Internal communications, disagreements and constructive criticism v1.1 (draft)

Document owner: Chair or designated committee member ·

Approval: Committee · Date:

Review: Annually Date:

1. **Purpose**

The group recognises that respectful disagreement and constructive criticism are essential to good governance. The aim is to work together in a polite, respectful manner to produce clear, accurate and inclusive communications that represent the ButeLGBTQ+ Community Group.

Members and volunteers must be able to raise concerns, question decisions and suggest improvements without fear of retaliation, exclusion or personal hostility.

The group will aim to address disagreements early, fairly and proportionately, while protecting confidential information and the wellbeing of those involved.

This policy will guide the process for the above and establish normal procedures.

2. **Communication principles**

All internal communications must be guided by the following principles:

Respect: criticise ideas, actions or decisions rather than attacking individuals. Committee members are encouraged to listen to one another, express their views politely, approaching differences of opinion with an open mind. The group's shared aim is to work collaboratively, maintaining a positive environment for everyone.

Openness: give people a reasonable opportunity to explain their views.

Constructiveness: where possible, identify the concern, its impact and a proposed solution. Where a First draft of a proposed social media, website content, press release or other communication is proposed; this must be treated as a starting point for discussion, comments & amendments. Constructive criticism is encouraged following the principles outlined above and below.

Confidentiality: do not share private messages, sensitive personal information or committee discussions outside authorised channels without permission, except where disclosure is justified or required.

Accountability: acknowledge mistakes, correct inaccurate information and take responsibility for agreed actions.

Inclusion: make space for different communication styles, access needs and levels of confidence. It is the Chair's responsibility to ensure that all voices are heard.

Internal communications, disagreements and constructive criticism v1.1 (draft)

These expectations apply to meetings, email, messaging groups, online meetings and communications connected to the group's activities.

3. **Appropriate communication channels**

The committee will agree which channels are used for which purposes

Channel	**Appropriate use**
Committee email or designated workspace	Formal proposals, Drafts, papers and decisions
Committee messaging group	Brief coordination and practical questions regarding new ongoing draft proposals
Scheduled meetings	Discussion, debate & collective decisions
Private conversation with a designated contact	Sensitive concerns or interpersonal issues
Formal complaints route	Serious, unresolved or confidential concerns

Important decisions must not be made solely through informal messages unless the constitution and agreed decision-making procedure permit this.

Decisions made between meetings must be recorded and reported to the full committee.

4. **How disagreements should be handled**

1. **Raise the concern clearly**.

Where safe and appropriate, the person should explain the issue calmly, identify the decision or behaviour in question and describe the outcome they are seeking

2. **Allow a response.**

The other person should have a reasonable opportunity to explain their understanding without interruption or personal attack.

3. **Seek a practical resolution.**

The people involved should consider clarification, an apology, a revised process, a compromise or mediation where appropriate.

4. **Escalate if unresolved.**

A concern may be referred to the Chair or another designated committee member. If the Chair is involved, the concern must go to an uninvolved committee member.

5. **Use a formal process when necessary.**

Allegations of harassment, discrimination, bullying, breaches of confidentiality, safeguarding concerns or serious misconduct should be handled through the relevant policy rather than being dismissed as an ordinary disagreement.

Direct discussion is encouraged where appropriate, but it is not compulsory if the person feels unsafe, intimidated or unable to raise the matter directly.

5. **Constructive criticism of committee decisions**

Committee members may challenge proposals, ask questions and express dissent before a decision is made.

The Chair should ensure that:

- All committee members have a reasonable opportunity to speak.
- Confident or long-standing members do not dominate discussion.
- Relevant evidence, practical experience and specialist skills are considered.
- Criticism is not treated as disloyalty.
- A decision is not assumed to be unanimous when it is not.
- Significant objections and agreed actions are recorded in the minutes where appropriate.

After a valid collective decision, members should normally help implement it, even if they personally preferred another option.

A material concern about legality, safety, discrimination, financial propriety or compliance should be escalated rather than suppressed.

Charity trustees must act within their legal duties and governing document. (*Relevant if we become a charity in future)*

https://www.oscr.org.uk/managing-a-charity/managing-charity-trustees/being-a-charity-in-scotland/charity-trustee-duties/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-decisions-at-a-charity

6. **Behaviour that is not acceptable**

The group will not tolerate:

- Personal insults, intimidation or threatening behaviour.
- Repeatedly interrupting, belittling or silencing others.
- Retaliation against someone who raises a genuine concern.
- Deliberate exclusion from communications or decisions as punishment.
- Sharing confidential discussions to embarrass or target individuals.
- Discriminatory or derogatory language about LGBTQ+ identities or other protected characteristics.
- Using the group's internal channels to harass, threaten or pressure another person.

A strong disagreement, criticism of a committee decision or a good-faith complaint is not, by itself, misconduct.

7. **Confidentiality in a small island community**

Because members may know one another outside the group, everyone must take particular care not to spread information about internal disputes through personal conversations, local networks or social media.

Confidentiality does not prevent someone from seeking independent advice, raising a safeguarding concern, reporting suspected wrongdoing or making a disclosure required by law.

Information should be shared only as necessary and through appropriate channels.

8. **Fair resolution and review**

Concerns should be handled promptly, impartially and proportionately.

Anyone directly involved in a complaint must not decide its outcome.

Where appropriate, the committee may agree to a facilitated discussion, mediation, clearer working arrangements or a written action plan. Discuss with Equality Network Scotland or SCVO for support on this

Serious or repeated breaches may be addressed under the group's separate volunteer concerns or complaints procedure.

No one should be required to reconcile personally with another member as a condition of being heard or protected.