

Healthwatch South Tees Policy and Procedures: Comments and complaints

1. Statement of policy

- 1.1 This policy is intended for use by anyone who has interaction with Healthwatch South Tees (HWST) as a service.
- 1.2 Quality of service is an important measure of an organisation's effectiveness and HWST welcomes feedback and ideas as to how we might do things better.
- 1.3 HWST is committed to the continuous improvement of its services and will actively encourage comments from service users, including telling us when we get things wrong.
- 1.4 HWST encourages everyone to deal with concerns directly and in a timely manner to avoid difficulties escalating. We will make our comments and complaints policy and procedure available to anyone that wants it.

2. Standards for handling complaints

- 2.1 HWST treats as a complaint any expression of dissatisfaction with our service that calls for a response. We will listen to complaints, treat them seriously and sensitively, and learn from them.
- 2.2 Service users will be treated with courtesy and fairness at all times. We also expect that they will be courteous and fair in dealings with our staff at all times.
- 2.3 Every effort will be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned. Information will be handled and shared on a need to know basis only. Information must be stored in a secure place with access to designated people only, in line with data protection.
- 2.4 We will deal with complaints promptly in line with the procedure and timescales below.

3. Complaints procedure

Informal resolution

- 3.1 In the first instance, HWST will seek to resolve any dissatisfaction informally. We encourage service users to raise any concerns with an

appropriate member of staff with a view to resolving misunderstandings and/or differences of opinion as simply and quickly as possible. A record of the issue and outcome should be made by the member of staff and passed to the CEO at MVDA as the senior responsible officer for HWST.

Formal process: stage 1

- 3.2 If informal resolution is not possible, the complaint should be made in writing (by email or letter) to the CEO at MVDA using the contact details at the end of this document. An appropriate advocate may be used where necessary. The complainant should provide as much clear detail as possible, including any relevant documents and correspondence

All written complaints must be referred immediately to the CEO. If the CEO is not available for an extended period (e.g. annual leave, sick leave) the complaint will be referred internally in line with any cover arrangements in place.

Formal process: stage 2

- 3.5 A complainant who is still dissatisfied may seek a review of the complaint by the HWST Partnership Board's Chair, who may seek the involvement of other members of the Partnership Board and others within MVDA and RCVDA in carrying out an investigation. The decision of the Chair will be final.

Timeframe

- 3.6 Concerns will be dealt with as promptly as possible. Complaints will be acknowledged in writing or by phone within three working days and we will aim to resolve the complaint within 10 working days.
- 3.7 It may occasionally be necessary to extend the time limit if, for example, the matter is complex or all relevant parties are not available to enable investigation to proceed. In this case HWST will keep the complainant informed of progress, the reasons for the delay, and the date by which a response can be expected.
- 3.8 Following any stage of the procedure, a complainant has a maximum of 28 days from the date of the response to request that their complaint be progressed to the next stage.

4. Remedies

- 4.1 All complaints and the action taken will be logged to enable monitoring of the types of problems that arise, the best way to sort them out and how to improve service delivery.

- 4.2 When we get things wrong we will act to:
- a. accept responsibility
 - b. explain what went wrong and why, and
 - c. put things right by making any changes required (e.g. staff training).

Serious complaints

- 4.3 If a complaint against a staff member is upheld, the organisation employing the member of staff may invoke the disciplinary procedure. This is an internal decision relevant to the organisation concerned only.
- 4.4 Managers should immediately inform the CEO of any serious complaints such as harassment, and the CEO will immediately inform the Chair so that appropriate action can be taken.

Unreasonable complaints or behaviour

- 4.5 Organisations with responsibility for Healthwatch South Tees reserves the right to address unreasonably persistent or vexatious complaints and/or behaviour with the complainant.

Address for correspondence

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