

## Managing Complaints

One thing that you can guarantee as a club committee is that you'll get complaints. Complaints about players, parents, managers, coaches and even committee members. Not all of these need to be dealt with formally but should still be recorded. However, some complaints will be more complicated.

It's very important to have a clear process for dealing with these so that there is consistency, transparency and a clear timeframe. If a complaint is allowed to drag on for a long time then it can get blown out of all proportion and becomes extremely stressful and time consuming.

Bear in mind that if the complaint is upheld you may be looking at dismissing the subject of the complaint from the club so it is really important to know that you have all of the information and you can justify your decision and the action of the club. Equally, you may decide NOT to dismiss this person from the club, again you need to be able to demonstrate why that decision has been made.

The simple steps in this guide should help to keep you aware of what to do and how to do it.

### **Step 1: Complain Received**

At the time of receiving the complaint – whether in person, by face or email, it is important to get as much information about the incident or incidents as possible. Names, dates, location and if there are any witnesses are important areas to cover.

### **Step 2: Record the Information**

You need to keep recording the information as you go along. Set up a folder, electronically or paper, saved under a sensible name – maybe the initials of the subject of the complaint and the date.

### **Step 3: Ongoing Referral**

Do you need to refer this to another person or agency? If it's an emergency and someone is at immediate risk, then you have to call 999 straightaway. If you want further advice you can call the NSPCC helpline on 0808 500 8000

Also consider calling the Designated Safeguarding Officer at the County FA for additional help and advice.

### **Step 4: Inform Committee Members**

You don't have to deal with this on your own. Your club's committee should work together to manage all complaints and to support one another. Decide who is going to take charge of the complaint and who is going to take what action. You may think that the complaint

warrants a temporary suspension of the person concerned so this has to be done as a whole committee.

### **Step 5: Inform subject of complaint**

You have to do this as soon as possible whether you are taking a decision to suspend them or not. If possible it is best to do this in person, backed up by a letter, preferably given to them by hand. The subject of the complaint will most likely be worried, upset and angry. If you talk to them face to face they will have the chance to ask questions about what the process is and what will happen to them so that you can reassure them that you are dealing with it quickly, appropriately and discretely. Don't tell them who has made the complaint as this will lead to a potential escalation. Ask them not to talk to parents of the team about the situation and NOT to put anything on any social media. Also put that in the letter as a condition.

### **Step 6: Investigate and Write Reports**

Get as many witness statements as possible. Ask people to email you with their impression of the incident. Get a statement from the subject of the complaint. Ask coaches/managers/committee members if there is any other information that might be helpful. Check if there are any other recorded incidents. Pull all of the information together into a report. Keep the report anonymised so that there are no names of club members included. The information can be on the lines of "6 statements were received that said..."

### **Step 7: Hold Committee Meeting**

Discuss the witness statements, discuss any mitigations or additional incidents and decide what action to take. Make sure that this meeting is minuted and that the minutes, witness statements and any testimonials are stored in the folder

### **Step 8: Inform Relevant People**

Firstly inform the subject of the complaint, again best done face to face. Invite them to a meeting with a couple of committee members, not the whole lot otherwise it can be intimidating. Let them know how you have investigated and that the committee have met and agreed action.

Remember that the witness statements/testimonials are confidential, the subject of the complaint does NOT have any right to see them or to know who the information has come from.

Inform the original complainant that you have investigated, taken appropriate steps and are closing the concern.

Remember that the complainant does NOT have the right to know what action has been taken and does NOT have the right to see the report.

## Actions

So you've done all of your investigations, gathered evidence and are now meeting to discuss what action to take. There are obviously a number of different routes you could use depending on the findings of your investigation.

**NO ACTION** – the complaint is unfounded. No evidence, no witnesses, contradictory information. This is a common outcome. Just make sure that the complaint is recorded in case something happens in the future.

**REMINDER OF CODES OF CONDUCT** – there is some evidence of poor practice but as a club you feel that you can manage it and that the subject of the complaint is aware of their behaviour and is appropriately contrite. Make sure they re-sign the code of conduct, remind them of the club ethos and what you expect from them.

**REDO THE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN WORKSHOP** — this would be appropriate for a coach or manager if they haven't done any Safeguarding training for a while

**PUT THEM ON A BEHAVIOUR CONTRACT** — Monitor their behaviour for a set period of time. Tell them what you expect and what the consequences will be if they break the contract. If this is for an u18 player, it is important that the parents are signed up to this as well and are supporting the club.

**TEMPORARY SUSPENSION** – Clubs are perfectly within their constitutional rights to suspend any member including parents or other spectators linked to a player. Do this in writing. Be clear about the dates or number of matches/sessions that the suspension will last for and the reasons.

**PERMANENT DISMISSAL** – this is obviously the last resort as no one wants to get rid of any club member but sometimes it gets to that stage. This should only be done if other actions have been taken such as suspension, and those actions have been properly documented. This needs to be set out in writing from the Club Chair and the committee. If this happens, other club members need to be informed so work out a formal statement to send out.

## HINTS AND TIPS

- Not all complaints require a full investigation process but all complaints should be noted
- If the subject of the complaint is under 18 then the parent/carer needs to be involved at all stages
- All of the information should be kept confidential.
- Timeframes need to be set out clearly at all stages
- The more people you have on the committee the easier it is to follow due process
- The subject of the complaint may want to appeal against the decision or escalate it to the County FA
- The complaints procedure should be available for all club members to view



## Escalation

If the subject of the complaint is dissatisfied with the overall outcome then they may wish to escalate to the County FA. In this case the incident will most likely be referred to the DSO or to the Discipline officer.

If an incident is escalated the CFA officer in charge of taking this on will need to see the route and information about the complaint, the club's investigation and how the outcome was reached. The escalation investigation does not necessarily reopen the original complaint but looks at how the complaint has been handled by the club to see if there has been any mishandling.

If the CFA felt that the original investigation was done under a constitutionally fair procedure then they would back up the outcome. If the CFA felt that there was mismanagement in the Club's handling of the investigation then the CFA would work with the club's committee to look at their procedures and take action accordingly.