

Minimum Standards for Complaints Investigation



Organisations covered by the Wakefield Compact range in size from statutory organisations turning over millions of pounds a year, to small local organisations staffed entirely by volunteers. It would be impossible, therefore, to specify one complaints procedure for all members. Your procedure should be proportionate to the size of your organisation, the complexity of your work and the risks you are managing. There are some basic features that every complaints procedure, large or small, simple or complex, should have and these are set out below.

Signposts: You must make clear how people can make complaints against your organisation and what your complaints process is.

Communication and Accountability: You must keep complainants in touch with progress, and make sure they know what is happening and who is dealing with their complaint at any given time.

Escalation: Complainants should be able to take their complaint to a higher level if they are not happy with the outcome achieved at any stage. Typically, there may be three levels:-

- An informal stage, when the emphasis is on putting something right as quickly and as simply as possible with the minimum of fuss.
- A formal stage, when the complaint is carefully investigated, a reasoned decision reached and a remedy proposed
- An appeal stage, where earlier decisions are reviewed and revised if appropriate, and a final decision is made.

Timescales: The longer a complaint continues the less satisfactory is its final outcome so you must set and publicise deadlines for each stage of your process. They should balance the need for reasonable speed against the need for care and thoroughness and meet relevant statutory deadlines. You must also ensure that you do not deny complainants access to any of their other rights:- complaints to the Local Government Ombudsman should be made within 12 months and to Judicial Review within 3 months of the original matter being complained about.

Records: Records should be kept of any formal complaint.

Learning and improvement: Complaints are an opportunity to learn. You should make sure that your organisation uses them to improve the services that you provide and the quality of all the work that you do.

Examples of good practice are available at

www.wakefieldvcs.org

The Compact is an agreement between the public sector and the voluntary and community sector. It recognises shared values, principles and commitments and sets out guidelines for how both parties should work together.

The Compact stands for better partnership working and creating better outcomes for individuals and local communities and is endorsed and supported by the Wakefield District Partnership.

