

Out East Fencing Club

Complaints Policy & Procedure

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Approved by: Board of Directors

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1. Purpose

1.1. Out East Fencing Club (the **Club**) aims to provide a high-quality, safe, welcoming and inclusive experience for everyone who participates in its activities.

1.2. The Club recognises that people may sometimes be dissatisfied with an aspect of the Club's activities, services, administration or conduct.

1.3. This policy provides a fair, accessible and proportionate process for raising and responding to complaints.

1.4. The Club will seek to resolve complaints constructively and, where appropriate, use complaints to identify improvements to its activities and practices.

1.5. This policy applies to complaints made about the Club or people acting on behalf of the Club. It does not prevent the Club from using another procedure where that is more appropriate.

2. Scope

2.1. A complaint may concern matters including:

- the quality or delivery of a Club activity;
- coaching or instruction;
- administration or communication;

- facilities or arrangements;
- a Club decision;
- the conduct of a person acting on behalf of the Club;
- failure to follow a Club policy or procedure; or
- another aspect of the Club's activities or services.

2.2. Complaints may be made by:

- members;
- parents or guardians;
- participants;
- volunteers;
- coaches;
- visitors; or
- another person directly affected by the matter complained about.

2.3. Where appropriate, a complaint may be made by someone on behalf of another person, subject to considerations of confidentiality and consent.

3. Complaints and Other Club Procedures

3.1. The Club has several procedures for dealing with different types of concerns.

3.2. A **complaint** is generally an expression of dissatisfaction about the Club, its activities, services, decisions or administration.

3.3. A **welfare concern** relates primarily to someone's wellbeing and should be dealt with under the Welfare Policy & Procedure where appropriate.

3.4. A **safeguarding concern** involves a concern that a child or another person may be at risk of abuse, neglect, exploitation or other serious harm. Safeguarding concerns must be dealt with under the Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy.

3.5. A **disciplinary matter** concerns an alleged breach of the Club's Code of Conduct or other rules and may be dealt with under the Disciplinary Procedure.

3.6. A matter may fall into more than one category.

3.7. A person raising a concern does not need to determine which procedure applies. The Club will determine the appropriate process based on the information provided.

3.8. Where a complaint raises a safeguarding concern, the safeguarding process shall take priority.

3.9. Where a complaint raises a welfare or disciplinary issue, the Club may coordinate the relevant procedures rather than requiring the complainant to submit multiple reports.

4. Principles

The Club will seek to handle complaints in accordance with the following principles:

- **Accessibility:** people should be able to raise concerns without unnecessary barriers.
- **Fairness:** complaints should be considered objectively and without predetermined conclusions.
- **Proportionality:** the response should reflect the seriousness and complexity of the complaint.
- **Confidentiality:** information should be shared only where there is a legitimate reason to do so.
- **Timeliness:** complaints should be acknowledged and dealt with within reasonable timescales.
- **Independence:** where appropriate, the person investigating a complaint should not be directly involved in the matter complained about.
- **Respect:** everyone involved should be treated respectfully.
- **Learning:** significant complaints should be used to identify opportunities for improvement.

5. Raising a Complaint

5.1. Complaints should normally be made to the Club in writing.

5.2. The Club may provide an online complaints form or another appropriate reporting mechanism.

5.3. A complaint should include, where reasonably possible:

- the complainant's name and contact details;
- a description of the matter complained about;
- when and where the matter occurred;
- the people involved;

- any relevant supporting information or evidence; and
- the outcome or action the complainant would like the Club to consider.

5.4. The Club may accept anonymous complaints where sufficient information is provided to allow the matter to be considered.

5.5. Anonymous complaints may be more difficult to investigate or resolve because the Club may be unable to obtain further information or provide an outcome to the complainant.

5.6. A person who requires a reasonable adjustment to raise a complaint should contact the Club so that an appropriate alternative arrangement can be considered.

6. Informal Resolution

6.1. Where appropriate and proportionate, the Club may seek to resolve a complaint informally before commencing a formal investigation.

6.2. Informal resolution may include:

- providing an explanation;
- correcting an administrative error;
- clarifying a decision or policy;
- arranging a conversation with an appropriate Club representative;
- agreeing a practical solution; or
- taking another reasonable corrective action.

6.3. Informal resolution will not normally be appropriate where:

- the complaint concerns serious misconduct;
- there is a safeguarding concern;
- there is a significant conflict of interest;
- the complainant does not wish to pursue informal resolution; or
- an informal approach could prejudice a formal investigation.

6.4. A person should not be required to confront another person directly where doing so would be inappropriate or could reasonably cause distress or risk.

7. Formal Complaints

7.1. A formal complaint may be appropriate where:

- informal resolution has not resolved the issue;
- the matter is serious;
- the complaint concerns a significant Club decision or failure;
- the matter involves repeated or persistent problems; or
- the complainant reasonably requests formal consideration.

7.2. The Club should acknowledge a formal complaint within **10 working days** where reasonably practicable.

7.3. The acknowledgement should normally confirm:

- who is handling the complaint;
- whether further information is required;
- the expected next steps; and
- an indicative timescale for a response.

7.4. The Club may extend the timescale where a complaint is unusually complex, involves multiple people or requires information from an external organisation.

7.5. Where the timescale needs to be extended, the complainant should be informed where reasonably practicable.

8. Investigating a Complaint

8.1. The person responsible for handling a complaint shall consider what investigation is reasonably necessary.

8.2. Depending on the circumstances, this may include:

- reviewing relevant documents;
- reviewing Club records;
- speaking to the complainant;
- speaking to people involved in the matter;
- obtaining relevant information from coaches, volunteers or other Club representatives;
- reviewing applicable policies or rules; or

- obtaining independent advice.

8.3. Investigations should be proportionate to the seriousness and complexity of the complaint.

8.4. The person investigating should not have a significant conflict of interest in the matter.

8.5. Where the complaint concerns a Director or other person responsible for handling complaints, an alternative person should be appointed where reasonably practicable.

8.6. Where the Club cannot reasonably investigate a matter independently, it may seek assistance from an appropriate external person or organisation.

9. Cooperation

9.1. People involved in a formal complaint should cooperate reasonably with the process.

9.2. The Club may ask people involved to provide information or attend a meeting where appropriate.

9.3. A person should not be required to provide information that would be unsafe, inappropriate or unnecessarily distressing.

9.4. Where a child or young person is involved, the Club shall take account of their age, understanding and welfare.

10. Interim Measures

10.1. The Club may take temporary measures while a complaint is being considered where this is necessary to:

- protect someone's welfare or safety;
- prevent further inappropriate conduct;
- preserve evidence;
- prevent a conflict of interest; or
- maintain the effective operation of Club activities.

10.2. Interim measures are not necessarily an indication that the complaint has been upheld.

10.3. Where appropriate, interim measures may include changes to coaching arrangements, temporary restrictions on participation or other reasonable steps.

10.4. Where the matter is disciplinary or safeguarding in nature, the relevant procedure shall also apply.

11. Outcome

11.1. At the conclusion of a formal complaint, the Club should provide the complainant with an appropriate written outcome where reasonably practicable.

11.2. The outcome should normally explain:

- the complaint considered;
- the main findings;
- whether the complaint was upheld, partially upheld or not upheld;
- any action the Club intends to take; and
- any available right of appeal.

11.3. The Club may be unable to provide detailed information about action taken against another individual because of confidentiality, data protection or other legal considerations.

11.4. A complaint may be:

- **upheld** where the evidence supports the complaint;
- **partially upheld** where some aspects are supported but others are not; or
- **not upheld** where the evidence does not support the complaint.

11.5. A complaint being "not upheld" does not necessarily mean that the complainant acted improperly or that their concern was unreasonable.

12. Remedies and Corrective Action

12.1. Where a complaint is upheld or otherwise identifies a legitimate problem, the Club may take appropriate corrective action.

12.2. This may include:

- correcting an error;

- changing a process;
- providing an explanation or apology;
- reviewing a decision;
- providing additional training;
- changing arrangements;
- improving facilities or communications; or
- taking action under another Club policy.

12.3. The Club will determine the appropriate remedy based on the circumstances.

12.4. The Club is not required to provide a remedy that would be disproportionate, unlawful or inconsistent with its constitutional or other obligations.

13. Appeals

13.1. A complainant may request a review of a formal complaint outcome where they believe:

- a significant part of the complaint was not properly considered;
- relevant information was not taken into account;
- the procedure was not followed appropriately; or
- the outcome was unreasonable in light of the information available.

13.2. An appeal should normally be made within **10 working days** of the complaint outcome.

13.3. The appeal should explain the grounds for requesting a review.

13.4. An appeal should, where reasonably practicable, be considered by someone who was not responsible for the original decision.

13.5. The person considering the appeal may:

- uphold the original outcome;
- vary the outcome;
- require further investigation;
- refer the matter back for reconsideration; or
- take another appropriate action.

13.6. The appeal decision should normally be communicated in writing.

13.7. The Club's internal complaints process will ordinarily be considered complete once an appeal has been determined.

14. Complaints Concerning Directors

14.1. A complaint concerning a Director should be handled by an alternative person where reasonably practicable.

14.2. The Director who is the subject of the complaint should not improperly influence the handling or outcome of the complaint.

14.3. Any relevant conflict of interest shall be managed in accordance with the Club's Conflicts of Interest Policy & Procedure.

14.4. Where the Club does not have sufficient independence to handle the complaint appropriately, it may seek external assistance.

14.5. Where a complaint concerns the sole Director, the Club should consider whether an independent external person or relevant governing body should be asked to handle or review the matter.

15. Complaints Concerning Coaches or Volunteers

15.1. Complaints about coaches or volunteers may be handled under this procedure where the primary issue concerns the Club's service or administration.

15.2. Where the complaint alleges misconduct or a breach of the Code of Conduct, the Club may also initiate the Disciplinary Procedure.

15.3. Where the complaint raises a safeguarding concern, the Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy shall apply.

15.4. The Club should take care to distinguish between a legitimate complaint about coaching and a disagreement with a coach's professional judgement.

16. Safeguarding and Welfare Complaints

16.1. The Club will not require a person to use the complaints process where their concern is more appropriately dealt with as a welfare or safeguarding matter.

16.2. Where a complaint indicates that a child or another person may be at risk of harm, the matter shall be escalated under the Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy.

16.3. The Club's safeguarding reporting route allows concerns to be submitted directly to the Welfare Officer. Where there is immediate danger, the Club's online safeguarding form should not be relied upon and emergency assistance should be sought.

16.4. Where a complaint involves a welfare concern that does not meet a safeguarding threshold, the Welfare Policy & Procedure may be used alongside or instead of this procedure.

16.5. A person raising a complaint should not be disadvantaged because their concern is subsequently dealt with under another Club procedure.

17. Confidentiality and Data Protection

17.1. Complaints shall be handled with appropriate confidentiality.

17.2. Information should be shared only with people who have a legitimate reason to receive it.

17.3. The Club shall handle complaint records in accordance with its Data Protection Policy and Privacy Notice.

17.4. Complaints may involve personal information about people other than the complainant. The Club may therefore limit the information provided in an outcome where necessary to comply with data protection or other legal requirements.

17.5. Confidentiality does not prevent information from being shared where required by law or necessary to protect someone from serious harm.

18. Anonymous Complaints

18.1. The Club may consider anonymous complaints where sufficient information is provided.

18.2. The Club may be unable to investigate an anonymous complaint fully where it cannot obtain further information.

18.3. Anonymous complaints should nevertheless be considered where they raise potentially serious concerns.

18.4. Where an anonymous complaint identifies a possible safeguarding concern, the Club shall follow its safeguarding procedures regardless of whether the complainant can be identified.

19. Vexatious or Repeated Complaints

19.1. The Club recognises that people may raise repeated complaints because they remain dissatisfied with an issue. Repetition alone does not make a complaint inappropriate.

19.2. Where a person repeatedly raises substantially the same matter after the Club's procedure has been exhausted, the Club may limit further correspondence where:

- the matter has already been fully considered;
- no significant new information has been provided; and
- continuing correspondence would be disproportionate.

19.3. Before limiting correspondence, the Club should explain the position to the complainant where reasonably practicable.

19.4. A complaint should not be dismissed as vexatious merely because it is strongly expressed or critical of the Club.

20. Malicious or Knowingly False Complaints

20.1. The Club recognises that a complaint may be made in good faith and remain unsubstantiated.

20.2. A complaint should only be considered potentially malicious or knowingly false where there is evidence that the person deliberately provided false information or made an allegation they knew to be untrue.

20.3. Where appropriate, such conduct may be addressed under the Code of Conduct or Disciplinary Procedure.

20.4. This section does not apply simply because a complaint is unsuccessful or cannot be substantiated.

21. Records and Monitoring

21.1. The Club shall maintain appropriate records of formal complaints.

21.2. Records should normally include:

- the complaint;
- relevant correspondence;
- information gathered during the investigation;
- the outcome;
- any appeal;
- action taken; and
- the date the matter was closed.

21.3. The Board should periodically review complaints in an appropriately anonymised form to identify recurring issues or opportunities for improvement.

21.4. Individual complaint details should only be provided to Directors where there is a legitimate reason to do so.

21.5. Complaints involving safeguarding, welfare or disciplinary matters should also be recorded under the relevant procedure where appropriate.

22. Protection from Retaliation

22.1. The Club does not tolerate retaliation, intimidation or victimisation of a person who raises a genuine complaint or participates appropriately in a complaints process.

22.2. Concerns about retaliation should be reported and may themselves constitute a breach of the Code of Conduct.

22.3. A complaint that is not upheld should not be treated as malicious merely because the evidence does not support it.

23. External Complaints and Governing Bodies

23.1. Nothing in this policy prevents a person from raising a matter with an appropriate external organisation where they are entitled or required to do so.

23.2. Where relevant, this may include:

- British Fencing;
- a venue or facility operator;
- a statutory authority;
- a relevant professional or regulatory body; or
- the police or emergency services where appropriate.

23.3. The Club will cooperate appropriately with legitimate external investigations or procedures.

23.4. Where an external investigation is underway, the Club may pause or adapt its own process where doing so is necessary to avoid interfering with that investigation.

24. Review

24.1. This policy shall be reviewed at least annually and sooner where appropriate.

24.2. The Board shall review the policy following significant complaints, material changes to the Club's activities or relevant changes in law or governing-body requirements.

24.3. Lessons arising from complaints should be used to improve Club practices where appropriate.

25. Approval

This Complaints Policy & Procedure was approved by the Board of Directors of Out East Fencing Club on:

Date: 12/08/2026

Chair / Director: Pel Houlihan

Next review date: 12/08/2027