

Making a complaint

Introduction

This procedure enables Friends for Leisure to respond to any complaints about the service and helps to ensure that we constantly strive to improve the way we work.

Our pledge

We treat all complaints as an opportunity to improve. We are happy to acknowledge the mistakes that we have made, apologise for them and then try to prevent them from happening again.

At Friends for Leisure, we know that there may be times when we do not meet our own high standards. When this does happen we want to hear about it, deal with the situation as quickly as possible and put measures in place to stop it happening again.

We take complaints very seriously and we treat them as an opportunity to develop. This is why we are always very grateful to hear from people who are willing to take the time to help us improve. We always thank people who contact us about their problems, concerns or worries.

Contact details for complaints

You can decide exactly how you would like to get in touch with us:

You can talk to a staff member at one of our activities.

You can telephone the office on 01260 275333. A member of staff will be ready and willing to help. If there is no-one in the office when you call, you can leave a message and a contact number, and someone will return your call as soon as possible.

A feedback form is available at **Appendix 2**. There is space on the form for you to tell us what you want to happen as a result of your feedback.

You can email us at info@friendsforleisure.org.uk.

Or you can write to us at: Friends for Leisure, Albert Chambers, Canal Street, Congleton. CW12 4AA

Please include your name, address and contact telephone number in your email or letter so that we can get back in touch with you easily.

If you want to make a complaint against the manager, please contact the chair of trustees.

At any time, you can raise your concern about commissioned services with Cheshire East Council. Further details can be found on their website:

https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/customer-services/complaints_and_feedback/complaints_and_feedback.aspx

Their telephone number is: 0300 123 5038.

The postal address is:

Customer Relations Team - Cheshire East Council
Customer Contact Centre
Macclesfield Town Hall
C/O Delamere House
Delamere Street
Crewe
CW1 2LL

You can also attend in person at any of their Customer Service Centres – location details can be found on their website.

Receiving complaints

Complaints may arrive through channels publicised for that purpose or through any other contact details or opportunities the complainant may have. Complaints received by telephone or in person need to be recorded. The person who receives a phone or in person complaint 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 FFL (e.g. YP; parent; volunteer)
- Tell the complainant that we have a 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 by email so that the complaint is recorded in the complainant's own words.

For further guidelines about handling oral complaints, see **Appendix 1**

Resolving complaints**Stage One**

In many cases, a complaint is best resolved by the person responsible for the issue being complained about. If the complaint has been received by that person, they may be able to resolve it swiftly and should do so if possible and appropriate. Whether or not the complaint has been resolved, the complaint information should be recorded on a complaints record sheet – see Appendix 3 - and passed to the manager (or chair of trustees if the complaint is against the manager) within 2 working days. If the manager is absent, the form should be passed to one of the trustees.

On receiving the complaint, the manager should record it in the complaints file. Docs\Feedback & Comments\Record of Complaints. The manager will be responsible for tracking the progress of the complaint.

If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a fair opportunity to respond.

If the complaint is an allegation of abuse or breach of the code of behaviour, reference should be made to the safeguarding procedures (S 1.3).

Complaints should be acknowledged by the person handling the complaint within 4 working days. The acknowledgement should say who is dealing with the complaint and when the person complaining can expect a reply. A copy of this complaints procedure should be attached.

Wherever practicable, complainants should receive a definitive reply within 10 working days. If this is not possible because for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given. Regardless of whether the complaint is justified, the reply to the complainant should describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

Stage Two

If the complainant feels that the problem has not been satisfactorily resolved at stage one, they can request that the complaint is reviewed at board level. At this stage, the complaint should be passed to the chair of trustees.

The request for board level review should be acknowledged within 4 working days of receipt. The acknowledgement should say who will deal with the case and when the complainant can expect a reply.

The chair of trustees may investigate the facts of the case themselves or delegate another trustee to do so. This may involve reviewing the paperwork of the case and speaking with the person who dealt with the complaint at stage one.

If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a further opportunity to respond.

The person who dealt with the original complaint at stage one should be kept informed of what is happening.

Complainants who have requested board level review should receive a definitive reply within four weeks. If this is not possible, a progress report should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given.

The decision taken at this stage is final, unless the board of trustees decides it is appropriate to seek external assistance with resolution.

External Stage

A complaint can be referred to the Charity Commission at any stage. Information about the kind of complaints the Commission can involve itself in can be found on their website at:

www.charitycommission.gov.uk/publications/cc47.aspx

Unreasonable or vexatious complaints

Friends for Leisure may reject a complaint at any time if the complaint is considered unreasonable or vexatious. We do not expect staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour by complainants. Unacceptable behaviour includes behaviour which is abusive, offensive or threatening. The manager will decide whether or not a complaint is to be categorised as unreasonable or vexatious.

Variation of the complaints procedure

The board of trustees may vary the procedure for good reason. This may be necessary to avoid a conflict of interest; for example, a complaint about the chair should not also have the chair as the person leading a stage two review.

Confidentiality

Staff should ensure that all action taken in accordance with this procedure complies with the Confidentiality and Data Protection policy (CP 1.0 refers).

Monitoring and learning from complaints

The manager will report to the trustee board on all complaints received on a quarterly basis.

Complaints will be reviewed annually to identify any trends which may indicate a need to take further action. The number of complaints received should be stated in the annual report.

Appendix 1 - Practical guidance for handling oral complaints

- Remain calm and respectful throughout the conversation.
- Listen - allow the person to talk about the complaint in their own words. Sometimes a person just wants 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.
- Obtain details about the complaint before any personal details.
- Ask for clarification wherever necessary.
- Show that you have understood the complaint by reflecting back what you have noted down.
- Acknowledge the person's feelings (even if you feel that they are being unreasonable) - you can do this without making a comment on the complaint itself or making any admission of fault on behalf of the organisation, e.g. "I understand that this situation is frustrating for you".
- If you feel that an apology is deserved for something that was Friends for Leisure'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.
- Give clear and valid reasons why requests cannot be met.
- Make sure that the person understands what they have been told.
- Wherever appropriate, inform the person about the available avenues of review.

Appendix 3 – Complaints record sheet. For official use.

Date of complaint:	Method of complaining:
Source of complaint: Parent/carer Young person Volunteer Professional <i>(please give details)</i> Other <i>(please give details)</i>	Name and address of complainant:
Details of complaint (as described by complainant):	
Preferred method of contact:	Telephone number:
	E-mail address:
Name of person receiving complaint:	Recorded in complaints file:
Stage one - actions:	Stage one - outcomes:
Stage one progress report issued:	Final reply issued:

Stage two – actions:	Stage two – outcomes:
Stage two progress report issued:	Final reply issued:
Complaint closure approved:	Closure recorded:
Action taken in response to investigation:	