Cheddar Valley u3a

Complaints Procedure

1. 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 the first instance, complaints should be directed towards the Committee of Cheddar Valley u3a ("the Committee"). This includes complaints from members about an issue that has arisen or complaints from an external organisation or individual. Depending on the nature and source of the complaint, the Committee will decide how best to reach a resolution.

In dealing with complaints, the Committee will ensure that:

- All actions are documented.
- Complaints are dealt with quickly and fairly.
- Where possible, issues are settled informally as set out in Section 2.
- Strict confidentiality is maintained throughout. (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 Cheddar Valley u3a's membership of and affiliation to the Trust.)
- Decisions are made based on the facts and evidence gathered.

2. Informal process

Whenever possible, complaints will be dealt with informally as detailed below.

a) Depending on what the issue is, the Committee will decide which Trustee is best placed to take the lead in attempting to resolve the situation informally.
b) The initial stage will include a check with the party raising the concern to see if they are willing to accept an informal outcome rather than going through a formal process.
c) The person(s) identified to lead on the informal stage will hold an informal discussion with all relevant parties. The purpose of this is 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.
d) If there are several people involved with the complaint it may be appropriate to speak with others mentioned so that as full a picture as possible is obtained.
e) The purpose of the informal meetings will be to seek to summarise the situation with both parties, attempt to reach a mutually satisfactory outcome, agree any changes required to ensure that the situation does not happen again and clear the air.
f) If the person(s) leading on the informal stage feels 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 they should make clear that there should be no repeat of the actions or behaviour causing concern but that no further action is necessary.

g) If, however, the person(s) leading on the informal stage feel 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 the u3a Committee, stating that this is a formal complaint. The referral 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.

3. Formal process

a. Where someone wishes to raise a formal complaint, they will be asked to put the complaint in writing, providing as much information as is relevant and giving specific dates and times where possible. They 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. They should be advised that whilst their desired outcome forms part of their complaint there are no guarantees as to what the final outcome will be.

b. The Chair of Cheddar Valley u3a will appoint a Trustee to lead on the investigation of the complaint. If the complaint is serious or complex, the Chair may choose to appoint two Trustees to co-lead. The Chair may also contact the Third Age Trust and request support from the Regional Trustee, a Trust volunteer and/or u3a Office staff. If additional support is requested from the Trust, the complainant will be informed that this has been done, with the reasons why.

Note: If the Chair is one of the parties involved in the complaint, the Vice Chair will replace the Chair in this procedure.

c. A letter or email will be sent to the complainant confirming receipt of the complaint and explaining which procedure will be followed:
   - if the complaint is deemed to be a disciplinary matter then the Disciplinary Procedure will be followed;
   - if the complaint is deemed not to involve a disciplinary matter then the rest of this Complaints Procedure (3d-3e) will be followed.

d. The person(s) appointed to lead the investigation will gather information and conduct 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, to avoid biasing any appeal.

e. The Chair will appoint a subcommittee of three committee members (“the panel”), chaired by the lead person(s), to hear the complaint. The date of the meeting to hear the complaint will normally be within 14 days of the complaint being received. At the discretion of the subcommittee chair, all parties involved in the complaint may be invited to attend to present

their case in person but must leave the hearing before the final decision is taken by the panel. The subcommittee will consider the matter, including any mitigating circumstances, and decide whether or not the complaint has been upheld and what subsequent actions should be taken. This could include, for example, a change of procedures or a change of venue for monthly meetings.

4. Outcome

The chair of the subcommittee will write to the person(s) who raised the complaint and the person(s) against whom the complaint was made to inform both parties of the decision. The letter will tell both parties clearly whether the complaint was upheld or not upheld, with reasons, and will specify any actions to be taken.

5. Right of appeal

All parties have a right to appeal the decision of the subcommittee. Any appeal must be in writing and must be lodged within a 7-day period from the date of the subcommittee decision. The appeal can include a request for a right of reply as well as written representations.

The Chair of CV u3a will appoint a panel of three Trustees to hear the appeal, which must not include any of the Trustees who were involved in the initial investigation.

The panel will convene a meeting to consider the appeal. Any person making an appeal will be offered a verbal right of reply and if they wish to take this up then they will be asked to attend the panel meeting. If the person making the appeal is the member or Trustee 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.

The decision of the appeal panel is final and no further action may be taken.

Approved by the Trustees of Cheddar Valley u3a 12.7.24
Reviewed 29 October 2025 & 6 November 2026, no changes needed.
Next review due November 2028.