

# Warrington Rowing Club

## Complaints Procedure 2024

Policy written by Warrington Rowing Club  
Policy adopted by the Committee: May 2024  
Policy to be reviewed: April 2027

### Overview

The purpose of this document is to set out a complaints procedure for WRC, should the need arise.

#### i. Context

From time to time issues can arise between rowers, coaches, parents and other club members. Where possible it is always preferable to deal with any such issues through informal conversations between those involved, drawing on other Club officials for advice or input where this is relevant. While hopefully rare, there may be occasions where this does not solve an issue and a more formal route is required.

#### ii. Commitment

This rowing club is committed to:

- Maintaining a robust complaints procedure
- Having a positive ethos and outlook to complaints and complainants
- Will seek to address the complaint informally wherever possible
- Will provide an update about complaints to the committee (anonymised where appropriate)
- Will convene an appropriately appointed complaints panel.
- Will learn from complaints where appropriate.

However, the following should be taken into account:

- All complaints are unique and so there should sometimes be some flexibility in how a complaint is addressed. Where this is the case, for example changes to timescales, it should be discussed with, and agreed by all parties. British Rowing guidelines will be referred to wherever appropriate.
- Complaints that move beyond the informal stage are often stressful for all concerned and this should be borne in mind by all parties.
- Communication is the key and a clear and mutual understanding of what is happening, why and when is useful.

### **iii. Purpose**

This procedure aims to reassure parents, coaches and others with an interest in the club that any complaint will be dealt with in an open, fair and responsive way.

### **iv. Scope**

A complaint is defined as a clear statement of dissatisfaction with an element of the club's work.

The difference between concerns and complaints is not always clear-cut and it is advisable to avoid being too prescriptive. Any expression of dissatisfaction that needs a response, however communicated, may be regarded as a complaint. Establishing what action (or acknowledgement) a complainant wishes to see taken is a good starting point to distinguish an enquiry from a complaint.

Complaints can be made by anyone, but it is anticipated that it will usually be by members of the Club and/or parents/guardians.

### **v. Dealing with complaints**

Efforts will be made to deal with a complaint seriously, but informally at the earliest stage to reduce the numbers that develop into formal complaints.

Informal complaints may be made by telephone, email, in person or in writing. At the formal stage (**stage 2**) a written complaint needs to be provided using the form in **appendix A**.

### **Vexatious or anonymous complaints**

There may be rare occasions when, despite all the stages of the complaints procedure being followed, a complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complaint has passed through all the stages and the complainant seeks to re-open the same issue, the club reserves the right to inform him/her in writing that the matter has progressed through all club-based stages of the complaints process and is now concluded.

Anonymous complaints, by their nature, cannot be investigated under this policy, as there is no complainant with whom to discuss the issues of concern. However, if there are a series of complaints related to a common theme, it would be prudent for the club to consider such themes to determine if any action is necessary e.g. a review of policy.

### **vi. Formal procedures**

The formal procedures will need to be started when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains

dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further.

It is important that:

- from the outset, complainants state what actions they feel might resolve the problem
- the club provides the complaints procedure to the complainants, if their complaint has not been resolved informally
- the **complainant completes the complaints form (annex A)** and that the club brings this form to their attention, making support available for its completion (or other reasonable adjustments) if necessary.

All parties should bear in mind that, because of the unique nature of complaints it can sometimes be difficult to ascertain when a complaint has become formal.

To help this, both parties should try to:

- agree when the complaint has become formal
- communicate clearly
- agree what stage the complaint is at
- agree the next steps, referring to the procedure.

## **vii. Investigating complaints**

The person investigating the complaint will endeavour to:

- establish **what** has happened so far, and **who** has been involved
- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved
- meet with the complainant or speak to them by telephone
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right
- speak to those involved in the matter and those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish.
- conduct the interview with an open mind but be prepared to persist in the questioning to ascertain the facts of the matter.
- keep notes of the interview and of all discussions/meetings including telephone calls, particularly at the formal stages
- independently minute interviews and panel meetings
- identify areas of agreement between the parties

- clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred on both sides

ensure that a focus on the **original complaint** is maintained, as stated on the Complaints Form provided by the complainants.

### **viii. Resolving complaints**

**At each stage** of the procedure all parties will keep in mind ways in which a complaint may be resolved. If appropriate, it may be acknowledged that the complaint is valid in whole or in part.

It may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following as a resolution:

- an apology
- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to help prevent it from happening again
- an undertaking to review club policies in light of the complaint.

An admission that the club could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence

### **ix. Time limits and flexibility**

Complaints will be considered, and resolved, as quickly and efficiently as possible, balanced against realistic expectations. On occasion, there may be the need for some flexibility. Complainants should be advised of the time when they may expect to receive a response.

**It is important that all parties are aware of any deviations in timescales and the reasons for them. Proposed alterations to timescales should be notified in advance and reasons given.**

All time scales refer to **working days**.

## **The Stages of complaints**

There are three stages:

- Stage one: Complainant/s discuss the matter with an appropriate Official - usually the squad coach, the Club Captain or, alternatively, the person against whom the complaint is being made (only if an adult).
- Stage two: Complaint investigated by the Head Coach  
or Club Chairman as appropriate to the circumstances:
- Stage three: complaint heard by the Complaints Appeal Panel.

### **Convening a complaints panel at Stage 3.**

The committee should review the establishment, terms of reference, constitution and membership of the complaints panel annually, in accordance with guidance from British Rowing. The panel will typically consist of three unbiased and independent members of the committee, but may if appropriate include persons nominated by other British Rowing affiliated clubs in the region. The panel must have a Chair who is appointed either by the committee, or the panel. The committee should appoint a Secretary to the panel to take minutes.

Committee panels should be independent and impartial and seen to be so. No person may sit on the panel if they have had prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it. There should be clear arrangements should a member of the panel be unable to serve,

Formal complaints should not be discussed on social network sites.

If the complainant discusses any aspect of the formal complaint on social networking sites, the complaint procedure will not continue and club will not investigate the complaint further.

## **Stage One**

### **Informal stage**

It is in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage and preferably with the person about whom the complaint has been made. If parents have a concern relating to their child they should raise this with the squad coach. In many cases the matter will be resolved straight away to the parent/s satisfaction. If the squad coach cannot resolve the matter alone it may be helpful to involve the Junior Co-ordinator, Head Coach or Club Welfare Officer.

**If the complainant is unsure who to discuss the matter with, they should contact the Club Welfare Officer.**

If the informal process has been exhausted and the complainant remains dissatisfied, the complaint will move to stage 2.

The complainant will be provided with the complaints procedure and asked to complete the complaints form, annex A.

The complainant needs to be clear about what their complaint is and how they would like it to be resolved.

This form should be forwarded by the complainant to the Club Chairman who will investigate the complaint (or may nominate the Head Coach to do so if s/he has no previous involvement).

## **Stage Two**

### **Formal stage**

#### **Complaint investigated by the Club Chairman or Head Coach**

The Club Chairman will:

Acknowledge receipt of the complaints form within **five** working club days.

Provide an opportunity to meet separately with the complainant and the person complained of within **a specified time**.

Investigate the complaint.

Provide a **written (which may be by email)** response to the complainant, copied to the person about whom the complaint has been raised. The response should indicate whether the complaint has been "**upheld**", "**upheld in part**" or "**overturned**".

If the complainant remains dissatisfied on receipt of the Chairman's report s/he needs to write to the **Secretary** (contact details available from the club ) to the committee within **ten** club working days also forwarding the original complaint form. The complaint will then move to stage three.

The Secretary will acknowledge receipt within **five** working days.

**NB** A different official will undertake the investigation at stage 3 in the absence of the chair or if the chair has had previous involvement in the matter.

If no correspondence has been received from the complainant/s within ten working days following their receipt of the Chairman's report, the matter will be considered closed.

### **Stage Three**

#### **Formal stage**

#### **Complaint heard by the Committee's Complaints Panel.**

Complaints rarely reach this level.

The Secretary will convene a Committee Complaints Panel (see ix above).

The Secretary will notify all parties of the date, time and location of the meeting. At least **five** working days notice will be given to attendees.

The Secretary will inform the complainant/s of the names of the panel members. the club contact details of the chair of the panel, and the procedure to be followed.

The complaint will be heard by the panel within **twenty\*** working club days of the Secretary receiving the written request to progress to Stage 3.

*\*If there are reasons why this timescale cannot be met, the Chair of the Complaints Panel will contact the complainant to explain reasons for the delay and provide a deadline for response, which should be as near as possible to the original deadline.*

Panel hearings are often the most stressful part of any complaints procedure, for all concerned. As at all stages, it is important that conduct is appropriate and that the meeting is as informal as possible

Following the hearing, the Chair of the panel will:

Provide a **written** response to the complainant, copied to the Club Chairman and the person against whom the complaint is being made within **ten** club working days.

Provide conclusions in the written response and reasons for the conclusions.

State what actions, if any, need to be taken.

Be clear that the complaint has been “**upheld**”, “**upheld in part**” or “**not upheld**”.

Explain that the decision of the complaints panel is final and concludes the investigations.



## Annex A - Complaint form

**Please complete and return to ..... Club Chairman  
who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.**

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Your name:

Rower's name (The person for whom your acting):

Your relationship to the rower

Address:

Postcode:

Day time telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

Email:

Please give details of your complaint.

What action, if any, have you already taken to try to resolve your complaint.  
(Who did you speak to and what was the response)?

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signature:

Date:

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Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By whom:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

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