



STREATHAM  
BAPTIST  
CHURCH

## SBC Complaints Policy

**Policy Approved by: Church Leaders / Trustees:** 9<sup>th</sup> February 2021

**Communicated to Church Staff:** website and email – 24<sup>th</sup> February 2021

**Communicated to: Activity Leaders (if applicable):** website and email

**Communicated to Church Members (if applicable):** CMM and website

**Review date:** 9<sup>th</sup> February 2022, or earlier if church needs dictate

### 1. Introduction

The primary purpose of the Streatham Baptist Church (SBC) complaints policy is to provide a clear process for dealing with complaints relating to decisions taken by its staff, trustees and volunteers. SBC recognises the importance of resolving complaints. This policy applies to all members and visitors to the church and will be implemented fairly and impartially.

### 2. General Principles

Everyone should be mindful that all people make mistakes and that a formal complaint should be a last resort. SBC's desire is that wherever there are concerns relating to actions taken by the church, those with concerns will do all they can to resolve those concerns informally rather than escalating their concerns into a formal complaints process. It is advisable to follow Scriptural principles of reconciling differences wherever possible before resorting to a formal process. *(Matthew 18:15)* If your brother sins against you, go to him and show him his fault. But do it privately, just between yourselves. If he listens to you, you have won your brother back. However, it is recognised that in some cases there will be no alternative but to resort to a formal complaint. This formal process should only be instigated when attempts to resolve the issue informally have failed or where, due to the nature of the complaint, it is not appropriate to address it with the person concerned.

You can make a complaint about:

- The services that the church provides.
- The behaviour of a church employee, trustee or volunteer that has affected you or someone for whom you are responsible.
- The application of church policies and procedures, or decisions made by the church, that affect you or someone for whom you are responsible.

Complaints that are not covered under this policy are:

- Complaints about the conduct, performance or behaviour of an accredited Minister or Church Worker. Serious complaints will be sent to the Baptist Union Leader, see Appendix B;
- Complaints about the application of the SBC's procedures or decisions made by the church which do not directly relate to the complainant;
- Grievances relating to employment decisions (this is a grievance procedure);
- Safeguarding concerns relating to child or adult protection. Any safeguarding concern should be reported to SBC's safeguarding designated person following the church's safeguarding policies and procedures;
- Complaints raised, which do not comply with the requirements of this policy, will not be dealt with and the complainant will be sent a copy of the complaints policy.

### **3. Procedure**

#### **3.1 There are two Types of Complaints:**

Type A A complaint that can be dealt with informally. It is usually an issue that can be dealt with verbally within a short time frame, without documentation.

Type B A complaint that is formal, is documented and follows the procedure below.

#### **3.2 Making a Formal Complaint**

An initial complaint should normally be made within 3 months of the incident or where there is a series of associated incidents, within 3 months of the last incident. It may be made by:

- a) Email to [info@streathambaptist.com](mailto:info@streathambaptist.com);
- b) Letter addressed to the Church Manager;
- c) Verbally to the Church Manager or a Church Leader

Formal written complaints shall include the following:

- The actions being complained about;
- When they took place;
- The reason the actions are considered to be wrong;
- Details of what has been done by the complainant to try and resolve any concerns;
- What could be an appropriate resolution;
- Details of who else has had an account of the matter;
- Any additional information;

The complainant is expected to maintain confidentiality so that there is no obstruction or interference with a church investigation. It is essential that others who are called on to provide evidence or their views are not influenced by the complainant, and they will be asked if the complainant has been in contact with them on the matter under investigation. If that is the case, this will be taken into account during the investigation.

#### **3.3 Receiving a Formal Complaint**

- All complaints received shall be:
  - a) Logged by the Church Manager in a dedicated folder on the confidential Leader's Drive (this will only include the name and nature of complaint);
  - b) Acknowledged within 3 – 5 days (excluding bank holidays) along with an indication of when a fuller response to the complainant will be made;

- c) Shared in part with all Trustees, so as not to jeopardise the investigation process. Detailed information about the procedure is in Appendix B.
- d) Where applicable, inform the person who is the subject of the complaint about the nature of the complaint unless this would seriously prejudice the investigation;
- e) Followed up in a prayerful and confidential manner and following guidelines in Appendix B.

Verbal complaints shall be acknowledged immediately and responded to immediately if that is appropriate.

- The Church Leaders will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Ministerial team, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants investigation;
- For all formal complaints an Investigating Officer (IO) will be assigned. Please see Appendix A for this process. Appendix C relates to how the IO will work through the process;

### **3.4 Outcome of a Complaint**

- All complainants will be encouraged to attend a meeting with the IO or Ministerial team with the outcomes of the investigation. They will then be provided with a written copy of the outcome and possible recommendations for the church as a result;
- There is the right to appeal any decision about a complaint. Written notice of intention to appeal should be made within 14 days of the date the outcome of the complaint was communicated. The appeal itself should be made within a further 14 days. Who the appeal should be made to is explained in the appeals process below;
- If the IO concludes that a complaint has been made vexatiously or in bad faith, SBC reserves the right to take external advice and potentially further actions such as church discipline or refusing to answer any further complaints relating to the same matter;

### **4. The Appeals process**

Notice of an appeal needs to be received in writing with the reasons why the original decision is being contested.

An Appeal's panel will be convened with at least one Minister, at least one other SBC Leader and at least one other church member. A hearing will be conducted where there is a presentation of the original complaint, by the complainant and the IO, with their conclusions. The panel will determine if the conclusion is upheld or if the appeal warrants further investigation.

If after an appeal the original decision is upheld, but the complainant considers the response has not been dealt with appropriately, or they disagree with the panel's decision the complainant may address concerns to the Baptist Union and London Baptist Association, then the Charity Commission.

### **5. Responsibilities**

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The SBC Ministerial team and Church Manager are responsible for managing the sharing and implementation of this policy.

The fact and content of the complaint will be kept confidential in so far as is necessary in order for the Church to properly investigate the complaint and reach a decision relating to it unless the fact or content of the complaints has not been treated as confidential by the complainant.

SBC will maintain a written record of all complaints with details of the action taken as a result of the complaint in accordance with the SBC Data protection policy.

## APPENDIX A

### Streatham Baptist Church Guidelines for completing an investigation

#### **Introduction**

- The purpose of this document is to give guidelines to anyone who undertakes an investigation on behalf of SBC
- It should not preclude the involvement or alerting of appropriate professional bodies, prior to or at any stage during an investigation. This includes police if a crime is alleged or suspected or Social Services Safeguarding Team if deemed necessary by the SBC designated safeguarding Person.

#### **Definition**

- In the course of church life, there will often be negative comments and 'grumbles' which are commonplace. However, when anyone makes a formal complaint, this must be responded to in an appropriate and timely way. These guidelines are relevant when formal complaints are made.
- If anyone makes a complaint or a disclosure which contains allegations relating to any potential misconduct, especially if it relates to a possible issue of safeguarding of Adults at Risk or Children and Young People, misuse of finances or any misuse of authority, then this should be taken seriously and reported as a formal complaint.

#### **Response to a Formal Complaint**

- If someone makes a formal complaint to a member of staff or Church Leader, then this should be logged with the Church Manager. An initial response should be sent to the complainant within 3 - 5 days, acknowledging receipt of the complaint and setting out the likely timescale by which a response will be made in writing
- A response is ideally made as soon as possible, though the time may vary due to the nature of the complaint. Some complaints will by their nature receive a quick response but others will require a longer timescale due to their complexity.
- The key thing is that the complainant is made aware of the process and has a reasonable idea of when a response will be made.

#### **The investigation**

- The Leadership team will appoint an Investigating Officer (IO) to look into the complaint or disclosure made. This person may be a member of the leadership or a Church member of good standing who has relevant skills and experience or the Safeguarding Designated Person if the matter relates to a safeguarding complaint or disclosure. Where the complaint relates to a Minister or Leader this will be referred to the London Baptist Association Team Leader for investigation.
- The IO should be given a brief of the allegations that have been made and be given access to all relevant paperwork e.g. complaint letter.
- If the person being investigated is a Leader or related to a Leader, then a conflict of interest must be registered and that Leader needs to remove themselves from discussions
- The IO will have an assigned person on the leadership team to support them. This person will regularly check in with the IO to see how the investigation is going and how the IO is doing.
- The IO should develop:
  - a timeline of objective facts which sets out what has happened and when
  - a series of set questions that they will ask the people that they want to interview.
  - an action plan which realistically sets the expected time needed for the investigation

#### **Interviews**

- All interviews should be conducted in a confidential setting. Ideally, the church building should be used where possible and a note-taker present to assist the interviewer. Meeting at someone's home should

be avoided unless absolutely necessary. Recordings are not normally necessary and should only be taken with the agreement of both parties.

- The person who is being interviewed should be asked questions which allow them to share what information they have. They should be made aware that further questions may be asked at a later stage as a part of the investigation. They should be made aware that notes will be shared with relevant parties if necessary and that the IO will be writing a report which will go to SBC's leadership team.
- The notes taken should be a reasonable summary of the key points made in the meeting in answer to the questions. They do not have to be a verbatim account of everything said. These should be sent to the interviewee as soon as possible (ideally the same or next day) following the interview to be agreed and confirmed as a fair and accurate record.
- Notes of any relevant meetings, whether in person or on the phone, should be made available to the IO.
- All notes and correspondence must be filed confidentially in the church building in the assigned storage folder.

### **The role of prayer**

- Prayer is a key aspect of such investigations and it is desirable for all parties to enter prayerfully into all the meetings that take place around a complaint or investigation.
- However, prayer also needs to be handled carefully. Prayers should be for honesty, truthfulness and justice to be done and for the well-being of those affected.
- Everyone involved in investigations needs to be aware of the danger of spiritual manipulation that can sometimes be at work through prayer and avoid any prayers which, intentionally or otherwise, apply pressure to anyone involved.

### ***The report***

- Once all evidence is gathered in, the IO should make a written report which should be shared with the Leadership team.
- The report should contain clear findings in response to the allegations and whether enough evidence has been found for these allegations to be upheld or dismissed.
- This report will be discussed at the next Leaders meeting for questions and validation.

### **Communication with those affected**

- Once the final decision is confirmed the relevant parties must be informed of the outcome as soon as possible and the implications of the outcome and what the next stage is.
- The person against whom the complaint has been made will also be informed about their opportunity to appeal against the decision.

**APPENDIX B**

The following guidelines should be followed by the Ministers when deciding the most appropriate response to a complaint.

	IF A COMPLAINT IS:	THE MINISTERS WILL RESPOND AS FOLLOWS:
a	Verbal	A member of the Ministerial, Leadership or staff team will chat informally to the complainant; clarify the complainant's expectations and provide a suitable response as outlined in section 3.3 of the complaints policy. If the complaint is deemed to be serious, the complainant shall be requested to put the complaint in writing.
b	Against the conduct of an Accredited Baptist Minister	Inform SBC Trustees and refer the complaint to the London Baptist Association Leader and the Baptist Union Leader to be dealt with according to Baptist Union rules.*
c	Against other Ministers	Inform SBC Trustees and refer onto the London Baptist Association.**
d	Against a Trustee who is not a minister	Pass to the Senior Minister, unless particularly complex or serious then include London Baptist Association Leader
e	Against Church Manager	Pass to Line manager
f	Against a member of SBC staff	Pass to Line manager
g	About safeguarding	Refer the complaint to an SBC Designated Person
h	About SBC staff employment	Refer the complainant to the SBC Staff Grievance Policy
i	Pastoral in nature	Refer the complaint to the Ministerial Team
j	Made by someone who may lack capacity to make a written complaint e.g. due to disability, learning difficulties and/ or difficulties using English.	Appoint an independent Advocate to assist and advise that person e.g. church member of good standing, family member.
k	Does not fall into any of a to i above, but is likely to be fairly easily resolvable	Clarify the response the complainant expects, investigate and provide an appropriate response, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An apology,</li> <li>• An explanation,</li> <li>• An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better,</li> <li>• An explanation of the steps taken to ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which changes will be made,</li> <li>• An agreement to review policies or procedures as a result of the complaint.</li> </ul>
l	A formal written complaint about a serious matter with potential to harm SBC's reputation	Inform all SBC Leaders, who will follow the formal investigation procedure set out in Appendix A, including the appointment of an Investigating Officer (IO).
m	Withdrawn verbally	Ask for written confirmation of the withdrawal.
n	Not resolved	Advise the complainant of their right to appeal within 14 days of the written response to the complaint. Set up an appeal panel, which will include at least one Minister, at least one other SBC Leader and at least one other church member.
o	Considered to be made maliciously or in bad faith by a church member	Respond appropriately, explain responsibilities of church members and, as a last resort, discipline the church member.

\*file:///C:/Users/BJSSStaff/Downloads/Complaint against Accredited Minister 2017.pdf

\*\*https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/269026/Complaints\_Procedure.aspx

## **APPENDIX C**

**Process followed by the Investigating officer**

Following receipt of each complaint the Investigating Officer (IO) will, within 10 working days, give the Complainant an estimate of their expected timescale for dealing with the complaint. As the investigation proceeds, it may become apparent is not possible to meet those timescales. At this point an updated timeline for dealing with the complaint will be provided to the complainant.

The more complex the complaint the longer the timescale is likely to be. In some cases, it can take several months to properly investigate and respond to a complaint.

If the subject matter of the complaint has also been referred to the Police or Social Services, it may be that our investigation into the complaint cannot commence or be completed until the Police have completed their investigations and either decided not to proceed or a Court decision has been taken. Our approach in these cases will depend on the particular circumstances of the case.

The IO will follow the guidelines set out on completing an investigation in Appendix A.

The IO must be prepared to present their findings to the appeals panel if necessary.

### **APPENDIX D**

**Template letter to acknowledge complaint (within 3-5 days of receiving complaint.)**

## Streatham Baptist Church Complaints Policy

[Date]

Dear [insert name]

I am writing to confirm that Streatham Baptist Church (SBC) received your complaint on [insert date].

We are sorry that you feel that [provide brief summary of complaint].

SBC, acting through our charity trustees, will review your complaint in accordance with our complaints policy [insert link].

The Investigating Officer [IO] will be in touch with you shortly to begin their investigation of your complaint.

SBC will treat the facts and content of your complaint carefully and in line with our data protection policy. However, on occasion the Church may need to make a public statement about the subject matter of the complaint or to report the matter to the statutory authorities and consequently the church cannot guarantee to keep the fact of or details of your complaint confidential.

You should maintain reasonable confidentiality as to the nature and content of your complaint, other than to seek professional advice if required, and now that you have submitted your complaint, you should avoid communicating with the person complained about or not discuss the matter while it is being investigated.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact [insert name/email] in writing.

Yours sincerely

[Name and signature]

On behalf of the Charity Trustees of Streatham Baptist Church