

**Dronfield and District u3a
Complaints Policy
Version: 1.2**

This document is available on the Policies page of the DDU3a website.

**Date Approved: 23 September 2024
Next Review Date: no later than September 2026**

1. Introduction

- a. From time to time a complaint or incident may arise about or concerning a member of Dronfield and District u3a (DDu3a). The source may be another member of DDU3a or a member of the community who is not in DDU3a, or an external organisation. This policy clarifies DDU3a's Principles and Procedures in dealing with complaints and follows the sample guidelines issued by the Third Age Trust (TAT).
- b. This Policy will be available to members in order that they know how to obtain help and advice in relation to complaints. This may assist in ensuring that issues can be resolved in an objective and timely manner.
- c. The Third Age Trust's (TAT) guidelines are followed when dealing with any complaint or incident:
 - i. The complainant(s) is supported in making the complaint
 - ii. The rights of all those involved are respected
 - iii. Confidentiality is adhered to.
 - iv. Matters are dealt with at the lowest appropriate level
 - v. There is a clear separation between the investigator / mediator / adjudicator roles (i.e. a firewall).
 - vi. There is consistency with other relevant DDU3a policies, including (but not limited to) the Member and Trustee Code of Conduct, Safeguarding and Diversity, Equality and Inclusion policies.
- d. The member of DDU3a's Executive Committee appointed as the Lead to coordinate and deal with complaints or incidents will be the Secretary.

2. Procedures

- a. The procedures apply to all members, including Trustees. Where the Chair or Secretary is subject to a complaint, the Executive Committee will appoint either another Trustee or external person(s) to assume the responsibilities assigned to the Chair and Secretary in relation to the handling of the complaint.
- b. Complainant(s) and person(s) subject to complaints will be given a copy of this policy document, irrespective of whether the complaint is viewed as minor or more serious.
- c. It is anticipated that most complaints will be minor and are capable of resolution informally via the process outlined for dealing with minor complaints (see section 3 below).
- d. Where matters are not straightforward, the Secretary may seek advice on how best to handle a complaint from the Third Age Trust.
- e. When this happens, the people involved will be informed and the reason(s) will be explained.
- f. In the first instance the member who receives a complaint should not attempt to deal with it. Instead they should inform the Secretary or Chair, or another Trustee if either is the subject of the complaint. This can be done by completing an Incident Report Form, (available from the Policies page of the website), by emailing either secretary@dronfieldu3a.org.uk or chair@dronfieldu3a.org.uk or by telephoning 01246

900201. For data protection reasons these initial emails should only inform the Chair, Secretary or other Trustee that a complaint has been received. They should not contain any details of the complaint or the personal data or anyone involved in it.

- g. When a complaint is made by a member, the Secretary will inform the Chair that a complaint has been made or that an incident has taken place. The Secretary will liaise with another Trustee and together they will initially determine the seriousness of the matter and therefore whether it should be handled through informal (minor) or formal (more serious) procedures. The Secretary will be cognisant that the Chair may later be Chairing an appeals committee for this complaint and therefore should not know the details of serious complaints.

3. Minor Complaints - Informal Procedure

- a. Every effort will be made to deal with minor issues informally and not invoke formal procedures.
- b. Informal resolution tries to ensure that the views of all those involved are heard, and that any matters of concern can be resolved to the satisfaction of those involved.
- c. It is not helpful to define a rigid process here. It may be that the members concerned meet face to face, but it is important not to require anyone to do this, as this may result in further upset / harm to the individual concerned.
- d. If a complainant does not wish to have the complaint dealt with through informal procedures, then the matter will be handled formally (see Section 4 below).
- e. If a mutually acceptable outcome can be reached between the people involved, then no further action will be taken.
- f. It may be that, if both parties agree, a mediator be appointed (who must adhere to confidentiality). Depending on the circumstances, if appropriate, this could be a Group Coordinator or another member of DDU3a.
- g. If the matter cannot be resolved by the people concerned, then the matter will be referred to the Chair who will determine next steps.
- h. If there is a pattern of minor complaints against a member being upheld, the Chair or Secretary will appoint a Trustee to discuss this with the person concerned and to advise the Chair and Secretary on any further action. The member will have the right to comment on that advice before the Chair and Secretary make a final decision.
- i. A short summary of the complaint and outcome, written by the Secretary, will be held in a secure centrally managed folder on the u3a's shared Master Documents drive. The folder will be accessible only to the Secretary, Chair and DDU3a's Systems Administrator(s). The Systems Administrator(s) will only access the information if both the Chair and Secretary have difficulty in doing so. The summary will be destroyed after 4 years.

4. More Serious Complaints - Formal Procedure

- a. Where the Secretary in consultation with another Trustee determines that a complaint is serious, the matter will be dealt with through the formal procedure. All Committee written correspondence with complainant(s) and person(s) subject to the complaint shall be sent recorded delivery via the postal system and not via email or another form of electronic communication.
- b. The Secretary will alert the Third Age Trust to the fact that a complaint requiring a formal procedure has been invoked and may seek advice from the organisation as to handling issues.
- c. The Secretary in consultation with the other Trustee shall determine whether the subject of the complaint will be suspended from any /all DDU3a activities. Suspension is a

neutral act and does not mean that the outcome of any investigation has been pre-determined. This decision will be reviewed in the light of relevant information emerging during the period of the investigation.

- d. The Chair and Secretary shall appoint a Trustee to investigate the complaint (an Investigating Officer). Where the complaint is determined to be so serious that matters must be referred to an external organisation for investigation, then the Secretary will appoint a Trustee to liaise with that organisation (this may be the Investigating Officer). In order not to prejudice the external investigation, it may be necessary to delay an internal investigation.
- e. The Investigating Officer shall conduct enquiries and submit a report to the Secretary. Any person who is interviewed during the investigation has a right to be accompanied by a person of their choosing in a supportive capacity. This is important, particularly where a member feels vulnerable or struggles to understand the formal procedure.
- f. The Investigating Officer will keep a written note of all relevant interactions which take place during the enquiry.
- g. The Chair and Secretary will arrange for a small panel of Trustees to consider the report. The Investigating Officer shall not be a member of the Panel. The complainant(s) and the person subject to the complaint shall be informed that they can make written and / or verbal statements to the Panel. If the subject of the complaint is one or more Trustees, the complaint will be referred to TAT for advice on management of the complaint.
- h. The Chair of the Panel will communicate the Panel's decision to the complainant(s) and the person subject to the complaint, in writing. Normally this will take place within 7 days of the Panel.
- i. The complainant(s) and person subject to the complaint shall have a right of appeal. An appeal should be lodged with Chair of the Panel, normally within 7 days of receipt of the Panel's decision. The Chair will then convene an Appeal Panel (not including any Trustee who was a member of the original Panel) to consider the original decision, taking into account any new evidence. Normally this will include an Officer of the Committee. The Chair of the Appeal Panel will communicate the decision of this Panel within 7 days.
- j. Records relating to the investigation and Panel hearing(s) will be held in a secure centrally managed folder on the u3a's shared Master Documents drive. The folder will be accessible only to the Secretary, Chair and DDU3a's Systems Administrator(s). The Systems Administrator(s) will only access the information if both the Chair and Secretary have difficulty in doing so. The records will be destroyed after 4 years.

Document History		
Date	Version	Summary of Changes
23 Sep 2024	1.2	All hyperlinks to DDU3a's old website removed. Paragraph numbering changed to conform with other DDU3a policies. Para 1.c.vi Member Code of Conduct changed to Member and Trustee Code of Conduct Para 2.f Reminder added that personal data should not be sent via email. Para 3.e "mutually acceptable" added to first sentence. Explanation of where complaints will be stored and who will have access to them added moved to new paragraph i. Para 4.c Reference to Treasurer removed. Para 4.g "coordination of the complaint" changed to "management"

		Para 4.j Explanation of where complaints will be stored and who will have access to them added.
February 2024	1.1	Para 2.1 changed to clarify that Exec Committee will appoint persons to replace Chair/Secretary if they are the subject of a complaint. Branding updated - DDU3A changed to DDU3a.
June 2022	1.0	New policy