

RAB Complaints and Feedback Policy and Procedure.

Introduction.

Within the limits of its resources and its constitution, Reading Association for the Blind (RAB) is committed to providing the best possible service to its users. It follows from this that individuals and organisations who are unhappy about the service they receive or do not receive should be clear about how to raise their concerns. Furthermore, they should know that the organisation welcomes such critical feedback. We will deal with it in a positive way that does not seek to evade the issues raised by the complainant.

The procedure outlined below aims to provide the necessary clarity as to how complaints will be dealt with. This document details the workings of the procedures needing to be understood by RAB staff, trustees and volunteers. This procedure will also be publicised on the RAB website.

The positive handling of any complaint, however, does not depend solely on having a written procedure. It depends very much on how people who want to raise a complaint are treated particularly at the first point of contact. Since any staff member, volunteer or any trustee could be that first point of contact by the complainant it is necessary for all of us to ensure that we listen carefully, are encouraging, and not defensive. For most people, raising a complaint is difficult. We should assume that if they have reached the stage of wanting to give voice to it, then they probably have something important to say.

Part One - Critical Friend Feedback.

The first procedure is to be followed when a service user provides critical feedback that is not a formal complaint. This kind of feedback may provide valuable information that can help shape future services and how expectations are communicated.

Part Two - A Formal Complaint.

This procedure outlines how formal complaints will be managed and the escalation levels.

Part One - Critical Friend Feedback.

All RAB service users, volunteers and stakeholders are to be encouraged to provide critical feedback on our services. Feedback might be given verbally or in writing. Either way, it should be passed to the RAB CEO who will share the information with the relevant manager.

Part Two - A Formal Complaint.

When a Concern is First Raised

People have the right to choose where, when, how and with whom in the organisation they will raise concerns about how they have been treated. Any staff member or trustee who is approached should be aware that the person may have no idea there is a procedure for handling complaints. The initial response should therefore be:

1. To listen and clarify the issues at stake, without sounding bureaucratic or formal.
2. Explain that RAB does want to hear their views and that in the interests of fair play a procedure has been set up to make sure people's complaints are dealt with properly. The complainant should be signposted to this procedure on the RAB website or provided with a paper copy.
3. Establish whether or not the person wants to use the procedure, in which case proceed to stage one.

It is important to recognise that at this stage, some concerns or complaints may be resolved. Depending on the gravity of the complaint, it may be that the simple act of listening is satisfaction enough for the complainant. Alternatively, it may be that a basic misunderstanding about what services RAB does and does not offer is cleared up.

If having talked through their concern, the person is still unhappy, then every encouragement to move to stage one should be given. It is clear, however, that RAB cannot formally take up the complaint if the person does not wish to take it further.

Stages of the complaints procedure

There are three stages in the complaints procedure and each complaint should start at the first stage and progress through until it has been resolved. However, the CEO and chair together had the discretion to bypass stages if they could both consider it warranted.

If any formal complaints are made about the CEO of RAB, the process should start at stage two with the chair of RAB performing the role normally undertaken by the CEO.

If any formal complaints are made about a trustee of RAB, the process should start at stage two, with the chair of RAB performing the role normally undertaken by the CEO.

If any formal complaints are made about the chair of RAB, the process should start at stage two, but with both the CEO and another nominated trustee performing the role normally undertaken by the CEO.

Stage one - Senior staff level

A stage one complaint begins as soon as we have received notification of it. The staff member who receives the complaint should immediately notify the CEO. The CEO will pass the complaint onto the staff member with responsibility for the subsection of RAB which is the subject of the complaint. The CEO has the discretion to refer to the investigation of the complaint to another appropriate member of staff, including himself/herself. This will particularly be the case if the complainant

perceives the investigating staff member to be inappropriate or if the complaint is about conduct of the person responsible for this stage of the investigation.

The investigating member of staff has responsibility for

- Investigating the complaint thoroughly
- Responding to the complainant within three calendar weeks of the complaint being made
- Ensuring that an accurate record of the nature and progress of the complaint is kept. This should be in writing and agreed by the complainant.

Investigating the complaint.

Investigating the complaint should involve finding out what happened, why it happened and what can be done now. It can involve talking to staff, looking at files and records, checking whether policies and procedures were followed or were inadequate and drafting a response to the complainant. This response should address the points raised by the complainant. It would explain whether or not RAB felt the complaint be justified or not. Even if it was not justified, the complaint will still be investigated because the complainant had felt aggrieved. It will detail what investigation was undertaken and the outcome of this. The response should also detail any remedial action to be taken by RAB and offer an apology where appropriate.

Satisfaction.

At each stage in the process, the person responded to complaints should ask them to state whether or not they are satisfied with the response their complaint. They should advise the complaint to the next stage in the procedure if they are not satisfied and wish to take the complaint further.

Right to be accompanied

At any stage of making complaint an individual has the right to help from a friend or supporter in making his/her case. In particular this includes the right to be accompanied to any meetings. The investigating member of staff should make sure the complainant is aware of this right.

Stage two - CEO Level

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response at stage one, they should then submit a stage two complaint which will be responded to by the CEO. The complaint should be made in writing to the CEO. The registration of a complaint at this level will be acknowledged by correspondence on the same day. It will then be the responsibility of the CEO to investigate the complaint and respond within three calendar weeks. The CEO must inform any staff, volunteers or trustees who are involved in the complaint that the complaint has progressed to stage two as soon as possible.

In investigating the complaint and responding to the complainant, the CEO should consider whether an apology is required, remedial action is necessary, any reprimand or disciplinary action may be necessary against any member of staff, and whether any changes need to be made to RAB's policies, practises and procedures.

Stage 3 - Complaints Panel

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response at stage two, they should submit a stage three complaint. This should be in writing and addressed to the Chair of RAB. A complaints panel will be established to which the complainant will be invited. The panel should meet within one month of the complaint reaching stage three.

The complaints panel will consist of three nominated trustees. If the complainant wishes, they may request that they make their appeal to the panel in person. They may bring a friend or supporter to help them put their case. The role of the chair is to ensure that the complaint is fully re-investigated and the response is not just a reproduction of previous responses.

When the panel has discussed the complaint, they will respond to the complainant within seven days.

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