

RAMBLERS COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Procedure title:	Complaints Procedure
Purpose / scope:	This procedure sets out the process regarding complaints made about the Ramblers as an organisation or how its representatives/ members have behaved. A complaint could be from a member, volunteer, member of staff or from the public. It should be read in conjunction with the Complaints Policy.
Related procedures:	Ramblers Code of Conduct Safeguarding procedure Volunteering policy Problem Solving procedure
Staff policy owner:	Head of volunteering development
Approved by:	Finance and risk committee, on behalf of the Board of trustees
Date approved:	February 2021
Next review due:	February 2023
Version:	3
Applies to:	Members, volunteers, trustees, staff, third party contractors, consultants and so on

Version control

Version	Date	Activity
1	2016	Complaints and Disputes policy 2016
2	December 2020	Rewritten to the Complaints Policy – approved February 2021
3	July 2021	Procedure updated

RAMBLERS COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Introduction

When someone considers that we have fallen short of their reasonable expectations and wishes to express dissatisfaction with any aspect of the organisation, then we call this a 'complaint'. It could be a minor concern about a walk, the membership process or it could be more serious matter. A concern or complaint could be about a Ramblers' member, volunteer or member of staff as well as the charity's policies, rules or regulations, or even something we have or have not done.

This procedure must be followed for resolving concerns and complaints and it describes how we will deal with them.

Our Values and Code of Conduct

We have a Code of Conduct for Ramblers members, volunteers, trustees and staff which explains our values. We are guided by our Values and Code of Conduct at all times.

We welcome feedback about our policies, procedures and decisions and will explain the reasons for them. We will not treat such feedback as a complaint unless we have breached our own procedures or the law in arriving at those policies and decisions.

Raising a concern or complaining to the Ramblers

- We only accept complaints about things that have happened in the last three months.
- We have a local approach to resolving complaints and encourage members to share their concern or complaint to the chair of their local Area or Group, if their complaint is about something that has happened in the Area or Group.
- We believe most concerns, grievances or complaints are best resolved locally with the people who were involved
- We do not generally investigate anonymous complaints.
- We do not accept complaints that are broadly the same as a previous complaint from the same complainant.
- We do not progress complaints that we believe are vexatious or malicious.
- We do not tolerate abusive behaviour or language from complainants.

Dealing with concerns and complaints

The concerns and complaints we receive vary from minor issues, such as membership queries, questions about the Ramblers approach to an area of policy through to more serious complaints, like assault.

Due to range and variety of issues and concerns we receive, complaints raised with us are organised into three groups or levels. Many concerns are at Level 1 or 2 and can be resolved locally and quickly by the relevant group, area or team.

Level 1

These are minor issues which we hope can be resolved promptly. Some examples include:

- **Transactions** – issues with membership fees, banking, volunteer expenses, marketing calls and emails, unusable systems and IT problems.
- **Activities and events** – walks which were wrongly described, the failure to run a walk or a late cancellation, groups or areas that are unwelcoming or are reluctant to have new members.
- **Relating to the organisation** – campaigns being run, the Ramblers' charitable aims and objectives, information on the website or in WALK magazine.

Level 2

These are concerns or complaints where we have not met the complainant's expectations and they wish to take it further. Some examples include:

- **Customer service** – no response or a slow response to a query or initial complaint.
- **Behavioural** – inappropriate, unpleasant or rude behaviour from a member, volunteer or member of staff.
- **Policy** – not supporting a public right of way, changes to existing policies and procedures.

Level 3

These are complaints which we consider serious, which might involve the police or other external organisation, and could damage the charity's or an individual's reputation. Some examples include:

- **Discrimination or harassment** of any of the nine protected characteristics of the Equality Act: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.
- **Indirect discrimination** – refusing to let a person with a disability take part in a walk.
- **Assault or abuse** – physical, mental, sexual, bullying, safeguarding.
- **Damage to property** – either Ramblers' property or an individual's.
- **Breach of confidentiality** - data protection, misuse of data or email address.
- **Fraud or theft** - misuse of funds.

Our complaints and feedback procedure

We aim to respond to all complaints and concerns and resolve them quickly, fairly and effectively. We will acknowledge your complaint no later than five working days after receipt. Wherever possible, we will provide a full resolution within 14 days of receipt of your complaint.

Where your concerns require us to examine a situation in more detail or we are not able to resolve them straightaway, we will acknowledge your complaint and keep you updated as necessary. Where this is the case, we will also tell you who is managing your complaint, so you have a point of contact if you need to get in touch with us. In

any event, you should expect to receive a full response from us at the earliest opportunity and no later than 14 days from the date we received your complaint.

We welcome complaints by email, phone, letter, via our website and face-to-face. To help us deal with your enquiry, please explain your concerns as clearly and fully as possible.

Level 1

Concerns and complaints about group-based activities should be dealt with at a local level. We encourage complaints to be raised with the local group, area or activity where the concern took place.

Whoever receives the initial concern or issue should find out what they can, apologise if necessary, and resolve the concern, if they feel able to do so, using the process below as a guide. In most cases, this informal approach will resolve the concern.

Level 2

These complaints will be passed on to our Supporter Care team who will then decide who is best placed to look into the issue.

This could be a Group or Area chair, a member of the Area Support team, a senior manager with responsibility for the subject area of the complaint, or another team. Please contact our Supporter Care team by:

Email: ramblers@ramblers.org.uk
Phone: 020 3961 3232 (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm)

Process for Level 1 and 2 complaints

We have a local approach to resolving minor issues - most can be dealt with locally by the group, area or other intermediary. Ramblers staff will only become directly involved where there is a serious complaint (Level 3) or when all other avenues have been exhausted. Ramblers staff are available in an advisory capacity to help with the process locally.

a Informal discussion

It is always best to resolve any concerns informally and at a local level, which means the Group or Area Chair will initially respond to concerns and issues. This could involve having a talk with the person or people concerned about behaviour, examining our policies or procedures, liaising with members of staff and so on. All discussions should be fair, discreet and confidential, and all parties should be kept fully informed with every possible attempt made to resolve a concern fairly and promptly.

At the informal discussion, the Group or Area Chair, lead volunteer or member of staff will make sure that:

- They talk to all the people involved discreetly and sensitively
- Confidentiality is maintained at all times
- Parties involved in a dispute do not speak to other members or volunteers about what has happened
- Everyone is kept updated, ideally within 14 days

Several follow-up meetings might be necessary if initial solutions do not work and alternatives suggested. The meetings are an opportunity to discuss further support and possible outcomes.

Support is always available from the Operations or Volunteering Development teams and guidance available on the Ramblers website, Assemble and on the staff intranet.

b Follow-up meeting

If the situation has not improved after an informal discussion, or if the original concern is serious, then the person should be invited to a more formal meeting with their Group or Area Chair, lead volunteer or member of staff. They can bring someone along to support them, if they wish.

They will be offered three possible dates and times to meet, and the meeting should take place during office hours and at a neutral place. If they will not attend the meeting, the process should move on to the next stage.

Where mitigating circumstances may have contributed to a situation, they should be discussed at this point and could be taken into consideration.

Support is always available from the Operations or Volunteering Development teams and guidance is available on Assemble, the volunteer website, and on the staff intranet.

Notes and records should be kept securely and confidentially.

c Review meeting

This meeting should go over the action plan and discuss what progress has been made. At this meeting, one of three decisions can be made:

- *Option 1 – the issue is resolved*

You will agree that following the formal meeting, the concern has been resolved or the situation has improved, and no further action is required.

- *Option 2 – the review period is extended*

You will agree that some progress has been made but improvement is still needed. The actions are reviewed and updated. Another review meeting could be arranged to go through the actions again.

- *Options 3 – the issue is assigned to a member of staff for further support*

If the required improvements have not been made and all possible solutions have been tried, or the issue is serious, then the complaint is passed on to the appropriate staff member – the Operations or Volunteering development team for investigation.

Formal procedure for Level 3 complaints

If the Group or Area Chair, lead volunteer or member of staff cannot resolve the issue locally, or if the original concern was serious or high risk, then the Volunteering Development team must be informed.

These complaints will be passed on to the Volunteering Development team for consideration and evaluation. They are specialists, providing expert advice, and will recommend if an investigation should be carried out.

Investigation

The Volunteering Development team will appoint an investigating officer to investigate a complaint when:

- A local and informal resolution has not worked, and the complainant has appealed against a decision
- When complex or serious problems are suspected
- A serious incident has happened

If a volunteer is involved, The Ramblers might temporarily suspend a volunteer from their role. This will allow the investigating officer to examine the allegations thoroughly and establish the facts. It should not be considered as an admission of any wrongdoing.

If a member is involved, they may be asked not to attend any activities or events during this time. This decision will be based on whether there is a risk to the wellbeing of the member or others.

A member under investigation may be suspended temporarily while the investigation takes place. This decision to suspend a member temporarily can only be made by the Director of Operations and Volunteering or CEO, and the member will be informed in writing. This is in accordance with The Ramblers Articles of Association and Standing Orders.

If a member of staff is involved, then the complaint will be passed on to our HR team and HR policies will be followed. A member of staff may also be suspended temporarily while an investigation takes place.

Outcome of investigation

After completing the investigation, the investigating officer will decide whether to uphold or reject the complaint and if any sanctions are recommended.

They will write to the complainant about the decision, any actions The Ramblers may take and their right of appeal.

Right to appeal

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation or believes the process was unfair, they have the right to appeal against the decision within 14 days. This is not an opportunity to challenge the decision if there is no new information, but to challenge how the issue was managed and investigated previously.

Once the appeal has been heard, the investigating officer will contact all parties and let them know the outcome and the recommended actions.

The appeal outcome is final and cannot be subsequently appealed. The case will then be closed.

Safeguarding

Where a complaint raises a potential safeguarding issue, we will refer to our Safeguarding policy.

Expelling a member

Rarely, where a serious complaint has been upheld against a member, the investigating officer may recommend to the Board of trustees that the member is expelled from The Ramblers.

This is in accordance with The Ramblers Articles of Association and Standing Orders.

Additional guidance

- Confidential records will be kept at each stage of the process, they will be updated regularly and stored securely.
- Where possible, decisions and outcomes will be communicated within a maximum of 14 working days.

Additional information

We hope to resolve your complaint in an honest, open and satisfactory way, but if you are unhappy with a decision, you can contact the following external regulators.

Fundraising or membership complaints:

Fundraising Regulator
2nd Floor, CAN Mezzanine Building
49-51 East Road
London, N1 6AH
Email: admin@fundraisingregulator.org.uk
Phone: 0300 999 3407
<https://www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/>

Use of personal data complaints:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House, Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire, SK9 5AF
Phone: 0303 123 1113
<https://ico.org.uk/>

Volunteering or group-led activity complaints, and all other areas of our work:

Charity Commission
PO Box 211
Bootle, L20 7VX
Phone: 0300 066 9197
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission>

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