

Step to Shelter Merseyside Complaints Policy

1. Introduction

Step to Shelter Merseyside is committed to providing high-quality services and fostering an environment of trust and respect. We recognise, however, that there may be occasions when individuals feel dissatisfied with aspects of our work. This Complaints Policy provides a clear framework for raising and resolving complaints in a fair, transparent, and timely manner.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Provide a structured process for individuals to raise concerns or complaints.
- Ensure that complaints are handled consistently, fairly, and promptly.
- Promote transparency and accountability in how we address issues.
- Use feedback from complaints to improve our services and operations.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all stakeholders, including:

- Clients and service users
- Staff and volunteers
- Funders, partners, and members of the public

Complaints may relate to any aspect of Step to Shelter Merseyside's services, activities, or conduct.

4. Principles

Step to Shelter Merseyside is committed to the following principles in handling complaints:

- **Fairness:** Complaints will be dealt with objectively and impartially.
- **Accessibility:** The complaints process will be clear and easy to access.
- **Confidentiality:** All complaints will be treated in confidence, and information will only be shared with those directly involved in resolving the issue.
- **Responsiveness:** Complaints will be acknowledged promptly and resolved in a timely manner.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Feedback from complaints will be used to improve services and prevent similar issues in the future.

5. How to Make a Complaint

Complaints can be made in the following ways:

- **Verbally:** In person or via phone by speaking to a member of staff or a manager.
- **In Writing:** By email or post to the organisation's main office.
- **Online:** Via the complaints form on our website (if available).

Contact details for submitting complaints:
Email: Dylan.Williams@steptoshelter.co.uk
Phone: +44 07840588627

If the complainant requires assistance in making a complaint (e.g., due to language barriers or disabilities), Step to Shelter Merseyside will provide support to ensure the process is inclusive.

6. Complaints Process

Step 1: Initial Complaint

- The complaint should be raised as soon as possible after the issue occurs.
- The relevant staff member or manager will acknowledge the complaint within **3 working days** of receipt.
- Wherever possible, complaints will be resolved informally through discussion.

Step 2: Formal Complaint

- If the complainant is not satisfied with the initial response, they may escalate the complaint by submitting it in writing to the senior management team.
- The complaint will be formally investigated, and the complainant will receive a response within **10 working days**. If the investigation requires more time, the complainant will be informed of the revised timeline.

Step 3: Appeal

- If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the formal complaint, they may appeal the decision by submitting a written appeal to the Board of Trustees.
- The appeal will be reviewed, and a final decision will be provided within **15 working days**.
- The decision of the Board of Trustees will be final.

7. Anonymous Complaints

Anonymous complaints will be considered at the discretion of the organisation. While it may be difficult to investigate anonymous complaints fully, they will be reviewed to identify potential issues or trends that require attention.

8. Complaints Against Staff or Volunteers

Complaints about the conduct of staff or volunteers will be handled in line with Step to Shelter Merseyside's disciplinary procedures.

9. Record-Keeping

All complaints, including informal ones, will be documented and stored securely. Records will include:

- The details of the complaint
- Actions taken to address the complaint
- The outcome of the investigation
- Any follow-up actions required

Records will be retained in compliance with data protection regulations and used to identify areas for improvement.

10. Unreasonable or Vexatious Complaints

Step to Shelter Merseyside reserves the right to limit responses to complaints that are deemed unreasonable, vexatious, or repetitive. Complainants will be informed if their behaviour is considered to fall into this category, and steps will be taken to manage further communication appropriately.

11. Learning and Improvement

Step to Shelter Merseyside views complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve. We will regularly review complaints to identify recurring issues and implement changes to prevent similar problems in the future.

12. Monitoring and Review

The complaints process will be monitored regularly to ensure its effectiveness and fairness. This policy will be reviewed annually and updated as needed to reflect changes in the organisation or feedback from stakeholders.

13. Contacting External Bodies

If a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the internal process, they may contact an external body such as:

- The Charity Commission
 - Local government or regulatory authorities
- Details of relevant external bodies will be provided upon request.