

Independent review of the Safeguarding Arrangements in Chelsea Football Club (CFC)

Executive summary of an Independent Review of safeguarding
arrangements across Chelsea Football Club, including the Stadium,
the Academy and the Foundation.

Commenced March 2017

Executive summary produced by Julie Dugdale, Head of Business,
Barnardo's Training and Consultancy.
Consultancy work undertaken by Julie Dugdale, Head of Business, Linda
Richardson and Andy Bowly, Barnardo's Consultants.

Independent Review of Safeguarding Arrangements in Chelsea Football Club plc: Executive Summary

In March 2017, following a tender process, Barnardo's Training and Consultancy was awarded a contract to undertake a full and in-depth review of the safeguarding arrangements in place at Chelsea Football Club. The review began in March 2017 and a detailed report was delivered to the board of the Club in March 2018. Feedback was also given to the Club during the course of the review so that any recommendations for change could be considered and affected at the earliest opportunity.

Subsequent to this review the Club asked Barnardo's to revisit a safeguarding case and seek the views of a family who were not engaged with the Club at the time of the 2017 review. Barnardo's contacted the family to gain an understanding from their perspective about how they felt the Club had handled safeguarding concerns and how they felt about support they had received from the Club. Barnardo's were asked to supplement their original review recommendations with any additional recommendations which followed from this exercise - to ensure that the Club could learn from this family's experience. A supplementary report with additional recommendations was delivered to the Club in July 2019. This executive summary reflects the findings and key areas for improvement identified in both reports presented to the Club. It has been prepared at the Club's request with a view to publication.

Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults is everyone's responsibility and all organisations that come into contact with the public have an important role to play in addressing these responsibilities. Chelsea Football Club recognises that ensuring good safeguarding arrangements are in place is a priority matter and has demonstrated this by commissioning this independent review of safeguarding arrangements as part of its drive to get this right. Barnardo's have hence undertaken a robust, independent and comprehensive review of Chelsea Football Club's safeguarding arrangements. This is the first time the Club has commissioned an independent review of this nature.

A team of reviewers from Barnardo's were appointed to undertake this work including Julie Dugdale, Head of Business for Barnardo's Training and Consultancy and Barnardo's Consultants Linda Richardson and Andy Bowly. The Barnardo's team have significant experience of auditing large organisations from a diverse range of sectors in this country as well as undertaking work overseas and the team of reviewers are highly experienced in the field of child protection and safeguarding.

The reviewers were mindful about the need to give careful consideration to what might constitute good arrangements, in line with expectations from the Premier League, the FA and the relevant Local Safeguarding Children Boards. In undertaking the review Barnardo's recognised that safeguarding is not the core business of the Club, but is integral to its achievement, its risk management and creation of a healthy learning environment and is critical to its overall success. Most importantly poor management of safeguarding is likely to have devastating results for children and young people.

The review has been concerned with 3 key business areas:-

1. The Club and its stadium
2. The Foundation (a charity which provides services to children and adults and which works in a number of deprived areas in London and surrounding areas)
3. The Academy (which identifies and trains the next generation of professional football players)

The following key aspects were taken into account whilst undertaking the review: -

- The extent to which Chelsea ensures it appoints the right people and gives them the right support.
- The effectiveness of the overall safeguarding systems and the various safeguarding arrangements in place. The identification of and response to child/adult protection concerns.
- The extent to which a safe environment has been created and the culture.

A series of individual interviews and focus groups were held with staff, who are involved in undertaking a wide range of duties within the Stadium, the Academy and the Foundation. The reviewers ensured that a range of personnel in different roles were consulted including those who work directly with the general public, those in management positions, and those with specialist roles supporting young players. Staff were extremely co-operative with the process and presented as keen to understand and learn about how improvements might be made to their safeguarding arrangements.

A number of children and young players were also consulted about the extent to which they enjoyed their engagement and felt safe and well cared for by staff in Chelsea. In addition parents were also consulted whilst accompanying their children during activities. Relevant policies and procedures and other key documentation relating to safeguarding was made available and reviewed. Full access was given to all activities operating during the period of the review. A focus group was also held with a group of scouts and their relevant managers so that they could be consulted as part of the process.

As part of the process, the team sampled case records and individual files. No individual member of staff nor individual child or family member has been named within the report as is our usual practice. The review of case files sampled included consideration of the Club's handling of cases where there had been allegations against staff and consideration was given to any lessons which could be learned when formulating findings and recommendations. All the information gathered was analysed including information from consultations with staff individually and in focus groups, conversations held with children and parents, the focus group held with scouts, as well as relevant policy and procedural documentation, and findings from observations of activities. Strengths, key findings and areas for improvements were then identified and a series of recommendations made to affect improvements designed to achieve the board's ambition of having the highest possible standards of safeguarding.

Addressing safeguarding issues is a vitally important, yet arduous task and in addressing the need to be mindful of risks and safeguards, the actions of those responsible for managing safeguarding concerns can sometimes appear overzealous and disproportionate. However, everyone who comes into contact with children and vulnerable adults has a role to play in keeping them safe and ensuring that their own actions and those of others are respectful, well-meaning and not open to misinterpretation. The fact that safeguarding is a priority appeared to be appreciated by all staff and this is to the credit of those who have driven the safeguarding agenda forward within Chelsea Football Club.

This review was commissioned to both identify current strengths and make proposals about how these might be built upon and to identify any shortfalls in practice.

Key findings were that Chelsea Football Club clearly treats safeguarding as a priority matter and is determined to ensure that all its activities and functions are discharged in a

manner whereby those responsible ensure the Club does its utmost to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and vulnerable adults. Chelsea Football Club recognises this is crucial to its overall success; however more importantly there is a real sense that Chelsea's leaders and staff from senior management to front line practitioners are personally and professionally committed to preventing and protecting children from significant harm. The Barnardo's team have seen substantial evidence that Chelsea Football Club takes its safeguarding responsibilities seriously. The large majority of findings are concerned with building on existing strengths and affecting improvements so that Chelsea Football Club can ensure its safeguarding arrangements become even better. The report provides full details of all recommendations made and it should be noted at the outset that although there are a lot of recommendations, save for a few fundamental issues, these detailed recommendations have been made to help the Club develop a clear action plan and affect various specific improvements to policies, systems and processes building on existing strengths. Set out below are the fundamental recommendations made in the report.

The review team found examples of some excellent practice, and overall observed a workforce who understood their responsibilities and were ready to act appropriately should the need arise. The staff consulted appeared without exception to be highly committed to delivering the safest and highest quality experience possible to the vulnerable groups with whom they interacted. The team of reviewers were impressed by the commitment demonstrated by all those spoken to, to ensure the highest quality of provision at all times.

Staff also demonstrated a commitment to their own continuous professional development in relation to safeguarding and a healthy attitude to ongoing learning and receiving further training, advice and guidance. There was strong evidence by senior management of a determination to ensure the right people were appointed, that they then demonstrated the right behaviours and took the right actions. All recommendations were reported back during the process and an action plan was then developed by the Club to address the recommendations made. It was pleasing to see that the Club accepted all recommendations made and acted upon these immediately, taking seriously the need to implement the changes proposed.

The culture across the Club, the Academy, the Foundation and the Stadium was one in which staff strive to be the very best in all aspects of their work. Staff undertook their duties with great pride and there was a definite "Chelsea" feel to all aspects, at the heart of which was a commitment and drive to achieve the very best results. An apparent attitude and commitment to provide the highest quality customer service in all activities at all times was apparent in the approach, attitude and behaviours of Chelsea's staff. Safeguarding was regarded as part of this and was given the priority attention it deserves. The culture was driven by a desire to continuously learn and improve and to seek to protect children and vulnerable adults.

The recommendations made are very much concerned with going from strength to strength and have been made to improve practice and procedures in accordance with the findings; they are for the most part about becoming "even better." However, there were some failings which were identified and more critical areas for improvement which related to:-

- a) The management of allegations against staff, and the need to ensure a consistent approach to making a professional judgement about referrals to the local authority for assessment and possible investigation. It was identified that the Club needed to ensure appropriate advice was always given on safeguarding matters across the

Club, the Stadium, the Academy and the Foundation and that there was an appropriate response by the relevant Human Resources and Safeguarding Managers in all business areas. A key recommendation here was the cessation of the use of fact finding meetings in such cases and the development and implementation of a policy on managing allegations. The team recommended the appointment of a Deputy/Assistant Manager for Safeguarding who should report directly to the Head of Safeguarding, and share responsibility for providing safeguarding advice to all business areas. This recommendation should result in better reporting arrangements and greater consistency in advice given to the relevant business areas. The intention through this proposed arrangement is to achieve more of “a golden thread” with a high standard of advice always being available to staff in all business areas and a consistency to the advice given.

- b) The benefits which could be gained by having a more centralised and streamlined approach to the management of safeguarding via joined up governance arrangements, procedures, processes and systems. A key recommendation here is that Chelsea would benefit from having one centralised "Safeguarding Hub" with one Head of Safeguarding and a Deputy/Assistant Head of Safeguarding with administrative support as well as the introduction of "Safeguarding Champions" across the Club who are responsible for championing safeguarding in their areas and who form part of a wider safeguarding team. Some examples of good practice and procedure were found in parts of the Academy, Stadium and the Foundation but not consistently applied. The review identified the need for Chelsea to take the best of its work from within the Stadium, the Academy and the Foundation and form one set of overarching documents with one safeguarding team which would strengthen current arrangements, collaboration and improve the sharing of learning. There was a sense that documentation guiding safeguarding has evolved in recent years with a raft of new documents being created in response to new situations or challenges. It is timely to review and create one set of policies and procedures with a robust quality assurance mechanism and sign-off process. This will also allow a more consistent approach and greater ownership and accessibility.
- c) The importance of ensuring an ongoing supportive dialogue with young people and their families where disclosures have been referred to statutory agencies and of pursuing a multi-agency approach to assessing risk and support in such cases.

Although there are many other recommendations these relate to specific and minor adaptations to existing documents, safeguarding arrangements, policy, procedures and practise. These include ensuring that other key policies are compatible with safeguarding procedures (for example HR and Health and Safety procedures) and recommendations regarding specific issues such as the communication with parents and players, safer recruitment, scouting activity, trips and tours and training for staff.

It was also recommended during the course of the review that Chelsea strengthened its governance of safeguarding within the Club to ensure “a golden thread” of reporting about and consideration of safeguarding matters to those responsible for the Club at the most senior level. In line with Premier League rules, the Club had appointed a Safeguarding Lead on their board of directors. However in order to further strengthen governance and ensure that safeguarding matters are given the attention they need at Board level, the Club took advice given and have created a sub –group of the Board known as the Safeguarding Committee. This comprises the Board Safeguarding Lead, a senior member of staff of the Club, an independent trustee from the Foundation and an external, independent safeguarding expert; the Head of Safeguarding attends and

reports to the sub-group and in turn relevant information is reported to the Board by its Safeguarding Lead.

To conclude, great efforts have already been made to take on board learning from previous serious incidents and previous audits and reviews. The recommendations made in this review will enable Chelsea to become even better in its approach to safeguarding. As a champion in the field, the recommendations made are designed to ensure Chelsea's safeguarding arrangements are in keeping with the development and achievements of the Club as a whole.

It should be acknowledged that throughout the period of this review Chelsea Football Club demonstrated a commitment to get things right and were keen to receive feedback throughout. Any recommendations made during the course of the review were promptly acted upon. Indeed the findings and recommendations were taken seriously at the most senior level within the Club and similarly feedback was also welcomed and recommendations acted upon by relevant senior and operational managers. The most significant recommendations were reported back during the course of the review and actions taken immediately to initiate change. The changes made meant the issues of concern had been fully addressed on completion of this review. Arrangements have undoubtedly been strengthened by the creation of a safeguarding hub, the enhancement in safeguarding leadership including the appointment of a new Head of Safeguarding to be supported by an assistant post thus ensuring cover at all times, the creation of a pool of safeguarding leads across the whole Club and changes to the leadership and approach taken by Human Resources in relation to their engagement in safeguarding matters. These changes have resulted in greater consistency in the advice being provided and the appropriateness of action being taken in relation to the management of reported concerns and allegations regarding staff. Final observations at the end of this process were that the Club has affected changes which have led to an even healthier culture and an open environment in which staff feel more confident about raising concerns and seeking advice, with a clear reporting structure and robust arrangements at all times for all staff seeking advice. The Club has invited Barnardo's to return in 2020 to undertake a lighter touch review to ensure all recommendations have been addressed and that in itself is a clear indication of ongoing commitment.

July 2019