

COMPLAINTS POLICY & PROCEDURE

1. Introduction

Our Commitment

Holbeach Amateur Theatrical Society (hereinafter referred to as “The Group”), are committed to providing a safe, friendly environment for members of the community to express and/or develop their dramatic abilities, make friendships and otherwise enjoy their membership of The Group. We will continually monitor our own performance, taking any steps required to improve standards where necessary.

We understand that occasionally things go wrong, and when they do, The Group promises to respond, so that the problem will not arise again. We regard comments and complaints as an important source of information that will help us maintain and improve standards.

What is a complaint?

The Group regards a complaint as: “Any written or spoken expression of dissatisfaction about The Group and/or any of its members, whether made formally or informally, after a clear explanation of the point at issue has been given.”

How do you go about complaining about us?

You can make a complaint to any member of our Committee.

You can make a complaint in the following ways:

- in person
- by phone
- in writing (letter or email)

A complainant can choose to deal with the matter by correspondence or at a meeting.

A friend or advisor can accompany the complainant at any meetings.

We will:

- Treat the complaint seriously and in confidence, however it is made.
- Deal with it quickly, politely and, where appropriate, informally (for example by phone); apologise when we have got things wrong.
- Explain our position or any action we take; avoid jargon and get our facts right.
- Give explanations which are clear and easy to understand; give you a contact phone number for enquiries.

If the complainant is still dissatisfied at this stage, The Group will:

- Tell you how to take your complaint further and ask for the complaint in writing.
- Acknowledge the complaint immediately, in writing.
- Investigate the complaint, and will send a written response to the complainant within ten working days.

After the matter has been settled, we may ask you how we can avoid similar problems in the future.

2. Complaints Procedure

Complainants are given the following advice

- If complainants are unhappy about any aspect of The Group, they are advised to speak to a Committee member in the first instance.
- The complaint may be referred to Sue McLaughlin, Membership Coordinator
- If the complainant is not satisfied with the response or wishes to raise the matter more formally, they are to be advised to write to or notify Colin Robinson as Chairman.
- If the complaint is about the above members of the Committee, the complainant is advised to write to or notify Ian Collins, Group Secretary. All complaints will be logged.
- A written acknowledgement will be sent within five working days.
- The complaint will be investigated properly.
- A reply will be sent to the complainant within ten working days, setting out how the problem will be dealt with. If this is not possible, an interim response will be made informing the complainant of the action taken to date or being considered.
- Complainant will be informed about progress every 10 working days.
- If the complaint cannot be resolved, the Chairman will report the matter to the next Group Committee meeting, which will decide on any further steps.
- All complaints will be treated confidentially.
- The complaints log will be monitored regularly and reviewed annually by The Group.

Dealing with habitual or vexatious complaints

Defining habitual or vexatious complaints

Complainants may be deemed to be habitual or vexatious when previous or current contact with them shows that two or more of the following criteria apply:-

Where complainants:

- Persist in pursuing a complaint where The Group Complaints Procedure has been implemented and exhausted.
- Persistently change the substance of a complaint, continually raise new issues or seek to prolong contact by continually raising further concerns or questions upon receipt of a response whilst the complaint is being addressed. (Care must be taken, however, not to disregard new issues which are significantly different from the original complaint as they need to be addressed as separate complaints).
- Are repeatedly unwilling to accept documented evidence given as being factual or deny receipt of an adequate response despite correspondence specifically answering their questions or do not accept that facts can sometimes be difficult to verify when a long period of time has elapsed.
- Repeatedly do not clearly identify the precise issues which they wish to be investigated, despite reasonable efforts to help them specify their concerns, and/or where the concerns identified are not within the remit of The Group to investigate.

- Regularly focus on a trivial matter to an extent which is out of proportion to its significance and continue to focus on this point. It is recognised that determining what a trivial matter is can be subjective and careful judgment will be used in applying this criterion.
- Have threatened or used physical violence towards members at any time - this will, in itself, cause personal contact with the complainant and/or their representatives to be discontinued and the complaint will, thereafter, only be continued through written communication. All such incidences will be documented.
- Have, in the course of addressing a registered complaint, had an excessive number of contacts with The Group - placing unreasonable demands on committee members. For the purposes of determining an excessive number, a contact may be in person, by telephone, letter or email. Discretion will be used in determining the precise number of excessive contacts applicable under this section, using judgement based on the specific circumstances of each individual case.
- Have harassed or been personally abusive or verbally aggressive on more than one occasion towards committee members dealing with the complaint. Committee members recognise, however, that complainants may sometimes act out of character in times of stress, anxiety or distress and will make reasonable allowances for this. They will document all instances of harassment, abusive or verbally aggressive behaviour.
- Are known to have recorded meetings or face-to-face/telephone conversations without the prior knowledge and consent of other parties involved.
- Make unreasonable demands on relationships and fail to accept that these may be unreasonable, for example, insist on responses to complaints or enquiries being provided more urgently than is reasonable or within The Group Complaints Procedure or normal recognised practice.

Handling habitual or vexatious complaints

Where complainants have been identified as habitual or vexatious, The Group and Colin Robinson as Chairman, will determine what action to take, in consultation with the Management Committee of The Group as necessary. The complaint may be dealt with in one or more of the following ways:

- In a letter, setting out the commitment and responsibilities for all parties involved if The Group is to continue processing the complaint. If these terms are then breached, alternative action may follow:
- Decline contact with the complainant, either verbally or in writing, providing the same method of communication and contact person is maintained.
- Notify the complainant in writing that The Group has responded fully to the points raised and has tried to resolve the complaint but that there is nothing more to add and continuing contact on the matter will serve no useful purpose. The complainant will also be notified that the correspondence is at an end, advising the complainant that they are being treated as a persistent or vexatious complainant and as such The Group does not intend to engage in further correspondence dealing with the complaint.
- Inform the complainant that in extreme circumstances The Group reserves the right to seek legal advice on unreasonable or vexatious complaints.
- Temporarily suspend all contact with the complainant, in connection with the issues relating to the complaint being considered habitual and/or vexatious, while seeking legal advice.

Having decided what action to take, this will be communicated to the complainant with an explanation of why their complaint has been classified as habitual or vexatious, and copied to relevant parties.

A record will be kept for future reference of the reasons why a complaint has been classified as habitual or vexatious. Statistical information on all complaints received will be presented regularly to the Management Committee with details of complainants who are categorised as habitual and/or vexatious.

Withdrawing habitual or vexatious complaints status

Once a complainant has been determined to be habitual and/or vexatious, their status will be kept under review and monitored by the Chair. If a complainant subsequently demonstrates a more reasonable approach for an appropriate period of time or if they submit a further complaint for which the normal Complaints Procedure would appear appropriate their status will be reviewed.

Document Retention and Record Keeping

All documents and records relating to complaints must be retained for a period of 3 years. In cases where complaints relate to or contain Safeguarding information, or the complaint is formal, then all relating documents and records must be retained for a period of 6 years.

All records must evidence the support provided to all those involved when a complaint is received, investigated and a decision is being reached.

This policy is due for scheduled review on 1st. November 2024