



Complaints, Compliments and Comments Policy

Version 3

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Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy

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1. Introduction

Real is committed to providing the best possible service for everyone who we support and work with. We recognise that the way we manage and respond to complaints, compliments and comments is an important part of this. By receiving feedback from the people who use our services, we can make sure that we did the best we can in the context of what we are funded to do. And if we've done something not as well as they would have liked, we need to know that too. Only then can we learn and improve.

This policy uses the following definitions:

- a complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about a standard of service.
- a compliment is an expression of praise concerning a service received.
- a comment is a suggestion for how a service can be improved.

Complaints, compliments and comments can be raised by users of our services, carers and/or others acting on behalf of a current or potential user of any of the services normally provided by the organisation.

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.

2. Guiding principles

2.1 The way we manage comments, compliments and complaints will be:

- Honest, constructive and open
- Timely, dealing with feedback as quickly and effectively as we can
- Consistent and fair, avoiding bias
- Sensitive, with due care being paid to individual differences and needs
- Respectful, making sure anyone giving feedback is kept informed of progress
- Accessible, ensuring appropriate support is in place to enable participation
- Confidential – we cannot respond to any complaints, compliments or comments that are anonymous, but confidentiality will be respected at all times as set out in this policy

2.2 We recognise the importance of the availability of support for people when making complaints, comments or compliments. Real staff and volunteers will be able to provide support to enable complainants to understand and follow the procedure.

2.3 However, advocacy support from Real cannot be given to someone making a complaint against Real. This is because it could be argued there was a conflict of interest. At any stage a complainant may seek advocacy support from an external agency.

3. Procedure

3.1 Complaints Process

There are three stages to our complaints process: -

Stage 1: Informal Resolution

At this stage an attempt should be made to resolve the complaint informally and to find a solution that will suit everyone concerned. The complainant should be encouraged to speak about their concerns to the staff or Manager supporting them at the time of their dissatisfaction. Most complaints can be dealt with at this stage.

The member of staff or Manager dealing with the complaint will provide information to the Delivery and Development Manager about the complaint and how it was resolved. The Development Manager will enter these details onto the Central Log.

Where considered appropriate and/or helpful a written communication will be sent to the complainant summarising the nature of their complaint and how Real has responded. If written communication would not meet the individual's access needs an alternative format will be used.

Timetable for stage 1: There is no limit for the informal stage but it should not take excessively long for the matter to be resolved. Informal complaints that cannot be resolved in a timely manner should be registered as formal complaints.

Stage 2: Formal Complaint

If a complainant has a problem that cannot be sorted out straight away, or they are not happy with the outcome of any informal resolution, they should be supported to make a formal complaint. We do have a standard form which complainants can use. However, a formal complaint can also be submitted in other written forms or in alternative formats in order to meet access needs, for example on CD or film, by email or in picture form. Details of a complaint can be given to a member of staff or a manager to record. The member of staff or manager will then read back the details to the complainant and ask them to sign, confirming they are correct.

The complaint must be submitted to the line manager of whoever the complaint is against.

At this stage, unless the complaint is against the Delivery and Development Manager, a copy of the complaint will be sent at this stage to the Delivery and Development Manager for registering on the Central Log, and to begin the process of recording all stages of the procedure.

The investigating Manager (or, in the case of a complaint against the Chief Executive, the Chair or delegated Board member) will send a letter of acknowledgement to the complainant within 5 working days.

When the investigation is complete the Manager will send a letter of explanation to the complainant within a maximum of 20 working days (and quicker, if possible), advising of the outcome, suggested remedy and what to do if he/she is still unhappy.

Most complaints are resolved within 20 working days but if the investigation is very complex the process may be extended to a maximum of 40 working days. If there are any delays an explanation must be sent to the complainant as soon as any anticipated delay is known and he/she must be kept informed of progress.

The Board will be kept updated on a quarterly basis of all new Stage 2 complaints arising and a summary of concluded complaints investigations, including any action taken. This will coincide with quarterly service updates provided to the Board.

At the end of stage 2 the complaints log must be updated with dates of letters and actions taken.

Timetable for stage 2

- Acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint within 5 working days
- Manager, Chief Executive, Chair or delegated Board member to investigate
- Letter of explanation to be sent to the complainant within 20 days either:
 - o advising of the outcome, suggested remedy and what to do if the complainant is still unhappy; or
 - o explaining any delays in the investigation and advising of a timeframe. The new timeframe must be within 40 working days, and if it can't be an explanation given at that point in time as to why.

Stage 3: Review by the Board of Trustees

If the complainant is not happy with the findings of the investigation in Stage 2, they may request a Board review.

The request must be put in writing within 30 days of the date of the explanation letter advising of the findings of the stage 2 investigation. The request must give the reason why the complainant wants the decision reviewed. If it is not possible for the complainant to put their request in writing on their own, Real will explore with them what external support can be given to meet their access needs.

The Chair (or delegated Board member) will conduct a review to see if the investigation was reasonably and fairly conducted and that the response to the investigation was adequate and answered the concerns

expressed in the original complaint. It is not a new complaint or re-investigation of the complaint itself.

Stage 3 is the final part of the Real complaints procedure. If complainants still feel that they have not been treated fairly, or not done what we reasonably could, they may take their complaint to an independent organisation, for example the Care Quality Commission, the Charity Commission or the authority who is funding the service (for example Tower Hamlets Council).

Timetable for stage 3

- Acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint within 5 working days
- Chair or delegated Board member to investigate
- Letter of explanation to be sent to the complainant within 25 days advising of the outcome, suggested remedy and what to do if complainant is still unhappy

3.2 Comments and compliments

3.2.1 Real recognises that when people have taken the time to offer a comment or compliment their contribution should be acknowledged with a response. Anyone making a comment or compliment will receive a written communication summarising the nature of their comment or compliment and how we have responded. If written communication does not meet the individual's access needs an alternative form of communication will be used.

3.2.2 The identity of persons making comments or compliments will not be made known beyond those directly involved in the complaints, comments and compliments procedure.

3.2.3 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
- Giving praise for good work where it has been requested for this to be done

3.2.4 Information about all comments and compliments received and the action taken in response will be recorded into the Central Log.

3.3 Follow-up actions and lessons learnt

All data from complaints, comments and compliments will be discussed by the Leadership Team within Real. Action Plans will identify what changes or improvements have been made to ensure that lessons are learnt and that similar issues are not raised again.

The Board will review annually the Central Log of complaints, comments and compliments to look for trends and issues and check the organisation's performance against this policy. The Real Leadership Team will support the Board in this process.

4. Responsibilities

4.1 The Board of Trustees

4.1.1 The Chair or a delegated Board member will investigate complaints and report their findings to a meeting of the full Board when:

- a stage 2 complaint is against the Chief Executive Officer
- a complainant has appealed against the findings of a stage 2 complaint

4.1.2 At the first available meeting after an investigation carried out by a Board member as per 4.1.1 has been completed, the Board will hear the investigation report and consider the findings. After the meeting the Chair will write to advise the complainant of the outcome, the suggested remedy and what to do if they are still unhappy.

4.1.3 The Board of Trustees will review annually a complaints report in order to:

- Check performance with regards to :
 - Whether the procedure was properly followed with respect to timeframes and maintaining confidentiality
 - Whether all remedies were actioned satisfactorily and in a timely way
 - Awareness of the policy and procedure and how to make a complaint or give feedback among service users
- Review the policy and procedure and if they remain fit for purpose or require adjustment
- Monitor any trends and agree appropriate action at an organisational level, for example training for staff and volunteers or improvements in areas of service delivery

Day-to-day responsibility for ensuring this policy is put into practice is delegated to the Chief Executive Officer with support from the Delivery and Development Manager where appropriate.

4.2 Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

4.2.1 Where a complaint has been made against a Manager, the CEO will be responsible for carrying out an investigation. A letter of acknowledgement will be sent within 5 working days of receipt of the complaint.

4.2.2 When the investigation is complete the CEO will send a letter of explanation to the complainant within the timeframe set out in the procedure advising of the outcome, suggested remedy and what to do if they are still unhappy.

4.2.3 The CEO is responsible for action planning in response to where changes or improvements have been identified as needed and ensuring actions are satisfactorily completed.

4.3 Delivery and Development Manager

4.3.1 The Delivery and Development Manager is responsible for maintaining a Central Log of complaints, comments and compliments and for sharing information from the Log with the Chief Executive Officer and the Board as required.

4.4 Line Managers

4.4.1 Line Managers are responsible for investigating complaints against members of staff and volunteers. A letter of acknowledgement will be sent within 5 working days of receipt of the complaint. When the investigation is complete the CEO will send a letter of explanation to the complainant within the timeframe set out in the procedure advising of the outcome, suggested remedy and what to do if they are still unhappy.

4.4.2 Line managers are responsible for ensuring:

- all complaints, comments and compliments are appropriately recorded

- all staff and volunteers they manage are aware of and correctly follow the complaints, comments and compliments policy and procedure
- appropriate systems are in place within the services they manage to ensure that services users are aware of how to raise complaints, comments and compliments and that information about how to do this is easily accessible
- all actions required in response to a complaint or comment within services they manage are completed in a timely and satisfactory manner

4.5 Staff and volunteers

4.5.1 Staff and volunteers are responsible for:

- understanding and following the complaints, comments and compliments policy and procedure
- informing service users about how to raise complaints, comments and compliments and providing appropriate support to do this where needed
- discussing with their line manager as soon as is possible any incident which they think has or may result in a complaint. Note that the client does not formally need to say they are complaining.

4.5.2 Most complaints and concerns are dealt with informally. Staff and volunteers should encourage complainants to speak to staff supporting them about their concerns at the time of their dissatisfaction. All complaints and comments and action taken, even if they are not formal complaints, must be recorded on the complaints form and submitted to the Delivery and Development Manager who will enter the details onto a Central Log.

4.6 Maintaining appropriate confidentiality

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

4.6.2 Real cannot respond to anonymous complaints, comments or compliments but throughout the procedure nothing will be discussed with anyone who does not need to know. 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. The complainant's

name will be kept confidential except to the manager or Chair/Board member investigating the complaint, the Delivery and Development manager if different to the investigating manager and the Chief Executive.

4.6.3 If Real receives an anonymous complaint, comment or compliment, it will consider it but it may not be dealt with in the same way. This is because most complaints need to be discussed and explored further. In particular, in the case of an anonymous complaint it is unlikely that any action would be taken against an individual staff member.

4.6.4 Records concerning all complaints and comments will be kept securely.