
COMPLAINTS POLICY & PROCEDURE

We encourage people to complain if you feel you have had a poor level of service from us. We will attempt to work through your complaint swiftly and professionally, to prevent issues escalating. Feel free to work through an advocate if you wish. You can contact the staff directly, but we have a confidential trustees' email address if you would like to email your concerns to them instead - opencountrytrustees@gmail.com (This email account is only checked monthly, so there may be a delay in responding. If you would like to speak to a trustee more quickly, leave your contact details with the staff and they will get a trustee to contact you directly).

Stage One: review by Open Country

The complaints procedure starts locally with David Shaftoe, the Chief Officer. He will acknowledge your complaint within five working days and carry out a full investigation into the circumstances surrounding it. He may delegate Wakefield-based complaints. The circumstances of your case will be examined to check that proper procedures were followed. The target time for responding in full to a complaint is 10 working days, though, if the issue is complicated, any delay will be explained. Depending on the severity of the complaint, this will be dealt with by email, letter, telephone or face-to-face.

If the complaint is upheld, you will receive a full apology and, where appropriate, be given details of any action that Open Country was able to take to retrieve the situation or at least put things right for the future. The aim is always to achieve resolution at the earliest stage possible.

But what if it is the Open Country Chief Officer that you are unhappy with, or that you would prefer to talk to someone else? You jump straight to stage two.

Stage Two: review by the Open Country Trustee Board

The letter you receive from the Open Country Chief Officer will also inform you of your right to ask for a review of the investigation should you not be satisfied with the outcome of stage one. Details of how to do this will be provided.

The next stage is the responsibility of the person with the ultimate authority at Open Country, the Chair of the Trustee Board. If you prefer, you can specifically ask for a male or female trustee. (Trustees are the people who run a charity; they all give their time voluntarily and receive no payment.)

The process used by the Open Country Chair in reviewing the complaint is similar to stage one. The same target times for responses apply and there is the same obligation for an apology, where owed, and for putting things right, if we can.

The Chair will check that the investigation so far has been carried out fully and properly. She or he will check that the fundamental point of the complaint has been addressed and look at any outstanding issues raised by the complainant.

Stage Three: review by an Independent Adjudicator

If you still feel that all the issues have not been properly tackled, the complaint first dealt with by staff and then by the trustees, can then go to a person who is entirely independent of Open Country. This person is called the Independent Adjudicator. She or he conducts a review of the investigation to check:

1. That the investigation has been conducted in line with stated procedures.
2. That the investigation has been handled fairly. The Adjudicator will not comment on the substance of your complaint.

Should the Adjudicator find that the stated procedure was not followed or that the matter has not been handled fairly, the Adjudicator will specify why and may give directions for a re-investigation. The decision of the Independent Adjudicator is final. We can arrive at a suitable Adjudicator by mutual consent. We would suggest the CEO of *Harrogate and District Community Action*, a representative from *NYC Health & Adult Services* or a representative from *Wakefield Council*.

COMMENDATIONS POLICY & PROCEDURE

It is always very nice to receive commendations for our work. Printed commendations are often kept in our scrapbook, and email versions are kept in a designated file on our computer.

Whilst commendations are often nice to show funders and supporters of our work, we will only divulge them with permission from the sender. Please read our **Confidentiality & Data Protection Policy**.

If people would like to offer a commendation to one of our volunteers, members or staff, we have to remind them that we cannot give personal details out without permission from the recipient. In practice, we often act as an intermediary in relaying these messages.

We always prefer to receive messages of thanks rather than gifts or bequests. Please read our **Gifts Policy** for more information.

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