



DEPARTMENT	OPERATIONS
POLICY/PROCEDURE	COMPLAINTS POLICY
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1. Policy Statement

Lincoln City Football Club (“the Club”) welcomes comments and complaints from supporters, stakeholders and from the general public. We use this process to improve services for our supporters, stakeholders and the wider community in which we exist.

The Club is committed to the continuous improvement of the services it provides. We recognise that, occasionally, mistakes will be made or the service offered will not meet an individual’s requirements or expectations. For these reasons it is our policy that all complaints should be:

- Treated seriously and in an open manner;
- Acknowledged immediately, preferably in writing;
- Investigated;
- Resolved, wherever that is reasonably practicable, within no longer than 13 working weeks; and
- Used as feedback to improve the service offered by the Club.

2. Scope

The policy applies to all supporters, stakeholders and members of the general public but does not replace procedures for staff grievances, where the grievance procedure should be used.

3. Responsibilities

- 3.1 All Club staff have a responsibility for receiving complaints, treating them seriously and dealing with them promptly and courteously in accordance with the procedure set out below.
- 3.2 The Club has a responsibility for resolving a complaint, and leading or contributing to an investigation into a complaint when this is considered appropriate.
- 3.3 The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for resolving complaints which have not been resolved during the previous two stages. The decision made by the Chief Executive is final.
- 3.4 The Senior Executive Officer (SEO) Team is responsible for ensuring that the complaints policy and procedure are operating effectively and may become directly involved if a complaint is unresolved by the relevant Head of Directorate.

4. Actions to implement and develop Policy

4.1 Stage One

A number of complaints can be resolved informally. Where this is not possible or does not result in satisfactory resolution, the complaint should be submitted in writing to the Club’s Office Manager.

The Club usually expects complaints to be made by the person concerned. However it will consider complaints made by a parent or advocate of the complainant. Anonymous complaints cannot be investigated.

All comments/complaints will be forwarded to the Office Manager who will acknowledge receipt within one working week. The Office Manager will then forward to the relevant Head of Directorate.

4.2 Stage Two

The relevant Head of Directorate will respond in writing within seven working days, explaining what has happened as a result of the complaint. Where this involves a member of staff, specific detail of action taken will not be made available. This is to ensure that our employees are afforded appropriate dignity at work.



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If the complaint requires further investigation that cannot be carried out within seven working days a detailed response will follow within 21 working days of receipt of the original written complaint.

4.3 Stage Three

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the relevant Head of Directorate's response then the complaint will be forwarded to a member of the Senior Executive Office (SEO) Team to resolve.

The Senior Executive Officer will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within two working weeks and a final reply will be completed within 8 working weeks to allow time for any formal investigations to take place.

4.4 Stage Four (final internal stage)

If the complainant is still dissatisfied with the response then the matter will be referred to the Chief Executive Officer. The Chief Executive Officer will respond within three weeks. The Chief Executive Officer's decision is final.

The total comments/complaints procedure should be finalised in no more than 13 working weeks unless there are exceptional circumstances in which case the complainant will be kept informed of progress.

4.5 IFO

Any customer or complainant who is unhappy with a decision made by the Club under this policy has the right to submit a complaint to The Independent Football Ombudsman, the contact details for which are as follows:

Independent Football Ombudsman

Premier House

1-5 Argyle Way

Stevenage

Hertfordshire

SG1 2AD

Tel: 0330 165 4223

Email: Contact@TheIFO.co.uk

Website: www.theifo.co.uk

5. Monitoring & Evaluation

The Office Manager shall maintain a confidential record of complaints dealt with to feed into the Club's quality improvement processes. The Office Manager will maintain a record of all complaints, appeals and outcomes and produce a quarterly report for analysis by the Board.

6. Safeguarding/Welfare Concerns

6.1 A concern would be classified as safeguarding when it relates to either:

- A child or vulnerable adult being at risk of abuse or significant harm; or
- A concern in relation to a member of Club staff abusing or causing harm either physically or emotionally to a child or vulnerable adult within their care.

All safeguarding concerns should be dealt with in accordance with either the Club's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy or Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Policy.



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6.2 It is important for non-safeguarding concerns that parents follow the Club's complaint procedure in full before escalating to other governing bodies. Issues should only be escalated to the EFL when the full Club process has been exhausted and a satisfactory response has not been received.

6.3 The FA case management team work with statutory agencies, County FA's and professional clubs assessing people who pose, or may pose a risk of harm and put in place safeguards. These include suspensions from football where necessary.

7. Process for dealing with Unacceptable Behaviour from Complainants

7.1 The Club aims to provide a service that is responsive to the complaints made by fans, customers, young players, parents and carers or any other person who may use our services. However, the Club retains the right to respond appropriately, where we consider any person(s) behaviour to be unacceptable. We need to ensure that Club staff and other users of our services do not suffer any disadvantage from complainants who act in an unacceptable manner.

7.2 This section of the policy sets out the approach which will be taken in circumstances where the actions or behaviour of an individual are considered to be unacceptable. This applies to anyone who is interacting or communicating with the Club, including complainants or their representatives.

7.3 The Club recognises that sometimes mental ill health or disability may make it difficult for people to express themselves or communicate clearly. The Club will always consider making reasonable adjustments for the individual if we are asked to do so – but we may still need to manage contact in these circumstances if considered necessary.

8. Definitions and examples of unacceptable behaviour:

8.1 The Club is often a route for complaints that are considered not to have been dealt with elsewhere. We understand that bringing a complaint can be a stressful experience. People may act out of character in times of frustration or distress. Our staff recognise this and, as such, would not necessarily view a complainant's actions or behaviour to be unacceptable solely because they appear to be assertive or determined.

8.2 However, the actions of complainants who are angry, demanding, or persistent may result in unreasonable demands on, or unacceptable behaviour towards, Club staff. It is these actions or behaviour that we consider unacceptable and aim to manage under this guidance. We have grouped these actions or behaviour under two broad headings: 'aggressive, offensive or abusive actions or behaviour' and 'unreasonable demands or persistence'.

8.3 All of our staff have the right not to be subjected to aggressive, offensive or abusive actions; language; behaviour; or aggressive, belligerent or threatening emails or communications regardless of the circumstances.

8.4 Examples of actions or behaviour grouped under this heading include any actions or behaviour that may have the potential to cause staff to feel intimidated, threatened or offended. These include, but are not limited to threats, physical violence, personal verbal abuse, derogatory remarks, and rudeness. We also consider that inflammatory statements and unsubstantiated allegations can amount to abusive actions or behaviour. It is possible to commit offences online and via social media, and/or incur civil liability in respect of, for example, defamation, and there have been a number of high profile legal cases in sport.

8.5 The Club has a responsibility to ensure that our work is undertaken in an efficient and effective manner. It is for the Club to decide what information it requires and when. On occasions, customers or complainants may make what we consider to be unreasonable demands on the Club or its staff, through the amount of information they seek or provide, the nature and scale of service they expect, or the frequency of requests for contact. This will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

8.6 We recognise that some customers or complainants will not or cannot accept that the Club is unable to assist them further or provide an unrealistic level of service when dealing with their complaint. Customers or complainants may



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continue to disagree with the action or decision taken in relation to their case or the frequency or level of contact they expect from the Club and persistently request further correspondence on the same issue.

- 8.7 Examples of unreasonable demands may include: requesting responses within an unreasonable timescale; insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular member of staff; continual phone calls, emails, or letters; repeatedly changing the substance of the complaint, or raising unrelated concerns. We consider it unreasonable for customers and complainants to attend our offices without an agreed appointment, unless they are delivering documents to our reception desk only.
- 8.8 Examples of unreasonable persistence include: continual refusal to accept a decision made in relation to a complaint; persistent refusal to accept explanations relating to what the Club can or cannot do, or continuing to pursue a case once it has been closed by the Club. The way in which these customers or complainants approach the Club may be entirely reasonable, but it is their persistent behaviour in continuing to do so that is not.
- 8.9 We consider that the level of contact has become unacceptable where the amount of time spent speaking to or corresponding with the customer or complainant, either by telephone or dealing with written correspondence, negatively impacts on our ability to deal with that complaint, with other complaints or to draw the matter to a close.

9. Club procedure for handling unacceptable behaviour:

- 9.1 When we consider that the actions or behaviour of a customer or complainant is unacceptable we will tell them why we find it unacceptable and we will give them the opportunity to modify their actions or behaviour. If the unacceptable actions or behaviour continue, we will take appropriate measures.
- 9.2 Club staff who experience unacceptable behaviour over the telephone have the right to either place callers on hold or end telephone calls. Staff are accountable for their actions and are required to log all instances of when calls have been terminated, noting the reason(s) for ending the call.
- 9.3 We have to take action when unreasonable actions or behaviour impair the functioning of the Club. We aim to do this in a way that, wherever possible, allows a complaint to progress through our process. We will try to ensure that any action we take is the minimum required to address the unacceptable actions or behaviour, taking into account any relevant personal circumstances of the customer or complainant.
- 9.4 It may be necessary to apply restrictions to the customer or complainants contact with the Club or its staff. A decision in this regard may be taken by the Chief Executive Officer or Senior Executive Officer (SEO) Team.
- 9.5 The Club will take any action(s) that it considers to be appropriate in relation to any unacceptable actions or behaviour. Normally we will write to tell the complainant why we believe their behaviour is unacceptable, what action we are taking and the duration of that action. Some of the options that we are likely to consider are:
- Limit a customer or complainant to making telephone calls on a specified day and time per week;
 - Require that contact is with a specified member of staff only;
 - Decline to accept any further telephone calls from a customer or complainant while still maintaining at least one form of contact;
 - To require a customer or complainant to communicate with the Club through a representative. Alternatively we might require a customer or complainant to appoint a different representative;
 - Read and file future correspondence but acknowledge or respond to it only if the customer or complainant is raising new information or making a new complaint.
 - To terminate or suspend consideration of a complaint in accordance with the Club complaints procedure. The customer or complainant may appeal a decision to suspend or terminate consideration of a complaint. In exceptional cases, we also reserve the right not to consider a future complaint from a customer or complainant when we consider the customer or complainant to be a vexatious complainant. We will take



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into account the impact on the customer or complainant and also whether there is a broader public interest in considering the complaint further; or

- Where appropriate, to report the matter to the Police, appropriate governing body or take legal action. In such cases, we may not give the customer or complainant prior warning of that action.

9.6 We will record all incidents of unacceptable actions or behaviour by a customer or complainant and any action taken by the Club to address these.

10. Vexatious Complainants

10.1 The Club may reject a complaint at any time if, in the reviewer's opinion, the complaint is considered "vexatious". A frivolous or vexatious complaint can be characterised in a number of ways:

- Complaints which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious (repetitious would include, for example, that after appropriated procedures have been followed and a full and final judgement has been provided the complainant continues to pursue the complaint);
- Insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner;
- Insistence upon pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason;
- Complaints which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance; or
- Demands for redress which lack any serious purpose or value.

10.2 Deciding whether a request is vexatious is a difficult task. The Club will take into account all the circumstances of the case and, if a final judgement has already been confirmed as part of the complaint's procedure. Our main consideration will be the issues raised in the complaint however consideration will to the behaviour of the customer or complainant bringing the complaint if it is felt that their behaviour has become unacceptable.

10.3 If we decide that a customer or complainant's complaint is vexatious, we will write to the customer or complainant explaining that we are terminating our consideration of the complaint or further correspondence on the issue under this policy. We will give reasons for our decision and we will send a copy of our letter to any related party which is the subject of the complaint.

10.4 Any customer or complainant who is unhappy with the Club terminating consideration of a complaint due to unacceptable behaviour/vexatious reason has the right to submit a complaint to The Independent Football Ombudsman as detailed in point 4.5 of this policy.

11. Related Policies/Documents:

- Customer Charter (including Ground Regulations)
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Policy