Guidance for dealing with complaints

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Guidance for dealing with complaints

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to give guidance to all volunteers who deal with complaints, issues, grievances or problems within branches or other areas of CAMRA.

It is split into two main sections, section one for those who wish to raise an issue and section two for those who are asked to help mediate and resolve issues.
It is it intended to be a guide to help with getting to a point of resolution with any issues that might otherwise get out of hand and escalate.

It serves as a guide to those seeking to provide resolution and advises what responsibility and authority they have to achieve this.

This document is intended as a guide in how to resolve disputes. However good judgement cannot be replaced by any document and it is in CAMRA's best interest to resolve all disputes and issues rather than punishing individuals. We must respect each other's views, keep disputes out of the public eye, maintain a professional stance and abide by CAMRA's Code of Conduct.

It is not the formal Complaints and Disciplinary procedure which is set out in an alternative document. If you believe an issue is disciplinary in nature, please first refer to that documentation and, if necessary, contact the chair of the disciplinary committee for help.

The following are out of scope and covered elsewhere:

- Any criminal activity – please refer immediately to CAMRA's Complaints and Disciplinary procedure
- Any Health and Safety Breach – please refer to your event organiser who will use the Festival Hub area of the CAMRA website for further procedures
- Data Protection – please refer to the Privacy Policy on CAMRA's website
- Concerns with the governance of the organisation – please contact the company secretary.

SECTION ONE – Raising an issue

If you have a complaint, issues, grievance or problem that you believe needs raising please do not be afraid to come forward. It is important that any issues are dealt with as early as possible so that they do not escalate and become larger issues.
There are two steps to resolution as set out below, informal and formal.

STEP ONE Informal discussions

Issues should initially be discussed informally between the parties who are in dispute, you may choose to do this with another person or persons present although that is not strictly necessary. Discussions should take place when both parties are sober although if may be more appropriate to deal with issues immediately even if

either or both parties have been drinking. A judgement call will need to be taken on this depending on the circumstances but a sober follow up is always recommended.

CAMRA members are expected to behave in a professional fashion and are reminded that issues must not be aired in public, we must respect other people's points of view and must abide by CAMRA's Code of Conduct.

If informal discussions do not lead to resolution of the problem then any person(s) involved are welcome to make a formal complaint.

STEP TWO - Formal discussions

If informal discussions have not led to resolution of the situation then it may be necessary or required by one of the parties to escalate the situation or ask for a mediator or investigator to get involved. This is usually to aid a path to resolution rather than to escalate the situation further.

In the first instance this should be the volunteer who is responsible for the area of concern, for example if an incident took place at a beer festival it would be the beer festival organiser. If the issue involves the person responsible for the area of concern then the next or alternative volunteer can be contacted, for example, the deputy festival organiser or the Regional Director. For a full list of people to contact please refer to the Complaints and Disciplinary Procedure.

At this stage it is recommended that key points are written down regarding discussions and the situation that is being dealt with just to keep a record and in case anything further happens longer term and to ensure that any agreements made are clearly documented to ensure a mutual understanding.

SECTION TWO - Dealing with an issue raised by someone else

If you are in a situation where you have had an issue, concern, complaint or any other problem raised to you then it must be dealt with professionally by yourself on behalf of CAMRA according to the Code of Conduct.

There are several things that are important in dealing with these situations which are listed below to help you with dealing with the issue.

It is not in CAMRA's nor the individual's interest to chastise members, the preferred conclusion is compromise and mutual understanding.

Guidance

Are you the right person for the job?

If you are responsible for helping to deal with a problem it is important to note that if you are too personally involved then you might not be the right person to help. If this is the case please ask for help from someone else who will be perceived to be less subjective.

This is important if you are close to one person in a conflict of interest or were perceived by others as being part of a situation. An objective viewpoint must be taken.

Key rules

1. All people involved must abide by CAMRA's Code of Conduct
2. Keep the conflict away from the public eye.
3. It is preferred that mediation takes place when all parties concerned have not been drinking

Listen and understand

4. Listen to all sides of the discussion
5. Focus on what is being said
6. Get the facts
7. Listen to the perceived understanding
8. Acknowledge the problem as it is seen by the person(s) involved
9. Avoid challenging the person(s) concerned
10. Give everyone involved an equal chance to talk, you may choose to do this separately or together
11. Find out what they are looking for from the situation
12. Thank them, acknowledge what they are saying and reassure them that you are taking it seriously. What to you as an investigator might not seem important may well be very important to the complainant.
13. Try to establish if there are extenuating circumstances involved.

Be professional

14. Take the issue seriously
15. Don't ignore the issue
16. Be objective and impartial
17. Do not judge, blame or point fingers
18. Try not to take anything personally

19. Put your own emotions and opinions aside.
20. Remain calm
21. If you need help or advice from others please ask for it.

After you have established the initial facts

22. Clarify your understanding of the situation
23. Play back what has been said/written in such a way that it is not blaming, e.g. I'd like to know more about this part of the story' instead of 'you haven't told me enough about this part of the story'.
24. Think about being in their shoes and try to see their viewpoint
25. Own the issue
26. Manage the expectations of people concerned setting out your next steps and to how you could help
27. Agree, with everyone concerned, on the way forward
28. Offer support for immediate action and long term action
29. If any actions need to be taken ensure it is clear who is to do them and by when.
30. Advise all people involved that they too are expected to behave and correspond in a professional fashion.

Investigations

31. Ensure that all people involved have abided by CAMRA's Code of Conduct.
32. Any situation where people have not abided by CAMRA's Code of Conduct should be escalated to the Disciplinary Committee.
33. Do not gossip about the issue
34. Prioritise resolving any conflict over being right
35. Document things … and confirm everything in writing
36. Follow up on any expected actions
37. Find out what the problem is - real or perceived or an underlying problem?
38. Attack the problem not the person
39. Focus on the immediate issue and not past issues
40. Follow up on the issue
41. Be supportive to all persons involved
42. Adhere to GDPR and do not share personal information with anyone else.
43. Statements from other parties may need to be taken, please refer to Appendix One for what is needed in a statement.
44. A full investigation may be required, please refer to Appendix two for what is needed to be documented in a full investigation.
45. If you believe the situation needs to be referred to the disciplinary committee please share all information with them. If you are in doubt or think a situation may latterly be referred to disciplinary then please share the information just in case.

Responsibilities and Authority

Only the disciplinary committee has the powers to suspend or expel members from the Campaign.

No other volunteer has the powers to exclude members from any CAMRA activity unless there are immediate health and safety issues, for example at CAMRA beer festivals where the organiser or designated Health & Safety Officer has the power to request volunteers leave the site in the event of a health and safety breach, or the licensee of a festival who has witnessed licensing breaches by a volunteer serving under age or overly inebriated customers.

Where possible incidents should be avoided by mediation in order to get resolution and/or apology, however, persons in charge do have the authority to request individuals leave CAMRA activities or events if they deem that, them remaining, could lead to further disruption, reputational damage or any breach of the Code of Conduct or the Volunteers Charter. The individual must be informed at the time why they are being asked to leave, preferably with witnesses.

If the incident in question is not a one off and is repeated behavior then the person responsible will need to complete a fully documented investigation in order to refer it to the disciplinary committee. A one off situation may only require further mediation after the event.

Inappropriate member behavior on social or traditional media or by email is also covered by both the Volunteer Charter and Code of Conduct and therefore is subject to the same rules of expected behavior. If, as a person in charge, you are made aware of issues of this nature you should obtain dated copies of anything deemed inappropriate and then ask for the removal of the same and if necessary, an apology. A follow up may be required if the removal and/or apology is not forthcoming, a fully documented investigation must take place before escalating to the disciplinary committee. All correspondence from any person involved relating to the incident(s) must be part of the documented evidence.

It is CAMRA's policy for all unelected posts (all roles bar the National Executive and elected members of Conference Procedures Committee) within the organisation to be reviewed on an annual basis. With this in mind it is not inappropriate to ask a member to temporarily step back from a post during any investigation, however no further action should be taken against any individual.

Outcome and next steps

There are a number of possible outcomes to investigations.

(1) further investigations from the investigator (or another independent person should they so wish)
(2) no further action
(3) escalation

Once an issue is resolved

Once an issue has been resolved it is important to ensure that any causes to the issue are resolved too. If it is a CAMRA matter that needs to be taken to another person within the Campaign please ensure that this is done and that all people who need to know are kept informed.

If lessons have been learned from any incidents please ensure that the necessary people know so that no further similar situation arises.

Both these should be done whilst respecting the privacy of any persons involved in the issue, so keeping the issue anonymous wherever possible.

If a situation is not resolved

If a situation if not resolved the next step for the person responsible is to raise it to the next level of authority within the campaign. The details of this can be found in the Complaints and Disciplinary Procedure.

Please ensure that any documentation related to the issue is forwarded to the necessary person once they have agreed to help

APPENDIX ONE Template for taking a statement

Statements may be required from people, either directly or indirectly involved in a situation, who could be CAMRA volunteers or members of the public. A statement may be very simple but should include the following information:

1. The name of the person writing the statement
2. their membership number (if applicable)
3. their role in the campaign (if applicable)
4. any conflict of interest to persons concerned (e.g. spouse)
5. In their own words a brief description of events that took place
6. Time and date that events took place
7. Any other persons present at the event.

APPENDIX TWO Template for a full investigation

If a more thorough investigation is required then there may be a requirement to write up the full investigation. In these situations an independent person, not related to the branch or event or who has any relationship with any persons involved, should lead the investigations. An investigatory document must be written and should contain but is not limited to the following:

1. Name, membership number and role of person carrying out the investigation
2. A statement of who the complaint is from and about (if necessary)
3. A list of people involved in the situation
4. Witness statements from all people who have provided them (including noting any that are outstanding if they have not yet been submitted)
5. If there are a number of complaints discovered in one investigation these should be broken down into different sections.
6. Findings from investigations clearly stated

It is important that the investigations are based on facts and statements rather than emotion and informal friendships and opinions.