

# Complaints Policy Guidance

This guide is for tennis clubs and centres who wish to put in place a complaints policy. A model policy is provided with this guide. You should read these documents together. If you already have a complaints policy, you do not have to adopt this LTA policy, but it might give you some ideas.

## Why have a complaints policy?

Dealing properly with complaints is an important part of running a club or centre. It helps you 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 you are serious about listening to your members and customers and can encourage members to feel confident and safe.

The LTA is not able to resolve all of the complaints and problems that arise in British tennis. We strongly recommend that clubs put in place a system to deal with problems locally. The LTA is available both to clubs and to individuals in case serious problems arise.

## How do we put the policy in place?

Remember, the policy will only be effective if you are able to deliver what it offers to your members and customers. You should read the policy carefully and plan how to make the policy a reality in your club. This guide gives you some advice on how to do this. When you have done this, you need to fill in the boxes and spaces on the policy. This will make sure that your members and customers can find the correct details.

## Values and principles

The values and principles outlined in the sample 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 clubs that understand this usually find it easier to put in place the detail of their policy.

### *The right to complain*

If you deal positively and seriously with complaints 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. You should 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.

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### *Equality*

The best way to make sure that you are delivering 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/equality](http://www.lta.org.uk/equality)

### *Fairness*



This is essential. It can be hard to be fair when you know the people involved in a complaint. Like the principle of equality, a good way to preserve fairness is to have a clear process to apply. 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 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.
- Check your rules and contracts. Make sure that you read your rules and any relevant contracts and stick to them.

#### *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 official role, as well as their experience in dealing with complaints.

It's best to have a clear structure for reporting and handling concerns. This will avoid disagreements about your 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 in some cases, and more information about this is included below.

#### *Getting advice and reporting a concern to other organisations*

Although you should deal confidentially with complaints, you are still able to seek advice and support. In fact, there are some 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 Child Protection officer at your County LTA or from the LTA Child Protection Department. If you are not able to contact them, your local social services, the Police, and the NSPCC can all offer advice. Keep these contact details available. If your club Child Protection 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 County LTA or the LTA support centre can often provide useful advice. If you wish to contact the LTA support centre, the Child Protection Department is the best place to start. 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. We may not always take on the complaint directly, but can offer advice and support about handling the case.

#### *Legal queries*

The LTA produces a range of guidance and advice to help you understand the legal implications of some issues. The LTA cannot offer detailed legal advice to individual clubs. If you are concerned about the legal implications of a complaint, you should call the LTA's Business Advice Service (BASeline). BASeline are able to provide advice to all affiliated clubs and can be contacted on 0844 5618133.

#### *General questions and queries*

Remember that your County LTA and the LTA support centre 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 the complaint. Record 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. Making a complaint can be worrying and stressful. This is especially important for children and young people. Usually, good communication will help. 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, think about the 'fairness' and 'confidentiality' of your investigation. Try to keep your 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. Perhaps most importantly, 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 rules of the facility
- Formal disciplinary action against a member of staff
- Changes to contracts or other formal agreements
- Referring the case to the LTA, or to another authority
- Taking no action

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 agree to this.

#### **Questions or comments about this guide**

If you have a general question about this guide, or if you have a general question about the way that the LTA handles complaints, you should contact the Legal Services Department at the LTA using the details provided below:

LTA Legal Services and LTA Child Protection

Contact us at:

National Tennis Centre

100 Priory Lane

Roehampton

SW15 5JQ

T: 0208 487 7008 / 7116

E: [childprotection@lta.org.uk](mailto:childprotection@lta.org.uk)

Childline and the NSPCC

If you would like independent advice on a Child Protection issue, you can contact: Childline: 0800 1111 or NSPCC advice for adults: 0808 800 50005

