



## Resolving Volunteer Issues (RVI) Guidance - for someone raising an issue

This guide is for anyone wanting to raise an issue about volunteers or a volunteers' experience.

It aims to support you through the process, making clear the principles and steps involved in resolving the issue.

Our RVI policy links to other policies, many of which can be found in section 12 of the policy. See our ['Which policy to use when'](#) flowchart

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## What types of issues are covered by the RVI policy?

Here are some – but not all - potential issues which you might want to raise. These fall within two main areas:

Issues relating to a volunteer/s might include:

- A volunteer behaving in a way that is not in line with our Code of Conduct e.g. making public derogatory comments about the MS Society, bullying or harassment, racism, breaching confidentiality, or a refusal to work with others to resolve conflicts.
- Refusing to do 'must do' training.
- Not following our policies and processes.
- Failure to work collaboratively with other volunteers and/or staff.
- Conflicts of interest or using a volunteer role to pursue personal issues.
- A volunteer not fulfilling their agreed role description or acting outside the boundaries of their agreed role.

Issues relating to a volunteers' experience might include:

- Dissatisfaction with their volunteering role e.g. the amount of time it is taking up, the tasks within it or a need for additional support or learning.
- Dissatisfaction with how their local group is operating e.g. its priorities, how decisions are made or disagreements within a volunteer group.

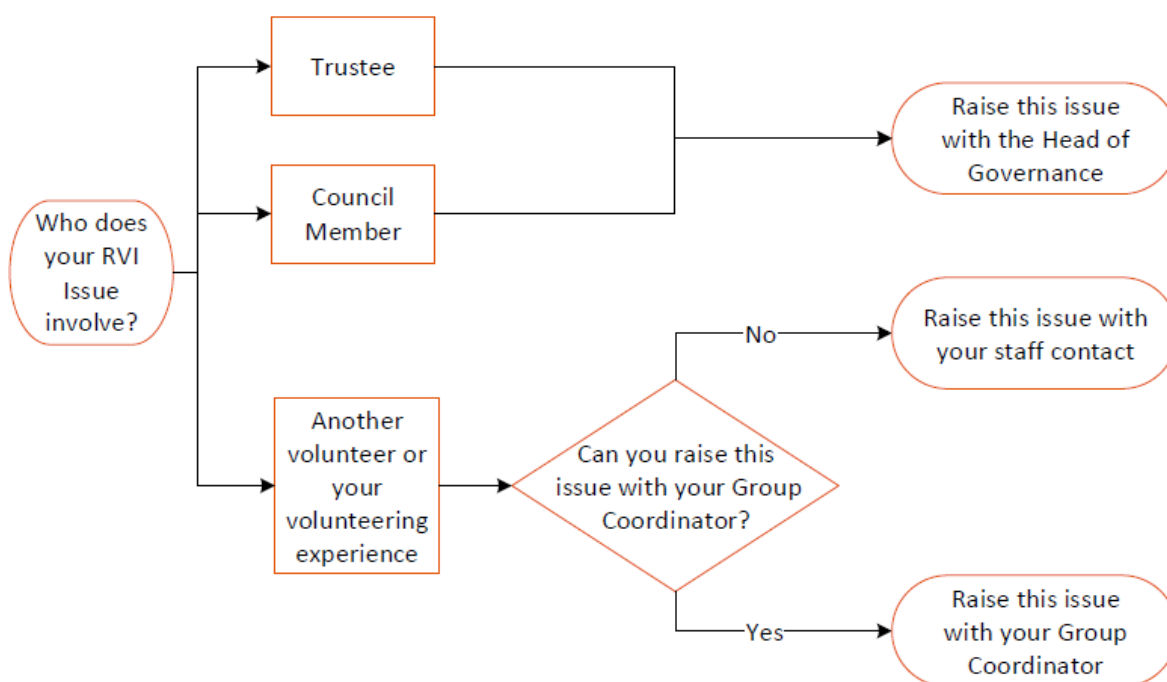
## How are issues raised?

Anyone can raise an issue using the RVI policy. You can do this verbally or in writing.

If you raise an issue verbally if it's possible, please also submit it in writing. The person you raise it with will also keep a record.

If you don't want to raise it in writing, the person you've raised it with may still seek to resolve the issue. For example, if a local volunteer mentioned to a Local Network Officer (LNO) that they heard another volunteer making racist comments, but did not wish to make a 'formal' complaint in writing, the LNO should still act on the issue raised.

The RVI policy has details of who you can raise issues with, depending on your role.



If you're not comfortable raising an issue to the person suggested in the policy, contact the Head of Volunteering via our Supporter Care Team.

In addition, issues may be referred to the Head of Volunteering in other ways, for example if you raise an issue relating to a volunteer with the Supporter Care Team as a complaint.

### Questions to think about before or when raising an issue

- What happened? How did this happen? What was the sequence of events?
- When and where did this take place / how long has this been occurring?
- What behaviours or actions did you witness or experience? What did the other person say? What did you see? How did it make you feel? What makes this inappropriate?
- Who (else) witnessed it happening or is involved?
- What are the roles and relationships of the individuals involved?
- Are there other occasions when something similar happened?
- What else may be contributing to the issue?

- What do you hope will happen now?
- What would be a good resolution to this issue?
- Is there anything else you'd like to add?

## What you can expect

### Policy principles

We're committed to our volunteers who give their time, skills and experience freely for the benefit of all people affected by MS.

The involvement of volunteers is usually a positive experience for everyone involved. However there may be times when an issue about volunteering or a volunteer needs to be addressed. It's important that there's a quick, fair and transparent process for doing so.

We use our RVI policy to resolve volunteering issues. These principles should be met every time issues are raised to ensure that everyone is treated fairly and consistently.

The following principles underpin this policy:

- Issues should be raised as soon as possible after the problem occurs, as any delay may mean that an effective resolution cannot be achieved.
- The majority of issues should be resolved informally.
- Issues will be dealt with fairly.
- All those directly involved in the process should be kept informed in a timely and appropriate manner.
- The process will be treated as confidential by all parties involved.
- A volunteer with an issue raised about them will be able to offer an explanation before any decision is taken in relation to their role.
- In any meetings that form part of an RVI process, each party may bring with them one other person for moral support. This person must not be involved in the issue and should not advocate for the individual. Individuals should provide prior notification of who will accompany them to the person chairing the meeting.
- Everyone involved will be expected to cooperate and adhere with the decisions reached through this process.
- There is a right of appeal as indicated in section 11 of the policy.

- Where a person is appointed to lead a formal investigation, they can decide not to pursue an issue if they consider it unreasonable or frivolous.
- Appropriate records of formal procedures will be kept by the Volunteering Team.

## Confidentiality

Everyone involved in a resolution process must maintain confidentiality to ensure the process is fair to everyone involved.

However, ensuring an issue remains confidential does not mean the person you've raised the issue with cannot tell anyone about it. If an issue is raised 'in confidence', or anonymously, it can still be addressed. If you are unsure whether to do so, speak to your main staff contact or the Head of Volunteering.

There are people you can talk to about an issue while maintaining confidentiality. If you are a volunteer, this would be your main staff contact person. If you are a staff member, this would be your line manager. Anyone involved in a volunteer issue can speak to the Head of Volunteering in confidence.

Any notes you make and keep on the issue should be stored safely to ensure confidentiality is maintained and data protection ensured.

## What's the difference between an informal and a formal process?

Issues are usually resolved informally, led by the person who you raised the issue with and/or an appropriate staff member. You can refer to the [Informal Process flowchart](#) for more details about this process.

Sometimes, a formal process is needed straightaway, for example if allegations of bullying, harassment or criminal behaviour are made, there is a significant and/or deliberate breach of our policies or a volunteer hasn't responded to reasonable requests for contact as part of an informal process. A formal processes will usually be led by an appropriate staff member.

You can refer to the [Formal Process flowchart](#) for more details about this process.

## Timescales

Issues will be acknowledged, addressed and resolved as quickly as possible.

The timeframes below should be followed whenever possible. Some flexibility may be required, e.g. to accommodate face-to-face meetings with those involved.

If the issue can't be resolved within the agreed timeframes, everyone involved will be updated and an explanation provided.

If an informal or formal process is resolved by creating an action plan, the people involved should agree the separate timescales for the action plan to be implemented and reviewed.

### When should you hear back?

You should receive acknowledgement of the issue being raised within seven calendar days. This should usually be sent by the person you raised it with.

### How long should an informal process take?

Informal issues should be addressed as soon as possible. Ideally they would be resolved within a month, however some flexibility in timescales may be required, for example to allow for face-to-face meetings with people involved.

### How long should a formal process take?

If an issue is raised which requires a formal process, this should be completed within six weeks of the formal process starting.

### When can appeals be submitted?

Any appeals should be submitted within two weeks of when the notification of the outcome of a formal process was given.

Appeals should be acknowledged within seven calendar days of receiving them.

## How long will an appeal take?

Any appeals should be completed and all parties informed of the outcome within one month of receiving it.

## Appeal

All parties involved in a formal process have the right to appeal when they are given outcome of a formal process.

Appeals should be raised in writing to the Head of Volunteering within two weeks of the end of a formal process. The Head of Volunteering may exercise discretion in accepting delayed appeals, or appeals raised verbally.

When an appeal is received, it will be considered by an appropriate member of the Executive Group. The main parties involved will be informed that an appeal has been received, the process that will be followed and the timeframes being followed.

## Preparing for a meeting to discuss the issue raised

Issues will always try to be resolved through an informal process which should involve conversations with all parties involved.

Here's a checklist to help you prepare for the meeting.

- ✓ Venue - accessibility and privacy will be respected.
- ✓ Date - a meeting will be arranged with enough time to sure you have time to prepare.
- ✓ Fairness - the person leading the issue will prepare for the meeting by speaking to people involved beforehand.
- ✓ Support - you can bring someone with you who could take notes during the discussion, and act as an impartial witness. They should not be involved in the issue. The person is to offer moral support but cannot advocate for you. You must let the person leading the issue know who you'll be bringing in advance.
- ✓ Confirmation - you will receive information about the meeting details in writing (e.g. email). Including:
  - Purpose of the meeting
  - Date and time



- Location of the meeting
  - Who will be attending
  - Where the meeting fits within the overall process
  - Relevant guidance and/or policies
- ✓ Prepare – think about what questions you want to ask or points you want to raise. In doing so, refer to our [Code of Conduct](#), your volunteer [Role Description and Welcome & Induction checklist](#), the [RVI policy](#), and this guidance.

Please note, depending on the outcome of the meeting, you may be invited to further meetings or discussions. You can always bring someone to support you (see above).

## Record keeping

Your notes may be requested by the person leading resolution process at a future date e.g. if there is a formal process or appeal.

### Who should take notes?

It's recommended that anyone who's involved in resolving a volunteering issue makes notes for their own records.

After meetings, notes should be circulated by the person who's leading the resolution process.

### What are good records?

Keep detailed notes which might include:

- Email correspondence between those involved or about the issue
- Notes of discussions with other people about the issue e.g. if another volunteer has mentioned the issue to you in conversation
- Notes of your own experience e.g. if you witness another volunteer saying something which seems inappropriate
- Notes from a meeting when the issue was discussed
- Any action points agreed

When taking and keeping notes:

- Write any notes up as soon as possible, while the issue is still fresh in your mind, and before you've spoken to anyone else about it
- Include dates, times, full names and roles of people present
- Make sure that notes brief and easy to understand

- Keep notes as objective and factual i.e. what happened, what was seen, said or felt by you. And not assumptions or speculation about what other parties may be thinking or feeling

Remember:

- These notes **must** be stored confidentially, and in line with guidance for storing personal data under the GDPR e.g. storing hand-written notes in a locked cabinet and password protecting typed documents
- These notes may be requested as part of a formal process or appeal
- Any individual has a right to see any information relating to them, so other people involved may request to see your notes

## Advice, support & guidance

When seeking advice, remember confidentiality and ensure that you only share details with those who need to know them. The Head of Volunteering can provide support and advice at any point during an RVI process.

## Feedback on this resource

Tell us what you think about this guidance by completing this short [survey](#). Your feedback will help us to improve our resources when they're reviewed.

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