

# Regional Partnership (WMLGA & WMRA)

## Compliments, Comments and Complaints Procedure Guidance Note

### 1. Our Commitment to you

1.1 The Regional Partnership (West Midlands Local Government Association and Regional Assembly) is committed to providing an efficient and good quality service. We aim to act promptly and give helpful, courteous and informative help and advice.

1.2 We welcome your compliments, complaints and suggestions as part of our commitment to providing a good service. We would like to know when we have done things well; if we have failed to provide you with the level of service you would expect; or if you have any suggestions for improvements.

1.3 We will handle all complaints fairly, politely and within agreed timescales and will also pass on any compliments to the relevant staff, whilst respecting your right to confidentiality.

### 2. Types of Complaint

2.1 A complaint about the service we provide might include the following:

- **where you consider the attitude** and conduct of an individual member of staff to be inappropriate
- **where you feel the quality** of service has not met your expectations
- **where you feel that there has been a case of maladministration** e.g. failing to follow the right procedures
- **where you feel that there have been delays** in receiving information or a response from us

2.2 We are unable to handle some complaints because they are outside our jurisdiction. If this is the case we will try and let you know to whom your complaint should be addressed. This could include;

- A request for information (see our Access to Information Policy)
- A query or comment about Government policy
- A complaint about a political party
- Complaints about individual local authorities

### 3. How to make a complaint, compliment or suggestion

The Regional Partnership has a four-stage process to ensure that if you are not happy with the initial response provided to you, you can ask more senior people to consider the issue again.

**3.1 Stage 1: (Informal Resolution)**

You should first communicate your complaint/compliment/comment directly and informally with the person with whom you have been in contact. You can express your views by letter, fax, email or telephone.

**3.2 Stage 2: (Formal Complaint to Head of Service)**

If you are not satisfied with the response to a complaint made informally, you may request in writing that the issue be considered by the relevant Head of Service and you may request this by letter, fax or email.

**3.3 Stage 3: (Formal Complaint to Chief Executive)**

If you are still not satisfied with our response to your formal complaint, you can write directly to the Chief Executive.

Chief Executive

West Midlands Regional Partnership (WMLGA & WMRA)

Regional Partnership Centre

Albert House

Quay Place

92-93 Edward Street

Birmingham, B1 2RA

**3.4 Stage 4: (Appeal to an independent person)**

The Chief Executive will determine if a complaint warrants further independent consideration.

**4. Our Promise to you**

- 4.1 All communications will be acknowledged within 5 working days and a full reply will be provided normally within 15 working days. Where the issue is complex and we need more time to investigate, we will give you a date when you can expect a full reply and from whom.

**5. Abusive callers**

- 5.1 We strive to provide a high quality service to all who contact us. In return our employees have the right to be treated with courtesy and politeness. If contact or correspondence (including email) is abusive, malicious or constitutes a personal attack, we reserve the right to limit our response to an acknowledgement. If any of our staff are subjected to abusive behaviour they have been given permission to offer one "warning" and then either walk away or in the case of a phone call, put the phone down. The abusive behaviour will be recorded and the Chief Executive will be informed.

## **Regional Partnership (WMLGA/WMRA) Complaints, Comments and Compliments Procedure - Advice for Staff**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This procedure deals mainly with complaints, comments and compliments from people outside the Regional Partnership, but can be used to record and monitor requests for service/action and appeals against policy. It sets basic standards for dealing with complaints.

### **2. What is a complaint?**

- 2.1 “A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, action or lack of action by the Regional Partnership or its staff affecting an individual or group” (Ombudsman)
- 2.2 The most important point here is that if an individual feels that they have been ill-served, then they will perceive that their complaint is legitimate and must be treated as such. No matter how unreasonable their position, you must regard their view as a complaint. There are, however exceptions:
- Is the person complaining about the content of legislation?
  - Is the person complaining about policies or actions of the Government or other public sector bodies in region?
  - Is the person complaining about a decision the Assembly/WMLGA or one of its Panels has taken?
  - Is the person expressing dissatisfaction with the level of service identified by the Assembly or WMLGA as appropriate?

If the answer to any of the above questions is yes, the position of the Assembly/Association should be politely but firmly explained and should not in itself be treated as a complaint. During the discussion with the complainant, you should undertake to raise the matter directly with your line manager or Chief Executive for consideration.

### **3. Quality**

- 3.1 In line with other public sector organisations, the Regional Partnership is committed to responding to all complaints within a set period of time. This response should include a comprehensive answer within the agreed timescale where possible.
- 3.2 Where this is not possible, there should be an explanation via a letter or phone call that should include:
- The name, address and telephone number of the person dealing with the complaint.
  - A confirmation of what action may be taken.
  - The date by which a substantive reply will be sent.
- 3.3 If a complaint is dealt with by telephone, a brief written note of the call must be kept.
- 3.4 Where the resolution of a complaint is likely to require a substantial period of time, regular contact should be maintained.

### **4. Procedures**

- 4.1 A complaint can be made over the telephone, by letter, by email or face to face at a meeting or at the reception desk. When a complaint is received, there is a four stage procedure to be followed.

### **Stage 1: (Informal Resolution)**

- You should first identify if you are the appropriate person to resolve the problem. Make every effort answer the complaint immediately, politely and informally if you are in a position to do so. Please ensure that you respond **within 5 working days**.
- **All complaints must be reported to the Head of Communications** who will be responsible for keeping record of all complaints made. You must also ensure that you provide an update on progress to the Head of Communications until final resolution. Further guidance on this is available from the Head of Communications.
- If the complaint cannot be resolved during the informal stage, invite the complainant to contact to your line manager/Head of Service in writing to ask the issue be given further consideration. Make sure that all the details of the complaint are written down as you understand them and passed to your line manager/Head of Service who must in turn report progress to the Head of Communication.
- If you are in receipt of a **compliment or comment** you should share this information with your line manager who will determine how best to communicate the compliment to relevant officers and what action is necessary with regard to any comment. They may also consider it warrants formally recording and if so should provide details to the Head of Communications.

### **Stage 2: (Formal Complaint to Line Manager)**

- Pass your notes to your line manager and inform them that a complaint may be made. On receipt of the escalated complaint, the line manager should investigate and respond in writing or via email within 10 working days.
- If the complaint can not be resolved during this Stage, invite the complainant to write to the Chief Executive.

### **Stage 3: (Formal Complaint to Chief Executive)**

- Pass your notes to the Chief Executive and inform them that a complaint may be made. On receipt of the escalated complaint, the Chief Executive will either investigate the complaint personally or may ask another Director to investigate on their behalf. A response should be made in writing or via email within 10 working days.

### **Stage 4: (Appeal to an independent person)**

- The Chief Executive will determine whether a complaint warrants any further independent investigation and if so, will determine with the Board, who should conduct this investigation.

## **4.2 Important - Complaints regarding officer conduct**

If a complaint is made about **your own conduct**, under no circumstances should you attempt to rectify the matter or deal with the complaint yourself. You should pass the complaint immediately to your line manager or the Chief Executive.

If the complaint is made about the conduct of a colleague, then you should pass the complaint to their line manager or the Chief Executive.

## **5. How to Handle Complaints**

5.1 The vast majority of complaints are adequately dealt with at the first, informal stage. Very often a telephone conversation or other personal attention and contact can diffuse a situation quickly.

- Get the facts. Always offer to help. Do not apportion blame.
- Always ask for, and where appropriate, record the complainant's contact details to enable us to respond appropriately and within the time scales promised.

- Restate the problem, ensure that you fully understand and feedback using your own words. This helps to show the complainant that you have listened. Concentrate on the complaint being made and don't interrupt. Ask tactful questions to establish an expected outcome ie what the complainant would like to happen. Try to get as much information as possible.
- Don't jump to conclusions. Wait until you establish all the information before deciding upon the necessary action. Take clear and concise notes.
- When handling telephone calls, if you need to transfer the caller, let them know where and why they are being transferred. Before you hand on the call, let the person who you pass the call on to have brief relevant details.
- People who complain may not always be calm and polite. When dealing with difficult people, remember to remain clam yourself.

## 6. Tips for dealing with difficult situations

### 6.1 Don't take it personally, the complainant may be:

- Under pressure
- Having a bad day
- Defensive if the problem is clearly the fault of the Assembly/Association

### 6.2 Avoid transferring an angry caller:

- Don't leave them on hold
- Allow the caller to blow off steam before trying to solve the problem
- Co-operation is easier if they have expressed their feelings
- Speak calmly and explain that you want to help, be as understanding as you can
- Take notes and clarify with them in order to show you are taking the complaint seriously

### 6.2 If the caller is at fault:

- Don't embarrass them
- Avoid apportioning blame

### 6.3 You do not have to accept abusive language, if the complainant is offensive and/or threatening (and certainly if they use abusive language)

- Inform them that you cannot help or deal with their complaint **until they calm down**
- If it is a telephone call, advise the caller that **you will terminate the call** if they continue with abusive language
- If they still continue, **put the phone down and inform your manager immediately.**

### 6.4 Do's and Don't's

#### Do

- Explore all possibilities
- Keep the complainant informed
- Focus on the future to try to prevent the same thing happening again
- Be positive, look at what you can do, not what you can't
- If you have to say "no" or "It's Assembly/Association policy" give an explanation where possible

#### Don't

- Leave the complainant without explanation, while you investigate the problem
- Be defensive or argue
- Make promises you can't keep
- Assign blame to yourself or other people