

West Kent YMCA Complaints Policy for Clients & Volunteers in all Projects - April 2017



Helping Young People Build Their Future

If your complaint relates to a staff member or manager you may exceptionally contact a different staff member, or another manager or head office (HR) who will take action to ensure your complaint is investigated. **Normally it is more appropriate, timely and effective to contact the member of staff directly.**

This complaints policy is primarily for all West Kent YMCA clients who we work with: residents, trainees, youth club members, event participants, counselling clients, young people on work experience or volunteering.

However, it also applies – when appropriate – to any formal complaints by:

- Customers [unless eBay trading / dispute rules apply]
- Volunteers [unless a formal grievance is being raised by employees and volunteers]
- Parents / Carers of clients or potential clients
- Referring agencies [statutory or voluntary] of clients or potential clients
- Funders / donors
- Commissioning / contracting organisations for our services
- Partner organisations
- Sub-contractors
- Agencies we refer in to
- Any other supporter / agency

Limitations. This policy does not relate to complaints by YMCA staff as these are dealt with under other HR policies [including but not limited to: Staff & volunteer handbook; Health & safety; Safeguarding; Equal opportunities, equality & diversity; Confidentiality, privacy & data protection; Grievance policy; Harassment, bullying & anti-discrimination; ICT policy, security & responsible usage, Code of conduct, professional boundaries; Whistleblowing confidential reporting, whistleblowing code of practice www.pcaw.org.uk by Public Concern At Work – the whistleblowing charity]

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1. WEST KENT YMCA COMPLAINTS POLICY FOR CLIENTS

West Kent YMCA values feedback from clients, service users, volunteers and other agencies and views the complaints procedure as a way of monitoring and enhancing service levels. We aim to be as helpful as possible to dissatisfied clients and to deal with complaints quickly and effectively. We recognise that if concerns are dealt with efficiently and monitored effectively, this can improve our relationship with clients and help us improve our standards, our monitoring and reporting and our quality assurance. In some cases, a complaint will help to improve our Health & Safety, our safeguarding or our public reputation. We have written procedures and service standards for dealing with complaints. We ensure some complaints such as those about harassment, discrimination, safeguarding or health & safety are dealt with quickly. We keep records of all complaints and keep complainants informed about progress and outcomes as far as we are able to. Our complaints process is clear and accessible to staff who must implement it and to all clients, customers, volunteers or other agencies who may need to use it to make a complaint. The policy is regularly reviewed and available on line, by email, fax or hard copy in all centres.

2. DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS

2.1 West Kent YMCA's complaints procedure aims to ensure that all clients have access to a system which will deal with concerns effectively and promptly. This document explains the procedure for people wishing to complain and how the issue will be handled. Staff are advised about the procedure to be followed, and are confident about what to do when a complaint is received. All parties are treated equally and in line with our equal opportunities policy. We are committed to a fair and efficient complaints system which is easily accessible. We care about providing a good service for our clients and value feedback. Complaints are monitored and used as a tool to improve our services wherever possible. We treat all complaints seriously and aim to deal with them in a constructive and sympathetic manner.

3. WHAT MAKES A GOOD COMPLAINTS SYSTEM?

3.1 We believe our complaints system is:

- Easily accessible [on email, hard copy, fax or on-line on our website – contacts]
- Easy to use
- Helpful and receptive
- Fair and objective
- Based on clear procedures and defined responsibilities
- Quick
- Thorough and rigorous
- Decisive
- Consistent
- Comprehensive
- Sensitive to any special needs and circumstances of the complainant
- Adequately resourced

3.2 Every care is taken to maintain confidentiality. Wherever possible, only those who need to consider the complaint know the identity of the complainant. However, it is important to stress that in some cases it may not be possible to preserve confidentiality, for example, if legislation applies, or allegations are made which involve third parties. You should feel confident that complaints will be dealt with impartially, objectively and professionally. There will be no adverse treatment of anyone because they have made a complaint. On this basis, we reserve the right to ignore all anonymous complaints as we cannot investigate or feedback to the complainant.

3.3 Service users should bear in mind that while most complaints are straightforward and can be dealt with quickly, some are complex, so take longer to deal with properly. Complainants will be kept informed of progress and, if there is any delay, will be told why.

4. STAGES IN THE COMPLAINTS PROCESS

4.1 If you wish to make a complaint, there are four stages to the procedure that should be followed:

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| Stage 1 | Discuss your complaint with local staff [such as your Key Worker]. It is hoped that your complaint will be resolved by them straight away. |
| Stage 2 | If the answer you have received is unsatisfactory; submit a written complaint to the Project Manager. Copies of the complaint form are available from the office, all centres, on our website, by email / fax and in this policy. |
| Stage 3 | Should the matter not be satisfactorily resolved you should raise the matter in writing with the Chief Executive who will discuss the issue with you. He/she will confirm his/her decision in writing to you as soon as possible. |
| Stage 4 | Should you not be satisfied with this decision, you should forward a copy of your complaint to the Chair of West Kent YMCA Board of Directors c/o Head Office, who will arrange for your complaint to be considered independently by a nominated Trustee. Their decision will be final and will be confirmed in writing to you as soon as possible. |

4.2 Before we consider a complaint, West Kent YMCA aims to ensure we have a clear record of what the complainant feels went wrong and what, in the complainant's view, we should do to put things right. We keep records at all stages, which show who dealt with the complaint, what action was taken and the complainant's response.

5. OUR COMMITMENT TO GOOD INVESTIGATIVE PRACTICE

5.1 We are confident that most complaints will be dealt with speedily and simply. Where, however, a more substantial inquiry is required we will:

- Contact the complainant to arrange a meeting or time for a telephone conversation
- Clarify the complaint;
- Set out in writing for the complainant our understanding of the complaint;
- Clarify the outcome sought;
- Check whether the complainant needs support of any kind, or has impaired sight or hearing, or a language difficulty, and check what help the complainant needs to understand these discussions.
- Check that the complainant fully understands the complaints procedure.
- Brief ourselves on relevant legal, policy and administrative details to the complaint.
- Assess whether the complaints procedure is the most appropriate way of handling the complaint and consider possible alternative procedures.
- Discuss the alternatives with the complainant.
- Consider whether the complaint can be resolved without further investigation.
- Obtain all relevant documents and keep copies for our records.
- Establish the sequence of events and names of staff directly involved.
- Carry out sufficient preparatory work prior to any interviews.
- Use open, not leading questions.
- We will endeavour not to express opinions verbally or by using body language.
- Consider whether a 'witness' should support the complainant at any interviews.
- Conduct interviews in an informal, relaxed manner and make notes of answers given.
- Try to separate hearsay evidence from fact.
- Deal with conflicting evidence by seeking corroborative proof. If this is not available, then as an exceptional measure, consideration can be given to organising a carefully managed meeting between conflicting parties.

- At the end of the interview, summarise the main points covered and ask if the interviewee has anything to add.
- Where possible make formal records of the interview within 24 hours.
- Investigate thoroughly in order to make a fair and properly informed decision.
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of their complaint. Where a complaint is taking significantly longer to investigate than previously advised, the complainant will be advised and given an explanation of the reasons and the expected revised timescale.
- Draft a report of any evidence obtained and circulate this for comment to those interviewed, including the complainant, unless there are special reasons not to do so.
- Consider comments and amend reports as necessary, adding conclusions and, if appropriate, a suggested remedy for the complainant.

6. IF THE COMPLAINT IS NOT UPHELD

- 6.1** We are aware that complaints usually come from people who feel they have a genuine sense of grievance. In cases where the complaint is not upheld, great care will be taken not to increase that feeling of grievance. We will attempt to give a clear, full and sympathetic explanation in any communication setting out the reasons for not upholding a complaint.

7. EFFECTIVE MONITORING

- 7.1** To monitor our complaints system we will, as far as practicably possible, ensure that:

- The complaint is clearly defined and our response answers the complaint.
- We have collected enough information to enable a fair conclusion to be drawn.
- We advise the complainant what to do at each stage if he or she is still dissatisfied.
- Time targets are met.
- Action is taken to correct any mistakes during the complaints procedure.
- We are aware of any wider policy/practice implications which may require further action and we monitor complaints by reference to gender, ethnicity, age, disability, sexuality, and faith in accordance with our equal opportunities policy.

Report, Decision & Action

Client notified of decision?

Yes

No

Date

Copy sent to Head Office [for HR records] on date by

Signed by

Date