

Resolving Complaints - The Scout Association's Complaints Procedure



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Guidance Notes for Group Scout Leaders and Commissioners

The Scout Association recognises its responsibility to deal fairly, constructively and consistently with expressions of concern or dissatisfaction from members and non-members on behalf of themselves or their children.

What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of concern or dissatisfaction with any aspect of Scouting. It is considered good practice to have an established process for handling complaints.

The process for resolving complaints seeks to:

- Resolve complaints as early as possible.
- Support members.
- Identify opportunities for change and improvement.
- Promote Scouting.

Notes:

(1) Complaints involving child protection matters must be dealt with in accordance with the set-down procedures.

(2) The procedure below should not be used where individuals disagree with a national policy set by the Association.

Elements of the Complaints Procedure

It is the policy of The Scout Association to have an open and equitable process for dealing with concerns and complaints raised by members and non-members.

The key elements of the procedure are that:

- All complaints will be dealt with in a fair and objective manner.

- The approach to complaints handling should be positive and pro-active.
- Resolutions and outcomes should contribute to a process of continuous improvement.
- Complaints should be dealt with consistently and reliably.
- If a complainant is not satisfied with the initial consideration of their original complaint they have the right for the original complaint to be reviewed once, and once only.
- The Scout Association does not generally investigate anonymous complaints.

Please note:

The offices of the Patron, President, Chief Scout and Deputy Chief Scout do not deal with complaints, disagreements or disputes. Any correspondence received on these matters by these offices will be referred to the most appropriate Commissioner.

Basic Principles of the Complaints Procedure

Complaints should be dealt with locally

- Whenever possible, local Leaders should first endeavour to resolve the situation informally and in discussion with the complainant.
- Complaints received will be passed to the most appropriate and most local Group Scout Leader or Commissioner for resolution.
- Complaints may be made orally or in writing. For the sake of clarity a written complaint is preferred. If a formal oral complaint is received the person acknowledging it should, for the sake of clarity, summarise the complaint in

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writing to the complainant and then check it is an accurate record of their conversation.

- Complaints received should be acknowledged in writing (which may be by email) within seven days.
- Complaints should, ideally, be resolved within four weeks.
- Any extension of the time beyond four weeks, and the reasons for it, should be communicated to the complainant.
- Group Scout Leaders and Commissioners should not deal with complaints in which they are personally involved, or where they may be considered by either themselves or others to have insufficient independence. In these cases advice must be sought from the next level of Scouting to ensure impartiality.

The process for dealing with complaints should be easily accessible and available

- All members involved with dealing with a complaint should be made fully aware of the process and their role within it.
- Details of the procedure will be made readily available to members and non-members.
- Complainants should be advised of the process and informed how they can access it.

Full support will be given to all those dealing with complaints

- Local arrangements should be made to provide advice and support to those dealing with complaints as required.
- Members must be fully supported in completing any training needs that arise as an outcome of the resolution of a complaint.
- Any learning points identified should be acted upon in a stated timescale.
- Support to all those dealing with the complaint should be provided locally. Further support, guidance and advice on dealing with complaints can be sought from Headquarters volunteers and staff if required.

Guidance notes on the operation of the Complaints Procedure

- a) Local, informal resolution should always be encouraged. Most complainants do not want to enter a formal complaints procedure. They simply want to have their questions answered, their concerns dealt with, or their opinion noted.
- b) It is important to recognise the point at which a complaint reaches a stage at which it should be dealt with formally.
- c) If a complaint is to be dealt with formally the Complaints Resolution Framework on page 4 should be used.
- d) The appropriate Commissioner should be kept fully briefed from the outset of dealing formally with a complaint.
- e) This Commissioner must avoid getting drawn into the detail of the initial handling of the complaint in case they are required to hear an appeal at a later stage.
- f) Communication is the key to successful complaints resolution. There should be adequate arrangements for effective communication between all parties, taking into account the various means of communication, for example meetings, post, email, telephone etc. All important communications should be put in writing, which may include email.
- g) There should not be any unreasonable or unexplained delay in dealing with a complaint.
- h) There may be times when urgent action is required. This may be for the safety or well being of those involved. In such cases, action should be taken by, or on the written authority of, the responsible Commissioner, with their advice and support.
- i) Leaders should be aware of the potential for public interest in a complaint about Scouting and brief the Local Media Manager if appropriate.
- j) The Association's Complaints Procedure should, as far as possible, be applied consistently in every case.

Responses to a Complaint

- a) The response to a complaint will be based on the findings of an investigation. An investigation is primarily an information gathering exercise and should therefore:
 - Gather all the facts
 - Seek the views of all those involved

- b) The response to the complaint must be:
 - Based on the findings of the investigation
 - Clear about findings ('this happened') and action points or recommendations ('this is what we will do')
 - In accordance with, and informed by the Association's policies
- c) All written responses should be given careful consideration before being sent.
- d) The response should answer, as far as reasonably possible, all the issues raised by the complainant.
- e) It is often helpful to distinguish clearly between a wrong action or decision, and something that was badly handled but not wrong as such.
- f) In the spirit of continuous improvement, action plans to deal with training or other issues that may arise as a result of the resolution of a complaint should be drawn up, agreed and implemented within a specified timescale.
- g) Confidentiality as well as the customary courtesy and consideration must be maintained.
- h) It should be acknowledged that there will be occasions when a complaint is unfounded and as such should be refuted. The response rejecting such complaints should state the reasons for the rejection.

Remember it is good to say 'sorry' and saying it can often diffuse a difficult situation. An apology is not necessarily an acceptance that anyone has done anything wrong, but may simply acknowledge that things could have been better handled. It is often a good starting point for a response to an initial complaint.

Appeals and Reviews

- a) It is the policy of the Association that a complainant who remains dissatisfied after a complaint has been investigated may have the outcomes reviewed by the next level in Scouting's structure.
- b) Any appeal must be received within six months of the complainant being notified of the outcome of the original investigation.
- c) Any appeal or request for a review should clearly state the basis on which it is being made. An appeal or a request for a review of

an original investigation is a 'right', not a 'privilege'.

- d) The Association's policy is to allow one appeal or review only. Thereafter the matter will be considered closed.
- e) For the purposes of clarity, an appeal or request for a review should be treated in exactly the same way as an original complaint. The same processes should be followed and the same courtesies (especially in terms of communication) extended to all parties.
- f) After a complaint has been dealt with and subsequently appealed or reviewed, no further appeal or review may be undertaken. If asked Commissioners should always politely make the policy clear and state that the matter is considered closed.

Checklist for Action

- Act promptly.
- Exchange contact addresses (including email) and telephone numbers, with all those involved to ensure contact can easily be made as necessary.
- Gather all the facts.
- Ensure the timescales are kept as far as possible and advise the complainant if there will be a delay.
- Ensure all correspondence is acknowledged promptly.
- Provide help and support to all those involved in dealing with the complaint.
- Ensure the response answers all the issues raised by the complainant as far as is reasonably possible.
- Ensure action plans are followed up.
- Brief the Local Media Manager if there is a possibility of publicity.
- Keep hard copies of correspondence including emails, written notes of meetings and telephone conversations. Make sure they are dated. When writing notes and reports remember the contents may need to be made available to all those concerned.
- Also keep records of any action both planned and taken.
- Retain all paperwork and records relating to the complaint for one year after completion of the process.

Complaints Resolution Process Framework

The level at which the process is accessed will depend on the nature of the complaint, but the principle is that a complaint should always be dealt with as locally as possible. In other words a complaint received by, say, a County/Area Commissioner about a Scout Group should in the first instance be referred to the Group Scout Leader.

The process allows for people at two different levels in Scouting to investigate and respond as necessary. After two levels of investigation and response the matter is considered closed.

1. Complaint about a Scout Group

Event	Action	Policy	Notes
<p>Complaint received that directly relates to matters in the Scout Group.</p>	<p>The matter is dealt with by the Group Scout Leader or Acting Group Scout Leader who will either try and resolve the issue or appoint someone to look into the matter and report.</p> <p>If the complaint becomes formal, the Group Scout Leader sends the Resolving Complaints leaflet to the complainant.</p> <p>The Group Scout Leader makes decision and informs complainant of decision and actions as appropriate.</p> <p>District Commissioner should be kept informed.</p> <p>All paperwork including outcomes and actions to be kept for one year.</p>	<p>Whenever possible resolve at local level and as informally as possible.</p> <p>Complainant should be kept informed of progress.</p>	<p>Ensure all actions are within the complaints policy framework.</p> <p>Seek help and support as required.</p> <p>Learning points should be noted and actioned within a stated timescale.</p>
<p>Complainant dissatisfied with the outcome of the first consideration of their complaint</p>	<p>Complainant must appeal within six months of receiving a first level response.</p> <p>Group Scout Leader passes all records and paperwork to the District Commissioner.</p> <p>District Commissioner will either try and resolve the issue or appoint someone to look into the matter and report.</p> <p>District Commissioner makes decision and informs complainant of decision and actions as appropriate.</p> <p>County/Area Commissioner should be kept informed.</p> <p>All paperwork including outcomes and actions to be kept for one year.</p>	<p>Complainant informed of outcome.</p> <p>No further review or appeal is available</p>	<p>Ensure all actions are within the complaints policy framework.</p> <p>Seek help and support as required.</p> <p>Learning points should be noted and actioned within a stated timescale.</p>

2. Complaint about a Scout District or Group Scout Leader

<p>Complaint received that directly relates to matters in the Scout District.</p>	<p>The matter is dealt with by the District Commissioner who will either try and resolve the issue or appoint someone to look into the matter and report.</p> <p>If the complaint becomes formal, the District Commissioner sends the Resolving Complaints leaflet to the complainant.</p> <p>District Commissioner makes decision and informs complainant of decision and actions as appropriate.</p> <p>County/Area Commissioner should be kept informed.</p> <p>All paperwork including outcomes and actions to be kept for one year.</p>	<p>Whenever possible resolve at a local level and as informally as possible.</p> <p>Complainant should be kept informed of progress.</p>	<p>Any complaints received at District level relating to a Scout Group that have not already been addressed within the Group must be referred back to the Group Scout Leader.</p> <p>Ensure all actions are within the complaints policy framework.</p> <p>Seek help and support as required.</p> <p>Learning points should be noted and actioned within a stated timescale.</p>
<p>Complainant dissatisfied with the outcome of the first consideration of their complaint</p>	<p>Complainant must appeal within six months of receiving a first level response.</p> <p>District Commissioner passes all records and paperwork to County/Area Commissioner.</p> <p>County/Area Commissioner will either try and resolve the issue or appoint someone to look into the matter and report.</p> <p>County/Area Commissioner makes decision and informs complainant of decision and actions as appropriate.</p> <p>Regional Commissioner* should be kept informed.</p> <p>All paperwork including outcomes and actions to be kept for one year.</p>	<p>Complainant informed of outcome.</p> <p>No further review or appeal is available</p>	<p>Ensure all actions are within the complaints policy framework.</p> <p>Seek help and support as required.</p> <p>Learning points should be noted and actioned within a stated timescale.</p>

3. Complaint about a Scout County/Area or District Commissioner

<p>Complaint received that directly relates to matters in the Scout County/Area.</p>	<p>The matter is dealt with by the County/Area Commissioner who will either try and resolve the issue or appoint someone to look into the matter and report.</p> <p>If the complaint becomes formal, the County/Area Commissioner sends the Resolving Complaints leaflet to the complainant</p> <p>County/Area Commissioner makes decision and informs complainant of decision and actions as appropriate.</p> <p>Regional Commissioner* should be kept informed.</p> <p>All paperwork including outcomes and actions to be kept for one year.</p>	<p>Whenever possible resolve as informally as possible.</p> <p>Complainant should be kept informed of progress.</p>	<p>Any complaint received at County/Area level relating to a Group or District that has not already been addressed within the Group or District must be referred to the Group or District as the case may be.</p> <p>Ensure all actions are within the complaints policy framework.</p> <p>Seek help and support as required.</p> <p>Learning points should be noted and actioned within a stated timescale.</p>
<p>Complainant dissatisfied with the outcome of the first consideration of their complaint</p>	<p>Complainant must appeal within six months of receiving a first level response.</p> <p>County/Area Commissioner passes all paperwork to the Regional Commissioner*.</p> <p>Regional Commissioner* will either try and resolve the issue or appoint someone to look into the matter and report.</p> <p>Regional Commissioner* makes decision and informs complainant of decision and actions as appropriate.</p> <p>Chief Commissioner should be kept informed.</p> <p>All paperwork including outcomes and actions to be kept for one year.</p>	<p>Complainant informed of outcome.</p> <p>No further review or appeal is available</p>	<p>Ensure all actions are within the complaints policy framework.</p> <p>Seek help and support as required.</p> <p>Learning points should be noted and actioned and actioned within a stated timescale.</p>

4. Complaint about a County/Area Commissioner

<p>Complaint received that directly relates to the actions of a County/Area Commissioner.</p>	<p>The matter is dealt with by the Regional Commissioner* who will either try and resolve the issue or appoint someone to look into the matter and report.</p> <p>If the complaint becomes formal, the Regional Commissioner* sends the Resolving Complaints leaflet to the complainant</p> <p>Regional Commissioner* makes decision and informs complainant of decision and actions as appropriate.</p> <p>Chief Commissioner should be kept informed.</p> <p>All paperwork including outcomes and actions to be kept for one year.</p>	<p>Whenever possible resolve as informally as possible.</p> <p>Complainant should be kept informed of progress.</p>	<p>Ensure all actions are within the complaints policy framework.</p> <p>Seek help and support as required.</p> <p>Learning points should be noted and actioned within a stated timescale.</p>
<p>Complainant dissatisfied with the outcome of the first consideration of their complaint</p>	<p>Complainant must appeal within six months of receiving a first level response.</p> <p>Regional Commissioner* passes all paperwork to the Chief Commissioner.</p> <p>Chief Commissioner will either try and resolve the issue or appoint someone to look into the matter and report.</p> <p>Chief Commissioner makes decision and informs complainant of decision and actions as appropriate.</p> <p>All paperwork including outcomes and actions to be kept for one year.</p>	<p>Complainant informed of outcome.</p> <p>No further review or appeal is available</p>	<p>Ensure all actions are within the complaints policy framework.</p> <p>Seek help and support as required.</p> <p>Learning points should be noted and actioned and actioned within a stated timescale.</p>

5. Complaints received directly by Headquarters including those received by, and those against, Chief Commissioners, Regional Commissioners, all national volunteers and national staff (wherever based)

Action	Policy	Note
<p>Complaint is acknowledged.</p> <p>If the complaint becomes formal, the receiving national volunteer or staff member sends the Resolving Complaints leaflet to the complainant</p> <p>Details are forwarded direct to the appropriate level for action.</p> <p>The next level up from the point of complaint is informed that the matter has been passed back with the request that it is dealt with in accordance with the complaints policy procedure.</p> <p>Records are kept of conversations and actions.</p>	<p>In those exceptional cases where the complaint directly relates to the actions of a national volunteer or a Chief Commissioner, the matter must be referred to The Secretary to pass to an appropriate person, normally a more senior national volunteer or another Chief Commissioner</p> <p>Complaints against staff members are dealt with under their contracts of employment and should be addressed to the appropriate Director or to the Chief Executive. Any complaint will be passed to the most appropriate line manager for investigation.</p>	<p>First point of contact in some circumstances.</p> <p>Role is normally to acknowledge and forward, not to attempt to resolve – except where the complaint directly relates to the actions of a national volunteer or a Chief Commissioner.</p> <p>Only in exceptional cases would a Chief Commissioner instigate a primary investigation. Such exceptional cases would include those instances in which the complaint directly relates to the actions of a senior national volunteer or another Chief Commissioner.</p>

* The role of Regional Commissioner only exists in England. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland matters are referred direct to the Chief Commissioner who will carry out the same procedure.