



## **COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

This policy outlines how we deal with compliments, feedback and complaints and ensures that any lessons learnt are communicated effectively across the organisation.

### **Policy Statement**

Compliments, feedback and complaints are welcomed as a valuable form of client feedback that can help Bench Outreach improve services effectively and increase client satisfaction. All staff should demonstrate an ability and willingness to listen, to apologise when necessary and to learn from mistakes.

Anyone who is asking for - or is receiving - a service from us can complain if they are not satisfied with the way they have been treated.

### **Compliments and feedback**

Compliments and positive feedback should be recorded on Salesforce and fed back at team / staff meetings if appropriate.

Client feedback is a key element of our Advice Quality Standard accreditation. It is an ongoing process within evaluation of the Housing First project.

Access to Housing and Benefits clients are asked to complete a client satisfaction questionnaire and this feedback is collated and reported to the board of trustees every six months.

### **Complaints Procedure at a glance...**

The formal procedure is a 3-stage process preceded by an initial attempt to resolve any dissatisfaction informally before proceeding to the formal process. All complaints should follow each stage in turn. The one exception is complaints about a manager which should always go straight to Stage 2.

<b>Informal</b>	Try to resolve the complaint directly and informally with the staff member concerned
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<b>Step 1</b>	Tell the member of staff or the manager you want to make a formal complaint.  The manager should then deal with your complaint and try to resolve the matter to your satisfaction within 15 days.
<b>Step 2</b>	Ask the nominated trustee, Sabrina Pathan, to look into your complaint.  Email: <a href="mailto:sabrinapathan@benchoutreach.com">sabrinapathan@benchoutreach.com</a>  The Trustee should then try to resolve the matter within 15 days.
<b>Step 3</b>	Ask for a final review. The Chair of the Board of Trustees will arrange this.  The manager will tell you how to contact the relevant person

## Definition

A complaint is "an expression of dissatisfaction requiring a response". It should be in relation to any expression of dissatisfaction with Bench Outreach's services. This could include dissatisfaction with any of the following:

- The attitude or behaviour of an employee or volunteer
- The length of time taken to respond to a request for service or information
- The quality of service provided.
- Not communicating decisions effectively

## Who can make a complaint?

A complaint can be made by any member of the public, a Bench Outreach client or any person who is asking to use one of Bench Outreach's services. Clients may choose to complain as a group, but this should be done through a named representative to assist easy communication and liaison with those involved. An advocate or friend may act on behalf of a complainant with written authorisation to do so.

Members of staff who have a grievance should use the appropriate employee procedures.

## Aim

The underlying aim is that we should try to resolve any complaints in the most direct and immediate way possible and learn from any mistakes we have made. The faster we resolve the

issue to the complainant's satisfaction the better. Complaints should be responded to as locally as possible by frontline members of staff, preferably without recourse to the formal procedure.

However, if a resolution cannot be found informally (or the matter is too serious to deal with informally) we should aim to provide every assistance and welcome taking the issue up using the formal procedure.

## **Principles**

Bench Outreach will endeavour to ensure the procedure is easy to access and widely advertised to its clients, encouraging best practice and an open and non-defensive work culture in all our services.

- Complaints will be dealt with impartially, objectively and professionally.
- Complainants should be given the opportunity to complain in confidence and without fear of any adverse consequences.
- The Manager will keep complainants informed about the progress of the investigation, and respond formally in writing within the agreed time limits.
- The complainant will be informed of their right of further redress at each stage and be provided with a named member of staff who will have lead responsibility for dealing with the next stage of their complaint.
- Mediation will be considered at some point in the procedure in order to achieve a resolution. If the investigator does not think mediation appropriate, they should be able to demonstrate why they took that view.
- The complainant will be referred to the appropriate agency if the complaint relates to something outside Bench Outreach's control.

## **Time Limits**

There is a 28-day time limit within which the complainant must indicate their wish to see any matter investigated. It is up to the discretion of the Manager whether or not to apply the Complaints procedure after 28 days have elapsed. A similar time limit is applied between each stage of the procedure.

## **Complaints procedure - preliminaries**

Bench Outreach will welcome the opportunity to resolve any problems at the time they occur. If someone experiences any problems with our services s/he should notify a member of staff who will do their best to resolve the matter straightaway and always within three working days.

Clients who identify a problem with Bench Outreach services should be given the "Making a Complaint" leaflet. This is also available in the waiting area and on the website.

### **Step one – Review by manager**

If someone wants to make a *formal* complaint the first person they should contact is the manager. Any member of staff can explain who the manager is if necessary.

The Manager will try to sort things out honestly, politely and as quickly as possible. If someone complains in writing, Bench Outreach aims to send the complainant a full and clear reply within 15 working days, hoping to resolve any concerns at this stage.

Our aim is to solve any problems a client may have raised quickly and satisfactorily. When we are wrong we will apologise and, if possible, put the matter right. We will also look at our procedures again to see what lessons we can learn from complaints.

However if someone is not satisfied with the response, s/he has the option to ask a Trustee for a review [Step 2].

At completion of Stage 1 the manager will send a record of the complaint and any action taken to the Chair of the Board of Trustees.

### **Step two – review by nominated Trustee**

If a complainant is not satisfied with the response at stage one, s/he should explain why and ask for a review by a Trustee.

The Trustee will consider the complaint and will investigate it. The Trustee will write to tell the complainant about the outcome of the investigation and will keep them informed if the investigation needs to take longer or be handled in a different way.

The Trustee should respond to the complainant within 15 working days. If the person feels her/his complaint has still not been fairly investigated or addressed, s/he may request a Final Review [Step 3].

### **Step three – Appeal for a final review by Chair of Trustees**

If both initial stages have been exhausted and the complainant is still not satisfied, the Chair of the Board of Trustees will appoint an appropriate panel or body to conduct a comprehensive review of the complaint. This final stage should allow complainants the opportunity of a face-to-face meeting with the Stage 3 reviewer(s) if that has not already happened at Stage 2. The Chair of the Board of Trustees should write to the complainant to confirm the procedure and the timescales involved.

Once the final review has taken place, it should be made clear that Bench Outreach's procedure has been exhausted and the organisation is unable to enter into further correspondence about the matter in question. The complainant should be furnished with information that will enable them to pursue the matter outside Bench Outreach if appropriate. This may include providing contact details of the Ombudsman, Council Department, funder or other relevant body. The complainant will also be informed that advocacy in pursuing their complaint may be available from an advice agency or law centre.

### **Reporting**

Complaints will be recorded on the central complaints database which is held on Bench Share (password protected).

On completion of Stage 1 managers should send copies of all complaints and any action taken to the Chair of the Board of Trustees.

The manager will submit a report to the Board of Trustees about all complaints within the service every six months with a view to identifying trends and any necessary longer-term corrective action.

### **Accessibility**

Time should be taken to read the procedure to clients if appropriate. Staff should always offer to assist a complainant and ask if they would like any help, such as mediation or language assistance, or would like someone to talk on their behalf. Complainants may use a friend or third party agency as representative, advocate, or companion at any stage of this procedure.

### **Exceptions**

The following will be excluded from the complaints policy:

- **Legal proceedings** – where a client has started legal action against Bench Outreach (excluding threatened legal action).

- **Members of Parliament or Councillor Enquiries** – these will be dealt by the Manager and the Chair of the Board of Trustees, unless they are acting as the complainant’s advocate.
- **Parallel complaints with a partner agency** - If a complainant is pursuing the same complaint through another organisation’s procedures and Bench Outreach is co-operating with an investigation led by them, an agreement should be made to be guided by the findings of that investigation.

**Related policies:**

- Code of Conduct

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