

COMPLAINTS POLICY & PROCEDURE

A. Policy Statement

The Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society (the Society) is committed to setting and maintaining high standards of service and operation to its members, visitors and service users. The Society is a registered charity and is committed to working in an open and accountable way.

The Society is overseen by a Board of Trustees and owns and operates the Wiltshire Museum (the Museum), employs staff and manages volunteers. The senior member of staff is the Director.

This Policy is designed to provide guidance on the manner in which the Society and Museum receives and handles complaints made against the charity, its Board of Trustees, its employees and volunteers.

I. Introduction

One of the ways in which we can continue to improve our service is by listening and responding to the views of our members, volunteers, customers and users, by responding positively to complaints and by putting mistakes right.

Therefore, we aim to ensure that:

- making a complaint is as easy as possible,
- we treat a complaint as a clear expression of dissatisfaction with our service
- we deal with it promptly, politely and, when appropriate, confidentially,
- we respond in the right way - for example, with an explanation, or an apology where we have got things wrong, or information on any action taken,
- we learn from complaints and use them to improve our service.

We recognise that many concerns will be raised informally and dealt with quickly. Our aim is to:

- resolve complaints informally wherever possible,
- enable mediation between the complainant and the individual to whom the complaint has been referred where appropriate.

However, if concerns cannot be satisfactorily resolved informally, the formal complaints procedure will be followed.

2. Definition

A formal complaint under this Policy as defined as:

An expression of dissatisfaction made to the Society, related to its products, services, or the complaints-handling process itself, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected.

An informal complaint can be by way of negative feedback, which may not require a resolution or formal follow up. While this type of feedback is valuable, the Policy does not apply to feedback of this nature.

Complaints by staff and volunteers regarding issues such as harassment or bullying should be dealt with via other policies, e.g. Equality, Grievance Procedure, Disciplinary.

3. Purpose

The formal complaints procedure is intended to ensure that all complaints are handled fairly, consistently and, wherever possible, resolved to the complainant's satisfaction.

The Society's responsibility is to:

- acknowledge a formal complaint in writing,
- respond within a stated period of time,
- deal reasonably and sensitively with the complaint,
- take action where appropriate,
- deal with complaints openly, fairly, promptly and without prejudice.

A complainant's responsibility is to:

- bring their complaint in writing to the Society's attention promptly, normally within 8 weeks of the issue arising,
- explain the problem as clearly as possible, including any action taken to date,
- allow the Society a reasonable time to deal with the matter,
- recognise that some circumstances may be beyond the Society's control.

4. Confidentiality

Except in exceptional circumstances, every attempt will be made to ensure that both the complainant and the Society maintains confidentiality. We ask that the complainant respects this principle of confidentiality while the complaints process is under way. However, the circumstances giving rise to the complaint may be such that it may not be possible to maintain confidentiality. Should this be the case, the situation will be explained to the complainant.

5. Principles underpinning this policy

- **Visibility.** This Policy is available on the Society's website and also internally.
- **Accessibility.** This Policy is readily accessible to all trustees, employees, volunteers, visitors and users.
- **Responsiveness.** Receipt of each complaint will be acknowledged. Complaints will be handled in an efficient and effective manner. Complainants will be treated courteously and kept informed of the progress of their complaint.
- **Objectivity.** Each complaint will be addressed in an equitable, objective and unbiased manner.
- **Charges.** There will be no charge to the complainant for making a complaint.

- **Confidentiality.** Personally identifiable information concerning the complainant is actively protected from disclosure unless the complainant expressly consents to it.
- **Customer focused approach.** All employees of the Society and the trustees are committed to efficient and fair resolution of complaints. We actively seek feedback from our users and acknowledge a user's right to complain.
- **Accountability.** All trustees and employees accept responsibility for effective complaints handling. Where appropriate complaints may be reflected in employee performance evaluation.
- **Continual Improvement.** Our complaints handling process will be reviewed periodically, and at least biennially to aim to enhance its efficient delivery of effective outcomes.

B. Formal Complaints Procedure

I. The Museum will adopt a Staged Approach to Complaints

The staged approach is designed to ensure that every effort is made to deal with complaints informally in partnership with the complainant. The formal stages should only be triggered in exceptional circumstances:

- **Stages 1 and 2 are the initial steps.** In the case of a complaint the Complaints Officer (the Company Secretary or Administration Manager if not the same person) should be the first point of contact and the majority of issues should be resolved at this stage. If there are still concerns the matter should be discussed with the Director.
- **Stage 3 is the formal stage** and involves the Chair and a panel of Trustees.
 - A list of the Board of Trustees is available from the Museum's website.

Stage One: discuss concerns informally with the Complaints Officer

1. Complainants are advised to speak to the Complaints Officer so everyone has a clear picture of the situation from all points of view. Most problems can be resolved at this information stage.
2. If the complainant indicates that they would have difficulty in discussing a complaint with the Complaints Officer, the complainant should be referred to the Director. In the event of the complaint being about the Director, it will be directed to a Trustee.
3. The person who is dealing with the complaint should ensure that the complainant is reassured that the matter will be investigated and is clear what action has been agreed. All staff and volunteers should be aware of the need for confidentiality.
4. A brief record of any telephone calls, meetings and agreed actions should always be kept, although it is not always necessary to provide the complainant with a written record at this stage.
5. If either the complainant or the person dealing with the complaint feels the matter needs to be taken further, the Director or Chair should be contacted.

Stage Two: Discuss concerns informally with the Director

1. More serious concerns which remain unresolved at the end of Stage 1 should be referred to the Director or Chair (depending on who was spoken to at Stage 1) immediately, by the Complaints Officer (or whoever dealt with the complaint at Stage 1).
 - The Director or Chair will investigate the matter further.
 - Any meetings that are held with the complainant should be arranged within ten working days, wherever possible. However, more complex complaints (or if any

individuals are not available, e.g due to holiday or ill-health) may require an extension to this time limit.

2. A log of all contacts relating to the complaint should be kept.
3. The Director or Chair must communicate the outcome to the complainant, either verbally or in writing.
 - Any agreed actions should be put in writing.
4. If, as a result of the investigation, issues arise relating to staff discipline or capability, details should remain confidential to the Director or Chair.
 - However, the complainant should be informed that the Museum has taken appropriate follow-up action.

Stage Three: Make a formal complaint in writing to the Chair of Trustees, who will then convene a Complaints Panel

1. This formal stage of the Complaint Procedure will be implemented if all previous stages have been exhausted, a complaint in writing addressed to the Chair of Trustees has been received or is against the Chair of Trustees.
 2. Acknowledgement of the complaint should be sent by the Chair of Trustees, normally within five working days.
 3. The Trustees will convene a panel of three Trustees who have not previously been involved in the complaint. The panel will normally meet within 15 working days of receiving the complaint.
 - If the complaint is against the Chair of Trustees, then another senior Trustee should be contacted, and they will convene the panel.
 4. The Chair of the panel should notify the Complaints Officer, Director and Chair of Trustees and the complainant as to whether they will be invited to attend the panel meeting. Alternatively, the panel may decide to consider written material only.
 - All parties must be treated equally. For example, if the Complaints Manager or Director are invited to the meeting, so must the complainant.
 5. If the complaint relates to a staff disciplinary or capability matter about which the Trustees have already taken action, the panel should focus on how the original complaint was managed to avoid prejudicing any ongoing disciplinary or capability procedures.
 6. The Complaints Manager/Director/Chair of Trustees and complainant should be informed of the Panel's decision in writing, normally within ten working days, wherever possible.
 - If the Complainant is not satisfied with the outcome, then exceptionally an appeal may be made to an agreed independent third party. This may, for example, be the Chair of the Wessex Museums Trust (a partnership of museums across Dorset and Wiltshire - www.wessexmuseums.org.uk) or a similar organisation.
- **This is the final stage of the Society's Complaints Procedure.**

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An Overview

