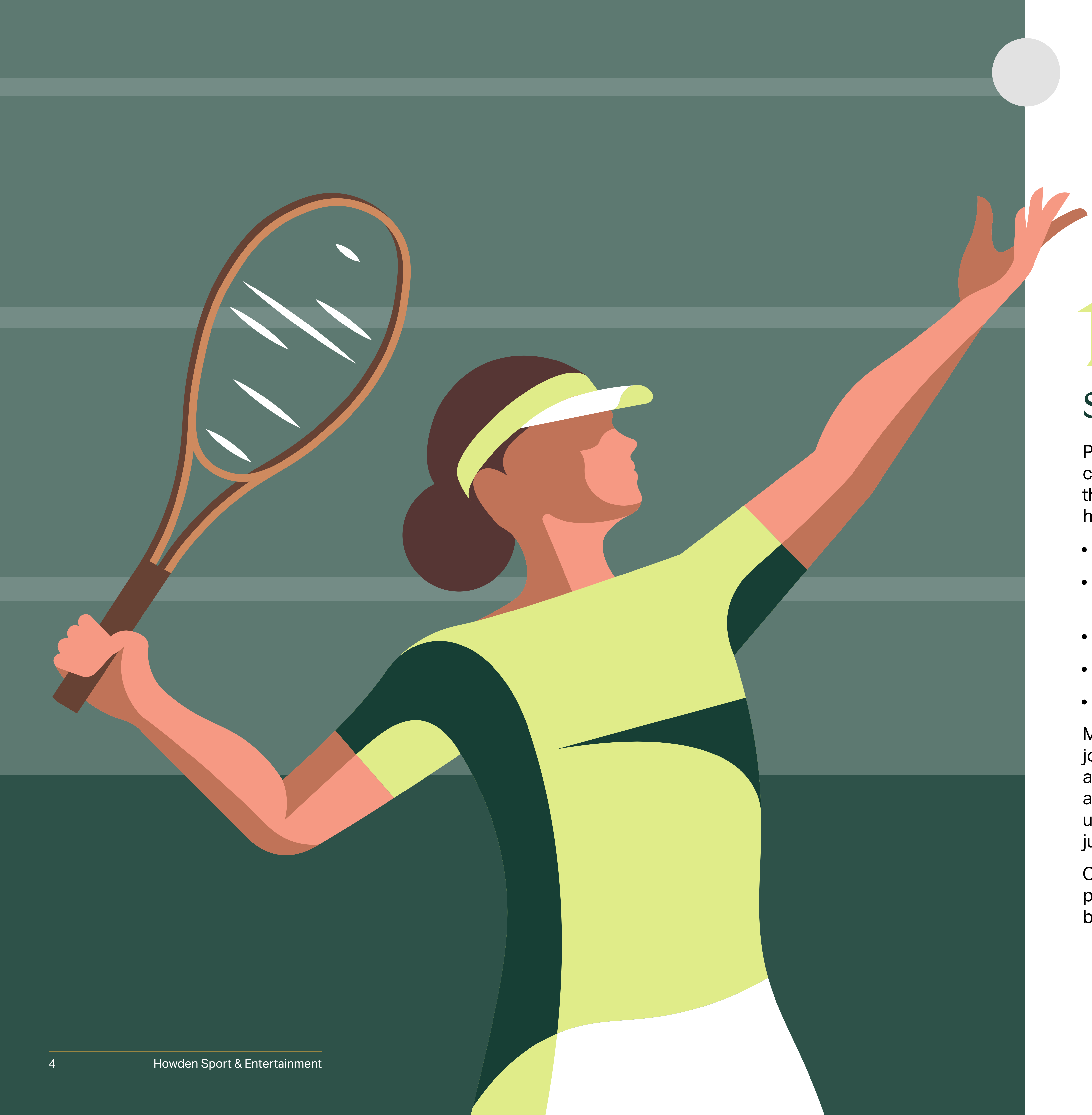
Howden Sport & Entertainment

Managing membership disputes in tennis clubs

Practical steps to help clubs respond fairly and confidently

Disputes can happen in any tennis club. They might involve members, committee members, coaches, parents, spectators or volunteers. Some are resolved informally, but some need a clearer process to help everyone understand what happens next.

For volunteer-led clubs, even small disputes can take time and energy away from running the club. Clear policies that anticipate and provide for common challenges, fair processes and good records can help clubs manage concerns calmly, consistently and proportionately.



1.

Start with clear policies

Policies can give clubs a useful route to follow when concerns arise. They can also help members understand the standards expected of them. Clubs should consider having and regularly reviewing:

- Membership rules
- A code of conduct for members, parents, coaches and volunteers
- A complaints and disciplinary procedure
- An equality and anti-discrimination policy
- A social media policy

Make policies easy to find. Share them when members join, keep them on the website and in the clubhouse, and consider asking members to acknowledge them at joining or renewal. Parents and guardians should also understand the expectations that apply to them and to junior members.

Clubs should also take care when using AI to draft policies or responses, unless the content is reviewed by someone suitably qualified.

2.

Follow a fair process

A decision may be reasonable, but it can still be difficult to defend if the process used to reach it appears unfair. Depending on the situation, a fair process may include:

- Acknowledging the complaint
- Deciding whether any immediate action is needed
- Gathering relevant evidence
- Explaining the allegation clearly
- Giving the person involved a chance to respond
- Making sure the decision-maker is impartial
- Communicating the outcome and reasons
- Offering a right of appeal, where appropriate

Policies should anticipate that sometimes a complaint involves a committee member, or someone close to them, and provide that in those situations the club should consider whether anyone needs to step back from the process.

3.

Be consistent, but proportionate

Consistency helps build trust. Similar issues should usually be handled through a similar process, regardless of whether someone is new, long-standing, senior, talented or well-liked. That does not mean every situation has the same outcome. Clubs can still consider context and seriousness. But decisions should be explainable, proportionate and in line with the club's policies.

An informal conversation may be enough in some cases. Where it is, it is important to keep a note so the club has a record of what happened and why.

4.

Consider equality and accessibility

Clubs should be aware of responsibilities linked to protected characteristics, including disability, race, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, religion or belief, age, pregnancy and maternity, and marriage or civil partnership.

Sometimes fairness may mean making reasonable adjustments so a member can take part in a process properly. This could include offering information in a different format or considering adjustments for disabled or neurodiverse members.

Policies can help by giving members a clear opportunity to share relevant needs early, explaining why that information is requested and how it will be used.

5.

Keep records and respect confidentiality

Good records can help demonstrate that the club acted fairly. Keep notes of complaints, key evidence, decisions, reasons and outcomes in an agreed format, such as formal notes or email.

Be careful with side conversations on WhatsApp or other informal channels, especially where decisions are being discussed. These messages can affect how fair the process appears if the matter is challenged later in court. Confidentiality matters too – details of complaints, personal data and safeguarding information should usually only be shared with those who need to know.

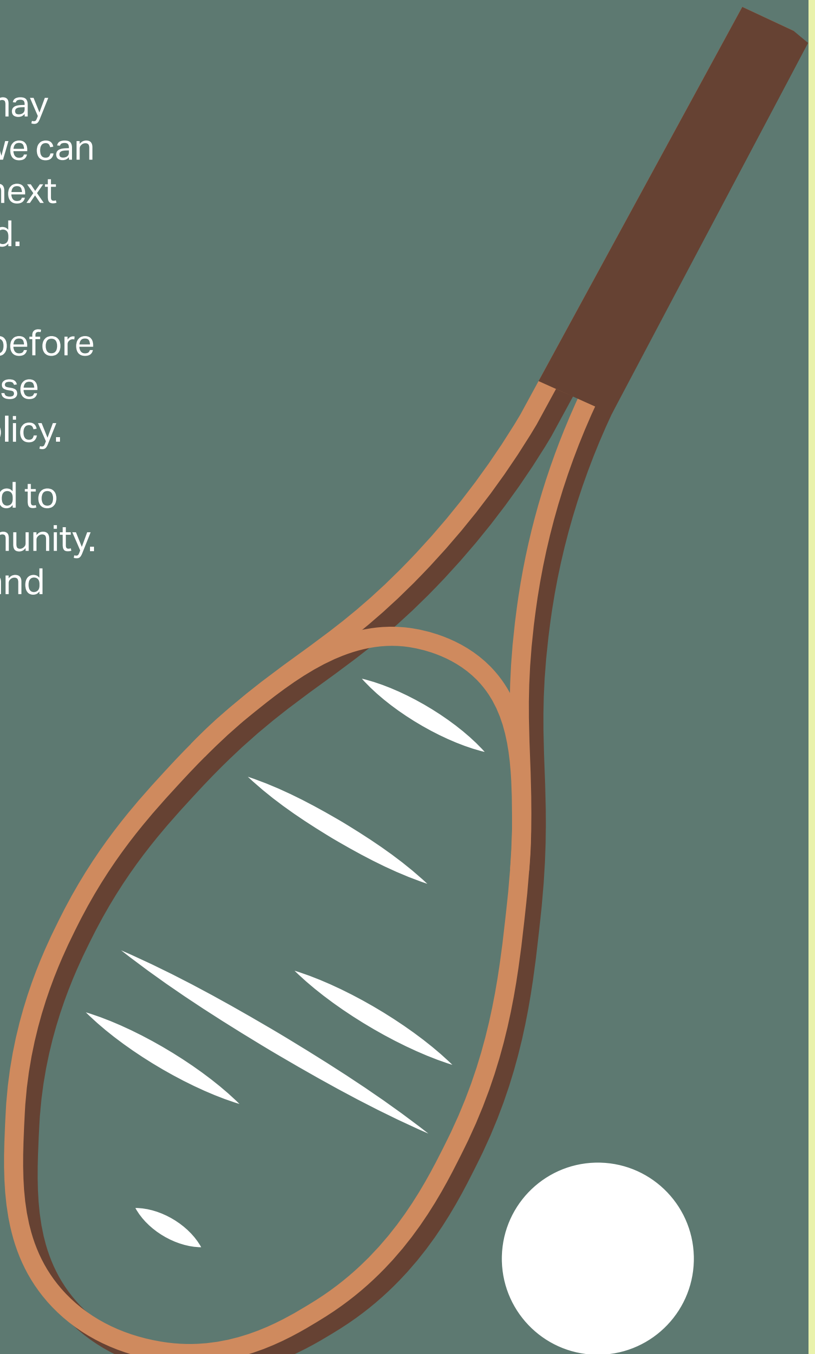
6.

Ask for support early

Howden is here to support the LTA and its affiliated venues and clubs. If a dispute is becoming contentious, could escalate or may lead to a claim, please contact us early so we can work together to help you understand the next steps and how your insurance may respond.

Do not assume legal costs will be covered retrospectively. If solicitors are appointed before insurers have agreed to cover the cost, those costs may not be recoverable under the policy.

Mediation may also help where people need to continue being part of the same club community. It can give everyone a chance to be heard and agree a practical way forward.



Quick checklist for tennis clubs

- ✓ **Are our policies clear, current and easy to access?**
- ✓ **Do members know what standards are expected?**
- ✓ **Could we explain our process if a complaint came in tomorrow?**
- ✓ **Do we know how to manage conflicts of interest?**
- ✓ **Are we applying policies consistently and proportionately?**
- ✓ **Are we keeping appropriate records?**

Clear policies, fair processes and calm, consistent decision-making can help tennis clubs resolve concerns before they become harder, more personal or more costly to manage.

Contact the Howden Sport & Entertainment team to discuss insurance offerings and expert advice that protects your organisation and its people.

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