

NORTH OF TYNE VOLUNTEERING AREA OF EXCELLENCE

WRITING A PROBLEM SOLVING PROCEDURE

A problem-solving procedure will ensure that you know how to deal with problems consistently should they arise. It is good practice to avoid using the same grievance and disciplinary policy for both staff and volunteers, and the term 'problem solving procedures' helps to differentiate between the two.

ALIGNMENT WITH THE HEALTH CHECK FOR VOLUNTEER-INVOLVING ORGANISATIONS

The Health Check for Volunteer-Involving Organisations considers whether you have policies and procedures in place to support our volunteers and which are communicated to them clearly. This includes details of how you will deal with any problems which arise as part of the volunteering.

IF A VOLUNTEER WISHES TO MAKE A COMPLAINT

Stage 1 - Oral complaint

Initial complaints, whether against a member of staff, the organisation or another volunteer, should be discussed with the volunteer. If the complaint is about the volunteer manager, then the matter should be referred to another manager. This person should be named in the problem-solving procedure. A meeting should be arranged and the volunteer should be informed that they can be accompanied by a nominated person of their choice. If the issue cannot be resolved at this stage then the volunteer should be informed that they can proceed to stage 2.

Stage 2 - In writing

If the volunteer is not satisfied with the outcome of the oral complaint, they may wish to make a formal complaint in writing to a more senior member of staff. This person again should be named in the organisation's problem solving along with a set timeframe in which the organisation should respond in writing.

Stage 3 - Opportunity to appeal

If the volunteer is not satisfied with the outcome, then they should be made aware that they may appeal to a member of the management committee if applicable usually the Chair. In some organisations a sub-committee can be formed specifically to deal with complaints. The volunteer can again have a nominated person present at this meeting.

The procedure should also state the time frame by which the volunteer would expect to receive a response and that their decision is final.

Volunteers have no legal rights unless they can prove that they are in fact employees, or that the organisation has been negligent in its duty of care towards them.

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IF SOMEONE WISHES TO MAKE A COMPLAINT ABOUT A VOLUNTEER

This part of the problem-solving procedure gives the volunteer the opportunity to be told why a complaint has arisen, the opportunity to state their case and the chance to appeal, if appropriate.

Stage 1 – Oral discussion

The first step is to discuss the complaint with the volunteer. There could be external factors influencing their ability to carry out tasks, their behaviour or their attitude. Identify goals that will help the volunteer to fulfil their role, and offer extra support, supervision and training where necessary. Agree a deadline for reviewing the situation with the volunteer.

If the complaint was raised by someone else, keep them informed of the measures you are taking to rectify the situation. If you would prefer complaints to be put in writing, then state this in your problem-solving procedure.

Stage 2 – Written warning

If the issue hasn't been resolved by the oral discussion or the review, then the volunteer manager can issue the volunteer with a written warning outlining the reason for the complaint. The volunteer should be given the opportunity to state their case, which could be to either the volunteer manager or a senior member of staff. The volunteer should also be allowed to be accompanied by a person of their choice.

Depending on the nature of the complaint, further objectives could be set, and help offered to the volunteer. However, if the organisation decides to ask the volunteer to leave, then the volunteer should be given the opportunity to appeal. The decision to ask a volunteer to leave should be a last resort.

Stage 3 - Opportunity to appeal

If a volunteer has been asked to leave then they should appeal in writing to a member of the management committee if applicable, usually the Chair. Sometimes a subcommittee can be formed specifically to hear appeals. The volunteer should be invited to have a nominated person present at this meeting. The Chair or sub-committee will need to respond within a specified time, and their decision is final.

Exceptions

There are some occasions when volunteers should be suspended immediately while an investigation is carried out such as behaviour that constitutes gross misconduct. The decision to suspend a volunteer needs to be confirmed to the volunteer in writing. In some cases, legal proceedings may need to be concluded before the next step of your problem-solving procedure can take place.