



Durham Women FC – Safer Environments Policy

Policy Version: 1.0 (July 2026) / Approved by: Board of Directors / Review Date: Annually

1. Purpose and Commitment

Durham Women Football Club (including Durham Women FC, Durham Women PGA, Durham Cestria and Durham ECT) is committed to creating and maintaining positive, safe, inclusive and professional environments for all athletes, staff, volunteers, visitors and fans.

This Safer Environments Policy sets out the standards, expectations and safeguards required to ensure that everyone involved in our club can participate free from harm, abuse, harassment, discrimination or unsafe practice. It aligns with:

- WSL Football *Safer Environments Guidance*
- Durham Women FC *Safeguarding Policy 2025–2026*
- The FA *Safeguarding Children Policy & Procedures*
- Care Act 2014 principles for safeguarding adults at risk

This policy must be read alongside the club's safeguarding policies, codes of conduct, safer recruitment procedures, whistleblowing policy, and "How to Raise a Concern" guidance.

"Everyone in our game has the right to a safe environment free from harm, abuse, harassment and discrimination where healthy relationships and appropriate boundaries are maintained."

2. Scope

This policy applies to:

- All club staff (paid or unpaid)
- Volunteers
- Contractors and commissioned service providers
- Athletes across all age groups
- Match officials
- Visitors, spectators and participants in club activities

It covers all club environments including:

- Training facilities
- Stadium and matchday operations
- Travel and accommodation
- Community and outreach programmes
- Digital and online spaces



3. Safer Environment Principles

Durham Women FC adopts the following core principles:

- **Empowerment:** Everyone should feel able to use their voice and raise concerns without fear of reprisal.
- **Safety:** Environments must be free from harm, abuse, harassment, bullying and discrimination.
- **Professional Boundaries:** Healthy, respectful and appropriate relationships must be maintained at all times.
- **Transparency:** All concerns will be managed through fair, person-centred and trauma-informed processes.
- **Protection:** No one will face retaliation for reporting harmful behaviours or unsafe conditions.
- **Inclusivity:** We recognise that women, girls and marginalised groups may face additional vulnerabilities and must be supported sensitively.
- **Accountability:** Everyone has a role in maintaining a safer culture.

4. Maintaining Professional Boundaries

4.1 Positions of Trust

Staff working with 16–17-year-olds are legally in a *position of trust*. Any sexual activity, communication or inappropriate relationship with this age group is a criminal offence.

“Legislation criminalises anyone in a position of trust who engages in sexual activity/communication or have an inappropriate relationship with this age group.”

4.2 Staff Responsibilities

Staff must:

- Reinforce professional boundaries if an athlete initiates inappropriate contact
- Report any behaviour that could be misinterpreted
- Report any concerning behaviour observed in others

5. Policies, Procedures and Governance

Durham Women FC maintains policies covering:

- Safeguarding children and adults at risk
- Codes of conduct
- Safer recruitment
- Health and safety



- Complaints and whistleblowing
- Risk management
- Health and Safety
- Lone working
- Online safety

The club's Safeguarding Team includes:

- **Board Safeguarding Champion:** Dawn Hepple
- **Safeguarding & Player Welfare Lead (DSO):** Marc McPhillips
- **PGA/Foundation Phase Safeguarding Officer:** Katy Hawkins

"The DSO is the first point of contact for all concerns about the welfare of any child or young person."

6. Creating a Safer Culture

All athletes, staff and volunteers must:

- Display professionalism on and off the field
- Respect privacy and personal boundaries
- Follow safeguarding, EDI, health & safety and conduct policies
- Use social media responsibly
- Promote inclusivity and positive behaviours
- Report harmful or abusive behaviour immediately

7. Safer Recruitment

Durham Women FC follows FA safer recruitment standards:

- Role profiles and safeguarding commitments
- Clear application and interview processes
- Values-based interviewing
- DBS Enhanced Checks where required
- Qualification and reference verification
- Induction, probation and ongoing CPD
- Exit interviews

8. U18s in First Team Environments

Athletes aged 16–17 are legally children. The club must:

- Maintain high standards of behaviour and role modelling
- Provide separate changing/showering facilities or complete detailed Player Welfare Plans
- Obtain parental consent for travel, media, medical and events
- Ensure appropriate staffing ratios
- Conduct regular welfare check-ins



- Include the Safeguarding Lead in all planning affecting U18s

9. Changing & Showering

- Athletes must have safe, clean, private facilities
- Staff must not enter changing rooms unless necessary
- No photography or recording is permitted
- U18s and adults at risk must have separate or staggered access unless a Player Welfare Plan is completed with full consent given from Player, Parents, DSO and other key club officials.

10. Travel & Accommodation

- Full risk assessments required
- Clear behaviour expectations and emergency contacts
- Athletes must never share rooms with staff
- U18s must not share with adults
- Staff must not enter athlete rooms except in emergencies
- Minimum two responsible adults must accompany U18s/adults at risk
- Staff must not consume alcohol or drugs while responsible for these groups

11. Female Athlete Health

The club supports open discussion of female athlete health including:

- Menstrual cycles
- Breast health
- Pelvic floor health
- Pregnancy and breastfeeding

Only qualified staff may conduct assessments, with documentation and chaperones.

Parents/carers must be informed of U18 health matters.

12. Physical Contact

Physical contact must be:

- Necessary
- Professional
- Explained
- In line with role requirements
- Documented where appropriate

Emergency restraint must be reported immediately.



13. Medical Treatment

- Athletes must give informed, voluntary consent
- Consent can be withdrawn at any time
- Gloves must be worn for medical procedures
- U18s require parent/carer consent for all treatment

14. Privacy, Data & Media

- Athletes must consent to use of images, data or media
- No pressure should be applied to participate in marketing
- U18s require parental consent
- Support plans must be in place for athletes receiving increased public attention

15. Communication

- Professional boundaries apply across all communication methods
- Personal contact details must not be shared outside role requirements
- Parents/carers must be included in all communication with U18s
- Adults at risk should be consulted on communication preferences

16. Lone Working

Staff must:

- Work openly and transparently
- Never visit athletes at home unless formally approved
- Never invite athletes to their home
- Never be in lone working situations with U18s or adults at risk

Any incident must be reported immediately.

17. Gifts, Rewards & Selection

- Rewards must be fair, transparent and recorded
- Staff must not give significant personal gifts
- Gifts to U18s/adults at risk must be formalised and communicated to parents/carers
- Staff must not accept gifts that could be perceived as bribes



18. Match & Event Day Safety

Clubs must ensure:

- Detailed operational plans
- Safeguarding embedded across all functions
- Clear reporting routes for spectators
- Trained staff for U18s and adults at risk
- Consideration of medical needs, lost children, challenging behaviour, intoxication, weather and noise

19. Online Safety

Durham Women FC recognises risks including:

- Harmful content
- Grooming
- Cyberbullying
- Unsafe sharing
- Online scams

Staff receive regular training; players receive digital literacy education; parents are supported through guidance.

All concerns must be reported to the DSO.

20. Raising Concerns

Durham Women FC has zero tolerance for:

- Abuse
- Harassment
- Discrimination
- Bullying
- Unsafe behaviours
- Retaliation

Concerns must be reported immediately to the Safeguarding Team via toot toot or by contacting a member of the team directly (shown below).



21. Reporting Contacts

Designated Safeguarding Contacts

- Dawn Hepple – Board Safeguarding Champion dawn.hepple@durhamwfc.co.uk
- Marc McPhillips – Safeguarding & Player Welfare Lead
 marc.mcphillips@durhamwfc.co.uk
- Katy Hawkins – PGA/Foundation Phase Safeguarding Officer
 katy.hawkins@durhamwfc.co.uk

External Contacts

- Durham FA Welfare Officer
- Durham MASH
- LADO
- NSPCC
- Police (999 emergency / 101 non-emergency)

22. Review and Continuous Improvement

Durham Women FC is committed to:

- Regularly reviewing safeguarding and safer environment practices
- Learning from incidents, feedback and evolving best practice
- Ensuring policies remain current, effective and athlete-centred