Digital and Social Media Policy

Alton Football Club

Purpose and Scope

Alton Football Club recognises that digital communication and social media are essential tools for running football activities, sharing information, and celebrating achievements. However, their use presents safeguarding risks if not managed appropriately.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- safeguard children and young people when using digital platforms connected to the club
- ensure communication with under-18s is safe, transparent, appropriate and accountable
- set clear expectations for coaches, volunteers, players, parents/carers and committee members
- align club practice with FA safeguarding guidance, CPSU and NSPCC best practice, and UK law

This policy applies to all digital communication linked to Alton Football Club, including email, messaging apps, websites, social media platforms, video platforms, livestreaming, and emerging technologies.

Safeguarding Principles

Alton Football Club is committed to the following principles:

- The welfare of children is paramount
- Digital communication must always be open, transparent and justifiable
- No adult should communicate privately with a child without oversight
- Children must be protected from grooming, bullying, exploitation and exposure to inappropriate content
- Parents/carers must be informed and involved in digital communication relating to their child
- All online behaviour should reflect the club's codes of conduct and values

Approved Platforms and Accounts

Club Owned Platforms Only

- All communication with players under 18 years must take place via club-approved platforms (e.g. Club email accounts, approved apps such as Spond, TeamApp or WhatsApp groups).

- Personal social media accounts or personal messaging apps must never be used for direct contact with children.

Administration and Oversight

- All group messaging platforms must have at least two adult administrators.
- Admins should be FA DBS checked, safeguarding trained, and approved by the Club.
- The purpose of each group must be clearly stated.
- Chat history must not be deleted except for moderation purposes.

Direct Messaging and One-to-One Contact

Under 16s

- One-to-one messaging between adults and under 16s is not permitted.
- All communication must include a parent/carer or take place within a group setting.

16–17 Year Olds

- Although 16–17 year olds may legally use social media independently, they are still children in safeguarding law.
- One-to-one messaging is strongly discouraged and may only occur where:
    - it is necessary for football activity
    - it is time-limited and transparent
    - parents/carers are aware
- 16–17 year olds must not be placed in a position where they are responsible for communicating with younger children.

Acceptable Content and Conduct

All digital communication must:

- relate directly to football activity or club administration
- be respectful, appropriate and non-discriminatory
- avoid personal, emotional or private conversations
- never include:
    - expletive language
    - sexualised language or images
    - bullying, intimidation or threats
    - excessive messaging
    - requests for secrecy
    - sharing of personal information

All communication should be written with the expectation that it could be reviewed by parents, the club committee, County FA or The FA.

Social Media Use

Official Club Accounts

- Only authorised individuals may post on official club accounts.
- Content must follow the club Photography & Filming Policy.
- No child's full name, address, school or personal contact details may be published.
- Comments must be monitored and moderated.
- Direct messages to children via social media are not permitted.

Personal Social Media Accounts

Staff and volunteers must:

- maintain appropriate boundaries
- not "friend", "follow" or privately message U18s connected to the club
- ensure privacy settings are applied
- not post content that could bring the club or football into disrepute
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Video Calls, Online Meetings and Livestreaming

- Online meetings involving children must be:
    - pre-arranged
    - time-limited
    - conducted on approved platforms
    - attended by at least two DBS-checked adults
    - include the child's parent/carer
- Livestreaming must be committee-approved and follow the Photography & Filming Policy.
- Chat functions must be disabled or moderated.
- Private video calls between adults and children are not permitted.

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

In line with emerging FA guidance:

- AI tools must not be used to generate, alter or simulate images, videos or voices of children.
- AI must not be used to profile, analyse or track children

Online Safety and Education

The club will:

- promote online safety resources to players and parents
- encourage children and vulnerable adults to speak up if something online makes them uncomfortable
- ensure coaches understand how grooming can occur online
- signpost support such as:
    - Club Welfare Officer
    - Childline (0800 1111)

Reporting Concerns

Any safeguarding concern relating to digital communication or online behaviour must be reported immediately to the Club Welfare Officer.

Concerns may include:

- inappropriate messages
- boundary violations
- online bullying or harassment
- attempts to move communication to private platforms
- misuse of images or videos

Concerns will be managed in line with the club's Safeguarding Reporting Procedures and escalated to the County FA or The FA where required.

Breaches of This Policy

Breaches may result in:

- removal from digital platforms
- suspension of role
- disciplinary action
- referral to the County FA or The FA

All action will be proportionate and safeguarding-led.

Related Policies

This policy should be read alongside:

- Safeguarding Children Policy

- Photography & Filming Policy
- Codes of Conduct
- Data Protection & Privacy Policy

Review

This policy will be reviewed annually or sooner if FA guidance or legislation changes.

Contacts

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Approval

Approved by the Club Committee on: 28 January 2026
Signed (Chairperson): Carl Saunders