



## **Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust Problem-Solving Policy**

### **Introduction**

Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (GWT) was created by volunteers and could not exist today without our dedicated volunteer team. We value the time and expertise you put into your volunteering. We want to make sure that your volunteer journey is an enjoyable one, you feel fully supported and part of a team. Sometimes issues may arise between volunteers or between staff and volunteers that need addressing. Where possible we would like to resolve any issues or concerns raised informally between the parties concerned, however on occasion a more formal problem-solving procedure maybe required. This document outlines GWT's problem-solving procedure and what staff and volunteers should do if they have a grievance with another person at GWT.

This procedure is important as it ensures fairness between all volunteers. We want to treat all our volunteers equally and with respect. This document will help us to do this, by creating a fair process where concerns can be raised confidentially, dealt with in a professional manner and resolved.

### **Who to report a problem to?**

If a volunteer has a concern about another volunteer's conduct, then they should first inform their Volunteer Supervisor. If they have a concern about a member of staff, then the volunteer should still inform their Volunteer Supervisor, unless the issue involves the supervisor, or they do not feel comfortable talking to them about it. In this case they should inform the Volunteer Coordinator of their concerns.

If a member of staff has a concern about a volunteer's conduct or another member of staff's conduct to a volunteer, then they should inform the Volunteer Coordinator within two working days. The parties involved will be made aware of either the informal or formal problem-solving procedure starting within one working week of the concern being raised.

### **Different levels of problems severity**

#### **Minor:**

Often resolved through informal discussion between volunteers or staff and volunteers. Normally, the problem has minimal impact to the Trust and others and is a mistake or a misunderstanding. One example could be a volunteer using tools inappropriately, this could lead to harm if left unaddressed but can be easily resolved

through a quick chat about proper tool use. Alternatively, an informal meeting about the need for further training.

**Moderate:**

Will need to be formally addressed through the formal problem-solving procedure. This is often resolved at the formal meeting stage. These problems are moderate as they may cause upset to other volunteers, staff or the public. For example, inappropriate words or comments which if left unaddressed could lead to other volunteers feeling uncomfortable with volunteering in the group, staff feel they cannot safely manage the volunteer or harm the Trust's public image.

**Extremely serious:**

These must be dealt through the formal problem-solving procedure and without quick resolution are likely to result in dismissal. The severity could be intentional physical harm or damage to staff, volunteers, land, property, income or reputation. Where extremely serious concerns are raised it may be required that an external investigation takes place by a statutory body such as the police.

'Moderate' and 'extremely serious' categories will require an accident/incident report form to be submitted as outlined in 'CoP02 Accident reporting & RIDDOR'

**Informal problem-solving procedure**

**When the problem is between volunteers:**

If the volunteer feels able to do so, they should first discuss the matter with the volunteer in question and ideally resolve this in an informal manner. If the volunteer does not feel able to do this or they believe the problem needs to be raised higher, they should raise their concerns with their Volunteer Supervisor or Volunteer Coordinator. Who can either talk to the volunteer in question via an informal chat or meeting. They may also at this stage decide to start the formal problem-solving procedure.

**When the problem is between staff and volunteers:**

If a member of staff has a concern about a volunteer's conduct which they feel cannot be resolved directly, then they should inform the Volunteer Coordinator. The Volunteer Coordinator will work with the staff member and the volunteer to resolve the problem. This should be done in person with all parties present unless the volunteer feels uncomfortable, or vice versa, talking directly with the member of staff who raised the issue. In this case the Volunteer Coordinator can act as a mediator. Any information gathered during the procedure will be kept confidential.

**When a problem is raised by a volunteer about another member of staff:**

If a volunteer raises a concern about a member of staff's behaviour or conduct and this cannot be resolved through informal problem-solving procedures, then the matter will be escalated to GWT's grievance policy for staff as long as there is due cause.

Where possible the Trust will resolve the problem through informal discussion between both parties in question. An informal meeting will take place where

concerns can be addressed, and solutions found in a friendly and supportive manner. However, if the issue continues after an informal meeting or is considered severe the Trust reserves the right to start the formal problem-solving procedure.

### **Steps for an informal meeting**

1. The meeting should take place as soon as possible and be somewhere private.
2. Any notes taken down during the meeting must be shared with the volunteer.
3. Staff need to clearly explain the concerns that have been raised against the volunteer by staff and or other volunteers.
4. The volunteer should be given sufficient time to give their perspective on the issue.
5. Possible solutions should then be discussed at the meeting. Both parties need to leave the meeting with a clear understanding of any actions agreed to resolve the problem.
6. Any actions to resolve the problem set at the meeting should be reviewed after one month. Both parties must be contacted to ensure they are still happy and the steps taken to resolve the problem are appropriate and working.

Other things to consider, the meeting may highlight that further training or support is required for the volunteer to carry out their role successfully. For some problems more than one informal meeting maybe required.

### **Formal problem-solving procedure**

Please note in some cases, if the incident is thought of as extreme and unacceptable behaviour, GWT reserves the right to head straight to step three of our formal problem-solving procedure.

### **Step one formal meeting**

If through informal discussions the problem could not be resolved or after a period of time no improvement has been made by the volunteer to resolve the inappropriate behaviour, then the first step of our formal problem-solving procedure will take place. The formal problem-solving procedure will also immediately start if the issues raised are considered moderate or extremely serious.

### **Formal meeting process**

1. The volunteer will be notified in writing that a formal meeting needs to take place due to concerns raised about their conduct. This document must also contain information on what these concerns are.

2. A copy of the problem-solving procedure must also be supplied before the meeting takes place to the volunteer.
3. The volunteer must be given a minimum of 10 days notice prior to the meeting and given the chance to reorganise the meeting if the date does not work for them.
4. Ensure at the meeting that the volunteer understands why the meeting is taking place and allow them to ask any questions they may have about the concerns raised.
5. Let the volunteer know that notes will be taken for our records, but these will be kept confidential and shared with the volunteer within two working weeks of the meeting.
6. The meeting will set up actions to resolve the problem. These actions must be written down and shared with the volunteer, within two working weeks of the meeting.
7. Ensure these actions are agreed and fully understood by the volunteer.
8. A time frame must also be set up and agreed by both GWT and the volunteer for the improvements to be achieved by. A review of the outcomes of these actions must be completed at the end of the timeframe.
9. The volunteer must on leaving the meeting understand what the next step will be if the agreed actions are not met.

### **Step two formal letter**

If the issue is not resolved satisfactorily within the agreed timeframe, the Volunteer Coordinator after consulting with the Volunteer Supervisor will send a written warning.

This written warning will explain:

- What was discussed at the formal meeting and what actions were agreed to be carried out to resolve the issue and the agreed time frame.
- Why a written warning is being given.
- Re-confirm in writing the actions expected to be made to resolve the problem and the time frame. Make clear what will happen next if the volunteer does not agree to take these actions, they may be dismissed as a GWT volunteer.
- Give the option of another meeting to help clarify the agreed actions for improvement. This meeting should take place within two working weeks of the written warning.

### **Step three final written warning**

If the volunteers has still failed to address the unacceptable behaviour, then a final written warning will be sent by the Head of Community Programmes, re-confirming the information in the first written warning. With the addition if the agreed actions are not followed within the next 30 days then they will be dismissed as volunteer.

### **Step four dismissal from volunteer role**

If after the agreed period of time for improvement set out in the written warning, the volunteers conduct has not improved then the volunteer will not be allowed to continue to volunteer with GWT. A dismissal may also occur if the volunteers conduct is extremely serious as outlined on page one.

A meeting needs to be organised to explain to the volunteer why the decision has been made to dismiss them, along with the reasons in writing. At the meeting the volunteer should also be notified of the appeal procedure.

Staff at the dismissal meeting will be the Volunteer Coordinator and a member of the Senior Management Team.

## **Appeals**

If a volunteer feels they have been unduly dismissed, then they can in writing ask for an appeal within two working weeks of the dismissal to the Head of Community Programmes. A date for an appeal meeting will be set within 30 days of receiving the appeal letter and the situation examined fully by the Head of Community Programmes. The dismissed volunteer may bring someone to accompany them of their choice. The volunteer will be given the opportunity to speak their case for wrong dismissal. Within two working weeks the volunteer will be informed of the Trust's decision.

If the dismissal still stands then any volunteer groups, the volunteer is a member of will be informed that the volunteer in question will not return. The group will not be told why.