

Complaints Procedure

Introduction

North Staffs Mind is committed to ensuring that all services and activities are of the highest quality. However, we recognise that there may be occasions when some service users may feel we fall below their expectations. Our Complaints Procedure helps us to respond clearly and properly to complaints.

We believe that complaints provide valuable feedback that helps us to improve our services and activities.

We

- acknowledge that complaints do happen
- are committed to investigating all complaints fully and fairly
- ask that a complaint must be made **within 12 months** of the alleged cause for complaint to allow us to investigate fully and accurately
- will not use complaints to apportion blame but to investigate every complaint in a fair, consistent, and professional manner
- have an appeals process should the complainant not be happy with the result of the response to the complaint
- regard complaints as a valuable and important part of customer feedback
- will ask complainants what they want the outcome of their complaint to be or if they can suggest solutions to the issue raised
- will deal with complaints in confidence unless this may place others at risk

What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction. A complaint may be made by an individual or a group, by a client or service user, stakeholder, or member of the public. It can relate to the way in which a person has been treated, to the service which they have received or to the policies and procedures of North Staffs Mind.

Complaints can be made to North Staffs Mind in different ways – in person, by letter, email, audiotape or phone.

Who is this procedure for?

This procedure should be used by any member of the public, client or service user or stakeholder.

The purpose of the procedure is to investigate the complaint in a fair and consistent manner, in order to satisfy complaints and concerns and to learn lessons for North Staffs Mind's ongoing service improvement and organisational development.

Complaints procedure

There are 3 stages to the procedure, and we undertake to resolve any issues at the lowest level, wherever possible.

Stage 1 – Making an informal complaint:

If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of our work, you should speak to the staff member concerned or their line manager in the first instance.

If you prefer the issue can be taken up with the Complaints Officer instead. The Complaints Officer will have an initial conversation with you to find out what you would like to see happen and if there is a simple solution that can address your concerns informally.

This will be completed within 14 days of NS Mind receiving the complaint.

Where an informal complaint is made, we aim to resolve it promptly and satisfactorily in order to prevent it leading to a formal complaint. If you are not satisfied with the results of this stage, you can go on to Stage 2 (see below). If you prefer that we deal with your complaint formally from the start you can go straight to Stage 2.

Stage 2 – Formal complaint (including investigation):

If you are not satisfied with the response you receive at Stage 1 or wish to make the complaint formal from the start you should outline your complaint by letter, email or audiotape and send it to the Complaints Officer at 83 Marsh Street, Hanley, Stoke on Trent ST1 5HN, marked 'Private and Confidential'. Formal complaints can also be made to the Complaints Officer in person or via a phone call.

If the complaint is about the Chief Executive, it should be addressed to the 'Chair of the Council of Management' at the above address and marked 'Private and Confidential'.

If you wish to make a complaint about our Council of Management, you should contact

National Mind (www.mind.org.uk) and/or the Charity Commission (www.gov.uk/complain_about-charity)

with your concerns.

Complaints will be acknowledged by letter **within 7 working days** from the date they are received.

Complaints may be made by a 'third party', a person authorised to act on your behalf – for example, an advocacy service such as Asist (www.asist.co.uk). Any complaint made in this way will be considered carefully to ensure that our response in no way breaches confidentiality.

A thorough investigation into the circumstances surrounding the complaint will be undertaken by the Complaints Officer. Once the investigation is complete, we will decide whether there are grounds for the complaint and what, if any, recommended actions need to be taken as a result.

You will receive a full response to your complaint **within 20 working days** from the start of the investigation, in writing, from the Complaints Officer.

If you are not satisfied with the response to your complaint, you will be given the opportunity to speak to a Senior Manager and given the option to appeal (Stage 3).

Stage 3 – Appeal:

If you remain unhappy with our response to your complaint you should let us know the reason(s) by letter, email or audiotape **within seven working days** of you receiving the written response to your complaint.

Reasons for dissatisfaction will be brought to the attention of our Chief Executive (or the Chair of the Council of Management where relevant).

An Appeals Panel, normally comprising three members, including a member of the Council of Management, will be convened to consider the appeal. Panel membership will be restricted to people who have had no previous involvement in the complaint.

The decision of the review process will be final. The Chief Executive or the Chair will communicate in writing within 28 working days of receiving the expression of dissatisfaction from the complainant.

Involvement of third-party organisations

You may have the right to take your complaint to an external body/third-party organisation as follows:

- BACP (British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy) (www.bacp.co.uk) for complaints about our Adult and Children and Young People counselling services.
- The Fundraising Regulator (www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk) for complaints about our fundraising activities.

Complainants can also contact Mind mind.org.uk (NAMH, National Association for Mental Health) for an independent review of North Staffs Mind's Complaints Procedure. Please note that Mind will only become involved after our complaints procedure has been exhausted and will act in this role only with the agreement of all parties concerned. Any involvement would be limited to a review of the complaints process, not an investigation of the complaint.

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