



Club Complaints Policy

Alton Football Club

Policy Statement

If any member feels that he/she/they have suffered expulsion, discrimination in any way or that the Club Policies, Rules or Code of Conduct or the FA Grassroots Code Standards of Behaviour been broken, they should follow the procedures below.

This procedure is intended to work alongside the Club Safeguarding Policy, Anti-Bullying Policy, Equality/EDI Policy, Player Recruitment and Selection/Game Time Policy, Codes of Conduct and any County FA or FA requirements.

Principles

In any football club, differences and misunderstandings may arise. Successful resolution of differences depends on the willingness of the parties involved to communicate with one another. Where possible, the Club will look to resolve complaints informally at a committee level.

Where a complaint cannot be resolved informally, a formal complaint should be made in writing, via email, to the Club Secretary. Formal complaints will be investigated by an individual or panel

appointed by the Club's Committee. Where the complaint or concern relates to the welfare or safety of a child or adult at risk or may amount to a lower-level safeguarding concern, it should be reported to the Club Welfare Officer and/or Hampshire FA Safeguarding Team in line with section 4 below:

It is intended that complaints procedures should;

- be easily accessible and clearly promoted to members, parents/carers, volunteers and young people
- ensure that all complaints are fully, fairly investigated and promptly considered
- ensure that the complaints process supplies an effective response
- ensure that proper redress, learning and proportionate action is made
- be child-centered where children or young people are involved, including seeking the voice of the child where appropriate



The Club will respect a complainants' desire for confidentiality wherever possible. Information will only be shared where necessary to carry out a fair process, safeguard children or adults at risk, seek County FA advice, comply with legal duties, or respond to a statutory agency.

The Club will use the feedback provided by both informal and formal complaints to ensure that its systems and services are improved. The Committee should review any learning after each complaint or concern and consider whether policies, training, supervision or communication need to be strengthened.

The Club will manage all complaints and lower-level concerns with empathy, impartiality and integrity. Concerns will not be ignored because they appear minor, as early action can prevent escalation.

What is a Complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with the conduct of the club, its committee(s), coaches, volunteer officers, players, or with alleged unfair practice in connection with the club. A concern may also include a lower-level concern or behavioural issue that falls below expected standards but still needs to be recorded and addressed.

Grounds for a complaint shall include, but shall not be limited, to the following:

- if the conduct of any individual, body, or organisation brings or is likely to bring the club into disrepute
- the violation of the Club's Constitution or Procedures
- behaviour that does not reflect the FA Grassroots Code Standards of Behaviour, including Enjoy the Game, Give Respect, Work Together, Play Safe and Be Inclusive.
- failure to report, record or act upon safeguarding or welfare concerns, including lower-level concerns.
- selection, game-time or player recruitment concerns where these appear inconsistent with the Club's policy or stated approach.

A lower-level concern is any concern, doubt or sense of unease, no matter how small, that someone may have acted in a way that is inconsistent with the Club's Codes of Conduct, the expectations of The FA/County FA, or the standards required by the Club. This may include inappropriate behaviour within football or outside of football, including outside work, volunteering or being an athlete, where the behaviour raises a concern about suitability, judgement, boundaries, safeguarding practice or expected standards. Such concerns may not appear immediately dangerous or intentionally harmful,



but can escalate and create an environment where more serious rule breaking or abuse may occur if they are not addressed

A Complaint may be made by:

- a member of the Club where the complaint concerns the Club
- the parent of or other person with parental responsibility for a member of the Club under the age of 18 years on his/her behalf
- any third party where the complaint concerns the Club
- a young person, with appropriate support and in an age-appropriate way

No complaints may be made under this policy about decisions made by referees at competitions held under the authority of the Club. Appeals procedures exist in respect of these matters. However, behaviour towards match officials, including youth match officials, may be dealt with under this procedure, referred to the League/County FA/ FA Discipline, or all parties.

Informal Complaint

It is clearly desirable for any complaint to be resolved informally where possible, and it is hoped that every attempt will be made to achieve this. Informal resolution should be prompt, proportionate and should not be used where there is a safeguarding concern, risk of harm, discrimination, criminal allegation, serious misconduct, repeated lower-level concern or conflict of interest.

An informal complaint can be made either verbally or in writing to the committee member or the committee of the Club directly. Every effort will be made to resolve informal complaints to the satisfaction of the complainant. Informal steps may include a conversation, reminder of the Grassroots Code/Codes of Conduct, mediation, mentoring, additional supervision, signposting to training or an agreed improvement plan.

Where it has not been possible to resolve the matter informally, the Formal Complaints Procedure should be invoked. The request should be made in writing to the Club Secretary. If the complaint concerns the Club Secretary, the complaint should be made to the Club Chair. Thereafter, if a conflict of interest exists, the complaint should be made to an independent member of the Club Committee or the Hampshire FA for further clarification.

Even where a matter is resolved informally, the Club should keep a brief, secure record of the concern, action taken and outcome, particularly where the matter involves children, volunteers in regulated activity, lower-level safeguarding concerns or repeated behaviour.



Reporting Routes and Initial Response

Complaints or concerns should usually be reported as follows:

- general club complaints: to the Club Secretary, or the Club Chair if the complaint concerns the Secretary.
- welfare, safeguarding or lower-level concerns involving children/adults at risk: to the Club Welfare Officer in the first instance, or directly to Hampshire FA Safeguarding Team if urgent, serious, or there is a conflict of interest
- discrimination reports: to the Club Secretary/Chair and, where appropriate, the County FA and/ or FA Discipline.
- complaints about the Chair, Committee or where the Club cannot be impartial: to Hampshire FA for advice on the appropriate route

The Club should acknowledge receipt of a formal complaint or lower-level concern within 5 days where possible, confirm who will manage the matter and provide an indicative timescale. If timescales cannot be met, the Club should update the relevant parties as soon as possible

The Club should open a secure record of the complaint or concern and appoint suitable, non-conflicted individuals to consider or investigate it within 10 days where possible. For lower-level concerns involving children, this should normally include the Club Welfare Officer unless there is a conflict of interest.

Formal Complaint

A formal complaint should be made in writing to the Club Secretary where a complaint has not been resolved informally or where the matter is of a serious nature. Where the matter is a welfare, safeguarding or lower-level concern, it should be made to the Club Welfare Officer or Hampshire FA Safeguarding Team as set out above. Complaints of a serious nature would include gross misconduct, negligence, discrimination, repeated poor behaviour, matters concerning the protection of young people or vulnerable adults, or behaviour that may breach the Grassroots Code Standards of Behaviour.

Verbal and anonymous complaints shall be reviewed for general improvement purposes but will not be investigated through the formal complaint's procedure. Anonymous or verbal safeguarding/welfare information must still be assessed and acted upon where there is enough information to identify a risk or pattern of concern. This may include liaising with Hampshire FA/ Hampshire FA Safeguarding team if the complaint relates to a safeguarding concern



A complaint must normally reach the Club Secretary or relevant complaints handler no later than 14 days after the alleged incident that gave rise to it. The Club may accept later complaints where there is good reason, where the matter relates to safeguarding/welfare, where there may be a pattern of lower-level concerns, or where it is in the interests of football to do so.

Complaints that fall outside the authority of the Club may be referred to Hampshire FA. The Club should seek Hampshire FA advice promptly where the appropriate process is unclear.

Complaints about the protection of children or vulnerable adults shall be referred to Hampshire FA, who will liaise with The FA, Police, NSPCC, Local Authority children's/adult services, LADO or other statutory agencies as required

Complaints alleging criminal activity may be referred to the Police. The Club should also seek advice from Hampshire FA Safeguarding Team where the allegation relates to a child or adult at risk.

The Club Committee will appoint an Investigating Officer(s) to investigate the allegation.

The Investigating Officer(s) will be independent of the matter being investigated and will remain impartial. The person who raised the complaint, anyone directly involved, or anyone with significant influence over the respondent should not decide the outcome.

The Investigating Officer(s) shall have the power and discretion to co-opt, from time to time, other persons with specific skills or experience to help in the carrying out of their duties.

If the Investigating Officer(s), to whom a complaint has been referred, is not satisfied that it meets the criteria for a complaint he/she/they may refuse to allow it to continue. Reasons should be recorded and communicated. Where the matter is a safeguarding or welfare concern, advice should be sought before deciding to take no further action.

Complaints or Concerns Involving the Behaviour of a Child or Young Person

Where a complaint or concern is about the behaviour of a child or young person, the Club will manage the matter in a child-centred, proportionate and safeguarding-aware way. The Club will consider the child's age, understanding, maturity, additional needs, welfare, parent/carers involvement, the seriousness of the behaviour and the impact on any person affected.

Children and young people may breach the Club's Codes of Conduct, team expectations, the Grassroots Code / Respect Standard or other relevant club policies. Examples may include bullying, discriminatory language, aggressive behaviour, unsafe conduct, repeated poor behaviour, disrespect towards officials, misuse of social media or behaviour that affects the safety, welfare or enjoyment of others.



Where appropriate, the Club may manage the concern under the Internal Misconduct Policy, Anti-Bullying Policy, Safeguarding Children Policy, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, Selection and Game Time Statement, Player Code of Conduct or other relevant club policy.

Possible responses may include a conversation with the child, parent/carer involvement, a reminder of expected standards, apology or restorative discussion where safe and voluntary, behaviour agreement, support plan, mentoring, education, increased supervision, temporary adjustment to activities, or referral to the Club Welfare Officer, Hampshire FA, The FA, the league or statutory agencies where required

Suspension or exclusion of a child from football activity should only be used where necessary and proportionate, such as where there is a serious or repeated concern, risk to others, refusal to follow agreed expectations, or where temporary protective action is needed while advice is sought.

The child and their parent/carer should normally be told the reason for any restriction, the expected length of time it will apply, what needs to happen before return, and whether there is a right of review or appeal.

Where there is any possible safeguarding concern, serious bullying, discrimination, sexualised behaviour, violence, threats, harassment, repeated behaviour or uncertainty about the correct route, the Club Welfare Officer and/or Hampshire FA DSO should be contacted for advice.

Managing Lower-Level Concerns

All lower-level concerns should be reported to the Club Welfare Officer and/or assistant Welfare Officer/s. The Club Welfare Officer should raise the concern with the Club Committee or relevant club officers, normally the Chair and Secretary, unless there is a conflict of interest.

The Club should send a concern/incident reporting form to the person raising the concern, and any other relevant parties, at the earliest opportunity. The form is intended to support the gathering of information, but non-completion of the form, or the concern being shared in another format, must not prevent the Club from taking appropriate action. Younger children, children/adults with additional learning needs, or individuals for whom English is not their first language may need support to complete the form or share their account in another appropriate way. If the person raising the concern shares information in another format, the Club should accept this and record the information securely.

The investigation should be documented and should include the voice of the child or victim wherever possible. Where a lower-level concern, complaint or misconduct matter directly involves a child, the child's voice should be considered as a priority. Children should be given the opportunity to share their account or view in an age-appropriate way, with parent/carer support where appropriate, while ensuring this is safe, proportionate and does not cause unnecessary repeated questioning.



Where a third separate lower-level concern is raised about the same individual, the Club must inform Hampshire FA / the County FA Safeguarding Team. This means three separate lower-level concerns, not three reports about the same incident, and includes situations where the Club has dealt fully with, or is dealing with, the previous two incidents. The Club does not need to wait for a third concern before seeking advice, particularly where concerns are escalating or where a second concern arises within 12 months of the first.

Where a coach, volunteer or club official resigns, leaves the Club or withdraws from their role during or as a result of a lower-level concern, misconduct or safeguarding-related investigation, the Club should contact Hampshire FA / the County FA Safeguarding Team for advice and to ensure relevant information is appropriately retained and shared where necessary.

Where a person is removed from a role because of lower-level concerns, where a third separate concern is raised about the same individual, or where concerns are more serious than first anticipated, the Club must inform Hampshire FA / the County FA Safeguarding Team.

Youth Voice

Where a complaint or concern directly affects a child or young person, the Club will ensure that the voice of the child or victim is considered wherever possible and, where the matter directly involves a child, as a priority. Their views should be heard and considered in an age-appropriate, safe and proportionate way. The child's welfare, safety and wellbeing must remain central to any decision-making.

This may include speaking with the child with parental/carers support where appropriate, inviting written feedback, using a trusted adult to help capture their views, or using another method that is suitable for the child's age, understanding and circumstances.

At the point of reporting, the Club should consider whether a child or young person has been affected and whether their view should be sought. During the investigation, children and young people should be offered the opportunity to share their account where this is safe and appropriate. At outcome stage, the Club should consider whether the action taken addresses the child's experience and supports a safe, inclusive and positive football environment.

The Club should not place pressure on a child to participate in the process and should avoid repeated questioning. Where there is any safeguarding concern, the Club Welfare Officer should seek advice from Hampshire FA Safeguarding Team before speaking with the child or family if there is uncertainty about the safest approach.



Complaints Panels and Investigations

The Club's Management Committee shall appoint a panel of suitably qualified individuals to hear and decide on complaints hearings. The individuals appointed by the Club should not be conflicted and shall remain impartial. The panel should have appropriate safeguarding awareness where the matter involves children, young people or adults at risk.

Where a formal complaint or lower-level concern has been received, the Club may appoint one or more individuals to investigate. Investigations should normally take place within 7-21 days of the report where possible, with updates provided if this is not achievable. The Club should communicate delays at the earliest opportunity to avoid frustration or escalation.

The Investigating Officer(s) may ask that other individuals take part and give evidence and/or that further written documents or other evidence be supplied by any or all of them.

Any improper contact, approach or try to influence or intimidate any Investigating Officer(s), witness or representative either in person, online, or through an intermediary must be at once reported to the Committee who may take such action as they consider appropriate. Such conduct may form the subject of a complaint.

It shall be for the complainant to prove the complaint on a balance of probabilities. The Club should assess all available evidence fairly and should avoid taking sides, becoming defensive or relying on assumptions.

Where appropriate, the respondent should be given enough information about the concern, evidence and process to respond fairly, subject to safeguarding, confidentiality and data protection considerations.

The Club may consider whether it is appropriate and proportionate to suspend a member or volunteer from some or all Club activity while the matter is investigated. Any interim measure should be risk-based, proportionate, kept under review and should not be treated as a finding of fact.

Decisions, Outcomes and Sanctions

The Investigating Officer(s) shall report their findings to the Club's Committee, who make their decision on cases before it by majority. The decision, reasons, action and any learning should be recorded in writing.

The Club's Committee may make whatever order it considers; such action may include:

- no further action / unsubstantiated finding



- discussion with the individual and reinforcement of the Grassroots Code or Club Code of Conduct
- mediation or restorative conversation where appropriate
- management guidance, mentoring, buddying, supervision or an improvement plan for a stated period
- education or training, including FA or England Football learning
- verbal or written warning as to future conduct
- temporary exclusion from specified Club activities, matches or training sessions
- suspension from membership
- removal from role where proportionate and following a robust, fair process
- referral to Hampshire FA, League, The FA or statutory agency where required

Remove from membership any person found to have broken the Club's Policies or Codes of Conduct or the FA Grassroots Code Standards of Behaviour (this will be ratified at a SGM in accordance with the Club's Constitution where required).

At outcome stage, the Club should communicate the outcome to the originating party. Full details do not necessarily need to be shared, particularly where this would breach confidentiality, safeguarding requirements or data protection obligations.

Where possible, the Club should aim to communicate the outcome within 28 days of the initial reported concern. Where a formal response process has been used, the Club should aim to send the decision and reasons within 10 days of the response deadline or hearing, unless a different timescale is communicated

Appeals

Either party may appeal a formal decision in writing within 14 days of the decision being notified to them. The appeal should set out the grounds of appeal, for example procedural unfairness, new evidence, disproportionality of outcome, or a decision that was not reasonably supported by the evidence.

The appeal should be considered by individuals who were not involved in the original investigation or decision wherever possible. The appeal decision should be communicated in writing and should usually be final within the Club's internal process.

If the Club is unable to resolve a complaint, or where independence is required, the Club may ask Hampshire FA to provide guidance or act as an external mediator where appropriate

Confidentiality, Records and Data Protection



As far as is practical, confidentiality shall be preserved in the investigation of a complaint. Such an approach is in the interest of both the complainant and any other person or persons involved. If, however, another person is named in a complaint, we believe that normally they should know what is said about them and who is making the complaint. The Club may also act if a complaint is found to be malicious.

The Investigating Officer(s) and Complaints Panel shall be responsible for conducting investigations into formal complaints, conducting hearings, where it has been found there is a case to answer.

The Investigating Officer(s) and Complaints Panel may recommend provisional suspension of an individual, group or member whilst they are investigating or prior to a full hearing of the matter.

The Club must keep detailed, secure records of complaints, lower-level concerns, investigations, action taken, outcomes and learning. Where concerns have been raised about an adult's behaviour around children, records should normally be retained until the subject of the allegation reaches normal retirement age or for 10 years from the date of the allegation, whichever is later. Records should be retained even where the concern is unfounded and even if the person stops working or volunteering for the Club, unless specific advice confirms otherwise .

Information relating to complaints, misconduct and lower-level concerns must be handled lawfully, fairly and securely. Information should only be shared where it is necessary, proportionate, relevant to the concern being managed, and on a need-to-know basis. Electronic records should be password protected and shared securely, including using passwords or encryption where appropriate.

Where volunteers use personal devices to create or store records, the Club should have guidance and safeguards in place. When responsibility for records changes, a proper handover should take place, including deletion of Club records from personal devices where appropriate. All communications should be professional in language and tone, recognising that individuals may have rights to request records that refer to them.

Arbitration/External Support

The complainant and the Club agree to submit any dispute concerning any matter connected with or arising out of this complaints policy and procedure exclusively to binding arbitration to be conducted by an arbitrator (or panel) appointed by the Hampshire FA.



Appendices

The appendices to this policy are intended to support clubs to manage complaints, lower-level concerns and safeguarding-related concerns consistently, fairly and within expected timeframes. Clubs should use the relevant appendix depending on the nature of the concern. The appendices do not replace the need to seek advice from the Club Welfare Officer, Hampshire FA, Hampshire FA Safeguarding Team / County FA DSO, The FA or statutory agencies where required.



Appendix 1 – Timeframes

Stage	Timeframe	Notes
Acknowledge complaint/concern	Within 5 days	Confirm who is handling it and likely next steps.
Open secure record and identify non-conflicted investigator/panel	Within 10 days	Lower-level concerns should normally include CWO unless conflict exists.
Gather evidence / meet relevant parties	7-21 days after report	Include child voice where appropriate and safe.
Agree action/outcome	Within 28 days from initial report where possible	If delayed, communicate revised timescales promptly.
Formal response from respondent	Suggested 7-14 days from request	Set a clear response deadline in writing.
Issue decision after response/hearing	Within 10 days where possible	Provide written decision and reasons, with proportionate detail.
Appeal deadline	Within 28 days of decision	Appeal to non-conflicted individuals where possible.
Escalation to Hampshire FA	At any stage if required	Must refer third separate lower-level concern, removal from role, safeguarding risk, statutory agency involvement, conflict, unresolved matter or more serious concern.



Appendix 2- Suggested complaint information to request

Detailed description of what happened, including what behaviour is said to have breached Club policy, the Grassroots Code or expected standards.

Details of when and where the behaviour took place.

Names and contact details of witnesses or people affected, where they consent to being contacted.

Any documents, screenshots, messages or other evidence.

Details of any former complaints or concerns about the same behaviour or individual, if known.

The outcome or support the complainant is seeking, recognising that the Club will decide proportionate action.

Where the concern affects a child or young person, any views they wish to share and what support they may need, captured in an age-appropriate and safe way.



Appendix 3- Suggested Lower-Level Concern Checklist

Concern received by Club Welfare Officer or relevant club official and logged securely.

Concern acknowledged and approximate timescale given within 5 days where possible.

CWO and suitable committee members agree who will investigate, with conflicts checked.

Evidence and observations requested from relevant parties; written submissions accepted where meetings are not possible.

If U18s are involved, consider how their voice can be heard safely and age-appropriately, with parent/carer involvement where suitable.

Record how the child or young person's views were sought or, where this was not appropriate, the reason why. Consider whether the outcome has been explained to the child/parent/carer in an age-appropriate way and whether any follow-up support is needed.

Club investigation team reviews evidence and agrees proportionate outcome/action.

Outcome recorded and communicated to the originating party with proportionate detail.

Hampshire FA Safeguarding Team consulted or informed where required, including third separate lower-level concern or removal from role.



Club Compliant Procedure

Supporting Documents Pack

How to use this pack

Use the route guide and flowchart first to decide whether the matter is a general complaint, lower-level concern, safeguarding concern, discipline matter, discrimination report or something that needs Hampshire FA advice.

Use the reporting form and investigation checklist to keep a clear, fair and documented process.

Use the template wording as a starting point only. Clubs should adapt it to the circumstances and seek Hampshire FA Safeguarding Team / County FA DSO advice where needed.

Where a child or young person is affected, consider their views in an age-appropriate, safe and proportionate way. Avoid repeated questioning or placing pressure on the child.

Documents included

1. Complaint/ concern route guide (**Essential**)

Use this guide at the point where a complaint or concern is received. When unsure, the Club Welfare Officer should seek advice from the Hampshire FA Safeguarding Team / County FA DSO.

Issue type	Examples	Initial route	Who should lead?	Escalation / referral
General complaint	Poor communication, selection process disagreement, club administration issue, concern about how a policy has been applied.	Informal resolution where appropriate, then formal complaints procedure if unresolved or serious.	Club Secretary/Chair or non-conflicted committee member.	Hampshire FA if outside club authority, unresolved, complex or conflict of interest.



Lower-level concern	Favouritism, inappropriate language, poor supervision, failure to challenge poor behaviour, putting performance over wellbeing, unsafe coaching practice.	Record as lower-level concern and manage through CWO/committee process. Internal club misconduct policy procedures if it involves a club member/parent/spectator from the club.	Club Welfare Officer and suitable non-conflicted committee members.	County FA DSO can be consulted at any stage. Must be informed where a third separate lower-level concern is raised or where removal from role is an outcome.
Safeguarding concern	Risk of harm, abuse allegation, sexualised communication, child/adult at risk concern, statutory agency involvement.	Do not manage solely as a club complaint. Follow safeguarding policy immediately.	Club Welfare Officer, with Hampshire FA DSO/statutory agency advice.	Hampshire FA DSO, The FA, Police, LADO, Children's Social Care or other agency as appropriate.



Discrimination concern	Alleged discrimination linked to race, sex, religion/belief, disability, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, age or other protected characteristic.	Record, assess risk, follow complaints process and relevant FA reporting route.	Non-conflicted committee member with CWO input where children are involved.	FA Discipline/ County FA as appropriate, particularly if linked to matchday discipline or safeguarding. Raise a ticket with FA Discipline via this link https://grassrootsdiscipline.thefa.com/support/tickets/new Internal club misconduct policy procedures if it involves a club member/ parent/ spectator from the club.
Match discipline matter	On-field misconduct, referee report, match official decision, competition sanction.	Usually outside club complaints procedure unless it involves a club member. Follow league/County FA discipline process. If it does involve a club member look to follow internal club misconduct policy.	Team/club official supporting relevant discipline process.	Raise a ticket with FA Discipline via this link https://grassrootsdiscipline.thefa.com/support/tickets/new County FA/league discipline process. Internal club misconduct policy procedures if it involves a club member/ parent/ spectator from the club.



Complaint about committee member / conflict	Concern is about Club Secretary, Chair, CWO or someone who would normally lead the process.	Use alternative non-conflicted committee member/ parent helper not linked to the complaint or seek external advice.	Independent/non-conflicted committee members.	Hampshire FA advice if independence cannot be achieved.
---	---	---	---	---

2. Complaints and concerns flowchart (**Essential**)

Suggested process for clubs. Timeframes may need to change depending on risk, complexity, volunteer availability or external advice. If timeframes change, keep parties updated.

Step	Action	Suggested timeframe	Key prompts
1	Receive complaint/concern and check for immediate risk.	Same day where possible	Is anyone at risk of harm? Is this safeguarding, statutory, discrimination or discipline? Does the CWO need to be involved immediately?
2	Acknowledge receipt and explain next steps.	Within 5 calendar days	Confirm the concern has been received. Avoid promising an outcome. Explain expected process and who will handle it.
3	Open a secure record and complete initial triage.	Within 10 calendar days	Record date received, parties, issue type, conflicts of interest, referral decisions and whether Youth Voice is needed.
4	Appoint suitable non-conflicted person/panel to investigate.	Within 10 calendar days	Should include CWO where safeguarding/lower-level concern involves children, unless conflicted.



5	Gather evidence and views.	Normally days 10-21	Speak to relevant parties, witnesses and, where appropriate, children/parents/carers. Accept written submissions where meetings are not possible.
6	Review evidence and agree outcome.	Aim by day 28	Apply balance of probabilities for formal complaints. Choose proportionate outcome. Consider training, mentoring, warning, mediation, referral, suspension/removal.
7	Communicate outcome.	As soon as reasonably possible after decision	Tell parties what can appropriately be shared. Full details do not always need to be shared with the person who raised the concern.
8	Offer appeal route where applicable.	Within 14 calendar days of outcome	Appeal grounds: process not followed, decision unreasonable, disproportionate outcome, new evidence.
9	Close record and review learning.	After outcome/appeal	Record actions, referrals, learning, policy changes and retention plan.

3. Club Complaint/ Concern Reporting form template (**Good Practice and useful template**)

This form can be completed by the person raising the complaint/concern, or by a club official recording information provided verbally or in another format. The form is intended to help gather information, but non-completion must not prevent the Club from taking appropriate action. Younger children, children/adults with additional learning needs, or people for whom English is not their first language may need support to complete the form or share their account in another suitable way.

Note: This club form supports initial recording and triage. It does not replace The FA safeguarding referral form, County FA referral routes, statutory agency referrals or the need to speak to the Club Welfare Officer/Hampshire FA Safeguarding Team / County FA DSO where required. If safeguarding referral is needed, information should be transferred into the relevant FA/County FA safeguarding form/process as advised.



SECTION A - CASE ADMINISTRATION	
Case/reference number	
Date concern received	
Person completing this form	Name, role, contact details and relationship to the club, if different from the person raising the concern/referrer.
Club/team/age group	
Type of matter	General complaint / lower-level concern / code of conduct concern / safeguarding or welfare concern / bullying / discrimination / selection or game-time concern / misconduct / possible FA safeguarding referral / other:
Immediate action required?	Yes / No / Not sure. If yes, describe any immediate safeguarding, welfare or safety action taken.
SECTION B - PERSON RAISING THE COMPLAINT/CONCERN	
Name of person raising concern	
Role/relationship to club	Parent/carer / player / coach / volunteer / committee member / match official / spectator / other:
Contact details	Telephone number and email address.
Preferred contact method	
Relationship to child/adult affected or person the concern is about	Include relationship to participant/person the concern is about and relationship to alleged victim/affected person where relevant.
SECTION C - PERSON/PARTICIPANT THE CONCERN IS ABOUT	
Name of person/people the concern is about	This may be the participant/person being referred to the Club, County FA or The FA. Include full name and any known aliases.
Role in football	Player / coach / manager / volunteer / committee member / parent/carer / spectator / match official / other. Include whether the role is paid or voluntary where relevant.
Club/team/organisation	
Contact details, if known	Telephone number, email address and address if relevant/known.
Date of birth or age, if known/relevant	
FAN number, if known	
Relationship to alleged victim/affected person	
SECTION D - CHILD/CHILDREN OR ADULT(S) AT RISK / PERSON AFFECTED	
Name(s) and age(s) of child/children or adult(s) affected	Include team/age group and club where relevant.



Parent/carers details, where applicable	Name, telephone number and email address.
FAN number, if known	
Gender and ethnicity, if relevant and known	Only record information that is relevant, necessary and appropriate.
County FA, if known	
Youth Voice / affected person's view	Where safe and appropriate, record what the child/young person or affected person has said, how their views were sought, and whether a parent/carers or trusted adult supported this. Do not repeatedly question a child or ask leading questions.
SECTION E - DETAILS OF THE CONCERN/INCIDENT	
Date, time and location of incident/concern	
What happened?	Include key facts, what was seen/heard, who was present, and whether this is a one-off, repeated or escalating concern. Use the person's own words where possible.
Type of concern	Physical abuse / emotional abuse / sexual abuse / neglect / bullying / cyberbullying / discrimination / high-level poor practice / lower-level concern / poor practice / code of conduct breach / Grassroots Code / Respect Standard breach / selection or game-time concern / other:
Does this appear to involve:	High-level poor practice / possible or actual risk of harm to a child or adult at risk / for information only / not sure. If not sure, seek CWO/Hampshire FA DSO advice before proceeding.
Other people involved or witnesses	Names, roles, contact details and relationship to the club/team.
Evidence or supporting information	Messages, screenshots, emails, photos, videos, match reports, social media posts, previous records or other documents. State where these are stored securely.
Previous or related concerns	Include any past concerns known to the club, league or County FA, including lower-level concerns already addressed.
SECTION F - ACTION TAKEN / REFERRALS / PROFESSIONAL NETWORK	
Action already taken by the club	Include who was spoken to, dates, immediate safeguards, venue/action restrictions, welfare support, or temporary measures.
Has this been reported to the Club Welfare Officer?	Yes / No / Not applicable. Include name and date/time.
Has advice been sought from Hampshire FA / County FA DSO?	Yes / No. Include name, date/time, advice received and agreed next steps.



Has this been referred to any statutory agency?	Police / Children's Social Care / Adult Social Care / LADO / NSPCC / other. Include names, contact details, date/time and advice received.
Does the FA safeguarding referral form need to be completed?	Yes / No / Not sure. If yes or not sure, the CWO should seek Hampshire FA DSO advice promptly. Relevant information from this form may need to be transferred to The FA safeguarding referral form, including participant details, referrer details, child/adult at risk details, professional network contacts, concern type, incident summary, action taken and previous concerns. Link to FA SG reporting form template can be found here: https://www.thefa.com/-/media/thefacom-new/files/rules-and-regulations/safeguarding/section-2/2-2-safeguarding-referral-form-affiliated-football-colour-version.ashx
Can The FA / County FA contact the victim or parent/carer directly?	Yes / No / Not known. Record any relevant consent, safeguarding or communication considerations. Do not delay urgent safeguarding action if consent is unclear and a child/adult may be at risk.
SECTION G - OUTCOME SOUGHT / SUPPORT NEEDED	
What outcome or support is being requested?	
Any adjustments or support needed to take part in the process?	For example communication support, safeguarding support, accessibility, language, disability, wellbeing or other needs.
Any confidentiality or information-sharing concerns?	Explain any concerns, but note the club may need to share relevant information with appropriate club officials, Hampshire FA, The FA or statutory agencies where required.
Signature/name and date	

4. Initial Triage and Safeguarding Check **(Essential)**

To be completed by the Club Welfare Officer, Club Secretary, Chair or other suitable non-conflicted club official/ complaint handler.

Check	Yes/No/Notes	Action required
Does the matter indicate a child or adult at risk may be at risk of harm?		If yes, follow safeguarding policy and contact Hampshire FA DSO/statutory agencies as appropriate.



Does the matter include an allegation of abuse, sexualised communication or criminal behaviour?		If yes, do not continue as a routine club complaint without advice.
Is the matter a lower-level concern involving an adult's behaviour around children?		If yes, CWO should be involved unless conflicted. Record as lower-level concern.
Has this individual had two previous separate lower-level concerns dealt with by the club/league?		If yes, refer to County FA on this third separate concern.
Is there any conflict of interest for the Chair, Secretary, CWO, investigator or panel?		If yes, appoint alternative non-conflicted individuals or seek Hampshire FA advice.
Is the matter already being handled through discipline, league, County FA, police, LADO or social care?		If yes, coordinate with the relevant process and avoid duplicating or compromising external enquiries.
Does the complaint involve a child/young person's experience or welfare?		If yes, consider Youth Voice and how their views can be gathered safely and age-appropriately.
Is immediate temporary action needed to safeguard or reduce risk?		Consider temporary supervision, role adjustment, suspension from duties or other proportionate safeguards, with advice where needed.

5. Investigation and Plan List **(Essential)**

Use this to plan a fair, documented and proportionate investigation. Not every case will require every step.

Task	Owner	Target date	Completed / notes
Confirm scope of complaint/concern and what questions need to be answered.			☐



Confirm who will investigate and who will make the decision.			☐
Check conflicts of interest and record how they have been managed.			☐
Confirm whether Hampshire FA DSO advice is needed before proceeding.			☐
Identify documents/evidence to request.			☐
Identify witnesses and parties to contact.			☐
Plan how to capture Youth Voice safely and appropriately, if relevant.			☐
Invite person subject of complaint/concern to provide their account.			☐
Invite complainant/affected party to provide any further information.			☐
Gather witness accounts and evidence.			☐
Review evidence against club policies, code of conduct and relevant guidance.			☐
Agree findings and outcome options.			☐
Complete outcome decision record.			☐
Communicate outcome and appeal rights.			☐
Record learning/actions and close file securely.			☐



6. Evidence and Communication Log **(Useful Operating Tool)**

Keep language factual and professional. Records may be disclosable under data protection rights.

Date	Person/contact	Method	Summary of evidence/communication	Stored where?

7. Outcome Decision Record **(Essential)**

This should be completed by the decision-maker/panel after reviewing the investigation evidence.

Case reference	
Date complaint/concern received	
Decision-maker/panel	
Policies/guidance considered	Complaints procedure / safeguarding policy / codes of conduct / lower-level concerns guidance / other:
Summary of issue	
Evidence considered	
Youth Voice considered, if applicable	How was the child/young person's view obtained or why was it not appropriate/possible?
Finding	Substantiated / partially substantiated / unsubstantiated / malicious / no further action / referred externally
Rationale for finding	



Outcome/action agreed	Discussion / code reminder / mediation / training / mentoring / supervision / improvement plan / warning / role restriction / suspension / removal / referral / other
Safeguarding or welfare actions	
Who needs to be informed?	Complainant / subject of complaint / parent/carer / CWO / committee / Hampshire FA / The FA / statutory agency
Appeal rights	Who may appeal, grounds for appeal, deadline and contact person.
Record retention plan	Where stored, who has access, review/retention date.
Learning for club	Policy updates, communication improvements, training needs, supervision changes.
Signed/date	

8. Template Letters/ Emails (**Useful Template Pack**)

Adapt these templates to the circumstances. Do not include unnecessary confidential detail. Consider whether Hampshire FA DSO advice is needed before sending in safeguarding or complex cases.

Acknowledgement of Complaint/ Concern

Subject: Acknowledgement of complaint/concern

Dear [Name],

Thank you for contacting [Club name]. I am writing to acknowledge receipt of your complaint/concern received on [date].

We will review the information provided, complete an initial triage and decide the appropriate route for managing the matter. This may include informal resolution, the formal complaints procedure, the lower-level concerns process, safeguarding referral or another relevant route.

Where possible, we aim to acknowledge concerns within 5 calendar days, open a record and identify suitable people to consider the matter within 10 calendar days, and work towards an outcome within 28 calendar days. These timeframes may change depending on complexity, safeguarding considerations or external advice. If that happens, we will keep you updated.

Please do not discuss the matter widely while it is being considered, as this may affect the fairness of the process. If you have any immediate safeguarding concerns, please contact [Club Welfare Officer] or the appropriate emergency/statutory service.

Kind regards,



[Name]

[Role]

Request for Further Information

Subject: Further information requested

Dear [Name],

Thank you for raising your complaint/concern. To help us understand the matter and decide the appropriate next steps, please provide the following information by [date]:

- What happened, including dates, times and locations where known;
- Who was involved or present;
- Any evidence you would like us to consider, such as messages, screenshots, emails or witness details;
- Whether a child or young person was affected and, if so, how their views could be obtained safely and appropriately;
- What outcome or support you are seeking.

If you would prefer to discuss this rather than provide written information, please let us know.

Kind regards,

[Name]

[Role]

Invitation to Investigation Meeting

Subject: Invitation to meeting regarding complaint/concern

Dear [Name],

We are currently considering a complaint/concern raised with [Club name]. We would like to invite you to a meeting to provide your account and any information you would like us to consider.

Meeting details:

Date/time: [insert]

Location/online link: [insert]

Attendees: [insert]

The purpose of the meeting is to gather information. No decision has been made at this stage. You may provide a written statement instead if you are unable or do not wish to attend a meeting.



If the matter involves a child or young person, arrangements will be made to ensure any discussion is age-appropriate and supported by a parent/carer or trusted adult where appropriate.

Please confirm whether you are able to attend by [date].

Kind regards,

[Name]

[Role]

Outcome Letter to Person Raising the Concern

Subject: Outcome of complaint/concern

Dear [Name],

Thank you for raising your complaint/concern with [Club name]. We have now completed our review/investigation.

Summary of concern:

[Brief factual summary]

Outcome:

[Substantiated / partially substantiated / unsubstantiated / no further action / referred externally / other]

Action taken:

[Share only what is appropriate and proportionate. For example: the matter has been addressed under the club code of conduct; further training/mentoring/supervision has been put in place; the matter has been referred to Hampshire FA; no further action will be taken.]

Please note that we may not be able to share all details due to confidentiality, safeguarding and data protection considerations.

If you are dissatisfied with the process or outcome, you may request an appeal by contacting [name/role/email] within 14 calendar days. Appeals should be based on one or more of the following grounds: the process was not followed, the decision was unreasonable based on the evidence, the outcome was disproportionate, or relevant new evidence has become available.

Kind regards,

[Name]

[Role]



Outcome Letter to Person Subject of the Complaint/Concern

Subject: Outcome of complaint/concern

Dear [Name],

We are writing further to the complaint/concern considered by [Club name]. Thank you for providing your account.

Outcome:

[Substantiated / partially substantiated / unsubstantiated / no further action / referred externally / other]

Reasons:

[Brief summary of the reasons for the decision]

Action required:

[Set out any action clearly, including timescales: discussion, code of conduct reminder, training, mentoring, supervision, improvement plan, warning, restriction, suspension, removal, referral or no further action.]

Expectations going forward:

[Insert relevant code of conduct/policy expectations]

If you are dissatisfied with the process or outcome, you may request an appeal by contacting [name/role/email] within 14 calendar days. Appeals should be based on one or more of the following grounds: the process was not followed, the decision was unreasonable based on the evidence, the outcome was disproportionate, or relevant new evidence has become available.

Kind regards,

[Name]

[Role]

Appeal Acknowledgement

Subject: Acknowledgement of appeal request

Dear [Name],

Thank you for your appeal request received on [date].

The appeal will be reviewed by [name/role/panel], who were not involved in the original decision where possible. The appeal will consider the grounds you have raised and any relevant information provided.



The appeal is not normally a full re-investigation unless there is a clear reason to gather further information. We will aim to provide an appeal outcome by [date], or update you if more time is needed.

Kind regards,
[Name]
[Role]

Appeal Outcome

Subject: Appeal outcome
Dear [Name],

Your appeal has now been considered.

Grounds of appeal considered:
[Insert summary]

Appeal decision:
[Appeal upheld / partially upheld / not upheld]

Reasons:
[Brief summary]

Outcome:
[Original decision confirmed / amended / referred back for further consideration / alternative outcome]

This concludes the club's internal process, unless the matter is referred to Hampshire FA, The FA or another relevant body.

Kind regards,
[Name]
[Role]

Referral/Advice Request to Hampshire FA/ Hampshire FA Safeguarding Team

Subject: Request for advice/referral - complaint or lower-level concern
Dear [Name],

I am contacting you on behalf of [Club name] to seek advice regarding a complaint/lower-level concern/safeguarding matter.



Brief summary:

[Insert factual summary, avoiding unnecessary personal data]

People involved:

[Roles/ages where relevant]

Actions taken so far:

[Insert]

Immediate safeguarding/risk issues:

[Insert]

Reason for advice/referral:

[For example: possible safeguarding concern, repeated lower-level concern, conflict of interest, removal from role being considered, matter unresolved, concern more serious than first anticipated.]

Please could you advise on the appropriate next steps.

Kind regards,

[Name]

[Role]

[Contact details]

9. Closure and Learning Review (**Good Practice**)

Use this when the complaint/concern and any appeal/referral have been concluded.

Review question	Notes	Action / owner / date
Was the matter acknowledged and progressed within expected timeframes?		
Were safeguarding risks identified and escalated appropriately?		
Were conflicts of interest identified and managed?		
Was Youth Voice considered where relevant?		



Were communications professional, factual and proportionate?		
Was the outcome proportionate and clearly recorded?		
Were all relevant people informed appropriately?		
Does the club need to update a policy, code of conduct or guidance?		
Is further training, mentoring or supervision needed?		
Where will records be stored and who has access?		
Is there any follow-up/review date required?		