**Appendix 6 - ERAR Volunteer Problem-Solving Procedure**

**Introduction**

North Tyneside Council (The Authority) and ERAR recognise the value of volunteering and the high-quality services volunteers provide on our behalf. As a result, this problem-solving procedure aims to encourage a supportive environment for volunteers where any concerns are dealt with quickly and effectively.

The purpose of this procedure is to provide guidance for volunteers and Volunteer Supervisors on the necessary steps to take in order to solve problems that may occur during the volunteering experience with ERAR.

In most cases the Volunteer Supervisor is able to deal with minor performance issues, complaints and grievances through normal support and supervision. If there are more serious issues or complaints, however, this problem-solving procedure is to be used.

In all cases issues must be treated confidentially and should only be discussed amongst those who are directly involved in trying to resolve the issue.

**Scope**

This problem-solving procedure applies to volunteers in ERAR only.

The procedure has two sections to deal with two different situations:

* The first is for circumstances where a volunteer may have a complaint in relation to their role. This process gives all volunteers the opportunity to make a complaint if they feel they have been treated unfairly or if they wish to raise an issue that they feel may cause concern for ERAR or the Authority.
* The second section is for complaints made or performance issues regarding a volunteer. This process gives the volunteer the opportunity to be advised why a complaint or performance issue has arisen, and to state their case in explanation or defence of their actions, before a decision is reached in relation to their role. It also details their opportunity to appeal where it is relevant.

**Section 1 – Where a volunteer wishes to make a complaint:**

**Stage 1** - The first stage of the process is for the volunteer to make an oral complaint whether it is about a colleague, another volunteer, ERAR/the Authority, or in relation to their role. Volunteers should raise the complaint with their Volunteer Supervisor. If the complaint is about the supervisor, the matter will be referred to another supervisor or their supervisor’s manager.

Once the volunteer has made an oral complaint, an informal meeting will be arranged. The volunteer can bring a friend or colleague to the meeting so long as they are not acting in a legal capacity. The meeting will aim to support the volunteer with their complaint and come to a solution that is beneficial and appropriate.

If the volunteer does not feel that there has been a resolution at this meeting, they can proceed to the second stage.

**Stage 2** – The second stage of the problem-solving process is applied when a volunteer is not satisfied with the outcome of the oral complaint in Stage 1. To proceed to Stage 2 the volunteer should make a formal complaint in writing to the next level of officer or manager within the Authority.

The Stage 2 officer/manager will consider the written complaint and will respond in writing to the volunteer within 20 working days. Once the volunteer has received the written response, they will have an opportunity to appeal if they are still not satisfied with the decision.

**Stage 3** – The final stage in the problem-solving process is the appeal stage. This occurs if a volunteer is not satisfied with the outcome of Stages 1 and 2. In order to appeal volunteers should write, stating the reasons for their appeal, to the senior manager within the service. An Appeal Meeting will then be arranged, to be chaired be either the senior manager (or their nominated officer).

At this meeting, the volunteer can be accompanied by a friend or colleague, not acting in a legal capacity. During the meeting, the senior manager (or their nominated officer) will hear the case and make a decision. A written response, setting out the decision, will then be sent to the volunteer within 5 working days of the date of the meeting. The decision made after the appeal meeting is final and there is no further right of appeal.

**Section 2 – Complaints about a volunteer:**

**Stage 1**- In cases where there has been a complaint or performance issue raised about a volunteer, it will first be necessary to establish how serious the issue is. If the issue is deemed to be serious then it may be necessary for the volunteer to be suspended pending investigation – see guidance at the end of this procedure.

The first step when dealing with a complaint or performance is to discuss it directly with the volunteer. An informal meeting will be arranged between the volunteer and their supervisor for this discussion.

During the meeting, the supervisor should:

* discuss the content of the complaint or the performance issue
* give the volunteer the opportunity to explain their view or version of events
* establish if there are any external factors that could be affecting the volunteer’s behaviour, attitude, or their ability to carry out tasks.
* identify any objectives and goals that will help the volunteer to fulfil their role
* offer extra support, supervision and training where necessary/appropriate.
* decide whether the case should be can be dealt with either:
  + informally within Stage 1,
  + referred to Stage 2, including where the supervisor believes that the matter may be sufficiently serious to justify bringing the volunteering arrangement to an end.
  + alternatively the supervisor may decide that it is necessary for the volunteer to be suspended pending further investigation.

Where the matter is dealt with under Stage 1 the supervisor should also arrange a review deadline with the volunteer. The time limit for this is usually dependent on the nature of the complaint or performance issue. If, following Stage 1, further concerns are raised regarding the volunteer, the supervisor may decide to refer the matter to Stage 2.

Remember it is important to keep the person who raised the complaint updated on the steps the Authority is taking to rectify the situation. Do not, however, give them confidential information about any formal action taken in relation to the volunteer.

**Stage 2** - When the concerns are not resolved via Stage 1, or where the matter is sufficiently serious that informal action did not suffice, the case will be referred to Stage 2. The supervisor should arrange a Complaint or Performance Management Meeting (to be chaired by either the supervisor or a more senior officer/manager) to discuss the matter in further detail and to consider formal action. This may include a written warning or the potential to end the volunteer arrangement.

The meeting should take place in a confidential and comfortable setting so that there are no interruptions.

At the meeting, the volunteer should be given the opportunity to state their case to their supervisor or a senior manager (and therefore should be given appropriate notice of the meeting). As previously, they can be accompanied by a friend or colleague, not acting in legal capacity.

At the end of the meeting, the supervisor/manager will reach a decision about appropriate actions. For less serious complaints the volunteer may be given a written warning or further objectives to help them in their role or be offered more support. The Authority can, however, decide the volunteer arrangement should end at this point.

**Ending the Volunteer Arrangement**

If the decision is reached to end the volunteer arrangement the supervisor/manager should do the following:

* confirm that their volunteering is ended – no notice is required so this is with immediate effect
* outline the reasons for the decision
* thank them for their service so far (if appropriate)
* confirm and explain the right of appeal (as per stage 3)
* send a follow-up letter to the volunteer to confirm all of the above.
* arrange for the return of any council property or equipment the volunteer holds – including any ID badges.
* advise colleagues, other volunteers and necessary clients that the volunteer will no longer be working with the service. Do not give the specific reasons as these are confidential.
* if the volunteer had responsibilities for certain clients, make sure they are informed of any new volunteers that are being assigned to them.

**Stage 3** – If a decision has been made, by the supervisor or manager, to end a volunteer arrangement the volunteer can appeal this decision. They should do so in writing, setting out the reasons for their appeal, to the next level of officer or manager within the service. The volunteer can be accompanied by a friend or colleague, not acting in a legal capacity. At the Appeal Meeting, the volunteer will be asked to state their case to the officer/manager who will then make the final decision. The volunteer will be informed of the decision within 5 working days. The outcome of the meeting is final.

**Suspension**

There can be some occasions where volunteers should be suspended from their volunteering immediately in order for an investigation to be carried out. These include situations where there are allegations of acts of gross misconduct such as theft, acts of violence, malicious damage, fraud or being under the influence of alcohol or drugs (this list is not exhaustive).

In situations where the volunteer is suspended, this should be confirmed to them in writing, including any terms of the suspension such as restrictions for contact with service users etc.