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Overview

Carers First is committed to providing the highest quality of service possible for carers and others to whom support is provided. This commitment extends to all areas of work which staff and volunteers may be involved in on behalf of the charity. It includes all general contact and communication with staff, the giving of information, advice, the provision of support and short breaks respite.

The charity wants our clients to be satisfied at all times with the service they receive and by the way they are treated. We understand that users of our service will at times wish to compliment us, make suggestions on how we can improve or indeed complain about them.

Definitions

This policy uses the following definitions:

- A compliment is an expression of praise concerning a service received.
- A comment is a suggestion for how a service can be improved.
- A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about the standard of service, an act, omission or decision of Carers First, either verbal or written, and whether justified or not, which requires a response

All complaints and suggestions will be received positively and be used as a means to improve the quality of services. People who use our services will not receive a lesser service from us if they raise concerns or make a complaint.

Principles

- Any complaint or comment received will be treated as serious and will be dealt with sensitively in compliance with this procedure.
- The procedure will be freely available and accessible via a variety of formats including online via our website.
- Complaints will be investigated fully and fairly.
- Complaints will be dealt with in confidence unless another person could be put at risk by matters referred to in the complaint.
- Any complaint that involves or may involve a safeguarding issue must immediately be reported to the Locality Safeguarding Lead and the Designated Safeguarding Officer who will follow the relevant Safeguarding processes. Such cases are likely to be reported to the Safeguarding Authorities and be subject to investigation by them.

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- Any member of staff who receives a complaint either about an incident, themselves or about another staff member of Carers First will immediately inform their Line Manager or a member of the Senior Leadership Team.
 - All reasonable efforts will be made to find a solution that is acceptable to all concerned.
 - Complainants will be given opportunities to discuss the problem and will be encouraged to use a friend to support them where appropriate.

Governance

All complaints, comments or compliments received from, or on behalf of a carer should be logged on their bluebox profile as “negative or positive feedback” and the appropriate manager informed who will take any necessary action. Depending on the nature of any complaint it may not be appropriate to log details of the complaint on the profile.

Service Managers should review all negative feedback monthly and report any themes and actions taken on the monthly report.

All complaints which reach the staged approach must be reported to the Director of Services within 2 working days of the complaint being received.

The Board of Trustees are made aware of complaints through the Chief Executive Report presented at board meetings.

Confidentiality

Everyone within the organisation is responsible for ensuring confidentiality is maintained appropriately at all times when dealing with complaints and comments.

In order to look into a complaint or concern it may be necessary to speak to other people it involves. This will be done giving away as few details as possible.

If the complaint or comment relates to a potential safeguarding concern we may be required to report the concern to the relevant bodies, eg local safeguarding team. We should always aim to seek permission for this but if the incident is time sensitive it may not always be possible.

After it's resolved, we will keep a summary on record, using the General Data Protection Regulations guidance. If appropriate a record will be placed on the carer's Bluebox profile.

We use anonymised information from complaints to make sure we learn and improve our services.

We may be obliged under contract to report complaints to funding bodies, for example the

local authority. We will not disclose any personal or identifiable details regarding the complaint without prior written consent from all parties.

Complaints

Inappropriate Complaints

Most complaints give useful feedback to us on our service. All complaints will be investigated and will not be influenced positively or negatively by the way in which it is delivered. However, Carers First has a responsibility to protect its staff from people who behave in a way which is abusive or malicious and if a complainant's behaviour prevents appropriate action the complaint cannot be pursued.

Examples of behaviour where the complaint may not be pursued:

- Abusive or threatening behaviour—whether in person or in writing.
- Persistent telephone calls, emails or letters on the same issue.
- Persistent verbal complaints that cannot be resolved.

Carers First is not required to investigate the following:

- a complaint by an employee relating to their employment (this should be handled through the grievance policy and procedure)
- a comment on how the service can be improved (this will be used as a means to improve the quality of services).
- a complaint that was made in person by telephone or email and is resolved to the complainant's satisfaction no later than the next working day after the day the complaint was given
- a complaint that has already been investigated and resolved.

If someone wishes to make a complaint, then there are three stages to go through to try and resolve the problem. They may wish to involve an advocate, friend or someone else to support at any stage. However, they should not be someone directly involved in the matter being investigated. If a sign language or community language interpreter is needed, please let the person dealing with the complaint know and every reasonable effort will be made to provide it.

Roles and Responsibilities

Designated Manager:

This should be an impartial manager who is not directly involved in the circumstances which led to the complaint as they may be required to give a witness statement. In cases of a

complaint against the Chief Executive, this should be a member of the Board of Trustees. In cases of a complaint against a Trustee, an appropriate member of the Board of Trustees will be appointed by the Chair or Vice Chair.

This person is responsible for overseeing and co-ordinating the complaint process. They will appoint someone to investigate the complaint should Stage Two be required.

They will be responsible for communicating with the complainant and any staff or volunteers who the complaint has been made against and liaising with the HR Manager should suspension of a staff member be considered during the investigation process.

Following the investigation they will be responsible for deciding if the complaint has been upheld and will liaise with the HR Manager should disciplinary action against the staff member be recommended.

If there is a likelihood that the complaint could lead to possibly disciplinary action against a staff member, the Designated Manager needs to be at least 1 reporting level below the manager likely to undertake any disciplinary hearings.

Investigating Officer:

This should be an impartial staff member who is not directly involved in the circumstances which led to the complaint.

They will be responsible for investigating the complaint, interviewing the complainant and anyone directly involved which may include staff, other professionals or users of the service, and collating any evidence which may prove or disprove the complaint.

They will complete a report which outlines their finding which the Designated Manager will use to make their decision.

Appeal Manager:

This should be an impartial manager who is not directly involved in the circumstances which led to the complaint.

They will be responsible for considering any appeal made by the complainant regarding the outcome of their complaint.

Hearing Officer:

Should a complaint be upheld and disciplinary action recommended, a Hearing Officer will be appointed to proceed with HR to undertake further actions. This post needs to be 1 reporting level higher than the Designated Manager.

Stage One – Making a complaint

In the first instance, complaints should try to be resolved informally. Whoever received the complaint should contact the Manager of the service involved who will contact the complainant and offer the opportunity to resolve the complaint informally in the first instance. They should discuss the details with the complainant, so we are clear about their required outcome. Appendix 1: complaints form.

An appropriate and impartial manager or team lead will be appointed to look into the complaint and respond to the complainant in writing within 5 working days (exceptionally may be extended to 15 working days).

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response received, or wishes to pursue their complaint formally then Stage Two should be used.

Stage Two – Investigation

With support of the Director of Services a Designated Manager will be appointed to oversee the complaints process. They will acknowledge receipt of the complaint (via letter or email) within five working days. They will complete a Terms of Reference (Appendix 2) and appoint an Investigating Officer.

The Investigating Officer will undertake an investigation using an Investigation Plan (Appendix 3) which may include interviewing the complainant, other staff and volunteers, service users and external professionals if appropriate. Carers First will ensure that the Investigating Officer is given protected time to undertake the investigation to a high standard. Staff invite to investigating meeting letter template (Appendix 4)

The Investigating Officer will complete an Investigation Report (Appendix 5) **within 12 working days** of the formal complaint being received and forward to the Designated Officer.

The Designated Officer will make a decision to dismiss or uphold all / part of the complaint. They will provide the complainant with a written reply with details of the investigation and any proposed actions **within 15 working days** of the formal complaint being received. If appropriate, a further meeting will be offered to discuss the outcome of the investigation.

If disciplinary action is recommended, the Designated Manager should forward all documents relating to the complaint to the HR Manager who will proceed as appropriate.

Stage Three – Appeal

If the outcome of the investigation at stage two is not acceptable to the complainant, they can appeal in writing within 10 days of receiving our written response. With support of the Director of Services, an appropriate Appeal Manager who has had no previous involvement with the complaint will be appointed to consider the appeal.

The Appeal Manager will make recommendations as necessary to the Director of Services or Chief Executive if appropriate. In cases of a complaint against the Chief Executive, to the Board of Trustees. In cases of a complaint against a Trustee, to the Chair or Vice Chair.

The Director of Services, Chief Executive Officer or appointed Trustee will send a written reply with details of any further proposed actions **within 10 working days** of the appeal date. If appropriate, a further meeting will be offered to discuss the outcome of the investigation.

Further Action

In the event of the complainant still not being satisfied with the recommendations of the panel, then this will exhaust all relevant stages within Carers First. The complainant will be advised of any external agencies they may complain to.

Comments and Compliments

Carers First recognises that when people have taken the time to offer a comment or compliment their contribution should be acknowledged with a response either verbally or written.

Information relating to comments or compliments will be made known to staff and volunteers where it is relevant to:

- Making changes to the way services are delivered
- Acknowledging and giving praise for good work

Information about all comments and compliments received and the action taken in response will be recorded on Bluebox.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Complaints Form

<https://carersfirst.sharepoint.com/:w/g/EZ-KSdUMaURCipPW8KUJRx0Bc9bJOE3neTN1KZteD2bYxw?e=AxR549>

Appendix 2 TOR Formal Complaint Template

<https://carersfirst.sharepoint.com/:w/g/Ea6so8R2P-IOs9ZcsTtQcqwBNroW4tBQYyhyvMi9DMOJKhw?e=kShQah>

Appendix 3 Investigation Plan

<https://carersfirst.sharepoint.com/:w/g/EctNOUK9y4pBsdC1z6 M7UB6oF3F0U89G2oqFSnFjtxpg?e=cB184L>

Appendix 4 – Letter to Staff Member to attend Investigation

<https://carersfirst.sharepoint.com/:w/g/EU 9tBKni9CnxTEuRyFPWEBORAR3WXnDETzCe7MQovFlw?e=epuEB5>

Appendix 5 Investigation Report Template

<https://carersfirst.sharepoint.com/:w/g/EV Yw6vEdNJCslUcOtmMBFEBjEJ5aXFQfBaE4Y8m3fsHwA?e=1t87zh>