

Problem solving procedure for Volunteers and Service Users

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1. Overview

Volunteers give their time freely. They are an important and valued part of Huntingdonshire Volunteer Centre (HVC) and taking action quickly, to address problems concerning Volunteers, or Service Users, is very important to HVC.

Unfortunately there are times when it is necessary to take action when issues arise. It is never easy to make a complaint against a Manager, volunteer or organisation. This document guides you through the procedure to help you resolve any day to day difficulties or complaints as quickly as possible. Where possible concerns about volunteers should be resolved informally as part of the ongoing supervision and support of the volunteer.

These procedures are designed for use in handling problems concerning Volunteers and Service Users.

2. Procedures

Having a clear procedure in place is helpful in the successful functioning of the HVC and is there to ensure all Volunteers and Service Users are treated openly, fairly and quickly.

Issues that may arise include:

- Persistent bad time keeping
- Going beyond the agreed boundaries of the role
- No respect of Service Users confidentiality/dignity/independence
- Breach of health and safety regulations or volunteer agreements
- Misuse of equipment or facilities
- Theft
- Discrimination on grounds of race/disability/ethnicity/religion/sexuality/age
- Offensive behaviour
- Being under the influence of alcohol, drugs or other substance abuse

3. Procedure when receiving a complaint concerning a Volunteer or Service User

3.1 Stage one – Informal process

If you receive a complaint about a volunteer or a service user you should inform your Manager. The Office / Shop Manager should raise the matter directly with the volunteer / service user concerned if they feel it is appropriate. If this resolves the matter then the details of the complaint should be passed to the HVC General Manager. Alternatively, the Office / Shop Manager can refer the matter to the HVC General Manager. If the complaint is about a Manager the complaint should be referred to the Chairman of the Trustees. The HVC Manager or Chairman will then consider the case and meet informally with complainant and/or volunteer/ Service User concerned, either individually or together, to seek to resolve the issue. The complainant may be accompanied or supported by a friend or supporter at any stage of the proceedings.

If the informal stage fails to resolve the problem it will be necessary to move to the formal stage.

3.2 Stage two- Formal Meeting

The General Manager of HVC (or Chairman) will re-investigate the circumstances leading to the complaint. The General Manager (or Chairman) will meet with the complainant, to discuss the details of the complaint.

The General Manager (or Chairman) will then issue the person, about whom the complaint has been made, with a written statement outlining the reasons for the complaint. The individual will be given an opportunity to respond and they may be accompanied by a friend or supporter to any meetings held.

The General Manager (or Chairman) will communicate the results of the investigation to the complainant within 20 working days of the complaint being received. The complainant will be informed if there is a delay in communicating the outcome of the investigation beyond 20 working days. If the complaint is found to be justified the Manager (or Chairman) will agree any necessary further action with the complainant and the individual about whom the complaint has been made. If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome they have the right to appeal.

3.3 Appeals Stage

The complainant has the right of appeal if dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint. To do so, the complainant should submit their appeal in

writing to the HVC General Manager (or Chairman), within 10 days of the official communication of the formal outcome. The HVC General Manager (or Chairman) will acknowledge receipt of the appeal, and pass it to the appeal panel. The panel is made up of three independent members of the Management Committee who have not been involved in the case, and will include at least one Honorary Officer.

The appeal panel will consider the case and communicate the results of the appeal to the complainant within 10 working days.

If the appeal is found to be justified the appeal panel will agree any necessary further action with the complainant and with the individual about whom the complaint was made. The decision of the appeal panel is final and no further appeal is possible.

4. Asking a volunteer to leave or step down from a role.

The outcome of the investigation may lead to letting a volunteer go. By the time this stage is reached the volunteer will have had the opportunity to put their case forward, so no further discussion is necessary at this point.

Asking a volunteer to step down from a role should come from a member of staff eg the Office Manager, the Shop Manager or the Manager of HVC or someone else with a degree of seniority within HVC.

The following points should be taken into account when you are requesting a volunteer to leave/ step down from a role:

- The meeting should take place in a quiet and private room
- You should have someone with you in the room for your own protection and to take a record of the meeting
- Consider what you are going to say in advance
- Be as quick and direct as possible
- Keep your emotions in check
- Do not attempt to get into a discussion with the volunteer. When you have said what you need to say leave the room. The note taker should escort the volunteer out of the building and advise them they should not come back to the office without first contacting the Member of staff / General Manager to arrange a suitable date and time. A return may be required to collect any personal possessions that cannot be removed on the date of meeting and request to leave.

- Inform staff and volunteers of the outcome but do not give the reasons.

A follow up letter should be sent to the volunteer, within five days of the request to leave or step down from a role, requesting the return of their badge and any other property of HVC.

5. Cases of Gross misconduct

The Manager (or Chairman) will deal with all cases of gross misconduct and follow the formal stages as outlined above. A volunteer will be suspended from volunteering duties pending the formal process in the case of gross misconduct. (This is for volunteers, not staff). In some cases, the gross misconduct may be considered as so serious that the decision to end the agreement will be reached without further attempts to address the volunteer's behaviour and/or actions.

Volunteers can be asked to leave, or to step down from their role immediately, while the investigation is carried out, for the following reasons (this list is not exhaustive):

- Bullying or harassment
- Assault
- Theft
- Acts of violence
- Malicious damage
- Deliberate falsification of documents
- Being under the influence of drugs or alcohol

6. Audit and Record keeping

The HVC General Manager will keep the Chairman of the Trustees informed concerning ongoing complaints. The HVC General Manager will report to the Trustees on the number, nature and outcomes of complaints, at least annually.

Everyone involved in handling a complaint must keep a record of all discussions, whether written or verbal, and all other actions and outcomes throughout each stage of the process. All information will remain confidential and will only be available, only to the volunteer and to those involved in the complaint. See Appendix 1 – Complaint Form.

7. Useful contact information

If you have a complaint please contact:

Office Managers:

Huntingdon: 01480 414766 or e-mail: huntingdon@huntsvc.org.uk

Ramsey: 01487 814117 or e-mail: ramsey@huntsvc.org.uk

St Ives: 01480 301462 or e-mail: stives@huntsvc.org.uk

St Neots: 01480 476047 or e-mail: stneots@huntsvc.org.uk

Shop Manager: 01480 700290 or e-mail: biz@huntsvc.org.uk

In writing:

HVC General Manager (or Chairman)

Huntingdonshire Volunteer Centre

1 Princes Street, Huntingdon

Cambridgeshire

PE29 3PA

Tel: 07718 272524

E-mail: info@huntsvc.org.uk

This policy was approved by the Trustees of Huntingdonshire Volunteer Centre

Signed:  Chairman

Date: 23/1/2024

Date of next Review: 23/1/2025

Appendix 1 - Complaint Form



Received by (name)	Date	Method (by phone/e-mail/in person)
Nature of complaint		
Referred to (name)	Date	Method (by phone/e-mail/in person)
Action Taken		
Suggested Actions to rectify situation:		
Outline what has been agreed:		

Additional Comments/Suggestions

Agreed by: (add names)

Signature:

Date:

Signature:

Date: