



Complaints Policy – Guidelines for Staff

1. Introduction

All users of Herts Vision Loss's services have the right to raise a complaint. As a matter of good practice it is essential that we have in place an accessible and easy to understand complaints service which provides an effective response, and where appropriate, an independent review. Herts Vision Loss is regulated by the Charities Commission and relevant pieces of legislation which require a robust Complaints policy.

2. Purpose of Complaints Service

The broad purpose of the complaint service is to recognise the rights of all users of our services and should:

- Enable clients to raise a complaint about the quality or nature of the service offered and receive redress as quickly as possible.
- Ensure complaints are acted on and are dealt with appropriately within a reasonable time frame.
- Provide a means of independent review for a complaint.
- Act as an important measure of quality of services provided by the organisation.

The aim is to resolve problems as soon as possible, however there are further steps, which can be taken if the complainant is not satisfied with our initial response.

3. Who Can Complain?

Any actual, potential or previous user of our service, their advocate or third party on behalf of the service user (but with the clients express wishes) has the right to make a complaint if dissatisfied.

There may be times when complaints come from other sources, for example, other service providers, fellow agencies and local businesses. We have an equal duty to respond to these complaints and to follow the good practice guidelines we have adopted for service users' complaints.

The complainant may wish to have a friend, relative or advocate to support them. Herts Vision Loss can help to identify independent help. The complainant may wish to seek advice from the Citizen's Advice Bureau, or to approach a statutory body or an advocacy service. The organisation should provide them with the necessary contact person and offer any help as necessary.

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Anonymous complaints cannot be dealt with via the formal process, but they should not be ignored. Often an anonymous caller is not complaining but providing information. Someone telephoning to complain is providing information, which should be acted on.

Where a complaint is considered to be persistent or vexatious then this must be raised with Herts Vision Loss's Board who will consider what further action is required.

4. Confidentiality

The complaints service should respect people's desire for confidentiality. We should ensure that people who complain are not subject to discrimination or retribution. If the complainant is a service user then it is important to inform them of who will be involved and informed about the complaint. The full details of the complaint should be kept separately. Herts Vision Loss's Policy on Confidentiality should be upheld by all staff throughout the investigation of the complaint.

5. Managing Complaints early – informal stage

Before users of our service feel it is necessary to activate a formal complaint there may be an opportunity of "putting things right", and resolving dissatisfaction at the first opportunity informally, but without minimising the complaint.

There is a commonly held view that to apologise to people who are complaining is to admit liability. This is not true. It may help to defuse the situation if staff apologise for the upset or anger we have caused. Staff should use a phrase like "I am sorry you have been made angry / upset; how can we put things right?"

Most complaints can be dealt with locally, however they will not be resolved unless time is committed to finding a solution. The complaint will also not be resolved if the person making it does not feel they are being listened to and their complaint given adequate attention.

The importance of the problem solving, or informal stage of the complaints service, needs to be recognised by all staff. Members of staff will have failed in their responsibilities to service users if they merely direct the complaint to Herts Vision Loss's Board. Time spent talking over the concerns of the individual should be seen as part of normal service delivery.

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At this stage the complaint may not be in writing and can be made in person or over the telephone or via a representative. This initial contact needs to be recorded on a complaint form. The record should include the nature of the complaint, a record of the initial conversations or meetings and the outcome, decision and actions taken. These records may be used in later stages of the complaints procedure and shared with the complainant.

6. The Formal Stage

If it is not possible to resolve the complaint at the informal stage, the complainant should be told where to take their complaint and when they can expect a response. They should be kept informed of the process and given an explanation if deadlines are not met.

All complaints should be thoroughly and objectively investigated. Procedures should include independent review within the organisation (i.e. review by someone within the organisation but separate from the details of the complaint).

There may be occasion when the time frame needs to be extended. Examples of such reasons include absence of key people required to inform the inquiry, amount of information being gathered, information being collected indicating that other actions are required outside the complaints service, e.g. the disciplinary or grievance procedures. It is important to maintain contact with the complainant and inform them of the delay and to give them a revised time frame.

7. Recording the Complaint

All complaints must be recorded on a complaints form. The record should include details of the complainant, the nature of the complaint, a summary of the initial contact with the complainant and a record of any decisions and actions taken at the time of the complaint.

8. Monitoring Process

All complaints must be monitored and the information shared with the Chair of Herts Vision Loss.

It is anticipated that all complaints will have been investigated and have resulted in a satisfactory outcome within 6 months of receiving the initial complaint. This time scale will be monitored over the next year.

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9. Management of 'out of time' Complaints

In most cases complaints will be deemed to be “out of time” if they are raised 6 months after the event. If a service user wishes to make a complaint about something that happened more than 6 months ago, staff should refer it to the Chief Executive Officer. The CEO will make the decision on what further action should be taken. Even if the complaint is out of time, it should not inhibit the Charity’s commitment to investigate serious complaints.

10. Informing Herts Vision Loss’s Insurance Company

Herts Vision Loss’s insurance company should be contacted immediately:

- If the complaint is the result of an injury
- If the complainant is threatening legal action
- If the complaint has arisen out of financial loss due to advice given by a Herts Vision Loss’s staff.

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