



Viabes Community Association

Complaints Policy and Procedure

Viabes Community Association, (hereafter VCA or The Association), 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 for anyone wishing to make a complaint.
- 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 VCA 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, wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are repaired.
- To gather information which helps us to improve what we do.

Definition of a Complaint

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

Where Complaints Come From

Complaints may come from hirers, clients, members, volunteers, or members of the local community. A complaint can be received verbally, by phone, email or in writing. This policy does not cover complaints from staff, who should use the Association's Discipline and Grievance policies.

Confidentiality

All complaint information will be handled sensitively, involving only those who need to know and following any relevant data protection requirements.

Responsibility

Overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation lies with the Trustees for VCA.

Contact Details for Complaints:

Written complaints may be sent to Viabes Community Association at:

Viables Community Centre,
Viables Craft Centre,
Harrow Way,
Basingstoke,
Hants
RG22 4BJ

or by e-mail at: office@viables.org.uk.

Verbal complaints may be made by telephone to 01256 473634 or in person to any of VCA's office staff at the address above.

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 shall:

- Write down the details of the complaint
- Take the complainant's name, address, and telephone number
- Note down the relationship of the complainant to VCA
- Advise the complainant that we have a complaints procedure
- Advise 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.

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 where possible and appropriate. Whether or not the complaint has been resolved, the complaint information should be passed to the Centre Manager for referral to VCA Trustees within one week. On receiving the complaint, the Centre Manager shall record it in the complaints log. If not already resolved, they will delegate an appropriate person to investigate and to take appropriate action. If the complaint relates to a specific person, that person should be informed and given a fair opportunity to respond. Complaints should be acknowledged by the person handling the complaint within one week. The acknowledgement will state who will address the complaint. Ideally, complainants will receive a definitive report within four weeks. If this is not possible because, for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, an interim report should be sent with an indication of when a full report will be given. Whether the complaint is

justified or not, the reply to the complainant should describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken resulting from 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 Trustee level. At this stage, the complaint will be passed to the Chair of the VCA Trustees. The request for Trustee-level review must be acknowledged within one week of receiving it. The acknowledgement should say who will deal with the case and when the complainant can expect a reply. The Chairperson may investigate the facts of the case themselves **or** delegate a suitably senior person 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, that person 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 progress. Ideally, complainants should receive a definitive report within four weeks. If this is not possible because, for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, an interim report should be sent with an indication of when a full report will be given. Whether the complaint is upheld or not, the report to the complainant should describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken resulting from the complaint. The decision taken at this stage is final, unless the Trustees decide it is appropriate to seek external assistance with resolution.

External Stage

The complainant may complain 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

Variation of the Complaints Procedure

The 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.

Monitoring and Learning from Complaints

Complaints are reviewed annually to identify any trends, which may indicate a need to take further action. The Complaints Procedure Policy will be reviewed annually.

Practical guidance for handling verbal complaints – for staff and Trustee members of VCA

- Remain calm and respectful throughout the conversation.
- Listen - allow the person to talk about the complaint in their own words. Sometimes a person may just want to "let off steam".
- Do not debate the details in the first instance; especially if the person is angry.
- Show 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 what you have noted down back to the complainant.
- 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 an appropriate response for something that you accept was the responsibility of the Association, 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.
- Do not promise things you cannot deliver.
- If requests cannot be met, give clear and valid reasons why not.
- Make sure that the person understands what they have been told.
- Wherever appropriate, inform the person about the available avenues of review or appeal