



## TEWKESBURY CRUISING AND SAILING CLUB

### OPERATING PROCEDURES

# COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

#### Introduction

No organisation is immune from the risk of complaint. Unresolved complaints jeopardise organisational standing and credibility. Prudent organisations take action to reduce the risk by ensuring that all those individuals likely to be in contact with the public are fully conversant and compliant with:

- The organisation's aims, objectives and operational ethos.
- Organisational policies, procedures, rules and regulations.
- Current plans and work programmes.
- The means of accessing specialist knowledge and advice on technical, legal or financial matters.
- The requirement to share relevant information with all who need to know on a timely basis and the communication mechanisms/routes within the organisation.
- The organisation's Complaints Policy and procedures including the requirement to maintain an official Complaints Register.

Experience in the management of complaints shows that, the earlier the intervention after a complaint is received and the more sincere, timely and complete the response, the higher the chance of successfully satisfying the complainant and retaining their confidence in and loyalty to the organisation. The procedure that follows is based on these principles.

#### Complaints Procedure

This procedure must be followed for all complaints received, whether face to face, by telephone, by email or by letter.

#### Oral Complaints

All complaints are serious. However, some can be successfully resolved through an immediate response, especially those relating to delays in communication, administrative mistakes, misunderstanding of process or failures in communications. Individuals of whatever rank receiving an oral complaint should try to resolve it "on the spot" using the following approach:

1. Listen.
2. Find out what the problem is, clarifying any ambiguities so that the true nature of the issue is beyond doubt.
3. Apologise immediately for any obvious mistake or failing in the standard of service provided.
4. Confirm that the person wishes to make a complaint.
5. Ascertain the complainant's name and address.
6. Offer to correct the error stating clearly what action is proposed and when it will be carried out. Make sure the complainant is satisfied with the action proposed.
7. Ensure that any undertaking is honoured in full.

Where no blame is thought to lie with the organisation, avoid suggesting that fault lies with the complainant or that he/she may have contributed to the matter. The emphasis should be on helping the complainant understand the full circumstances and to do all possible to put the matter right. If action is required, seek confirmation that the complainant is happy with the action proposed.

In every case where the person says they are making a complaint it should be recorded in the Official Complaints Register.

If a complaint cannot be resolved as suggested above, the complainant should be advised that, whilst the complaint will be noted, it would be helpful to have it in writing and that he or she should write to the Honorary Secretary who will investigate and respond.

## **Written Complaints**

This includes all complaints received in writing or by email and complaints of a more serious or complex nature, however received. Upon receipt, the complaint must be recorded in the Official Complaints Register. The matter must then be drawn to the attention of the Honorary Secretary and Commodore within three working days. If a comprehensive reply cannot be issued immediately, an acknowledgement giving details of the action proposed and estimated timescale for issuing a substantive response should be sent to the complainant within five working days. Following investigation, a substantive response should be issued within twenty working days. If for some reason this target cannot be met, a letter of explanation should be despatched within the above timescale.

Responsibility for the investigation of complaints and the issue of substantive replies will rest with the General Committee. During investigation care should be taken in interviewing staff to ensure that staff rights are not breached. Similarly, should a meeting with the complainant be necessary, this should be undertaken by at least two officials and a full written record maintained.

## **Appeals**

Where, despite best efforts, it is not possible for the General Committee to resolve the issue, the complainant should be advised of the appeals procedure. The Commodore will establish an Appeals Panel, who will have had no prior involvement with the complaint, from among the Executive and other suitable persons with integrity and standing among the general membership.

## **Anonymous Complaints**

Such complaints should be recorded in the Official Complaints Register along with an indication of the activity area referred to and the action taken. A typical entry for such might read "An anonymous letter re training received 17/10/2005. Referred to Honorary Secretary for action on (date). General Committee informed (date). Correspondence filed reference number ..... "

Occasionally an anonymous letter may suggest serious organisational failing or a misdemeanor on the part of a volunteer, which the Executive Committee may feel requires action by means of an investigation, a policy review, or an audit. Such action would be appropriate but care must be taken to ensure that the Committee does not rely solely on the uncorroborated statement of an anonymous letter to justify action.

## **Official Complaints Register**

This register should be maintained in an appropriate format (either manual or digital). Entries should record the following in respect of each complaint received:

- Date received and file reference number
- Source
- Brief Summary of Complaint
- Action Taken. This should include date of acknowledgement, date of issue of substantive reply
- Date, content and outcome of any meeting held
- Outcome and Resolution
- The letters/emails, records of phone calls and notes of meetings should be filed by case in a dedicated file.

The Official Complaints Register should be laid before the General Committee annually with a short summary of the number, nature and outcome of complaints received during that period. The Register should be signed off by the Commodore.