

# Problem Solving Procedure for Volunteers

## Introduction

The Pony Club values our Volunteers for the essential contributions they make. We recognise that from time to time Volunteers may wish to raise problems or concerns connected to their duties or working relationships with other Volunteers or Staff.

With this procedure The Pony Club intends to guide and support problems to be raised by Volunteers and, where possible, resolved quickly, consistently, respectfully, confidentially, at the appropriate level and to the satisfaction of all concerned. It is not contractual or subject to the employment law or the grievance and disciplinary procedures that apply to Staff.

It also outlines the process that the organisation, District Commissioner's (DC) and Area Representatives (AR) will follow when a conduct or performance problem involving a Volunteer arises. The Vice Chair has ultimate responsibility for managing Volunteers.

## Purpose of this Volunteer's procedure

The aim of this procedure is to:

- Maintain a positive, safe, respectful and inclusive environment for all
- Support Volunteers to fulfil their roles effectively
- Address problems or concerns promptly and proportionately
- Protect Members, Volunteers and Staff

The use of the Problem Solving Procedure for Volunteers is two-fold:

1. It sets out a fair, transparent and supportive process for the management of the performance and conduct of Volunteers.
2. It provides a clear process for Volunteers to raise concerns about their working environment, working relationships or the conduct, behaviour or performance of another Volunteer or member of Staff.

There are three main sources of identifying a problem to be dealt with by this procedure. They are:

1. A complaint about a Volunteer by another Volunteer or Official
2. A complaint by a Volunteer about a member of Pony Club Staff or an event organiser
3. Behaviour observed at any Pony Club activity, including in-person and on-line, which may be considered to breach organisational codes, rules or policies which set our standards and expectations of those who work with us.

**Safeguarding. It is important to note that there is a separate procedure to follow for raising safeguarding concerns. This procedure does not cover safeguarding.**

## Scope of this procedure:

This procedure applies to all Volunteers engaged in working with The Pony Club, including one-off, event based, and regular Volunteers of all levels of seniority and length of volunteering service.

The procedure for Volunteers is distinct and separate from the Disciplinary and Grievance procedures used to manage Staff conduct and performance, yet it is designed to complement and feed into them, where necessary.

Staff will continue to use informal conversations to try to resolve matters, where possible and appropriate, with the option to use the organisation's formal Grievance procedure to raise concerns or problems that relate to Volunteers.

The Pony Club will follow this Problem Solving Procedure for managing the conduct, behaviour and performance of Volunteers even if the complaint is made via the Staff Grievance procedure.

## **Standards and Expectations**

The expected standards of behaviour are provided in the Code of Conduct, policies and rules which are there to promote and uphold the privacy, dignity and wellbeing of those individuals we work with and to ensure that The Pony Club's reputation is maintained.

Volunteers and Staff are accountable for their actions when working on behalf of The Pony Club on a daily operational basis and when representing TPC at events and activities.

The following documents are applicable to everyone who works with The Pony Club, including Volunteers.

- The Pony Club Code of Conduct for Officials, Volunteers and Staff
- Safeguarding policy and procedures
- Health and Safety rules
- Data protection and confidentiality requirements
- Role description and training guidance
- The Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy Statement/Policy
- The Harassment, Bullying and Dignity at Work Policy

These documents are provided to Volunteers and Staff at induction and as and as and when they are updated.

## **Principles:**

The Pony Club commits to:

- Treating Volunteers and Staff with dignity and respect
- Handling problems and concerns promptly, fairly and confidentially
- Giving Volunteers the opportunity to respond to complaints before decisions are made
- Keeping proportionate records
- Prioritising safety

## **Confidentiality**

This process for raising and handling problems and complaints is expected to be conducted respectfully and privately in order to protect the dignity of all concerned. It is expected that Volunteers and Staff will respect people's right to confidentiality. Discovery of a failure to respect the confidentiality of the process will be considered to be a breach and will be handled via this procedure for Volunteers or via the Disciplinary procedure for Staff.

## **Definitions**

**Conduct issue:** Behaviour inconsistent with the organisation's values, Code of Conduct, the Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy and the Harassment, Bullying and Dignity at Work Policy. (Examples include rudeness, disrespectful behaviour, and inappropriate conduct in-person, on social media or on other technology, boundary issues, and unsafe behaviour).

**Serious concern:** includes any behaviour that is discriminatory, harassing, bullying, criminal, or otherwise highly inappropriate—whether in person, online, or through other technology. It also includes repeated or serious breaches of the organisation’s codes, policies or rules, breaking confidentiality, or any behaviour that could harm the organisation’s reputation.

**Performance issue:** Difficulties meeting the expectations of the role, for example incomplete tasks, reliability concerns, misunderstanding instructions.

## **Problem Solving Procedure**

### **1. Informal Stage**

#### **Identifying a concern**

A concern about performance or conduct may be identified by Staff, Members, Centre Proprietors or other Volunteers.

##### **a. Informal peer conversation**

Where appropriate it is encouraged that the individuals directly involved attempt to nip the problem in the bud themselves, politely and privately Volunteer to Volunteer or Volunteer to Staff member.

Problems that may be appropriately handled at this informal stage include but are not limited to:

- Minor miscommunications, minor inappropriate language or misunderstandings
- Minor failure to follow processes, such as updating certifications or training
- Inconsistent planning and tracking leading to missed deadlines

A timely, straightforward and respectful conversation should outline the problem and its impacts. Time should be taken to listen to each other’s perspective with a view to agreeing together on how best to resolve the issue and prevent any future repeat. This informal conversation is to be kept confidential. It may be useful to capture what is agreed in writing but this should not be shared with anyone else unless you both agree it is beneficial to share it, or part of it, with a specific individual in order to assist with the delivery of the agreed actions.

If a Volunteer does not feel comfortable having this initial informal conversation themselves, they may raise it, in confidence, with a trusted colleague who may be willing to have the informal conversation for them.

##### **b. Informal Management Discussion (to Support and Improvement)**

If an initial informal peer conversation does not work, the Volunteer should raise it confidentially with the appropriate local branch DC or Staff line manager who will:

- Speak privately with the Volunteer or member of Staff who raised the concern
- Discretely gather information about the problem
- Speak privately with the Volunteer or Staff member who is the subject of the concern

- Explain the problem clearly and the consequences of this behaviour
- Provide a specific recent example (dates, times, location)
- Seek and listen to the Volunteer or Staff member's perspective
- Offer some motivation to change, focusing on the positive benefits of the desired behaviour
- Agree what support or adjustments may help (for example training, shadowing, or clearer expectations)

### **Support Plan (if needed)**

A short informal written plan should be created that includes:

- What improvement/ change is expected. What the goal is
- What support will be provided
- A realistic goal and timescale to correct the problem behaviour and to review progress (4 to 6 weeks) as appropriate.

### **Outcome of Informal Stage**

It is expected that most issues should be resolved at the informal stage. If the problem persists or is considered to be too serious the matter will move to the Formal Stage of the procedure.

## **2. Formal Stage**

The formal stage is an escalation that can be used when:

- Issues were not resolved informally
- The concern is more serious
- There is potential risk to individuals or the organisation

Safeguarding concerns are managed by a separate formal procedure.

Serious allegations or concerns under this procedure may bypass the informal stage and go straight to the formal stage. The Volunteer may be suspended from all Pony Club activities while the issue is reviewed.

External reporting may be required, for example to the police, insurers or the Charity Commission if serious incident criteria are met.

Serious concerns relating to member of Staff will be managed under the Disciplinary Procedure.

### **a. Information Gathering**

The Area Representative or, for a Staff related issue, the member of Staff's line manager will:

- Speak confidentially with relevant Staff, Volunteers and other potential witnesses
- Explain and maintain the confidentiality of the procedure
- Review any relevant records
- Consider safeguarding or risk assessment requirements and follow the relevant procedure
- Produce a summary of concerns

## **b. Formal Meeting**

If the subject of the complaint is a member of Staff, and the information gathered indicates that action is required, then the Organisation's formal Disciplinary Procedure will be applied.

If the concern relates to a Volunteer they will be invited to a formal meeting under this Problem Solving Procedure. They may bring a fellow Volunteer or a friend or family member for support, by prior agreement. Legal representation is not allowed unless the organisation chooses otherwise.

This confidential meeting will be used to:

- Explain the problem and any evidence (e.g. suspected breach of the Code, rules or policy)
- Encourage the Volunteer to share their perspective
- Consider any mitigating factors
- Explore potential options such as reasonable adjustments, alternative roles or other course of action for the improvement of performance or conduct.

No decision will be made at the formal meeting. Following the meeting and after careful consideration, the manager may decide on one of a number of options to support the resolution of the problem.

## **c. Consider Possible Outcomes**

Following the meeting the charity may decide to:

- Consider suggesting remedial action such as an apology
- Provide further support or training to refresh or develop skills or set a revised support plan
- Consider offering informal, voluntary relationship re-set/ resolution via mediation
- Reassign to a new area or role
- Remove certain duties
- Set clear expectations of performance and conduct and set a formal review period
- Offer some time out from their voluntary work to rest and revitalise
- End the volunteering arrangement at Branch/Centre or national level

Following the decision being made the charity will:

- Inform the Volunteer in private in person (or on-line), of the decision
- Put the decision in writing too
- If applicable, inform the Volunteer what will happen if any outcome problem solving arrangements are not adhered to
- Inform the individual who raised the concern that the matter has been dealt with. They will not be provided with the specific details as that remains confidential.

## **Ending the Volunteering Arrangement**

The charity reserves the right to stop a Volunteer's involvement if:

- A serious breach of the Code of Conduct or TPC rules or policies occurs
- Health and Safety risks cannot be mitigated
- Safeguarding concerns arise
- Performance or conduct does not improve
- The charity no longer has an appropriate role for the Volunteer.

Where possible, the charity will give notice, but immediate removal may occur if safety or serious concerns requires it.

A brief, factual record of the reason for ending the relationships will be kept securely on file.

#### **d. Appeal**

Volunteers may request a review of a formal decision concerning their volunteering. Requests are preferred in writing and should be sent to the Vice Chairman who has ultimate responsibility for managing Volunteers. Appeals should be made within 10 working days of the decision being made.

An appeal meeting will be conducted by the Vice Chairman or another Trustee not previously directly involved in the matter. Again the Volunteer may be able to bring someone with them by prior agreement. The decision made as a result of the appeal meeting is final.

#### **Record Keeping**

The charity will keep:

- Notes of meetings
- Copies of improvement/support plans
- Summaries of decisions

Records will be:

- Stored securely and confidentially
- Retained only as long as necessary under data protection rules (GDPR/Data Protection Act 2018)
- Never framed as disciplinary records (as volunteers do not have employment status)

#### **Review of Problem Solving Procedure**

This procedure will be reviewed every two years or sooner if legislation or Charity Commission guidance changes.