

Lincoln Women's Aid

Complaints Policy and Procedure – service users, other organisations and members of the public

PURPOSE:

To establish the policy and procedure of Lincoln Women's Aid (LWA) with regard to complaints and comments from service users, other stakeholders and the general public and how these will be used to improve the range and quality of services.

INTRODUCTION

This document contains a policy statement (Part One) and procedural guidance (Part Two). The functions of each are set out briefly below.

Part One – Policy Statement. The policy statement sets out the broad framework of principles within which the particular area of work will be carried out. It sets out the organisation's broad style and approach to the issue, including any aims and guiding principles.

Part Two – Procedural Guidance. The procedural guidance sets out the details that staff will require to carry out their duties in this particular area of work. It also sets out the specific tasks involved in undertaking this area of work and identifies who is responsible for carrying them out.

PART ONE – POLICY STATEMENT

1 Statement of Intent

The following statement will be displayed at all projects run by Lincoln Women's Aid. (This statement will be displayed in English.)

“We aim to provide service of a standard acceptable to all our users. If we fail to do this we want to know about it. This will enable us to not only deal with the specific problem, but also to avoid it happening again.”

Our complaints procedure sets out how to take up matters you think are unsatisfactory about the service you have received from us. Ask a member of staff for a leaflet about the complaints procedure. If you would rather talk to someone about the complaints procedure, please ask the member of staff who sees you.”

2 Introduction

This policy sets out the procedures we will follow when we receive a complaint from users of the service, an organisation or member of the public. It does not address complaints made by staff or volunteers (these are dealt with through grievance and disciplinary procedures) nor job applicants (recruitment procedure).

Lincoln Women's Aid is committed to encouraging service users and stakeholders to come forward with any complaints and comments about the services delivered in order to make sure that quality is protected and service users' needs are appropriately met.

LWA undertakes to monitor all comments and complaints to ensure that they are used to improve the range and quality of service delivery on a continuous basis.

LWA will ensure that all service users and stakeholders have access to clear information on how to voice complaints and comments. Service users in particular will be provided with the support they need in order to make their views known. Also, LWA will ensure that no service users are disadvantaged or treated less favourably as a result of complaining or making comments.

This procedure is meant to provide a means to resolve a dispute between Lincoln Women's Aid (LWA) and any complainant. It requires staff, volunteers and Management Committee (MC) members at every stage to work to resolve the complaint. Complaints are likely to be in one or more of the following areas:

- Dissatisfaction with our service, such as inadequate work, problems with casework, unacceptable delay or failure to deliver a service, etc.
- Disputes between user and the organisation regarding policy, procedures or activities.
- Discourtesy or unhelpfulness on the part of staff.

PART TWO – PROCEDURAL GUIDANCE ON COMPLAINTS

When someone wishes to register a complaint, the following procedure should be adopted. When the complaint is against the member of staff dealing with complaints the same procedure will be followed, but with the chair of the MC substituting for the staff members role at all stages.

1 PRELIMINARY STAGE

The complaint should be made either by completion of a Complaints Form or by a request to make a verbal complaint.

2 STAGE 1

The complainant can speak directly to the member of staff concerned in order to raise and resolve their complaint, if they feel able to do so. Alternatively they can talk to any other member of the front line staff to discuss the complaint with them.

If the complainant does not feel able to do either of these options, they can talk to any member of the Admin Team based at Lincoln Women's Centre on 01522 575 490. This can be done in person or by phone, whichever is appropriate.

The staff member who is approached at this stage should keep a written record of the conversation using the Complaints Form and create an entry in the Complaints Monitoring Log. This staff member will endeavour to resolve the matter, within the boundaries of her delegated authority. Records will be kept using the Complaints Monitoring Log.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, or where it is not possible to use Stage 1 above (for example, if it is not possible for them to phone or visit the office) then refer to Stage 2 below.

Time limit for Stage 1

Stage 1 should be completed within **5 working days** of receiving the complaint.

3 STAGE 2

The complainant should be asked to put their complaint in writing to the Chair of the Management Committee, marked 'Confidential', providing as much detail of the complaint as possible. The complaint can be submitted using the Complaints Form or a letter. Once the complaint is received an entry will be made in the Complaints Monitoring Log and an ongoing record will be kept.

If the complainant is unable to put their complaint in writing, they will be offered an interview with the chair of the Management Committee (or her nominee). The role of the Committee Chair or nominated Committee Member at this initial meeting will be confined to putting the complaint in writing, obtaining the complainant's approval for this, and ask the complainant to sign to indicate they agree with the contents. The complainant may choose to work with a third party at this stage and throughout the process - LWA should provide a list of potential advocates if the complainant does not have someone to whom they can turn.

The Chair of the Management Committee (MC) will then investigate the complaint and attempt to resolve it.

If the complaint involves individual members of staff, volunteers or the Management Committee, the Chair of the MC must offer that person the opportunity to put forward their account of the situation.

The Chair of the MC may delegate any aspect of the investigation to a nominee from the Committee.

Time limit for Stage 2

The MC Chair will ensure that all complainants receive a response **in writing** within **10 working days** of the letter / Complaint Form being received or the meeting to complete the Complaint Form. This letter will summarise what investigations have been carried out, provide an apology if necessary and outline what action, if any, is proposed to resolve the matter. A copy of this letter should be attached to the original Complaints Form and the outcome recorded in the Complaints Monitoring Log.

If a response by letter is unsuitable, the MC chair must offer the complainant an interview to provide the response verbally. This meeting should be held within **10 working days**, as for the written response. A written record of this interview will be kept and signed by the complainant. Once again this will be Complaints Monitoring Log.

If the complainant is not satisfied at this stage they should ask for the matter to be dealt with under Stage 3 of the complaints procedure.

4 STAGE 3

Where Stage 2 does not resolve the matter, the Chair or MC member should immediately refer the complaint to full MC, who will appoint a complaints panel from among their members.

The Complaints Panel will comprise three members of the Committee, including the Chair if she was not involved at Stage 2. One member of the Complaints Panel will be nominated as the Complaints Officer and she will be responsible for convening the panel.

The Complaints Officer will inform the complainant immediately that the panel is being convened they will also be contacting the staff/volunteer/management member(s) against whom the complaint is made.

The panel will review the decision made at Stage 2 and may seek further clarification from any of the parties involved before reaching a conclusion.

The Complaints Officer is responsible for ensuring that records of the meeting are kept and that the complaints monitoring form is completed.

Time limit for Stage 3

The complaints panel will notify the complainant of its decision and reasons for that decision within **15 working days** of having received notice of the complaint. The panel's decision will be final.

The complaints officer will be responsible for reporting the panel's findings to the next meeting of the Management Committee.

5 STAGE 4

The complainant will be notified that if they remain unhappy with the decision the complaint may be passed to AdviceUK or another suitable organisation for arbitration.

The arbitration will be confined to the following:

- establishing the complaints procedure has been followed and
- ensuring the complaint has been dealt with fairly.

6 RECORDING AND MONITORING COMPLAINTS

All complaints will be recorded and kept on file, including those which were resolved without being put in writing. The Complaints Monitoring Log shall be used to do this and will include information about the type of complaint; brief details about the complaint; the stage reached; whether or not there was a satisfactory outcome; and any actions / changes to policies, procedures or working practices as a result.

All complaints shall be treated with regard to the Confidentiality Policy.

A report will be made once a year to the Management Committee and any service user participation groups summarising the nature of complaints received and how they were resolved. The Administrator will have responsibility for producing this report

In addition, periodic reports detailing the number and type of complaints will be submitted to the Supporting People Team. The frequency of these reports will be determined by the Supporting People Team as part of their contract(s) with LWA.

7 PUBLICISING THE PROCEDURE

The paid staff members are responsible for ensuring that posters and leaflets are displayed in the Refuge and Women's Centres welcoming complaints from service users and that the posters and leaflets clearly explain the procedure for making the complaint.

The paid staff members are responsible for ensuring complaints leaflets are available at all outreach sessions.

8 ENSURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROCEDURE

All MC members will receive a copy of the Complaints Procedure.

Existing and new workers and volunteers will be introduced to the complaints procedure via induction and training. The procedure will be reviewed every five years and amendments agreed by the MC.

Procedure reviewed: November 2008
Date of next review: October 2013

APPENDIX ONE – COMPLAINTS FORM

Lincoln Women’s Aid COMPLAINTS FORM

Please tell us the details of your complaint

Please tell us what you feel should / should not have happened

Please tell us what you would like us to do now

Your name _____

Your telephone number _____

Your address _____

Is it all right to contact you here? Yes / No
If your answer is 'No', how can we contact you?

Thank you for completing this form. Send it to Admin Team, Lincoln Women’s Centre, 2nd Floor, Brook House, 32-33 Silver Street, Lincoln. LN2 1EW and mark your envelope CONFIDENTIAL.

APPENDIX TWO – COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE SUMMARY

Lincoln Women's Aid has a complaints procedure which is available for anyone to read on request. Complaints are welcomed and seen as a means of improving the service that we provide, to individuals, agencies and other organisations. A positive outcome will always be sought for all complaints.

Complaints can be made either verbally or in writing, all complaints will be logged and a time frame for a response will be given immediately to the complainant.

If you wish to see a copy of the policy; want more information; need help in making a complaint; or wish to make a complaint and do not feel comfortable in doing so with your Key or Support Worker, you can contact the Admin Team on 01522 575490 and they will help you.

Complaints Forms are available on the 'downloads' section of our website - www.lincolnwomensaid.org.uk; from the Refuge; the Women's Centres; your Key worker or Support Worker; and from the Admin Team.

If you wish to make an anonymous complaint directly to the Management Committee pre-addressed envelopes can be obtained from your Key worker or Support Worker; the Refuge; the Women's Centres; and the Admin Team.

APPENDIX THREE – COMPLAINTS INFORMATION SHEET

Complaints can be made:

- In person to any member of staff or the Admin Team.
- By phone to any member of staff: at the Refuge on 01522 510041, Lincoln Women's Centre on 01522 576761, Grantham Women's Centre on 01476 561 131 or to the Admin Team on 01522 575490.
- In writing to the Management Committee.

If you wish to make a complaint about a member of staff; the service or advice that you have received; or the organisation as a whole then please:

1. Request a Complaints Form from your Support Worker or
Collect a complaints Form from the Refuge or Women's Centre
2. Contact the Admin Team on 01522 575490 for help or information.
3. Request a pre-addressed envelope from the Admin Team, the Refuge, the Women's Centres or your Key or Support Worker in order to return your complaint.

All complaints will be looked into without bias; will be believed; will be treated with respect; and will be seen as a positive way to evaluate and improve our service.