



ORGANISATION	BELFAST & DISTRICT BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION (BDBKA)
Policy Title	Complaints & Disciplinary Policy/Procedure
Policy Author	BDBKA Management Committee
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1. Purpose	
This policy outlines the procedures for managing complaints/disputes involving members and sets out a fair, transparent and consistent process for addressing concerns and disciplinary matters. It should be read alongside the BDBKA Code of Conduct and the BDBKA Guide on Implementing the UBKA Safeguarding Policy; these policies set out the behaviour expected of BDBKA members.	
2. Scope	
This policy covers: • Complaints made by or about members, • Alleged misconduct or breaches of the Code of Conduct or Safeguarding Policy, and • Procedures for the investigation and resolution of complaints and any subsequent disciplinary actions.	
3. Principles	
• All complaints and concerns will be treated seriously and confidentially. • Everyone involved will be treated fairly and given the opportunity to work through problems or disputes. • Decisions will be based on evidence and follow a clear, consistent process. • Members will be given an opportunity to respond to any complaints or concerns. • There is a right of appeal against any disciplinary action taken against a member. • All allegations involving safeguarding shall be managed in line with the UBKA Policy on Safeguarding People. • Information relating to the disciplinary process will be handled in line with DPA, including ensuring confidentiality and security of sensitive information (BDBKA Data Handling & Record Management policy).	
4. Definitions	
• Complaint: Any expression of dissatisfaction or concern about the behaviour or conduct of a member, raised by a member or external party. • Disciplinary Action: Steps taken in response to misconduct or breach of policy. This may include warnings, suspension or termination of membership.	

5. How to make a complaint:

- Complaints must be made in writing and sent to the BDBKA Secretary. All written complaints received will be recorded. Where a verbal complaint is received, this will, where possible, be agreed to be an accurate account with the complainant, in writing, before further action is taken.
- The Secretary will:
 - record the complainant's name/contact details, including email address, home address and telephone number.
 - record the facts of the complaint; to include the date, time, location and nature of the complaint, as well as the name and details of anyone else involved in the complaint (the subject of complaint or witnesses to the incident). When registering the complaint, record what action(s) the complainant considers should be taken to promote resolution.

5. Complaints Procedure

5.1 Informal Resolution:

- Where appropriate, minor concerns should be addressed by the Secretary and one other member of the Committee (not the Chairperson).
- An informal meeting will be held with the member, and the complaint will be discussed.
- If the complaint is resolved no further action will be required.

5.2 Formal Complaint: if informal resolution is not possible or appropriate:

- **Submission** - a complaint must be submitted in writing to the BDBKA Secretary. It should include details of the incident, dates, people involved and any supporting evidence. A complaint will be acknowledged within **5 working days**.
- **Investigation:** a fair and impartial investigation will be conducted by the Secretary and two Committee members (**Panel**). This will involve interviews and review of any relevant documentation, within **15 working days**, where possible. Both the complainant and the individual named in the complaint (*the subject*) can bring a representative to support them if they wish.
- **Outcome:** both the complainant and the subject of the complaint will be informed in writing (by the Secretary) of the determination of the investigation and any subsequent action. Where appropriate, a meeting will be convened to agree on a written statement and any agreed actions will be recorded, signed by the subject of the complaint and the Secretary and stored in a secure place. Such a meeting will **not be** recorded as disciplinary action and be seen as a process of constructive dialogue.

6. Disciplinary Procedure

6.1 Grounds for Disciplinary Action:

- Breach of confidentiality.
- Disrespectful or abusive behaviour.
- Harassment or discrimination.
- Failure to follow Code of Conduct and/or Policies including Safeguarding.
- Criminal behaviour or gross negligence.

6.2 Disciplinary meetings will be conducted by the Secretary and two other Committee members (*Disciplinary Panel*).

6.3 Stages of Disciplinary Action:

- **Verbal Warning:** minor first-time issues. A formal warning may be given if despite informal discussions, conduct does not improve. A brief note of the warning will be kept, subject to satisfactory conduct. This warning will lapse after 3 months if conduct is satisfactory.
- **Written Warning:** if there is no improvement within the prescribed time or should repeated or more serious issues arise, the Secretary will issue a written invitation to attend a disciplinary meeting. This meeting will provide an opportunity for the member (with their representative) to talk about the issues and any further allegations. This meeting should take place as soon as is reasonably possible. The member will be informed in writing if no further action is warranted. Failure to improve may lead to a final written warning and termination of membership.
A copy of the written warning will be kept securely on file, but the warning will lapse after 3 months subject to satisfactory conduct. Where a written warning is given, the Committee will be advised and kept up to date with any progress.
- **Final Written Warning:** for continued or if other serious misconduct occurs, a further disciplinary meeting will be called with the member and their representative. This may be accompanied by temporary suspension, pending further review. If it is established that there has been a failure to improve or change behaviour, then a *final written warning* will be given to the member - setting out the grounds for the complaint, the improvement that is required, and a time frame. The written warning will make it clear that any recurrence of the offence, lack of improvement or other serious misconduct, within the stipulated period of time, will result in termination of membership and also advise of the member's right of appeal.
A copy of the written warning will be kept on file, but the warning will lapse after a stipulated time period, subject to satisfactory conduct. Where a written warning is given, the Committee should be advised and kept up to date with any progress.

7. Final stage - termination of membership

If the member's conduct still fails to improve, the final stage in the disciplinary process may be instituted and membership terminated. This decision will be made by the disciplinary panel and confirmed by the Committee following an appropriate hearing to give the member the opportunity to state their case and put forward any mitigating circumstances.

Following the hearing the member will be provided with written reasons for the termination, if it is confirmed. They will also be notified of the date on which membership will terminate, and advice on their right of appeal.

8. Appeals

8.1 An appeal of the decision and any sanction will be considered if lodged by the individual within **10 working days** of the decision being communicated to them. The Chairperson will lead the appeals panel (with two other Committee members who have not been involved in the process) - to review all the evidence and come to a view within **15 working days**.

8.2 If there are no grounds for an appeal the individual will be notified promptly. *The Secretary will not form part of the Appeal sub-committee and the Panel will make the final decision.*

The member may attend the Appeals Panel (with their representative) to present any further evidence which they consider will assist the process or explain their actions.

9. Gross Misconduct

Should a member be accused of committing gross misconduct (*for example theft, an act of violence, malicious damage, deliberate falsification of documents, harassment, serious breach of H&S, bullying, discrimination or a child protection issue*), the above procedures regarding progression of **warnings will not apply**. In such cases, immediate steps will be taken to inform the relevant external agency (e.g. Police or Social Work) of the allegations for investigation.

10. Suspension

10.1 If a member is accused of gross misconduct, they will be placed on a precautionary suspension, pending the outcome of the external investigation. If the appropriate authority subsequently finds the allegation(s) to be substantiated, the individual's membership will be terminated with immediate effect.
In such circumstances there will be no right of appeal to BDBKA.

10.2 Should the external agency's investigation be inconclusive, the complaint will re-join the BDBKA disciplinary process, which will determine whether it is unsubstantiated or should result in a final written warning, or termination of membership. The member may submit evidence or provide mitigating factors influencing their behaviour to the disciplinary panel and be accompanied by a representative. If the panel decision goes against them, the member will have a right of appeal, to be handled as set out in **Section 8 above**.