

## **Commonword Enterprises** **Complaints Policy**

Commonword intends to provide the best possible service to all. To this end we ensure that client and worker behaviour accords with equal opportunities and constitutional guidelines. Any client is entitled to make a complaint if they feel this has not been achieved. This policy covers all complaints about any aspects of the organisation, including events and workshops. It does not necessarily exclude social activities. The procedure outlined in this policy is intended to enable Commonword to respond quickly, clearly and properly to complaints and to know when and why people are not satisfied with its services so that it can improve them.

There is a separate disciplinary and grievance procedure for paid workers in the organisation, which may be invoked in relation to a complaint.

### **What is a complaint?**

- A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, either written or spoken.
- A complaint can be made by an individual or a group.

You may wish to complain if you are not satisfied with the way you have been treated or by the service you have received from Commonword.

### **Principles of Commonword's complaints procedure**

- Commonword recognises that compliments and complaints are an important part of feedback from clients.
- All complaints, will be investigated fully and fairly.
- Complaints will be dealt with in confidence. The only exception to this is when others could be put at risk by matters referred to in the complaint or there are criminal or legal issues which Commonword cannot ignore.
- All parties in a complaint shall be fully informed of this complaints policy and procedure.
- If the person complaining is not happy with the response to the complaint, she or he will have the right to appeal.
- Written records will be kept for five years of all formal complaints. After this period they will be destroyed.

### **Who can make a complaint?**

- A complaint under this policy is one made by a client about the service provided.
- A complaint can also be made by a parent, carer or family member of a client if it is about the service provided to the client and usually should be made with their knowledge and consent.

This procedure does not cover complaints made by Commonword staff, volunteers, or board members, who need to follow agreed grievance, disciplinary or other internal procedures.



## Unreasonable or vexatious complaints

A complaint may be unreasonable or vexatious where one or more of the following apply:

- There are insufficient or no grounds for the complaint, or grounds do not fall within the remit of the complaints policy and procedure.
- The complainant refuses to specify the grounds of a complaint despite offers of assistance.
- The complainant refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved.
- The complainant raises subsidiary or new issues whilst a complaint is being addressed that were not part of the complaint at the start of the complaint process.
- The complainant changes the substance or basis of the complaint without reasonable justification whilst the complaint is being addressed.

This is not an exhaustive list. For more information please refer to our policy on dealing with unreasonable, abusive, persistent or vexatious complaints and complainants.

## Serious complaints

If the complaint is of a serious nature (e.g. in relation to conduct which might breach child protection, health and safety, or other relevant policy) then the complaint cannot be dealt with informally and must always be reported immediately to the Chief Executive, who must then report this immediately to the Chair or a member of the Board.

If the complaint is deemed to involve either child protection or health and safety risks or issues it may also be necessary for Commonword, in the person of the Chief Executive (taking Board advice), or for the Board to report the matter to the relevant authority or regulatory body.

## Suspension from or of services

If a complaint is deemed to be serious in nature, or has the potential to put at risk other service users besides the parties to the complaint, then the Board has the power, at its discretion, to:

- Suspend from Commonword or from the services provided one or both parties to the complaint.
- Suspend any part of the service where it is deemed continuing the service could put at risk service users.

## Complaints Procedure

Once a complaint is made, it will first be dealt with informally if possible. At this stage, the complaint or any meetings will not need to be recorded. If the complaint cannot be resolved informally or is too serious to be dealt with informally then it must be **put in writing**. This starts the formal complaints procedure, where written records will be kept of all proceedings.



A formal complaint should state:

- What is being complained about and why
- Exactly what happened
- When it happened
- Which member of staff was involved
- What outcome/remedy the complainant is seeking

If the complaint is not about one incident but about a number of incidents or about the way Commonword does things which the complainant thinks are wrong, this needs to be explained and examples given.

If it is not possible for the complaint to be put in writing the complainant should be put in touch with the Finance & Office Manager so that their complaint can be listened to and recorded in writing

### **Formal Complaint Procedure**

1. The written complaint is logged and a complaints file created.
2. The complaint is reviewed to ensure that there are sufficient grounds and that it falls within the remit of the complaints process.
3. Where the complaint is deemed not to have sufficient grounds or not to fall within the remit of the complaints process you shall receive the decision in writing within 7 days of the receipt of the complaint.
4. Where the complaint is deemed to have sufficient grounds and to fall within the remit of the complaints process the Chair or another officer of the management committee will be informed as soon as possible.
5. A copy of the complaint and this procedure will be sent to all parties involved within 14 days of the complaint being received.
6. A complaints body will be set up by the management committee within a further 14 days, with the purpose of recommending options to the committee. The body will be comprised of three members of the Management Committee or else two members of the Management Committee and a further member co-opted for their professional expertise in the relevant area of the complaint.
7. Should sufficient Management Committee members be unavailable to take part in the complaints body, the Management Committee may appoint a senior member of Commonword's staff to take forward the complaint, provided that member of staff has no involvement, direct or indirect, with the matter giving rise to the complaint.
8. The complaints body/senior member of staff will aim to complete investigations and interview all relevant people within 28 days. If the investigation will take longer than 28 days, all parties will be fully informed. In serious cases, the complaints body can take immediate action.
9. The management committee shall meet within 14 days to discuss the recommended options and reach a decision on a course of action to resolve the complaint.
10. All parties shall receive the decision in writing, or as appropriate, of the management committee within 7 days.

During the complaints process it should be remembered that Commonword is a small voluntary organisation and there may be situations where it is not possible to respond



within the time scales set out above. For example, if Board members are unavailable at the time the complaint is made.

When you are told the outcome of the complaint, you will be told:

- What investigation was undertaken
- Whether the complaint is upheld or not
- The reason for the decision
- What you should expect if the complaint is upheld (e.g. an apology, a new way of working, help to move to a more appropriate service)

## **Appeal Process**

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your complaint, or your complaint was deemed not to have sufficient grounds or not to be within the remit of the complaints process, you can respond to the Board. The procedure for doing this is as follows:

1. If either party is dissatisfied with the decision, they can make a response to the management committee within 14 days of the written decision being sent.
2. If a response is made within the 14 days, the complaint will be referred to the management committee for further consideration.
3. The Board will consider any further submissions and speak to the person who investigated the complaint. The Board will then make a decision about whether to agree with or turn down your complaint.
4. The decision of the Board at this stage is final.