

Ballyhoura Bears Walking Club Complaints Policy and Procedures

1. Introduction

Members are entitled to be treated with respect by other members. It is crucial that any issues or concerns are addressed fairly, promptly and informally if possible. Everyone is eligible to use these procedures. This policy covers complaints related to club activities, interaction between members and other issues affecting club operations.

Action may be taken if the behaviour of members is not consistent with the standards of behaviour expected as set out in the Club's Constitution, the Club's Rules and the Club's Code of Conduct.

Just as complainants deserve respect, similarly everyone else must also be treated with respect. Therefore, complaints which the Chairperson considers to be malicious or vexatious or where false information is knowingly submitted will be dismissed.

The complaints system will operate in accordance with the principles of natural justice, equity and fairness.

Complaints relating to children, the misuse of drugs, sexual misconduct or any other matter(s) considered to be of a serious nature will be reported to the appropriate authorities as necessary.

2. Definitions

Complaint: Dissatisfaction with club member's behaviour, club activities or club matters/policies.

Complainant: The individual raising the complaint, club members, landowners, members of the public.

Respondent: The individual or group against whom the complaint is made, other members who the complainant believes have failed to act in accordance with the Club's code of conduct, rules or club constitution.

3. Procedures for dealing with Complaints – Informal Procedures

As a general principle, it is desirable that complaints are dealt with as quickly as possible. Therefore, persons who have a complaint should begin to deal with matters within 30 days of the alleged incident. It is desirable that complaints be dealt with in an informal manner as quickly and at as low a level as possible. If a person, for example, has a complaint against the actions or inactions of an individual member they should promptly approach that person, explain their concerns and seek an immediate resolution by discussion. If the person concerned does not engage with them meaningfully or in any event the matter is not resolved at this first stage, the complainant should approach Club's Chairperson and discuss their concerns. The Chairperson will normally seek to resolve the issue by discussion with both parties. If a mutually acceptable outcome is achieved as a result of this discussion, a brief written record, signed by both parties, may be prepared. A copy of this record may be kept on file by the Club. If a mutually acceptable solution can not be reached either party may invoke the formal complaint procedures.

4. Procedures for dealing with Complaints – Formal Procedures

The formal complaints procedures will normally only be invoked when the informal procedures have been exhausted. In certain exceptional cases, the Chair may direct that matters proceed directly to the formal stage.

A formal complaint must be in writing, signed and submitted to the Club Chairperson. Formal complaints will in every case be copied to the person complained of (the respondent). The formal complaint must identify the respondent and give comprehensive details of the complaint. A copy of this may be kept on file.

Formal complaints will be considered by the Club's Committee who will respond in writing. In the course of the investigation, the Committee may interview both parties to the dispute and any third party who may be in a position to assist in the investigation. At any such interview, the parties may be accompanied. On completion of the investigation, the Committee will prepare a written report. This report should determine all essential detail, actions to be taken e.g. mediation, disciplinary action, or policy change and ensure that decisions and outcomes are proportional, fair and appropriate. The Chair shall forward a copy of the report to the parties and shall determine whether both parties accept the report and its recommendations as a fair outcome of the proceedings. If either party is dissatisfied with the report of the Committee or with the remedial actions taken arising from the report, they may write to the Club Chairperson within 28 days of receipt of the Club's decision.

5. Complaint Appeals

The matter will then be referred to an independent third party nominated by the Committee who will investigate the complaint and respond in writing.

Appeals shall consist of a statement of the reasons why the report of the Committee is not accepted. The independent third party will be supplied with copies of all the documents which have been prepared in the course of the procedures to date.

The independent third party shall determine its own procedures and, if it considers it necessary, may invite oral submissions or further written submissions. Its decisions shall be copied to all parties to the dispute under consideration and may, at their discretion, be copied to the Committee if it considers its decisions have implications for the development of relevant procedures, processes or operations within the club.

There shall be no further avenue for appeal within the Club.

6. Disciplinary Actions

The disciplinary actions that maybe imposed include;

- a. a warning as to future conduct;
- b. suspension of Club membership;
- c. removal of Club membership;
- d. removal from office of a Club committee member;
- e. exclusion of a non-member from the Club, either temporarily or permanently;
- f. not approving a non-member's current and/or future membership application.

7. Record Keeping

Detailed records of all complaints, investigations and resolutions will be retained (for legal purposes information can be held for up to 6 years)

Ballyhoura Bears Walking Club Code of Conduct

This code of conduct together with the Club's Constitution and the Club's Rules set out clear expectations for all members of the Ballyhoura Bears Walking Club to cultivate a positive, safe, and inclusive environment. By joining and participating in our Club, you agree to abide by these guidelines.

Respect and Inclusivity

The Ballyhoura Bears Walking Club is an inclusive club and expects its members to treat each other with courtesy and respect, regardless of their experience level, background, or personal characteristics. We promote a positive environment, welcoming people of all ages, genders, races, religions, sexual orientations, and abilities. Sexist, racist, ageist, harassment, bullying or other discriminatory behaviour in words or actions is not tolerated. Any behaviour that marginalises, intimidates, or excludes others is unacceptable.

Safety and Responsibility

Hillwalking, climbing and mountaineering are activities that can be dangerous and may result in personal injury or death. Participants should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement.

Participation in club activities is not an automatic right and can be restricted by the Committee based on relevant skill, experience, health or other mitigating factors. Members must abide by any guidelines that may be set out by the club in accordance with Mountaineering Ireland's advice and policies.

Alcohol and Substance Use

All club members, leaders and volunteers as part of this club shall follow the law when it comes to illegal drugs, alcohol and tobacco and shall display leadership and good example. Club members, leaders or volunteers shall not present themselves at club-based activities while under the influence of alcohol or any other illegal/non-prescription drug.

Communication

Open and honest communication with club members and leaders will be maintained. Concerns, issues, or feedback will be shared constructively. All communication of an official nature within the club and between its members must be done in a recorded medium such as emails or over a club forum. Members should aim to actively participate in club activities and meetings, share knowledge and skills with others, fostering a supportive learning environment.

Handling Conflicts

Members should address conflicts or grievances respectfully and through appropriate channels, following the club's complaints procedure if necessary.

Respect for the Environment and Local Communities

Members should adhere to Leave No Trace principles to minimise environmental impact. This includes leaving no litter, keeping within existing path lines where possible, leaving your dog at home and respecting wildlife. Avoid damaging flora and fauna, and be mindful of noise levels. Respect local communities and landowners. Be courteous to locals and adhere to any rules or guidelines specific to the areas you visit.

Social Media and Public Representation

Members must be mindful of the content shared on social media, ensuring it reflects positively on the club and respects the privacy of members. Members should obtain permission before sharing photos or videos of members, especially in public forums.

Voluntary Club Leaders

Club leaders are recruited from suitably skilled members of the club. They must lead by example, and always put the welfare of everyone involved first and foremost. Prospective club leaders are encouraged to let the Committee know their interest in taking on a leadership role and the Club will try to facilitate necessary training for that role.

The Ballyhoura Bears Walking Club always needs new people willing and able to help out and will support and encourage anyone interested to progress in the necessary skills.

All leaders should be fairly treated and respected for the tasks they are doing, and if you are being led you should behave according to the leaders' instructions to ensure your own safety and the safety of others.

Committee Members

Committee members are democratically elected members who accept their role within the committee structure to do the best possible job. Committee members must be willing to operate in an impartial and transparent manner, always putting the best interest of the club first. Committee members must be adequately accessible to members of the club and must attend the relevant club activities to be able to perform their duties properly.

Note:

Breaches of this code of conduct may result in disciplinary action, including warnings, suspension, or termination of club membership. Members are encouraged to report any violations of the code of conduct to the Club Committee.