

Out East Fencing Club

Welfare Policy & Procedure

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Approved by: Board of Directors

Effective from: 11/08/2026

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1. Purpose

1.1. Out East Fencing Club (the **Club**) is committed to promoting the welfare, wellbeing and dignity of everyone who participates in or contributes to its activities.

1.2. The Club recognises that welfare concerns can arise for a variety of reasons and may affect children, young people and adults. Not every welfare concern will amount to a safeguarding concern, but concerns should be taken seriously and dealt with appropriately.

1.3. This policy establishes the Club's arrangements for:

- promoting positive welfare;
- identifying and responding to welfare concerns;
- providing an appropriate point of contact for members;
- supporting members who raise concerns;
- escalating concerns where necessary; and
- identifying when a welfare concern should instead be handled under the Club's safeguarding or other procedures.

1.4. This policy should be read alongside the Club's **Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy**, which takes precedence where there is a concern that a child or vulnerable person may be at risk of harm.

2. Scope

2.1. This policy applies to everyone participating in or acting on behalf of the Club, including:

- members;
- children and young people;
- parents and guardians;
- Directors;
- coaches;
- employees;
- volunteers;
- contractors; and
- visitors where appropriate.

2.2. The policy applies to welfare concerns arising in connection with Club activities, relationships or communications, whether they occur:

- during training or lessons;
- at competitions or events;
- at Club social activities;
- online;
- during Club-organised travel or activities away from the usual venue; or
- as a result of conduct connected with the Club.

3. Welfare Principles

3.1. The Club will seek to create an environment in which people:

- feel welcome and respected;
- can participate without intimidation, harassment or inappropriate behaviour;
- can raise concerns without fear of retaliation;
- are treated fairly and with dignity;
- can ask for reasonable support or adjustments;
- are able to participate at a level appropriate to their circumstances; and
- know who they can approach if something is affecting their welfare.

3.2. The Club recognises that welfare is a shared responsibility. Coaches, Directors, volunteers, members and parents all have a role in maintaining a positive environment.

3.3. The Club will seek to respond proportionately. Not every difficulty requires formal intervention, but concerns should not be ignored simply because they do not meet a safeguarding threshold.

4. Welfare Officer

4.1. Appointment

4.1.1. The Board shall designate an appropriate person to act as the Club's **Welfare Officer**.

4.1.2. The Welfare Officer should have sufficient authority, independence and access to the Board to perform the role effectively.

4.1.3. The Welfare Officer may assume additional responsibilities as part of their involvement with the Club (for example: coach, Safeguarding Officer, etc.), so long as these roles do not reasonably conflict with their position as Welfare Officer.

4.1.4. The Welfare Officer should have appropriate training or experience for the responsibilities assigned to them.

4.2. Responsibilities

The Welfare Officer may:

- act as a confidential point of contact for welfare concerns;
- listen to members and help them identify appropriate next steps;
- provide information about relevant Club procedures;
- identify whether a concern should be escalated;
- coordinate with the Safeguarding Officer where appropriate;
- support reasonable welfare measures;
- maintain appropriate records;
- identify recurring welfare issues and report them to the Board in an appropriately anonymised form; and
- promote good welfare practice across the Club.

4.2.2. The Welfare Officer is not expected to provide professional counselling, medical treatment, legal advice or other specialist services unless separately qualified and authorised to do so.

4.2.3. Where a member's needs fall outside the Club's competence, the Welfare Officer should encourage or facilitate access to an appropriate external source of support where appropriate.

5. Relationship with Safeguarding

5.1. Welfare and safeguarding overlap but are not identical.

5.2. A welfare concern may relate to:

- stress or anxiety affecting participation;
- difficulties within the Club;
- conflict between members;
- bullying or inappropriate behaviour;
- concerns about inclusion or accessibility;
- difficulties affecting a young person's participation;
- bereavement or other personal circumstances;
- concerns about the suitability of a Club environment; or
- another issue affecting a person's wellbeing.

5.3. A concern should be treated as a **safeguarding concern** where there is reason to believe that a child or another person may be at risk of abuse, neglect, exploitation or other serious harm.

5.4. Where there is uncertainty, the concern should be discussed with the Welfare / Safeguarding Officer or an appropriate external safeguarding body rather than being dismissed.

5.5. The Club's Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy sets out the procedure for responding to safeguarding concerns.

5.6. Where a welfare concern becomes a safeguarding concern, the safeguarding procedure shall take priority.

6. Raising a Welfare Concern

6.1. A welfare concern may be raised by:

- the person affected;
- a parent or guardian;
- a coach;
- another member;
- a Director;
- a volunteer;
- a visitor; or
- another person who has a legitimate concern about someone's welfare.

6.2. Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing.

6.3. A person raising a concern should provide as much relevant information as they reasonably can, including:

- what happened or what they are concerned about;
- when and where it happened;
- who was involved;
- whether the concern is ongoing; and
- what support or action they are seeking, if known.

6.4. A person does not need to establish that their concern is justified before raising it.

7. Responding to a Welfare Concern

7.1. The person receiving a welfare concern should:

- listen respectfully;
- take the concern seriously;
- avoid making unnecessary assumptions or judgements;
- establish whether there is any immediate risk;
- explain what may need to be shared with others;
- identify the appropriate procedure;
- make an appropriate record; and
- refer the matter to the Welfare Officer where necessary.

7.2. The Club should seek to agree appropriate next steps with the person raising the concern where this is reasonably practicable.

7.3. The Club should not promise an outcome that it cannot guarantee.

7.4. Where the concern involves another member or participant, the Club should consider whether immediate steps are required to protect the welfare of those involved while the matter is considered.

8. Immediate Risk

8.1. Where there is an immediate risk of serious harm, the Club's priority shall be the safety of the person concerned.

8.2. Appropriate emergency assistance should be obtained where necessary.

8.3. A welfare procedure must not delay emergency medical or safeguarding action.

8.4. Once the immediate situation is safe, the matter should be escalated and recorded appropriately.

9. Welfare Concerns Involving Children

9.1. Where a concern involves a child or young person, the Club shall consider whether the concern falls within the Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy.

9.2. Adults should not attempt to determine independently whether a child is experiencing abuse or neglect.

9.3. Any concern that may indicate a child is at risk of harm should be referred through the Club's safeguarding arrangements.

9.4. Parents or guardians should normally be involved in welfare matters concerning their child where appropriate, but information should not be shared where doing so could increase risk or prejudice safeguarding action.

10. Welfare Concerns Involving Adults

10.1. Adult members may also raise welfare concerns or require support.

10.2. The Club may provide reasonable support within the limits of its role, which may include:

- listening and providing an appropriate point of contact;
- adjusting participation arrangements where reasonably practicable;
- helping resolve a Club-related issue;
- signposting to appropriate external support; or
- taking action under another Club policy or procedure.

10.3. The Club does not assume responsibility for providing professional medical, psychological, counselling or social-care services.

10.4. Where an adult appears to be at risk of serious harm, the Club should seek appropriate professional or emergency assistance and consider whether safeguarding procedures apply.

11. Bullying, Harassment and Inappropriate Behaviour

11.1. The Club does not tolerate bullying, harassment, intimidation or other inappropriate behaviour.

11.2. Concerns may be addressed through:

- informal resolution where appropriate;
- welfare support;
- the Code of Conduct;
- the Complaints Procedure; or
- the Disciplinary Procedure.

11.3. The appropriate response will depend on the seriousness, persistence and circumstances of the behaviour.

11.4. Where behaviour may constitute abuse, exploitation or another safeguarding concern, the Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy shall apply.

12. Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing

12.1. The Club recognises that participants may experience periods of stress, anxiety, low mood, bereavement or other difficulties affecting their wellbeing.

12.2. Club personnel should respond with sensitivity and should avoid attempting to diagnose or treat mental health conditions.

12.3. Where appropriate, the Club may:

- listen and provide a supportive point of contact;
- consider reasonable adjustments to participation;
- provide information about appropriate external support;
- encourage the individual to seek professional assistance; and
- consider whether any immediate safeguarding or health and safety concerns exist.

12.4. Where a person appears to be at immediate risk of serious harm, appropriate emergency or safeguarding assistance should be sought.

13. Accessibility and Reasonable Adjustments

13.1. The Club aims to make fencing accessible to people with different needs and circumstances.

13.2. A member may raise a welfare concern where a physical, sensory, cognitive, communication or other need is affecting their ability to participate safely or comfortably.

13.3. The Club should consider reasonable adjustments where practicable and appropriate.

13.4. Welfare concerns relating to discrimination, accessibility or inclusion may also be addressed under the Club's Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy.

14. Confidentiality

14.1. Welfare concerns shall be handled sensitively and confidentially wherever reasonably possible.

14.2. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed where information needs to be shared:

- to protect someone from serious harm;
- to comply with a legal obligation;
- to enable an appropriate investigation;
- with a relevant safeguarding or statutory authority; or
- for another legitimate and necessary Club purpose.

14.3. Information should be shared only with people who have a legitimate reason to receive it.

14.4. The person raising a concern should be told, where appropriate, what information can and cannot be kept confidential.

15. Records

15.1. The Welfare Officer should maintain appropriate records of significant welfare concerns.

15.2. Records should normally include:

- the date the concern was raised;
- the person raising the concern, where known;
- the person affected;
- a factual description of the concern;
- relevant actions taken;
- any referrals or escalation;
- agreed follow-up actions; and
- the date the matter was closed or reviewed.

15.3. Records should be factual, proportionate and objective.

15.4. Records should distinguish between information provided by others, direct observations and the Club's own assessment.

15.5. Welfare records shall be stored securely and handled in accordance with the Club's Data Protection Policy and Privacy Notice.

16. Follow-Up and Support

16.1. Where appropriate, the Welfare Officer should agree a follow-up with the person who raised the concern or the person affected.

16.2. Follow-up may include:

- checking whether the situation has improved;
- confirming that agreed measures have been implemented;
- considering whether further support is required; or

- determining whether the matter should be escalated or addressed under another procedure.

16.3. The Club should avoid unnecessary prolonged involvement in matters that have been appropriately resolved.

16.4. Where an issue is ongoing, the Welfare Officer may agree a review date.

17. Complaints and Disciplinary Matters

17.1. A welfare concern may also constitute a complaint about the Club or an allegation of misconduct.

17.2. Where appropriate, the matter should be handled under the Club's Complaints Policy & Procedure or Disciplinary Procedure.

17.3. Welfare support should not be withheld merely because a formal complaint or disciplinary process is taking place.

17.4. The Club should consider whether interim measures are appropriate to protect the welfare of people involved in a complaint or disciplinary matter.

17.5. Where a Director has a personal interest in the matter, the Club's Conflicts of Interest Policy & Procedure shall apply.

18. Retaliation and Victimisation

18.1. No person should be penalised, intimidated or subjected to inappropriate treatment for raising a genuine welfare or safeguarding concern.

18.2. The Club shall take concerns about retaliation or victimisation seriously.

18.3. Deliberately making a malicious or knowingly false allegation may itself constitute inappropriate conduct and may be addressed under the Club's Code of Conduct or Disciplinary Procedure.

18.4. A concern should not be treated as malicious merely because it cannot ultimately be substantiated.

19. External Support

19.1. The Club recognises that it cannot provide all forms of welfare support.

19.2. Where appropriate, the Welfare Officer may signpost members or families towards:

- relevant health or social-care services;
- specialist support organisations;
- local authority services;
- British Fencing welfare or safeguarding resources; or
- emergency services where appropriate.

19.3. The Club should avoid presenting itself as a substitute for qualified professional support.

19.4. Where external referral is necessary to protect someone from serious harm, the Club should not delay appropriate action because the person has not consented, where disclosure is legally or ethically justified.

20. Welfare and Youth Activities

20.1. The Club shall consider welfare when designing and delivering youth activities.

20.2. This includes consideration of:

- appropriate session structure;
- age-appropriate coaching;
- supervision;
- breaks and access to facilities;
- communication with parents and guardians;
- collection and departure arrangements;
- inclusion and accessibility;
- behaviour management; and
- opportunities for children to raise concerns.

20.3. Children and young people should be encouraged to speak to a trusted adult if something is making them uncomfortable or affecting their participation.

21. Role Boundaries

21.1. The Welfare Officer and other Club personnel should recognise the limits of their role.

21.2. They should not:

- provide professional counselling without appropriate qualifications;
- conduct specialist safeguarding investigations;
- provide medical diagnoses or treatment;
- promise absolute confidentiality;
- make decisions that properly belong to statutory authorities; or
- attempt to resolve serious allegations informally where formal action is required.

21.3. Where a matter exceeds the Club's competence, appropriate external advice or support should be sought.

22. Board Oversight

22.1. The Board shall maintain appropriate oversight of welfare arrangements while respecting the confidentiality of individual cases.

22.2. The Welfare Officer may provide the Board with anonymised or aggregated information about:

- recurring welfare issues;
- significant trends;
- policy or training needs;
- operational concerns; and
- actions required to improve the Club's welfare arrangements.

22.3. Individual cases should only be disclosed to the Board where there is a legitimate reason for Directors to receive the information.

22.4. Where a welfare matter involves a Director, the Club's Conflicts of Interest Policy shall apply.

23. Training and Awareness

23.1. The Club shall ensure that relevant personnel understand:

- the purpose of this policy;
- how to raise a welfare concern;
- the distinction between welfare and safeguarding;
- their responsibilities around confidentiality; and
- when to escalate a concern.

23.2. The Board shall review training needs periodically.

23.3. Welfare Officers should undertake appropriate training for their role.

24. Relationship with Other Policies

24.1. This policy should be read alongside the Club's:

- Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy;
- Code of Conduct;
- Complaints Policy & Procedure;
- Disciplinary Procedure;
- Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy;
- Health & Safety Policy;
- Data Protection Policy; and
- Photography & Social Media Policy.

24.2. Where more than one procedure applies, the Club should coordinate the relevant processes rather than requiring the person raising the concern to navigate them independently.

25. Review

25.1. This policy shall be reviewed at least annually and sooner where appropriate.

25.2. The Board shall review the policy following any significant welfare incident, material change to the Club's activities, or relevant change in law, guidance or governing-body requirements.

25.3. Lessons arising from welfare concerns should be used to improve the Club's practices where appropriate.

26. Approval

This policy was approved by the Board of Directors of Out East Fencing Club on:

Date: 11/08/2026

Chair / Director: Pel Houlihan

Next review date: 11/08/2027