

Norwood Lakes United FC

COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Policy owner: Club Committee

Approved by: Norwood Lakes United FC Committee

Date adopted: [1 September 2026]

Review date: [30 Aug 2027]

1. Policy Statement

Norwood Lakes United FC is committed to providing a safe, inclusive, respectful and enjoyable football environment for all players, parents and carers, coaches, volunteers, committee members and other members of our football community.

We recognise that, from time to time, concerns or disagreements may arise in connection with club activities, decisions, communication or conduct.

The club welcomes feedback and takes complaints seriously. We are committed to dealing with complaints fairly, consistently, sensitively and, wherever possible, promptly.

This policy sets out how complaints can be raised, how they will be considered and the steps the club will take to resolve them.

Our approach is guided by the principles of fairness, transparency, confidentiality, accountability and the welfare of children.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Provide a clear and accessible process for raising complaints.
- Ensure complaints are considered fairly and without prejudice.
- Support the early and constructive resolution of concerns.
- Protect the welfare, dignity and rights of children and young people.
- Promote appropriate standards of conduct across the club.
- Identify opportunities for learning and improvement.
- Maintain confidence in the club's governance and decision-making.

3. Scope

This policy applies to complaints raised by or concerning:

- Players and their parents or carers.
- Coaches and team managers.
- Club officials and committee members.

- Volunteers.
- Other individuals involved in or affected by club activities.

Complaints may relate to matters including:

- The behaviour or conduct of a coach, volunteer, parent, player or club official.
- Communication between the club and its members.
- Training arrangements, team organisation or club activities.
- Club decisions, processes or administration.
- Membership, fees or other club-related matters.
- Equality, inclusion, discrimination or unfair treatment.
- The application of club policies and procedures.

This policy does not replace the club's safeguarding procedures, the FA's disciplinary processes or any statutory reporting requirements.

4. Safeguarding Concerns

Safeguarding concerns must always take priority over the ordinary complaints process.

If a complaint involves the safety, welfare or protection of a child, including allegations of abuse, bullying, harassment, inappropriate behaviour or a risk of harm, it must be referred promptly to the Club Welfare Officer.

Safeguarding concerns will be managed in accordance with the club's safeguarding procedures and relevant FA guidance.

Where appropriate, concerns may be referred to the County FA, the FA, children's social care, the police or other relevant authorities.

If a child or another person is at immediate risk of harm, contact the emergency services on 999.

A safeguarding concern will not be delayed while an ordinary complaint is being investigated or resolved.

5. Our Complaints Principles

The club will seek to ensure that all complaints are handled in accordance with the following principles:

Fairness: Everyone involved will be treated fairly and given an appropriate opportunity to explain their perspective.

Impartiality: Complaints will be considered objectively. Anyone directly involved in the complaint must not make decisions about its outcome.

Confidentiality: Information will be shared only with those who need it to consider, investigate or resolve the complaint, or where disclosure is otherwise necessary or required.

Timeliness: Complaints will be acknowledged and addressed as promptly as reasonably possible.

Respect: All parties are expected to communicate respectfully and refrain from intimidating, threatening or abusive behaviour.

Child welfare: The welfare and best interests of children will remain a primary consideration throughout the process.

Learning: The club will use complaints, where appropriate, to improve its practices, communication and overall delivery.

6. How to Raise a Complaint

Where possible, complaints should be raised promptly after the incident or concern arises.

The club encourages individuals to raise concerns informally in the first instance, where it is appropriate and safe to do so.

However, individuals are not required to attempt informal resolution where the complaint is serious, involves a power imbalance, relates to discrimination or misconduct, or where informal discussion would be inappropriate.

Stage 1: Informal Resolution

Where appropriate, individuals are encouraged to discuss their concern with the relevant coach, team manager or club official.

The aim is to resolve misunderstandings or concerns constructively and at the earliest opportunity.

The person receiving the concern should:

- Listen respectfully and take the concern seriously.
- Seek to understand the issue and the outcome being requested.
- Consider whether an informal resolution is appropriate.
- Seek support from the Club Committee where necessary.

Where possible, informal concerns should be resolved within 10 working days.

If the concern cannot be resolved informally, or the complainant is uncomfortable raising it directly, a formal complaint may be submitted.

Stage 2: Formal Complaint

Formal complaints should be submitted in writing to the Club Secretary.

Email: southnorwoodlakes@gmail.com

Subject: Formal Complaint – Norwood Lakes United FC

The complaint should include, where possible:

- The name and contact details of the person raising the complaint.
- The nature of the complaint.
- Relevant dates, incidents and individuals involved.
- Any supporting information or evidence.
- Details of any previous attempts to resolve the matter.
- The outcome or resolution being sought.

Where a complaint concerns the Club Secretary, it should be submitted to the Club Chair.

Where a complaint concerns the Club Chair, it should be submitted to another appropriate committee member who is not involved in the matter such as the Treasurer.

The club recognises that some individuals, including children, may require support to raise a complaint. Reasonable assistance will be provided where appropriate.

7. Acknowledgement and Initial Assessment

The club will aim to acknowledge receipt of a formal complaint within five working days.

The Club Secretary, or another appropriate person appointed by the Committee, will undertake an initial assessment to determine:

- Whether the complaint falls within the scope of this policy.
- Whether it raises a safeguarding concern requiring immediate referral.
- Whether the matter should be addressed through another club, league, FA or statutory procedure.
- Who is best placed to consider or investigate the complaint.
- Whether any immediate steps are required to protect individuals or ensure the fair handling of the matter.

The complainant will be informed of the next steps, subject to any safeguarding, confidentiality or other legal considerations.

8. Investigation and Consideration

Where a formal investigation is appropriate, the club will appoint an impartial person to consider the complaint.

The person investigating must not have a personal interest in the matter or have been directly involved in the events giving rise to the complaint.

Depending on the nature and seriousness of the complaint, the club may appoint an independent committee member or another suitably impartial person.

The investigation may include:

- Reviewing the complaint and supporting information.
- Speaking with the complainant.
- Giving relevant individuals an opportunity to respond.
- Reviewing relevant club records, communications or policies.
- Considering any other relevant evidence.

The club will seek to complete its consideration of the complaint within 20 working days of acknowledgement.

If additional time is required due to the complexity of the matter, availability of individuals or other circumstances, the complainant will be informed of the delay and given an updated timescale.

All parties are expected to cooperate reasonably with the process.

9. Complaint Outcomes

Once the complaint has been considered, the club will determine an appropriate outcome based on the information available.

Possible outcomes may include:

- The complaint is upheld in full.
- The complaint is partially upheld.
- The complaint is not upheld.
- The matter is resolved through an agreed informal or restorative approach, where appropriate.
- The matter is referred to another relevant process or authority.

Where a complaint is upheld, the club may take appropriate action, which could include:

- Clarifying or changing a club process or decision.
- Improving communication or guidance.
- Providing additional training or support.
- Reviewing relevant policies or procedures.
- Taking appropriate action under the club's disciplinary or governance arrangements.
- Referring the matter to the relevant football governing body or authority.

The complainant will receive a written response outlining the outcome, the reasons for the decision and any relevant next steps.

The club will respect the confidentiality and privacy of all individuals involved. This means that it may not always be appropriate to disclose specific disciplinary actions or personal information relating to another individual.

10. Request for Review or Appeal

If a complainant believes that their complaint has not been handled fairly, they may request a review of the process or outcome.

A request for review should be submitted in writing to the Club Chair within 10 working days of receiving the outcome.

The request should explain the reasons for seeking a review, which may include:

- A significant procedural concern.
- Relevant new information that was not reasonably available during the original investigation.
- A concern that the decision was not reasonably supported by the evidence considered.

The Club Chair, or another suitably impartial committee member, will determine whether a review is appropriate.

Where possible, the review will be undertaken by someone who was not involved in the original investigation or decision.

The club will aim to respond to a review request within 15 working days. If additional time is required, the complainant will be informed.

The review outcome will be communicated in writing.

This internal review represents the final stage of the club's complaints process. It does not remove any applicable rights to raise concerns with the relevant County FA, The FA or another appropriate body.

11. Complaints Involving Club Committee Members

Where a complaint involves a committee member, that individual must not be involved in deciding the complaint or determining its outcome.

Where a complaint concerns the Club Chair or multiple committee members, the club will seek to appoint an appropriately independent person to consider the matter.

If the club cannot reasonably investigate the complaint impartially, it may seek advice or support from the relevant County FA or another appropriate independent body.

12. Confidentiality and Data Protection

All complaints will be handled sensitively and in accordance with the club's Privacy Statement and applicable data protection legislation.

Information will be shared only where necessary for the proper handling of the complaint, safeguarding, legal obligations or other appropriate purposes.

Complaint records will be stored securely and access restricted to authorised individuals.

The club will retain complaint records only for as long as reasonably necessary, taking account of the nature of the complaint, safeguarding considerations, legal obligations and any relevant retention requirements.

13. Vexatious or Unreasonable Behaviour

The club recognises that raising a complaint can be stressful and that individuals may feel frustrated or upset.

All complaints will be considered on their merits.

However, the club does not expect coaches, volunteers, committee members or other individuals to tolerate threatening, abusive, discriminatory or persistently unreasonable behaviour.

Where such behaviour occurs, the club may take proportionate steps to manage communications or protect those involved, while ensuring that legitimate complaints are not dismissed or obstructed.

Any decision to restrict communication or take further action must be reasonable, proportionate and consistent with the club's other policies and applicable football regulations.

14. Protection from Retaliation

No individual should be disadvantaged, intimidated or treated unfairly for raising a complaint in good faith or participating in a complaints process.

The club will take concerns about retaliation seriously and consider appropriate action where necessary.

This protection does not prevent the club from addressing substantiated misconduct or other concerns through the appropriate procedures.

15. External Complaints and Escalation

Norwood Lakes United FC recognises that some matters may fall outside the club's authority or require independent consideration.

Depending on the nature of the complaint, individuals may be able to raise concerns with:

- The relevant County Football Association.
- The Football Association (The FA).

- Tandridge League, where the matter falls within its remit.
- The Information Commissioner's Office, for relevant data protection concerns.
- The police or relevant statutory safeguarding authorities, where appropriate.

The club will provide relevant information about external routes where reasonably possible.

Nothing in this policy prevents an individual from contacting an appropriate external body or statutory authority.

16. Monitoring and Review

The Club Committee will periodically review complaints to identify recurring issues, improve club practices and strengthen the experience of players, families, coaches and volunteers.

Complaint information will be handled confidentially and reported in a way that respects the privacy of those involved.

This policy will be reviewed at least annually, or sooner where required due to changes in legislation, FA guidance or club arrangements.

Norwood Lakes United FC is committed to listening, learning and resolving concerns fairly, with the welfare of our players and the integrity of our football community at the heart of our approach.

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