

COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide a clear, fair and transparent procedure for the handling, assessment and investigation of external complaints, from members and non-members. (There are separate procedures for complaints from staff.)

The complaint may be about:

- a representative (ie local correspondent or representative on an external group)
- a member of staff
- a trustee
- a procedure, a policy, a timetable.

Complaints may only be raised by those directly affected by any of the above. Simply a disagreement with a society policy, for example, does not constitute a complaint and will be handled as ordinary correspondence.

Procedure

For complaints other than those about the general secretary or a trustee

- 1 Receipt of complaint, by email or letter, by office manager.
- 2 On day of receipt (or first working day thereafter), office manager informs general secretary by email of the complaint, and forwards any documentation. As a minimum, the email details should include:
 - date of complaint
 - name, address, email address and telephone number
 - brief overview of the complaint
 - any supporting documents and correspondence
 - The outcome you are seeking by raising your complaint

If these details are not provided the office manager will ask the complainant to provide them.

- 3 A letter or email will be sent within three working days from the general secretary, or office manager on her behalf, to the complainant, and to any accused party, acknowledging receipt of the complaint and informing him or her that an investigation (if relevant) will be made.
- 4 On receipt of the email and supporting documentation, the general secretary will review the complaint, carry out any investigation and respond to the complainant within 10 working days. If the investigation needs more time, the complainant will be informed, with an estimate of when the response will be sent.

- 5 If the complaint cannot be answered by the general secretary, she will pass it to the chairman who will respond to the complainant within 10 working days (or inform the complainant that longer is needed, with an estimate of when the response will be sent).
- 6 If the complainant is unhappy with the general secretary's response (see 4) and wishes to appeal, the general secretary will pass the appeal to the chairman, with all the original material, for further investigation and review.

For complaints which are about the general secretary or a trustee (acting in a trustee rather than volunteer capacity)

- 7 These will be passed immediately to the chairman to determine.

For complaints referred to the chairman (paras 6 and 7)

- 8 The chairman may wish to appoint a panel of trustees to determine a complaint, allowing for a further appeal which can be determined by the three officers.

For complaints about the chairman

- 9 These will be passed to the vice-chairman, who may wish to adopt the process in para 8.

For complaints about a trustee acting in a volunteer capacity, eg as local correspondent or representative on a committee

- 10 While such complaints should be determined by the general secretary, she will inform the chairman on receipt of the complaint since there is a potential reputational risk, and she will discuss with the chairman any special measures which need to be taken.
- 11 For paragraphs 7-10, the chairman will respond to the complaint within 10 working days (or inform the complainant that longer is needed, with an estimate of when the response will be sent).
- 12 In all cases an accused party will also be informed of the final outcome.

Appealing against a decision

- 13 If the complainant or the accused party is not satisfied with the proposed resolution he/she can contact the chairman to request an appeal. Only the complainant and the accused party have the right of appeal.
- 14 Any appeal must satisfy one or more of the following criteria:
 - The appellant has new, relevant information to present (which he/she has not previously submitted).

- We have failed to consider adequately or at all information the appellant provided in connection with the complaint.
- The response to the complaint is unsound, in that no reasonable person could have reached that conclusion based on the information provided.

15 The appellant's written request for an appeal must include a statement as to why the response is not satisfactory and provide evidence to support the appeal. The appellant must submit the request within 14 days of the date of being informed of the complaint outcome. We shall acknowledge receipt of the appeal within 10 working days.

16 We shall always attempt to provide a full response to the appeal within 20 working days. There may be occasions where this is not possible and, where this is the case, we will always notify the appellant of a date by when he/she may receive a response. Our outcome response, which will always be in writing, is final.

All complaints

17 The response or outcome of the investigation is logged on the complaints register, and the complaint is closed after 14 days if no further correspondence is received

18 The Open Spaces Society will not engage in repetitive discussions about closed complaints

19 The board of trustees will annually review a summary of the complaints and responses.

20 The data relating to complaints will be retained for two years from the date of the complaint.

February 2021