Oystermouth Bowls Club

 Complaints Policy

**1. Introduction**

From time to time the Club may encounter a matter involving one or more of its members that relates to a complaint. How the Club handles such matters will impact on the culture of the Club and its ability to continue to operate successfully and harmoniously.

It is recognised that members may have differences of opinion and in most circumstances, it is anticipated that matters will be resolved in an amicable manner. When concerns are expressed, there is an expectation that an informal resolution will be sought.

There are matters that can occur as the result of a breach of Club rules, but others are often a consequence of a misunderstanding, lack of communication, personality clashes or differences in expectations. Quite often, members may not be aware of the Club rules and expectations.

Addressing complaints can benefit the Club by highlighting problem areas which need to be corrected. A complaint may involve the behaviour of another member, concerns about harassment, bullying or any other area of concern. This policy will be used to address all such matters.

It is possible that a member has a concern about something but it does not rise to the level of a complaint. It is always important to enable someone to be able to talk about anything that might be considered a concern.

In the first instance if any member wishes to have a discussion, then they should raise the matter with:

* Club captain if the concern relates to selection, matches and internal/external competitions.
* A member of the Management Committee if it relates to any other matter.

If the discussion does not adequately address the concern the member may wish to consider making a complaint. Complaints of any nature shall be addressed in writing to the Secretary. This policy provides guidance for those with a complaint, those who have had a complaint made against them and those who are responsible for addressing a complaint.

**2. Guiding Principles**

The Club will apply the following principles in dealing with such matters. These principles incorporate concepts of procedural fairness and natural justice.

* Both the person making the complaint (complainant) and the person the complaint is against (respondent) will be given full details of what is being said against them, and have the opportunity to respond (give their side of the story)
* Decisions will be unbiased and fair
* Conflicts of interest will be avoided
* Confidentiality will be maintained
* Irrelevant matters will not be considered
* Complaints will be treated seriously
* All parties will be kept informed
* Accurate records will be kept
* A complaint will be handled promptly
* Complainants will not be victimised
* Any penalties imposed will be fair and reasonable
* An appeal process will be available

**3. Scope**

This policy applies to all club members, visitors from other clubs and the public when involved with any aspect of the Club.

This policy refers primarily to a written complaint. It should however be noted that informal/verbal complaints will occur. These issues may be handled rapidly by informal resolution by the relevant club official, as noted above. The complainant can always formalise the process by putting in a written complaint.

The standard of proof for determining whether a breach of the Club rules has occurred is “on the balance of probabilities”. This means that the decision maker must be satisfied that a breach is more probable than not. The level of proof will rise in accordance with the seriousness or importance of the issue. For example, an allegation of being rude will have a lesser level of proof than an allegation of theft.

**4. Investigating a Complaint**

The key person in the process is the ‘Complaint Investigator’ (CI).

The Management Committee Chair will determine who should be the CI. The CI, independent of both the complainant and the respondent, will be responsible for investigating the specific matters of concern.

The CI will make recommendations to the Management Committee which will make the final decision.

Any Management Committee member involved in a complaint or grievance, or with a conflict of interest, will be excluded from the Complaint process. They will also be excluded from any relevant decision-making process.

**5. Formal Complaint Process**

1. The first step for the complainant is to write to the Secretary. All complaints should be made in writing and signed and dated, although emails will be accepted.

2. The CI will be appointed by the Management Committee Chair.

3. The CI will consider all of the information that is available and will meet with the complainant to discuss the details of the complaint before progressing the investigation.

4. If mediation is possible this should be pursued if agreed by all parties.

5. If the CI is not satisfied that the matter has been resolved, and mediation is not considered suitable, the Management Committee Chair will be advised.

6. The CI will present their information to the Management Committee and the Committee will then carefully consider such information. Deliberations should consider the specific matters presented in an unbiased and fair manner.

7. Notes should be kept of the discussions along with the decision of the panel.

**6. Complaint Outcomes**

The Management Committee will determine an appropriate course of action and will inform the complainant and the respondent of its decision in writing.

Advice to the complainant and respondent is to include appeal information.

Club officers, who need to know the outcome, including any penalties, should be informed on a confidential basis.

Provide feedback to the Committee so that any changes to Club policies or practices can be made, or if any information needs to be communicated to the general membership.

Communicate with any outside bodies as necessary.

Penalties that may be applied include:

1. A verbal reprimand.
2. A written warning.
3. Suspension from the club for up to six months; and
4. Termination of membership

**7. Appeals**

A member has the right to appeal the decision made by the Management Committee. Any appeal must be in writing addressed to the Secretary and made within fourteen days of the decision being communicated to the appealing party.

Any such appeal will be heard by a panel of three members who have not been involved in any aspect of the complaint or the previous decision-making process. Membership of the panel will be determined by the Management Committee Chair. Any such member appealing will have the right to appear before the panel and to representation, should she/ he so wish. The decision of the appeals panel will be final.

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