

Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire

COMPLAINTS POLICY

1. General Policy Statement

- 1.1 Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire provides a range of services that seek to increase the quality, quantity, contribution and accessibility of voluntary and community action throughout South Bedfordshire.
- 1.2 It is our intention to provide the best possible service to Members, service users, learners and stakeholders (referred to as service users throughout this Policy). To help achieve this, Voluntary and Community Action welcomes feedback from users, be it critical or complimentary, to help the organisation improve. The continued goodwill of service users is greatly valued.
- 1.3 Voluntary and Community Action will also provide opportunities for feedback through its annual User Survey, training workshop and event evaluations, Volunteer Feedback requests and other measures. Voluntary and Community Action will provide information to service users on how to provide feedback, which will be available in a leaflet and on our website.
- 1.4 However, we recognise that from time to time there may be occasions when service users feel that the quality or level of service provided falls short of what they could reasonably expect.
- 1.5 There are occasions when Voluntary and Community Action may need to make decisions on awarding grants or programme delivery. Not all its decisions will please everyone and the merits of a decision taken in a particular case can not be challenged, although the process by which the decision was reached can be.
- 1.6 Voluntary and Community Action would expect to resolve any day to day difficulties or complaints informally and as quickly as possible. In the first instance Voluntary and Community Action would expect a service user (or their representative) to provide feedback or to raise any complaint informally by speaking or writing to the member of staff concerned. If the matter is not resolved through informal communication the service user may use the formal procedure set out below.
- 1.7 All complaints will be taken seriously, handled sensitively, investigated promptly and thoroughly, and used to improve our services.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 This policy applies to Members, service users, learners and other stakeholders that use the services of Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire. The purpose of this policy is to set out the organisation's commitment and procedures for dealing with feedback on its services or the behaviour of its staff and volunteers and for challenging decisions made in the assessment and accreditation of learners.

3. Compliments, Comments and Complaints

- 3.1 Voluntary and Community Action welcomes feedback from its service users; including:
- 3.2 **Compliments** on aspects of its service or the behaviour of its staff and volunteers that has been found to be particularly helpful, useful or exceptional.
- 3.3 **Comments**, observations or concerns about some aspect of its service or the behaviour of its staff and volunteers that should be recorded but is neither a compliment nor a complaint.
- 3.4 **Complaints** about some aspect of its service or the behaviour of its staff and volunteers that has fallen so short of service users' expectations that they feel action should be taken to correct some damage they have suffered or to protect future service users from the same problem.
- 3.5 A communication expressing a compliment or comment should be acknowledged in writing with thanks for comments or compliments and the correspondence placed on the *Nice Letters* File in the General Office.

4. Procedure for Dealing with a Complaint

- 4.1 A complaint should be made either in person, or by telephone, fax, letter or email to the Director who will acknowledge, in writing within five working days, the receipt of any complaint. If the complaint is about the Director, the complaint should be addressed to the Chairperson (marked *Private and Confidential*).
- 4.2 At this, and any subsequent stage, the complainant may be accompanied or supported by a friend, but not a legal representative.
- 4.3 The Director (or Chairperson) will investigate the circumstances leading to the complaint, meet with any affected staff and communicate the results of the investigation to the complainant within a reasonable time – normally within 20 working days of the complaint being received. If the investigation leads to a delay then an interim reply will be sent explaining the reasons for the delay. If the complaint is found to be justified, the Director (or Chairperson) will seek to agree any necessary further action with the complainant. Where appropriate, Voluntary and Community Action will make a written apology to a complainant.
- 4.4 If it is felt necessary, or where the complainant requests it, a meeting may be arranged to discuss the complaint. If a meeting is held, a record should be made of any corrective action agreed to reverse any damage caused, whether the matter is considered closed or if the complainant wishes to pursue the complaint to appeal.
- 4.5 The complainant will have the right – if dissatisfied with the results of the enquiry – to put their case, in writing, to an appeal panel of three Trustee Board members. If the appeal is found to be justified, the appeal panel will seek to agree any necessary further action with the complainant. The decision of the appeal panel is final and no further appeal is possible.
- 4.6 In the case of complaints from learners participating in Learning and Skills Council funded activities and where the complaint is unresolved, the Director must inform the Learning and Skills Council, which will review the actions taken and may require further action to be taken, carry out any other enquiries it deems necessary in order to affect a satisfactory conclusion to the complaint.
- 4.7 The Director will ensure that any corrective or preventative action is taken immediately, or as soon as is reasonably practicable, to improve services and ensure a similar problem cannot arise in the future.

5. Procedure for Dealing with Learner Assessments

- 5.1 Where a learner (or candidate) is dissatisfied with an assessment outcome they have the right to appeal directly to their Assessor, which must be in writing and indicate:
- the points of disagreement;
 - the evidence in the portfolio or assignment that the learner believes meets the requirements of the performance criteria or competency standard.
- 5.2 The Assessor will review the evidence leading to the complaint and communicate the results of the review to the learner within a reasonable time – normally within 20 working days of the complaint being received. If the complaint is found to be justified, the Assessor will agree any necessary further action with the learner.
- 5.3 If the learner is not satisfied with the outcome of their first appeal they can appeal to the Internal Verifier, which must be in writing. The Internal Verifier will also consider correspondence submitted in the first stage and will review the evidence leading to the complaint. They will communicate the results of the review to the learner and the Assessor within a reasonable time – normally within 20 working days of the complaint being received. If the complaint is found to be justified, the Internal Verifier will agree any necessary further action with the learner and the Assessor.
- 5.4 If the learner is not satisfied with the outcome of their second appeal they can appeal to the Awarding Body. The appeal must be in writing and the learner must provide evidence that their appeal has been through both previous stages and must be accompanied by copies of all documentation from both previous stages. The Awarding Body will have its own timescales for reviewing the evidence and will communicate the outcome to the learner and to Voluntary and Community Action.

6. Confidentiality

- 6.1 Anyone making a complaint has the right to confidentiality. Where a member of staff is being complained about they will be informed of the complaint, its progress and outcome. Information gathered during any investigation of a complaint will only be used for the purpose intended and will not be shared without the knowledge of the complainant or the staff member concerned.
- 6.2 The Director will maintain a log of, and keep confidential records relating to, each complaint received.

7. Monitoring and Review

- 7.1 The Director will report annually (in February) to the Trustee Board, keeping it informed of the number and nature of comments, compliments and complaints received; the outcomes and actions taken; and any notable issues raised.
- 7.2 The effectiveness of this policy will be monitored and amended as and when necessary by the Director. Significant changes will require the approval of the Trustee Board. The policy will also be reviewed every three years as part of a continuing review of organisational policies.