**Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)**

**Complaints and Disputes**

**CAD-014-01**

**Purpose**

The purpose of this Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is to outline the process for handling complaints received by Out There Exeter (the "charity") and disputes that may arise between the charity and its stakeholders. This SOP aims to ensure that all complaints and disputes are handled promptly, fairly, and effectively in accordance with the charity's values and principles.

**Scope**

This SOP applies to all complaints received by Out There Exeter and to disputes that may arise between the charity and its stakeholders. This SOP applies to all complaints and disputes regardless of content and parties involved, which include the following:

* Beneficiaries
* Donors
* Partners
* Volunteers
* Employees
* Trustees
* Suppliers
* Member of the public

**Definitions**

* **Complaint:** An expression of dissatisfaction or disapproval regarding the charity's products, services, or actions.
* **Dispute:** A disagreement or conflict between the charity and a stakeholder.
* **Complaints and Disputes Form:** A form to record complaints and disputes.
* **Complaints and Disputes Officer:** The designated individual responsible for investigating and resolving complaints and disputes.

**Procedures**

1. **Reporting**
   1. Complaints and disputes can be submitted by emailing [info@out-there-exeter.com](mailto:info@out-there-exeter.com).
   2. Any stakeholder or member of staff who becomes aware of a dispute should report it to the charity, the Chair of Trustees, and if applicable - a designated Complaints and Disputes Officer, as soon as possible.
2. **Receipt and Acknowledgment**
   1. Upon receiving a complaint or a dispute, a Complaints and Disputes Officer should be assigned to the Complaint or Dispute to start the process as outlined within this SOP.
   2. The charity should promptly acknowledge the receipt of the complaint or dispute. This acknowledgment should be made within two working days and should include the following information:

* Confirmation of receipt of the complaint or dispute
* A complaint and dispute (CAD) reference number
* Contact information for the Complaints and Disputes Officer

1. **Documentation**

All complaints and disputes should be captured on the CAD tracker and documented using the charity's standardised Complaints and Disputes Form, which should include:

* Contact information for all parties involved
* Complaint or dispute details and supporting evidence
* Date and time of complaint or dispute receipt
* CAD reference number
* Assigned Complaints and Disputes Officer

1. **Internal Complaints and Disputes**
   1. The Chair of Trustees or the designated Complaints and Disputes Officer should make ‘initial contact’ with all parties involved in the complaint or dispute to discuss the matter. The aim of this initial contact is to gather information about the complaint or dispute and to assess the likelihood of it being resolved informally.
   2. For internal complaints and disputes, an appropriate Complaints and Disputes Officer should conduct an initial assessment to determine whether the complaint or dispute can be resolved informally.
   3. If informal resolution is feasible, the Complaints and Disputes Officer should facilitate a discussion between the parties involved to reach an amicable resolution. This may involve mediation, conciliation, or other forms of alternative dispute resolution (ADR).
   4. If informal resolution is unsuccessful, the Complaints and Disputes Officer should proceed with a formal investigation. This may involve interviewing witnesses, reviewing relevant documentation, and gathering additional evidence. The Complaints and Disputes Officer will prepare a report summarising the findings and recommend a resolution.
   5. The Chair of Trustees will review the investigator's report and decide on how to resolve the complaint. This decision may include:

* Upholding or rejecting a complaint
* Taking disciplinary action against a member of staff
* Terminating the contract with a supplier
* Forcing a members vote on a trustee status
* Terminating membership
* Providing an apology
* Offering compensation
* Taking other appropriate action

The Chair of Trustees will communicate the resolution to all parties involved in the complaint or dispute.

1. **External Complaints**
   1. For external complaints and disputes, the Complaints and Disputes Officer should follow a similar process to that of internal complaints. However, there may be additional considerations, such as the need to maintain confidentiality and protect the privacy of parties involved.
   2. The Complaints and Disputes Officer will communicate the resolution to all parties involved and keep the relevant stakeholders, such as the Chair of Trustees and any management team, informed of the outcome.

1. **Communication and Follow-up**
   1. Throughout the complaints and disputes process, the charity should maintain open and transparent communication with all parties involved. The Complaints and Disputes Officer should keep all parties involved informed of the progress and resolution process.
   2. The charity should also follow up with all parties involved after the resolution has been communicated to ensure their satisfaction with the outcome.
   3. All parties involved should be given the opportunity to provide any feedback on the process, how the investigation was handled, and on the outcome.
2. **Recording and Reporting**
   1. The charity should maintain a centralised record of all complaints and disputes on a CAD tracker, keep stored the complaints and disputes forms, investigation reports, and resolution outcomes.
   2. This information should be used to identify trends, improve processes, and enhance satisfaction with the charity's services.
   3. Regular reports on complaints should be generated and shared with relevant stakeholders, including the Chair of Trustees, members, volunteers, and staff.
3. **Training**

Complaints and Disputes officers should receive training on the complaints and disputes processes to ensure that they can handle complaints and disputes effectively. Training should cover:

* Identifying and recognising complaints
* Appropriately handling complaints
* Completing complaint forms
* Maintaining confidentiality and respecting the complainant's privacy

1. **Contact Information**

For any questions or concerns regarding the complaints or disputes process, anyone can contact the charity by emailing [info@out-there-exeter.com](mailto:info@out-there-exeter.com)

**Review and Revision**

This SOP will be reviewed and revised annually to ensure that it remains relevant and effective, or as needed to reflect changes in the charity's strategies or the regulatory environment.

**Compliance**

Failure to comply with this SOP may result in investigation and disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal for employees and termination of volunteer appointments and membership of the charity, and a vote on removal of trustee.

**Version Control**

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| **Version:** | V1.1 FINAL |
| **Date of approval:** | 01/12/2023 |
| **Date of next review is due:** | 01/12/2024 |