

VAC Complaints Procedure

We are keen to hear from you if you have any comments to make about VAC and the services we provide. Anyone who uses VAC's facilities has the right to complain if they are not happy with the quality of service they have been given. We welcome your views and will do our best to deal with any complaints promptly and efficiently. VAC would like to hear from you if you have any comments or complaints to make:

- on the quality or nature of the service provided
- because of being refused a service without an acceptable reason
- because of unreasonable delays in VAC providing a service;
- because of decisions or actions of a member of VAC's staff
- because of a failure to provide information or giving out inaccurate information
- because of the way VAC is run, for example, ways of working are contrary to policy on equal opportunities
- because you believe you have been discriminated against because of your religion, language, gender, sexuality, marital status, age or disability, or on any other grounds
- because you have some suggestions on how our services could be improved

How Do I Complain?

If you wish to complain, you could do this informally or formally. Consider the following procedures and decide which best suits you.

(a) Resolving a complaint informally

An informal chat: Many complaints can be sorted out by talking the problem over with a member of VAC's staff. An informal chat may resolve the problem or clear up any misunderstanding. If you ask them to, the staff member will record the main points of the discussion and give you a copy of this.

Discussion with VAC's Director: You may prefer to resolve the problem with VAC's Director. To do this, contact the Director who will arrange a mutually convenient time to meet within 10 working days of being contacted. At the meeting a record will be made and a copy given to you. (Our Director's contact details are at the bottom of this page.)

VAC is committed to receiving your comments and complaints sympathetically, and where appropriate resolving the problem as amicably as possible and to your satisfaction. If, however, you are still dissatisfied you can make a formal complaint following the procedures outlined below.

If you need any help making your complaint or during the progress of your complaint, for example, if English is not your first language or you have

difficulty writing, we will try to arrange the help you need. If this is the case, please let our Director know.

Confidentiality

Anyone making a complaint has the right to confidentiality. Within VAC's normal complaints procedure this means that only the Chair, the person looking into the complaint, (which will usually be the Director unless the complaint is against him/her), the Complaints Panel/Executive Committee, and (if relevant) the staff member who is being complained about, will know about the complaint, its progress and outcome.

Information gathered during the investigation of a complaint will only be used for the purpose intended and will not be shared without your knowledge or that of the staff member concerned. Such information will only be shared on a 'need to know' basis.

(b) Making a formal complaint

Stage 1 – Send your complaint in writing, or on a cassette tape, to VAC's Chair at the address given at the foot of this page. You will be sent an acknowledgement (within five working days) that the complaint has been received and you will be told about:

- how the complaint will be dealt with and who is dealing with it; how long it should take to look into your complaint and when you should expect to receive a report about your complaint (this normally takes about 21 working days); the right to confidentiality if that is what you want; the right to have a friend or advisor for support; the further stages of the Comments and Complaints procedure.

Stage 2 – If you are still not happy after receiving the Chair's response, you can ask that your complaint is referred to the Complaints Panel of the Executive Committee. Such a request should be made in writing, or by sending a cassette tape, to the Chair and be received within 21 working days of the written reply (to stage 1),

A meeting of the Complaints Panel will be held within 28 working days of receiving your request. The Complaints Panel will be appointed by the Chair or one of the Vice Chairs of the Executive Committee and will consist of two people (two members of the Executive Committee or one member of the Executive Committee plus an independent person or some other variation). Panel membership will be restricted to members of the Executive Committee who have no previous involvement in the matter.

You will be invited to attend a meeting of the Panel and will be entitled to have a friend or advisor with you if you wish, or a language interpreter or sign language interpreter if needed.

The Panel will report to the next meeting of the Executive Committee including any recommendations for action and the decision of the Executive Committee will be given to you in writing within 7 working days of its meeting, and will be final as far as VAC is concerned.

At all stages the time limits can be altered by mutual consent. (Please note that a day throughout this procedure refers to one working day.)

In summary:

Informal steps

- (1) Raise complaint with a member of VAC's staff
- (2) Ask for a meeting with VAC's Director : *This will be set up within 10 days of your request*

Formally Stage 1

- (3) Complaint raised with the Chair of VAC
 - Acknowledgement : *within 5 days*
 - Written reply : *within 21 days*
- (4) Satisfied? Yes? Procedure ends. Not satisfied? Move to Stage 2

Stage 2

- (5) Request complaint to be referred to the Complaints Panel: *within 21 days of receipt of the written reply.*
 - Meeting of the Complaints Panel : *within 28 days after receipt of the request.*
 - Meeting of the Executive Committee : *decision notified within 7 days of the meeting.*
 - Satisfied? Yes? Procedure ends. Not satisfied? Then...

What further action can I take?

VAC is committed to resolving problems. If, after following the above procedures, you are still unhappy with the response or outcome, you may choose to refer the matter to:

Head of Voluntary Sector Unit
London Borough of Camden
Crowndale Centre
218 Eversholt Street
London NW1 1BD

Tel: 020 7974 5791 **Fax:** 020 7974 5824

or to

The Director
National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA),
177 Arundel Street,
Sheffield S1 2NU

Tel: 0114 278 6636 **Fax:** 0114 278 7004

(About National Association for Voluntary and Community Action: NAVCA is the membership organisation and national umbrella body for councils for voluntary services like VAC. They are keen to ensure CVS operate effectively and smoothly and work within the Code of Practice and Statement of Values that member CVS agree to. If you feel it would be helpful to involve the national association in the discussion, NACVS would be happy to be consulted. Their role would be to facilitate the resolution of any problem rather than to conduct an investigation.)

Contact details for VAC Director at March 2010.

Simone Hensby, Director – VAC.

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