**Inverness Women’s Aid**

**Complaints Policy & Procedure**

**1 Policy Statement**

Inverness Women’s Aid delivers services to women, children and young people who are experiencing domestic abuse.

Inverness Women’s Aid aims to provide a high quality standard of service. If we fail to do this it is important that we know about it.

This policy and the separate procedure will provide an effective and transparent way of dealing with complaints. It recognises that the most successful organisations are those that have moved towards a culture that perceives complaints as an opportunity to improve quality of services.

Inverness Women’s Aid will demonstrate both fairness and openness in the way it deals with complaints and show that it is prepared to listen to its stakeholders.

**2 Policy Aims**

A complaint may be defined as, “an expression of dissatisfaction about the standard or quality of service, action or lack of action by Inverness Women’s Aid or its staff, affecting an individual or a group of individuals who receive a service provided by Inverness Women’s Aid.”

Inverness Women’s Aid aims to investigate and address all complaints in order to continually improve the quality of our service.

Inverness Women’s Aid aims to:

* take complaints seriously and offering those who complain a clear response to their complaint within defined time limits;
* improve services by providing an opportunity to amend, reflect on and improve the services provided by Inverness Women’s Aid;
* ensure that the Inverness Women’s Aid Complaints Procedure will be easily understood and straightforward to use, and will accept either spoken or written complaints;
* ensure that the Inverness Women’s Aid Complaints Procedure will be well-managed, fair and objective, aimed at resolving problems as quickly as possible and in a manner which respects confidentiality and privacy.

**3 Responsibilities**

3.1 Employer’s Responsibilities

Inverness Women’s Aid is responsible for:

* ensuring that all employees are aware of and adhere to this policy and complaints procedure;
* providing clear and accessible information to service users on the complaints policy and procedure;
* providing easily available information on how service users can make a complaint to the Care inspectorate;
* ensuring that employees access the appropriate level of training to support the implementation of this policy and procedure;
* managing complaints within the agreed procedures and timescales;
* recording complaints and actions taken;
* monitoring and reviewing complaints so that the organisation can improve practice.

3.2 Employees’ Responsibilities

All employees are responsible for:

* ensuring that they understand and comply with this policy and procedure;
* learning from complaints which have arisen and striving to improve delivery of the service;
* Using other policies and procedures to make internal complaint, which cannot be addressed informally. See 4.1 for further information.

**4 Complaints in practice**

4.1 Difference between complaints and whistleblowing

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| **4.1.1** | **Complaint**  The individual reporting the issue is personally affected by the matter of concern, and it is in respect to receiving poor treatment within Inverness Women’s Aid. There is a vested interest in the matter of concern. |
| **4.1.2** | **Whistleblowing**  The individual reporting the issue is not personally affected by the matter of concern, but rather holds concern for its impact on others in the workplace or beyond, as a matter of public interest. There is no vested interest in the matter of concern, or the concern reaches *beyond* the individual’s own vested interest.  When the matter of concern is not limited to an individual’s own personal experience and in the public interest needs to be handled in a different way, stakeholders should use the provisions of the Whistleblowing Procedure when appropriate. See Appendix 8.3 for further information.  Examples may be:   * mistreatment or abuse of service users; * danger to the health and safety of any individual; * damage to the environment; * a criminal offence; * fraud, corruption or dishonesty; * financial maladministration; * breaches of law or any statutory code of practice; * any attempt to cover up information relating to any of the above.   (*this list is not exhaustive*) |

**4.4 Complaints procedure**

The accompanying Complaints Procedure outlines how Inverness Women’s Aid will conduct the practice of handling complaints.

**4.5 Equality and Diversity**

Inverness Women’s Aid Equality and Diversity Policy sets out Inverness Women’s Aid commitment to prevent unequal treatment and discrimination.

Inverness Women’s Aid values the diversity of its workers and the contribution that each worker makes to the organisation and will work to ensure that discrimination does not take place when implementing its Complaints Policy and Procedure.

**5 Breach of policy**

**5.1 Service Delivery**

This Complaints Policy and Procedure offers the framework for dealing with problems arising in service delivery. Where there are concerns about a breach of this policy or in cases where it is in the public interest, service users may also refer to the Inverness Women’s Aid Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure.

**5.2 Employment**

Inverness Women’s Aid employees who feel that this policy has been breached should raise this in the first instance with their [*insert appropriate management arrangement e.g. line manager, staffing group.]* If an employee does not feel the issue has been dealt with to their satisfaction it can be dealt with formally under Inverness Women’s Aid Grievance Procedure.

**6 Training and Information**

All workers of Inverness Women's Aid will receive a copy of the Complaints Policy and Procedure and their role in implementing the policy will be fully explained. Inverness Women's Aid, in the implementation of this policy, will identify any training requirements for workers.

Inverness Women's Aid Complaints Policy and Procedures will form part of the induction programme for all new workers.

**7 Monitoring and Review**

Inverness Women's Aid recognises that genuine resolution of complaints can only be achieved by monitoring and assessing the use of this policy and procedure and then using this information to modify and improve our future action plans and provisions.

Inverness Women's Aid will monitor complaints against specific targets set within the Inverness Women's Aid complaints Action Plan.

Inverness Women's Aid will monitor and review this policy *every three years* and/or when there are relevant changes in legislation or circumstances.

**8 Appendices**

8.1 Legislative and Regulatory Framework

Inverness Women's Aid aims to comply with all legislation and codes of practice related to the handling of complaints.

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| Related legislation  and codes of practice |  |
| SWA National Service Standards  Standard 4  Standard 5 | [http://www.Invernesswomensaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/NationalServiceStandards-SummaryApril2011.pdf](http://www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/NationalServiceStandards-SummaryApril2011.pdf) |
| SSSC Codes o Practice | <http://www.sssc.uk.com/about-the-sssc/multimedia-library/publications?task=document.viewdoc&id=239> |
| National Care Standards for Early Education & Childcare  Standard 14 | http://www.nationalcarestandards.org/files/early-education.pdf |
| National Care Standards for Housing Support Services  Standard 3 | http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/349567/0116840.pdf |
| Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010  Part 5 | http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2010/8/introduction |

**8.2 Related internal policies and procedures**

* Disciplinary
* Grievance
* Whistleblowing

8.3 Definition of whistleblowing: further information

The following excerpt is from *Public Concern at Work: Frequently Asked Questions*

http://www.pcaw.org.uk/faq-answers#complaintandwhistleblowing

*What is the difference between making a complaint and blowing the whistle?*

*When someone blows the whistle they are raising a concern about danger or illegality that affects others (e.g. customers, members of the public, or their employer). The person blowing the whistle is usually not directly, personally affected by the danger or illegality. Consequently, the whistleblower rarely has a personal interest in the outcome of any investigation into their concern - they are simply trying to alert others. For this reason, the whistleblower should not be expected to prove the malpractice. He or she is a messenger raising a concern so that others can address it.*

*This is very different from a complaint. When someone complains, they are saying that they have personally been poorly treated. This poor treatment could involve a breach of their individual employment rights or bullying and the complainant is seeking redress or justice for themselves. The person making the complaint therefore has a vested interest in the outcome of the complaint and, for this reason, is expected to be able to prove their case.*

**Inverness Women’s Aid**

**Complaints Procedure**

**1 Introduction**

Inverness Women’s Aid Complaints Procedure sets out how service users can make a complaint about the service they have received.

A complaint can be about any aspect of the service, for example:

* avoidable delay, poor quality service or lack of service;
* unfairness, bias or prejudice in the way services are provided;
* the attitude or approach of staff.

**2 How to make a complaint**

A complaint can be made in the following ways:

* informally, eg in person, by telephone or text;
* formally, eg by letter or by email (to [info@invernesswa.org](mailto:info@invernesswa.org) )

A complainant has the right to make a formal complaint if they wish to do so. However, it is often quicker and easier if the problem can be resolved informally.

When someone wishes to register a complaint, the steps below should be followed.

2.1 Stage 1: informal resolution

This stage may be used to advise a member of staff of a particular problem, allowing them to resolve the matter informally

The complaint can be made in person, by text or by phone call. The member of staff being informed in the first instance of the complaint will take an accurate note of the details and of the solution being sought, and will aim to let the person know when the matter will be pursued. If the complaint cannot be resolved immediately, the worker will inform the service user of the subsequent action to be taken.

*Time limit*

Informal complaints will be acknowledged within 3 working days and the complainant advised of the outcome within 10 working days.

2.2 Stage 2: formal resolution

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, or does not want to involve the worker directly responsible for the service, then a complaint should be made in writing to the Executive Manager at Inverness Women’s Aid, marked Private and Confidential.

A complaints form is also available from Inverness Women’s Aid which can be used to detail the complaint (see Appendix 1)  
A formal complaint should provide as much information as possible about what the problem is and how the complainant would like to see it resolved.

Inverness Women’s Aid will then investigate the complaint and attempt to resolve it.

Inverness Women’s Aid will write to the complainant summarising what investigations have been carried out and what action, if any, is proposed to resolve the matter. A copy of this letter should be attached to the complaint form.   
  
*Time Limit*

All formal complaints will be acknowledged in writing within 3 working days. Inverness Women’s Aid will respond to the complainant following an investigation of the complaint within 10 working days of the complaint being received. Where it is not possible to complete an investigation of a complaint within this time limit Inverness Women’s Aid will write to the complainant to advise them of an alternative timescale.

2.3 Stage 3: appealing the decision

If the complainant does not feel that Inverness Women’s Aid has resolved the complaint satisfactorily, they should write to the Appeals Panel of Inverness Women’s Aid.

The Executive Manager will provide the Appeals Panel with all previous written correspondence and information in connection with the complaint.   
  
The Appeals Panel (maximum 3, minimum 2 people) will also contact any staff member(s) if a complaint concerns them.   
The Appeals Panel will review the decision made at Stage 2 and may seek further clarification from any of the parties involved.

The panel's decision will be final. The Chair of the Appeals Panel is responsible for ensuring records of the panel’s meeting are kept and the complaints monitoring form is completed.   
  
*Time Limit*

The Chair of the Appeals Panel will acknowledge receipt of the letter within 3 working days. The Appeals Panel will notify the complainant of its decisions and reasons within 28 days of having received notice of the complaint.

**3 Making a complaint to the Care Inspectorate**

If the complaint concerns a service that is registered with the Care Inspectorate, the service user may complain directly to them. The Care Inspectorate has its own Complaints Procedure which is outlined fully in their publication “Procedure for handling complaints” (see Appendix 9.1 below.)

**4 Independent advice**

Before deciding to make a formal complaint, the complainant may wish to get independent advice. This can be obtained for example from Citizens Advice Bureaux (see Appendix 9.1) or local solicitors.

**5 Confidentiality**

All complaints are treated confidentially.

Only those dealing with complaints (and those staff member(s) involved, if indeed any staff member(s) have been cited as a subject of the complaint) will be aware that a complaint has been received and is being dealt with.

Anonymous requests will be acted upon; however it is better to provide contact details so that the complainant can be informed of the outcome.

**6 Vexatious complaints**

Inverness Women’s Aid wants to deal fairly and honestly with complainants and ensure that other service users, staff, or the organisation as a whole do not suffer detriment from persons making aggressive and/or obsessive complaints. Inverness Women’s Aid’s solicitor will write to vexatious complainants to inform them that their behaviour is considered to be unacceptable.

**7 Recording and monitoring complaints**

All complaints will be noted on record and kept on file by Inverness Women’s Aid, including those which were made verbally and resolved informally. Storage of records will follow the Inverness Women’s Aid Data Protection Policy and Procedure.

**8 Publicising the procedure**

Inverness Women’s Aid will provide information on the Complaints Policy and Procedure to all users of its services.

The following materials are available relating to complaints:

Further resources (see Appendix 1)

Inverness Women’s Aid complaints information leaflet (see Appendix 2)

Inverness Women’s Aid complaints information leaflet for children and young people (see Appendix 3)

Information on the Complaints Policy and Procedure will also be displayed on notice boards in the office or other premises.

Full copies of the policy and procedure will be available on request from Inverness Women’s Aid.

**Appendices**

**Appendix 1 Further resources**

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| --- | --- |
| Care Inspectorate: complaints | [www.scswis.com/index.php?option=com\_content&view=article&id=7569&Itemid=369](http://www.scswis.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7569&Itemid=369) |
| Care Inspectorate:  Procedure for handling complaints | [www.scswis.com/index.php?option=com\_docman&task=doc\_details&gid=827&Itemid=378](http://www.scswis.com/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_details&gid=827&Itemid=378) |
| Citizens Advice | [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk) |

**Appendix 2**

**Inverness Women’s Aid Complaints Information Leaflet**

Inverness Women’s Aid aims to provide a high quality service to all its users and your comments and suggestions are always welcome to help us improve our service. However, there may be times when you are not happy with the service you have received. This leaflet outlines how you can make a complaint and how it will be dealt with.

Anyone who receives or requests a service from Inverness Women’s Aid can use the complaints procedure. Your complaint will be dealt with sympathetically and in confidence.

*What can you complain about?*

Complaints can be about:

the service that has been provided or the lack of it;

the way in which it was delivered;

the attitude or approach of members of staff.

*Complaints can be made*

In person

By telephone 01463 220719

By e-mail to [info@invernesswa.org](mailto:info@invernesswa.org)

By letter

*Stage 1*

If you are not satisfied with the service you have received you should let us know as soon as possible what is wrong. Usually you would complain to the member of staff who has been dealing with the matter.

*Stage 2*

If you do not receive a satisfactory response or do not want to involve the staff member you should make a complaint to the manager. This can be made in writing or by contacting a member of our staff who can take down the details of your complaint.

Stage 1 & 2 complaints will be acknowledged within 3 working days and responded to, after investigations, within 10 working days

*Stage 3- to IWA Board of Directors*

If you still feel that your complaint has not been satisfactorily resolved you should write to the Directors of Inverness Women’s Aid. The nominated Director will acknowledge receipt of your complaint and will arrange an investigation.

Stage 3 complaints will be acknowledged within 3 working days and responded to, after investigations, within 28 days.

**External Advocacy Support for Clients**

Any service user can take advantage of an external advocacy service to help them to Appeal. If you wish to use this service please speak to a member of staff who can arrange for them to contact you for support or can provide you with details so that you can contact them directly yourself.

**Some local contacts**

Advocacy Highland 01463 233460

Citizens Advice 01463 237664

Alternatively you can contact the Care Inspectorate, who regulate our service.

Their contact details are:

Care Inspectorate   
Great Glen House  
Leachkin Road  
INVERNESS  
IV3 8NW

T: [0345 600 9527](tel:0345%20600%209527)

W: www.careinspectorate.com

**Appendix 3**

**Inverness Women’s Aid Complaints Information Leaflet for Children and Young People**

If you’re worried or unhappy about the way you have been treated at Inverness Women’s Aid, we would like you to tell us.

Some of the reasons why people might complain are because they think their support worker has been unhelpful, hasn’t listened to them or hasn’t done something they said they would.

If you feel OK about it, you can talk with your support worker about why you are unhappy. They will try to help sort out the problem. If this doesn’t sort out the problem, or you don’t want to talk to your support worker about it, you can make a complaint. We really want to hear from you.

*How can I complain?*

You can make a complaint by talking with [*insert the Manager or complaints co-ordinator].*

You can do this by:

meeting [*insert name]*

phoning [*insert number]*

texting [*insert number]*

emailing [*insert email address*]

writing a letter [*insert address details*]

filling in the form at the back of this leaflet.

*Can anyone help me to complain?*

You can ask an adult you trust (like your mum, or other family members, friend or a teacher) to help you make a complaint.

*What happens once I’ve made a complaint?*

The Manager will look into your complaint and let you know what they find.

If you aren’t happy with what you hear from the Manager you can ask for an appeal. This means some independent people from IWA’s Boardwill have an appeal meeting and look into your complaint. They will decide if anything else needs to be done about your complaint.

You can attend the appeal meeting if you want and can bring someone to support you or to speak on your behalf. After this meeting you will get a letter telling you what will be done about your complaint.

*Can I complain to anyone else?*

You can also speak to the Care Inspectorate about any issues you are having. You can contact them on 0345 600 9527 or at <http://www.careinspectorate.com/index.php/complaints>

Inverness Women’s Aid Complaints Form for Children and Young People

You do not have to give us your details but it would be good to have them so that we can let you know what we are doing about your complaint.