



Chesterfield Complaints Procedure

1. Introduction

Chesterfield u3a has over 800 members who organise and participate in a wide range of activities and events throughout the year. We hope that members (and non-members where relevant) enjoy these and have no cause for complaint. However, it may be that on some occasion an issue or problem becomes apparent, or an incident occurs which is upsetting or offensive, and the matter needs to be addressed.

This document sets out how Chesterfield u3a will deal with problems, incidents or issues which give members and others cause for concern. It includes options for informal resolution plus a formal Complaints Procedure. Our aim is that matters of concern are resolved quickly and in the most appropriate way.

2. Informal resolution

If you are unhappy or upset with another member for some reason, in the first instance consider approaching that person, in a non-confrontational way, explaining your concerns, and asking them for an explanation of their words or actions. Clarifying misunderstandings may be all that is needed.

If you feel unable to make a direct approach yourself, but still favour a low-key informal resolution, then you could involve someone else, with the following options available depending on circumstances:

- *Your concern arises from behaviour or action in an Interest Group setting:* you could ask the Group Co-ordinator or another member in the group to help you in resolving the matter.
- *Your concern relates to behaviour or action in other settings:* e.g., Open Meetings, Coffee Mornings, publicity events etc. Again, you could ask another member to help you.
- *For any concern:* you could contact the u3a Secretary (see contact details at the end); explain that there is a concern which you would prefer to be resolved informally if possible, and you would like someone to assist with this. (If the complaint is connected to the Secretary, then contact the u3a Chair or Vice-chair instead).

If you choose option 1 or 2, see Appendix 1 for guidance on how to raise matters in a non-confrontational way. If you choose option 3 (above) and contact the Secretary to ask for assistance, your request will be acknowledged, and a committee member will be appointed who will contact you to find out about your concerns. He or she may also speak to other people involved in the matter, or support you in doing so, and then try to bring matters to a satisfactory informal resolution, involving all parties and taking all views into account; ideally within 14 days of receipt of the complaint.

3. Moving to the Complaints Procedures

At any stage during any of the above three options trying to achieve an informal resolution, you could decide that you do not want to continue with the informal process, or it might become clear that an informal resolution is not possible. You could then apply to invoke the formal Complaints Procedure. Alternatively, you might decide from the start that the matter is serious enough to require the Complaints Procedure.

If the complaint is against Chesterfield u3a as an organisation, or the committee or a committee member, then the formal Complaints Procedure must be used from the start.

4. Making a formal complaint

Contact the Secretary (see contact details at the end) to inform Chesterfield u3a that you wish to make a formal complaint. Your request should be acknowledged within 7 days wherever possible. (If the complaint is connected to the Secretary, then contact the u3a Chair or Vice-chair instead).

5. The Formal Procedure

i. Investigating the complaint

The Complaints Procedure involves keeping a written record of statements, evidence and decisions.

One or more committee members will be appointed to carry out a thorough investigation of your complaint (unless this has already taken place during an informal resolution stage) and to produce a written report of their findings. You will receive a copy of the report, and asked to write and sign a statement as to whether or not you agree with the findings.

ii. Complaints Panel Hearing

A Complaints Panel will then be appointed to hold a Formal Hearing into your complaint, preferably within 14 days of completion of the investigation report. You and other interested parties will be able to attend and to speak at the Hearing. The Panel will consider the report of the investigation, listen to the views of interested parties, and then decide if there are genuine grounds for the complaint and, if so, what is the most appropriate way to resolve it. The decision will be sent to you in writing within seven days of the Hearing.

iii. The possibility of an Appeal

If you are not satisfied with the decision of the Complaints Panel, you can appeal within seven days of receiving the decision notice by informing the Secretary that you wish to do so. An Appeal Panel will then be appointed and will meet within 14 days of receipt of the appeal. Again, you and other interested parties will be able to attend. The Appeal Panel's decision is final and will be sent to you within 7 days of the Appeal Hearing.

6. Communication and confidentiality

Communications relating to concerns and complaints might be done electronically.

Electronic versions of communications and reports, and any associated personal information, will be kept on password protected files by the Secretary. It will only be disclosed as needed to investigators or Panel members involved in the Complaints Procedure while it is underway, then it will be retained by the Secretary for 3 years after the Procedure has been concluded.

Contact the Secretary:

- via our website (chesterfieldu3a.org.uk)
- by emailing secretary@chesterfieldu3a.co.uk or
- by telephoning our *Enquiries number (07928 327876)* and leaving a message.

Please give your name, membership number and brief details of your complaint.

APPENDIX 1: Guidance on resolving conflict.

Conflict in an Interest Group setting

Edited extract from TAT Group Convenors/Leaders Handbook

Problem solving

Sometimes issues can arise within a group that disrupt the smooth running and can spoil the enjoyment for everyone. Don't leave a problem too long before trying to resolve it.

Issues between group members

Where there is potential for friction it is advisable to begin by bringing it into the open. Either you or another person could try to facilitate a discussion either with the members concerned or with the whole group, but it is important that the Group Co-ordinator remains neutral and non-judgemental. If, as Group Co-ordinator, you cannot reach a resolution, speak informally to your Groups Facilitator or a member of your committee can be contacted for advice if necessary. If a situation does not resolve and becomes acrimonious your committee may need to implement the formal Complaints Procedure or the Disciplinary Procedure.

Other issues you may encounter.

- If a member's behaviour is regularly disturbing other members of the group consult the Group's Coordinator for help. If you feel comfortable dealing with the issue in the first instance, then you can do so. Alternatively, you can seek additional support from your Group's Coordinator.
- If there is a very serious problem in a session, it may be necessary to ask a member to leave for the remainder of the session. If this occurs, please contact the Group's Coordinator as soon as possible after the end of the session.
- If a member who is not able to cope independently comes to a meeting without a 'carer', inform the Group's Coordinator as soon as possible to discuss how best to resolve this situation.

Types of conflicts and how to resolve them.

Edited extract from website <https://www.latrobe.edu.au/mylatrobe/common-types-of-group-conflicts-and-how-to-resolve-them/>

Conflicts over outcomes and expectation

This arises when each person has a different expectation for the outcome. For example, if a person wants to change the meeting day which does not suit one other members of the group, then it can cause conflict.

Relationship conflicts

This is a common conflict and occurs when two or more people have personalities or traits that clash with one another and it may be hard to contain the negative feelings about it. One might have an opposing view from another, or dislike how another person conducts themselves. Another example is two people want to lead the group but aren't prepared to support each other.

Process conflicts

This conflict occurs when the disagreement is about how tasks will be completed. It might be that the team can't decide on how to distribute tasks, who needs to do what, who makes final decisions or even when the next meeting will be. All these conflicts can lead us feeling stressed and overwhelmed, but what if there was a way to resolve these?

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How to resolve group conflicts

Acknowledge the conflict.

Ignoring an issue could lead to further arguments, disagreements and potentially even hurt feelings. Avoid this by acknowledging the issue out loud and letting the team know what is happening. It may not be pleasant but getting it out in the open can then allow everyone to work on a solution. Just remember, always do this respectfully and in a way that cares for both you and the other person, yelling your problem at someone, although it might be getting it out of your system, doesn't always lead to the outcome we're looking for! Decency and respect should be exercised at all times.

Communicate

It is important that all parties in the group can have their say when a conflict arises. Open and honest communication will help the group know exactly where everyone is at and help the group understand where a grievance might be coming from. Make sure you're respectful and clearly state the issue and how you're feeling, but also make sure that you listen and be prepared to consider that people are allowed to see things differently.

Listen and find a solution.

When listening to others, make sure you listen attentively and try to understand where they are coming from with empathy. Not everyone is the same – we all have different upbringings and experiences which can shape our understanding of what it means to communicate, what can upset one person may not upset another; give people space, yourself included, listen and do your best to bring understanding. This will allow the group to then start working towards a solution for the conflict that arises.

Reflect on what your part is.

It's important to be honest with ourselves as to how we have been with the group as well. Have we stepped up to what's need or pulled away and withdrawn from the opportunity? Have we been reactive and shut people down or have we been open, clear and considerate? No one's perfect but reflecting on the part we've played and taking responsibility for it can be a great growth opportunity and can often help the others in the groups to do the same – but not always! Be aware, take responsibly and move on, let others come to understand their part in their own way – you don't have to force it down their throat! That never gets anyone anywhere anyway.

Remember the importance of the relationship of the group.

At the end of the day, a conflict is usually a smaller blip in a bigger picture. You don't have to be friends with the people in your group, but it's probably more useful if you aren't butting heads all the time. In a group, you have to be able to deal with all sorts of people. Try to keep the bigger picture in mind and remind yourselves to be respectful, composed and decent to everyone.

Edited extract from <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/involving-volunteers/supporting-and-managing-volunteers/solving-volunteer-problems/#/>

Investigate the problem.

Talk to the person involved and find out the facts. If the problem involves several people, try to speak to all involved.

If you are investigating a problem:

- avoid taking sides.
- listen to what people have to say.
- don't become defensive.
- try to stick to facts.
- avoid blame.

Once you understand the issue, you can work out the best course of action.

If it's difficult for you to remain fair and objective, involve someone else in the process.

Take action.

Explain to the person / people involved what the problem is and the impact it has had. They may be unaware of the issue and drawing their attention to it could fix things.

Avoid blaming people, as the problem may not be their fault. Approach it as trying to tackle the problem together.

Decide with the person / people involved what they would like to happen and how you'll try to solve the problem. Involving people in the solution will help make it a success.

Finally, agree when and how you will review progress.