GUIDANCE NOTES NO:

10.1

SAFEGUARDING ADULTS IN OPEN-AGE ADULT FOOTBALL

FOR CLUBS AND LEAGUES

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The FA
FOR ALL

INTRODUCTION

Football is an inclusive sport that offers opportunities for adults across England to participate in a wide range of roles. These roles include players, coaches, referees, club/league officials, staff and volunteers. For the overwhelming majority, involvement in football is a positive and enriching experience that supports physical health, mental wellbeing and social connection.

It is recognised that individuals aged 16 and 17 may also participate in open-age adult football. Notwithstanding their participation in the adult game, these individuals remain legally classified as children. Accordingly, clubs and leagues must ensure that appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place and must comply fully with The FA Safeguarding Children Policy and associated procedures. This includes taking all reasonable steps to protect their welfare, ensuring that those working with them are appropriately vetted and trained, and promoting an environment in which they feel safe, supported and able to raise concerns.

All individuals participating in football should be able to do so within a safe, inclusive and respectful environment. Safeguarding is therefore a fundamental responsibility shared by **everyone** involved in the game.

All The FA Guidance Notes referred to in this document are available by **clicking here**.

SECTION 1: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

ADULT AT RISK

The Care Act 2014 is the main legislative framework governing the safeguarding of adults who may be at risk of harm. It replaced earlier guidance which used the term "vulnerable adult."

Under the Care Act 2014, a shift in terminology was introduced. The terms "vulnerable adult" and "vulnerable person" are no longer used; instead, the legislation adopts the terms "adult at risk" or "adult at risk of harm."

This change reflects a move towards more respectful and empowering language, emphasising an individual's rights, autonomy and dignity. It seeks to focus on supporting adults to live safely, rather than defining them by perceived vulnerability.

The Care Act 2014 defines an adult at risk as:

A person aged 18 or over who:

- Has need for care and support; and
- Is experiencing, or at risk of abuse or neglect; and
- As a result of those care and support needs is unable to protect themselves from either the risk of, or the experience of abuse or neglect.

When thinking about 'adults at risk' it's important to understand:

- The level of risk may vary over time; an individual may be considered an adult at risk in certain circumstances, but this does not imply that they have always been, or will remain, an adult at risk.
- Having a disability does not automatically mean a person is an adult at risk.
- It's not just players who could be adults at risk. It could also be coaches or referees, staff or other volunteers.
- 'Care and support needs' includes people who have physical or mental health conditions or impairments.

SAFEGUARDING ADULTS

Safeguarding adults means protecting an adult's right to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect. It is about people and organisations working together to prevent and stop both the risks and experience of abuse or neglect, while at the same time making sure that the adult's wellbeing is promoted including, where appropriate, having regard to their views, wishes, feelings and beliefs in deciding on any action.[1]

In open-age adult football this means creating inclusive environments where people feel safe to raise concerns, as well as ensuring that any such concerns are responded to appropriately. This includes:

- Ensuring coaches and others in positions of trust and influence understand their responsibilities and respect clear boundaries.
- Ensuring everyone knows how to raise concerns.
- Ensuring swift, appropriate actions are taken in response to concerns.

Not all concerns about adults are safeguarding concerns that relate to adults at risk. Where the individual is not an adult at risk, welfare or behaviour concerns may be considered by other teams for example Equality, Diversity and Inclusion or Discipline and Integrity Teams (see flow chart below, which can be found along with more information about Football's adult safeguarding responsibilities in The FA Adult Welfare and Safeguarding in Affiliated Football Policy and Procedures.) As indicated in the flowchart, if a concern is beyond The FA's scope, other football bodies or authorities, the police, adult social care or other agencies may be involved.

[1]Care and Support Statutory Guidance, updated September 2024.

CONCERN FLOWCHART

GENERIC FLOWCHART FOR REPORTING

Key:

- DSO = Designated Safeguarding Officer
- CWO = Club Welfare Officer

There are concerns about a person's behaviour.

OR

There has been disclosure or an allegation about a person's behaviour.

What are the concerns regarding?

Adult welfare or abuse

Is the adult (or anyone else) at immediate risk of harm, or is a serious crime being committed?

Yes

- Call emergency services;
- Explain that there may be a safeguarding issue.

Is the CWO/DSO implicated?

No

- Make notes and include the adult's wishes and views if known.
- Inform CWO/DSO.
- Referrals to statutory agencies should be passed to Safeguarding@TheFA.com within 24 hours.

Yes

- Report to next level e.g. DSO.
- Make notes and include adult's wishes and views if known.

Low-level concern or poor practice

Is the CWO/DSO implicated?

Yes

No

Make notes and refer to CWO/DSO

Include adult's wishes and views if known.

Managed locally by C/LWO in line with club/league policy with support provided by CFA DSO.

The adult's wishes and views are taken into account throughout the process.

Suspected abuse must be referred to Safeguarding@TheFA.com. Other agencies may then be involved usually only with the consent of the adult.

Possible outcomes:

- Support to adult;
- Monitoring;
- Support to club/provider;
- Education and training;
- Regulatory actions;
- Police enquiry;
- Criminal proceedings;
- Adult Care Safeguarding Assessment;
- Disciplinary charges;
- No further action.

SECTION 1:
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW (CONT'D)

THE FA SAFEGUARDING IN AFFILIATED FOOTBALL POLICY AND PROCEDURES

The FA's Adult Welfare and Safeguarding Policy and Procedures (see Guidance Notes 1.5) applies across the game to anyone over the age of 18. It sets out The FA's commitment to adult welfare and safeguarding and outlines best practice principles to support those working and volunteering in football.

The FA's Safeguarding Children Policy (see Guidance Notes 1.1) applies wherever individuals under the age of 18 are involved in football.

16/17-YEAR-OLDS IN OPEN-AGE ADULT FOOTBALL

Where there are under-18s in open-age adult teams, the club/league must:

- Adopt and adhere to The FA Safeguarding Children Policy (in addition to The FA Adult Welfare and Safeguarding Policy).
- Ensure those working with 16/17-year-olds have a DBS[2] check.
- Ensure those working with 16/17-year-olds complete the relevant FA course (Safeguarding Adults Course for disability football or Player Welfare in Open-Age Football for non-disability football) – it's best practice to complete both.
- Ensure 16/17-year-olds know how to raise concerns.

[2] The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), is an agency delivering the government's requirements for vetting checks for those working with U18s and they state that if a team has, or is likely to have, one or more 16/17 year old in an adult football team, and if the time that the coaches and managers work with these children meets the period condition, then this is deemed as 'regulated activity'. This requires the eligible coaches and managers working with these U18s to undertake the requisite DBS check.

SECTION 2:
WHAT YOU NEED TO DO (CONT'D)

Clubs and leagues with open-age adult teams are required to take the following seven steps.

Following these steps will help safeguard everyone by:

- Reassuring everyone that your club or league takes safeguarding adults seriously.
- Protecting everyone by providing a more aware and safer environment.
- Informing and empowering people to recognise and report safeguarding adult concerns.

STEP 1:

ADOPT AND ADHERE TO THE FA ADULT WELFARE AND SAFEGUARDING IN AFFILIATED FOOTBALL POLICY AND PROCEDURES (AND ADOPT AND ADHERE TO THE FA SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN POLICY AND OTHER SAFEGUARDING MEASURES WHERE THERE ARE 16/17-YEAR-OLDS)

There are differences between the policies and procedures for safeguarding children and safeguarding adults. These differences include:

- The rights of adults to make their own choices and decisions.
- Developing a culture that involves adults and consults them on all decisions affecting them.
- Laws, government guidance, and football regulations.

Because of these differences there are separate safeguarding adults and safeguarding children policies.

There are editable policy templates to help you (**Guidance Note 1.4 Editable Children's Policy Template** and **Guidance Note 10.3 Editable Adult Policy Template**).

STEP 2:

APPOINT A CLUB OR LEAGUE WELFARE OFFICER[3]

Every Open-Age Adult Club/League should appoint a Welfare Officer. This is the person who champions safeguarding of adults. In clubs they are the first point of contact for any safeguarding concerns.

These Guidance Notes are to support you:

- Guidance Note 10.2 Appointing a Welfare Officer
- Guidance Note 10.6 Safer Recruitment of Volunteers in Open-Age Adult Football
- Guidance Note 5.2 Welfare Officers' Code of Conduct

STEP 3:

IDENTIFY THE COACH/MANAGER AND ASSISTANT COACH/MANAGER AND ENSURE THEY ARE ON CLUB/COMPETITION PORTAL.

Remember if they are working with anyone under the age of 18 they will need a DBS check.

[3]There are C/LWOs who focus on different areas of the game:

- Club/League Welfare Officer (Youth)
- Club/League Welfare Officer (Adult Disability Teams)
- Club/League Welfare Officer (Adult Teams)

In smaller clubs/leagues the same person may oversee all these functions. In large clubs there will be a team of CWOs and deputies. League Welfare Officers are sometimes also known as Competition Welfare Officers.

SECTION 2:
WHAT YOU NEED TO DO (CONT'D)

STEP 4:

COMMUNICATE THE POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Policies are only effective when people know about and understand them, so clubs and leagues need to clearly communicate what their policies mean in practice.

Things to consider:

- Remind everyone about the policy at pre-season/other meetings.
- Share information about the policy and practice on digital platforms.
- Make sure everyone knows who the Club and Leagues Welfare Officers are and how to contact them.
- Make use of the Easy Read[4] documents (see **Guidance Notes 10.7 to 10.10** inclusive).
- Communicate clearly that all concerns will be taken seriously and that adults will be involved in safeguarding decisions and actions relating to them.
- Ensure new staff and volunteers are aware of the policy and procedures.

STEP 5:

ENSURE STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS COMPLETE THE FA SAFEGUARDING ADULTS AND PLAYER WELFARE IN OPEN-AGE FOOTBALL COURSES.

These two free, short, online courses are designed to help anyone in football recognise and respond to adult welfare and safeguarding concerns.

STEP 6:

REVIEW BEST-PRACTICE GUIDANCE (GUIDANCE NOTE 10.5) AND IDENTIFY ACTIONS TO STRENGTHEN EXISTING SAFEGUARDS.

When best practice is discussed and promoted it's easier to identify and challenge lower-level concerns, poor practice and abuse.

Make sure everyone knows about any new practices that are implemented.

STEP 7:

REPORT ANY CONCERNS AND SEEK GUIDANCE FOR MANAGING LOWER-LEVEL CONCERNS AND POOR PRACTICE.

Safeguarding adults can be complex. Remember adults need to be involved in any safeguarding processes and their views and wishes must be considered.

The County FA Designated Safeguarding Officer (CFA DSO) is always on hand to offer guidance and advice – all concerns must be reported to them.

Check out these **Guidance Notes** for more information:

- **Guidance Note 10.4 – Recognising and Responding to Adult Safeguarding Concerns.**
- **Guidance Note 2.2 – Safeguarding Referral Form.**
- **Guidance Note 1.5 – Adult Welfare and Safeguarding Policy:**
  - **Appendix 2 – Definitions, signs and indicators of adult abuse;**
  - **Concern-reporting flowchart**

[4]Easy Read documents are created with and for adults with learning disabilities, but can help lots of people by presenting complex information clearly and simply making it easier to understand.

SECTION 2: WHAT YOU NEED TO DO (CONT'D)

WHISTLEBLOWING

Whistleblowing in the context of safeguarding adults means escalating a concern when it is recognised that appropriate safeguarding actions have not been taken.

It may also mean raising concerns about misconduct or suspected misconduct.

These types of safeguarding whistleblowing concerns in football should be referred to The FA's Safeguarding Case Management Team via Safeguarding@TheFA.com, who will review the concerns and advise.

Alternatively, whistleblowing concerns can be reported to the police or local adult services teams.

Remember – safeguarding is everyone's responsibility – you are not alone. Help and support is always available.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Football brings people and communities together. Looking out for each other's wellbeing helps make football safe and inclusive. **The FA Welfare Directory** is a resource that signposts users to organisations that may be able to provide support for some of the issues that clubs and leagues say their players face most often.

The Football Association
Wembley Stadium
London HA9 0WS
T: +44 (0)800 169 1863
F: +44 (0)800 169 1864
W: TheFA.com