

PROCEDURE FOR HANDLING COMPLAINTS

Adopted 24th February 2017

PNFS views complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve for the future, as well as a chance to put things right for the person or organisation that has made the complaint.

Our policy is:

- to provide a fair complaints procedure which is clear and easy to use
- to publicise the existence of our complaints procedure so that people know how to contact us to make a complaint
- to make sure everyone at PNFS knows what to do if a complaint is received
- to make sure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way
- to make sure that complaints are resolved wherever possible and that relationships are repaired
- to gather information which helps us improve what we do.

Definition

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect of or any member of PNFS.

Where complaints come from

Complaints may:

- come from any person or organisation that has a legitimate interest in PNFS
- be presented verbally, by email or in writing.

Confidentiality

All complaint information will be handled sensitively. It will be shared only with those who need to know and will comply with relevant data protection requirements.

Responsibility

Overall responsibility for the policy and its implementation lies with the Managing Committee.

Variation of the complaints procedure

We may vary the procedure for good reason. This may be necessary to avoid a conflict of interest. For example, the Chair should not lead a stage 2 review about the Chair's conduct.

Monitoring and learning from complaints

We will review the complaints log once a year to identify trends which may indicate a need to take further action.

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed regularly and updated as required.

Procedure A – for complainants

How to complain

- Write to:
The Secretary
Peak and Northern Footpaths Society
Taylor House
23 Turncroft Lane
Stockport
SK1 4AB
- or email mail@pnfs.org.uk
- or speak to any member of the Managing Committee at the above address or at any of our events or activities.

How we will deal with your complaint

Stage 1

1. In many cases, a complaint is best resolved by the person responsible for the issue being complained about. If that person has received your complaint, they will try to resolve it swiftly and appropriately.
2. Whether or not your complaint has been resolved, the Secretary will record it in the complaints log within one week. If it has not already been resolved, they will nominate an appropriate person to investigate and take action on it.
3. The person nominated to handle your complaint will send you a written acknowledgement within one week. They will tell you their name and when you can expect a reply to the complaint. They will attach a copy of this complaints procedure to their letter or email.
4. If your complaint relates to a specific person, we will give them the opportunity to respond.
5. We will aim to give you a definitive reply within four weeks. If this is not possible because, for example, we have not completed our investigation, we will send you a progress report with an indication of when a full reply should follow.
6. Our reply will tell you what we have done to investigate your complaint; the conclusions from the investigation; and any action taken as a result of your complaint.

Stage 2

1. If you feel we have not satisfactorily resolved your complaint at stage 1, you can ask for it to be reviewed by the Managing Committee.
2. We will acknowledge your request for a Managing Committee review within one week of receiving it. We will tell you when you can expect a reply and who will deal with your case. This will be the Chairman or other senior member.
3. We will aim to give you a definitive reply within four weeks. If this is not possible because, for example, we have not completed our investigation, we will send you a progress report with an indication of when a full reply should follow.
4. Our reply will tell you what we have done to investigate your complaint; the conclusions from the investigation; and any action taken as a result of your complaint.
5. The decision we take at this stage will be final, unless we choose to seek external assistance to resolve the case.

Stage 3

If your complaint has not been resolved at stage 2, and falls under the aegis of section 18 of the PNFS constitution† it **must** be taken to mediation. You and the Managing Committee will choose the mediator by mutual agreement. PNFS will bear the cost of mediation.

Complaining to the Charity Commission

You may complain to the Charity Commission at any stage. The Charity Commission website tells you the kind of complaints the Commission can involve itself in. See www.charitycommission.gov.uk/publications/cc47.aspx

† Section 18 of the constitution

If a dispute arises between members about the validity or propriety of anything done by the members under this constitution, and the dispute cannot be resolved by agreement, the parties to the dispute must first try in good faith to settle the dispute by mediation before resorting to litigation.

Procedure B – for members of the Managing Committee

Receiving verbal complaints

Complaints received in person must be recorded. You should:

- write down the facts of the complaint
- take the complainant's name, address and telephone number
- note down the relationship of the complainant to PNFS
- tell the complainant we have a formal complaints procedure
- tell the complainant what will happen next and how long it will take
- where appropriate, ask the complainant to send a written account by post or email so that the complaint is recorded in the complainant's own words.

For further guidelines about handling verbal complaints, see **appendix 1**.

Resolving complaints

Stage 1

1. If you receive a complaint about an issue you are responsible for, try to resolve it swiftly and appropriately yourself.
2. Whether or not you have resolved the complaint, inform the Secretary about the complaint within one week, so it can be recorded in the complaints log. If it has not already been resolved, the Secretary will nominate an appropriate person to investigate and take action on it.
3. If you are nominated to handle the complaint, send the complainant a written acknowledgement within one week. Give your name and tell the complainant when they can expect a reply to the complaint. Attach a copy of the complaints procedure to your letter or email.
4. If the complaint relates to a specific person, that person must be given the opportunity to respond.
5. Aim to send the complainant a definitive reply within four weeks. If this is not possible because, for example, the investigation is not complete, send the complainant a progress report and indicate how long it is likely to take.
6. In your full reply, explain what you have done to investigate the complaint; the conclusions from the investigation; and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

Stage 2

1. If the complainant is not satisfied by the response at stage 1, they may ask for the case to be reviewed by the Managing Committee.
2. Acknowledge a request for a Managing Committee review within one week of receiving it. Tell the complainant when they can expect a reply and who will deal with the case. This will be the Chairman or other senior member of the Managing Committee.
3. The Chair may investigate the facts of the case or delegate as appropriate. The investigation may involve reviewing the paperwork on the case and speaking to the person who dealt with the complaint at stage 1. This person should be kept informed of what is happening throughout stage 2.
4. If the complaint relates to a specific person, that person must be given a further opportunity to respond.

5. Aim to send the complainant a definitive reply within four weeks. If this is not possible because, for example, the investigation is not complete, send the complainant a progress report and indicate how long it is likely to take.
6. Whether or not the complaint is upheld, explain in your full reply what has been done to investigate the complaint; the conclusions from the investigation; and any action taken as a result of the complaint.
7. The decision taken at this stage will be final, unless the Managing Committee chooses to seek external assistance to resolve the case.

Stage 3

If the complaint has not been resolved at stage 2, and falls under the aegis of section 18 of the PNFS constitution it **must** be taken to mediation. The Managing Committee and the complainant will choose the mediator by mutual agreement. PNFS will bear the cost of mediation.

Complaining to the Charity Commission

The complainant may also complain to the Charity Commission at any stage. The Charity Commission website lists the kind of complaints the Commission can involve itself in. See www.charitycommission.gov.uk/publications/cc47.aspx

Appendix 1 Practical guidance for handling verbal complaints

- Remain calm and respectful throughout the conversation.
- Listen. Allow the person to talk about the complaint in their own words. They may just want to 'let off steam'.
- Don't debate the facts in the first instance, especially if the person is angry.
- Show an interest in what is being said.
- Write down details about the complaint before asking for personal details.
- Ask for clarification whenever necessary.
- Show you have understood the complaint by reflecting back what you have noted down.
- Acknowledge the person's feelings (even if you feel they are being unreasonable). You can do this without making a comment on the complaint itself or admitting any fault on behalf of the Society. For example, 'I understand this situation is frustrating for you.'
- If you feel that an apology is deserved for something that was clearly the Society's responsibility, then apologise.
- Ask the person what they would like done to resolve the issue.
- Be clear about what you can do, how long it will take and what it will involve.
- Don't promise things you can't deliver.
- If requests cannot be met, give clear and valid reasons for this.
- Make sure the person understands what they have been told.
- Where appropriate, tell the person about the available avenues of review or appeal.