

GRAMPIAN REGIONAL EQUALITY COUNCIL LTD

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Introduction

GREC is committed to providing an efficient and effective range of services to all of its users, and as part of striving towards that aim always welcomes and encourages feedback, including any complaints that may arise.

The Complaints Procedure outlined below is one part of the process of feedback which GREC encourages. Over time this procedure will have the potential for stimulating improvements in the organisation's service delivery.

Communication & availability of this procedure

This policy will be available on GREC's website. At their initial appointment clients will be informed that they can request a hard copy of the policy (in their own language if required) or access it on the GREC website. Where appropriate, individuals will be guided through this procedure, and if desired sign-posted to an appropriate organisation for advocacy, advice and support (e.g. Citizen's Advice Bureau, Advocacy Aberdeen).

Who can make a complaint, and against whom?

Anyone who receives or requests a service from GREC can use the Complaints Procedure. This procedure can be used to make complaints against GREC members of staff and volunteers, and any individuals or groups carrying out work on behalf of GREC.

Where an individual does not feel able, confident or safe to make a complaint independently, GREC will process complaints received on an individual's behalf by a third party, e.g. an advocacy service, a trade union, carer, family member or friend. Complaints received by third parties (with the appropriate paperwork to confirm that the third party is representing the individual) will be dealt with like all other complaints.

Anonymous complaints will be noted, but not acted upon, unless a pattern emerges.

How to make a complaint

A complainant can lodge a complaint in writing, on the phone, or in person.

Phone: 01224 595505

Address: GREC, 41 Union Street, Aberdeen, AB11 5BN

Email: info@grec.co.uk

Letters and emails should be marked "private and confidential" and for the attention of the General Manager; where the complaint relates to the General Manager, for the attention of the Chair of the Board.

Informal Approach

Any service user has the right to make a formal complaint whenever they wish to, but in the first instance it can often be quicker and easier for everyone if the problem can be sorted out informally.

The service user has this choice.

An oral or brief written complaint can be made to any member of staff at GREC, who will try to resolve the problem there and then if possible.

If the problem cannot be resolved satisfactorily, or if this approach does not seem appropriate to the complainant, then a more formal approach can be used.

Procedure to be Followed in the Event of a Formal Complaint

A written complaint is advised, though oral complaints in person or by telephone are accepted (details above).

It is important that a written complaint makes clear the nature of the problem and how the complainant would like to see it resolved.

The member of staff who receives an oral complaint should make as accurate a transcript of the complaint as possible and seek the agreement of the complainant as to the accuracy of the transcript.

Managing and investigating the complaint

GREC's Admin Manager will manage the complaint process; ensuring it reaches the appropriate staff or board members, and that everyone is referring to the most up-to-date complaints procedure.

However the complaint is made, whether orally or in writing, GREC will write to the complainant within one week to acknowledge that the complaint is being dealt with.

In most circumstances the General Manager will lead on investigating complaints, speaking to relevant individuals, and collecting evidence where available.

If the General Manager is the focus of the complaint, then the Chair of the Board of Directors will be the most appropriate person to receive the complaint.

If the complaint is against one or more members of the Board of Trustees/Directors, then the Chair should be the person to investigate the complaint.

If the complaint is against the Chair, then the Vice-Chair should be the person to investigate the complaint.

In such circumstances where it is deemed that the complaint is of such seriousness that it has the potential to damage the reputation of GREC, or for any other reason that makes it unreasonable that the General Manager or Board of Directors could investigate a complaint impartially then an independent panel will be identified to investigate the complaint.

In all such circumstances, the individual investigating must take an impartial and objective approach to the complaint, and explain to the target of the complaint that complaints must be investigated and dealt with in a serious, professional and objective manner. The lead investigator will discuss their findings and recommendations with the Chair of the Personnel Committee (or another member of the Committee if the Chair is not available) before making a final decision on the complaint. The involvement of the Personnel Committee will allow for oversight, accountability and transparency within the process.

Whoever leads on investigating the formal complaint should respond in writing as soon as possible, but always within one month of receiving the complaint. In some circumstances more time may be required to investigate a complaint; this should be communicated in writing to the complainant within one month of receiving the complaint. The complaint should be dealt with in no longer than 3 months.

The complainant and the complained against, and/ or their representative, will not come into contact at any time as a result of the investigation.

Where relevant any individual involved in the complaint will declare an interest in relation to any other individual or group involved in the complaint process.

Appeals

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response they receive, then they have the right of appeal.

An appeal should be made in writing to the Chair of the Board of Trustees/Directors, or the Vice-Chair in cases where the Chair is the focus of the complaint.

The appeal should state the problem as fully as possible.

A written acknowledgement of the appeal should be issued by GREC within one week of its receipt, and the matter should be dealt with either by an Appeals Sub-Committee made up of three Board of Trustees/Directors members or, in cases of a very serious nature, by the full Board of Trustees/Directors at its next meeting. No individual can investigate the same complaint twice, and so some board members may be excluded from the appeal process due to their involvement in dealing with the initial complaint.

Complainants have the right to attend the meeting of appeals panel, and to be accompanied and/or represented by a supportive person of their choice.

A response should be issued to the complainant normally within three months of receipt of the appeal being lodged.

In general the decision of the Appeal Sub-Committee or the full Board of Trustees/Directors should be final. In the case of those receiving GREC's

counselling service, individuals will have the right to submit a complaint to COSCA (Counselling & Psychotherapy in Scotland). GREC will ensure that an outcome report of the complaint and appeal process has been submitted to COSCA within one month of the conclusion of the complaints process. COSCA will verify that the GREC's procedure has been followed and the outcome was lawful, reasonable and properly explained. Contact details for COSCA are as follows:

16 Melville Terrace, Stirling FK8 2NE; 01786 475140; info@cosca.org.uk.

In the case of legal action

The person responsible for investigating the complaint can halt the complaint process at any stage should it emerge that legal action is under way, pending or intended, until any legal process is complete

Time limits

Complaints can be made relating to any incident, behaviour or breach that is alleged to have taken place within the last 18 months.

Appeals should be lodged within 1 month of the decision made (in writing) on the initial complaint.

Complaints and appeals should be acknowledged within 1 week of receipt.

Complaints will ideally be dealt with within 1 month, but in no more than 3 months in exceptional circumstances.

Appeals will ideally be dealt with in 6 weeks, but in no more than 3 months in exceptional circumstances.

Potential sanctions

Examples of sanctions that may be enforced as a result of a complaint being upheld are as follows:

- On-going review of performance and/or behaviour
- Formal written warnings
- Final written warnings
- Dismissal for gross misconduct

Genuine apologies will be made wherever they are due.

Sanctions will be monitored by the General Manager. Where the General Manager is being sanctioned, this will be monitored by the Chair of the Board.

Confidentiality_

Complainants' confidentiality will be respected as far as possible, but not so far as the person (or persons) complained about are not aware of the complaint.