

RAMBLERS PROBLEM SOLVING PROCEDURE

Introduction

This is the procedure that must be followed for resolving any issues about the conduct of volunteers or any concerns relating to their volunteering. It describes how we will deal with all concerns – ranging from minor issues, such as poor time keeping, to serious problems such as abusive behaviour.

Addressing issues with volunteers

We have a Code of Conduct explaining our values. It is important that everyone involved with The Ramblers is aware of these values and is guided by them at all times. If a serious concern is suspected or reported, such as sexual assault, The Ramblers might suspend the volunteer temporarily while the allegations are investigated.

If this is the case, refer to section below called **Investigation**.

Local and informal resolution

1 Informal discussion

Examples: personality clashes, going beyond the boundary of a role, bad time keeping

We have a local approach to resolving issues and believe it is always best to try and resolve any issues informally and at a local level – this means the volunteer manager or lead volunteer, for example an area or group chair, having a talk with the person concerned. This discussion should be open, honest, objective and confidential. The volunteer should be fully informed about the issue and every possible attempt made to resolve a concern fairly and promptly.

At the informal discussion, the volunteer manager or lead volunteer will make sure that:

- They talk to all the people involved discreetly and sensitively
- Confidentiality is maintained at all times
- Parties involved in a dispute do not speak to fellow volunteers or members about what has happened
- Everyone is kept updated, ideally within 14 days

Several follow-up meetings might be necessary if initial solutions do not work and alternatives suggested. The meetings are an opportunity to discuss further support or training. Also, if a volunteer is finding it difficult to carry out their role, is feeling unfulfilled, or their needs have changed, then a different role might be more appropriate.

Support is always available from the Operations or Volunteering development teams and guidance available on Assemble, the volunteer website, and on the staff intranet.

2 Follow-up meeting

Examples: persistent inappropriate behaviour – disruptive, not following rules and regulations eg health & safety

If the situation has not improved after an informal discussion, or if the original concern is serious, then the volunteer should be invited to a more formal meeting with their manager or lead volunteer. The volunteer can bring someone along to support them, if they wish.

The manager or lead volunteer will offer three possible dates and times to meet, and the meeting should take place during office hours and at a neutral place. If a volunteer refuses to meet, then they may be asked to step down from their role. Where mitigating circumstances may have contributed to a situation, they should be discussed at this point and could be taken into consideration.

The volunteer manager will make sure:

- Any possible solutions are discussed and clearly understood by both sides
- Actions should be agreed to resolve the issue satisfactorily and a suitable time arranged to review the actions
- They discuss what will happen next if the agreed actions are **not** carried out
- If a plan or action points cannot be agreed, then the volunteer may be suspended temporarily from volunteering for specified period of time to allow for further investigation

Support is always available from the Operations or Volunteering development teams and guidance is available on Assemble, the volunteer website, and on the staff intranet.

Notes and records can be stored on Assemble, and emails can be sent and received using Assemble.

3 Review meeting

This meeting should go over the action plan and discuss what progress has been made. At this meeting, one of three decisions can be made:

- *Option 1 – the problem is resolved*

You will agree that following the formal meeting, the issue has been resolved or the situation has improved, and no further action is required.

- *Option 2 – the review period is extended*

You will agree that some progress has been made but improvement is still needed. The actions are reviewed and updated. Another review meeting could be arranged to go through the actions again.

- *Options 3 – the problem is assigned to a member of staff*

If the required improvements have not been made and all possible solutions have been tried, or the issue is serious, then the problem is passed on to the appropriate staff member – the Operations or Volunteering development team for investigation. Whatever the decision, the volunteer's record should be updated on Assemble, and any notes or records stored on Assemble.

Formal procedure

Examples: serious concerns - fraud, physical or sexual assault, safeguarding

If the volunteer manager or lead volunteer cannot resolve the issue locally, or if the original problem was serious or high risk, then the Volunteering development team should be informed.

Investigation

The Volunteering development team will appoint an investigating officer to investigate a problem when:

- The local and informal resolution has not worked, or if a serious concern is raised
- When complex or serious problems are suspected
- A serious incident has happened

When a serious or high risk concern is raised, then The Ramblers might temporarily suspend a volunteer. Depending on the concern, an external investigation may have to take place. In most cases this will not be necessary, but will apply where the police or another external agency has a statutory duty to investigate; for example, theft, fraud or allegations of abuse. If a volunteer or staff member is concerned about the safety of anyone connected with the charity, they should refer to the Ramblers Safeguarding policy or contact the safeguarding lead, the Head of volunteering development.

All notes and records should be stored on Assemble.

Outcome of investigation

Once the investigation is finished, the investigating officer will write a report providing the decision and recommended actions.

- The report will identify if the volunteer is at fault and if this is the case, then an appropriate level of sanction will be recommended. Depending on the original concern, this could be:
 - o verbal warning
 - o written warning
 - o removal from volunteer role
 - o withdrawal of membership

The final decision to remove a volunteer must be made by the head of volunteering development. If the volunteer is also a member, the CEO or the Director of

operations and volunteering must be informed of any recommendations regarding membership and a report submitted to the Board of Trustees.

If the volunteer is not at fault, then the next steps will depend on the original concern.

The investigating officer will contact all parties and let them know the outcome of the report and the recommended actions.

Right to appeal

If the person who raised the concern is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation or believes the process was unfair, they have the right to appeal against the decision within 14 days. This is not an opportunity to challenge the decision if there is no new information, but to challenge how the issue was managed and investigated previously.

The appeal outcome is final and cannot be subsequently appealed. The case will then be closed.

Additional guidance

- Confidential records must be kept at each stage of the process and the volunteer's record should be updated regularly. Notes and records can be stored on Assemble, and emails can be sent and received using Assemble.
- Where possible, decisions and outcomes should be communicated within a maximum of 14 days.