

HANDLING A COMPLAINT PROCEDURE

Purpose of the Policy

This policy defines the way that Healthwatch Hampshire will deal with complaints, and is intended to provide guidance for all Healthwatch employees as well as ensuring consistency in dealing with complaints.

Healthwatch Hampshire recognises that complaints may be made for a wide variety of reasons and that they provide an opportunity for learning for individuals and the organisation. Establishing the facts and finding out why a situation occurred is more important than apportioning blame. It is also recognised that being involved in a complaint can be a stressful experience for the complainant and employee, and support needs to be available throughout the process.

The aim of the policy is to provide a system which:

- Is accessible to users
- Deals with complaints as close as possible to the point at which they arise
- Is fair to all parties
- Provides a thorough and effective mechanism for dealing with real grievances
- Is quick and efficient
- Ensures that lessons are learnt from complaints and applied to the operation of the organisation.

Scope and Definition

All comments and feedback about Healthwatch Hampshire will be listened to, and ideas for improvement will be included in the normal monitoring processes of the organisation and projects.

It is important to understand the difference between a concern and a complaint. If you are unsure whether someone is making a complaint or wishes to raise and discuss a concern then please firstly check with the person for clarity and also speak with your line manager for guidance.

A concern is an expression of worry or disquiet about an event or incident which is usually current and can be completely remedied to the individual's satisfaction within a short period of time.

A complaint is a formal expression of dissatisfaction about any aspect of Healthwatch Hampshire or service delivered within Healthwatch Hampshire projects which has personally affected an individual and which requires an investigation and a formal response in order to promote resolution between the parties concerned. It is usually historical (i.e. happened in the past) and cannot be immediately remedied. Any complaint received by Healthwatch Hampshire relating to the content of an NHS complaint letter (written with the consent of the patient) and sent from the independent NHS health complaints advocacy service at Healthwatch Hampshire must be re-directed to be dealt with by the service provider's complaints handling team.

It can be received in a variety of formats i.e. verbal, written, videotape etc and Healthwatch Hampshire will encourage people to use the method of communication that is most relevant for them.

All employees working in Healthwatch Hampshire will follow the Healthwatch Hampshire Complaints Policy for complaints relating to Healthwatch Hampshire activities and employees. This is to ensure that

Healthwatch Hampshire has an accurate view of all complaints and delivers the same level of service to all complainants.

Processing a Concern

The procedure for handling a concern will be to clarify if it is a voiced concern or do they want to make a complaint. Discuss the concern with the individual and inform them what action you are going to take i.e. if it is about an individual that you are going to raise the matter with them and log it as a concern. Check that the individual is satisfied with your action.

Processing a Complaint

The procedure for handling complaints is in two parts: Local Resolution and a Review Panel.

Local Resolution

Many expressions of dissatisfaction can be handled with an apology at the time. Where this is insufficient and the person wishes to make a complaint the following procedure will be used.

Every employee who receives a complaint is responsible for either dealing with it themselves or passing it on to someone who can without delay. The timescales for dealing with complaints are shown in the Monitoring section.

All complaints will be recorded in the Healthwatch Hampshire Complaints file. Complaints that relate to an employee or the running of a specific project will also be recorded in the Project Complaints file. This will enable The Healthwatch Hampshire Manager to include the information in their regular review processes.

Every complaint will be recorded within 24 hours and an acknowledgement sent to the complainant within 3 working days explaining who is responsible for investigating the complaint (this would normally be the Healthwatch Hampshire Manager depending on the nature of the complaint) and enclosing a copy of the Complaints Process, which explains the process and the timescales for dealing with complaints.

The Healthwatch Hampshire Manager may also inform the Chairperson of the Healthwatch Hampshire Advisory Board if they believe it is appropriate.

Any employees who are complained about will be informed of the complaint as soon as possible and kept informed of progress throughout by the Healthwatch Hampshire Manager. Support must be provided from within Healthwatch Hampshire or from the employing service provider organisation.

In all cases direct contact with all people involved in the complaint is a vital part of the investigation to ensure that a full understanding is gained before actions taken.

In the case of a serious complaint somebody outside of the service involved should carry out the investigation.

If it becomes clear during the investigation that disciplinary action may be involved the complaints procedure must halt and the disciplinary procedure of the employing body invoked, and the complainant informed.

As a result of the investigation a summary of the outcomes, covering all aspects of the complaint will be produced and given to the complainant. This will normally be a written summary but where appropriate, a verbal explanation may also be given. All employees involved in the complaint should have an opportunity to comment on the reply.

When a complaint is found to be justified, an apology should be offered to the complainant. Where appropriate the complainant should be offered a meeting with the people concerned.

The complainant should be made aware of their right to request a review of the complaint by a Review Panel.

Review Panel

Where a complaint is about the Healthwatch Hampshire Manager or a complainant requests a review it should be passed to the Chairperson of The Healthwatch Hampshire Advisory Board. The Chairperson should acknowledge the request in writing and, in the case of a requested review ask the complainant to set out their remaining grievances.

The Chairperson should identify a panel of people (minimum of three people, with a nominated chair) who have not been involved in the complaint to investigate and prepare a report and recommendations. The Chairperson will then prepare a written response to the complainant and communicate it to them in the most appropriate way.

Timetable

- Record the complaint in the register(s) within 24 hours.
- Deliver confirmation of receipt to the complainant with the name of the investigating person within 3 working days.
- Deliver the result of the investigation to the complainant within 20 working days.

In the case of a request for a Review Panel

- Record the request for a review in the register(s) within 24 hours.
- Deliver confirmation of receipt to the complainant with the name of the investigating panel within 3 working days.
- Deliver the result of the investigation to the complainant within 20 working days.
- Where the dates cannot be met a letter will be sent to the complainant giving the reasons and a revised date given. This will also be filed in the Healthwatch Hampshire Complaints file.

Monitoring

A review of complaints will be included in every project, regular monitoring meeting and a review of all complaints will be included in the regular Management meetings.

The Healthwatch Hampshire Manager will review the policy annually.

Ends.

Healthwatch Hampshire April 2023.