



Essex Badger Protection Group

Complaints & Problem-Solving Policy

Purpose

To encourage improvement in individual conduct and performance and to offer appropriate support for all those involved in working towards our common goals. This procedure sets out the actions that may be taken to resolve issues that may arise in working with others and with volunteers towards those goals.

Principles

1. To provide a safe space for all those volunteering together to protect badgers and show that the Group, its members and volunteers are committed to science-led, professional conduct at all times.
2. To resolve all problems quickly, fairly and openly.

If you have a complaint

Complaints are viewed as an opportunity to learn and improve for the future and to put things right for the person or party that has made the complaint. All complaint information will be handled sensitively, telling only those who need to know and following any relevant data protection requirements.

Oral Complaint (Stage 1)

Before formal procedures, the Group will try to resolve the matter by informal discussion with you. If you are unhappy with an individual in the Group, sometimes it is best to tell them directly in order to deal with the issue quickly. If you feel this is difficult or inappropriate, speak to a committee member.

- If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a fair opportunity to respond.
- If the above does not resolve the complaint, then you should speak to a committee member about the complaint.
- Complaints will be acknowledged by the committee member handling the complaint within one week.

- The acknowledgement will explain who is dealing with the complaint and the timescale for a reply. (Ideally, complainants should receive a definitive reply within 30 days. If this is not possible because, for example, an investigation has yet to be fully completed, a progress report will be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given.)

An oral complaint can progress to the next stage if this fails to bring about the desired improvement or a satisfactory solution.

Written Complaint (Stage 2)

If you feel that the problem has not been satisfactorily resolved at Stage 1, you can request that the complaint be formally reviewed at the Committee level.

You should write this request within two weeks of receiving a reply at Stage 1. At this stage, the complaint will be passed to the Chairperson of the Group. NB: If the complaint concerns the chairperson, the complaint should be addressed to another committee member (Vice-Chair, Secretary or Treasurer) and marked 'confidential'.

- The request for committee-level review will be acknowledged within one week of receipt of the written complaint. The acknowledgement will state who will handle the case and the timescale for a reply.
- The Chairperson (or alternative committee member as necessary) will investigate the facts of the case with at least one other committee member or delegate a suitably senior person (or sub-committee) to do so. This may involve reviewing the paperwork of the case and speaking with the person who dealt with the oral complaint at Stage 1.
- If the complaint relates to a specific person, they will be informed and given a further opportunity to respond.
- You should expect to receive a definitive reply within 30 days. If this is not possible, a progress report will be sent to indicate when a complete response will be given.
- Whether the complaint is upheld or not, the reply should describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result.

The decision at this stage is final.

Variation of the complaint procedure

If the complaint is made about a volunteer:

Informal Discussion (Stage 1)

In the first instance, a committee member or volunteer coordinator (if applicable) will discuss the complaint with the volunteer. This review meeting will be used to investigate the situation and substantiate the facts of the case. Where necessary, it should identify what will help the volunteer fulfil their role and offer extra support,

supervision and training where necessary. A deadline should be agreed upon to review the situation with the volunteer.

If the complaint was raised by someone else, they will be kept informed of the measures being taken to rectify the situation.

Written Warning (Stage 2)

If the issue hasn't been or cannot be resolved by the oral discussion or the review, the matter will be raised further at the Committee level. A written letter may be issued detailing the reasons for the complaint.

The volunteer should be allowed to state their case, which could be to either the volunteer coordinator (if applicable) or a confidential committee meeting. A person of their choice may accompany the volunteer.

Depending on the nature of the complaint, further objectives could be set, and help offered to the volunteer. However, at this stage, a decision may be made to ask the volunteer to leave.

Appeal (Stage 3)

If a volunteer has been asked to leave, they can appeal to the group's Chairperson. They should do so in writing to the committee within 30 days of being informed of the decision. A sub-committee may be formed to review the appeal. The volunteer will have the option of being accompanied to the meeting by a person of their choice. The Chair or sub-committee must respond within 30 days from that meeting, and their decision will be final.

Gross Misconduct

All volunteers must adhere to the group's Volunteer Code of Conduct. A volunteer can be dismissed without notice on grounds of gross misconduct, which may include:

- Theft from the group, members of the public, or colleagues.
- Fraud or deception during volunteering.
- Assault, fighting or any other violence in the course of volunteering.
- Serious misconduct or criminal acts, whether during or outside volunteering, bringing the group into disrepute.
- Vandalism, damage or sabotage to any property belonging to the Group.
- Harassment of group members, the public, other volunteers or partners, including harassment of a sexual or racial nature, or on the grounds of sexual orientation, religion or belief, age or disability.
- Bullying or intimidation without reasonable explanation, such as to cause significant distress to a colleague or member of the public.

A dismissal must be confirmed in writing within ten working days of the date of the disciplinary meeting.

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