COMPLAINTS AND CONCERNS PROCEDURE

Purpose

In any group, complaints or concerns 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 the first instance, complaints or concerns should be directed towards the Winsford U3A Committee and these may come from members, an external organisation or other individuals.

This procedure sets out how Winsford U3A will approach a complaint or concern and it is intended to ensure that any issues will be dealt with promptly, fairly and consistently.

The difference between a complaint and a concern

A concern is an expression of worry, doubt or an inquiry seeking reassurance about an important issue. A complaint is a formal or explicit expression of dissatisfaction regarding an action, a lack of action or a poor standard of service that typically expects a corrective response or resolution.

u3a Complaints – Responsibilities of the Committee

In the first instance, complaints or concerns should be directed towards the committee of the u3a. Depending on the nature and source the committee will make a decision as to how best to approach reaching a resolution and who will be the designated Trustee to lead the enquiry.

In dealing with complaints, the u3a committee will ensure:

- All actions are 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 the 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 and concerns can be dealt with informally as detailed below:

- The designated Trustee will first attempt an informal resolution, by holding a discussion with each party concerned. 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.
- The designated Trustee will seek to summarise the situation with both parties, be clear about any required changes to ensure it does not happen again and clear the air. If the designated Trustee feels that there is a case to answer but that nevertheless it is a minor issue, then it should be made clear to the relevant parties that there must be no repeat of the sort of actions/behaviour which led to this problem. If that outcome is accepted by both parties, then no further action is necessary.

If the designated Trustee feels 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, then they will be advised to put the matter, in writing, to the Chair of Winsford 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. The complainant will receive a letter or email confirming receipt of the complaint.

Formal process

If a more formal approach becomes necessary then the committee will 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 Trust volunteer and/or National Office staff. The Committee will inform the complainant that additional support has been requested and the reasons why.

Decision

The Committee will discuss the situation and agree on an outcome. This decision will be communicated in writing to the complainant and if appropriate any other persons involved. This will include the outcome of the investigation and 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 provided it is lodged within a seven day period from the date of the decision being provided to the complainant and any other persons involved.

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 themselves). This should not include those who were involved in the initial investigation.

The person raising the appeal will be offered a verbal right of reply, if they wish to take this up then they will be asked to attend a meeting with the appeal panel. Where the verbal right of reply involves the person against whom the complaint has been made, they 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 taking into account any mitigating circumstances, and then make a final decision, which must be communicated in writing to both parties.

Confidentiality

All procedures and documents relating to a complaint or concern must be kept confidential at all times. Information should only be shared with those who have a genuine need to receive it. This may include Third Age Trust staff, Trust volunteer/s and the Regional Trustee. All situations should be dealt with discreetly and by showing respect to the parties and views involved.