

Cheltenham u3a Grievance Procedure

Introduction

Grievances and complaints from within are very rare in organisations such as Cheltenham's u3a 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. This procedure has been produced to provide guidance on how this may be achieved.

Issues may result from a number of sources, examples being:

- Disruptive and/or anti-social behaviour;
- Poor attendance/timekeeping;
- Failure to pay agreed fees or costs of the group activities.

The Cheltenham u3a Committee members (the "Committee") believe that such issues should be resolved between members and Group Leaders. If this is not possible then they should be directed towards the Committee, who will endeavour to decide how best to resolve the issue to the satisfaction of those involved.

This procedure also addresses issues from members that have arisen from an external organisation or individual.

In dealing with issues, the Committee will ensure that:

- Complaints will be dealt with quickly and as fairly as possible.
- The Committee will try to de-escalate the situation and settle issues without having to resort to formal action, where possible.
- Confidentiality must be maintained. For more serious complaints, the Committee may need to liaise with and share information with other authorities. This will be handled in such a way that confidentiality will not be breached.
- Decisions made will be based on the facts and evidence presented. Agreed actions will be documented.

In most cases, it is believed that issues can be dealt with informally as detailed below.

Procedure

Informal Procedure

The "Informal Procedure" is intended to help to resolve issues without resorting to the Committee. The Groups' Co-ordinator and/or Access Equality & Inclusion (AE&I) officer will first attempt informal resolution, by holding a discussion with each party concerned. 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.

The Groups' Co-ordinator and/or AE&I officer will seek to summarise the situation with both parties, be clear about any required changes to ensure it does not happen again and clear

the air. If there is a case to answer but of a minor nature, then it should be made clear to the relevant parties. If this outcome is accepted by both parties, then no further action is necessary.

If it is agreed 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 complaint wishes to lodge a formal complaint, then the Groups' Co-ordinator and/or AE&I officer will refer the matter, in writing, to the Chair of the Committee stating that this is now a formal complaint and the following procedure needs to be followed. This will include a summary of the complaint, any steps already taken to deal with the issue and any action that the parties involved consider necessary to resolve it.

The “Group Leaders Handbook” contains further details on the informal process (“ADVICE SHEET 6: SORTING OUT PROBLEMS/GRIEVANCES”) and additional advice is available in full on the TAT National website.

Formal Procedure

Only if the “Informal Procedure” does not resolve the issue will the “Formal Procedure” be invoked. The Committee will appoint a designated Trustee for the management of the issue. The Committee may (under extraordinary circumstances) also contact other authorities for help or advice. If this is the case then the Committee will inform the complainant that additional support has been requested and the reasons why.

The committee will request that the complaint is put in writing giving specific dates and times (where possible). A letter or email will be sent to the complainant confirming receipt of the complaint.

The Chair will appoint an investigating Trustee to gather information relating to the complaint. This will include the letter of complaint and any supporting documentation or other member statements. The result of these investigations must not be disclosed to any other Trustees at this stage, in order not to bias any appeal.

The Chair will appoint a subcommittee of three committee members to hear the complaint. The timetable for the date of the meeting to hear the complaint will be short, within 14 days

The subcommittee will then consider the matter, taking into account any mitigating circumstances and agree what action to take.

Decision

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

If the complaint has been upheld, the letter will also specify what action will be taken as a result.

Right of appeal

A right of appeal should be offered providing it is lodged within a 7 day period from the date of the subcommittee decision being provided to the complainant and the member or Group Leader against whom the complaint has been made. The appeal needs to be lodged in the form of a written representation for the Committee to consider. An appeal can be lodged either by the person who made the complaint or by the person against whom the complaint has been made.

The appeal can include a request for a right of reply as well as written representations.

For the appeal, the Chair will convene a meeting of three Trustees (including him/herself). This should not include those who were involved in the initial investigation.

The person raising the appeal will be offered a verbal right of reply. If s/he wishes to take this up then s/he will be asked to attend a meeting with the appeal panel. Where the verbal right of reply involves the member or Trustee against whom the complaint has been made, s/he will be offered the option to attend the appeal panel meeting.

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, taking into account any mitigating circumstances, and then make a final decision, which must be communicated in writing to all parties.

Approved for use by the Cheltenham u3a committee:

Date: June 2022