

Association of Dogs & Cats Homes

COMPLAINTS POLICY

Purpose

The Association of Dogs & Cats Homes (ADCH) is committed to meeting the expectations of our members, supporters and members of the public. However, if someone is unhappy with their experience of ADCH, or of one of our members, we shall try to address their concerns and make the necessary changes to address the issue. Wherever possible we seek to resolve complaints informally without the need for them to be escalated to regulatory or governing body.

Who can complain?

- We will consider a complaint from anyone affected by their experience of ADCH or one of its members.
- If an individual is considered vulnerable or unable to make a complaint, it may be possible to accept a complaint made on their behalf, such as by a relative or carer (subject at all times to establishing their authority to represent the complainant).
- If an individual faces difficulties in pursuing their complaint or otherwise making use of our services because of a disability we shall do our best to make reasonable adjustments as necessary to our procedures in order to accommodate their needs. We shall let the complainant know how we propose to accommodate their needs; if we are unable to meet their request we shall explain why.
- ADCH will not respond to anonymous complaints unless these concern animal welfare or criminal activity (fraud, theft etc).

Receipt of complaints

ADCH will address complaints made:

- Orally at the time of the incident to a member of staff, volunteer or Trustee
- In writing to any valid ADCH address
- By telephone
- By email
- Through any social media site managed by ADCH

Unreasonable behaviour

- We reserve the right to reject complaints which are abusive or characterised by unreasonable behaviour whether in terms of the nature of the complaint or the manner in which it is pursued
- We reserve the right to take appropriate action in cases where a complainant behaves unacceptably. This may involve restricting the manner in which the complainant may communicate with our staff and volunteers

Principles

- Fairness – Similar complaints will be assessed in the same way to ensure consistency of approach to all investigations and responses.

- Objectivity – The investigation and treatment of complaints will be carried out objectively. Any potential or actual conflict of interest on the part of investigators or other people involved in handling the complaint must be declared
- Confidentiality - It is important that in order not to prejudice potential investigations, any interviews are kept confidential and not discussed with colleagues unless they are directly involved in either the situation which gave rise to the complaint, or in the investigation of the complaint.

Compliance

ADCH complies with legislation both in relation to the business it conducts and in dealing with complaints

Retention of Personal Information

- Any records will be kept in line with ADCH's Privacy Policy.
- Records will be kept confidential and retained by ADCH in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998) and General Data Protection Regulation (2018)

Timescales

- We will aim to acknowledge receipt of a complaint in writing (by email) within 10 working days
- We aim to investigate and resolve uncomplicated complaints in relation to ADCH within a further 10 working days
- Where investigation involves a member organisation, or speaking to a number of different individuals, this may take longer, but the complainant will receive regular updates and we aim to resolve all complaints within 2 months of receipt.

Section 1 deals with complaints about the ADCH itself

Section 2 deals with complaints made to the ADCH about a member organisation

Section 1 – complaints about the ADCH

This Section addresses those situations where a member of ADCH, or a member of the public is dissatisfied with any aspect of their experience of ADCH

The complaints policy does not cover:

- Any complaints by employees or volunteers of ADCH that are covered by ADCH Grievance Policy, Whistleblowing Policy or some other procedure covered elsewhere
- Complaints from any party with which ADCH has a trading relationship.
- Complaints about our service if they are not made within three months of the incident taking place.

Investigation

Complaints will be investigated by a Trustee or appropriate individual appointed by the Chair

Complaints about an ADCH employee will be addressed in line with the Employee Handbook and secondment agreement.

Customer Remedies

Where a complaint is upheld, the action ADCH will take to put matters right can include any combination of the remedies set out in the list below. The general principle we follow is that a complainant should, so far as possible, be put in the position he or she would have been in, had things not gone wrong. The remedy chosen will be proportionate and appropriate to the failure of service and take into account what the complainant was looking for when making their complaint. An apology is normally appropriate, but other action may also be necessary.

Possible remedies are:

- A sincere and meaningful apology, explaining what happened and/or what went wrong.
- Remedial action, which may include reviewing or changing a decision relating to the service given to an individual complainant.
- Provide the service desired by the complainant.
- Putting things right (for example, a change of procedures to prevent future difficulties of a similar kind, either for the complainant or others).
- Training or closer supervision of staff or volunteers.

An apology is not an acceptance of liability under Section 2 of the Compensation Act 2006.

Where a complaint is not upheld, the complainant will receive an oral or written response by the investigating Trustee as appropriate, explaining the reason and outcomes.

Actioning Lessons Learned

The insight and learnings from customer complaints should be included in customer service or process improvement initiatives to produce a better outcome.

Section 2 Complaints about ADCH Members

This section deals with how the Association approaches complaints received concerning member organisations.

The ADCH will only investigate complaints where it is alleged that the member is in breach of Association rules, policies, procedures or standards. We will not investigate minor complaints of poor customer service, disagreement with members' reasonable procedures, rehoming decisions or other similar minor and common complaints. However, we will give members anonymised feedback so they are aware that these complaints have been received, and with the written permission of the complainant, we will forward full details to the member.

Investigation

Where ADCH needs to investigate, this will normally be undertaken by a Trustee or appropriate individual appointed by the Chair.

Wherever possible, the management and/or trustees of the member organisation about which the complaint has been received will be informed and given the detail of the complaint, unless it is believed that to do so would significantly compromise the safety of any individual or animal. In some cases, it may be appropriate to refer the complaint directly to other bodies:

- In the case of allegation of serious financial mismanagement or potential illegal activity, the complaint may be referred directly to the police or relevant charity regulatory body
- In the case of allegations of serious animal cruelty or abuse, the complaint may be referred to the appropriate authority

Where referrals to other authorities are made, the complainant should be informed of this, and written records kept detailing the nature of the report, to whom it was made, and any acknowledgement and outcomes received.

Outcomes

Members will be informed of the findings of the investigation and the Chair and Trustees will determine next steps which may include:

- No further action if the complaint is not upheld
- Improvement plans
- External assessment visits
- Coaching / buddying from another member
- Referral to authorities
- Termination of membership

Appeals

Members may appeal a decision to terminate their membership according to the appeals process set out in the ADCH Constitution.