



## **Hartlepool United Football Club** **Allegations of Abuse against Staff**

### **Introduction**

Hartlepool United Football Club is committed to providing the highest level of care for both its players and its staff. It is extremely important that any allegations of abuse against a coach, any other member of staff, or volunteer in our Club are dealt with thoroughly and efficiently, maintain the highest level of protection for the Child or Adults at Risk whilst also giving support to the person who is subject of the allegation.

This policy is designed to ensure that all staff, young people and parents or carers are aware of the procedure for the investigation of allegations of abuse in order that all complaints are dealt with consistently and efficiently as possible.

We hope that having a clear policy outlined will help young people to feel comfortable that they can voice concerns about any member of staff. Allegations will be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Officer immediately or to the COO where the Designated Safeguarding Officer is the subject to the allegation. All allegations will be taken seriously and investigated immediately.

### **Purpose**

The procedure for dealing with allegations against staff depends on the situation and circumstances surrounding the allegation. This policy must be followed when dealing with allegations but may be adapted to each case. This policy will be used alongside the Club's **Complaints Policy and Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk policy**.

***The above policy can be found on the Club Website and in the Safeguarding File.***

This policy will be used in any case where it is suspected or alleged that a member of staff or a volunteer at the Club has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed a child/adult at risk or may have harmed a child/adult at risk (our **Safeguarding Children/Adults at Risk Policy** outlines what it means to harm a child/adult at risk
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child/adult at risk or
- Behaved towards a child/adult as risk or children in a way that indicates he or she may pose a risk of harm to children/adult at risk

## **Timescale**

It is imperative that allegations against staff are dealt with as quickly as possible to:

- Minimise the risk to the child/adult at risk
  - Minimise the impact on the child's academic progress
  - Minimise stress to the employee concerned
- Ensure a fair and thorough investigation for all parties

To enable this to happen, all staff, parents, and young people and service users should be aware of the procedures set out in this policy.

## **Procedure**

### **Reporting an allegation**

All allegations made against staff should be reported immediately to the DSO/SSM. Complaints about the DSO should be reported to the SSM. Complaints about the SMM should be reported to the Adrian Bevington (Champion Safeguarding Officer) who will then contact the designated officer at the local authority.

Staff who are concerned about the conduct of a colleague towards a child/adult at risk are undoubtedly placed in a very difficult situation. They may worry that they have misunderstood the situation and they will wonder whether a report could jeopardise their colleague's career. All staff must remember that the welfare of the child/adult at risk is paramount and must report their concerns immediately.

The DSO/SSM/Champion Safeguarding Officer will contact FA Safeguarding team and the EFL Safeguarding team and the designated officer at the local authority (refer to EFL guidance for managing safeguarding concerns) and a discussion will take place to decide whether:

- More information is required; or
- No further actions are needed; or
- A strategy discussion should take place; or
- There should be immediate involvement of the police or social care

The club will share available information with the FA Safeguarding team designated officer about the allegation, the child and the person against whom the allegation has been made and consider whether a police investigation or a strategy discussion is needed. Representatives from other agencies may be invited to the discussion and could include representatives from health, social care and police.

Hartlepool Borough Council Local Authority Designated Officer: Phil Curtis

An investigation into the allegation is normally carried out by the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and or the FA Safeguarding team or by the Club. This will be agreed at the initial evaluation stage. Where the school is not conducting the investigation, it will cooperate with investigative agencies.

Internal investigations must be second to any safeguarding investigation and may need to be delayed until the external investigation is complete.

The following definitions should be used when determining the outcome of the investigations:

**Substantiated:** there is sufficient evidence to prove the allegation

**Malicious:** there is sufficient evidence to disprove the allegation and there has been a deliberate act to deceive

**False:** there is sufficient evidence to disprove the allegation

**Unsubstantiated:** there is insufficient evidence to either prove or disprove the allegation. The term, therefore, does not imply guilt or innocence.

**Unfounded:** to reflect cases where there is no evidence or proper basis which supports the allegation being made

### **Supporting those involved**

#### **The person(s) who make the allegation and their parents/carers**

Parents and carers will be notified if their child makes or is involved in an allegation against staff if they do not already know. However, if the police or social services are to be involved, they will be contacted first and will advise as to what information may or may not be disclosed to the parents. *(There will be a staff member designated to the role of liaising with the parents and child about the case and ensuring that they are fully informed as far as possible).* Parents and carers will be made aware of any progress in the investigation, and where there is no criminal prosecution, the outcome will be explained to them. This may be a disciplinary outcome. During a disciplinary hearing the deliberations and information used for making a decision are usually confidential, but parents will be told the outcome in confidence.

Social services and the police may be involved and will provide the school with advice on what type of additional support the child may need.

The club's **Whistleblowing Code** (can be accessed in the policies and procedures file) enables staff to raise concerns or allegations against their colleagues in confidence and for a sensitive enquiry to take place.

#### **The employee**

Hartlepool United has a duty of care to its employees and will take steps to minimize the stress of any allegation and the investigation process.

The person who is the subject of the investigation will be informed as soon as possible and usually after the initial discussion with the designated officer. The employee will then be advised on what the next course of action will be. However, if the police or social services are to be involved, they will be contacted before the employee, and will advise as to what information may be disclosed to the person under investigation.

The DSO/SSM/Champion Safeguarding Officer will keep the employee informed of the progress of the case and any other work-related issues.

The employee may need additional support and the club will consider what might be appropriate to best accommodate this. If it is a criminal investigation and the police are involved, they may provide additional support.

### **Confidentiality**

The Club will make every effort to guard the privacy of all parties during and after an investigation into an allegation. It is in everyone's best interest to maintain this confidentiality to ensure a fair investigation with minimum impact for all parties.

### **Suspensions**

The Club will not suspend a member of staff without serious consideration and will not do it automatically once an allegation has been made. Depending on the nature of the case, it may be possible that alternative arrangements are made so that the individual can continue working.

The employer (board) holds the power to suspend an employee but will listen to the views of the police and or FA and or LADO regarding suspensions.

In the case of suspension, the employee will receive written confirmation within one working day and will be informed of the reason for the suspension.

### **Resignations**

If an employee resigns when the allegation is made against them or during an investigation, the investigation will continue until an outcome has been reached, with or without the employee's cooperation. They will be given full opportunity to answer the allegation.

### **Record Keeping**

Where an allegation is found to be malicious, it will be removed from the record of the employee concerned.

For all other allegations, records of investigations and outcomes will be kept in the employee's personal file and they will be given a copy. The record will be kept, including for people who leave the organization, at least until the person reaches normal retirement age or for 10 years if that will be longer, from the date of the allegation.

Details of any allegations made by a young person will be kept in the confidential section of their record.

All information is stored in locked filing cabinets in a locked office.

### **Action on conclusion of the case**

If the allegation is substantiated and the employee is dismissed or resigns, or we cease to use the volunteer's services, the school will consider whether a referral must be made to the DBS as appropriate.

If it is decided that the employee may return to the Club after a suspension, then provisions will be put in place by the club to ensure that the transition is as smooth as possible. This may involve a phased return for a trial period or the use of another member of staff as a support system in the short term. If the child/adult at risk who made the allegation is still at the club, the club will consider what needs to be done to manage the contact between employee and child/adult at risk.

#### **Action in the case of false or malicious allegations**

Where an allegation is proved to be false, the SSM and Adrian Bevington (Board Member – Champion Safeguarding Officer) may refer to social services to determine whether the child/adult at risk needs support or has been abused by someone else.

The club's **behaviour policy** sets out the disciplinary action that may be taken against pupils who are found to have made malicious allegations against club staff. The SSM may consult the club board when considering what action to take.

If the claim has been made by a person who is not a member of the club, the club may pass the information to the police who may take further action against that person.

#### **After the case**

No matter what the outcome is of an allegation of the abuse against staff, the club will review the case to see if there are any improvements that can be made in its practice or policy that may help to deal with cases in the future.

Signed by: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Board Member: \_\_\_\_\_

Review Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed by: \_\_\_\_\_

Senior Safeguarding Manager: \_\_\_\_\_

Review Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**This policy will be reviewed annually, at time of legislation/guidance updates or due to lessons learnt.**

**Review Date: October 2022**