

2. COMPLAINTS

1. Policy

Avenues wants to ensure that everyone using or wishing to use its services, relatives, advocates, other professionals or members of the public are fully aware of how to make a complaint. Also they are confident in the knowledge that they can make a complaint that will be listened to and dealt with fairly without being penalised or discriminated against.

This policy does not apply to staff for whom separate procedures exist (see below).

2. Making People Aware

The booklet “**How to Make a Complaint**” should be made available to every individual who we support, family, friends and advocates. Staff should ensure that each individual or someone acting on their behalf understands the contents.

In order not to exclude people who are not able to read and write, complaints will be received in any form including tape, symbols, video and pictures.

Anyone else who wishes to make a complaint should also be given the appropriate copy of “How to Make a Complaint” (the content may vary slightly for different areas and different people who are receiving a service).

The appropriate copy of “How to Make a Complaint” should also be available for reference in every service.

Copies of this booklet can be obtained from the Complaints Officer at Avenues Head Office.

This booklet is also available on CD. A copy will be available at each service and extra copies can be obtained from the Complaints Officer.

If anyone requires a booklet in another format or language the request must be made to the Complaints Officer.

Members of staff should be aware of the procedure as outlined in the booklet “How to Make a Complaint”, and ensure that individuals know how to make a complaint, and understand the process.

3. Complaints

Any complaint is very important to the person making it, and should therefore be dealt with in a sympathetic and understanding manner.

Complaints could range from issues like -“I’m fed up with cold tea all the time” - to various issues regarding service or housing provision, and on to more serious matters like poor working practice of staff. People who make a complaint do not always start with “I want to make a complaint”, so it is very important to listen carefully to what people say. You must remember though, that whatever the level of the complaint may be, it is of great concern to the person making it.

Some reasons why people complain;

- Services don’t meet their needs
- Staff can be rude and offhand
- Services are provided ineffectively
- They are frustrated
- They feel they have no control of their lives They feel they are robbed of dignity and self respect We don’t listen.

The main reasons people don’t complain ;

- Fear - fear of retribution, being penalised, “picked on”.
- They don’t know how to complain, or who to complain to.
- They are not aware that they can complain.

4. Recording the Information

When someone makes a complaint to you, you must do the following:

- 1 Make a note of the date and time that the complaint was made.
- 2 Write down details of the name, address and telephone number of the person making the complaint.
- 3 Write down details of the complaint, including as much information as possible.
- 4 Give the person a copy of “How to Make a Complaint”, or if that is not possible let them know where they can get a copy.
- 5 Put the information you have recorded in the complaints file, if it is confidential log that a complaint has been made and store the information in a lockable place.

5. Reporting the Complaint

The Complaints Officer should be notified immediately, and a copy of all the details should be sent to him/her. You should also notify your line manager.

Out of office hours

If the complaint needs immediate attention and cannot be resolved by staff that are present, the on call manager should be informed.

If you resolve the complaint satisfactorily on the spot, you are still required to report the complaint to the Complaints Officer. In this case you should also report the details of the

action taken to resolve the complaint satisfactorily.

A complaint can still be made and recorded even if the person does not want to give his/her name etc.

In this case, all other information as required above should be recorded and passed to the Complaints Officer.

6. Dealing with Complaints when someone makes a complaint:

- **Don't be defensive**

Don't argue with the person making the complaint. Listen to them sympathetically and accept that there is a problem.

Don't take it personally. Your attitude will affect the whole situation. Remember that the person making the complaint is already unhappy.

- **Don't assign blame**

If individuals, their relatives or representatives are unhappy about something, we have a responsibility to listen to them and do something about it.

Don't blame any particular service, department or member of staff. We are **all** responsible for the quality of the services that are provided.

- **Don't make any promises**

Don't make promises that you are unable to keep. That will only increase the level of dissatisfaction, and give justified cause for another complaint. Don't make any promises on behalf of other people - they might not be able to keep them either.

- **Treat people with respect, and be friendly**

Remember everyone has a right to complain. Be friendly and show respect. Tell them your name and ask them theirs.

- **Develop your listening skills**

Listen carefully. As said before, people who complain do not usually start off by saying, "I want to complain"!

Concentrate on what is being said and ask for clarification in a tactful way if you are not clear on what is being said. Take notes to ensure you remember what was said correctly. Repeat the complaint to the person making it. This will show that you have fully understood what the complaint is.

Let people talk enough to get it out of their system and make it clear to you what the complaint is.

- **Being positive**

Thank the person for bringing the matter to your attention. If they seem concerned, assure the person that he/she will not be “picked on” or penalised or discriminated against in any way because they have made a complaint. Ask them what outcome they want to achieve.

Look for a solution rather than a cause.

Look at various possibilities.

7. What Happens Next?

The Complaints Officer will make sure that:

- 1 The complaint is acknowledged in writing within three working days.
- 2 Someone is appointed to investigate the complaint and the name of that person is given to the person making the complaint.
- 3 The person who made the complaint is informed of the final outcome of the investigation, in writing.
- 4 The complaint is satisfactorily dealt with within 28 days for adults and within 14 days for children and young people and in cases where this is not possible that the reasons for the delay are fully explained in writing.
- 5 For services for children and young people a request for an independent investigation can be made by the complainant to the Complaints Officer at any point. They will ensure that someone who does not work for Avenues is appointed to look at the complaint and then make recommendations about what should be done within one month of being appointed.
- 6 The appropriate Director is informed as soon as possible of complaints and regular reports are provided to the Management Committee which separate out complaints regarding services for adults from those regarding services for children and young people.
- 7 A copy of complaints received and details of its investigation and outcome is provided to the service for the complaints file.

8. Other people to complain to

- 1 For services that are registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC), complaints may also be made to CQC or referred at any stage if a complainant wishes to do so. Details of how to contact the Commission are contained in the booklet “How to make a Complaint”.
- 2 For services for children and young people complaints may also be made to OFSTED or referred to at any stage if a complainant wishes to do so. Details of how to contact OFSTED are contained in the booklet “How to make a Complaint”.

- 3 People can complain to the local Social Services department.
- 4 If people are not happy with the response from Social Services and Avenues they can contact the Local Government ombudsman.

9. Other Policy and Procedures

- 1 The Safeguarding Adults and / or Children Procedures must be followed where the complaint concerns abuse of an individual.
- 2 Staff wishing to make a complaint about the service should raise this with their line manager and if necessary follow the Whistle Blowing Procedures.
- 3 Staff wishing to make a complaint about the way in which they have been treated should use the Grievance Procedures.

All these Policies and Procedures are in the Operational Manual, which is available in every service and office base.

The Complaints Officer can be contacted at:

Avenues Trust Group, River House, 1 Maidstone Road Sidcup Kent DA14 5TA

Telephone: 0203 535 0500

Fax: 0208 300 2196

Website: www.avenuesgroup.org.uk