

Complaints Policy and Procedure

1. Background

Individuals and organisations have the right to express their views about the performance of Healthwatch Kingston (hereafter HWK) and the way in which it conducts its business. Anyone who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the service received by HWK can provide feedback, raise a concern or make a complaint. This includes complaints against the Board of Trustees (hereafter trustees), staff, volunteers and any other persons acting on behalf of HWK. This policy is a statement of intent and will be implemented as a procedure.

2. Scope

HWK is committed to learning and improving its service as a result of feedback and complaints. If HWK is perceived to have fallen short of the high standards it sets, by someone who has received a service, then it is imperative that they can provide feedback or voice their concern easily and expect a prompt response.

This policy does NOT cover:

- Complaints about other partner agencies and services that HWK works with
- Complaints or concerns about the NHS, which should be dealt with through the NHS complaints procedure
- Complaints about the provision of social care services, which should be dealt with by the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames complaints procedure

3. Procedure

There are four stages to HWK's Complaints Procedure (see figure 1 below) and wherever possible an emphasis is placed on resolving any concerns as quickly as possible:

- I. Individuals are encouraged to contact the office in the first instance and ask to speak to the Chief Officer who provide the complainant with the Complaints Policy and Procedure. Providing information or correcting misunderstandings or misconceptions at this early stage may enable the issue to be successfully resolved at a local level without the need for an individual to make a formal complaint. If acceptable to the individual an offer to meet and discuss the

concern with the Chief Officer will be provided.

- II. If the concern is not resolved to an individual's satisfaction, or the complaint is about the Chief Officer, then they should notify the Chair in writing to the address provided in section 5 of this policy and procedure and state that they wish to make a formal complaint and provide details of the natures of their concern(s). The Chair will acknowledge the complaint. Attempts to resolve the complaint will be completed within 15 working days of establishing the nature of the complaint. This stage will also include an offer to meet with the Chief Officer or Chair of the Board of Trustees. Exceptionally, if further time is needed, and where possible, this will be agreed with the individual. A revised timescale will be provided in writing. A written response will be provided to the complainant on conclusion of this stage of the complaints process.
- III. If an individual is not happy with the outcome of their formal complaint, they will be able to appeal to a panel of two to three trustees who have not previously been involved in the matter will then review the complaint. A timescale will be provided (within 15 working days) and once the appeal process has been completed the complaint will be closed. A written response will be provided to the complainant on conclusion of this stage of the complaints process.
- IV. If an individual remains dissatisfied they can take their complaint to the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames. The individual may also subsequently take their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman (www.lgo.org.uk).

Fig 1 Summary of Complaints Procedure

Stage I: Local Resolution

Stage II: Formal Complaint

Stage III: Appeal Process

Stage IV: Escalation Process

4. Compliments, Suggestions and Comments

In contrast to addressing matters of concern made by individuals Healthwatch Kingston is keen to receive positive feedback about its services which can be provided in person, over the phone, by post or email.

5. Contact details

The contact details for Healthwatch Kingston are:

Healthwatch Kingston upon Thames
Kingston Quaker Centre
Fairfield East
Kingston upon Thames
KT1 2PT

Tel: 0203 326 1255

Email: info@healthwatchkingston.org.uk

6. References

- [HW England Complaints Policy dated 2017](#)
- Healthwatch England: Guidance on developing an effective complaints policy, 2013
- Healthwatch England: Template complaints policy, 2013

7. Document Control

Title of Document: Complaints Policy & Procedure	
Board Approval Date: 26 November 2019	Review Date: December 2020

Note to Board - Escalation Policy & Procedure (2015): The Board is requested to review and agree to drop this policy and procedure as there is duplication with the revised Complaints Policy and Procedure document.

Escalation Policy & Procedure

1. Why have an Escalation Policy & Procedure?

The escalation process is a formal process that has been established to allow Healthwatch Kingston (hereafter HWK) to share with Healthwatch England issues about health and social care services that HWK is unable to resolve locally and that it proposes Healthwatch England take forward. A formal process is in place so that Healthwatch England can log and respond to issues escalated from HWK. It also allows Healthwatch England to assess whether an issue is indeed one that is best taken up by Healthwatch England or if it is something that can be better resolved through additional signposting and support to HWK. This policy is a statement of intent and will be implemented as a procedure in accordance with Healthwatch England's guidance.

2. What can be done to avoid escalation?

HWK aims to work in partnership with health and social care services and whenever possible to facilitate a culture of collaborative working in the best interests of the local community. During the course of its work, however, there may be times when HWK wishes to voice concerns about a service provider, commissioning decision or unmet need. On these occasions HWK will exhaust all local avenues for resolution before escalating an issue to Healthwatch England. These include:

- Trying to resolve the issue directly with the commissioner and/or service provider, including (if unresolved) escalating the issue to the Chief Executive or other NHS or Local Authority directors
- Identifying a local charity or campaign group who is already focusing on the issue and is better-placed to lead on it because of their knowledge and expertise
- Contacting the Care Quality Commission or the appropriate regulator and seeking their advice and support
- Bringing the issue to the attention of the Health Overview Panel
- Consulting with other local Healthwatch to see if anyone else has already tackled something similar
- Contacting Healthwatch England to find out if the issue is best dealt with at a national level without the need for a formal escalation
- If appropriate, contacting local MPs or local media to leverage action on the issue

3. What are the reasons for escalation?

There are two reasons why HWK will escalate an issue to Healthwatch England. They are:

- A local issue that HWK has not been able to resolve at a local level
- A local issue that is irresolvable locally as it relates to national policy and cannot be addressed at a local level

If the issue is related to a safeguarding concern it must be addressed in accordance with HWK's Safeguarding Policy & Procedure.

4. How to escalate an issue?

HWK can escalate an issue via the web form (www.healthwatch.co.uk/escalation) which will require the provision of the following information:

- Date of escalation
- Description of the issue being escalated and the reasons why
- Details of how the issue come to the attention of HWK
- Other organisations involved in the issue
- Related reports or recommendations
- Evidence to show what HWK has done to resolve the issue locally
- Expectations of Healthwatch England

5. What happens next?

5.1 Reporting and Safeguarding

After an escalation notification is received by Healthwatch England it is screened for any safeguarding issues. HWK should resolve any safeguarding issues prior to escalating a case but Healthwatch England retains this double-check.

5.2 Screening

The case is then checked against the escalation criteria. If it does not meet the criteria, HWK will be contacted by the Healthwatch England development team who will provide support to resolve the issue locally. If local action still does not lead to a resolution, the issue can be re-submitted as an escalation.

5.3 Investigation

Each escalation case will be designated a single point of contact within Healthwatch England. This person will coordinate investigation of the case, remain in contact with HWK and advise on next steps. At this point, the case will be taken

up by the intelligence and policy teams within Healthwatch England. The intelligence team will look at how widespread the issue is within the Healthwatch network and will also look at whether there is any other relevant national data on the issue. The policy team will undertake some basic research to understand how the issue could be resolved e.g. what national policy does the issue relate to, who is affected by the issue, which stakeholders are involved, who is involved in funding/commissioning/service provision.

5.4 Actions

Based on the research and intelligence gathered, a recommendation will be made as to how Healthwatch England can push for the issue to be resolved. Actions could include:

- Using the issue as evidence if it relates to a wider piece of Healthwatch England work
- Informally or formally raising the issue with a statutory body
- Using Healthwatch England's information or advisory powers with a statutory body or Secretary of State
- Carrying out media work to gain traction on the issue
- Carrying out more in-depth investigation on the issue e.g. focus groups with specific consumer groups
 - Taking forward the issue in a Healthwatch England special report/inquiry/thematic brief

5.5 Timelines

A definitive time line for the escalation process cannot be set out as each escalated case is unique and takes varying amounts of research and action to resolve. HWK should however expect an automated response when the e-form is submitted; an acknowledgment that the escalated issue has been received and is being processed within one week of submission, and an initial response from the lead person who will be investigating the case within two weeks. If there has been a surge in cases, or if there is any other reason why the investigation of HWK's case will be delayed, this should be indicated in the acknowledgement HWK will receive within one week of submission. Once the case has been taken up by a lead person, they will be in regular communication with HWK to update on progress. Any queries during any stage of the process HWK can contact the lead person within Healthwatch England or contact escalations@healthwatch.co.uk

6. References

The following publication was used to produce this document: • Healthwatch England: Escalation Process, 2014

7. DocumentControl

Title of Document: Escalation Policy & Procedure

Board Approval Date: December 2015

Review Date: December 2016

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