



Company No: 07058666

Charity No: 1179433

SIGBI Ltd Dispute Resolution Procedure

For the purpose of this document, references to SIGBI Limited and Soroptimist International will be written as "SIGBI" and "SI" only.

SIGBI DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROCEDURE

1. Introduction

SIGBI's aim is to provide a productive, pleasant and constructive volunteer experience for every member. It is recognised that in exceptional circumstances, members may have concerns about matters relating to their membership experience that cannot be resolved on an informal basis. There may be occasions when it is necessary to work through one of the dispute procedures.

The Grievance and Disciplinary Procedure is designed to offer the opportunity to raise such issues and have them resolved appropriately. Wherever possible, members are encouraged to resolve any issues informally and at the earliest opportunity possible. This procedure applies to all members of SIGBI, including Associate members, at every level of the organisation. Any queries about the implementation of the Procedure should be raised with the Director of Membership.

This guide provides good practice advice for dealing with discipline and grievances. It sets out principles for handling disciplinary and grievance situations and more detailed advice and guidance that members will often find helpful both in general terms and in individual cases.

Members should always seek to resolve disciplinary and grievance issues inside the Club, Region, National Association, Network and Country. If discipline and grievance issues are settled at an early stage, they are normally less likely to damage relationships.

Good practices – including for recruitment, induction training, mentoring and use of the Code of Conduct in these – can prevent many discipline and grievance problems arising.

Handling Grievances – An overview

- Always follow the Disciplinary and Grievance procedure
- It is always useful to consider mediation at any stage

Resolve grievances informally
Often it is a quiet word that is needed

Use the formal procedure when the informal approach has not worked or is inappropriate to use to resolve the issue

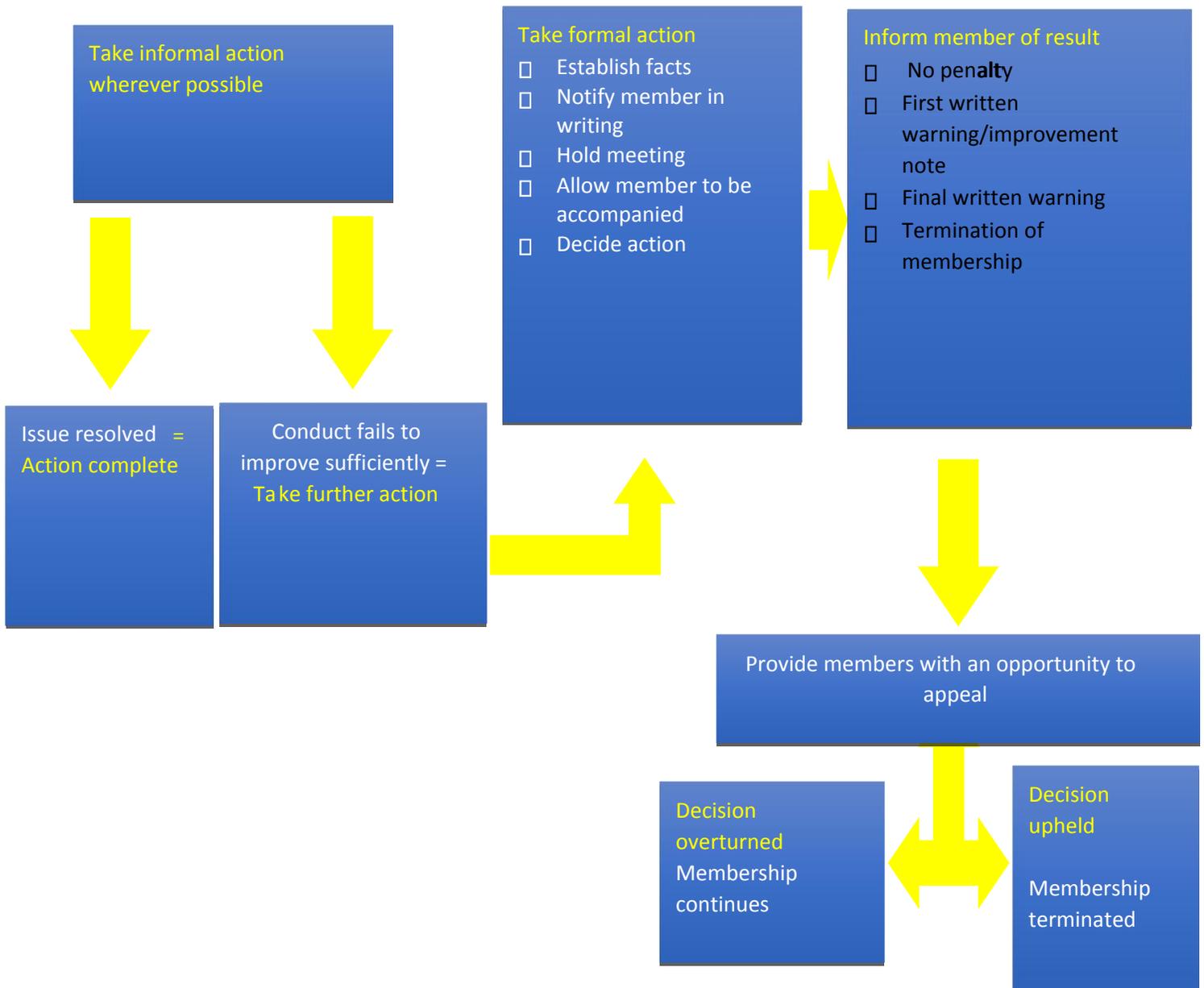
- Member to let the President/Membership Officer at the appropriate level (Club/Region/NA/Country) know the grievance in writing
- Meeting to discuss the grievance with a neutral member with appropriate skills
- Allow the member to be accompanied to the meeting
- Decide on appropriate action
- Allow the member to appeal

Issue resolved

Deal with the appeal impartially and have it heard by a neutral member not previously involved

Disciplinary Overview

- Always follow the Disciplinary and Grievance procedure
- It is always useful to consider mediation at any stage



SIGBI is committed to encouraging harmonious working relationships between members. In most instances, conflict is resolved informally without the involvement of a third party; however, where resolution is not achieved SIGBI has a formal process, the Grievance and Disciplinary, and this informal Dispute process where mediation is used.

Aims

The procedure has been adopted to provide members with an objective and impartial framework for resolving conflicts. It aims to offer an alternative to a formal grievance as a means of resolving conflict. Mediation can take place at any stage; the grievance will be put on hold whilst mediation takes place.

What is Mediation?

It is used to help improve or restore working relationships between individuals. It is voluntary and completely confidential.

A mediator (a neutral third person who has had no prior involvement in the matter in question) will work with the parties to help them find their own solutions and reach an agreement designed to resolve the disagreement or improve the situation.

It is based on the principle of collaborative problem solving, with a focus on the future and rebuilding relationships, rather than apportioning blame.

It gives the participants an opportunity to step back and look at how the situation can be put right, looking at their own actions as well as those of the other party.

Mediation is conducted on the basis that both parties want to achieve a mutually agreeable outcome and solution. A successful mediation should lead to both parties feeling that the outcome is fair, reasonable and appropriate under the circumstances.

Mediation can be used in a variety of circumstances, for example:

- Misunderstandings or conflict between members.
- Where there are allegations and counter allegations.
- Perceptions of harassment, discrimination or bullying.
- Communication difficulties.

General Principles of Mediation

One or both of the parties or, in some cases, a third party, would initiate mediation by contacting the Director of Membership. Following the referral, the appointed Mediator would meet with the parties to ascertain the viability of proceeding with the mediation.

The appointed Mediator will be independent of both parties and have no vested interest in the outcome. A list of Mediators will be held at SIGBI Headquarters in Stockport.

Confidentiality

No personal information (including information relating to attending an appointment or joint mediation session) will be passed on to anyone outside the mediation process without express permission.

Consent will be obtained prior to the disclosure of any personal information if this information is deemed necessary.

Information may be disclosed where:

- A party reveals they have committed a criminal offence or it has been found that a criminal offence has been committed.
- There is a legal requirement to disclose information.
- There are clear indications that there is a serious risk of harm to a participant or others.
- The Mediator believes that inappropriate and overt behaviour may have taken place during the mediation session.

If the informal approach does not resolve the issue or if the issue is one of a serious nature the formal Grievance and Disciplinary is the procedure to use.

The mediation process is confidential on all sides unless there is a potential unlawful act or where there is evidence of serious risk to health and safety. In these circumstances the process will be terminated and the Director of Membership informed. Information (including documents) may in these cases be supplied to others.

As mediation is a confidential process there will be no direct involvement or accompaniment from other members during the mediation process other than in exceptional circumstances and at the discretion of the Mediator and the agreement of the two parties involved.

If a third party makes a referral, that party will be advised when the process has been completed but will not be party to any agreement.

Once resolution has been achieved, both parties will sign an agreement. This remains confidential between the parties and the Mediator. If the agreement contains items requiring support from Club, Region/NA/Network/Country or Federation both parties must agree how this will be handled and include it in the agreement.

There may be instances where mediation is not appropriate, where this is the case the parties involved will be informed.

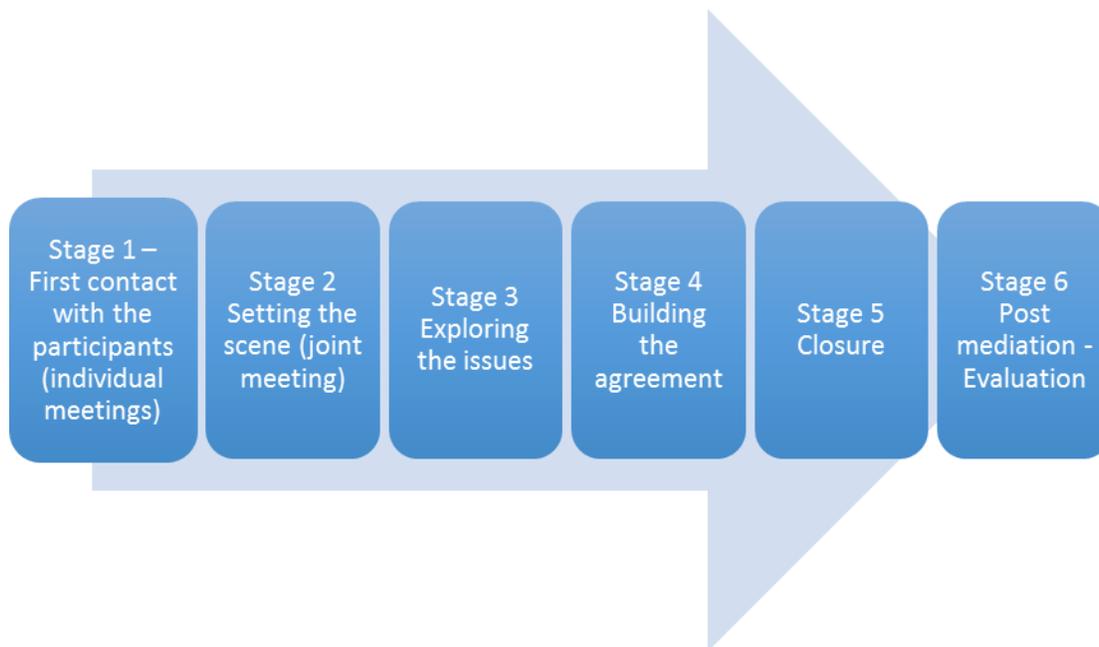
Relation to other procedures

Given the positive outcomes that can be achieved, members will normally be asked to consider mediation prior to proceeding with the formal Disciplinary and Grievance Procedure. To maximise the opportunity for successful resolution, mediation is also available during the formal procedure (without detriment to the individuals if it is unsuccessful) and in some cases following the conclusion of the procedure, as it gives the parties the opportunity to repair their working relationship and agree how future interactions will be handled.

The Formal Procedure can be resumed if the mediation is unsuccessful following written notification from the same party. Equally, if the mediation is successful, the individual can choose to end the grievance procedure by writing to Federation.

The Mediation Process

All requests for mediation must be made via the Director of Membership; mediators should not be approached directly. The mediation process is shown on the next page.



Stage 1 - First contact with participants (Individual meetings)

The Mediator will meet both parties individually for the purpose of:

- Highlighting that confidentiality will only be breached if issues of a criminal nature surface, at which point the meeting will stop and Federation will be informed. The appropriate authority e.g. the Police may need to intervene.
- Defining the core issues and identifying the ideal outcome expected by both parties. The Mediator may need to meet either or both parties again to clarify any further issues arising from stage one. The Mediator will outline the subsequent stages of the process, identifying an appropriate time and location for the joint meeting.

Stage 2 - Joint meeting - Setting the scene

The Mediator will:

- Agree the agenda.
- Set the boundaries and ground rules in agreement with both parties.
- Explain and agree the process.
- Clarify and summarise the agreed areas of conflict.

Stage 3 - Exploring the issues

The Mediator will:

- Explore the issues with the parties.
- Encourage communication.
- Manage any conflict during the early stages of the discussion.
- Encourage a mutual understanding about the problem.
- Check understanding and clarify assumptions.
- Identify any concerns about the issues.
- Encourage a change of focus from the past to the future.
- Summarise areas of consensus and disagreement.

Stage 4 - Building the agreement

Mediation will work towards:

- Generating and evaluating options.
- Encouraging problem solving.
- An acceptance or acknowledgement of conciliatory gestures.
- Encouraging both parties to move from a non-negotiable stance, focussing on future resolution rather than the past problem.
- Constructing agreements and creating fall back arrangements.
- Identifying the next steps if no agreement is reached.

Stage 5 – Closure

The session will be concluded when both parties agree that they have dealt with the conflict and have reached a mutual agreement with a clear understanding of what has been agreed. An agreement will be drawn up in clear unambiguous language for signing by both parties. It will be agreed who retains copies. The mediator may suggest a further session is arranged or the parties may decide to hold follow-up meetings (even if full agreement has been reached), either with or without the mediator.

If no agreement over the issues is reached, the mediator will attempt to gain agreement from the parties as to what the issues are and to how they will proceed in the future. They will then close the session, reasserting the need for confidentiality.

There is no appeal process associated with mediation however participation in mediation does not exclude members from other courses of action, e.g. submitting a grievance. Members also have the option to register their concerns about the process, or a particular mediator with the Director of Membership.

Stage 6 Post Mediation – Evaluation

The Mediator will provide details of any conditions relating to the agreement between parties to the Director of Membership for monitoring and evaluation purposes. No personal information will be recorded as part of this process.

Formal Grievance Procedure

Soroptimist International of Great Britain and Ireland (SIGBI Ltd) is an organisation, which upholds high ethical standards and requires members to adhere to a Code of Conduct. This procedure is in place to deal with allegations of a breach of the Code of Conduct.

Aim

To provide a framework by which members can report behaviour which is harmful to themselves or others or which brings the organisation into disrepute.

SIGBI encourages members to make every effort to resolve disagreements informally and at the earliest opportunity, but it recognises that direct resolution is not always possible.

If a member or group of members become aware of behaviour, which they reasonably believe contravenes the Code of Conduct, they should raise it initially with the person concerned. If this does not result in a modification of behaviour, then the matter should be taken up with Club President, if there is one and if not, with the Region/NA/Network/Country President or Membership Officer or the Federation Councillor (FC).

The President, Membership Officer or FC will work to seek reconciliation between members. This might include arranging facilitated conversations or Mediation. If this is not possible or it is decided that a sanction is needed, the matter must be escalated to the next level and the appropriate form must be completed and sent to SIGBI HQ. A grievance panel of three will be appointed. This will be a combination of officers of the club and Region/NA/Network/Country Officer/s who have had no prior involvement in the issue, are neutral and have the skills to take part in the dispute meeting.

SIGBI guarantees confidentiality. Matters of concern should be raised without fear of reprisal or recrimination. Another member may accompany the complainant at any meeting.

Should the outcome of the dispute meeting be unsatisfactory to the complainant, they may appeal the outcome and pursue the outstanding matter further. The complainant should inform the President, Membership Officer or FC, in writing, and the issue would be raised at the next level of management; an appeal meeting will then be arranged with the Regional, National Association, Network or Country President and Membership Officer or two other Regional, National Association, Network or Country Officers and a member of the appeal panel appointed by the Director of Membership, none of whom will have had any prior involvement in the issue.

SIGBI recognises that issues of concern should be dealt with quickly and professionally and meetings will be arranged for the earliest possible date. The outcome of the appeal meeting will be confirmed in writing normally within ten working days.

Notes and records on disputes will be kept confidential.

Note: The purpose of the Procedure is to help and encourage members to achieve and maintain acceptable standards of conduct and performance. Moreover, it ensures that the organisation behaves fairly in investigating and dealing with allegations of unacceptable conduct or performance.

Accordingly, SIGBI reserves the right to depart from the precise requirements of its dispute procedures where it is expedient to do so. The procedure may be implemented at any stage if the circumstances warrant this.

Member Rights in the Procedure

- Each alleged breach of the Code of Conduct will be properly and speedily investigated.
- At each stage of the Procedure, a member has the right to be accompanied by another member. If the chosen member is not available at the requested time, the member may propose an alternative time, within five working days of the scheduled meeting. The member will be advised of the nature of the meeting and given the opportunity to state their case together with supportive evidence and/or witnesses before a decision is made.
- Notes and records will be kept confidential.

A possible outcome of the grievance meeting and any appeal may be the instigation of a disciplinary hearing.

Dispute Meeting

The member will be given details (including, where appropriate, written copies of evidence and relevant witness statements) of the complaint in writing at least three working days before the meeting. At the meeting the member will be given an opportunity to state her case.

Following the meeting the grievance or disciplinary panel will determine its findings and inform the member of the outcome in writing within two working days of the decision being made. The meetings will be held without reasonable delay whilst allowing the member reasonable time to prepare their case.

A member must make every effort to attend the meeting. Members will be given reasonable opportunity to set out their case, ask questions and call relevant witnesses. Where it is the intention to call witnesses advance notice must be given of such.

Representation

A member has the right to be accompanied by a fellow member of her choice at all stages of the procedure. It is suggested that she chooses a member in whom she is happy to confide and will offer her support. The fellow member will be allowed to address the meeting to put information forward and to sum up the member's case, respond on behalf of the member to any views expressed at the meeting and confer with the member during the meeting, The fellow member does not, however, have the right to answer questions on the member's behalf, or address the meeting if the member does not wish it.

Formal Disciplinary Procedure

SIGBI is an organisation, which upholds high ethical standards and requires members to adhere to a Code of Conduct. This procedure is in place to deal with allegations of a breach of the Code of Conduct by a member.

Aim

To provide a framework by which SIGBI can deal with behaviour which is harmful to members or others or which brings the organisation into disrepute.

SIGBI encourages members to make every effort to resolve disagreements informally and at the earliest opportunity, but it recognises that direct resolution is not always possible.

If a member or group of members become aware of behaviour, which they reasonably believe contravenes the Code of Conduct; they should raise it initially with the person concerned.

If this does not result in a modification of behaviour, then the matter should be taken up with the Club President, if there is one and if not, with the Region/NA/Network/Country President or Membership Officer or the Federation Councillor (FC).

The President/ Membership Officer/FC will work to seek reconciliation between members. This might include arranging facilitated conversations or Mediation. If this is not possible or it is decided that a sanction is needed, the matter must be escalated to the next level and the appropriate form must be completed and sent to SIGBI HQ. A disciplinary panel will be appointed. This will be a combination of officers of the club and Region/NA/Network/Country Officer/s who have had no prior involvement in the issue, are neutral and have the skills to take part in the disciplinary meeting. The disciplinary panel should consider whether it is necessary for the member in question to have their membership suspended pending the outcome of the procedure and notify the member accordingly.

SIGBI guarantees confidentiality. Matters of concern should be raised without fear of reprisal or recrimination. Another member may accompany the member in question at any meeting.

Should the outcome of the disciplinary meeting be unsatisfactory to the member, they may appeal the outcome. The member should inform the President/Membership Officer/FC, in writing, and the issue would be raised at the next level of management; an appeal meeting will then be arranged with the Regional/NA/Network/Country President and Membership Officer or two other Regional, National Association, Network or Country Officers and a member of the appeal panel appointed by the Director of Membership, none of whom will have had any prior involvement in the issue.

SIGBI recognises that issues of concern should be dealt with quickly and professionally and meetings will be arranged for the earliest possible date. The outcome of the appeal meeting will be confirmed in writing normally within ten working days. The outcome of the appeal is final and there can be no further appeal.

Notes and records on disputes will be kept confidential.

Note: The purpose of the Procedure is to help and encourage members to achieve and maintain acceptable standards of conduct and performance. Moreover, it ensures that the organisation behaves fairly in investigating and dealing with allegations of unacceptable conduct or performance.

Accordingly, SIGBI Ltd reserves the right to depart from the precise requirements of its dispute procedures where it is expedient to do so. The procedure may be implemented at any stage if the member's alleged misconduct warrants this.

Member Rights in the Procedure

- Each alleged breach of the Code of Conduct will be properly and speedily addressed.
- At each stage of the Procedure, a member has the right to be accompanied by another member. If the chosen member is not available at the requested time, the member may propose an alternative time, within five working days of the scheduled meeting.

- The member will be advised of the nature of the meeting and given the opportunity to state their case together with supportive evidence and/or witnesses before a decision is made.
- Notes and records will be kept confidential.

Following the hearing, if any allegations of gross misconduct are proven, the membership of the member may be terminated forthwith.

Dispute Meeting

The member will be given details (including, where appropriate, written copies of evidence and relevant witness statements) of the complaint in writing at least three working days before the meeting. At the meeting the member will be given an opportunity to state her case.

Following the meeting the grievance or disciplinary panel will determine its findings and inform the member of the outcome in writing within two working days of the decision being made. The meetings will be held without reasonable delay whilst allowing the member reasonable time to prepare their case.

A member must make every effort to attend the meeting. Failure to attend the meeting without reasonable excuse will result in the meeting taking place in their absence. Members will be given reasonable opportunity to set out their case, ask questions and call relevant witnesses. Where it is the intention to call witnesses advance notice must be given of such.

Representation

A member has the right to be accompanied by a fellow member of her choice at all stages of the procedure. It is suggested that she chooses a member in whom she is happy to confide and will offer her support. The fellow member will be allowed to address the meeting to put information forward and to sum up the member's case, respond on behalf of the member to any views expressed at the meeting and confer with the member during the meeting, The fellow member does not, however, have the right to answer questions on the member's behalf, or address the meeting if the member does not wish it.

Sanctions

First Written Warning:

The appointed panel may impose a first written warning.

The member will be clearly informed of the steps she must take to improve her conduct and what will happen should she fail to do so, or commit any other breach of the Code of Conduct and the period time the member has to effect this improvement.

This formal warning will be recorded on the member's record in the Federation Office and will remain in force for a minimum of six months from the date on which it was issued, and will be confirmed in writing. The member will be notified when the warning has expired and been removed from their record.

Final Written Warning:

Where an investigation indicates a very serious lapse in conduct or a member fails to improve behaviour following a first written warning or a further breach of the Code of Conduct occurs, a dispute meeting will be conducted, by a panel with the relevant skills appointed by the Region/NA/Network/Country President/Region/NA/Network/Country Membership Officer, with the member concerned.

At that dispute meeting a final written warning may be given.

This warning will be confirmed in writing, normally within five working days and will clearly state what steps the member must take to improve their conduct and the period of time the member has to effect this improvement. The warning will also set out any appropriate action required in terms of monitoring or supporting the member's improvement. This warning will also clearly state that failure to achieve the required improvement or any other lapse in conduct during the life of that warning, will normally lead to the termination of the member's membership, unless there are exceptional circumstances. This warning will normally remain in force for a period of twelve months from the date on which it was issued. The actual period will be confirmed in the written confirmation. The member will be notified when the warning has expired and been removed from their record.

Termination of membership or other sanction:

If the member fails to make the required changes/improvements in accordance with the final written warning, a disciplinary meeting will be conducted, by a panel with the relevant skills appointed by the Region/NA/Network/Country President/Region/NA/Network/Country Membership Officer, with the member concerned.

At that disciplinary meeting termination of membership may be recommended to the Membership Director.

The termination of membership will be confirmed in writing to the member, normally within five working days of the dispute meeting. The member will cease to be a member from the date termination of membership is communicated to them.

Certain offences are of such a serious nature that it would be inappropriate to proceed through the levels of warnings. Offences that come into this category are but are not restricted to the following:

- Physical violence, actual, verbal or threatened and general intimidating behaviour, bullying or harassment to other members or the general public.
- Theft or the attempted theft of property belonging to SIGBI Ltd or one of its members, suppliers or visitors or other dishonesty.
- Fraud or attempted fraud.

- Abuse of, or malicious damage to, property or technology belonging to SIGBI Ltd, or any other person.
- Falsification of documents or records.
- Being in possession of or serious incapacity of controlled drugs, misuse of alcohol or controlled drugs or substances without medical authorisation.
- Serious abuse of, accessing, reading, copying or utilising in any way by e-mail, Internet or other communication media, material that could be regarded as offensive, racist, sexist, pornographic or any other material that is either illegal or likely to offend.
- Involvement in a situation where the member's actions make it impossible for the SIGBI Ltd /member relationship to continue e.g. fine for theft or fraud.
- Wilful disobedience of a reasonable instruction or request or withholding information, misleading or lying to SIGBI Ltd in response to a reasonable request.
- Action, which brings SIGBI Ltd into disrepute.
- Accepting bribes in connection with the SIGBI Limited's activities.

The above offences are not exclusive or exhaustive.

Appeal Procedure

A member has a right to appeal against any decision. The member should in the first instance inform the Region/NA/Network/Country President/Region/NA/Network/Country Membership Officer in writing of such a wish giving grounds for appeal within five working days of receipt of the letter, which forms the subject of the appeal.

The Director of Membership will appoint an appeal panel (which is neutral and has the relevant skills) to hear the appeal, as soon as possible, to which the member will be called and given an opportunity to state her case. Depending on the circumstances it will be either a rehearing of the dispute meeting or a review of the original investigation with the test being whether a reasonable person could have come to the conclusion they did on the facts as found, plus consideration of any new evidence which was not available to the original panel and if the sanction is proportionate to the findings of fact.

The decision will be notified to the appellant in writing within five working days. The outcome of the appeal is final and there can be no further appeal.

Formal Warning Appeals

A member who considers that they have been unfairly disciplined through the issue of a formal warning may appeal against that decision. The request for a review should be made in writing giving grounds for appeal to the person who issued the warning, within five working days of receipt of the written confirmation of the warning. A panel at an appropriate level appointed by the Director of Membership whose members have not previously been involved in the case will hear the appeal.

Appeals against termination of membership

A member who considers that their membership has been unfairly terminated may appeal against that decision. The request for an appeal should be made in writing giving grounds for appeal to the person who issued the decision within five working days of receipt of the written confirmation of the

termination of membership. A panel at an appropriate level appointed by the Director of Membership whose members have not previously been involved in the case will hear the appeal.

Timing

Appeals will normally be held within three weeks of the request being received, or within a specified period of time as notified in writing. The outcome of the appeal will be advised to the member in writing normally within five working days of the review being held.