ABBEY THEATRE TRUST (ST ALBANS) LTD
Problem Solving Procedure

Scope
This policy applies to The Abbey Theatre Trust (St Albans) Ltd, including its resident theatre companies, the Company of Ten, the Company of Teens, St Albans Youth Music Theatre ("SAYMT") and any other theatrical companies established from time to time, collectively known as "ATT".

This policy applies to all current members of ATT.

Introduction
The ATT is a registered charity entirely powered by the efforts and enthusiasm of our members. Almost every aspect of ATT's operation depends on the dedication and passion of individuals who freely give their time and expertise.

Without them, we could not continue to provide high-quality live theatre to the people of St Albans and our surrounding community. In addition, we recognise that providing opportunities for membership helps to promote active citizenship and social inclusion.

Whilst the involvement of members is generally a positive experience for everyone involved, there are times when things can go wrong. It is important that, as an organisation, we recognise when things go wrong, acknowledge where improvements can be made, and take active steps to improve.

A member may wish to make a complaint about something or someone. Similarly, a member's performance may decline, or someone may wish to make a complaint against a member. These are rare occurrences, but to ensure a fair, equitable and consistent approach to dealing with them, it is essential for ATT to have a formal procedure. This document sets out that procedure.

Some points to remember

- Saying sorry when things do go wrong is vital for everyone. It is always the right thing to do and is not an admission of liability.
- An apology acknowledges that something could have gone better and is the first step to learning from what happened and preventing it from reoccurring. All complaints must be treated confidentially and should only be discussed amongst those who are directly involved in trying to resolve the issue.
- The majority of complaints and issues are likely to be resolved during the course of a production; however, this is not the only time issues can arise.
- An effort should be made to resolve the problem informally at a local level.
- Informal complaints that do not progress to a Stage 2 written complaint (see below) must be fed back to the Management Committee. Lessons cannot be learned if issues are held back.
- A written record of all incidents and complaints should be maintained. This should be kept separately to the record of visitor complaints/feedback.

- Allow enough time for all meetings and conduct them in a private place.
- Keep complainants informed at every step of the procedure.
- Members have the right to be accompanied by a colleague or friend in any meetings that form part of the problem-solving process.

If a member wishes to make a complaint
This part of the problem-solving procedure gives members the right to complain if they believe they have been unfairly treated, and/or to voice their concerns.

Disagreements between members can arise in any membership organisation, including a community theatre such as ours. Wherever possible, members are encouraged to raise concerns early and to try to resolve matters informally, respectfully and constructively with those involved. This may be done directly or with appropriate support from another member, the relevant IC, Watchdog, Executive Officer or other suitable person.

The formal stages of this Procedure should only be used where an informal approach has not resolved the issue, or where the nature of the concern means that a more formal process is appropriate.

<u>Stage 1 - Verbal complaint</u>
Initial complaints, whether against a member of staff, the organisation, another member or anyone else, should be discussed initially with the member and a local resolution sought. If the issue arises during the course of a production, this should be facilitated through the production's Watchdog.

If the complaint is about the member's IC, a Director or any other individual acting in a supervisory capacity, the matter should be referred to the appropriate Executive Officer.

If a complaint arises outside of the course of a production, the appropriate Executive Officer should be involved in the Stage 1 meeting.

The table below provides examples of areas that may be complained about, and identifies the relevant Executive Officer:

Area of Complaint	Executive Officer
Stewarding, Bar, Coffee	Front of House Executive or Membership Executive
Directors, Assistant Directors, Director's Assistants, Actors	Production Executive (for the relevant season)
Stage Management, Lighting, Sound, Props, Costume, Construction	Technical Executive

During this meeting, the member can be accompanied by another member or friend, not acting in a legal capacity, if they wish.

A record should be kept of this Stage 1 meeting by the Watchdog or Executive Officer. Any agreed steps to be taken following the meeting should be recorded and circulated to those involved. The Watchdog must notify the relevant Executive Officer of the broad details of all informal complaints/issues raised, whether the issue has been resolved, and what, if any, agreed steps have been taken. This information must be fed back to the Management Committee.

If the issue cannot be resolved at this stage, the member should make a formal complaint in writing to the appropriate Executive Officer.

Stage 2 - In writing
Members making a complaint in writing should do so within three weeks, excluding bank holidays and weekends, of the informal meeting taking place. The appropriate Executive Officer will aim to acknowledge the letter within three days of receipt.

An investigation into the complaint will be undertaken. We will aim to discuss the results and any subsequent actions at a meeting with the member within 21 days of the original letter. If it is considered likely that matters will take longer than 21 days, the member should be notified as soon as possible that there is likely to be a delay and given the reasons for that delay.

During this Stage 2 meeting the member can be accompanied by another member or friend, not acting in a legal capacity, if they wish.

Formal minutes should be taken of any Stage 2 meeting and approved by those in attendance. The actions or decision taken should be confirmed in writing to the member. The outcomes of all Stage 2 complaints must be fed back to the Management Committee.

Stage 3 - Right to challenge
If the member is not satisfied with the outcome, they can challenge it in writing to the Chairman within 21 days of the decision meeting.

An investigation into the complaint will be undertaken, and the results and any subsequent actions will be discussed with the member within 14 days of the challenge letter.

During this meeting, the member can be accompanied by another member or friend, not acting in a legal capacity, if they wish.

The Chairman will confirm their decision in writing. Their decision is final. The Chairman's final decision must be fed back to the Management Committee.

If someone complains about a member
This part of the problem-solving procedure gives members the right to be told what concerns are being raised, the right to state their case, and the right to challenge.

Sometimes minor issues can arise, such as a member not fitting in as well as expected, personality differences, not meeting the required standards when undertaking tasks, or being unreliable. However, if a more serious issue occurs, immediate action may be necessary (see exceptions on page 5).

Minor issues are usually identified as part of the production process, or when working with an IC. They may be relatively easy to resolve, either by the IC or by another individual acting in a supervisory capacity for the area, without resorting to formal procedures.

This checklist suggests how some issues can be dealt with:

- A comprehensive induction to the theatre and the member role.
- Assessment of the member's training needs and addressing them.
- Providing the member with support.

However, if these do not address the issues then the following procedure should be instigated.

Stage 1 – Verbal discussion
If, as a member, you feel comfortable doing so, you should first consider speaking directly to those involved to seek mutual resolution and understanding.

The first step is to discuss the issue with the member. There could be external factors influencing their ability to carry out tasks, their behaviour, or their attitude.

- Identify goals that will help the member to fulfil their role, and offer extra support, supervision, and training where necessary.
- Set a deadline for reviewing the situation.
- Document your discussion and the agreed actions.
- Notes of the meeting should be sent to the member within 14 days of the meeting.
- If there is insufficient improvement, then you may need to adopt a more formal approach and move to Stage 2 of the procedure and issue a written warning.
- Feedback should be provided to the Management Committee.

Stage 2 – Letter – detailing concerns
If the issue has not been resolved by the verbal discussion or the review, the Chairman, in conjunction with the Front of House Executive, Membership Executive or equivalent Executive and IC where applicable (for example, Bar Manager or Technical Executive), should issue the member with a written warning outlining the reason for the complaint.

The member has the right to state their case to the relevant Executive, the Honorary Secretary and the Chairman.
Depending on the nature of the complaint:

- Further investigation of the issue may be needed.
- Further objectives could be set, and help offered to the Member.
- A sanction may be imposed (see below).

Sanctions
Most issues can be resolved by clearly setting standards.

Where there is a more serious or repeated breach, this will be discussed by the Management Committee and the following options may be applied:

- The member can be asked to refrain from undertaking any public-facing duties on behalf of ATT.
- The member will not be considered for directing, acting or undertaking any role in relation to future shows. This can be for a period of time or indefinitely.
- The member may have their membership withdrawn.

A decision to ask a member to cease all activity should be a last resort. Whatever the decision, the member has the right to challenge.

The member will have the right to put representations to the Board of Trustees/Management Committee before any decision is made.

If a decision is made to prevent the member from participating in any ATT activities, whether temporarily or permanently, and/or if their membership is withdrawn, the following good practice guidelines should be adhered to:

- The meeting should take place in a private setting.
- Be quick and direct. The decision has been made, so ensure the member is informed in a timely manner.
- Inform the member of their right to challenge.
    - A letter should be sent to the member to reiterate the decision, outline the reasons why, and confirm their right to challenge.

A copy of the Problem-Solving Procedure should be included with the letter. Include any information relating to their departure, for example, the return of any key fobs.

Stage 3 - Right to challenge
If the member is not satisfied with the outcome, they can challenge it in writing to the Chairman within 21 days of the decision meeting.

A further investigation into the complaint should be undertaken, and the results and any subsequent actions should be discussed with the member within 14 days of the challenge letter.

During this meeting the member can be accompanied by another member or friend, not acting in a legal capacity, if they wish.

The Chairman will confirm their decision in writing. Their decision is final.

If the complaint is about the Chairman, the challenge can be sent to either the Honorary Secretary or Treasurer.

Exceptions
There are some occasions on which members may be asked to suspend their voluntary activity until an investigation is carried out. These include acts that constitute gross misconduct, including, but not limited to:

- Abuse of a minor or vulnerable adult;
- Theft;
- Assault;
- Acts of violence;
- Malicious damage;
- Deliberate falsification of documents;
- Harassment; or,
- Being under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Illegal or criminal acts will be reported to the police and may result in prosecution. The Front of House Executive, Membership Executive, Honorary Secretary, Chairman and Theatre Manager must be informed immediately of any allegations that may constitute gross misconduct.

This procedure will be reviewed annually.

Record of Policy

Version	V1
Policy First Created	2026
Last Updated	
Review Frequency	Annual
Person/s responsible	Chairman Secretary
Associated Policies	Company of Ten Directors' Handbook Company of Ten Stage Manager's Handbook EDI Policy