

ORKNEY ALCOHOL COUNSELLING & ADVISORY SERVICE

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE (CLIENTS)

1. Why have a complaints policy?

The organisation aims to provide a first class service but there may be occasions when you're not happy about something, and if this is the case it is important for you to tell us.

The aim of this complaints procedure is to give you clear details of what steps you can take to try and get things put right where there's a problem.

The complaints procedure also gives us the chance to keep an eye on the quality of service we provide so that we can continually work to improve it.

2. What is a complaint?

A complaint is defined as:-

“an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard and quality of service, action or lack of action by the organisation or its staff affecting an individual customer or group of customers.”

A complaint may also be an opportunity for the organisation to learn more about how to meet the needs of its customers.

3. Who can use the complaints policy?

Anyone who receives or requests a service from the organisation can use the complaints policy.

The procedure is also open to people who may be acting on your behalf (but, as you will see later, we do encourage you to try to sort things out with us first).

Generally, however, we will not discuss your business with third parties unless you have authorised us to do so.

It will not normally be possible for us to deal with anonymous complaints, as it is obviously difficult for us to check things with the person making the complaint.

4. What can you complain about?

You can complain about any aspect of our service which you are unhappy about, for example:

- if you have not received information you have asked for
- if you feel that a member of staff, a committee member or a counsellor has not behaved reasonably towards you
- if you feel you have been unfairly discriminated against

We are always interested in comments on our policies from individuals and groups. While we are clear that these may not necessarily be complaints they will still be handled via the complaints procedure to ensure that the comments are effectively managed and responses are given within a reasonable period.

We suggest, however, that you contact us quickly if you are unhappy about something. It is difficult for you - and us - to investigate a case if time has passed.

5. Trying to sort things out informally

You have every right to make a formal complaint whenever you wish to, but in the first instance it can often be quicker and easier for everyone if the problem can be sorted out informally; the choice is yours. We can deal more effectively with your problem if you tell us exactly what it is and how you would like to see it resolved.

To try and resolve the problem informally, the best thing for you to do is to talk to (or drop a line to) our Manager. He or she will let you know how long it should take for him/her to investigate the problem, and hopefully also to sort it out. If (s)he is not available when you call please leave a message.

6. The formal complaints policy

If the problem has not been sorted out informally or if you have a complaint against a member of staff, you should in the first instance complain to the Manager. Complaints about the Manager should be sent to the Chairman.

When you make a complaint it is really important for you to let us know exactly what the problem is and how you would like to see it resolved. We would encourage you to do this in writing wherever possible and normally within three weeks of your becoming concerned about a specific action which we have taken. If this is not easy you can complain by telephone or in person and we will summarise it in writing. If the Manager is not available your complaint will be noted by the person who speaks to you and passed on to the co-ordinator, or to the Chairman if the Manager will not be available in the next 2 working days.

If you have made a complaint by telephone or in person, the member of staff who notes the complaint will check with you that they have taken a correct record, and you will normally be asked to sign it. In this way everyone is clear on what the complaint is about.

Whether you have complained in writing, by phone or in person, we will write to you within five working days to acknowledge that your complaint is being dealt with.

We will then write to you again within three weeks of receiving a complaint to let you know progress and if possible the outcome. Do please remember that some things may not be within our control and may therefore be less easy to sort out.

You may subsequently decide to withdraw the complaint. Depending on the issue raised, it may be necessary for us to continue investigating it.

If you are not happy with the response you will be able to use the appeals procedure.

7. Taking your complaint further - the appeals procedure

If you don't feel that the Manager and Chairman have resolved your complaint satisfactorily, you can appeal to the voluntary members of the Management Committee. Again we suggest you do this as quickly as possible and normally within three weeks. We will write to you within five working days to acknowledge receipt of your letter.

The Management Committee has setup an Appeals Sub-committee of 3 committee members not previously involved and which meets as required. The Chairman of the Management Committee will normally be kept informed of progress of the complaint where (s)he is not a member of the sub-committee. The Chairman will not be kept informed if (s)he has been involved in the decision about which you are complaining. If in addition to your written complaint you are keen to talk to the sub-Committee you can do this. If you want to bring along a friend or adviser for example from Orkney Citizens Advice Bureau then this is fine.

You will be notified of the date of the Appeals Sub-committee hearing within three working weeks of your request, to take place within the following four working weeks.

The Chairman of the Appeals Sub-Committee will write to you within five working days of the meeting to let you know the decision.

8. Who will know about my complaint?

We will, as far as possible, respect the confidentiality of your complaint. Whilst we are looking into your complaint your name will not be divulged any more than is absolutely necessary within the Association, and if your complaint goes to the Appeals Sub-Committee then only the Chairman of the Management Committee and the members of the sub-committee will be told who has complained.

9. Getting independent advice

We would always hope that any problem could be sorted out informally.

However, you may feel it is important to get independent advice before you decide whether to complain to us formally. Advice agencies in this area include:-

- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Solicitor
- Age Concern Orkney
- Advocacy Orkney

Further assistance and advice may be obtained from:

- COSCA (Counselling & Psychotherapy in Scotland)
16 Melville Terrace, Stirling, FK8 2NE.
Tel: 01786 475 140 Email: info@cosca.org.uk
- BACP (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy)
BACP House, 15 St John's Business Park, Lutterworth, LE17 4HB,
Tel: 01455 883300 Email: bacp@bacp.co.uk

10. How do we record and monitor complaints?

Complaints can help us as well as you! All formal complaints made to the organisation are recorded by the Manager, who will regularly advise the Management Committee of changes or improvements the organisation may be taking as a result of complaints received.

11. Improving our service to you

Complaints aren't the only way of telling us what you think of the service we provide. We always welcome suggestions on how we can improve things so if you have any ideas about this please let us know.

Adopted by the Board of Management on March 19th 2003

Amended on September 9th 2004

Amended on June 21st 2009