



for disabled children  
and young people in Sussex

## COMPLAINTS POLICY

### Introduction

Amaze is committed to providing an excellent service and working in an open and accountable way that builds trust and respect. Amaze recognises the value of the opinions and views of our users, which will sometimes be made as an expression of concern or in the form of a complaint. We encourage feedback and aim to make it easy for users to raise concerns and make complaints. This policy provides a framework for handling concerns and complaints.

### 1. Definition

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction with any aspect of Amaze's work (whether justified or not) that requires a formal response.

A concern is an expression of dissatisfaction with any aspect of Amaze's work (whether justified or not) where the person raising it says they do not want a formal response.

Complaints and concerns can be about an incident or the experience of an individual, or they can be wider, for example about Amaze policy and practice and how that affects users and potential users.

Managers will use their discretion as necessary to determine at which point a concern crosses the line into a complaint and the level of formality required in documenting the process followed.

This policy applies to all staff and volunteers of Amaze, including projects or partnerships (such as Parent Carer Forums) where Amaze provide the accountable body function.

### 2. Aims of the policy

Amaze wishes to encourage users and stakeholders to say when they think something about our service is not right or does not meet their expectations. Amaze does not ask that complaints be made in any prescribed way and will respond to complaints and concerns however they are raised e.g. verbally, in writing or via the website feedback form. Amaze aims to resolve complaints quickly, fairly and effectively. One of the ways in which we can continue to improve the way we work and the services that we provide is by listening and responding to the views of our users, partners and stakeholders and in particular responding positively to complaints, and by putting mistakes right.

### 3. Responding to concerns

It is recognised that some people may wish to raise a concern without wishing to label it a complaint and that many concerns are best raised and dealt with more informally. But Amaze will still aim to respond to more informal concerns quickly and effectively, and to learn any lessons from such concerns. Amaze may therefore still use the procedure in this policy in some cases where a user has raised a concern but chosen not to ask for it to be treated as a formal complaint. Comments made on social media will as far as possible be dealt with swiftly but informally as this is the nature of the medium.

#### **4. Support and guidance**

Some people may feel more comfortable dealing with a person who is not directly associated with the service they are using. Some people may need help to communicate their concerns effectively or without undue distress. For this reason, a manager from another part of the organisation or a member of the Amaze Management Committee can be made available to any user for help and guidance. In some circumstances Amaze may suggest a user may wish to get support from an external advocacy service. This is separate from the option in the complaints procedure to ask the Chief Executive or Trustees to review the response to a complaint.

Support and guidance will be available to staff to ensure that this policy is understood and that agreed procedures are followed.

Where a complaint is against a member of staff, volunteer or trustee, they should be informed of the support available to them.

#### **5. Responding to complaints**

All reasonable steps will be taken to resolve the individual issue following the process outlined below. Following investigation and consideration Amaze may accept all, part or no element of a complaint. Wherever appropriate, an apology will be offered and information given on any action taken. If there are reasons why Amaze is unable to resolve the issue as the user would wish, for example if funding levels do not allow us to offer the level of service sought or an alternative member of staff to work with that user, a clear and transparent explanation will be given.

Amaze will embrace complaints and concerns as an opportunity to improve the quality of what we offer and the way we deliver our services. Action will be taken as appropriate based on lessons learned from the individual complaint so that the issue does not recur, or the service is improved.

#### **6. Standards**

The minimum standards expected are as follows:

This policy will be clearly available to read from the “contact us” page of the Amaze website, alongside a feedback form. Hard or digital copies will be available on request.

All users will be given clear information on request, about this policy and procedure, with guidance on how to raise a concern or make a complaint.

An initial response to any concern or complaint, fully explaining the procedure, will be made within five working days. This will be followed by a more formal response as soon as reasonably possible.

The confidentiality of the nature of the concern or complaint will be respected by Amaze. If the circumstances giving rise to the complaint are such that it may not be possible to maintain confidentiality, the situation will be explained to the

complainant.

All Amaze staff will treat concerns and complaints with care and respect to the individual.

All complaints will be thoroughly investigated and the conclusion clearly communicated. The judgement and proposed actions of the staff member dealing with the complaint should be reviewed with their line manager, before providing a formal response to the user.

If at any time during the investigation of a complaint matters arise that warrant investigation under disciplinary proceedings, or through a criminal investigation, the complaints procedure will be suspended until those investigations are concluded. Similarly, the complaints procedure should be suspended if a complainant is actively seeking legal redress.

Making a complaint or raising a concern will not jeopardise an individual's access to Amaze services at the time or in the future, other than in exceptional circumstances, such as a repeated pattern of complaints which are not upheld after careful investigation (vexatious complaints). Every effort will be made to avoid a decision to withdraw access to Amaze services, to signpost to alternative support from other organisations. A clear explanation will be given of the decision.

## **7. The complaints process**

All stages of the handling of an individual complaint should be properly recorded - as outlined below.

Service users will be encouraged, in the first instance to raise their concerns or complaints with the staff member responsible for providing the service. However, it is recognised that the user may prefer to discuss the matter with the staff member's line manager. If the user is not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint or the way in which it has been handled, they can ask for it to be reviewed by the Head of Carers Services, or Chief Executive. Should the user wish to take the matter to a further level they can approach the Amaze Trustees. If the complaint relates to services in Amaze's service level agreements with Brighton and Hove City Council, East Sussex County Council or West Sussex County Council, the user may also raise it through the council's complaints process.

Where a complaint includes a concern about safeguarding or that action to safeguard has not been taken in accordance with Amaze's procedures, this should be dealt with in line with the Safeguarding Policy by the designated lead on safeguarding, the Head of Carers Services. Alternatively an individual can contact the relevant council's safeguarding contact number or the NSPCC if they do not wish to contact Amaze direct on a safeguarding issue.

Where a complaint or concern is raised with Amaze but proves to relate to another organisation or service, the complainant will be offered information about how to take the matter up with the relevant body. In these circumstances reference should be made to Amaze's Policy on Whistleblowing.

## **8. Mediation**

Mediation is an alternative approach to disagreement resolution. There may be circumstances where it would be useful to seek mediation in connection with an issue that has been raised as a complaint. Mediation is not part of this formal procedure and there is no obligation to consider mediation. However, in some circumstances Amaze may propose mediation as an option. This may be at any point in the process of dealing with a complaint or concern.

## **9. Recording and Reporting**

The minimum expectation is that the following are recorded in complaints and concerns log (appendix 1) and kept up to date:

- Date of complaint or concern (or date file started)
- Name of individual raising the complaint or concern
- Nature of the concern or complaint
- Date of initial response
- Person handling concern or complaint
- Actions taken to investigate concern or complaint
- Date of formal response
- Any other subsequent actions

A file should be opened containing copies of all correspondence relating to the concern or complaint, including a copy of the formal response to the user.

The Head of Carers Services, or Chief Executive will report the nature and outcome of a registered concern or complaint, to the Personnel Subgroup.

The Personnel Subgroup will review all registered concerns and complaints quarterly and ensure staff receive training and assistance with the procedure, if required.

This policy will be reviewed by the Trustees at least every three years.

## **10. Responsibility and Breach of Policy**

Everyone is responsible for their own compliance with this policy. For staff, breaches of policy may incur disciplinary action, depending on the severity of the issue. Please refer to our Disciplinary Policy for further information on disciplinary procedures. Staff who are unsure about whether something they propose to do might breach this policy, should seek advice from their manager or the policy owner.

## **11. Communication of the Policy**

This policy will be available in the policies folder and hard copies will be available on request. New staff and volunteers will be made aware of the policy during their induction with their manager. Training will be available on request. Reminders will be given at staff meetings.

## **12. Related Forms/ Associated Documents**

Amaze Complaints/Concerns Record (see below)

### 13. Related Policies

Please also see the following related policies:

- **Disciplinary Policy**
- **Whistleblowing Policy**
- **Safeguarding Policy**

#### VERSION CONTROL / RECORD OF CHANGES

<b>Review date</b>	<b>Version</b>	<b>Section</b>	<b>Changes/Comments</b>
Feb 2015	2	All	Full Review of Policy; approved by Management Committee March 2015
Dec 2018	3	All	Full Review of Policy; approved by Management Committee Feb 2019
June 2022	4	All	Full Review of Policy; approved by PSG July 2022

## Amaze Complaints/Concerns Record

Date of complaint or concern (or date file started)	
Name of person raising the concern or complaint	
Nature of the concern or complaint	
Date of initial response	
Person handling concern or complaint	
Actions taken to investigate	
Date of formal response	
Any other subsequent actions	

Passed to appropriate senior manager

Name

Date