

Crawley u3a Complaints Procedure

Complaints – responsibilities of the committee

In any organisation, complaints will occur from time to time, 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. In general, complaints will ultimately be directed upwards to the committee of Crawley U3A. This may include complaints from members about an issue that has arisen with another member, or complaints directed by an external organisation or individual. In each scenario the committee will expect complainants, or those receiving the complaint, to record a clear account of the actions and circumstances underpinning the complaint as soon as possible. If a complaint arises during a group activity, then the Group Leader should be informed as soon as possible, unless the circumstances suggest that the issue should be brought to the direct attention of the Groups Coordinator. Many complaints will, of course, be of a minor order, such as, say, the low/high temperature in a venue, and these can, with diplomacy, be resolved on the spot with little fuss..

Any members who experience anything which they believe contravenes the Members Code of Conduct, the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy (EDI) and Accessibility Policy, or with which they are not happy should speak first informally with the relevant Group Leader or Event Organiser. Only if this fails to resolve the matter should this formal complaints' policy be followed.

Depending on the nature and source of the complaint, the committee will decide as to how best to approach reaching a resolution.

In dealing with complaints, the U3A committee will ensure that:

- All actions will be documented.
- Complaints will be dealt with quickly and fairly.
- The U3A committee will try to de-escalate the situation and settle issues without having to resort to formal action, where possible.
- Confidentiality will be maintained. For more serious complaints, the committee may need to liaise with and share information with the Third Age Trust. This will not constitute a data breach due to Crawley U3A's membership of and affiliation to the Trust.
- Decisions made will be based on the facts and evidence gathered.

Informal process

In most cases, it is hoped that complaints can be dealt with informally as detailed below:

- Depending on what the issue is, a decision should be taken as to who the best person is to lead on attempting to resolve the situation informally. If an issue has arisen between two members in a group, then the group leader may be the best person supported by the Groups' Coordinator, if felt appropriate. For issues involving committee members it will be best for another committee member to attempt to mediate and try to find a solution. The initial stage requires checking with the party raising the concern as to whether s/he is willing to accept an informal outcome as opposed to going through a formal process.
- The person(s) identified to lead on the informal stage will hold an informal discussion with all relevant parties. 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.
- If there are several people involved with the complaint – it may be deemed appropriate to speak with others mentioned so that as full a picture as possible is obtained.

- The purpose of the informal meetings will be to seek to summarise the situation with both parties, attempting to reach a mutually satisfactory outcome, agree any changes required to ensure that the situation does not happen again and clear the air.
- If it is felt that there is a case to answer but that nevertheless it is a minor issue, and all parties are willing to accept the agreed outcome then it should be made clear that there should be no repeat of the actions/behaviour and that no further action is necessary.
- If, however, it is felt by the person(s) leading on the informal stage, that 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, the matter should be referred, in writing, to the Chair of Crawley U3A Committee stating that this is a formal complaint. 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.

Formal process

Where someone wishes to raise a formal complaint, s/he will be asked to put the complaint in writing providing as much information as is relevant and giving specific dates and times – where possible. Or alternatively, they can make a verbal complaint through a conversation with the Chair or Secretary of the u3a committee, this conversation will need to cover the nature and details of the complaint.

The complainant should also be asked what outcome they are hoping to achieve by making the complaint, for example, whether they would be prepared to accept an apology. The Chair or Secretary will point out to the complainant that whilst their desired outcome forms part of their complaint, this will not necessarily affect the determination.

The committee may appoint a Trustee who acts as the designated Trustee for managing complaints. The committee may also contact the Third Age Trust and request support from the Regional Trustee, a Trust volunteer and/or National Office staff, in which case the committee will inform the complainant that additional support has been requested and the reasons why.

A letter or email will be sent to the complainant confirming receipt of the complaint and the following procedure will be set in motion.

The Chair will appoint either one or two people to lead on the investigation. This may entail gathering information and conducting interviews related to the complaint. The person(s) against whom the complaint has been made will be informed about the basis of 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 prejudice 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, consider any mitigating circumstances, and agree what action to take. This could include, for example, a change of procedures, a change of venue for monthly meetings or whatever outcome is deemed the most appropriate solution.

Decision

The subcommittee decision will be communicated in writing to both the member or Trustee who raised the complaint and the member or Trustee against whom 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 Trustee 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 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 right of reply involves the member or Trustee against whom the complaint has been made, s/he will be offered the option to attend with a companion who may also speak in a personal capacity.

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, consider any mitigating circumstances, and then make a final decision, which must be communicated in writing to both parties.

VERSION CONTROL

Complaints Policy	Description of changes	Date
1.0 (based on TAT template Oct 2021)	None	15 th Dec 2022
2.0	Changes made to allow members to report complaints verbally and to give more emphasis (at the start) on the role of Group Leader or Event Organiser in attempting to resolve complaints before escalation to Committee level.	13 th March 2024