



## Summary - Complaints Policy

Stepping Stones is committed in providing a quality service and working in an open and accountable way that builds the trust and respect of all who access our service. One of the ways in which we can continue to improve our service is by listening and responding to the views of clients, children, outside agencies we partner with, and by responding positively to complaints and by putting mistakes right. We aim to bring all concerns about Stepping Stones services to a satisfactory conclusion for all the parties involved by having a fair complaints procedure that is clear and easy to use for anyone wishing to make a complaint.

All complaints will be dealt with promptly, politely, and when appropriate, confidentially with fair investigations handled in a timely manner. Staff at Stepping Stones will be trained to know how to handle complaints. We will ensure that, wherever possible, complaints are satisfactorily resolved, relationships repaired, where necessary and complaints are used to improve our service.

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction whether justified or not, about any aspect of Stepping Stones. Where a complaint refers to an individual who is not a Stepping Stones' employee or volunteer and is working at Stepping Stones in a professional capacity whilst employed by another organisation, the complaint will be passed on to that organisation to deal with. Complaints may come from any person or organisation that has a legitimate interest in Stepping Stones and can be received verbally, by phone, by email or in writing.

All complaint information will be handled sensitively and, except in exceptional circumstances, every attempt will be made to ensure that both the complainant and Stepping Stones maintain confidentiality. However, in certain circumstances it may not be possible to maintain confidentiality. Each complaint will be judged on its own merit and the situation will be explained to the complainant. Complaints are reviewed annually to identify any trends which may indicate a need to take further action. Overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation lies with the Board of Trustees. This policy replaces the previous policy and will be reviewed annually.

### Procedure

It is hoped that most concerns will be resolved quickly by an informal approach. However, if concerns cannot be satisfactorily resolved informally, then the formal complaints procedure should be followed.

#### Stage 1

In many cases a complaint can be resolved by clients speaking with their keyworker who may be able to resolve it quickly. If the complaint concerns a keyworker the complainant should speak to the Women's Service Manager. The keyworker will inform the Service Manager of all complaints and if not already resolved then the Service Manager will investigate it and take appropriate action. Any parent, carer or guardian who is uneasy about any aspect of the Childcare Service should in the first instance talk with the Childcare Service Manager or

Deputy Manager in their absence. The Childcare Service Manager will investigate it and take appropriate action.

Any person who requires a written response to their concerns should request one at this stage. All complaint information will be passed to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), whether or not the complaint has been resolved. Where the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a fair opportunity to respond.

### **Stage 2**

If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome, or if the problem recurs, the client should make a formal complaint, in writing, to the CEO who will investigate the complaint. Complaints should be addressed to The CEO, Stepping Stones (9a George Street West, Luton, Bedfordshire LU1 2BJ) and marked "Confidential".

A written complaint should provide as much detail as possible about the complaint and include details of what happened, when and where it occurred, with dates and times. The complainant can expect a written reply in acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint, as well as some indication of how and when the complaint will be addressed within 5 working days. All complaints will be dealt with within 28 days. If assistance is required in making a complaint the CAB or other similar organisations may be contacted for guidance.

Complaints about the CEO should be addressed to The Chair of Trustees. The CEO will make a reply to the complaint, stating their view and what action may be taken. If dissatisfied with the response a request that it be reconsidered can be made. Should the need for disciplinary action of a staff member, volunteer or student be identified, the disciplinary policy will be invoked. The complainant will be informed of operational action taken because of a complaint, but due to Data Protection and confidentiality issues, not any disciplinary sanction.

### **Stage 3**

If a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation of a complaint, they can request that the complaint is reviewed at Board level. At this stage the complaint will be passed to The Chair of the Board of Trustees. The complainant can also write to the Chair of Trustees stating why they are dissatisfied with the outcome. This must be done within 10 days of receiving the written response from the CEO. The request for Board level review will be acknowledged within a week of receipt and the complainant will be informed of a timescale for response to the complaint.

The person who dealt with the original complaint at Stage 1 will be kept informed of what is happening. If the complaint relates to a specific person, they will be informed and given a further opportunity to respond.

### **External Stage**

#### **Charity Commission**

The complainant can complain to the Charity Commission at any stage. The Charity Commission is the independent watchdog for charities. Information about the kind of complaints the Commission can involve itself in can be found on their website at:

[www.charity-commission.gov.uk](http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk). - Stepping Stones (Luton) Registered Charity Number: 1162349

Ofsted

If the complainant would prefer to make their complaint directly to Ofsted their contact details are:

Ofsted Complaints & Investigations Team - Tel: 0300 1231231

Ofsted Helpline - Tel: 0300 1231231 Ofsted Registered Number: EY435517

In the event of an allegation being made against a member of staff, the following procedure will be carried out as necessary:

- Member of staff will be suspended
- Incident investigated
- Ofsted informed
- Local Authority informed
- Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)
- Luton Safeguarding Children Board informed

Tel: 0300 1231231

Tel: 01582 548997

Tel: 01582 548069

Tel: 01582 547590

## Complaints age 5 and over

The registered person must inform the parent, carer or guardian who made the complaint (in writing or by email if they request this) of the outcome of the complaint, within 20 days of the date the complaint was made.

## Premature Exit of Service Users

In some exceptional circumstances Service Users may be asked to leave the service prematurely due to a range of behaviours.

The first stage following a complaint would be a meeting with the Women's Service Manager or the CEO to discuss any issue. This meeting would be followed by a letter setting out both the reason for exclusion and the length of time it will be in effect. The right of appeal against the decision will be set out in the letter.

Any appeal should be sent in writing to Sandra Brown, Chair of the Board of Trustees, who can be reached on [sandra.brown@steppingstonesluton.org.uk](mailto:sandra.brown@steppingstonesluton.org.uk) . Appeals will be acknowledged within a week of receipt and the complainant informed of a timescale for a further meeting. Following a meeting with the Chair of Trustees a written decision will be issued. There will be no further right of appeal following this decision.

This policy will be reviewed as required and no later than a year after the last review date.

Sand Braun

Signed..... Chair of Trustees

Name.....Sandra Brown.....Dated.21 March 2024.....  
Print Name