



Stockport County  
Football Club

# Low Level Concerns Policy

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## Legal Framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and statutory guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- [UK General Data Protection Regulation \(UK GDPR\) Data Protection Act 2018](#)
- [DfE \(2021\) 'Keeping children safe in education 2021'](#) [DfE \(2018\) 'Working Together to Safeguard Children'](#)

This policy operates in conjunction with the following Stockport County Football Club policies:

- [Child & Young Person Safeguarding Adults safeguarding Policy](#)
- [Staff Code of Conduct](#)
- [Managing Allegations Against Staff Policy](#)
- [Whistleblowing Policy](#)

Stockport County Football Club incorporates the Academy and Stockport County Community Trust and will be referred to throughout the document as 'the club'.

## **Introduction**

Stockport County FC is committed to providing the highest level of care for all persons who use the club. This is a new policy which will enable staff and volunteers to share concerns no matter how small. It is designed to ensure that all staff, young people and parents or carers are aware of the procedure for the investigation of concerns in order that all concerns are dealt with as consistently and efficiently as possible.

The club feels that having a clear policy and reporting procedures will support all individuals to feel comfortable that they can voice concerns about any member of staff or volunteer. Low-level concerns should be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Team immediately, or to the Board Level Safeguarding Lead where the Safeguarding Officer is the subject of a low-level concern. All low-level concerns will be taken seriously and investigated immediately.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of the policy is to create and embed a culture of openness, trust and transparency in which clear values and expected behaviour which are set out in the Staff Code of Conduct are constantly lived, monitored and reinforced by all staff and volunteers.

## **What is a Low-Level Concern?**

A low-level concern is any concern, even if no more than causing a sense of unease or a 'nagging doubt' that an adult may have acted in a way that: is inconsistent with Stockport County FC Staff Code of Conduct, including inappropriate conduct outside of work, and does not meet the allegation threshold or is otherwise not serious enough to consider a referral to the LADO (Local Authority Designated Lead) but may merit consulting with and seeking advice from the LADO or FA on a no-names basis if necessary.

The word 'allegation' and 'concern' can be and are used interchangeably by different people. Sometimes individuals may shy away from the word 'allegation' and express it as a 'concern' instead. The crucial point is that whatever the language used, the behaviour referred to may, on the one hand, be capable of meeting the harm threshold and hence be referable, or, on the other, it does not meet the harm threshold in which case it will be treated as a low-level concern. Please refer to the Spectrum of Behaviour (page 9).

The focus is not on the language used by the person disclosing it; the focus is instead, on the behaviour being described.

## **The importance of sharing low-level concerns**

Staff do not need to be able to determine in each case whether their concern is a low-level concern, or if it is in fact serious enough to consider a referral to the LADO/ FA or meets the threshold of an allegation. Once staff share what they believe to be a low-level concern this determination will be made by the Safeguarding Team.

## **Will my concern remain anonymous?**

If a staff member raises a concern and does not want to be named, then Stockport County FC will respect that person's wishes as far as possible, however there may be circumstances where the staff member will need to be named (for example, where it is necessary in order to carry out a fair disciplinary investigation). In line with the Whistleblowing Policy, staff will be protected from potential repercussions caused by reporting a genuine concern.

### **Should staff 'self-report'?**

Occasionally, a member of staff may find themselves in a situation which could be misinterpreted or might appear compromising to others. Equally, a member of staff may, for whatever reason have behaved in a manner which, upon reflection, they consider falls below the standard set out in the Staff Code of Conduct. Self-reporting in these circumstances can be positive: it is self-protective and demonstrates an awareness of the expected behavioural standards. Crucially, it is an important means of maintaining a culture where everyone aspires to the highest standards of conduct and behaviour.

### **Acting on concerns**

Where the concern is unfounded and it is discovered upon evaluation that the low-level concern refers to behaviour that was not considered to be in breach of the Staff Code of Conduct, and the law. The Safeguarding Officer will speak to the individual about whom the concern was made to discuss their behaviour, why and how the behaviour may have been misconstrued, and what they can do to avoid such misunderstandings in the future. The Safeguarding Officer will also speak to the individual who shared the concern, outlining why the behaviour reported is consistent with club standards, and the law.

### **Where the concern is low-level**

Where the Safeguarding Officer determines that a concern is low-level, the club will respond to this in a sensitive and proportionate manner. The following procedure will be followed:

- The Safeguarding Officer holds a meeting with the individual about whom the concern was reported, during which they will talk to the individual in a non-accusatory and sympathetic manner and inform them of how their behaviour was perceived by the individual who reported the concern (without naming them, where possible).
- Clearly state what about their behaviour was inappropriate and problematic. Discuss the reasons for the behaviour with the individual and inform the individual clearly what about their behaviour needs to change.
- Discuss any support that the individual may require in order to achieve the proper standards of behaviour. Allow the individual the opportunity to respond to the concern in their own words.
- The Safeguarding Officer asks the individual to re-read the Staff Code of Conduct. The Safeguarding Officer will also consider whether the individual should receive guidance, supervision, or any further training.
- Where considered appropriate in the circumstances, the Safeguarding Officer will develop an action plan, with input from the individual, that outlines ongoing and transparent monitoring of the individual's behaviour and any other support measures implemented to ensure the staff member's behaviour improves.
- Where it is necessary to undergo an investigation into the behaviour, this will be done discreetly, and information will only be disclosed to individuals on a need-to-know basis.

The Safeguarding Officer will ensure that all details of the low-level concern, including any resultant actions taken, are recorded and securely stored on 'my concern'. The specific approach to handling low-level concerns will be adapted on a case-by-case basis. It is unlikely that a low-level concern will result in disciplinary procedures; however, individuals may be given warnings in line with the Disciplinary Policy where behaviour does not improve once it is brought to their attention. Where behaviour does not improve over a longer period of time, the concerns will be escalated and dealt with in line with the 'Managing Allegations Against Staff Policy.'

In addition, The FA currently operate under the "3 strike rule" on low-level concerns. This means that where an individual has been investigated for 2 previous allegations of low-level concerns, upon receipt of the 3rd concern this would be elevated as a formal referral to the Safeguarding Football Authorities due to the pattern of behaviours forming. In order for the FA to be fully aware of **all** investigated low-level concerns, individual clubs are required to complete the online FA Outcomes of Low-Level Concerns Investigation Form. The information contained in the Outcome of Low-Level Concerns Investigation Form will be kept as intelligence by the FA.

## **Spectrum of Behaviour**

### **Allegation**

Behaviour which indicates that an adult who works with children has;

- behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child;
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child;
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates that they may pose a risk of harm to children.



### **Low Level Concern**

Any concern – no matter how small, even if no more than a 'nagging doubt' – that the adult may have acted in a manner which;

- is not consistent with Stockport County FC Staff Code of Conduct, and/or;
- relates to their conduct outside of work which, even if not linked to a particular act or omission, has caused a sense of unease about that adult's suitability to work with children.



### **Appropriate**

Behaviour which is entirely consistent with Stockport County FC Staff Code of Conduct, and the law.

## Low-Level Concerns (LLCs) Flowchart

- DSL Designated Safeguarding Lead
- DSO Designated Safeguarding Officer
- LADO Local Authority Safeguarding Lead
- FA Football Association

Share with DSO/DSL as soon as is reasonably practicable and within 24 hours using the concern form below.



Where LLC is initially shared with DSL – they must immediately pass to DSO.



DSO to speak to person who raised LLC, review information and determine whether behaviour:

- a) is entirely consistent with the organisations' Code of Conduct, and the law
- b) constitutes a LLC
- c) is serious enough to consider a referral to LADO/FA
- d) when considered with any other LLCs that may have previously been raised about the same individual, should be reclassified as an allegation, and referred to LADO/FA.



DSO to seek advice from LADO/FA, if in doubt on a no-names basis if necessary

DSO to speak to the Individual about whom the concerns have been raised (unless advised not to do so by LADO/FA or other external agencies).



DSO to also consider whether LLC also raises misconduct or capability issues – taking into account any advice from LADO/FA and consulting Head of People on a no-names basis where necessary – and, if so, to refer matter to Head of People



DSO to make appropriate records of all internal and external conversations, their determination, the rationale for their decision, and details of any action taken, and to retain records in accordance with LLCs policy. DSO to complete the online FA Outcome of Low-Level Concerns Investigation Form.

<b>Low Level Concern Form</b>
<p>Please use this form to share your concern – no matter how small, even if no more than a ‘nagging doubt’ that an adult may have acted in a manner which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• is not consistent with Stockport County Football Club’s Staff Code of Conduct, and/or;</li><li>• relates to their conduct outside of work which, even if not linked to a particular act or omission, has caused a sense of unease about that adult’s suitability to work with children.</li></ul> <p>You should provide a concise record – including brief context in which the low-level concern arose, and details which are chronological, and precise and accurate as possible – of any such concern and relevant incident(s) (and please use a separate sheet if necessary). The record should be signed, timed and dated.</p>
<b>Details of Concern</b>
Name of staff/volunteer member:
Department & Role:
Concern:
<b>Signed:</b>
<b>Date &amp; Time:</b>

<b>Reviewed by:</b>
<b>At: (Time)</b>
<b>On: (Date)</b>
<b>Action Taken: (Specify)</b>
<b>Signed:</b>
<b>Date &amp; Time:</b>
This record will be held securely in accordance with Stockport County Football Club's Low Level Concerns Policy. Please note that low-level concerns will be treated in confidence as far as possible, but Stockport County FC may in certain circumstances be subject to legal reporting requirements or other legal obligations to share information with appropriate persons, including legal claims and formal investigations.



## Safeguarding Team

