

1. Purpose

This procedure sets out how Southwell u3a will deal with complaints and grievances from members or complaints from an external organisation or individual.

2. Complaints and Grievances

In any organisation, complaints and grievances occur from time to time and it is important that members know where to turn for help, advice and support so that, whatever the issue, it can be dealt with quickly, objectively and appropriately. In the first instance, complaints and grievances should be directed towards the committee of the Southwell u3a. These may include complaints from members about an issue that has arisen, grievances when members feel they have been treated unfairly and complaints from an external organisation or individual. Depending on the nature and source of the complaint or grievance, the committee will make a decision as to how best to approach reaching a solution.

In dealing with complaints and grievances, the Southwell u3a committee will ensure that:

- all actions are documented,
- complaints/grievances are dealt with quickly and fairly,
- attempts have been made to de-escalate the situation and settle issues without having to resort to formal action,
- confidentiality is maintained,
- decisions made will be based on the facts and evidence gathered.

For more serious complaints, the committee may need to liaise with and share information with the Third Age Trust. This will not constitute a data breach due to the Southwell u3a's membership of and affiliation to the Trust

3. Informal process

In most cases, it is hoped that complaints and grievances can be dealt with informally as detailed below:

- Depending on what the issue is, a decision should be taken as to who the best person is to lead on attempting to resolve the situation informally. If an issue has arisen between two members in a group, then the group leader may be the best person supported by the Groups Coordinator, if felt appropriate. For issues involving committee members, another committee member will attempt to mediate and try to find a solution. The initial stage requires checking with the party raising the concern as to whether they are willing to accept an informal outcome, as opposed to going through a formal process.

- The person(s) identified to lead on the informal stage will hold an informal discussion with all relevant parties. The purpose of this would be to understand the problem and hear each party's views. The parties may decide to put their concerns or complaints in writing, and for the sake of clarity, this is often helpful.
- If there are several people involved with the complaint or grievance, it may be deemed appropriate to speak with others mentioned so that as full a picture as possible is obtained.
- The purpose of the informal meetings will be to summarise the situation with both parties, attempting to reach a mutually satisfactory outcome, agree any changes required to ensure that the situation does not happen again and clear the air.
- If it is felt that there is a case to answer, but that nevertheless it is a minor issue, and all parties are willing to accept the agreed outcome, then it should be made clear that there should be no repeat of the actions or behaviour and that no further action is necessary.
- If, however, it is felt by the person(s) leading on the informal stage, that the situation warrants a more formal approach or a specific course of action, e.g. exclusion from an interest group; or if the person raising the issue wishes to lodge a formal complaint or grievance, the matter should be referred, in writing, to the Chair of Southwell u3a stating that this is a formal complaint or grievance. This will include a summary of the complaint or grievance, any steps taken to deal with the issue and any action that the parties involved consider necessary to resolve it.

4. Formal Process

When someone wishes to raise a formal complaint or grievance, they will be asked to put the matter in writing, providing as much information as is relevant and giving specific dates and times where possible. The complainant will be asked as to what outcome they are hoping to achieve, for example whether they would be prepared to accept an apology. It will be explained to the complainant that, whilst their desired outcome forms part of their complaint or grievance, they need to be aware that there are no guarantees as to what the outcome will be.

The person appointed by the Southwell u3a Committee as the designated Trustee to manage complaints will lead the investigation. The Chair will appoint two other committee members to hear the complaint or grievance.

The committee may also contact the Third Age Trust and request support from the Regional Trustee, a Trust volunteer or National Office staff, in which case the committee will inform the complainant that additional support has been requested and the reasons why.

A notice will be sent to the complainant confirming receipt of the complaint or grievance and that

- if the complaint or grievance is deemed to be a disciplinary matter, then the disciplinary procedure will be followed,
- if the complaint or grievance is deemed not to involve a disciplinary matter, then the following formal process will be undertaken.

The investigation will include gathering information and conducting interviews related to the complaint or grievance. Any persons against whom the complaint or grievance has been raised will

be informed about the basis of the complaint. This will include the letter of complaint and any supporting documentation or other member statements. The result of these investigations will not be disclosed to any other Trustees at this stage, in order not to bias any appeal

The timetable for the date of the meeting to hear the complaint or grievance will be short, within 14 days of receipt of the complaint or grievance by the Chair. The subcommittee will consider the matter, taking into account any mitigating circumstances, and agree what action to take. This could include, for example, a change of procedures or whatever other outcome is deemed the most appropriate solution.

5. Decision

The subcommittee decision will be communicated in writing to both the member or Trustee who raised the complaint or grievance and any member or Trustee against whom the complaint has been made. Both parties will be informed of the outcome of the investigation, in respect of whether the complaint or grievance has been upheld or not upheld.

If the complaint or grievance has been upheld, the letter will also specify what action will be taken as a result. This may include action to remedy the complaint or grievance or use of the Disciplinary Procedure if any member or trustee may have broken the Code of Conduct.

6. Right of Appeal

A right of appeal should be lodged in writing within a 14 day period from the date of the subcommittee decision being provided to the complainant and any member or Trustee against whom the complaint has been made. An appeal can be lodged, either by the person who made the complaint or grievance or by the person against whom the complaint or grievance had been raised. For the appeal, the Chair will convene a meeting of three Trustees who were not involved in the initial investigation.

The person(s) raising the appeal will be offered a verbal right of reply. If requested, a meeting will be held with the appeal panel and the person raising the appeal may be accompanied by a companion, who may also speak in a personal capacity. Where the verbal right of reply involves a member or Trustee against whom the complaint or grievance has been made, they will similarly be offered the option to attend with a companion who may also speak in a personal capacity.

The whole issue will be summarised and the person making the appeal will be given the opportunity to speak. The appeal panel will review the decision based only on the facts included in the original hearing and the written and verbal representations to the appeal hearing, taking into account any mitigating circumstances. They will then make a final decision, which will be communicated in writing to all parties concerned within seven days.

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