

**Disciplinary Commission (“The Commission”)**  
**On behalf of Surrey FA**  
**In the matter of Copthorne FC (Case ID: 11372576M)**  
**Hearing Summary including Written Reasons**

The Commission

1. This is the hearing summary and the written reasons for the decision of the Disciplinary Commission which convened on-line on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> November 2023 to consider the above matter.
2. Nick Leale (Chairman), Jairo Marin and Philip Chaplin were the Commission members appointed by the FA to consider the case. Ravel Cheosiaua was appointed by the FA as Commission Secretary.

The charge

3. Copthorne FC was charged by Surrey FA in respect of the following matter:

Charge 1: FA Rule E20 – Failed to ensure directors, players, officials, employees, servants and representatives, conducted themselves in an orderly fashion whilst attending any match.

The charge followed the alleged misconduct of Copthorne FC players and/or representatives at a match between Sedlescombe Rangers FC and Copthorne FC on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2023.

Key background facts and evidence

4. The following is a summary of the key submissions provided to the Commission. It does not contain reference to all the points or submissions made and the absence of any point does not mean that it has not been considered.
5. For the avoidance of doubt, the Commission have carefully considered all the evidence and materials in respect of this case.
6. Surrey FA had received an extraordinary incident report from match referee Frank Meilack dated 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2023.
7. In summary, it was alleged that a group of Copthorne FC players and/or representatives had shouted “you’re a cunt ref” at the referee from their car when leaving the ground.
8. A summary of the key evidence in support of the allegation appears below.
9. On 25<sup>th</sup> September 2023, Surrey FA notified Copthorne FC of the misconduct charge being brought against the club, as outlined above. On 6<sup>th</sup> October 2023 the charge was denied and a personal hearing requested. Club Secretary Andrew Beadle attended the hearing to represent the Club’s interests.

Summary of relevant evidence

10. The written evidence considered by the Commission included:

- Extraordinary Incident Report and further clarifying e-mail from match referee Frank Meilack;
- Statement of Daniel Elliot;
- Statement of Wes Brannigan (Cophthorne FC Manager);
- Statement of Harry Bryant (member of Cophthorne FC, acting as assistant referee at the relevant match).

11. The Commission heard oral evidence from:

- i) Referee Frank Meilack – who confirmed the content of this statement and that people he recognised as Cophthorne FC players and/or representatives wound down their car window and shouted “you’re a cunt ref” as they left the car park of the ground. Mr Meilack stated that there were 4 Cophthorne players in the car, all had their windows down, and he recognised one bearded player in particular from the game.
- ii) Daniel Elliot – who confirmed the content of his statement.
- iii) Wes Brannigan – who confirmed the content of his statement.
- iv) Harry Bryant – who confirmed the content of his statement.

Andrew Beadle, representing the Club, had not been at the match himself, but relied heavily on a statement that Sedlescombe had told his squad that the referee had already left before Cophthorne came out from their changing room.

#### Decisions and reasons

12. The Commission carefully considered all of the written and oral evidence provided.

13. The burden of proof rests with the County FA.

14. The standard of proof is the civil standard, the balance of probability. In simple terms, the Commission has to be satisfied, on the evidence, that it was more likely than not that an event occurred.

15. The Commission concluded that on the evidence they could be entirely satisfied that it was more likely than not that players/ representatives of Cophthorne FC used the alleged abusive words towards the referee as they left the ground. The charge was therefore found proved.

The Commission found the referee Mr Meilack (an official with 35 years experience) to be a highly credible witness who was clearly providing an accurate account of events.

16. The Commission were informed that the Club had one previous E20 misconduct finding from 2019 for which the Club was fined £165 in the previous 5 years.

16. The Commission imposed the following sanction in respect of this matter:

- a fine of £140.

17. This decision is subject to the right of appeal under the relevant FA Rules and Regulations.

Nick Leale (Chairman)

Jairo Marin

Philip Chaplin

13<sup>th</sup> November 2023