

COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS POLICY

1. Introduction

Connection Support is committed to providing a high quality, transparent and accessible service to everyone we work with. Complaints and compliments and other forms of feedback provide valuable information on levels of client satisfaction and provide us with an opportunity to improve upon all aspects of our service. Feedback is taken seriously and is seen as an opportunity for improvement.

Compliments – This policy welcomes all kinds of feedback. A compliment is an expression of praise, encouragement or gratitude. Anyone who has a relationship with Connection Support can compliment an individual staff member, a team or a service. Compliments are passed on to staff and their line manager, and are used to identify areas of good practice that our service can learn from. All written or verbal compliments received will be kept confidentially and in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018. Contact details for clients and stakeholders to make compliments is available on Connection Support’s website. When information is used for monitoring, publicity or other purposes it will remain anonymous.

Complaints - We need to know when we get things wrong and to resolve them as soon as possible. We handle any expression of dissatisfaction with our service which calls for a response as a complaint. We listen to complaints, treat them seriously, and learn from them so that we can continuously improve our service. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not.

2. Scope:

- a. This policy covers any complaint about:
 - The standard of service received from us
 - The behaviour of our staff or volunteers in delivering that service, including allegations of abuse by our staff and volunteers
 - Any action or lack of action, by our staff, volunteers or others engaged on Connection Support business
- b. Formal and Informal complaints.
- c. Right of Appeal.

3. Specific Information

a) Confidentiality

All complaints received will be dealt with confidentially and in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018, subject to the need to disclose information as required by statutory authorities.

b) Access to the Complaints Process

All clients receive a copy of the Clients Complaints Procedure when they are signed up to the service.

The Client Complaints Procedure is available to download on Connection Support's website for all stakeholders.

c) Formal and Informal Complaints

Many minor issues can be resolved successfully with a client and their worker without using the complaints process. However, when a client or other stakeholder contacts the organisation rather than the worker directly, the issue must be dealt with via the complaints procedure. Should the complainant describe the complaint as 'informal' this will be recorded on the Complaints Log, but in any case will be dealt with using the same process as a 'formal' complaint.

Complaints may be made verbally or in writing and both will be treated equally.

Where the organisation has evidence of a serious issue that the client does not wish to make a complaint about, the manager will refer to the Code of Conduct and Disciplinary procedures instead of the Complaints process.

d) Time Limits for Making a Complaint

Complaints must be made within 3 months of the incident that is being raised unless there are exceptional circumstances e.g. the issue was not known about within the time limit. An example of this is where an allegation is made that welfare benefits that were not awarded within the time limit but have subsequently found to be reduced or refused based on the advice given by a support worker.

No complaints will be considered that are more than 6 months old, unless the issues have been considered informally prior to the 6 months.

There is no time limit for the allegations of abuse by one of our members of staff or volunteers.

e) Roles & Responsibilities

Managers will:

- Ensure that all complaints are appropriately investigated and responded to, in line with the Connection Support Complaints Procedure.

Staff will:

- Notify their line manager or senior manager as soon as they are able to of any communication received that could be perceived as a complaint.

f) Third Party Reporting

Complainants may wish to have a third party or advocate acting on their behalf. For example, third parties may include: advocates, advice organisations, professionals such as social workers, community psychiatric nurses, doctors or solicitors, family members or friends. Where a third party is helping a complainant with a particular complaint, we need written consent to that effect. When we have this authority, we will take all possible steps to keep the third party informed of progress on the complaint. We do not need written consent if a MP or elected Councillor is helping a constituent with a complaint, and we can disclose information to them in response to their enquiries.

g) Remedies

When we get things wrong we will:

- Accept responsibility and apologise.
- Explain what went wrong and why, and put things right by making any changes required.
- Learn lessons from mistakes and change policies and practices where proportionate and sensible to do so.
- The action we take to put matters right (i.e. redress) in response to a service complaint can include a combination of remedies. The general principle we follow is that complainants should, so far as possible, be put in the position they would have been in, had things not gone wrong. The remedy applied needs to be proportionate and appropriate to the failure in service, and take into account what redress people seek when they complain. An apology is generally the most appropriate action, but other action may also be necessary in some circumstances.

h) Vexatious and repetitive complaints; unreasonable or abusive behaviour

All complaints will be dealt with in accordance with this policy. However, unreasonable or abusive complaint behaviour does happen from time to time and occasionally complaints are received which can be deemed 'vexatious' or 'repetitive'. These complaints can be costly to handle; or responding to them may be a disproportionate use of our staff's time. Deciding whether a complaint is vexatious requires us in each case to take into account the context and history of the complaint. We will consider whether the complaint is likely to cause unjustified distress or disruption. In particular, we will consider the following issues:

- Could the complaint fairly be seen as obsessive?
- Is the complaint harassing or causing distress to staff?
- Does the complaint appear to be designed to cause disruption or annoyance?
- Does the complaint lack any serious purpose or value?

For a complaint to be vexatious, we will consider whether there is a proper or justified cause for it. We will not only examine the complaint itself, but also its context and history. That context may include other complaints made by the applicant to us (whether complied with or

refused), the number and subject matter of the complaints, as well as the history of other dealings between the complainant and ourselves.

i) Recording Complaints

Complaint details, outcomes and actions taken are recorded by us and used for service improvement. We record all complaints we receive and collate data from them to help us understand what types of problems are most prevalent, and how well we are doing to resolve them. We value feedback and expect to use it to help us to:

- Get things right in the future if we have not done so already
- Improve our relationships with Clients and other Stakeholders.
- Be more open and accountable
- Act fairly and proportionately
- Seek continuous improvement

We will handle Client information so that it is only processed and retained appropriately and legally, in line with Data Protection legislation.

j) Right of Appeal

All complainants have the right of appeal against decisions made as a result of the investigation. Appeals must be received within 10 days of the Decision Letter being sent.

k) Equality & Diversity

All complainants will be treated equally, fairly and with respect. We will not treat anyone less favourably than anyone else because of their:

- Colour or race: this includes ethnic or national origin or nationality.
- Sexual orientation.
- Sex or legal marital or same-sex partnership status: this includes family status, responsibility for dependants, and gender (including gender reassignment, whether proposed, commenced or completed).
- Disability.
- Religious or political beliefs or trade union affiliation.
- Any other unjustifiable factors, for example language difficulties, age, pregnancy and maternity.

4. Relevant Legislation

Connection Support fully accepts the statutory requirements laid down in the following legislation:

- Equality Act 2010
- Data Protection Act 2018

5. Relevant Policies and Procedures

- Client Complaints Procedure for Managers
- How to make a Complaint Procedure for Clients and Stakeholders (Connection Support website)
- How to make a Complaint leaflet
- Client Complaints Form
- Equality and Diversity Policy and Procedures
- Code of Conduct
- Disciplinary Policy & Procedures

6. Policy Review and Update

This policy was last reviewed on May 2019
 Date for next Review May 2022

7. Change Control

Date of change	Person Making Change	Authorised by	Nature of Change
June 2017	Vanda Waters	Mark Thompson	Reviewed Policy. Right of Appeal included. Formal/Informal complaints/ Time limits
May 2019	Sarah Doughty	Liz Bubbear	Reviewed Policy and updated