Adoption West Complaints Policy

**Introduction**

Adoption West welcomes compliments, comments and complaints from its users. We value feedback from all our service users and will use all feedback to help us improve and develop our service to meet the needs of children, adopters, birth families and others that we work with.

Adoption West is committed to providing a high quality, transparent and accessible service to everyone we have contact with. To do this we need you to tell us when we get things wrong. We want to help resolve your complaint as quickly as possible.

Any expression of dissatisfaction with our service will be handled as a complaint. We will listen to your complaints, treat them seriously, and learn from them so that we can continuously improve our service.

**What is a Complaint?**

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not.

Our policy covers complaints about:

* the standard of service you should expect from us
* the behaviour of our staff in delivering that service
* any action, or lack of action, by our staff or others engaged on behalf of Adoption West

Our complaints policy does not cover:

* matters that have already been fully investigated through this complaint procedure
* complaints for which there is a legal remedy or where legal proceedings already exist
* complaints that appear to warrant a child protection investigation or vulnerable adult investigation
* complaints from members of staff about employment matters
* complaints about recruitment decisions
* complaints about an external organisation or body such as a local authority or voluntary adoption agency

**Complaints About Adopter Recruitment Decisions**

If you are not happy with a decision made by the Agency Decision Maker regarding the outcome of your prospective adopter assessment you will have received a Qualifying Determination.

A "qualifying determination" is a determination made by an adoption agency that it considers a prospective or existing adopter is not suitable to adopt a child.

If you are a prospective or an existing adopter who has recently received a **qualifying determination** which you don’t agree with, you have three options:

1. You can apply to the Independent Review Mechanism for a review of adoption agency’s qualifying determination, within 40 working days of the date of your letter.
2. You can make written representations to Adoption West.
3. You can accept the Qualifying Determination. In which case it takes effect 40 working days after the date on the letter.

You can only exercise one option.

Your adoption worker will provide you with information about the IRM (Independent Review Mechanism)

Adoption West will make the decision about your suitability to adopt or whether or not a particular child should be placed with you. This decision may be reviewed in the light of any representations made by you but Adoption West and the Local Authority responsible for the child have the right to make the final decision.

**Making a Complaint**

If you are dissatisfied about any aspect of our service and have not been able to resolve this immediately with the member of staff concerned, we will consider your complaint using the process below.

All complaints will be acknowledged within 5 working days at each stage.

**Complaints made by children**

If a child or young person receives care or a service from Adoption West, and they are unhappy with the care or service they receive, we would like to hear about it so that we can investigate and resolve their complaint.

1. If the complaint is regarding the care or any service that has been provided by Adoption West, the child or their representative can contact us at the address at the end of this document or speak to the Adoption West social worker.
2. If the complaint is regarding the care or service provided by the local authority responsible for the child, the complaint should be made to the relevant local authority.
3. If the child or representative is unsure about who to complain to regarding a service, contact Adoption West and we will make sure your complaint reaches the correct person/organisation.

**Local Authority Contact information**

The following are the contact numbers and emails for each of the Local Authorities within the Adoption West Area.

Bath and North East Somerset Council – 01225 47 7752 or [complaints\_cypandadults@bathnes.gov.uk](mailto:complaints_cypandadults@bathnes.gov.uk)

Bristol Council – 0117 922 2723 or

[complaints.feedback@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:complaints.feedback@bristol.gov.uk)

Gloucestershire County Council – 01452 427388 or [corporatecomplaintsteam@gloucestershire.gov.uk](mailto:corporatecomplaintsteam@gloucestershire.gov.uk)

North Somerset Council – 01275 882 171 or

[complaints.manager@n-somerset.gov.uk](mailto:complaints.manager@n-somerset.gov.uk)

South Gloucestershire Council – 01454 865924 or [cahfeedback@southglos.gov.uk](mailto:cahfeedback@southglos.gov.uk)

Wiltshire Council – 01225 718400 or

[complaints@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@wiltshire.gov.uk)

Information about how a child may make a complaint to Adoption West or their local authority can also be found within the Children’s Guide. This is provided to all children at the beginning of their placement.

**Confidentiality**

All complaints received will be dealt with confidentially and in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act, subject to the need to disclose information as required by statutory authorities, and/or as a result of statutory, legal obligations.

**Standards for Handling Complaints**

You can make a complaint by letter or email. If you make an initial contact by phone, we will ask you to put your complaint in writing. We treat all complaints seriously and we will treat your complaint in confidence.

You can expect to be treated with courtesy, respect and fairness at all times. We expect that you will also treat our staff dealing with your complaint with the same courtesy, respect and fairness.

We will deal with your service complaint promptly. We will acknowledge receipt of a written complaint within 5 working days where we have a return address and you can expect to have a full response within 20 working days. In a few cases we will not be able to send a full reply within 20 working days of receipt, for example if your complaint is very complex. If this happens, we will tell you the reason why and let you know when we will be able to reply in full, keeping you fully informed of progress.

We will treat all complainants in the same way in line with the Equality Act 2010

**How to Make a Complaint**

If you wish to make a complaint, you can do so by email or letter, all complaints must be received in writing. If you are disabled, and need a reasonable adjustment to ensure you can register your complaint, you can contact us alternatively by:

* telephone (one of our officers will help you by writing out your complaint)
* asking a member of staff to help you in writing out your complaint

Our contact details are in the Contacting Us section below. If you require different adjustments, let us know and we will try and put those arrangements in place where we can.

**Service Complaints Procedure**

We have a two-stage service complaints procedure (see Appendix 1 - Procedure Diagram). At each stage it will help us to resolve your complaint quickly if you can:

* give us as much clarity and detail as possible,
* provide any documents and correspondence
* state that you are making a complaint,
* state the specific points you wish to see addressed and
* propose a suggested remedy.

If we do not have all the details required to deal with the complaint, we may contact you and ask you for further information.

Stage 1 – Local Resolution

This is the first opportunity for us to resolve your complaint. We expect the majority of complaints to be resolved at this stage. On receipt of your complaint we will acknowledge your complaint and it will be passed to the Service Director to decide which manager should respond to your complaint. You should receive a full response to your complaint within 20 working days. You have a maximum of 28 days from the date of the Stage 1 response to request that your complaint is progressed to Stage 2 if you are not satisfied with the response.

Stage 2 - Investigation

If you are dissatisfied with the response at stage 1, you may request a review. This will be carried out either by the Service Director (or by a member of the Board of Directors should your complaint include the Service Director). Your request should be sent to the Service Director, who will forward, if necessary, your request to the relevant Board Director to be reviewed.

The Service Director will review the complaint, may contact you to discuss your concerns, interview staff and review documentation in order to fully investigate the complaint. A full written response will be provided at Stage 2 within 20 working days.

**If you are still not satisfied**

If having followed the two internal stages of our service complaints procedure you remain dissatisfied, you will be informed of your right to make representation to any appropriate statutory body.

**Timescales**

**Stage 1**

We will acknowledge complaints within 5 working days of receiving each complaint. We will send a full response within 20 working days of receiving each complaint.

If you make a complaint in person to a member of our staff (at an event or meeting), we will record your complaint in writing within 3 working days, and acknowledge it within 5 working days thereafter. We will then deal with your complaint in accordance with our policy for written complaints.

Stage 2

We will acknowledge complaints within 5 working days of receiving each complaint. We will send a full response within 20 working days of receiving each complaint.

Extending time limits

We aim to complete our investigation into all complaints received about our service within the timescales set out above. However, in a limited number of cases - for example, if a complaint is very complex or requires further explanation, it may be necessary to extend the time limit to ensure we have all the information necessary to deal with it. If this is the case we will keep you informed of progress with the investigation, the reasons for the delay, and inform you of next steps.

**Responses to a Complaint**

When we get things wrong we will act to:

* + accept responsibility and apologise
  + explain what went wrong and why, and
  + put things right by making any changes required

learn lessons from mistakes and change policies and practices wherever we can so that we can improve the service to children, adopters and birth families

The action we take to put matters right in response to a service complaint can include any combination of the possibilities set out in the list below. As far as possible we will seek to find a solution to ensure you feel that we have heard and acted on your complaint.

Possible Outcomes to a Complaint

* + A full apology, explaining what happened and/or what went wrong.
  + Corrective action, which may include reviewing or changing a decision on the service given to an individual complainant
  + Provide the service required in the first instance
  + Putting things right (for example a change of procedure to prevent future difficulties of a similar kind, either for the complainant or others)
* Training or supervising staff; or a combination of both

**Recording Complaints**

Complaint details, outcomes and actions taken are recorded by us and used for service improvement. We record all complaints we receive and collate data from them to help us understand what types of problems are most prevalent, and how well we are doing to resolve them. We value your feedback and expect to use it to help us to:

* get things right in the future if we have not done so already
* become more customer focused
* be more open and accountable
* act fairly and proportionately
* seek continuous improvement

We will handle your information so that it is only processed and retained appropriately and legally, in line with data protection legislation.

We provide anonymised data to our Board of Directors about complaints, compliments and suggestions to inform the development of our services in the future.

**Contacting Us**

All complaints and requests for review under our complaints procedure should be sent as follows:

By email: [feedback@adoptionwest.co.uk](mailto:feedback@adoptionwest.co.uk)

By post: Adoption West

Floor 2, Old County Hall

Bythesea Road

Trowbridge

Wiltshire

BA14 8JN

If you are unable to contact us in writing as above, and require a reasonable adjustment because you are a disabled person, you may contact us as follows:

**Telephone:** 03303 550333

**Alternative Formats for this Policy**

Adoption West is committed to equal opportunities and our aim is to make our corporate complaints policy easy to use and accessible to all of our service users. We will take reasonable steps to accommodate any adjustments you may need to enable you to access this policy or receive responses to complaints in other formats, and provide such assistance as you may reasonably require.

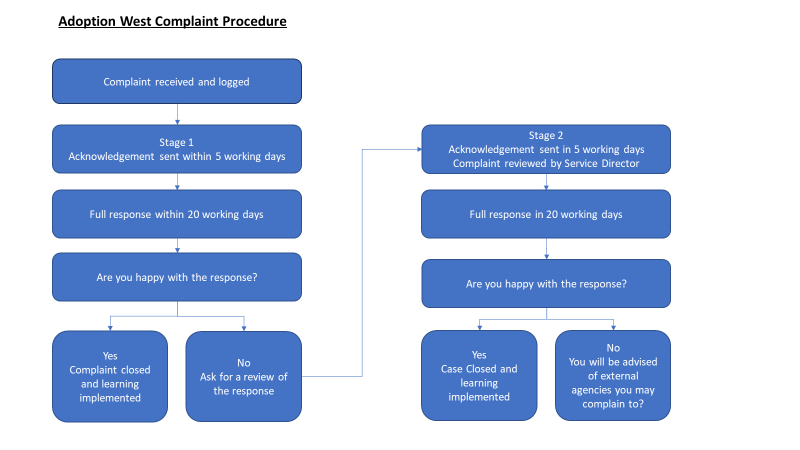
If you would like the policy or a response to a complaint in another format (such as Braille, audio CD, BSL video, large print or Easy Read) please contact: [feedback@adoptionwest.co.uk](mailto:feedback@adoptionwest.co.uk)

**Comments and Compliments**

The quality of our service is important to us. Learning from complaints, is the best way of ensuring continuous improvement which will help us to provide a high quality service to children, adopters and birth families.

We are also interested to hear from you about any comments you have on our service and how we can improve overall, as well as any compliments you wish to make about our service and the staff who provide it.

Any comments/compliments you wish to make can be given to us by contacting any members of our staff, or you can e-mail Adoption West – [feedback@adoptionwest.co.uk](mailto:feedback@adoptionwest.co.uk)

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