



Cogwheel Counselling

Complaints Policy - February 2023

Introduction

Cogwheel Counselling (referred to as Cogwheel in this policy document) aims to provide its staff, volunteers, clients, and any person who comes into contact with our organisation with the best possible service. However, we recognize that, from time to time, situations may arise when it is deemed that the quality or level of service provided falls short of what could reasonably be expected.

We take complaints seriously at Cogwheel. They provide us with an opportunity to review and improve our services and practices going forward.

All Complaints or expressions of dissatisfaction will be dealt with using this procedure. Please note that for counselling clients, there is additional information in the Service Agreement as to what to do if they are not happy with the service they have received.

At any stage, the complainant may be accompanied by a supportive person who is not a legal representative.

The Charity's Grievance Procedure, for use by staff or volunteers who have a complaint, is detailed in the Employee or Volunteer Handbook respectively.

Informal Stage

Cogwheel hopes that any source of dissatisfaction can be remedied on an informal basis. In the first instance, we would expect that any complaint is raised directly with the person concerned. Where that is not possible, please contact the office by phone on 01223 464385 or by email at admin@cogwheel.org.uk and ask to speak with the Head of Services.

Formal Complaint Procedure - Stage One

Where a resolution cannot be achieved on an informal basis, a formal complaint should be made by email to the Chair of the Board of Trustees (referred to as the Chair in this policy) at chairoftrustees@cogwheel.org.uk. Please ensure all emails are marked '**Confidential - Complaint**'

The complaint should include the following information to help us investigate the incident(s) effectively:

- your name and contact details - this is essential as we will not investigate anonymous complaints
- outline the nature of your complaint as precisely as possible. This will help us to investigate further and hopefully to resolve the issue.

Please include details such as the place and time the incident(s) occurred. Once a complaint has been received, an acknowledgement of receipt will be sent to the complainant within 10 working days. This will include who is dealing with the complaint, what action is being taken, and when the complainant can expect to receive a full reply - the target time for responding in full to a complaint is 20 working days.

The Chair will task either the Head of Services or if the complaint involves the Head of Services, then a designated Trustee will be appointed to investigate the circumstances leading to the complaint. This may require an interview with the complainant. The person responsible for investigating will communicate the outcome of the investigation to the complainant. If the complaint is found to be justified, the Head of Services or designated Trustee will agree any necessary further action with the complainant. This communication must also inform complainants of their right to ask for a review of the investigation if they are not satisfied with the outcome of Stage One, and how to access the second stage.

Formal communication of the outcome of the investigation will be made by email, and an informal opportunity to discuss the outcome over the phone, online or face to face, should be made available where practicable.

The Chair should remain abreast of investigations if carried out by the Head of Services or a designated Trustee but will not be actively involved in the resolution process. Where the complaint is against the Chair, two members of the Board of Trustees will need to investigate. Once the investigation is complete, a

communication detailing its findings should be emailed to the complainant. If the matter is complex and likely to take longer than originally indicated, an email explaining the reasons why, and including an indication of when a response can be expected, is to be sent to the complainant.

The full response must contain sufficient information to assure the complainant that their complaint has been taken seriously. If the complaint is upheld, the complainant must be given a full apology for their experience and given details, as far as possible, of what steps will be put in place to prevent a recurrence of the situation.

Appeal - Stage Two

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the results of the enquiry, they will have the right to put their case in writing to an Appeal Panel made up of the Chair (unless the complaint is about him/her/them) and two senior members of the Board of Trustees.

The process to be followed in reviewing the complaint is similar to Stage One, but the persons conducting the review will be different. The same target timetable applies.

Once again, the communication responding to the complainant must contain an explanation, apology if required, information about remedial actions, and satisfactory assurances that the complaint has been investigated fully.

This communication must also inform the complainant that the reviewers' decision is final and that no further appeal is possible.

Please note that counselling clients have an additional final step, if none of the above actions have sufficiently addressed their concerns, they may choose to contact BACP (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy) by phone on 01455 883300 or by email at bacp@bacp.co.uk. Cogwheel Counselling is an accredited organisational member of BACP (membership number 00101419).

Reporting

The Chair or designated Trustees will keep the Board of Trustees informed of the number and nature of complaints, and the outcomes, and will report to the Board on this at least annually.