



Complaints Policy

Refreshed: September 2014

Our commitment

We aim to provide high quality services that meet our customers' needs. We believe we achieve this most of the time. If we are getting it right please let us know. We work hard to provide the best possible services but things can sometimes go wrong. If you are not happy with us please tell us.

If you have a comment or complaint we want to make it as easy as possible for you to tell us about it, this is why we have a complaints procedure. We value the views of our customers. Your views give us valuable information about our services and the way that they are delivered.

An effective complaints procedure ensures that we have an opportunity to put things right for an individual who has received a poor service, and so that we can learn from our mistakes and improve the accessibility, delivery and the quality of the services we provide.

Our complaint procedure is available both to customers who have used our services, and to those who think they have not received a service we said we would provide.

This procedure does not cover complaints about charities. If you have a complaint about a charity you should read the Charity Commission guidance which is available here:

www.gov.uk/complain-about-charity

What is a complaint?

We define a complaint as: *any expression of dissatisfaction, made either verbally or in writing, about us and our services.* A simple enquiry or request for action is not treated as a complaint.

Our Complaints Policy covers complaints about:

- Accessibility of services provided
- The standard and quality of services provided
- The attitude, behaviour or conduct of staff, both employed and voluntary
- Any form of discrimination
- Sub-contracted services

Ensuring Effectiveness

All complaints will be treated sensitively and confidentially. Any information you give us will be treated in the strictest confidence and in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. Any information relating to a third party will also be treated in confidence and in accordance with the Act.

The information provided will only be used for the purposes of dealing with complaints and for monitoring.

Normally a complaint should be made within three months of the incident that caused the dissatisfaction. We can extend these time limits at our discretion, where it would have been unreasonable for the complaint to have been made earlier and where it is still possible to investigate the facts.

All staff members, trustees and volunteers are made aware of the Complaints Policy and Procedure during their induction period with us. The Central Services Manager will ensure those involved in processing complaints are supported and feel confident to undertake the work.

We will keep an anonymised complaints log. This will be monitored regularly and reviewed annually by our trustees. We will review and amend the Complaints Policy as necessary in light of lessons learnt from complaints received, changes in legislation and in accordance with best practice.

Habitual or vexatious complaints

A complaint can be regarded as habitual or vexatious when the Complaints Procedure has been exhausted and/or the complainant acts unreasonably eg:

- Persistently making the same or a substantially similar complaint
- Persistently changing the substance of a complaint, or raising new issues
- Being unwilling to accept documented evidence given as factual or deny receipt of an adequate response in spite of correspondence specifically answering their questions
- Repeatedly not identifying the precise issues which they wish to be investigated
- Repeatedly raising trivial concerns/issues outside the remit of our Complaints Policy
- Threatened, abused, harassed or used physical violence towards staff at any time
- Placed unreasonable demands on staff through an excessive number of contacts
- Recorded meetings or face-to-face/telephone conversations without the prior knowledge and consent of all other parties involved

Continuing to respond to such complaints can take up a significant amount of our resources in time and money and can thereby detract from the services that can be provided for others. Where complainants have been identified as habitual or vexatious, the Chief Executive will determine what reasonable action to take, in consultation with the Chair of the Trustee Board as necessary. The person making the vexatious or habitual complaint will be informed in writing of this decision and action.

Our Complaints Procedure

How to make a complaint about us

You can make a complaint to any of our staff. You can make a complaint:

- in person, by making an appointment
- by phone, by calling: 01273 234023
- in writing, by emailing: info@bhcommunityworks.org.uk or writing to:

Community Works, Community Base, 113 Queens Road, Brighton, BN1 3XG

A complainant can choose to deal with the matter by correspondence or at meetings. We accept the involvement of an independent advocate of the customer's choice, during any stage of the complaint process, and we can signpost complainants to independent advocacy organisations who could help.

We will:

- treat your complaint seriously and in confidence, however it is made
- deal with it quickly, politely and, where appropriate, informally (eg by phone)
- apologise when we have got things wrong
- explain our position or any action we take
- avoid jargon and get our facts right
- give explanations which are clear and easy to understand
- give you a contact phone number for enquiries
- tell you how to take your complaint further

Stage One: Problem Solving

- We will attempt to deal with all complaints informally in the first instance, seeking a quick and satisfactory resolution
- If you are dissatisfied with the level of service or the conduct of any individual working for us, you should, in the first instance, report this to us as soon as possible. It is often possible for us to put things right quickly at this stage without the need for you to resort to a formal complaint
- If you are unhappy about any of our services, please speak to the relevant staff member, manager or Chief Executive
- If you are unhappy with an individual in our organisation, sometimes it is best to tell him or her directly. If you feel this is difficult or inappropriate then speak to the staff member's manager or the Chief Executive
- Often we will be able to give you a response straight away. When the matter is more complicated we will give you at least an initial response within five working days

Stage Two: Formal Complaint

- If you're not satisfied with our response or wish to raise the matter more formally, please write to or notify the Chief Executive. If your complaint is about the Chief Executive, please write to or notify the Chair of our Trustee Board
- The Chief Executive may investigate the complaint and the response made during the informal stage and attempt to resolve the issues, or delegate any aspect of the investigation to a nominee
- If the complaint involves a staff member(s) the Chief Executive, or delegated nominee will also offer the opportunity for the individual staff member to put forward their account in the form of a written statement
- All complaints will be logged. You will receive a written acknowledgement within five working days. The aim is to investigate your complaint properly and give you a reply within ten working days. The reply will explain:

- whether we uphold your complaint
- what we plan to do about the issues raised in your complaint
- if we do not agree with your complaint, why not
- how you can appeal if you are unhappy with our decision
- If your complaint is particularly complex the timescales may be longer. We will keep you informed of the reason for any delay and when you can expect a full reply
- If the matter is not resolved to your satisfaction during this stage and you remain aggrieved you may ask for your complaint to be referred to Stage Three

Stage Three: Your right to Appeal

- If after we have responded you are not satisfied, please write to or notify the Chair of our Trustee Board
- You will be sent an acknowledgment by the Chair after you've notified us that you wish to proceed to Stage Three. We aim to respond within seven working days
- At this stage your complaint will be looked at by a Complaints Panel, which will consist of the Chair of the Trustee Board and two other trustees. You will have the option to meet with the Complaints Panel if you wish and a meeting date will be offered within 10 working days of our receiving notification that you wish to proceed to Stage Three
- You will then be sent a letter confirming the decision of the Complaints Panel. We aim to respond within seven working days of meeting with the panel
- When we notify you of the outcome of the Stage Three Appeal, this will be our final response to your complaint