

Barrow Community Library

Handling complaints about volunteers (including members of the management committee)

1. Introduction

This policy covers what to do when a complaint is made about a volunteer (including members of the management committee) and how to handle these.

2. What this policy covers, and does not cover

What the policy covers	Course of action
Lesser irritants that are not covered in section 3	Do not use this policy - pick up as a part of normal supervision etc of the individual
Anything covered in the list in section 3	Use sections 4-9 of this policy
Anything more serious than the list in section 3	Use section 10 of this policy

3. What can trigger a complaint

Any of the following list (which is not exhaustive) can trigger a legitimate complaint:

- Persistent bad time keeping
- Going beyond the boundaries of the agreed role
- Not respecting service users and other volunteers' confidentiality/dignity/independence and individuality
- Breach of health and safety regulations or agreements
- Misuse of the organisation's equipment or facilities
- Discrimination on grounds of disability/ethnicity/religion/gender/sexuality/age etc
- Abuse or other offensive behaviour, but stopping short of anything in the Immediate suspension list (see section 10).

All complaints must be made in writing (email or letter) to the relevant person in the table in the following section.

4. Who handles a complaint

Complaint about...	Complaint handled by
Volunteers (other than LMC members and the Coordinator of Volunteers)	Coordinator of Volunteers
Coordinator of Volunteers	Chair of the committee
Committee members (other than the chair of the committee)	Chair of the committee
Chair of the committee	Vice-chair of the committee

5. Handling a complaint

When a complaint is received, the order of events is as follows:

- i. Respond in writing to the person making the complaint, acknowledging receipt and making it clear i) that the complaint will be handled according to the Library's policy; ii) the process will begin as soon as possible, aiming to complete it as soon as possible, and iii) progress will be reported back as soon as the person handling the complaint is in a position to do so.
- ii. The person handling the complaint meets with the individual about whom the complaint has been made, seeking to i) establish whether there is a case to answer and ii) if so, resolve it informally as a result of this meeting and any downstream actions required by it.
- iii. If this does not achieve the desired result within the agreed timeframe, then the person handling the complaint needs to send a written warning to the individual.
- iv. If this is unsuccessful, then the individual must be dismissed.

The following sections explain each of steps ii) – iv) in more detail.

6. Handling the complaint - meeting with the individual

The person handling the complaint should meet with the individual about whom the complaint has been made as soon as this can be done. The meeting should cover those of the following list that are relevant to the situation.

- Speak with the individual about the range of issues that may be influencing their ability to carry out tasks, their behaviour or their attitude. Often they may not realise that they are doing anything wrong and cannot be expected to change if a particular issue is not brought to their attention
- Supply the individual with a well thought out induction talk, together with the relevant volunteer policy and role description.
- Remind them of any other relevant policies, ground rules etc
- Check if they have training needs
- Check if they need extra support or supervision
- Check if they are unfulfilled in their current role. Have their needs changed, or would they like to use different skills to help the organisation? If so, it may be possible to modify their role description, ask them if they would like to work in another area, or develop a completely new role for them
- Check if the individual is suffering from burnout or unable to cope with the demands of the role any more. They may need a break from volunteering or may prefer to volunteer in another organisation for a while
- Keep notes of all meetings where problems are discussed.

At the end of the meeting, or meetings if more than one has been necessary, the person handling the complaint should do the following:

- Establish a view as to whether the complaint is justified
- If not, then communicate this to all relevant parties
- If the complaint *is* justified, then make clear to the person about whom the complaint has been made, i) what changes are expected of them within a reasonable timeframe; ii) what the Library can do (if anything) to assist them; iii) anything else that might reasonably be required of the individual, given the circumstances of the case, including but not limited to, requiring a suitable apology.
- Make clear what will need to happen if the required improvement plus whatever else is required, has not taken place by the end of the agreed timeframe.

- Feed back to the person who made the complaint so that they know i) that action has been taken and ii) have a broad understanding of what the action is.

7. Handling the complaint - written warning

If the issue is not resolved as a result of the previous section, then the person handling the complaint should give the individual about whom the complaint has been made, a written warning including the following:

- A reiteration of the reason for the complaint
- A summary of what was agreed at the end of the meeting described above, with regard to improvements and anything else that may reasonably have been required
- Depending on the nature of the complaint, set further objectives and offer help to the individual
- Set a period of time by which sufficient improvement needs to be in place
- Make it clear that if sufficient improvement and anything else that has been required are not in place by the agreed date, then the individual will be dismissed
- Offer a face-to-face meeting with the individual to put their case if they wish to. They can be accompanied by a person of their choice if they so wish.

8. Dismissal

If the required improvements etc have not materialised by the end of the agreed period of time, the individual must be dismissed.

This is carried out by the person handling the complaint. If the Coordinator of Volunteers needs to dismiss a volunteer, they should confer with the chair of the committee in advance to agree the approach to the dismissal. If they are both of the opinion that it would be better coming from the chair, then the chair can carry out the dismissal instead.

The default approach to conducting a dismissal is to arrange a meeting for this purpose. After the meeting, an email should be sent to confirm the dismissal and the reasons for it. If the individual will not commit to a meeting, then the dismissal may be done in writing via email or letter.

9. Appealing against a decision to dismiss

The person who has been dismissed may appeal against the decision. If so, the appeal must be in writing to the person who has dismissed them.

The appeal is then heard as per the table below.

Individual appealing against a dismissal decision	Who hears the appeal
All volunteers other than committee members	Chair of the management committee
Coordinator of Volunteers	A sub-committee of the library management committee convened for the purpose and whose members are selected by the chair
Committee members, excluding the chair of the committee	A sub-committee of the library management committee convened for the purpose and whose members are selected by the chair

The chair of the committee	A sub-committee of the library management committee convened for the purpose and whose members are selected by the vice-chair
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The appeal must be heard at a meeting convened for the purpose. The individual who has been dismissed may be accompanied by another person of their choosing if they require. A written record of the meeting must be kept by whoever is hearing the appeal. Once the person or sub-committee hearing the appeal has reached a decision, this will be communicated to the individual in writing. This decision is final.

10. Immediate suspension

There are some occasions where an individual can be suspended immediately, while an investigation is carried out and led by the Chair of the management committee, or someone to whom this is delegated by the Chair of the management committee, or the vice-chair if the incident concerns the chair.

This includes but is not limited to, acts that constitute gross misconduct such as:

- Theft
- Assault
- Acts of violence
- Malicious damage
- Deliberate falsification of documents
- Harassment
- Being under the influence of drugs or alcohol etc.

Once the investigation has been completed, the person carrying out the investigation will determine the required course of action. If it has been the case that the individual is guilty of gross misconduct, then they must be dismissed as per this policy.

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