Redgrave Community Society Limited



"working for the community"

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COMPLAINTS AND DISPUTE RESOLUTION POLICY

1 Purpose and authority

The Society will deal with complaints fairly, promptly and impartially, seek practical resolution of disputes and learn from concerns raised. This policy provides the internal dispute resolution procedure required by Rule 9.12 and the internal stages supporting Rule 9.13.

This policy operates under the Society's registered Rules, including the complete amendment registered by the FCA on 27 May 2025. If any provision conflicts with those Rules, the Rules prevail. Nothing in this policy changes membership rights, voting requirements, officer appointments or matters reserved to members.

2 Scope and the Cross Keys

Anyone may complain about the Society's actions, omissions, governance, communications, property responsibilities or activities. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction requiring a response. A dispute involves disagreement between parties about their rights, responsibilities or conduct. The special route in section 8 applies to the member disputes described in Rule 9.13.

The Society owns the Cross Keys, and the tenant operates the pub. Complaints about ordinary pub service, food, bookings or the tenant's staff should normally be directed to the tenant. The Society will explain the appropriate route, seek consent before forwarding personal information where appropriate, and retain responsibility for any part concerning its own conduct, landlord duties or activities. This policy does not alter the lease or determine a contractual dispute with the tenant.

Employment grievances, safeguarding concerns, suspected crime, fraud, safety emergencies and data protection complaints require the relevant specialist procedure or external route. The Secretary will coordinate any overlapping Society complaint without delaying protective action, statutory referral or contractual deadlines.

3 Responsibilities and impartiality

The Management Committee is accountable for this policy and appoints uninvolved people to investigate and review complaints. The Secretary receives and logs concerns, coordinates correspondence and records decisions. The Chairperson oversees progress unless involved in the complaint.

A complaint concerning the Secretary should go to the Chairperson; one concerning the Chairperson should go to the Secretary or another uninvolved Committee member. If both are involved, or the complaint concerns the Committee collectively, send it to an uninvolved Committee member or to the Society's registered office marked for independent handling. The Committee will arrange external assistance where it cannot provide a sufficiently independent investigation or review.

Anyone with a relevant interest must declare it and must not investigate, review or decide their own case. Rule 5.17 prohibits voting where a committee member, spouse, partner or immediate relative has a personal, financial or other material interest. Committee decisions must meet the Rules on quorum and voting; delegated action must be expressly authorised under Rule 2.7. An external investigator or reviewer who is not a member of the Society acts in an advisory capacity. Any decision exercising powers reserved to the Management Committee must be taken in accordance with the Rules.

4 Raising and recording a concern

Contact the Secretary at secretary@redgravecommunitysociety.com, write to the Society at its registered office, or speak to a Society representative. Concerns may be raised verbally, by telephone or in writing. The recipient must pass them promptly to the appropriate uninvolved person. Assistance, alternative formats and a supporter or representative will be permitted where reasonably needed.

Explain what happened, relevant dates, who was involved, the effect on you, any steps already taken and the outcome sought. Provide supporting material where available. Missing records do not prevent consideration. Raise concerns as soon as reasonably possible; there is no automatic 30-day cut-off. Delay will be considered fairly, including continuing problems, delayed discovery and barriers to reporting. Where action under Rule 3.8 is sought, the complaint must be submitted in writing by a member to the Secretary, or to the Chairperson where the Secretary is the complainant.

Anonymous information will be assessed on its substance and available evidence, although investigation and feedback may be limited. The recipient will record the concern, contact details, where supplied, relevant responsibilities and any urgent action. People must not suffer retaliation for raising or supporting a concern in good faith.

5 Informal resolution and acknowledgement

Where appropriate, an uninvolved person will discuss the concern and seek an agreed practical solution. Informal resolution is optional and must not be required where the matter is serious, sensitive or unsuitable for direct discussion. Record any agreement and check that actions have been completed.

Acknowledge receipt within five working days, identifying who will handle the matter, the procedure and expected response date. If the concern belongs elsewhere, explain why and how to raise it there. If it remains unresolved or a formal response is requested, proceed to section 6. Working days exclude weekends and public holidays in England.

6 Formal investigation and response

The investigator will confirm the issues, relevant evidence and outcome sought. They will give affected parties a fair opportunity to respond, interview people where necessary and keep factual records distinguishing evidence from opinion. Information will be shared only to the extent needed for a fair process and lawful handling. A supporter may assist at meetings; any limits must be explained and proportionate.

Aim to issue a reasoned written response within 20 working days of receiving the formal complaint. If more time is needed, explain the reason before the target expires, give a revised date and provide progress updates. These targets do not extend any statutory, contractual or Rules-based deadline.

The response will explain what was investigated, the findings, whether the complaint is upheld wholly or partly, reasons, corrective action and the review route. Remedies may include an explanation, apology, correction, agreed action or a change in practice. Spending, settlements and other commitments require proper authority. Disciplinary action must follow section 9 and the applicable Rules or procedures.

7 Internal review

A complainant dissatisfied with the response may request review, explaining the disputed finding, procedural concern or new evidence. Requests should normally be made within 15 working days of the response; reasonable late requests will be considered. The Secretary will arrange review by uninvolved Committee members or an appropriately independent external person.

Acknowledge the review request within five working days and aim to provide a written outcome within 20 working days. Explain extensions and revised dates. The reviewer will consider fairness, evidence, reasons and action. An external reviewer who is not a Society member will recommend an outcome. The appropriately authorised, uninvolved Society decision-maker may uphold or vary the decision, or return it for further investigation, in accordance with the Rules. Record and communicate the outcome.

The review concludes the ordinary internal complaints process. It does not remove rights under the registered Rules or applicable law, create an unrestricted right to demand a Special Members' Meeting, or prevent the external dispute route in section 8. Members wishing to seek a meeting or resolution must follow the relevant Rules.

8 Member disputes mediation and arbitration

Under Rule 9.13, a dispute between the Society or an officer and a member, or a person who ceased to be a member not more than six months previously, concerning interpretation of or arising from the Rules must be dealt with through this policy. Identify these cases at the outset, keep a record of the issues and internal steps, and preserve the parties' Rules-based rights.

The parties should explore discussion and, where suitable and agreed, mediation by an independent person. Mediation helps the parties reach their own agreement; the mediator does not impose an award. Record any agreement, its authority and implementation. A party need not accept a proposed settlement.

Only after all other avenues have been explored, except as otherwise provided in the Rules, an unresolved dispute within Rule 9.13 may, in default of agreement between the parties, be referred on application by either party to a person appointed by the Chief Executive of the Plunkett Foundation, now known as Plunkett UK. The appointee acts as sole arbitrator in accordance with the Arbitration Act 1996, as applicable and amended. Rule 9.13 provides that the decision, including any decision about arbitration costs, is final, subject to applicable law.

Before referral, clarify the issues, applicable procedure and potential costs with Plunkett and obtain advice where needed. Do not describe mediation as binding arbitration or promise that external assistance is free. No internal timetable or extension overrides statutory rights, including the court route under section 138 of the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014 where its conditions are met. The FCA is not the Society's ordinary complaints appeal body.

9 Membership rights and protective action

Handling a complaint does not itself suspend membership rights, expel a member or remove a Committee member from office. Any membership suspension or expulsion must follow Rule 3.8, including its requirement for a written complaint by a member and consideration by the Management Committee. An expulsion proposal requires the prescribed notice of at least 14 days, opportunity to respond and a resolution approved by not less than two-thirds of Committee members present and voting. Suspension under Rule 3.8 is limited to the specified rights and a period not exceeding twelve months. Removal from Committee office must follow the applicable provisions of Rule 5.

Precautionary restriction from an activity may be needed for safety or safeguarding; it is not a finding of guilt and must be proportionate and reviewed. Follow the Safeguarding Policy and obtain statutory advice promptly. Do not wait for an internal complaint to be upheld before making a necessary referral.

10 Confidentiality records and conduct

Keep a restricted complaints log and case file recording dates, issues, handlers, interests, evidence, outcomes, actions and review. Protect personal information, share it only where necessary and lawful, and explain that absolute confidentiality cannot be promised. Retention must reflect the case, applicable law, safeguarding needs and any funder or contractual requirements; review it periodically.

Committee minutes must record decisions appropriately while protecting sensitive case details. Members' inspection rights under Rule 9.11 remain subject to confidentiality duties. Publish only anonymised learning where individuals cannot reasonably be identified.

Disagreement, persistence or an unsubstantiated complaint does not by itself establish malice. Where conduct is threatening or seriously disrupts handling, an uninvolved authorised person may impose proportionate contact arrangements, explain reasons and offer review. Necessary action on credible concerns must continue. Any allegation of knowingly false or malicious reporting requires evidence and fair process.

11 Monitoring and review

The Committee will review anonymised trends, overdue cases and completion of corrective actions, and assess the policy annually and after a serious incident or change in the Rules. The Secretary will make the policy available to members and the public and brief people who receive complaints. Read it with the Society's Equal Opportunities, Safeguarding, Health and Safety, Financial Management and Procurement policies.