from any individual alleging a grievance involving the conduct, business or affairs of Healthwatch Cumbria or any employee, representative, director or advisor of the organisation.

This policy recognises that it may be possible to resolve some complaints very quickly often by front line staff. More serious verbal complaints may warrant more formal treatment depending on the nature and severity of the allegations. The most appropriate investigation process will be put in place based on the professional judgement of the individual who receives the complaint.

A complaint is likely to include at least one of the following:

- dissatisfaction with our service, such as inadequate work, unacceptable delay or failure to deliver a service etc

- disputes between users and the organisation regarding policy, procedures or activities
- discourtesy or unhelpfulness on the part of the staff

Complaints Manager

Named person appointed to manage all aspects of each complaint from start to finish and who will either carry out the investigation or appoint a separate Investigating officer if that is more appropriate.

Objectives

- To ensure that the individual and/or their representatives are aware of how to complain, and the process is easy to use.
- To ensure complaints are dealt with promptly, fairly and with sensitivity, bearing in mind the upset and worry this can cause not only to the complainant but also any staff who have been cited in the complaint.
- To ensure that learning takes place following complaint and feedback so that our support and services are continuously improving

Complaints Handling Principles and Procedure

All complaints

- All complaints, no matter what the subject matter, will be taken seriously.
- When appropriate we will aim to resolve verbal/minor complaints immediately by front line staff
- Staff will be at all times polite, courteous and sympathetic, and will remain calm and respectful.
- Staff should not accept blame, blame others or make excuses. All complaints are treated confidentially. Only the officers dealing with complaints will be aware of the complaint.
- Healthwatch Cumbria aims to handle complaints fairly and honestly regardless of who makes a complaint.
- Healthwatch Cumbria treats all members of the community equitably and will not show bias to any particular individual or group. And, where appropriate, every effort will be made to make information available in a different format, or language if necessary.
- If it is deemed that the procedures of the organisation have failed then the issues need identifying and acting upon.
- Complaints in the log must be maintained for a period of 7 years following the resolution date.

- The complaints procedure should be audited every six months, and reviewed to ensure that it continues to comply with laws, regulations, guidelines and best practices.

Minor/verbal complaints

After talking through the problem staff members should agree a course of action to resolve the issue. The staff member taking charge of the complaint should then clarify the course of action with the complainant. Line managers should always be informed about any feedback or complaint both positive and negative.

If the suggested plan of action is not acceptable to the complainant then the complainant will be provided with a copy of the complaints procedure and will be requested to put their complaint in writing. This will then move to a Stage One complaint.

Written complaints

Stage One

All communications with the complainant will be logged on the complaints log and all copies of letters etc., kept on file.

All complaints will be reviewed by David Blacklock Chief Executive of Healthwatch Cumbria.

In most cases, the Complaints Manager will be Sue Stevenson, who is solely responsible for ensuring that the agreed policy is complied with.

All Complaints will be discussed with the Complaints Manager and recorded on the Complaints Log.

The Complaints Manager will instigate the Complaints Process including: investigation, named staff responsible and timeframes and an acknowledgement letter sent **within 5 working days**.

The letter must contain:

Name of the person appointed as Complaints Manager and name of staff appointed to investigate the complaint, if different.

A copy of the complaints policy

Expected date of outcome

A summary of the proposed investigation process

If the complaint has been made on behalf of a complainant then permission must be obtained in writing from the complainant to proceed.

The complainant should be invited to speak to the Complaints Manager, or the investigating officer. This can be done by phone.

The person handling the complaint should keep a record of the conversation in the complaints log.

If the complaint is about a member(s) of staff, the Complaints Manager should offer the opportunity for the member(s) of staff to put forward their account.

If the complaint raises a potentially serious matter, advice should be sought from a legal advisor. If legal action is taken, then the Complaints Procedure should be reviewed in line with the advice given.

On receipt of the complaint an immediate investigation will be launched and **within 21 days**, a full explanation will be made available to the complainant. This can be either communicated in writing or at a meeting.

If the issues are too complex to be finalised in 21 days, then the complainant must be informed of the delay.

Complainants will be advised that they can bring a friend/relation/advocate along to any meetings.

If a meeting is arranged to discuss the investigation then a detailed explanation of the rationale for the meeting and the planned agenda will be provided.

A written account of the investigation, including details of any meeting which may have taken place, will be sent to the complainant. This letter will also detail the next steps should the complainant wish to contest the outcome.

Stage Two

Healthwatch Cumbria will try in all instances to deal with complaints at a local level. However, if the complainant is not fully satisfied with the outcome, and wishes to appeal, an appeal can be sent in writing to the Board of Directors.

The Board will **acknowledge the letter of appeal within 5 days**, and provide an outline of how they will proceed. A sub group of the Board will be appointed to deal with the complaint and must comprise at least 3 members including the chair.

The sub group will **meet with the complainant within 21 days**, from the first day of receiving the appeal letter.

The Board may choose to delegate the responsibility for dealing with an appeal to a senior member of staff or independent person if it is appropriate to do so.

Stage Three

If the complainant remains unsatisfied with the outcome after Stage Two, then an independent mediator will be sourced.

The complainant will be contacted by letter to explain how the investigation will be conducted at this stage.

After this final procedure the outcome deemed by the independent mediator will stand.

Complaint/Feedback log

Healthwatch Cumbria holds a Complaints/Feedback log. This log is used to record every complaint or piece of feedback received, even if the individual does not classify their feedback as a complaint. The log is used to track key elements of the complaint process and is categorised to identify potential trends or concerns and to produce reports.

All complaints must be logged in the Complaints Log and must contain at least the following information:

Date of complaint

Complainants name

Nature of complaint and the circumstances

Name of person(s) who is the subject of the complaint

The service which is subject to the complaint

The date and conclusions of the decision rendered in connection with the complaint.

Reviewed September 2014