



League Safeguarding Briefing 2025-2026

Shantell Saltwood- Designated Safeguarding
Manager



Session plan



Welcome & purpose



Role clarity:
LWO/YLWO +
committee



Lower-level
concerns



Recording + info
sharing



Toolkit + action
planning + Q&A



General updates

Hampshire FA Safeguarding Team

Shantell Saltwood – Designated Safeguarding Manager

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Michelle Saunders – Deputy Designated Safeguarding Officer

Michelle.Saunders@hampshirefa.com

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Senior Safeguarding Lead: Mel Gill

Deputy Senior Safeguarding Lead: Darren Parker

Chief Executive: Neil Cassar

Board Safeguarding Champion: Ian Walkom





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Welcome & Purpose



Why are you here?

Annual briefing for all YLWOs/LWOs (open to wider league committee)

Practical information and support for managing low-level concerns

Outcome: consistent decisions, good recording, strong escalation habits

Today is designed to give you practical, repeatable processes.

You'll leave with a shared decision flow, recording standard, and scenario practice.





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Roles and Responsibilities

What is Safeguarding?

*In its broadest sense, safeguarding is the protection of a person's **health, well-being, and right to live in safety, free from harm, abuse, and neglect.***

There are distinct laws in England relating to Safeguarding Children and Young People under the age of 18, and relating to Safeguarding Adults at Risk of Harm over the age of 18.

Effective safeguarding of children and adults relies on individuals and organisations working together to:

- *Promote wellbeing.*
- *Prevent harm and reduce the risk of abuse or neglect.*
- *Respond to any concerns they have about an individual's well-being.*



Roles & responsibilities

League Welfare Officers and committees working together

League Welfare Officer (Youth / Open-Age)

- Acts as the league's welfare lead and first point of contact for welfare/SG within the league structure.
- Supports Club Welfare Officers (CWOs) / club leads with advice, consistency and signposting.
- Maintains oversight of themes/patterns across the league (not an “investigator”).
- Knows when and how to escalate to Hampshire FA / The FA for advice and referral routes.

Wider league committee members

- Promote a safe culture: clear expectations, consistent standards and visible reporting routes.
- Back proportionate responses and ensure welfare + discipline handovers are clear.
- Manage conflicts of interest so decisions are credible and fair.
- Ensure confidentiality and secure handling of welfare information.

Key point: Welfare and discipline often overlap—agree who leads which parts and document handovers.



What does 'good' look like at league level?

Clear reporting routes are published and visible

Consistent recording and secure storage

Proportionate action and follow-up

Pattern spotting across fixtures/teams/individuals

Clear escalation routes and advice channels

Clear welfare contact routes: league → club → County FA / The FA as appropriate.

Consistent recording and review dates to spot patterns early.

Committee backing for proportionate actions (and escalation when needed).



Safeguarding culture: Respect & reporting confidence

League Welfare Officers (Youth + Open-Age) | League committee members

Culture sets the baseline: what's 'normal' in your league becomes what's tolerated

Make reporting easy: publish welfare contacts and routes in every league comms pack

Be consistent: similar behaviours → similar responses

Back officials and volunteers: challenge abuse, discrimination and intimidation early

Use learning not blame: correct poor practice before it becomes harm

Definitions & boundaries

Low-level concern vs misconduct vs safeguarding referral

Low-level concern

Behaviour/practice that may not meet referral threshold but needs early action to protect people and culture. Often about boundaries, language, intimidation, poor practice, or emerging patterns.

Misconduct / discipline

Breach of rules or codes of conduct. May overlap with welfare (e.g., harassment, discriminatory language, threatening behaviour). Requires a clear handover route and outcomes.

Safeguarding referral

Concerns that meet safeguarding threshold (risk of harm/significant concern), criminal indicators, or child/adult-at-risk issues that require escalation for advice/referral.

Rule of thumb: if risk is unclear, or the behaviour involves secrecy/coercion/power imbalance—seek advice early.





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Lower-Level Concerns



Lower-level concerns (NEW guidance coming next season)

The FA / NSPCC guidance: “Managing lower-level concerns within Clubs and Leagues” (coming in 2026-2027).

Purpose: early identification + prompt, proportionate management to prevent escalation.

Applies to youth football and to adult football environments where welfare/culture concerns arise.

Key message: lower-level does not mean ‘no action’ — record, respond, review and escalate when needed.

What is a lower-level concern?

01

A concern/doubt/sense of unease about behaviour that is not in line with The FA's expected standards.

02

May be small or subtle, but if unaddressed can create an environment where more serious harm occurs.

03

Often the first indicator — learning from survivors shows abuse can start as a lower-level concern.

04

The priority is early action: empathy + impartiality + integrity + child-centred practice.

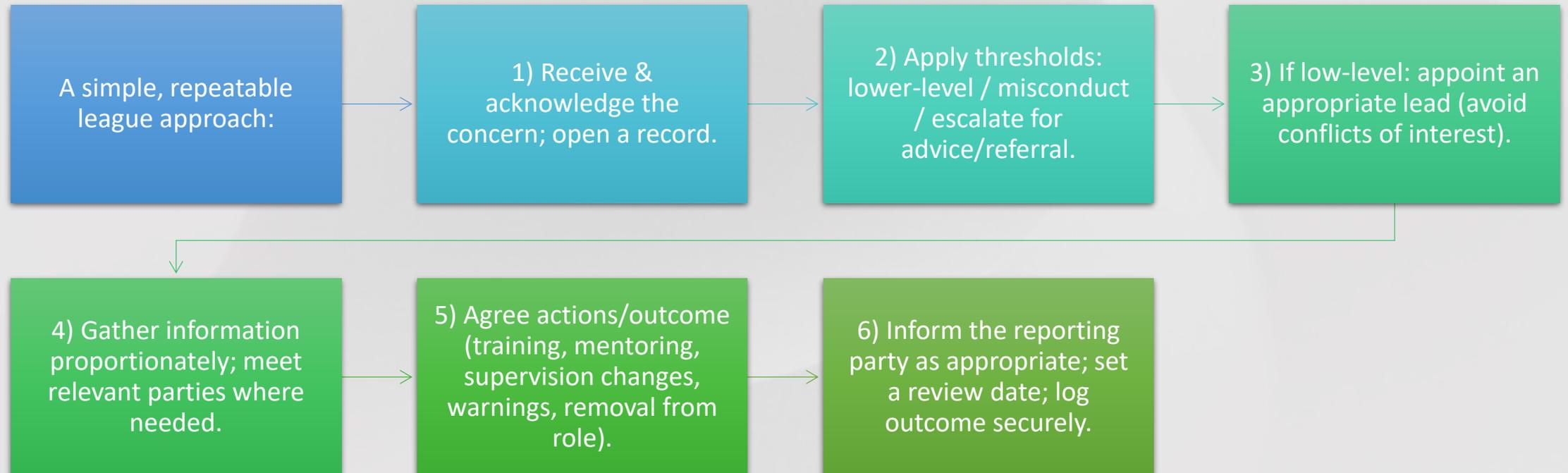
Examples (from the guidance): behaviour & culture

- Examples in the FA/NSPCC guidance include (not exhaustive):
- Favouritism / not treating all children fairly and equitably.
- Allowing rough/dangerous play; bullying; bad language or inappropriate behaviour.
- Punishments that humiliate players.
- Inappropriate use of social media (e.g., communicating with children online).
- Alcohol, smoking or vaping while supervising children.
- Allowing discrimination (religion, race, gender, sexuality, disability, socio-economic status).

Examples: poor practice & boundary management

- The guidance also highlights lower-level concerns such as:
- Failure to provide appropriate adult/child supervision ratios for coaching sessions.
- Putting performance before wellbeing and safety.
- Not following FA guidance on transporting children (including travel abroad).
- Not holding required qualifications / safeguarding checks (e.g., DBS, safeguarding education).
- Failure to challenge lower-level concerns in others.
- Sharing confidential information inappropriately.

League process (based on FA/NSPCC flowchart)



Escalate immediately: clear triggers in the guidance

- The guidance includes a clear escalation note:
- Any sexualised communication **MUST** be referred to the County FA Safeguarding Team immediately.
- If the concern becomes more serious during the process, escalate at that point (do not 'complete' the lower-level process first).
- If multiple reports relate to the same person, inform the County FA Safeguarding Team.

What leagues should have in place (checklist)

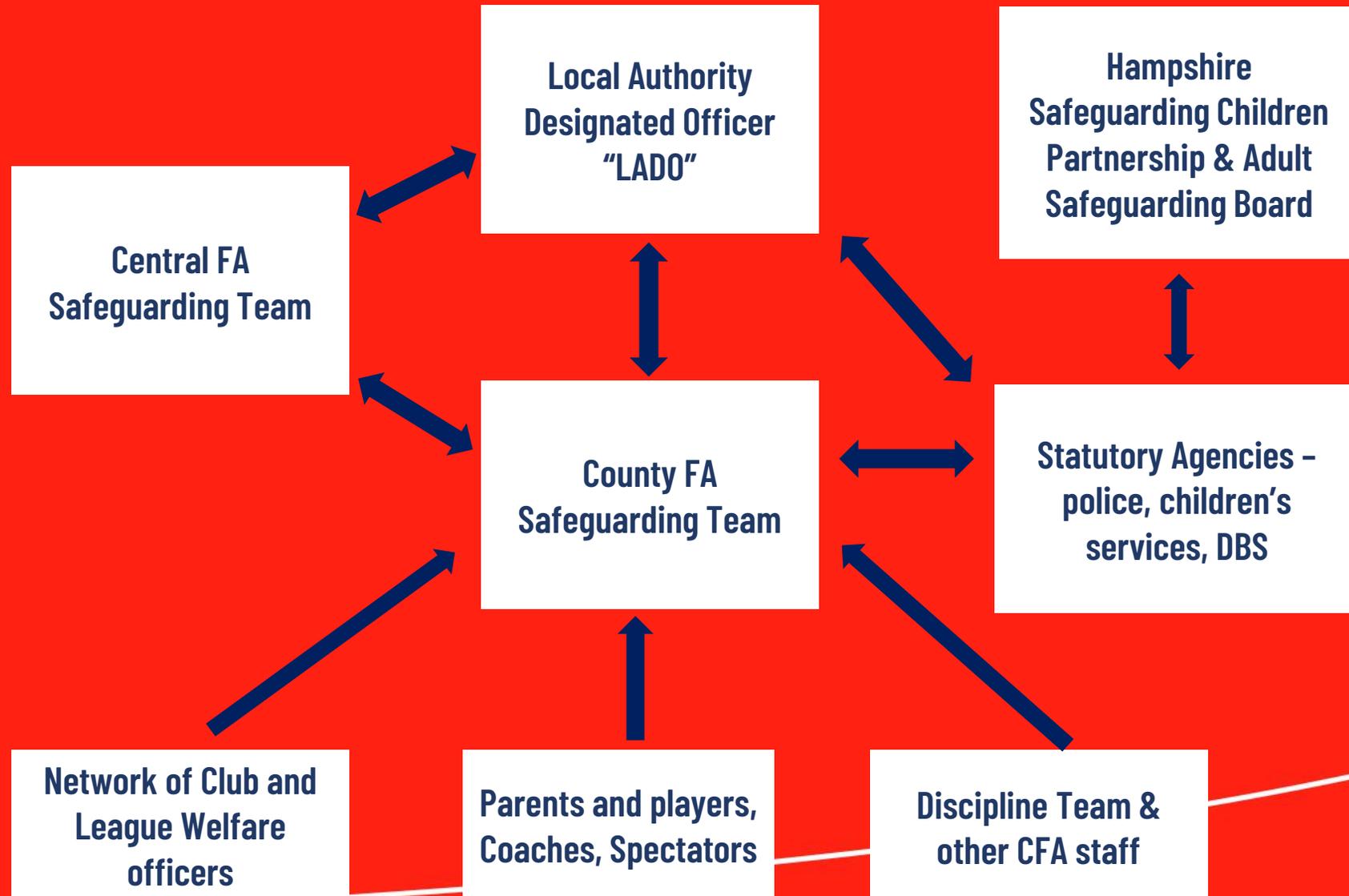
- The guidance checklist suggests clubs/leagues should have:
- Clear communication/reporting routes for raising concerns (including for young people).
- A concern management process with agreed timescales.
- Knowledge of the County FA Designated Safeguarding Officer and when/how to contact them.
- Codes of conduct for all groups (players, coaches, officials, parents/carers).
- A process for recording concerns/incidents and storing them securely.
- Child-centred approach + Safeguarding Policy, Anti-Bullying Policy, Complaints Procedure, Recruitment/Selection (game-time) policy.



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Recording & Information Sharing

Reporting Concerns - How does the Safeguarding team operate?



Decision flow

Step 1: Receive the concern (don't investigate)

First response

- Listen and reassure; be calm and respectful.
- Do not promise confidentiality—explain information will be shared only on a need-to-know basis.
- Check immediate safety: is anyone at immediate risk right now?
- Capture the essentials: who/what/when/where; exact words if relevant.
- Do not investigate or interview—your job is to record and route appropriately.

Recording (do it right)

Good notes = better decisions, safer football

Record (minimum headings)

- Date/time reported + date/time of incident.
- Factual description (what happened; exact words if needed).
- People involved + witnesses.
- Immediate actions taken + rationale.
- Outcome + agreed next steps.
- Review date and who is responsible.

Avoid

- Speculation, diagnoses, labels, or character judgments.
- Over-sharing—keep to need-to-know and facts.
- Delays: record as soon as possible while details are clear.
- “No record because it felt small” — small patterns become big problems.

Tip: Use the same template every time so records are consistent across clubs and cases.



Information sharing: practical principles



Need-to-know only
(welfare route, not
general committee)



Store securely; limit
access



Avoid WhatsApp for
sensitive details



If unsure about sharing:
seek advice first



Share the minimum
needed with the
minimum people.



Explain to reporters what
will happen next and
when they'll hear back.

Low-level concern log (minimum headings)

League Welfare Officers (Youth + Open-Age) | League committee members

Unique reference number

Date/time received + date/time of incident

Reporter details (if appropriate) and relationship to league

Factual account (including exact words where relevant)

People involved/witnesses

Immediate safety considerations

Actions taken + rationale

Outcome + review date + escalation decision

Reporting Concerns – What MUST BE reported to Hampshire FA Safeguarding Team?

When an individual now or previously involved in football activity in any capacity has or is alleged to have:

- Been involved in the harm, abuse or exploitation of a child and/or Adult at Risk
- Committed a criminal offence against or related to a child and/or Adult at Risk
- Committed a sexual offence against anyone (adult or child)
- Behaved in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children and/or Adults at Risk
- Been subject to previous low-level concern that has been actioned by the club and a further low-level concern has been raised

All cases that are referred to a statutory agency (i.e. Police, Social Services, LADO) must be referred to the FA Safeguarding Team via Hampshire FA



How to report concerns to Hampshire FA SG Team

Team Inbox: safeguarding@hampshirefa.com

Shantell Saltwood- Shantell.Saltwood@hampshirefa.com /Tel:
01256 853012

Michelle Saunders- Michelle.Saunders@hampshirefa.com /Tel:
01256 853022



Where and How to Report Concerns

If a child or young person is in immediate risk of harm, contact the Police or Children's Social Care;

and/or call the NSPCC Helpline for advice on 0808 800 5000 or text 88858 or email help@nspcc.org.uk

Non urgent safeguarding matters can be reported to your Hampshire FA Safeguarding Team – safeguarding@hampshirefa.com or The FA directly at Safeguarding@TheFA.com

Alternatively, clubs in steps 1-4 may also contact the NLS Safeguarding Case Manager at the FA or the Vanarama National League DSO (steps 1-2).



Poor practice, such as breaches of code of conducts should be dealt with internally.

Discussing these with the County FA DSO or the Vanarama National League DSO (steps 1-2) can support with this process.

Welfare vs discipline

Clear handovers stop gaps and mixed messages

Typically discipline-led

- Abuse of officials; threatening behaviour; serious misconduct on matchday.
- Discriminatory language/behaviour and serious harassment.
- Repeated breaches of codes of conduct requiring formal outcomes.

Typically welfare-led (with discipline awareness)

- Boundary concerns and poor practice that need early correction.
- Supervision/communication practices needing improvement.
- Low-level patterns that may escalate if repeated.

Many cases overlap—agree who leads which part and record the handover (date, owner, next step).



Toolkit (takeaway)

Copy this into league docs or a one-page handout

Golden rules

- Don't investigate: listen, record, route.
- Don't promise confidentiality: need-to-know sharing only.
- Record early: small issues become patterns.
- Act proportionately, set a review date, monitor.
- If unsure: seek advice early.

Recording headings

- Reported by + date/time; incident date/time.
- Facts (what happened, exact words if needed).
- People involved + witnesses.
- Actions taken + rationale.
- Outcome + next steps.
- Review date + owner.

Optional: add a "pattern tracker" line (previous similar concerns? yes/no + reference).





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General Updates



Safeguarding Compliance

From this week, Hampshire FA will be working with the FA 365 compliance team, who will now send out communications to individuals up to 3 months before they become non-compliant and up to 21 days post expiry of any Safeguarding qualifications and/or FA DBS.

If an individual/ team and or club are due to be suspended, the League Welfare Officer and Secretary will be copied in on any comms that are sent to the club/ individuals.



Future Fit

A new development-led framework for grassroots youth football in England (from 2026/27).

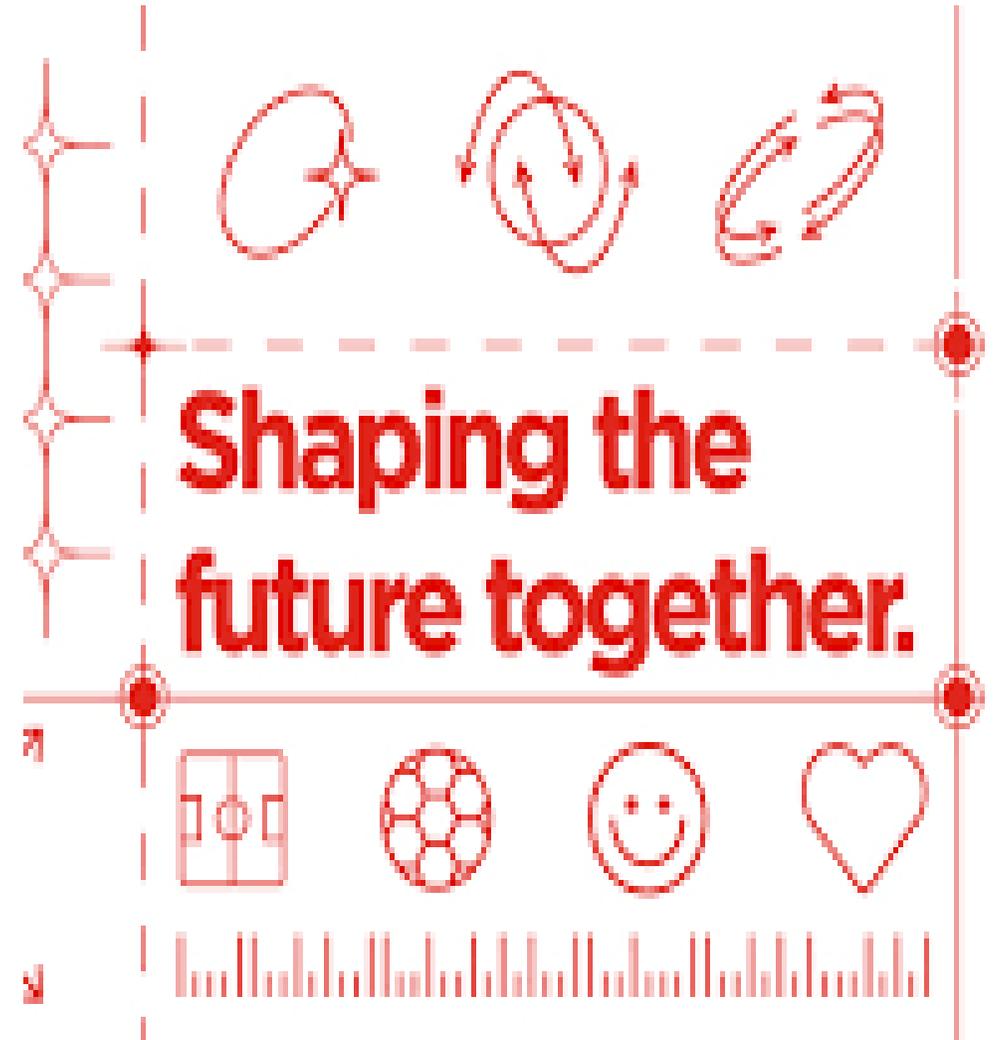
Purpose: make youth football more enjoyable, inclusive and age-appropriate — ‘children first’.

Designed to increase: time on the ball, time on the pitch and physical activity.

What changes: introduction of a new entry format (3v3) and updated small-sided formats by age.

Implementation: mandated from 2026/27, with opportunities for early adoption in 2025/26 (in some areas).

Why it matters to leagues: impacts formats, festivals/competition structures, communications and welfare planning.



Future Fit Video



Future Fit Dates and Information Links

Future Fit Showcase dates

7th March, Timings TBC
Winklebury Football Complex, Basingstoke

12th April, Timings TBC
Venue TBC (North Hampshire)

26th April, Timings TBC
King George V Football Complex, Portsmouth

Isle of Wight
Date, Timings & Venue TBC

Bournemouth
Date, Timings & Venue TBC

Info on updated timings and locations can be found here: <https://www.hampshirefa.com/news/2026/feb/16/futurefit-hampshire-showcase-events>

The most up-to-date information on the upcoming changes can be found here: <https://futurefit.EnglandFootball.com/futurefit/index.html>

There was a Digital Leagues Conference held in November, which covered a lot of the questions leagues might have about operating 3v3 and implementing the wider Future Fit changes. All of the content for that is stored and can be readily accessed here: <https://events.ringcentral.com/org/7Y7GjbMIG4cHpWssCDdlhdOrc/page/futurefit-digital-conference-hub>

There is also a Digital Clubs Conference taking place on the evenings of Monday 16th, Tuesday 17th and Wednesday 18th March, which you can share with their clubs. For registration and further information: https://events.ringcentral.com/events/futurefit-digital-conference-clubs?sc_src=email_7263726&sc_lid=772299666&sc_uid=%24uid%24&sc_lid=1



Play Safe Weekend



Play Safe
Weekend will
take place on
September 26th
and 27th.



Partnership with
NSPCC



The FA are committed to deliver a safer game, which is free from discrimination and where poor behaviour is the exception. We know this is what our participants want and deserve.

In addition to campaigns, harsher sanctions and increased awareness, our greatest asset as we address these challenges are those within our football community – teammates, coaches, spectators, club officials who are witnessing harmful behaviour in parks and clubs across the country. We want to empower this group to be able to act in a safe and proportionate manner, which supports the victim and the work we are all undertaking.

Many of the learners in these Active Bystander sessions may have witnessed or heard things that just didn't feel or look right. They may have been left wondering "what do I do?" or "how should I respond?".

Across the UK many people are taking part in Active Bystander training, giving them the skills and confidence to take positive actions when they see something amiss. This training session brings the Active Bystander into football and supports our people to understand the role that they can play.

THE FA ACTIVE BYSTANDER WORKSHOP



FLAG IT



Useful Resources



<https://www.thefa.com/football-rules-governance/safeguarding/section-11-the-complete-downloads-directory>

Close & next steps

Keep it consistent, record early, and ask for advice when unsure

What to do after today

- Agree on your league's internal handover: welfare ↔ discipline (who owns what).
- Publish your reporting routes (league + club) and make them easy to find.
- Use one shared recording template across the league.
- Schedule a welfare “pattern check” point during the season (e.g., monthly/quarterly).
- Know how to seek advice from Hampshire FA / The FA when thresholds are unclear.
- Make sure that Safeguarding is on any meeting agendas and is regularly discussed by your committee.



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QUESTIONS?





**Thank
You!!!**

