

Godalming Theatre Group Complaints Procedure

1. INTRODUCTION

Members, volunteers or customers who feel that they are being subjected to any form of harassment, bullying or victimisation or have any other complaint about the actions of the GTG or its members or volunteers should use the following procedures. These procedures aim to promote fairness and consistency in dealing with complaints.

All complaints will be treated seriously and taken to be made in good faith unless there is clear and objective evidence that they were made maliciously or vexatiously. The fact that a complaint is not found to be justified or to be substantiated does not mean that it has been made in bad faith.

The GTG will seek to ensure that complaints and those assisting in investigations arising from complaints are protected against victimisation for making the complaint or assisting in the investigation. Anyone found to have victimised someone will be subject to action under the GTG's Dignity and Respect Policy.

2. RESOLVING COMPLAINTS

There are two stages to these procedures – an informal stage and a formal stage. A complainant need not follow both stages and use of the informal stage does not automatically lead to, or preclude, the use of the more formal stage. The procedures set out are the same for members, volunteers and customers.

Stage 1: Informal Action: any individual who believes that they are being bullied or harassed, should take the following informal steps:

- Approach the person about their behaviour directly or indirectly

Bring the person's behaviour to his/her attention (either orally or in writing) and let them know that their behaviour is unwelcome or upsetting and should be stopped immediately. He/she may also be notified that if their behaviour continues, a formal complaint may be made. Having an informal discussion with a person about their behaviour may help them to understand the effect that it is having on someone else and the discussion may help that person to change his or her behaviour. If an individual feels unable to take such action him/herself, he/she can ask someone else to approach the person on their behalf.

- Document incidents

Keep a record of any incidents that occur and note the dates, times, circumstances and names of any witnesses. Where appropriate, this record should include a note of the date on which the alleged harasser/bully is informed of his/her behaviour and what was said and done. This will be useful evidence if the unacceptable behaviour continues and the individual who feels harassed/bullied wishes to make a formal complaint. Members can contact the Chair or any member of the committee who can help them deal with the issues, arrive at a realistic assessment of them and talk through the options available in confidence.

If after discussing the resolution options an individual decides to deal with the situation through a facilitation meeting and the other party agrees to such a meeting, an appropriate facilitator will be identified, who will meet with the parties and attempt to find an outcome acceptable to both parties. The facilitator will be sufficiently independent of both parties.

If the matter remains unresolved, through the informal process or if the problem continues following an agreed resolution, the complainant may consider other options such as discussing the matter again with the Chair of the Group. He/she may also consider making a formal complaint.

Stage 2: Formal Action

This stage is the formal part of the GTG's Grievance Procedure and a complainant can request that the investigation is undertaken by a senior independent member of the GTG committee. The investigator will gather evidence and interview relevant parties, providing a written report to the Chair making one of the following recommendations:

- Take no further action. This is appropriate in cases where the allegations have not been substantiated or where there is insufficient evidence.
- Proceed to a disciplinary hearing. This is appropriate in cases where it has been found that there is a case to answer or where conflicting accounts need to be considered further.

The GTG will try to ensure that, wherever possible, the complainant and the person accused of prohibited conduct are not required to interact with each other on GTG activities while the complaint is under investigation.

Where an allegation relates to behaviour that may amount to gross misconduct, the person accused of prohibited conduct may be temporarily suspended from GTG activities during the investigation.

In cases where a disciplinary hearing is to be held, suspension may continue until the hearing has been concluded.

If the complaint is upheld the hearing panel will decide on the most appropriate sanction. This may include being removed from the GTG list of members and prohibited from continued involvement with the GTG. If the person found to have committed prohibited conduct continues to be involved with the GTG, the GTG will try to avoid wherever possible, and if requested by the complainant, the parties having to work alongside each other or having to interact with each other.

If the complaint is not upheld, the Chair will support both parties to continue or resume activities and to help repair relationships. If it is found that a complaint against an individual has been malicious, appropriate action may be taken against the complainant.

Efforts will be made where possible to avoid the complainant and the person accused of prohibited conduct having to work alongside each other or interact with each other, if either of them does not wish to do so.

3. GUIDANCE FOR THOSE ACCUSED OF PROHIBITED CONDUCT

Individuals who are approached informally about their behaviour should be sensitive towards the person approaching them, and should be mindful that what may have been a joke for them or considered by them as normal behaviour, may be offensive for another. It is possible to offend someone without intending to. Different people find different things acceptable and everyone has the right to decide what behaviour is acceptable to them and to have their feelings respected by others. The concerned party may be content with an explanation, an apology and/or an assurance that the behaviour will not be repeated in future. This may be sufficient to end the matter.

Individuals accused of bullying or harassment may seek advice/support from one of the GTG's Committee members.

4. CONFIDENTIALITY & RECORD KEEPING

All reports of prohibited conduct as well as associated records will be treated with confidentiality. In cases where there is unacceptable risk to the personal health and or safety of the complainant or to others, the GTG may, however, need to make appropriate and lawful disclosure. Where a complaint has been made and not substantiated following an investigation, no record will be kept in the GTG records of the person accused of prohibited conduct.