



Steps Lawn Tennis Club Guidance for Dealing with Complaints

Why have a complaints policy?

Dealing properly with complaints is an important part of running any club. It helps the club to tackle problems before they become serious. If problems do become serious, the policy provides a way for them to be dealt with. An effective complaints policy shows that Steps LTC are serious about listening to its members and club users and can encourage them to feel confident and safe.

Values and principles

The values and principles outlined in the club's Complaints Policy are important. Read and understand them, and refer to them when responding to complaints or problems. There is extra information below about how to put these values and principles into action. This is an important part of the guide, because if you understand this, you will find it easier to put in place the policy detail.

The right to complain

Deal positively and seriously with complaints. In this way, you will be able to tackle real problems and quickly resolve less important matters. Remember, complaints are important because they can sometimes reveal serious issues. Take care to make sure that complainants are not disadvantaged if they decide to speak out. This is especially important for children and other vulnerable adults.

Equality

The best way to make sure that you deliver an equitable response is to have a clear internal process that you will apply with care. Always be aware that personal attitudes can affect how you respond, even if you don't mean them to. Think hard about whether this is happening. You can find out more about equality in tennis at www.lta.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/governance-and-structure/policies-and-rules/equality-and-diversity/.

Fairness

Essential. It can be hard to be fair when you know the people involved in a complaint. Like the principle of equality, there are some useful tips that you can follow to improve fairness:

- Try to avoid bias. If you have strong links with one person involved in a complaint, it is better to not to handle the matter. You might be able to put aside your feelings, but others need to be confident in your fairness.
- In most cases, a person who is the subject of a complaint should be told about the complaint, and should be given the opportunity to respond in detail before any decision is made.
- Try to avoid having important decisions about a complaint taken by a single individual.
- Never use a complaint as an 'excuse' or 'reason' to take action against someone because of other concerns. Deal with each issue clearly and separately.

Safety and welfare take priority

If a complaint suggests that someone's safety or welfare could be at risk, make those issues a priority. It is easy to become bogged down with personal disagreements or arguments over small issues. Don't allow these to overshadow the important things.

Confidentiality

Treat complaints with sensitivity and care. Any leaks of information could have a serious impact on both the person who made the complaint and the person it was about. Think about who it is appropriate to discuss an issue with. Consider each person's club role, as well as their experience in dealing with complaints.

Follow the policy's clear structure for reporting and handling concerns to help avoid disagreements about the handling of sensitive information. Do not share personal information or details of complaints processes with people who don't need to know. The need for confidentiality does not affect your right to seek advice or support.

Getting advice and reporting a concern to other organisations

Deal confidentially with complaints but seek advice and support where appropriate. There may be situations where you have an obligation to discuss your concerns with others.

Children and young people

If a complaint suggests that a child or young person could be at risk, you have an important duty to get advice at the earliest stage. It is not a breach of confidentiality to ask for advice or support from the Tennis West of Scotland Welfare Officer or from the Tennis Scotland Lead Welfare Officer or from the LTA's Safeguarding Team. If you are not able to contact them, your local social services, the Police, and the NSPCC can all offer advice. If the club's Welfare Officer has been trained, then he or she will have more information about how to pass on a concern. Do not wait until a crisis has occurred.

Serious misconduct or crime

In serious cases, it can be difficult to know how to handle a complaint. In these cases, the Tennis Scotland Lead Welfare Officer or the LTA's Safeguarding Team can often provide useful advice. If you think that a crime may have been committed, you should consider contacting the Police. This is even more important if you think that you have information that could stop another crime from being committed.

Licensed coaches

Licensed coaches have a direct link with the LTA. If you think that a licensed coach has acted in an unprofessional way, you should think about reporting this to the LTA. They may not always take on the complaint directly, but can offer advice and support about how best to handle the case.

Legal queries

The LTA produces a range of guidance and advice to help understand the legal implications of some issues but it cannot offer detailed legal advice to individual clubs. If you are concerned about the legal implications of a complaint, you should contact the LTA's Legal & Tax helpline partners Brabners (03330 433 232) who can provide legal advice to affiliated clubs.

General questions and queries

Remember that Tennis Scotland and the LTA are available to offer support and advice on a wide range of practical and policy issues.

Handling a complaint

Acknowledge the receipt of a complaint within 5 working days. If you are not able to deal with the complaint immediately, explain why and provide a timescale. Keep a record of your correspondence, as well as conversations and important decisions. Provide the complainant with the details of a person to contact about the progress of their complaint.

Try to keep the complainant updated every two weeks, even if there has been no progress. You should think about the welfare of the complainant as making a complaint can be worrying and stressful. This is especially important for children and young people. If you think that more specialist support is needed, consider seeking advice (see above).

Investigating a complaint

Often, you will need to investigate a complaint. For simple issues, this might mean some simple fact-finding. In other cases, you might need to speak to a wide range of people. Remember the values that are discussed above. These are very important, in particular, the 'fairness' and 'confidentiality' of your investigation. Ensure you the investigation relevant.

Reaching an outcome

Remember to reach an outcome! Don't allow complaints to remain open and unaddressed. This is unfair to everyone involved in the issue, and can lead to complications later. You should carefully weigh up the information that you have before reaching an outcome. Try to have a small, confidential group of senior officials involved in the decision.

As in the investigation stage, you should think about the values that are discussed above. Anyone who is personally involved in the complaint should not be involved in making a decision about the outcome. You should normally make sure that someone has a chance to see and respond to every complaint or allegation against them. This is not appropriate if sharing information would put someone at risk. In this case, seek advice (see above).

There are several outcomes that you should consider. Often you will be able to arrange an informal solution that all parties can agree to. For example:

- Changes to procedures or arrangements.
- An explanation or apology for particular behaviour.
- An agreement to behave differently in future.
- Sometimes you will need to take more formal measures:
 - Formal disciplinary action against a member under the club rules.
 - Changes to contracts or other formal agreements.
 - Referring the case to the LTA, or other authority

Remember that some of these formal outcomes will require separate processes. These might be described in your rules, or might be legal requirements. For instance, you have special legal duties if you take action against a member of staff.

Keep the complainant informed of the outcome, including the outcome of any formal action. In some cases, this information might be too sensitive to share. Staff disciplinary proceedings require particular care, and you should think carefully about sharing details of these. You should not normally share information about formal action against a child unless the child and his or her parents/carer/guardian agree to this.

Questions or comments about this guide

For general questions about this guide or about the way that the LTA handles complaints, contact them (020 8487 7000, safeguarding@lta.org.uk).

For independent advice on a Child Protection issue, contact Childline 0800 1111 or NSPCC advice for adults 0808 800 5000.

Useful Contacts

- Stepps LTC Welfare Officer (welfareofficersteppstennis@gmail.com).
- Tennis West of Scotland Welfare Officer Baljunder Purba (07984494982; Baljinder_purba@hotmail.com).
- The Tennis Scotland Lead Welfare Officer Mat Hulbert (07949500458; matthew.hulbert@tennisscotland.org).
- The NSPCC advice line (0808 800 5000; www.nspcc.org.uk).