

# Volunteer Problem Solving Procedure

## Introduction

While the involvement of volunteers is by and large a positive experience for everyone involved, it is important to bear in mind that sometimes things can go wrong. From time to time there may be instances where a volunteer has a complaint about another volunteer, a member of staff or the organisation itself. Similarly, a member of staff, another volunteer or a member of the public may have a complaint about a volunteer's contribution, attitude or conduct.

It is good practice to avoid using the same grievance and disciplinary policy for both staff and volunteers, and the term 'Problem Solving Procedure' helps to differentiate between the two. Whereas there is a statutory requirement to follow a formal grievance and disciplinary policy for employees, the policy for volunteers is less formal in approach. Whilst BBOWT does not wish to create a formal contractual relationship with volunteers, this Problem Solving Procedure will ensure that staff and volunteers know how to deal with problems in a consistent manner should they arise.

BBOWT has a collaborative approach to problem solving. This procedure helps staff work closely with volunteers if problems arise. This document is split into two sections, the first being if a volunteer wants to complain, and the latter if a complaint is made against a volunteer.

## Guidelines

All complaints will be resolved openly, fairly and quickly to

- Protect volunteers
- Minimise any disruption to staff and volunteers
- Demonstrate that BBOWT respects its volunteers, and
- Protect the reputation of the organisation

### If a volunteer makes a complaint

- Stage 1 Oral Complaint

Initial complaints, whether concerning a member of staff, the organisation or another volunteer, will first be discussed with the volunteer informally. If the complaint concerns the volunteer's manager the matter should be referred to the HR Officer with responsibility for volunteering or another manager. The volunteer will be given the option to be accompanied to the meeting by a nominated person of their choice. The discussion will be followed up with an informal written summary to briefly outline the date/circumstances of the conversation. If the issue cannot be resolved at this stage then the volunteer should proceed to stage 2.

- Stage 2 Written Complaint

If the volunteer is not satisfied with the outcome of the oral complaint, they may make a formal complaint in writing to the HR Officer with responsibility for volunteering or a senior member of

staff, for example a Head of Department. The volunteer must make the written complaint within one month of the incident. BBOWT commits to responding to the complaint within two weeks. Depending on the circumstances of each situation, a manager will respond to the complaint (refer to the line management structure). The HR Officer with responsibility for volunteering will be involved in an advisory capacity at this stage. The Chief Executive will be informed of the complaint and will be updated on progress by the HR department.

- Stage 3 Opportunity to Appeal

If the volunteer is not satisfied with the outcome, then they may appeal to the Chairman of the Board of Trustees. The appeal along with the reason(s) for the appeal must be made in writing. The Chairman should respond to the appeal within two weeks and their decision will be final. If appropriate, the volunteer may be given the option to meet with the Chair. In this circumstance the volunteer may be accompanied at the meeting by a person of their choice. In the event that the Chairman is not available to respond within this timescale the Honorary Secretary to the Board will respond.

### **If someone complains about a volunteer**

Sometimes minor issues may arise during the course of volunteering, such as a volunteer not fitting into the team as well as was expected, not meeting the required standards or being unreliable. Such issues will usually be detected during regular supervision, and may be quite easy to resolve without resorting to formal procedures. From time to time, members of staff may need to remind the volunteer of the policies, procedures and BBOWT values that are relevant within the organisation. Ideally this is dealt with at induction by use of the volunteer handbook along with a verbal outline of the role to be undertaken (written role description in the case of a Key Volunteer). The responsible member of staff must check if the volunteer has any training needs or if the volunteer feels they could benefit from extra support or supervision.

BBOWT will always aim to find the best solution for the volunteer. If the issue isn't resolved through regular supervision, or if a complaint is raised by a third party, then the problem will be dealt with on a more formal basis. Any complaint will be investigated from both sides.

In cases of serious complaints volunteers may need to be suspended immediately while an investigation is carried out. These include, but are not limited to, acts that would constitute gross misconduct if committed by a member of staff for example theft, assault, acts of violence, malicious damage, deliberate falsification of documents, harassment or being under the influence of drugs or alcohol. The decision to suspend a volunteer will be confirmed to the volunteer in writing.

- Stage 1 Oral discussion

The first step is for the volunteer's manager to discuss the complaint with the volunteer. There could be external factors influencing the volunteer's ability to carry out tasks, their behaviour or their attitude. This meeting will seek to identify goals that will help the volunteer fulfil their role, and to offer extra support, supervision and training where necessary. A deadline will be agreed for reviewing the situation with the volunteer. If the complaint has been raised by someone else, within reason, they will be kept informed of the measures being taken to rectify the situation.

The discussion will be followed up with an informal written summary to briefly outline the date/circumstance of the conversation.

- Stage 2 Written Warning

If the issue hasn't been or cannot be resolved by the oral discussion or the review, the HR Officer with responsibility for volunteering may issue the volunteer with a written warning outlining the reason for the complaint. Before any warning is issued the Head of HR will be consulted. The volunteer will be given the opportunity to state their case, which may be to either the HR Officer with responsibility for volunteering or a senior member of staff. The volunteer will 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 opportunity to appeal. The decision to ask a volunteer to leave will be the last resort and the Chief Executive will be informed of this before the final decision is actioned.

- Stage 3 Opportunity to Appeal

If a volunteer is asked to leave then they may appeal in writing to the Chief Executive. The appeal along with the reason(s) for the appeal must be made in writing. If appropriate, the volunteer may be given the option to meet with the Chief Executive. In this circumstance the volunteer may be accompanied at the meeting by a person of their choice. The Chief Executive will respond to the appeal within two weeks and their decision is final.

### **Conducting an exit meeting**

If a volunteer is asked to leave an exit meeting will be conducted to explain the decision and tie up any loose ends. This will be conducted by a Line Manager, a Head of Department or the HR Officer with responsibility for volunteering or any other person BBOWT deems appropriate.

### **Further Information**

- All complaints are treated confidentially, and will only be discussed amongst those who are directly involved in trying to resolve the issue.
- Records of the incident and a log of communications are stored confidentially. Complainants will be kept informed at every step of the procedure.

These guidelines are reviewed regularly in conjunction with the Volunteer Policy, Volunteering Procedures and other relevant BBOWT documents.