



Adoption West Complaints Policy

Introduction

Adoption West is committed to providing a high quality, transparent and accessible service to everyone we have contact with. To help us do this we ask you to share compliments, comments and complaints with us. If something has gone wrong, we will look into it for you and wherever possible put things right. We will use all feedback to improve and develop our service to meet the needs of children, adopters, birth families and others that we work with.

This policy describes how Adoption West will manage and respond when you share compliments, concerns and complaints with us. It is designed to enable us to resolve concerns and complaints quickly and, as far as possible, at the initial point of contact.

Contacting us with your feedback:

If you think we've done something well or you'd like to suggest something we could do differently which would help improve the service for other people, please share this with a member of our staff, or you can e-mail Adoption West at feedback@adoptionwest.co.uk

If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of our service and want to make a complaint it is often helpful to start by speaking to a member of staff or manager as they may be able to sort out your concerns straight away. If you this doesn't resolve your complaint or you would rather contact someone who is independent, we ask you do this in writing by:

Email: feedback@adoptionwest.co.uk
Post: Adoption West
Floor 2, Old County Hall
Bythesea Road
Trowbridge
Wiltshire
BA14 8JN

If you are unable to contact us in writing and require a reasonable adjustment because you are a disabled person, please contact us by telephone and a member of staff will record the details of your complaint or help you to write the complaint.
Telephone: 03303 550333.

What is a Complaint?

We define a complaint as:

an expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not.

Our policy covers complaints about:

- the standard of service we deliver
- 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

Who can complain?

We welcome complaints from children who receive care from Adoption West, adopters, prospective adopters, birth families and those entitled to support through Adoption Support.

Complaints made by a child or young person

If a child or young person who receives care or a service from Adoption West is unhappy with the care or service, we would like to hear their feedback so we can investigate and resolve the complaint for them.

1. If the complaint is about the care or service that has been provided by Adoption West, the child or their representative can contact us using any of the methods described above or speak to the Adoption West social worker.
2. If the complaint is about 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 the complaint reaches the correct person/organisation.

Local Authority Contact information

The following are the contact numbers and email addresses 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

Bristol Council – 0117 922 2723 or
complaints.feedback@bristol.gov.uk

Gloucestershire County Council – 01452 427388 or
corporatecomplaintsteam@gloucestershire.gov.uk

North Somerset Council – 01275 882 171 or
complaints.manager@n-somerset.gov.uk

South Gloucestershire Council – 01454 865924 or
cahfeedback@southglos.gov.uk

Wiltshire Council – 01225 718400 or
complaints@wiltshire.gov.uk

Information about how a child can 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.

What you can expect from us when you make a complaint

We value your feedback and want to reassure you we take all complaints seriously. If you make a complaint, you can expect us to treat you with courtesy, respect and fairness at all times. In return we ask that you treat our staff with the same courtesy and respect when they are dealing with your complaint.

We will treat all complainants in line with the Equality Act 2010. Reasonable adjustments will be made to the procedure where required to ensure that all complainants can access, and complete, the procedure.

Making a complaint will not affect the way we respond to you in future.

Your complaint will be dealt with in confidence and in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018. However, please be aware, there are occasions when we need to disclose information as required by statutory authorities and/or as a result of statutory, legal obligations. Wherever possible we will tell you if this is what we intend to do.

Our process

We have a two-stage formal complaints procedure; please see below and Appendix 1 - Procedure Diagram. However, we believe it is best for all concerned to try and resolve concerns and complaints as early as possible and we encourage you therefore to use the Informal Resolution stage of our procedure.

If you want to bring an issue to our attention, we ask you contact us with the following information:

- state that you are raising a concern or complaint
- give us as much information as possible, for example, names of staff, dates of events
- provide any documents and correspondence that you refer to in your complaint
- state the specific points you wish to be addressed
- propose a remedy for your complaint.

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

Informal Resolution

The purpose of the Informal Resolution stage is to resolve your concerns and complaints as quickly as possible without the need for you to enter a formal complaints procedure.

When we receive your concern/complaint we will:

- Acknowledge your complaint within 2 working days.
- Pass your complaint to the line manager for the member of staff or service you have complained about.
- Review the information you have provided to understand your concerns.
- Contact you by telephone where we need further information to understand your concerns and the outcome you are looking for.
- Provide a written response within 10 working days.

There are occasions when the issue is sufficiently serious or complex to require immediate escalation to Stage 1 of the formal complaints procedure. Where this is the case, we will inform you within 2 working days. You can also request that your complaint moves straight to the Stage 1 Local Resolution stage.

Stage 1 – Local Resolution

If the Informal Resolution stage does not resolve your complaint, please let us know within 20 working days from the date of the letter and explain why you are dissatisfied with the response you received.

Within 2 working days we will pass your complaint to a senior manager for allocation to an appropriate manager to investigate your concerns.

This manager will carry out an investigation of your concerns and will:

- Review the detail of your complaint and the remedy you are looking for
- Review relevant case records
- Speak to the staff involved
- Consider relevant legislation, policies and procedures

You can expect to receive a full written response which addresses all elements of your complaint within 20 working days.

If you are dissatisfied with this response, you have up to 28 days from the date of the Stage 1 response to request that your complaint is progressed to Stage 2. Information about where to direct your request for Stage 2 will be included in the Stage 1 response.

Stage 2 - Review

The purpose of Stage 2 is to carry out a review of the complaint response at Stage 1 and investigate any outstanding issues which have not been addressed at Stage 1.

Your request for escalation to Stage 2 should explain why you are dissatisfied with the Stage 1 response and the remedy you are seeking at Stage 2.

It is usual for a Service Manager/Director to respond to a Stage 2 complaint unless the complaint concerns the Service Director in which case the complaint will be escalated to a member of the Board of Directors.

The Stage 2 investigation will begin with a review of the complaint correspondence at Stage 1 to ensure the response has covered all issues raised at Stage 1. It will also include contact with the

complainant to understand the outstanding concerns, a review of relevant documentation and interviews with staff. A full written response will be provided at Stage 2 within 20 working days.

If you are still not satisfied

At the conclusion of Stage 2 you have exhausted the internal service complaints procedure and you will be informed of your right to make representation to one of the following statutory bodies if you remain dissatisfied

- The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman www.lgo.org.uk/ or 0300 061 0614.
- The registration authority –Ofsted Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD, 0300 123 1231 Textphone 0161 618 8524 enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk www.gov.uk/ofsted
- Adoption West's Registration Number: SC049026

Timescales

We ask that concerns and complaints are brought to our attention as soon as possible. Any issue raised more than a year after the incident being complained of will not be considered under this procedure unless the Service Director accepts that there are exceptional reasons to explain the delay, or the complaint is about a particularly serious matter.

Informal resolution

We will acknowledge your complaint within 2 working days.
Provide a response within 10 working days.

Stage 1

We will acknowledge your complaint within 2 working days.
Provide a full written response within 20 working days.

Stage 2

We will acknowledge requests to escalate a complaint to Stage 2 within 5 working days.
Provide a full response within 20 working days.

Extending time limits

We aim to complete our investigation of 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 particularly complex or requires input from another organisation, it may be necessary to extend the time limit to ensure we have all the information necessary to respond.

If this occurs, we will inform you of progress with the investigation, the reasons for the delay, and confirm the date when you can expect a response.

Suspending Decisions

In certain circumstances it is appropriate to consider suspending a decision until a complaint has been considered. Suspending a decision will need to take account of the impact this will have on the wellbeing of the child or young person concerned.

The decision to suspend should be made through detailed discussion and risk assessment between the Service Director and relevant Service Manager. Decisions need to be made on a case-by-case basis, but there should generally be a presumption in favour of suspending the decision, unless there is a good reason against it (for example, if leaving a child or young person where they are would put them at risk).

Concurrent processes

Where there are current court proceedings, the complaint will be suspended until after the final hearing. This is because a complaint investigation could prejudice the outcome of the proceedings. Where this is the case we will offer you the opportunity to raise your complaint again when the court process has concluded.

Learning from complaints

When we respond to complaints we will seek to provide you with a response which assures you that your concerns have been heard. When the outcome of a complaint shows that we have got something wrong or the quality of service has not met the required standard, we will:

- accept responsibility and provide a meaningful apology
- explain what went wrong and why
- wherever possible put things right by making any changes required which could include reviewing or changing a decision on the service for the individual complainant

We will also use the feedback to identify the lessons for the service to learn from and use these to improve the service to children, adopters and birth families. This can include but is not limited to:

- a review of policies and procedures to make sure we get our processes right in future
- a review of the way we communicate with children, adopters and birth families
- training for individual staff and teams

A complaint does not have to be upheld for us to identify service improvements

Recording and monitoring complaints

We record all complaint details on receipt and at the conclusion of the complaint a record of the outcomes and the actions taken are recorded and used to monitor the effectiveness of the complaints procedure and ensure the service can learn from the complaints it receives.

A record of complaints which are resolved at the informal stage will be kept for the current year + 2 years.

A record of complaints which are resolved at Stage 1 will be kept for the current year + 5 years.

A record of complaints which are resolved at Stage 2 will be kept for the current year + 10 years.

Anonymised data is shared with our Board of Directors and is also used for reporting to help us understand what types of problems are most prevalent, and how well we are doing to resolve them.

Unacceptable behaviour and unreasonably persistent complainants

We are committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to making our service as accessible as possible. Due to the nature or frequency of contact from a small minority of complainants, it is sometimes necessary for us to deal with these complainants under this section of the complaints procedure.

The following definition will be used for unacceptable behaviour:

Unacceptable behaviour includes deceitful, abusive, threatening behaviour or similar actions which adversely affect the capacity and wellbeing of staff.

Behaviour may be considered unreasonably persistent when a complainant:

- Refuses to specify the grounds of a complaint, despite offers of help.
- Refuses to cooperate with the complaint investigation process.
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure.
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice.
- Makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeking to have them replaced.
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
- Denies or changes statements he or she made at an earlier stage.
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant new information at a later stage.
- Raises many detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are all answered.
- Submits falsified documents from themselves or others.
- Adopts a 'scatter gun' approach: pursuing parallel complaints on the same issue with other agencies
- Makes excessive demands on the time and resources of staff with lengthy phone calls, emails to numerous council staff, or frequent detailed letters and expects immediate responses.
- Submits repeat complaints with minor additions/variations and insists these are considered as 'new' complaints.
- Refuses to accept the decision; repeatedly arguing points with no new evidence
- Harassing or personally abusive or verbally aggressive on more than one occasion to staff dealing with the customer or complaint.
- Threatens or has used physical violence towards staff at any time

Procedure for dealing unacceptable behaviour and unreasonably persistent complainants

If, following detailed consideration, the Service Director and appropriate Service Manager consider that a person has behaved unacceptably or has been unreasonably persistent in line with the definition above, the Service Director will write to the complainant informing them that their behaviour is considered unacceptable or unreasonably persistent and will:



- identify Adoption West's concerns regarding their behaviour and/or number and nature of the complaints they have been making,
- inform them that their use of Adoption West's complaints procedure will be limited to a single point of contact (SPoC),
- inform them what methods they can use to contact the SPoC e.g. letter only.
- inform them that Adoption West will review all new correspondence from them but will only respond to genuinely new issues
- advise them when this decision will be reviewed and of their right to complain to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

In exceptional circumstances, immediate action may be taken without following the procedure.

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

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