

SOUTH COURT

BAPTIST CHURCH

Complaints Procedure

The Trustees of Southcourt Baptist Church (SBC) approved the following procedure on March 18th 2020:

1 Introduction

The primary purpose of the SBC complaints procedure is to provide a clear process for dealing with complaints relating to decisions or actions taken by its staff, Central Leadership Team or Volunteer Leaders.

Please note that any [complaints about our Lead Pastor are handled through the Baptist Union Ministerial Recognition processes](#). Click on the link for more information and to decide whether to use this procedure or the BU one.

2 General Principles

We 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 complaint. It is advisable to follow Scriptural principles of reconciling differences wherever possible before resorting to this formal process. However, we recognise that in some cases there will be no alternative but to resort to a formal complaint. This formal procedure should only be instigated when attempts to resolve the issue informally have failed or where, due to the nature of the complaints, it is not appropriate to address it with the person concerned.

3 Who can bring a complaint?

There is no restriction on who can bring a complaint. However, in some cases we may receive a number of inter-related complaints or a number of people may make the same complaint. In those circumstances we may decide to consolidate the investigation into the complaints or to deal with the earliest complaint first. The approach will depend on the nature of the complaints and the timing of receipt of the complaints.

4 What types of complaints will be considered?

SBC will deal with complaints about:

- The application of SBC's procedures or decisions made by SBC which directly relate to the complainant (unrelated to the conduct of our Lead Pastor).
- The conduct of staff employed by SBC
- The conduct of trustees and others who are appointed to serve on a voluntary basis within the church.

5 What type of complaints will not be considered?

- Serious complaints about the conduct, performance or behaviour of our Lead Pastor. These complaints are dealt with through the Baptist Union Ministerial Recognition process.
- Complaints about the application of 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 matter for the grievance procedure within the SBC Employee Handbook).
- Complaints raised which do not comply with the requirements of this procedure will not be dealt with and the complainant will be sent a copy of the complaints procedure.

March 14th 2020

SOUTH COURT

BAPTIST CHURCH

6 How do you make a complaint?

6.1 Complaints regarding application of procedures or decisions made

A complaint must be made in writing and must set out the following:

- The actions you are complaining about;
- When they took place;
- Why you think the actions are wrong;
- Details of what you have done to try and resolve your concerns;
- What you consider would resolve your concerns;
- Details of who else you have reported the matter to;
- Any additional information;
- Confirmation that you are happy for detail of your complaint and the supporting documentation to be provided to those who have made the decisions in question.

Any supporting documentation that exists should be enclosed.

Your complaint will not be dealt with unless you provide all of the information set out above. The church provides a form that can be used to make a formal complaint - see Appendix 1 (which can be printed or requested from the Operations Manager - liz@southcourt.org).

The complaint should be sent to the Lead Pastor, David Graham (david@southcourt.org) who will arrange for an investigation to take place. Where your complaint relates to actions of the Lead Pastor, it should be sent to the Baptist Union - see the link above - who will look into it.

6.2 Complaints regarding SBC staff, trustees and other volunteers serving within SBC

A complaint must be made in writing and must set out the following:

- The name of the person you are complaining about;
- The events you are complaining about;
- Details of when the events took place;
- Details of where the events took place;
- Details of any witnesses to the issues of concern;
- Details of what you have done to try and resolve your concerns;
- What you consider would resolve your concerns;
- Details of who else you have reported the matter to;
- Any additional information; and
- Confirmation that you are happy for detail of your complaint and the supporting documentation to be provided to the person complained about should it be necessary to do so.

Any supporting documentation that exists should also be enclosed.

Your complaint will not be dealt with unless you provide all of the information set out above.

The church provides a form that can be used to make a formal complaint - see Appendix 1 (which can be printed or requested from the Operations Manager - liz@southcourt.org).

SOUTH COURT

BAPTIST CHURCH

The complaint should be sent to the Lead Pastor, David Graham (david@southcourt.org) who will arrange for an investigation to take place. Where your complaint relates to actions of the Lead Pastor, it should be sent to the Baptist Union - see the link above - who will look into it.

7 How will the complaint be dealt with?

In the first instance, the complaint will be acknowledged in writing or by email within 5 working days. Secondly, the Lead Pastor will appoint an investigator to look into your complaint. You will be told who will be appointed to investigate.

The complaint will then be reviewed by the investigator. The person investigating will seek to:

- Establish what has happened and when it happened and who else was involved;
- Meet with the Complainant or contact them if there is a need for clarification regarding the complaint or further information is required;
- If following the initial information and any discussions with the Complainant the investigation is to proceed, the investigator will inform those who have been complained about of the nature of the allegations made (unless in the opinion of the investigator this would prejudice the investigation interview);
- Interview those involved and those complained about where necessary to understand their account of events;
- Keep notes of all investigatory interviews;

7.1 Complaints regarding application of procedures or decisions made

- Once the investigation is concluded the investigator will decide whether the complaint is well founded and send the complainant their decision. Where any aspect of the complaints are upheld the investigator should also specify the actions suggested to remedy the situation.

7.2 Complaints regarding SBC staff conduct

- If the person investigating concludes that the evidence suggests that conduct worthy of disciplinary action may have taken place, the issue will be dealt with under the staff disciplinary process as outlined in the Employee Handbook.

7.3 Complaints regarding SBC trustees and others who are appointed to serve on a voluntary basis within the church

- If the person investigating concludes that the evidence suggests that misconduct may have taken place, the issue will be referred to the Trustees who will chair a panel of three trustees unconnected with the matter under investigation to consider the evidence and to come to a decision. The panel may choose to invite the complainant or the person complained about to address the panel, but are not required to do so. Such a decision will be communicated to the complainant and to the individual within 5 days of the panel's decision. The investigator will also inform the Charities Commission if circumstances require.

8 Timescales

Following receipt of each complaint the investigator will, within 21 days, give the complainant an estimate of their expected timescale for dealing with the complaint. Where, as the investigation proceeds, it is not possible to meet those timescales, an updated timeline for dealing with the complaint will be provided.

SOUTH COURT

BAPTIST CHURCH

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 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.

9 Safeguarding Issues

Where a complaint relates to safeguarding issues the investigation and follow up actions will be carried out in accordance with our safeguarding procedures in place and these may be adjusted to account for the particular circumstances and any guidance issued by the local authority designated officer involved in the case.

10 What if you are unhappy with the outcome of the investigation?

10.1 Complaints regarding application of procedures or decisions made

You will have the right to appeal any decision on a complaint on these issues. Written notice of intention to appeal should be made within 14 days of the date the outcome of your complaint was sent to you. The appeal itself should be made within a further 14 days. The appeal should be in writing and must be sent to the Lead Pastor who will arrange for your appeal to be considered by someone other than the person who took the initial decision (where possible).

The appeal must set out:

- Your grounds of appeal; and
- What you consider would resolve your concerns.

10.2 Complaints regarding the conduct of staff, trustees and those in voluntary appointments

There is no right for complainants to appeal against the outcome of the investigations into staff, trustee and volunteer conduct. This is because we believe that individuals in these groups who are under investigation need certainty that if an investigation has concluded it will conclude the matter.

If new evidence comes to light that has not previously been submitted that should be provided to the investigator who will determine whether further investigation is necessary in light of that evidence.

11 Vexatious Complaints

If the investigator concludes that a complaint has been made vexatiously or in bad faith the church reserves the right to take the following actions:

- In all cases to inform the complainant that this is how the complaints are being seen and the reasons why. The consequence of this will be that any further complaints and correspondence from the complainant would be ignored.

12 Contact by complainant

Once a formal complaint has been made, you should avoid any ongoing discussion or correspondence with the person you have complained about relating to your complaints without the consent of the investigator.

SOUTH COURT

BAPTIST CHURCH

[13 Confidentiality](#)

The fact of and content of your complaint will be kept confidential safe in so far as is necessary in order for us to properly investigate the complaint and reach a decision relating to it unless we are aware that you have not treated the fact or content of your complaints as confidential.

Please note that we expect you to maintain reasonable confidentiality as to the nature and content of your complaint so that the investigator is able to work without obstruction.

[14 Charity Commission](#)

Where we have exhausted all avenues, should the complainant still be dissatisfied they may contact the Charity Commission as follows: <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-charity>

SOUTH COURT

BAPTIST CHURCH

Appendix 1

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FORM - Appendix 1

This form can be used to submit the following complaints:

- Complaints regarding application of procedures or decisions made (please use **section A**); and
- Complaints regarding staff, trustee or volunteer conduct (please use **section B**).

SECTION A – Complaints regarding application of procedures or decisions made

Please provide the following information:

Your name:

Your address:

Your telephone number:

Your email address:

The actions you are complaining about:

When they took place:

Why you think the actions are wrong:

March 14th 2020

SOUTH COURT

BAPTIST CHURCH

Details of what you have done to try and resolve your concerns:

What you consider would resolve your concerns:

Details of who else you have reported the matter to:

Any additional information:

Confirmation that you are happy for detail of your complaint and the supporting documentation to be provided to those who have made the decisions in question:

Please note your complaint will not be dealt with unless you provide all of the information set out above.

Please send this form to the Lead Pastor at the following address marked 'Private and Confidential', who will arrange for an investigation to take place.

Southcourt Baptist Church, 40, Penn Road, Aylesbury, Bucks, HP21 8HW

March 14th 2020

SOUTH COURT

BAPTIST CHURCH

SECTION B – Complaints regarding staff, trustees or volunteer conduct

Please provide the following information:

Your name:

Your address:

Your telephone number:

Your email address:

The name of the person you are complaining about:

The events you are complaining about:

Details of when the events took place:

Details of where the events took place:

Details of any witnesses to the issues of concern:

SOUTH COURT

BAPTIST CHURCH

Details of what you have done to try and resolve your concerns:

What you consider would resolve your concerns:

Details of who else you have reported the matter to:

Any additional information:

Confirmation that you are happy for detail of your complaint and the supporting documentation to be provided to the person complained about should it be necessary to do so:

Please note your complaint will not be dealt with unless you provide all of the information set out above.

Please send this form to the Lead Pastor at the following address marked 'Private and Confidential', who will arrange for an investigation to take place.

Southcourt Baptist Church, 40, Penn Road, Aylesbury, Bucks, HP21 8HW

March 14th 2020