



Complaints procedure

The Society's approach to complaints and concerns follows two main processes, depending on whether the complaint/concern is verbal or in writing. Complaints should be viewed as a positive learning process. They should be investigated as transparently as possible. Under no circumstances will any person raising a concern be treated any differently as a result.

Written / Formal complaints: Any written complaint is to be regarded as formal and is investigated in line with the procedure (see details below). Formal written complaints may be received from any member of the public, whether a member of the Society or not. They can be about a policy, procedure or an action on the part of any member of the Society, or a member of staff.

The Society has a complaints procedure, which is displayed on the web site. The complaints procedure is overseen by the Complaints Officer, who is our Company Secretary, Mr Brian Gates. He may appoint a trustee or an independent individual to work with him to investigate any complaint.

Informal resolution: Most disagreements or differences of view can be resolved informally, outside this complaints procedure.

The complaints procedure should be used only when informal resolution has failed.

What is *not* a formal complaint?

- **Any concern not expressed in writing**
- **Any concern that is expressed publically**, for example on social media or the internet, *without* also being conveyed direct to the Society in writing.
The Society strongly discourages discussion of any concerns on social media or other public sites, because this contaminates any evidence and makes it almost impossible for anyone to carry out a fair investigation.
- **Child protection and vulnerable adult safeguarding concerns are not to be treated as complaints.**
They must be dealt with under the relevant safeguarding procedures and referred without delay to the appropriate authorities in line with government guidance (please see our Child and Vulnerable Adult safeguarding policies).
- **When informal concerns relate to a trustee:**
Informal concerns about a trustee's behaviour should, if possible, be resolved between the parties at the time. If this is not possible, the person raising the concern (including whistle-blowers) should discuss the matter with the Chairman, or, if the Chairman is the subject of the concern, the Vice Chairman or Company Secretary should be consulted. The Chairman, Vice Chairman or Company Secretary will raise the matter with the individual trustee. If the matter cannot be resolved in this manner, it may be brought to the Council.
- **Any concern expressed verbally or in writing to a trustee, with a request that the complainant remains anonymous.**
It is almost impossible to investigate anonymous concerns effectively, because so much relevant information cannot be accessed. Also, the person being investigated nearly always guesses who raised the concern. Trustees should be able to trust their colleagues and should never promise anonymity. They should explain to anyone asking them to raise a concern on their behalf that there is a formal complaints procedure, and advise them how to access and make use of it.
- **Informal concerns about a member who is not a trustee**
The person raising the concern must either resolve the matter themselves, or put their views in writing to the Company Secretary. At this point, it will become a formal complaint and will be handled in line with the complaints procedure.
- **Verbal or written concerns about a person who is not a member of the Society**
These cannot be investigated at all, as we have no jurisdiction over non-members.
- **Verbal or written concerns about show/judging decisions**
Persons wishing to raise a concern regarding a show/judging decision should refer to the rules of the show concerned.

Written / Formal complaints:

1. Any trustee or staff member receiving a concern about a Member, policy or procedure should ask the person to for permission to forward this to the Company Secretary.
2. If the complaint is about the Company Secretary, the person receiving it should pass it to the Chairman.
3. Whoever receives the complaint will log the event with the date, time, contact details of the person raising the complaint and any immediate action taken.
4. The complaint must be acknowledged by email or in writing immediately it is received. The complaint must then be passed without delay to the Company Secretary and Chairman.
5. The Complaints Officer will write to the complainant within 10 days of receipt to explain how the complaint is to be dealt with.
6. The Complaints Officer will write again to the complainant within 28 days of receipt, to confirm the outcome. If it is not possible to conclude the investigation within that timeframe, he will contact the complainant to explain why.

Where a complaint:

- (a) relates to procedure or Society policy;
- (b) involves alleged criminal activity or serious wrongdoing that may result in legal action being taken against the Society; or
- (c) where it becomes apparent to the Complaints Officer during the investigation that the matter may have serious implications for the Society;

The Complaints Officer should advise the members of Council immediately and present a report to them with recommendations about how to proceed.

Conduct of the investigation:

1. Where a complaint relates to an individual or individuals, confidentiality must be maintained at all times. The board of trustees should not be 'copied in' during an investigation.
2. Whoever investigates must do so in a fair and impartial manner. No one who has a potential conflict of interest may investigate any complaint.
3. The Complaints Officer and/or independent investigator should speak with the subject(s) of the complaint and if necessary, any witnesses. Detailed notes must be made of any telephone conversations and meetings that take place during the investigation.
4. When there are several separate issues, these must be untangled and investigated separately, as it is possible that some will be upheld and others not upheld.
5. If at any stage before, during or after the investigation, the Complaints Officer considers that criminal activity may have taken place, s/he must, in consultation with the Company Secretary, advise the police **in the area in which the possible offence occurred**, using the non-emergency contact number 101 and asking to speak with the relevant police force.
6. A general update in respect of completed investigations only, will be provided verbally to trustees at the next Council meeting. Confidentiality will be preserved in respect of individuals involved, subject to paragraph 4 above.
7. All recording should be completed with due regard to the Data Protection Act 1998 and GDPR 2018. Recording should make it clear what is fact and what is allegation. Investigators must assume that the subject may ask to see what has been recorded.