

DVC Complaints Procedure: Individuals and Organisations

Policy Statement

DVC is committed to providing excellent customer service to everyone who is affected by its operation. We do not look at complaints as unwanted and we are firmly committed to a process of continuous improvement of which the complaints procedure is just one element.

Recognising that sometimes things go wrong, or mistakes are made, this policy outlines the procedures to follow to make a complaint and the internal procedures we follow to manage the process.

This procedure will be available on our web site and will form part of the induction process for staff and trustees. A copy will be sent to anyone making a complaint. Regular statistical reports will be provided to the Management Committee.

Objectives

The objectives of this complaints procedure are to ensure that:

- any complaints that are received are investigated at the appropriate level in the organisation,
- all complaints are actioned in the most expeditious way,
- persons making complaints know how their complaint will be dealt with and
- wherever possible, lessons are learned.

Definition of Customer

For the purposes of this procedure, customers are defined as anyone, individual or group, who has any dealing with the organisation; excluding staff who are asked to raise issues either with the Manager, project co-ordinator or under the internal grievance procedure. Trustees are also excluded from this procedure: any specific issues should be raised with the Chair of Management Committee.

Misunderstandings

Even if customers do not regard a particular concern as a 'complaint', we would still like to know about it as it may help us deal with something we would otherwise overlook. These smaller things that go wrong or small misunderstandings can often be put right very quickly. We want to know about these; we want customers to get an acceptable solution very quickly but we also need to learn from the process.

In striving for excellent customer service, we realise that this is a high standard and in order to meet it, we need to be made aware of even the most minor failing. In order to avoid customers feeling that a minor issue is not worth raising as a complaint, we will take steps to encourage comment and constructive criticism at every level.

Training will be provided to all staff in dealing with all reported issues and misunderstandings. This training will include an empowerment to immediately resolve any issue where our service level has not met our customer's expectations, if this is possible. Members of staff will record all issues dealt with in this way. The customer's name will not be included and the staff member will make an objective judgement on the cause of the problem and these will be analysed on a regular basis as part of our process of continuous improvement.

Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is defined, for the purpose of this procedure, as a written record compiled by any customer of DVC that is sent to the appropriate person to be registered and where the originator has received an acknowledgement.

To clarify, the definition "complaint" does not include a comment provided by individuals asking for a simple remedy to a minor problem.

Integrity

During the process of dealing with a complaint we will be as open and transparent as possible. People raising complaints will be given full information about the progress of their complaint except in the cases mentioned below.

- If the complaint involves questions about the actions or competencies of individual members of staff or trustees, other processes may subsume the complaints procedure and DVC may not be able to provide the person raising the complaint with all the relevant information. (For instance, employment legislation may prevent publication of the results of disciplinary processes)
- The legal requirements of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (Whistleblowers) may restrict the information that can be provided to persons raising complaints.

If either of these situations occurs the Manager will provide an explanation without disclosing any restricted information.

To ensure confidentiality, information about the progress of a complaint will only be provided to the person making the complaint.

Complaints Process

Customers making formal complaints are asked to write or email an explanation of the issue that has caused them to be dissatisfied. A complaint should also contain an explanation of what the person making the complaint requires to be done to resolve the issue.

Complaints should be sent to the Manager in order to register them within the procedure.

The Manager will send an acknowledgement by return giving a reference number for use with any further correspondence with DVC.

The Manager will refer each complaint to an appropriate Management Committee member for the first review, unless such a person is specifically mentioned in the complaint, in which case it will be referred to the Chair or other Trustee of the organisation.

All correspondence about complaints will be treated as confidential.

When the first reviewer has considered the detail of the complaint, the person raising the complaint will receive a written response detailing any proposed remedial action. This will be done within 28 days of the receipt of the original complaint. If this is not possible, Manager will explain this in writing within the 28 days.

The person raising the complaint will also be told in this response that they can request a second review.

If a second review is requested, the matter will be referred to a more senior person within DVC. This may be the Chair of the Management Committee or other Management Committee member.

Following the second review, the person raising the complaint will be provided with a written response detailing any changes to the previously proposed remedial action. In the majority of cases the second review will be the final position of DVC. However, this final response will also indicate if, and how, the complaint can be progressed beyond this second stage.

Further progressing of a complaint beyond the second review will depend on the nature of the matter. The Charity Commission has a list of the types of issues it would be willing to investigate in some circumstances. Other alternative routes include the police, trading standards or health and safety within a local authority and a funding body if the service being complained about was funded directly by such a body. The response from the second review will explain all relevant options.

If an accusation is made that this procedure has not been followed, the matter can be raised for discussion at a Trustees meeting by contacting the Chair of the organisation. The Trustee's meeting will not consider the substantive matter because this may invalidate the second review process, but may refer the whole matter back to the first review stage and ask for a report to make sure that the full procedure is followed.

If at any stage the customer making the complaint wants to stop a complaint from being progressed, the customer can do so in writing or email to the Manager. DVC reserves the right to continue to investigate serious complaints in these circumstances.

Results of Complaints

The Management Committee will receive a report immediately following every complaint, detailing the general nature of the problem and a list of remedial actions that have been taken. A summary statement will be included, at the discretion of the Management Committee, in our annual report.

Continuous Improvement

DVC strives to be a learning organisation and will further develop quality improvement procedures, which will include information received from this process. DVC would appreciate feedback from complainants about their experience of DVC's complaints procedure and may use this to improve the way complaints are managed in the future.

Agreed by Management Committee 13/8/14