

Safe football. Respectful behaviour. Fair treatment.

A place where everyone belongs.

Wessex League - Conduct & Culture

Creating safe, welcoming football where everyone belongs

Football should be competitive, passionate and enjoyable. It should also be a place where people are treated well, respected and made to feel they belong.

The Wessex League wants every player, manager, coach, match official, club officer, volunteer and supporter to enjoy football in a safe, welcoming, respectful and positive environment.

Conduct refers to the behaviour, standards, accountability and reporting expected of everyone involved in the game.

Culture is the shared values, everyday attitudes and leadership tone that shape how people are treated and whether they feel they belong. Conduct sets clear expectations for behaviour and accountability. Culture creates an environment in which people are treated fairly, can participate without discrimination and feel they belong.

Together, they help create the kind of football environment we want across the Wessex League.

The League's approach reflects;

The FA's A Game Free From Discrimination strategy has three central priorities: to boost representation, drive inclusion and tackle discrimination. It also supports Hampshire FA's Moving the Dial 2024–28 strategy, which emphasises equal opportunities, inclusive communication, a positive culture, representation, community engagement and the proactive tackling of discrimination.

Our Commitment to the Game

The Wessex League promotes a culture in which respect, positive conduct, and belonging shape every matchday experience.

We recognise that our clubs bring together people from different:

- Communities and cultures;
- Ethnic and national backgrounds;
- Religions and beliefs;
- Ages and generations;
- Sexes and sexual orientations;
- Abilities and disabilities;
- Social and economic backgrounds; and
- Life experiences.

Those differences are part of football and should be valued.

The FA Standardised Rules applying to the Wessex League are clear. The Competition and every member club must be committed to promoting inclusivity and eliminating all forms of discrimination, must not unlawfully discriminate and must make every effort to promote equality by treating people fairly and respectfully and providing access and opportunities throughout the community. Alleged breaches of equality legislation must be referred to the appropriate sanctioning Association.

What This Means on a Matchday

We want people to be able to attend a Wessex League game and concentrate on enjoying football.

Passion, emotion and rivalry are important parts of non-league football. This is not about removing passion from the game or creating a clinical football environment. It is about ensuring that passion does not become intimidation, abuse, discrimination or behaviour that damages the reputation of a club or the League.

Players, coaches, officials and supporters should therefore:

- Treat people fairly and consistently;
- Avoid discriminatory, abusive or demeaning language;
- Respect different cultures, backgrounds and communication styles;
- Avoid making assumptions about people because of their identity or background;
- Respect match officials and opposition personnel;
- Challenge unacceptable behaviour appropriately;
- Support anyone who raises a genuine concern; and
- Report serious concerns through the correct football channels.

The League's Management Directives already make home clubs responsible for ground and crowd control and allow the Board to address disciplinary matters that may bring the League into disrepute, where they are not otherwise dealt with specifically by The FA.

Conduct, Culture and Belonging

The Wessex League expects clubs to foster a culture in which people can participate without fear of discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation.

The FA policy covers the protections provided by equality legislation, including:

Age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race, including colour, nationality and ethnic or national origin; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.

The policy also addresses harassment and victimisation, making clear that discriminatory language or behaviour has no place on the pitch, in technical areas, around grounds, in clubhouses or online.

Hampshire FA's Equality Policy similarly commits to equal opportunity, respect for individual dignity and football free from intimidation, victimisation, harassment or abuse.

Responsibilities of the Wessex League

The League will:

- Promote safeguarding, positive conduct, strong culture and belonging;
- Provide clubs with clear information and practical guidance;
- Support FA and County FA initiatives;
- Provide an identifiable Conduct and Culture contact;
- Encourage concerns to be reported;
- Support the correct referral process;
- Cooperate with County FAs and The FA;
- Share useful resources and good practice;

The Wessex League's Conduct and Culture Officer provides Board oversight, communication, monitoring and annual review.

What We Ask Wessex League Clubs to Do

Clubs do not need complicated language or large numbers of policies to make a difference.

They should be able to demonstrate that they:

- Understand and follow FA and League conduct and culture requirements;
- Have a Conduct and Culture Statement appropriate to their club;
- Communicate expected standards of behaviour;
- Provide reasonable adjustments where appropriate;
- Make football as accessible as reasonably possible;
- Treat people fairly and respectfully;
- Challenge discriminatory behaviour;
- Know how discrimination and unacceptable conduct should be reported;
- Support people who raise genuine concerns;
- Co-operate with their County FA and The FA when incidents are investigated; and
- Keep appropriate records when concerns are brought to their attention.

The Wessex League places particular importance on leadership, communication, reporting, monitoring and continuous improvement.

Discriminatory Abuse from Spectators

There is an established FA grassroots procedure for handling discriminatory abuse from spectators during a match.

Club representatives are responsible for monitoring, reporting and acting on abuse from their spectators.

Where discriminatory abuse is directed towards a player, manager or match official:

1. Tell the referee.
The incident should be brought to the referee's attention at an appropriate break in play.
2. The referee informs a responsible club representative.
This might be the Club Secretary, manager or another appropriate club official.
3. The club acts.
The representative should try to identify the individual responsible and take appropriate action to stop the behaviour while allowing the match to continue where possible.
4. If the behaviour continues, the referee can suspend the match.
Players may be temporarily removed from the field while the club is given a further opportunity to resolve the situation.
5. If the risk remains, the referee can consider abandoning the match.

The decision to suspend or abandon a match is the referee's after appropriate consultation.

The referee must report incidents brought to their attention to the relevant County FA as an extraordinary incident, even where the referee did not personally hear the discriminatory abuse.

Responsibilities of Clubs

Clubs should ensure that those representing them understand that a football club's conduct, culture and reputation are shaped by what happens:

- On the pitch, in technical areas, around the ground, in the clubhouse and online.
- Managers and coaches set the tone for players.
- Club officials set the tone for volunteers and supporters.
- Supporters contribute significantly to the atmosphere experienced by players and officials.
- Everyone therefore has a part to play.

Where serious misconduct falls within FA or County FA jurisdiction, the Wessex League will support and cooperate with that process rather than attempting to replace it.

The Standardised Rules expressly preserve the jurisdiction of The FA and affiliated Associations over relevant misconduct matters.

Reporting Discrimination or Unacceptable Conduct

You do not need to decide whether an incident legally constitutes discrimination before reporting it.

If you experience or witness something concerning, report what happened accurately and allow the appropriate football authority to consider it.

A concern may be reported to:

- The match referee or another match official;
- A responsible club official, Club Welfare Officer or Club Secretary;

- The relevant County FA;
- The FA through its current discrimination reporting process;
- Kick It Out through its current reporting service; or
- The Wessex League Conduct and Culture Officer for guidance, support and help with referral at respect.wessexleague@gmail.com.

The Wessex League Conduct and Culture Officer is primarily there to support, guide and signpost. Formal investigations or disciplinary decisions that fall within FA or County FA jurisdiction should be dealt with by the appropriate football authority.

The FA's grassroots spectator protocol also encourages anyone witnessing discriminatory abuse to report it immediately to the referee and subsequently to the appropriate County FA, with Kick It Out available as an alternative reporting route.

Accessibility and Belonging

A positive club culture goes beyond dealing with discrimination after something has gone wrong.

It also means thinking about whether someone can actually access and enjoy the football environment.

That can involve:

- Accessible facilities;
- Clear information before visiting a ground;
- Reasonable adjustments;
- Welcoming volunteers;
- Family-friendly environments;
- Respectful and welcoming language;
- Understanding disability and neurodiversity;
- Respecting religious and cultural needs where reasonably possible; and
- Making new players, volunteers and supporters feel comfortable when they arrive.

Hampshire FA's strategy specifically identifies equal opportunities, inclusive communications, inclusive facilities, representation, community engagement, positive culture and neurodiversity as important parts of making grassroots football more welcoming.

The Wessex League Approach - Where Everyone Belongs

Our practical work is built around four simple areas.

WELCOME

First impressions, hospitality, accessibility and atmosphere.

Would someone enjoy arriving at our club for the first time?

RESPECT

How players, coaches, officials, volunteers and supporters behave towards one another.

Does our conduct represent the standard we want for the Wessex League and your club?

BELONGING

Helping people from different communities and backgrounds feel that football is genuinely for them.

Would everyone feel welcome here?

GROWTH

Learning, sharing good practice and making realistic improvements throughout the season.

How can we improve just a little every month?

The objective is steady improvement in conduct, club culture and the matchday experience across the League.

Useful Resources

For current guidance, training and reporting information:

- [The FA - Equality, Diversity & Inclusion](#)
- [The FA - Report Discrimination in Grassroots Football](#)
- [The FA - Safeguarding](#)
- [Hampshire FA - Moving the Dial 2024–28](#)
- [Kick It Out](#)
- [Wessex League - Standardised Rules 2026/27](#)
- [Wessex League - Management Directives 2026/27](#)
- [The FA - Protocol for Dealing with Discriminatory Abuse by Spectators at Grassroots Level](#)

The Wessex League Standardised Rules provide the underlying requirement for clubs and the League to promote inclusion and eliminate discrimination. The Management Directives set out the League's practical expectations regarding standards, discipline, ground management and the conduct of its competitions.

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