

Barnardo's independent review into the sexual
abuse perpetrated by Higgins when he had links
with, and was in the employ of, Southampton
Football Club.

November 2021

Final report produced by
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'Many abusers live among us hiding in plain sight, never publicly identified, despite abusing multiple victims over decades'¹

¹ *Journal of Trauma and Disassociation The Abused and the Abusers (2017)*

Key: *Acronyms used to identify roles of individuals who contributed to this review and/or who are referred to in this report: -*

BM 1-6:	refers to board members at key times
MAN 1-2	refers to managers who were employed by the Club during key periods
STF 1-10	refers to individuals who were or are still employed by the Club
CV 1- 26	refers to conversations with men who were boys known to Higgins,
SFC	Southampton Football Club (the 'Club')
FA	Football Association
FL	Football League

N.B. Members of the current senior leadership team at the Club willingly contributed to the review and provided full access to relevant files and documentation in their possession. Our thanks are also extended to Hampshire Constabulary who helpfully cooperated with the review and assisted throughout the process.

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Important information

All those who have contributed to this review have done so voluntarily and the names and details of these individuals have not been identified. Whilst some quotes from documents or conversations held with individuals have been included, the sources of the quotes are not provided in order to provide anonymity for the individuals concerned.

Some may find the content and references in this report distressing, but we have taken care to accurately, and hopefully sensitively, portray what happened to some boys during a period when Higgins was an employee at Southampton Football Club.

This report has been presented by the review team to the Board of Directors of Southampton Football Club. Any decision to arrange the onward transmission or publication of the report is a matter for the board.

Structure of the Report

This report has been anonymised. References to personal details or identifying features relating to individuals who have contributed to this review have been omitted although we recognise that the identity of some individuals who held key positions in Southampton Football Club (SFC), the Football Association (the FA) or in any of the other Clubs or sporting organisations mentioned in this report may still be deduced. Where the report offers critical comment on actions or decisions taken or not taken, some individuals, where it has been possible to do so, have been given the opportunity to comment on aspects of the report which relate to them. In some instances, former board members or staff have sadly passed away. Where it has not been possible for an individual to contribute or comment due to their health and wellbeing, family members have been invited to review extracts from the report on behalf of the individual concerned. Any views or comments we have received have been carefully considered and acknowledged in producing this final report.

Within this report there are nine sections:

Section 1 provides a brief summary of the circumstances which led to this independent review and Barnardo's role in conducting the review and producing this report.

Section 2 outlines the approach taken and identifies the key lines of enquiry within the review.

Section 3 reflects the voices of men who, as children, were abused by Higgins and who chose to share what happened to them with the review team. Their own words have been used to portray the reality and impact of their experiences, but their identities have been protected. Quotes from conversations have been included to reflect their voices and are written in italics. In addition, some quotes have been used from transcripts from interviews or witness statements where permission has been given to do so.

Section 4 explores what is known about child sexual abuse, the way perpetrators operate and the impact this abuse has on the dreams, hopes and lives of children and the adults they become. This section begins to draw on the experiences of those affected as well as reflecting findings from years of research and practice. This section helps us understand the way Higgins operated and why children could not speak up about their abuse.

Section 5 highlights the relatively recent acknowledgement of child abuse in the field of football and refers to past and current legislation. The section helps us understand the historic context and the eventual development of a safeguarding framework in football. It also explains our duty of care to children.

Section 6 examines Higgins' involvement with the Club and the structure and governance arrangements of SFC during and after Higgins' involvement and employment with the Club.

Section 7 presents findings and our conclusions and explores the 'why, what and who' questions that have been raised by many individuals.

Section 8 describes the Club's safeguarding arrangements in 2021.

Section 9 provides a summary of the responses received from individuals who were given extracts from this report.

Section 10 contains a summary of the review team's conclusions and presents their concluding remarks.

Annex 1: provides a chronology and timeline produced by the reviewers to support the review process.

The last section in the main body of the report contains the response of Southampton Football Club to the review and its conclusions.

There are five appendices

- Appendix 1** Information about Barnardo's Training and Consultancy
- Appendix 2** The Review Team
- Appendix 3** Terms of Reference
- Appendix 4** Underpinning Principles
- Appendix 5** Contact details of organisations who offer support.

Section 1

Introduction

'He was like a God figure to us ...and we were continually reminded about this.'

'It's like he had his own cult... we were in his bubble and no-one else could get in.'

1. This review was commissioned by Southampton Football Club (SFC) following the conviction of Bob Higgins in 2019 for sexually abusing boys when he was working for or on behalf of the Club.
2. In June 2019, almost 30 years after he was first accused and cleared of child sexual abuse, Higgins, began a 24-year jail sentence for abusing schoolboy football players over four decades. According to court transcripts, Higgins was described by the Judge, who presided over the trial, as a *'cunning and manipulative predator'* who abused his position of trust as a respected football coach and caused *'real, enduring harm'* to his victims.
3. The jury was told Higgins kept an open house at his family home and encouraged parents to allow their sons to stay there so they could attend training sessions at weekends and during school holidays. This allowed him to groom² and abuse young boys clearly believing his status, power, and influence would prevent his victims from speaking out or from being believed, if they did do so.
4. Higgins had worked as a coach and scout for SFC in the mid-1970s and until 1989. Appointed by the Club, Higgins gained a reputation as a highly effective football coach and was known for having launched the careers of some well-known football players; in doing so, he enhanced the reputation of SFC. Higgins' reputation and position also meant, he had easy and unchecked access to schoolboys connected to the Club. He used his position to groom and then sexually abuse boys who had dreams of a football career

² *Grooming is the predatory act of an individual who purposefully builds a trusting and emotional connection with a child (or an adult) so they can manipulate, exploit, and abuse them.*

which both he and the boys themselves, knew Higgins could make or break. Higgins abused boys at football camps, during trips and tournaments at home and overseas, whilst travelling in his car and staying at or visiting his family home.

5. Frequently described as a powerful “*God-like figure*”, Higgins was clearly skilled and adept at grooming not only young boys but also their parents, many of whom were happy to entrust their sons into his care believing he had their best interests at heart.
6. Higgins was first brought to trial in early 1990 to face charges of indecent assault against six young boys but was acquitted at the direction of the presiding Judge in January 1992. Five of the boys who told police of the abuse they had suffered at the hands of Higgins were never asked to give evidence at the trial. Higgins was left at liberty to continue his abuse.
7. For more than a quarter of a century, Higgins was given access to hundreds of schoolboy players. His eventual exposure as a serial sex offender did not take place until dozens of other former players came forward in 2016, when the full extent of historical abuse in football began to emerge and was reported in the media.
8. Once Higgins’ trial in 2019 had concluded, senior managers of Southampton Football Club commissioned this independent review to explore why the abuse of so many boys by such a prolific and persistent sexual predator continued over such a long period of time, without detection. The Club also wanted to know if more could have and should have, been done to protect boys from Higgins.
9. This review is an attempt to seek answers to such questions and ensure that the voices of those boys, now adults, are heard loud and clear.

Section 2

The Review Process

The approach taken

10. A meeting was held in November 2019 to confirm our involvement in this review and agree the terms of reference and its scope. Before any information was shared a Memorandum of Understanding³ between SFC, Hampshire Constabulary and Barnardo's was signed and agreed. Under this arrangement, relevant data held by the police could be shared to support the review so that contact could be made with witnesses/individuals involved.
11. In order to support the review process, the following actions were undertaken:
 - We⁴ were confirmed as the review team.
 - As the review team, we set up a secure email box with a bespoke email address for the review and developed a secure filing system for storing confidential information to be accessed only by ourselves.
 - SFC placed a statement on its website providing details about the review and providing information about how individuals could contribute to the review process.
 - We produced a standard letter about the review which was forwarded to anyone who made enquiries with SFC, Hampshire Constabulary or with Barnardo's via the secure email address.
 - SFC provided a list of current and ex-employees.
 - Hampshire Constabulary wrote to individuals who had provided witness statements for Higgins' trial in 2018 and 2019 to advise them of the review and to pass on our contact details. The same individuals were also asked for permission for police to pass their contact details on to us. Where permission was granted, we made direct contact with the individuals concerned.

³ A memorandum of understanding is an agreement between two or more parties outlined in a formal document. It is not legally binding but signals the willingness of the parties to move forward with a contract.

⁴ Julie Dugdale and Linda Richardson. See Appendix 2.

- SFC made arrangements for key documents, records, and board minutes to be sent securely to Barnardo's for access and secure storage.
- As the review team, we made contact with individuals over a twenty-month period, initially to those whose contact details had been provided to us, and as the review progressed, to those who contacted us directly via the secure inbox or who asked for us to make contact with them.
- Details of the review, together with our request for a face-to-face conversation were then sent to agreed email addresses. We initially travelled to meet with individuals at a location of their choice prior to the Covid 19 pandemic.
- When the review process was impacted upon by the Covid pandemic and subsequent restrictions, conversations were offered online via different communication platforms.
- Consent was obtained at the start of meetings for notes to be taken of conversations, and these were shared if and when requested by the individuals. Where there was agreement, conversations were usually recorded.
- Throughout the review, we kept in touch with the individuals with whom we had made contact and provided updates as to progress on the review.

12. We approached or tried to make contact with seventy individuals, not all of whom returned calls or emails; some sent messages indicating they did not want to contribute to the review or indicating they had been advised by their solicitors not to do so; others just did not respond. The review spans almost four decades, and some individuals who may have helped our understanding about how the Club operated before, during and after Higgins was employed were unable to assist due to ill-health. Others who may have helpfully contributed to the review have sadly passed away including one individual whose efforts, alongside other men, to bring Higgins to justice, are not forgotten. The impact of what happened to this individual has been shared with us and reflected upon by family members.

13. We are immensely grateful to the individuals who did contribute voluntarily and spoke with us about their contact with Higgins and about what happened. Their insights and reflections helped us gain an understanding of how Higgins operated and how he managed to get away with what he did for so long and in plain sight.

14. As a review team, we have taken care to be as accurate as possible with dates and timelines; in doing so we have had to rely on the memories and recollections of many individuals, and, where they existed, access to old paper records, which were never written with the expectation of such intense external scrutiny, thirty and forty years later. We have accessed court transcripts, witness statements, media reports and reports of conversations where these have taken place and had been recorded, and where permission to access these has been given. We have also made reference at times to the report produced by Clive Sheldon ***'Independent Review into Child Sexual Abuse in Football 1970-2005'*** which was published in March 2021; many of the individuals who spoke with us also met with Sheldon and his team.
15. We spoke with twenty-six men who, as young boys, knew or were abused by Higgins. It is the conversations with these men whose childhoods were stolen or ruined by Higgins which sit with us and will continue to do so long after this review has concluded. The willingness of these individuals to talk openly and honestly about what happened to them as children and the impact this had and continues to have on their lives has been remarkable. The collateral damage on their families, their employment and on their physical and mental health and well-being is incalculable. It is through their testimonies that people who read this report might begin to understand the devastation and impact Higgins' abuse had on the lives of these men when they were children and the ongoing impact on their lives as adults.
16. Their testimonies are a stark reminder of the need to ensure that those who hold positions of trust fully understand their responsibilities to keep children safe and attend to their welfare needs, ensuring that they discharge their responsibilities at all times with integrity, sensitivity, and compassion. It is only by listening to the accounts of those who have been abused, that the impact of failing to fulfill a duty of care to those affected can be truly appreciated and those with responsibility can be held to account.
17. Whilst we have been unable to confirm exactly who knew what and when, we have drawn on research and experience, and have made our own professional judgments about what happened and what was likely to have been known at the time, based on the 'balance of probabilities', to reach our conclusions as outlined in this report.

18. This review has taken place over an extended period due to the amount of information that needed to be processed and to give individuals who wished to contribute to the review plenty of time to consider the personal implications of doing so; we have also been mindful of the additional impacts of the pandemic throughout. Extensive opportunities were afforded to current and past employees/volunteers/board members of the Club to meet with us before this report was finalised.
19. It is good practice where individuals are or are thought to have likely been criticised in a published report, that they are given an opportunity to respond to any comments which may be perceived as critical of their actions or decision-making. Those who we believe to be subject to criticism in this report were given the opportunity to provide feedback and their feedback has been incorporated into this report and considered in reaching our conclusions.
20. The use of language in reports such as this is important. Some individuals who have been sexually abused prefer to identify as victims, whilst others may prefer to identify as survivors; others may prefer not to be known as either. We have chosen in this report to refer to those who contributed to this review and who knew or were abused by Higgins as children as 'men'. We also respectfully acknowledge that there were many, many more men, who for whatever reason were either not able, or chose not to, contribute to this review. Whilst their voices are not directly reflected in our report, their experiences and the impact upon these individuals too is recognised and has been considered by us in undertaking this review.
21. Whilst the accounts shared with us have been taken directly from our conversations with the men who chose to contribute to this review and we have chosen to anonymise these, it should be acknowledged that some individuals were happy to waive their anonymity and be named. We took the view, however, that it was important not to use real names or use information which would allow the men to be recognised.
22. As the review progressed, we determined that the lines of enquiry were best addressed by reviewing key episodes which occurred over time so that we could consider what happened at each stage and who knew what and when. We identified eight key episodes or periods of time and have considered each of these chronologically in Section 7- Findings and conclusions. We

were acutely mindful of the dangers of hindsight bias⁵ but wanted to understand why certain actions and decisions were or were not taken at key points when Higgins worked for or on behalf of the Club. We also wanted to know how children involved with the Club today are better protected than they were when Higgins was an employee and therefore, we consulted current leadership at the Club to ensure reference could be made to safeguarding arrangements in place today.

⁵ *Hindsight bias is the tendency for people to perceive past events as having been more obvious and predictable than they actually were at the time.*

Section 3

Voices of men⁶ who, as children, knew or were abused by Higgins

'He could ruin our careers with a click of the fingers, and we would do anything at that age as we were naive and thought anything was ok.'

23. We heard from the men who spoke to us about their perception of how Higgins did what he did for so long without repercussion and how the abuse had impacted on every aspect of their life. The impact on their families and intimate relationships, their physical and mental health, education, careers, and financial stability has been, and for some continues to be immense. Whilst the experience of each individual was unique, there was a significant degree of consistency across the accounts given in terms of Higgins' *'modus operandi'* i.e., the way in which he habitually operated when he abused the boys entrusted to his care. According to police reports, over a hundred individuals came forward after 2016, to give witness to Higgins' abuse; we include in this section quotes which reflect the voices from some of the men who met with us and spoke about how Higgins operated as a predator and how the abuse they suffered impacted and continues to impact upon them as adults.
24. There were a number of themes which emerged during the conversations held and quotes from conversations are detailed below in relation to these themes as follows:
- How boys perceived Higgins
 - How Higgins groomed boys
 - How Higgins groomed parents
 - The power and control held by Higgins

⁶ The term 'men' in this report refers to the adult males who contributed to this review and who, as children, knew or were abused by Higgins.

- How Higgins held boys' dreams in his hands
- How Higgins exploited and coerced boys
- The impact Higgins had on the lives of those he abused.

How boys perceived Higgins

25. A number of the men talked to us about how Higgins would set boys up to compete for his attention.

- *'He was like a god like figure, untouchable. He was like Southampton Football Club. Boys were vying for his attention.'*
- *'I didn't really know it as abuse. Some of us got far more attention than others.'*
- *'It's embarrassing to say but I saw affection on sofa, settees, cuddling. Sometimes he had two or three of us draped all over him.'*
- *'In the car we'd almost be vying for his attention.'*
- *'It always felt he was measuring you not just on your playing ability- does he like me? Was I one of the more favoured players?'*
- *'All the time xxx and I were competing for his attention.'*

26. Accounts were shared with us of how Higgins sometimes presented himself a father figure to some of the boys: -

- *'He promised me he would be my father figure. He used to give me gifts, attention.'*
- *'Bob Higgins told some lads he was their new Dad.'*
- *'It was a tough thing to tell your parents someone was showing more affection than their own family. Higgins was quite good at targeting vulnerable boys and becoming like a father figure. He was confident no one would talk about it.'*

27. Higgins was often described as God-like by the men who spoke to us: -

- *'Bob Higgins was like a God sitting on a throne with boys draped around him'.*
- *'I looked at him as a God'.*
- *'The coaches put Bob Higgins on a pedestal; he was like God. You had to do what he said and make sure you didn't upset him.'*
- *'I never saw anyone challenge him... everyone looked at himas though he was God.'*

28. Some former staff also commented on this aspect: -

- *'As a person he was like God. He was producing the players. Everything he said and did seemed right. He was like God to the players.'*
- *'He was like God. I'm not sure if the boys were frightened of him. He seemed to have them under a spell.'*
- *'He had an awe about him- a larger than life character. He joked with the parents and was very charismatic. ...older players ...idolised him.'*

How Higgins groomed boys

29. Various accounts were shared with us by some of the men describing how Higgins' deliberately groomed and ensnared the children: -

- *'I didn't want for anything –boots, tops etc.'*
- *'The way he groomed people was the most strange thing – he gave you things; he rewarded you. Even though he abused you, you were in awe of him. I was confused about a lot of things for many reasons.'*
- *'If he came in a room, I remember I'd want him to look at me, to say, "alright son" and just show a little endearment to me, give me a pat on my shoulder.'*
- *'I used to get kit as well and I used to get extra expenses e.g., it would be £3 for a train, and he'd say take £5.'*

- *'He was very endearing. He made you feel straight away that you were special. He made you feel you were his special player. Bob would make you feel very jealous very quickly. If you played well, he would let you know. If you didn't, he would make gestures to you to show you that he wasn't happy. He would want you to show affection, make amends.'*
- *'He treated you.... he took me out shopping, he bought me gifts....'*

30. Some former staff and parents also commented on boys being groomed and exploited: -

- *'I didn't know this then, but he was groomed by him from day one; it was all 'Bob said this, Bob said that.'*
- *'He walked about almost like the pied piper. These boys were so in awe of him.'*
- *'He had a way - you worshipped him, especially the kids.'*
- *'...all around him like the pied piper.'*
- *'He was the pied piper.'*

How Higgins groomed parents

31. A recurring theme throughout conversations held was the manipulation and grooming of parents as well as of the boys: -

- *'He had contact with my parents; he came and stayed in my parent's home... he ruled my parents. It was frightening looking back as Bob Higgins had total control.'*
- *'He groomed my parents. The control he had....'*
- *'They all seemed to love Bob and thought he was the bees' knees.'*
- *'Some of the parents went on holiday with Bob and Shirley.'*
- *'Bob was very good at keeping away who he needed to keep away but getting the trust of the parents.'*

- *'Your parents were well groomed.'*
- *'He groomed parents as much as the kids. He visited our house on a number of occasions to have dinner with my parents. He was very charming, very 'schmoozy'; he knew what he was doing.'*
- *'My Mum thought he was lovely- he bought me a brand-new pair of trainers. He was basically grooming my parents- they thought the sun shone out of him. That made it harder to discuss anything.'*
- *'He told my dad he was going to take me under his wing.'*

32. As well as grooming boys and parents, there was also evidence that Higgins groomed other adults around him including parents: -

- *'He was astonishingly good at grooming people. His employers too - no doubt. Everyone thought he was a pied piper. He was incredibly manipulative - he got people to do what he wanted.'*
- *'He befriended my parents, my teachers.'*

The power and control held by Higgins

33. There were many descriptions given to us of the power and control Higgins had over the boys: -

- *'He had a way of looking at you that was a bit leery. He had an arrogance about him that he had total power over you.'*
- *'I'd never seen coaching like it. Because it was the Club straight away, he had this power over us. He'd ask us to pick something up; we'd all have done anything for him. Looking back, I'm sure he knew he had that power.'*
- *'It's just the power he had; nobody held him to account.'*

- *'He was very clever-he was the one in charge...he was an intimidating character. The spotlight and stress you were put under by him was demanding but we didn't know any different.... He had that sort of kingmaker element about him- at that time I genuinely believed he held your career in his hands.'*
- *'But you wouldn't question Bob as it might jeopardise you becoming an apprentice. It wasn't brainwashing but we were all in awe of him and therefore didn't do anything to upset his regime.'*
- *'He controlled us like puppets with his eyes...almost with his eyes he called you over...if only one of us went over and cuddled him he would give us a glare.'*

How Higgins held boy's dreams in his hands

34. Many boys perceived Higgins as the one who held their football careers in his hands: -

- *'I knew if I said anything my dream would be over, I'd be out. It was my word against him.'*
- *'They called him the star maker.'*
- *'There was desperation to make your dreams come true. He made it very clear he was the guy who'd make it come true.'*
- *'He was going to make me a footballer; he was very confident-he was going to make me a footballer.'*

How Higgins exploited and coerced boys

35. Numerous men shared how Higgins had made them, as young boys, feel confused about what was happening, so they did not perceive it at the time as being exploitative or abusive; they were groomed to feel that they were 'in love' and /or were in a special relationship. Higgins was highly skilled in manipulating boys so that they would begin to depend upon him emotionally.

- *'It was like a relationship with a man or a woman. You couldn't think he might be with someone else. Mentally and verbally, he would say he loved me, and he would get me to write him letters. He would tell me he had letters written from other boys and said I had been a long time since I'd written him one.'*
- *'On an emotional level I was deeply attached.'*
- *'I loved him. I wanted his approval. I wrote letters; I put love at the end.'*
- *'He never played lively dance songs; it was love songs. He'd say, "Did you hear the words there?" He'd say, "How do you feel about me?'*
- *'This is so mixed up in terms of my feelings for him.'*
- *'I'll never take it away from him, -he made you feel very, very special.'*
- *'Bob- a father, older brother, best friend, it was almost like you were in a relationship with him. He could turn very jealous, be very manipulative, he almost played you off in the relationship'.*
- *'...this guy whom I loved and whom I thought loved me..... I still had these feelings for him, but it was all just a game for him.'*
- *'I hate to say it, but I owe a lot to him. He did what a father would do. I still feel sad that he's in a cell, but he deserves it.'*
- *'I still have feelings towards Bob. I don't know if I still love him-I don't know if I'd hug him or hit him'.*
- *'It was constantly on my mind all the time not to upset him-he had a hold on me'.*
- *'At 12, I'd never experienced any of that feeling - emotionally or sexually. I walked in and saw two boys sat there cuddled into him - I just thought it must be normal'.*

The impact Higgins had on the lives of those he abused

36. There was overwhelming evidence that Higgins had an enormously detrimental effect on the lives of those he abused. Men talked to us about the impact the abuse had on their lives at the time and over the years that followed, including the long-term effects from the trauma they suffered following the abuse. We also heard about the huge impact on the lives of their families.

- *'I wondered if I was gay... this has lingered throughout my life. I am edgy about being called anything to do with gay to this day. I have had fights and words over being called gay etc. The stigma is so strong in me. I have had to fight to keep him from winning.'*
- *'I went down the road of alcohol at an early age. That was the start of my trying to forget.'*
- *'It had a massive effect on me mentally.'*
- *'I don't have the best relationship with my son – I wonder if it affected me. It's not a very nice place to be, being a very knowledgeable survivor.'*
- *'I experience flashbacks.'*
- *'All of my life is spent mentally keeping control.'*
- *'The mental side has been the worse. Some of the lads didn't suffer physical abuse but still had emotional abuse and didn't get their day in court'*
- *'The damage has been dreadful, so deep'.*
- *'It has had horrific repercussions in my life.'*
- *'I've never told my parents- I didn't want them to feel guilty about what happened... they have no clue what I went through.'*
- *'...it turned me off from being a professional footballer'.*
- *'Boys have had an horrendous time in their adult life but now have had the courage to tell.'*
- *'He affected my love of football and how I grew up... in a different way. I ended up quitting because of the way he affected me. It brought back bad memories.'*

- *'I was diagnosed with PTSD and depression'.*

Section 4

The sexual abuse of children

'He would touch us up... made us think it was normal.'

Child Sexual Abuse –what it means

37. Child sexual abuse is an umbrella term that is now used to associate a range of acts and behaviours that are deemed to be harmful to children. There is a wealth of evidence to suggest the term 'sexual abuse' was used as far back as the 1860s, but it was not widely used in the UK until the 1980s.

38. The UK Government's definition of child sexual abuse (CSA) for England is:

*'... forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse.'*⁷

39. Intra-familial abuse refers to sexual abuse of children that occurs within a family environment by family members, or by someone who is close to the child in other ways, even though, as with Higgins, they might not be related.⁸ The key consideration is always

⁷ *Working together to safeguard children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Department for Education (2018) www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children.*

⁸ *Key messages from research on intra-familial child sexual abuse. McNeish and Scott DMSS Research June 2018.*

whether the abuser is thought of by the child as someone they depend on and could trust. One of the key messages we received from our conversations during this review was the way in which Higgins encouraged the boys to think of him like family and even, at times, seeking to come between boys and their parents.

40. As the prevalence of sexual abuse of boys has become known, awareness that boys and not just girls can be victims of abuse has increased. As late as 2014, research⁹ indicated that one in nine girls, and one in 53 boys under the age of 18¹⁰ are sexually abused, but more recent data suggests that 1 in 6 men have experienced sexual abuse during childhood and/or adolescence but did not report it.¹¹ We know that child sexual abuse often goes unreported, and rates of non-disclosure are often higher among males than females. This research¹² suggests that underreporting by males may be partially explained by the fear of a perceived loss of masculinity and not being seen as strong and very possibly the fear of being labelled as homosexual when the perpetrator is also male.

Impact of sexual abuse on children

'There are some very, very profound results of what happened, it caused me many difficulties in relationships, marriage, none of those positive..., some incredibly negative outcomes. It doesn't disappear because there are always circumstances or scenarios that remind you of what happened and that won't ever change but I have managed to develop coping mechanisms.'

41. Sexual abuse of children can have wide-ranging and serious consequences and for some, the effects last until, and endure throughout, adulthood, impacting on self-esteem, mental

⁹ *The lifetime prevalence of child sexual abuse and sexual assault assessed in late adolescence, Finkelhor et al, 2014*

¹⁰ *Men with childhood sexual abuse histories: Disclosure experiences and links with mental health: Romano et al, 2019*

¹¹ *Romano et al, 2019*

¹² *Romano et al, 2019*

and physical health, family relationships and in some cases even impacting on their relationships with their own children and grandchildren.

'I couldn't have anything to do with football, couldn't watch it, couldn't even kick a ball in the garden with my young son.....[it] brought back too many awful memories.'

42. A great number of children effectively have their childhood stolen as a consequence of the abuse they suffer. The traumatic sexualisation to which they are subject means their sexuality and sexual feelings may develop, but in ways which leave children confused and isolated; they are involved in behaviour they don't understand and which doesn't feel right, yet the behaviour has been instigated by an adult whom they trust and, importantly, on whom they depend.¹³ A sense of powerlessness can leave children isolated, reinforcing shame or guilt which then becomes part of the child's self-image, enduring throughout adulthood. The combination and intensity of these feelings in this context makes what happens particularly damaging, and especially so, given the extent to which the child trusts and relies on their abuser for their care and well-being.

Modus Operandi of Perpetrators and Higgins specifically

'Love letters, love songs, [he] made you feel special when you were on your own. He checked for vulnerabilities 'bit like a jackal'.... we would vie for his attention.'

43. Child grooming is the deliberate process by which offenders gradually initiate and maintain sexual relationships with children in private and in secrecy. Grooming allows these offenders to slowly overcome a child's natural boundaries long before sexual abuse occurs.

¹³ Key messages from research on intra-familial child sexual abuse. Centre of Expertise on child sexual abuse, July 2018, *The Trauma of Child Sexual Abuse: Two Models* Finklehor 1987.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/citedby/10.1177/088626058700200402>

On the surface, grooming behaviours look like a caring relationship between the perpetrator, the targeted child and (potentially) the child's parents.

'My parents had two jobs... he would offer lifts to help my parents out, ... suggested I stayed over with him.'

etrator, the targeted child and (potentially) the child's parents.

44. The grooming process can often go unnoticed and unseen because the offender is well-known or highly regarded in the community. As the youth coach at SFC, Higgins was very influential; he had a reputation as a *'star-maker'* and someone who developed players who were, or became, household names in the football world. Even before any abuse began, Higgins made sure it was easy for parents and children to trust him.
45. Perpetrators of abuse generally select victims who are vulnerable in some way and then slowly gain their trust before systematically breaking down barriers to abuse. The boys who Higgins abused were vulnerable not just because of their age, but also in the sense that they had a dream, and it was within Higgins' gift to make that dream come true; Higgins held all the power. Abusers will take time grooming children, developing trust, building a relationship because it brings about the appearance of co-operation, making the act of abuse seem to be consensual.

'He'd say... 'is this what you want?'... he made it feel like it was my choice.'

'He was psychologically controlling xxx; not physically threatening him.'

46. We heard how Higgins could at first be tentative in his moves to see how boys responded: *'accidental'* touching, sexual banter, commenting on their bodies and genitals, dropping hints that other boys were doing so much more to prove themselves, and mocking those

who were more reserved. These subtle, and sometimes not so subtle moves then paved the way for him to develop more physical and abusive contact.

'I got off lightly, my dislike of him meant he was not as involved with me.'

'He'd pat you and say well done but was touching my testicles. He'd tap you on the bum. You felt like it's not right. He'd get you doing stretching exercises and would touch you up. None of the boys would talk about it.'

47. We were told about the way in which Higgins would make boys feel special, showing them affection, using secret signals to let them know he was thinking of them, winking, catching their eye through the car mirror whilst playing love songs and asking boys to send him love letters to 'prove' how much they thought of him. Of course, it was these love letters written by young boys that Higgins used in his defence at court to try to prove their infatuation with him and discredit their allegations of abuse. Even then, Higgins clearly thought that one day he might be called on to account for his actions.
48. Like many other predators, Higgins targeted and exploited vulnerabilities often deliberately creating situations which ensured an emotional neediness, isolating boys from parents, adversely comparing skills and physiques between boys and at times, purposefully creating rifts between father and son and presenting himself as the only father- figure.

'He kept adults at a distance.'

'Everything was about isolation so he could groom and abuse.'

'There were no eyes on Bob Higgins-he was allowed to do what he wanted to do.'

49. Higgins didn't only groom boys, he was highly skilled at grooming parents too. He took time to earn their trust and took pains to present himself as a caring figure to whom parents could confidently entrust the care of their child. Encouraging them to attend training sessions where soap water massages would openly take place, and which Higgins presented as 'normal', but were essentially a technique he used to allow him to abuse boys.

'We'd never let our kids round if we knew what he was up to'.

50. Coaches were groomed in the same way and his apparent 'openness' about what he was doing in terms of massages and other physical contacts left adults, we were told, believing that nothing could be amiss because he didn't try to hide anything. The modus operandi of abusers like Higgins, rely heavily on their skills to fool other adults and pull the wool over their eyes so that other adults truly believe that children are in a safe and caring pair of hands. ¹⁴

'I, and [other coaches] should have done more ... to question his behaviour ...but without concrete evidence it would have been difficult to achieve anything'' ...I should have done more.'

Understanding why children didn't tell

'I didn't have the confidence to speak out with my parents when he was so well regarded by them.'

¹⁴ *Grooming and Red Flag Behaviours Darkness to Light*.d2l.org; NSPCC, <https://www.mosac.net/Grooming>

'I felt uncomfortable but didn't know how abusive it was at the time. Everyone made a big joke about it. Are you Bob's favourite? ... People didn't realise it at the time.'

'The nakedness and just seeing him naked was just normal all the time.'

'I look at it now and its bloody obvious... but I'd never been 13/14 before.'

51. There are multiple and pervasive barriers to children and young people telling someone about experiences of sexual abuse. The information shared with us reveals that Higgins maintained secrecy and silence through a range of dynamics, contexts and controlling relationships with boys and adults, which created for him a culture in which he could abuse with impunity.
52. There is little to suggest he actually told boys not to tell anyone about what was happening, but the message that he was in charge and in control of what happened to boys and their careers was conveyed in other ways. We learnt from some men that whilst Higgins demonstrated affection to make boys feel special, he also used psychological and physical tactics to intimidate boys. We were told if Higgins was displeased, he made sure boys knew about it - they might not be selected to play in a game or a match or they could find themselves being humiliated in front of other boys, deliberately ignored, or even subjected to physical assaults.

'My relationship with Bob was that I could never do well enough; I always had to do better. Sometimes I was physically sick from training. He created the opportunity to abuse me, mentally first, physically next then sexually over a 3 ½ year period.'

'Physical punishments-sprints -done in front of someone else.... Doing handstands or press ups... I was scared to ever make a mistake or error.'

'I had given up everything for a whole week and travelled to the training, missing family things - I played for half an hour during that whole time. I asked one of the coaches if I could speak with Bob. I was told Bob wouldn't speak with me. I didn't know what I had done.'

'He hit me and [said] 'I was too good looking to be a [position] ... What I had done, I do not know. The journey back was abusive verbally, but I knew I could not tell anyone [about what happened].'

'Sometimes I went home, and I would not sleep because he'd ignored me, or I'd done something wrong. Basically, if I let him abuse me, he'd be happy with me. Sometimes he did some awful things to me and wouldn't speak to me the next day. I wondered if I'd done something wrong... if I'd done enough.'

53. Often, the abusive adult will convince the child that they won't be believed or that they are somehow responsible for the abuse and will be punished for it. Children frequently remain silent to protect a non-abusive or a non-knowing parent from finding out about what has been happening. We heard that some men remembered that as young adolescents they felt they needed to protect their parents from finding out about Higgins, both because parents would then blame themselves for allowing their son to spend time with him and also because the parents might stop their involvement in football. We heard distressing stories of the impact on some parents when they found out years later of the abuse inflicted on their sons by Higgins.

'I am consumed, night and day by feelings of guilt and shame, sadness and revulsion, I feel a failure as a [parent] and I will be forever in a mental prison [for failing to protect my son].'

54. Abusers are skilled manipulators and take pains to reassure others that they are 'good and caring' adults for children to be around and they can be immensely skilful at creating doubt in those who may question their motives.

'The reasons he gave were that we needed to trust him, he needed to be like a second father to us - if we trusted him, and it worked both ways, then the chances were there, that we could become professional footballers.'

55. We were also told that some boys, like many victims of sexual abuse, also developed a sense of loyalty towards Higgins and developed a complex and compelling bond with him, which even as adults, they found hard to understand. It is important to remember that adolescence is a highly impressionable age, teenage bodies and brains are maturing at a rate not experienced since infancy and first loves and infatuations can evoke powerful feelings. Being the object of interest of a 'revered and God-like' figure such as Higgins would have been acutely and intensely affecting at the time. It was these feelings which were encouraged and then exploited by Higgins. It is these emotions and responses by 'victims' which are often not well understood by adults who do not know about the controlling tactics used by abusers to gain and maintain access to vulnerable children.
56. In order to keep the abuse secret, abusers will often play on the child's fear, embarrassment or guilt about what is happening, perhaps convincing them that no one will believe them, or threatening them, or indicating that the child will be punished or face other consequences for telling. Sometimes the abuser will convince the child that he or she enjoyed what happened and wanted it to happen, blaming or shifting responsibility on to them. Sometimes, a child may be confused if they experienced positive physical pleasure, arousal, or emotional intimacy from the abuser. This confusion can make it almost impossible for the child to speak up and they may then begin or may be encouraged to believe, that they have been complicit in the abuse.
57. For some of the men who talked with us, there was an ongoing question in their minds whether having not reported the abuse, they had then permitted it and agreed to it

happening and they should they have made more of an effort to stop it from happening. But these men were children at the time and there are never any situations where a child is responsible for any sexual interaction with an older and much more powerful adult. For the children concerned or the adults they later became, it is not always easy for them to accept that they were not responsible or to blame, in any way, for the abuse inflicted on them.

58. Survivors of sexual crimes can, we know be burdened with a deep sense of guilt and shame.¹⁵ The thought of revealing what they have endured—in explicit detail—can be overwhelming. It means in the telling; they must relive the experience. It means they must remember things they do not want to remember and talk about things they do not want to share. Many victims of abuse are hesitant to give voice to the violation, the pain, and the feeling of sheer helplessness. Fragile and traumatised, some survivors are just not ready, physically, emotionally and psychologically—to come forward, until as an adult they are asked, or feel compelled, to do so¹⁶.

59. Many of the men we spoke too, described these feelings to us and for some, they are clearly ever-present.

'...nightmares.... a figure pins me to the bed and.... I cannot escape.'

'I experience flashbacks.... all of my life I am mentally keeping control.'

60. Of course, the public stature of Higgins played a prominent part in his being able to abuse boys in what might be described as plain sight. His status and reputation in the football world significantly reduced the chances of not only any child speaking out, but also the adults around those children also.

61. The impact of sexual abuse does not end when the abuse stops. Survivors of sexual abuse often do not have access to support and are at significantly greater risks of experiencing

¹⁵ A scoping review of adult survivors' experiences of shame following sexual abuse in childhood. Macginley, Breckenridge and Mowll. June 2019

¹⁶ Why Adult Victims of Childhood Sexual Abuse Don't Disclose. Psychology Today. March 2019

severe and chronic mental health issues, including alcoholism, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and high-risk behaviours.¹⁷

62. As a society, we continue to find it difficult to talk about sexual abuse of children.¹⁸ The consequence of this reluctance to talk about child sexual abuse may reduce our capability and preparedness to protect children from it. Within families and communities, there remains, even today, a disbelief and denial that adults who are known and trusted by children and their families would sexually abuse children in their care, and a belief that if the advances were really unwelcome, any child would scream and yell, and fight off their abuser.¹⁹
63. Sadly, we know this not to be the case for the reasons we have briefly outlined. It is possible that this resistance as a society to understand and acknowledge the power dynamics involved when children are sexually abused by adults in positions of trust may well have been a factor in the trials when Higgins was first acquitted.
64. Child sexual abuse continues to be far less likely to be identified and discussed than other forms of abuse.²⁰ When we do talk about sexual abuse, adults can use language that minimises or dismisses the abuse, or which implies consent. Non-abusing adults may ask ‘*why did you not speak out*’, implying the child could have stopped what was happening if only he/she had only spoken out; it is important to understand how Higgins operated such that he made the abuse appear to be normal.
65. In the 1970s and 1980s, it remained the case that very little was spoken or written about child sexual abuse but more recent landmark enquiries into historical allegation have highlighted that the sexual abuse of children especially in large institutions like the church, youth detention centres and sporting organisations was widespread and unacknowledged. Following the Cleveland Inquiry in 1988 into child sexual abuse, legislation pertaining to

¹⁷ *Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse 2018*

¹⁸ <https://www.stopitnow.org/ohc-content/what-keeps-us-from-talking-about-sexual-abuse>

¹⁹ *How denial and Victim Blaming Keep Sexual Assault Hidden, Institute for Family Studies January 2019*

²⁰ *Child Sexual Abuse: Toward a Conceptual Model and Definition. Mathews, and Collins-Vezina, Sage, November 2017.*

children was modernised with the introduction of the Children Act 1989. Research²¹ indicates however, that many of these institutions were largely unaffected by these changes and continued to self-regulate without evidence of any child protection processes or procedures.

'We were still in an era where anyone in authority assumed respect. You assumed you could trust them: - teachers, parents, coaches. Even parents wouldn't challenge authority.'

²¹ *Key messages from research on institutional child sexual abuse. Centre of Expertise on child sexual abuse. September 2018*

Section 5

Safeguarding Children in Football

The Football Dream

'It was my dream; it was all I ever wanted to do.'

66. The game of football has a long history and is reported to be the most popular sport in the world,²² with an estimated four billion fans the world over. It engenders great passion as seen on football terraces and reported in the world's media. Certainly, studies suggest football is the most popular sport in the UK²³ ; and the FIFA²⁴ World Cup is in the top five most popular sports events²⁵ .
67. Football follows a traditional league system which consists of more than one hundred teams. Today, of children aged 5 to 10, roughly 31% play football at least on a monthly basis and at age 11-15 football becomes even more popular with approximately 44% in this age group playing the sport.²⁶ The sport has millions of fans, yet of the estimated 1.5 million boys who play organised football in England, less than two hundred will become a professional at the top of their game. ²⁷

'There was desperation to make your dreams come true.

He made it very clear he was the guy who'd make it come true.'

68. Whilst a successful football career is demanding and seems to have very few entry barriers other than talent, and good health, the rewards are perceived by many to be immense; status, high financial rewards and for some, world -wide renown on the sporting stage. Those who excel in the sport are, more often than not, revered and their legacies resonate

²² [The Most Popular Sports In The World - WorldAtlas](#)

²³ [UK sporting events attract 67m spectators | Deloitte UK](#)

²⁴ [Founded in 1904 to provide unity among national soccer associations, the Federation Internationale de Football Association \(FIFA\) a world-renowned prestigious sports organisation.](#)

²⁵ [The most popular sport events in the UK | Arts | YouGov Ratings](#)

²⁶ [Football participation England 2016-2020, David Lange, Nov 16, 2020](#)

²⁷ [Football participation England 2016-2020, Lange 2020.](#)

for years but like many other sports, football demands dedication, consistency, hard work and sacrifice.

69. Many youngsters embark on their dream to be a full-time professional player at a very young age playing through grassroots clubs and as they get older some, if fortunate enough, are offered a coveted place, at a football academy. Competition for these places is fierce. Once accepted within an academy, boys continue to face intense competition to be retained and are known to ‘give their all’ as they progress through the age groups.²⁸

‘It’s the dream... sadly people take advantage.’

70. History and current events tell us there have always been abusers, who exploit and prey upon children who are determined to achieve their dream in their chosen sport. Whilst media focus is currently on football, and as what happened to hundreds of young boys in the care of ‘trusted’ adults unfolds, it is becoming clear that abusers do not operate only in sport at premiership/championship levels, grassroots sports can also provide unchecked access to children for unscrupulous adults. Whilst checks such as the vetting of staff through Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)²⁹ are an important measure in preventing abusive adults having access to children, such processes are not in themselves sufficient to protect children. It is essential for the protection of children that organisations ensure the values, behaviours and the culture that underpins all they do, promote the importance of safeguarding and those working there hold the belief that ‘it could happen here’.

The Emergence of a Safeguarding Framework in Football

71. Safeguarding in sport has, perhaps until the turn of this century, been an issue widely neglected. Whilst there is evidence of a much greater awareness today of the need for

²⁸ *No Hunger in Paradise Calvin, 2018*

²⁹ *The role of the DBS is to help employers in England and Wales make safer recruitment decisions and prevent unsuitable people from working with vulnerable groups, including children.*

everyone to safeguard and protect children in our care, the responsibility to do so, has essentially been enshrined in our laws and our values for well over a century.³⁰

72. Just as education, residential and religious institutions have had to come to terms with failings to protect the children to whom they owed a duty of care, sporting organisations too, have had to address the knowledge that children and young people, have been abused on their watch by individuals who held positions of trust acquired through status, employment or reputation. The following court cases, for example, led to convictions of individuals working as coaches or scouts for or on behalf of different football clubs in England and Wales.³¹

1960, 1961, 1965 and 1984: Frank Roper convicted of sexual abuse of young boys

1995: Barry Bennell convicted in Florida of four counts of indecently assaulting a 13-year-old male in 1994

1998: Barry Bennell convicted of 23 counts of sexual abuse against young boys between 1978 – 1992.

2002: George Ormond convicted of sexual offences against five boys.

2007: Ted Langford convicted of four counts of sexual abuse of young boys between 1976 and 1990.

2015: Barry Bennell convicted of four counts of sexual abuse against young boys in 1980.

2018: Barry Bennell convicted of 50 counts of sexual abuse against young boys between 1979 and 1991.

2018: Ted Langford convicted of 35 counts of sexual abuse against young boys from 1973 to 1998.

2018: Michael Coleman convicted on three accounts of sexually abusing boys in the early 1980s.

2018: Anthony Pickering convicted of sexual offences against young footballers in 1970s and 1980s.

2019: Bob Higgins convicted of 49 counts of child sexual abuse against young boys between 1980 and 1989.

2019: Dylan Lamb, football coach convicted for 30 years for sexual offences against young boys.

2020: Barry Bennell convicted of nine counts of sexual abuse against two young boys

³⁰ In 1908, the Children Act 1908 was introduced followed by the Children and Young Person Act 1920 with a bundle of laws to protect young persons and children in the early 20th century. The Children and Young Persons Act 1933 consolidated the laws into a single law which was superseded by the introduction of the Children Act 1989 which became law in 1991.

³¹ The details of these offences have been briefly summarised for the purposes of this report.

between 1979-1988.

2021: Stephen Walker, a football coach, convicted of multiple counts of sexual abuse over four decades.

73. There were also other successful cases in Scotland and Wales, in which men in football had been charged and found guilty of sexual offences against children, including William Toner, Jim McCafferty, James Torbett, Gerald King, Frank Cairney, Norman Shaw, and David Daniel Hayes.
74. In addition to these successful convictions, there were numerous other cases in which allegations did not result in individuals being found guilty. In 1992, Higgins was found not guilty of six charges of sexual abuse against young boys. Kit Carson was due to stand trial to face multiple charges of child sexual abuse against young boys between 1978 and 2009 but committed suicide on the day he was due to attend court.
75. Sheldon in his report³², states *'I do not consider that perpetrators shared boys with one another for sexual purposes, or shared information with one another that would have facilitated child sexual abuse'*. Whilst we also found no evidence in this review to suggest Higgins was part of an organised paedophile ring, some of the individuals listed in the above paragraphs undoubtedly knew each other through their connections in football. We heard from a number of men that Kit Carson and Barry Bennell were, for example often, present at competitions they played at when at Southampton.

'When the issue blew up with Barry Bennell at Crewe, I knew Barry and Higgins were connected and Kit Carson (KC). I knew I needed to say something. They used to go to Sweden I knew I needed to say something to someone.'

'That time we were there for the week... Barry Bennell was there.'

'We went to the cup with Kit Carson- and Crewe was always there- Barry Bennell.'

³². *Independent Review into Child Sexual Abuse in Football 1970-2005 Clive Sheldon QC March 2021*

76. In our view, it is highly probable that these individuals would have had some awareness of each other's proclivities, as perpetrators are likely to be highly tuned into and aware of other adults with similar patterns of behaviours to their own. The modus operandi of most of these abusers, according to what we have learnt was similar, making use of car journeys, inviting boys to their homes, and using tours and tournaments with overnight stays as opportunities for abuse to take place.
77. Higgins and Carson worked together at Peterborough Football Club for a period of two years between 1994 and 1996. Boys from Crewe Alexander Football Club where Bennell was employed, also took part in an international tournament known as the 'Sotonia' cup. We were unable to find many documented details about this competition but understand from conversations held and from board minutes³³ that this was a competition launched by Southampton City Council and the University of Southampton and was managed by Higgins on behalf of the Club. We understand the tournament was also supported, amongst others, by Bennell and Carson.
78. By the 1980s, there were some reported cases of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse in the sport³⁴, but very few of these reports were made public. It took another two decades before significant developments were made to safeguard the well-being and safety of children involved in football.

Safeguarding in sport today

79. In England, Wales, and Northern Ireland³⁵, efforts to tackle child safeguarding in sport began in earnest in 2001 with the formation of the NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU). This followed a series of high-profile cases of abuse in sport, including that of a British Olympic swimming coach who was convicted of two rapes and a series of assaults against young athletes. The CPSU is part of NSPCC and is funded by Sport England, Sport Northern Ireland, Sport Wales, and UK Sport.

³³ February 1983/March 1983, Board minutes

³⁴ Brackenridge, Celia, and Rhind Daniel July 2014

³⁵ In Scotland, there is a similar partnership between **Children 1st** and Sport Scotland.

80. As part of their funding conditions with Sport England and UK Sport, all National Governing Bodies³⁶ (NGBs) are now expected to have appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures in place as well as maintaining the Standards for Safeguarding and Protecting Children in Sport (the 'Standards')³⁷ which are issued by the CPSU.
81. The NSPCC through its CPSU undertakes an annual 'health check' of all NGBs against the standards, reporting back to Sport England to ensure this funding condition is being met. The Standards provide a framework for all those involved in sport to help them create a safe sporting environment for children and young people and to protect them from harm. They also seek to provide a benchmark to help those involved in sport make informed decisions and promote good practice and challenge about practice that is harmful to children.
82. NGBs include organisations such as British Cycling, The Lawn Tennis Association and England Athletics. Aside from overseeing rules, clubs, coaching and competitions, the NGB of each sport decides how to spend income generated by membership fees, TV rights, Lottery Grants and investment from Government and the four UK Sports Councils. NGBs are clearly important social institutions – they are the custodians of tradition for their sport, influencing who gets to play and on what terms. The Football Association (The FA) is the national governing body for football in England.
83. In mid-November 2016, the abuse of young players at football clubs in the UK came to light and received substantial media coverage. The revelations began when Andy Woodward³⁸, a former professional football player with Crewe Alexander Football Club, broke his silence and talked of the abuse he had suffered at the hands of the former coach, Barry Bennell. Other professional footballers came forward and waived their rights to anonymity and talked publicly about being abused by Bennell and other coaches and scouts in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. This then led to a surge of further allegations, as well as questions as to whether the clubs had acted appropriately when concerns and allegations about these

³⁶ A National Governing Body (NGB) is an organisation that governs and administers a sport on a national basis, whether that is for the whole of the United Kingdom (i.e., England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales), for Great Britain (i.e., England, Scotland, and Wales) or for one of the Home Countries individually.

³⁷ [Standards for safeguarding children in sport | CPSU \(thecpsu.org.uk\)](https://www.thecpsu.org.uk/standards-for-safeguarding-children-in-sport)

³⁸ *Position of Trust Andy Woodward 2020*

individuals came to light. In response, the FA commissioned Clive Sheldon QC to undertake an investigation into the sexual abuse of children in football; his report³⁹ was published in March 2021.

Legislation and Statutory Guidance – the historical context

84. The Children Act 1989 established the legislative framework for the current child protection system in England and Wales. Working Together to Safeguard Children, usually referred to as ‘Working Together’, is the statutory guidance produced by the government. This guidance sets out the legislative requirements placed on all organisations and agencies who have functions relating to children.
85. Working Together statutory guidance was initially published in 1999 but was revised in 2006 following the public inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié. In response to Victoria’s death, the government commissioned a public inquiry, led by Lord Laming⁴⁰. The findings of the highly publicised inquiry led to the government’s Every Child Matters green paper, which proposed changes in legislation and policy to maximise opportunities for agencies to work together in order to effectively safeguard children. This green paper was later followed by the introduction of the Children Act (2004).
86. The Children Act (2004) places a duty on all agencies to make arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. In 2006, a revised version of Working Together was published, since which time, there have been four further updates to the guidance. In 2010, the guidance update expanded the focus on interagency working and took into account the recommendations of Lord Laming’s 2008 progress report ‘The Protection of Children in England’, which emphasised the importance of frontline practitioners getting to know children as individuals. The 2013 update was in response to the review of child protection in England, carried out by Professor Eileen Munro. The update in 2015 focused on the need for early help responses to identify and support the needs of children and young people as these needs emerge and are identified.

³⁹ ‘Independent Review into Child Sexual Abuse in Football 1970-2005’

⁴⁰ [Independent report overview: The Victoria Climbié Inquiry: report of an inquiry by Lord Laming - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

87. The most recent update of Working Together in 2018 continues to have a focus on the need for early help, but also focuses on complex and contextual safeguarding⁴¹ as well as a review of how local safeguarding arrangements are implemented and governed. Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) includes for the first-time specific reference to sporting clubs and organisations. *'All National Governing Bodies of Sport, that receive funding from either Sport England or UK Sport must aim to meet the Standards for Safeguarding and Protecting Children in Sport.'*⁴²
88. Although these organisations have always had a duty of care to safeguard and protect the children with whom they work, the more recent reference to sports organisations in statutory guidance makes expectations clear and strengthens the message that safeguarding children is everyone's responsibility.

A Duty of Care

89. All adults who work with children and young people have a crucial role to play in shaping their lives in ways which can be affirming and inspiring and which can make a very real difference to the adult the child will become. This unique opportunity also carries a responsibility for these adults whatever their role, to exercise a duty of care to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children with whom they come into contact.
90. This duty of care rests with these individuals who are expected to ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to safeguard and ensure the safety of a child or young person involved in any activity, or interaction for which that individual is responsible. Any person in charge of or working with children and young people in any capacity is considered, both legally and morally, to have a duty of care and a responsibility to keep them safe from harm.
91. The vast majority of adults who work with children do act professionally and aim to provide a safe and supportive environment which promotes the well-being of children and young

⁴¹ *Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse*

⁴² *Working Together to Safeguarding Children. HM Government July 2018*

people in their care. It is recognised however that there are adults who will deliberately seek out, create, or exploit opportunities to abuse children. Bob Higgins was such an adult.

Section 6

Southampton Football Club

History and Governance of Southampton Football Club from 1974 -1992

92. Traditionally, football clubs were viewed as sports and social clubs which were run by committees for the benefit of its members and community, and not as commercial enterprises.⁴³
93. Like so many other football clubs, Southampton Football Club was, in the 1970s and 1980s, run by a 'board' which essentially relied on a group of volunteers to manage Club business. We were advised that the committee for Southampton Football Club, during those times, was made up of local businessmen, solicitors, sponsors and landed gentry and it was they who ran the Club, with only a handful of employees, which included the Club secretary and a [football] Manager. Coaches and scouts at the time were self-employed and on part-time contracts. The Club became a Public Limited Company in 1996.
94. Board meetings were held monthly, and we have been able to access most of the minutes from meetings which took place between 1974 and 1991. Where references are made to Higgins, we have included these in the timeline which can be found in Annexe 1.
95. As part of this review, we were able to talk with three of the ex-board members. Although being asked to recall events and conversations which took place over 30 years ago, these individuals shared with us what they could remember when Higgins was involved with or employed by the Club. Some of the other members who sat on the board at the time that Higgins worked at the Club, have since then passed away. There are no individuals on the current board who served or held positions at the time Higgins' was an employee of the Club.

⁴³ Conn, David 2010a *Why fans will never run football in England*

96. We understand from various conversations there was very little contact between board members and Higgins, although there is evidence in board minutes that Higgins attended a number of sporting events alongside some members of the board. One board member who had oversight of youth development activity and reported back to the board on this activity at monthly meetings, but we were told by two former board members and managers that board members had no direct contact with the boys themselves or their training, as that was left, at the time, to Higgins. We were told that board business was centred on attracting sponsors, keeping the Club financially viable and maintaining its position in the football league. Although board members apparently had very little involvement with Higgins, his talent in spotting, recruiting, and training boys who went on to play in the Club's first team was acknowledged by some of those we spoke to, and he was clearly seen as being hugely beneficial to the Club.

'He was bringing the kids through-making the stars.

No-one had any reason to think anything of him. '

97. The conversations held were helpful in allowing us to gather information about how Club business was conducted during the period Higgins was contracted and employed by the Club. It also allowed us to probe in greater detail some of the information we had accessed through documents and board meeting minutes.

98. We are immensely grateful to the former board members and the individuals who currently work or had worked for the Club during the time Higgins was an employee and who came forward to speak with us. The family of one individual who was unable to contribute directly for health reasons agreed to look over references we had made to that individual and we are grateful to them for doing so. These conversations helped us gain a sense of the management and culture of the Club at that time, and we heard views which suggested that Higgins' influence was not only evident in terms of the boys but also extended to board members, the staff with whom he worked and parents.

'Bob had total command... (board members) believed every word he said, and parents were the same.'

Higgins' involvement with Southampton Football Club

99. It would appear that Higgins served as a football coach for several major teams in England from the early 1970s up until the late 1990s. He started scouting, seemingly, as a young teenager, for Queen's Park Rangers and later Crystal Palace Football Club and then set up his own soccer school in the early 70s which later became the 'Bob Higgins Soccer Academy'. MAN1 told us that during the 1970s and 1980s the Club had scouts and youth development activities in the North East as a number of the Club's coaching staff had links to area at that time. The Club went on to develop a similar operation in the Southwest and would work with boys from around 13 years of age with a view to offering schoolboy contracts to the best players at 14 and then offer apprenticeships from the age of 16.
100. MAN1 recalled that sometime around the mid to late 1970s, the Club's board of directors discussed with him, how they could scout and recruit more young players. At the time, although their coaches had established links with scouting networks in the Northeast and Southwest, it was agreed that a similar set-up should be established in London to develop a network for the scouting, development, and recruitment of young players in that area.
101. According to MAN1, the Club's management was first introduced to Higgins' during a visit to Gillingham Football Club in Kent sometime in the late 1970s. They were, we understand, impressed with Higgins and the scouting and recruitment practices they observed. We were told that whilst this was management's first introduction to Higgins, he was already well known to BM1 and also to a couple of their coaches.
102. Sometime soon after the visit to Gillingham, Higgins began to work on a part-time basis with the Club, running the youth scouting and development activities in various locations. We were told that Higgins was not a full-time member of staff until the 1980s and in his part time role, he operated several activities outside of the Club. It would seem that the Club accepted that Higgins would continue to operate his own independent soccer school as it was thought his network across the South could be advantageous to the Club in spotting young talent.

103. There are references in Clive Sheldon's report⁴⁴ to an alleged conversation reported to have taken place sometime in 1974 between BM1 and a Headteacher of a local school where Higgins had been coaching pupils.
104. According to police records accessed by Sheldon, the Headteacher first contacted the Local Education Authority⁴⁵ to complain about reports of Higgins' inappropriate behaviours and also that Higgins had obtained his coaching role through false credentials by claiming to be a fully qualified coach who was working for Chelsea Football Club.
105. According to the same account, concerns were then shared with BM1. The Headteacher claimed he was advised by BM1, not to repeat this gossip or legal action would be taken. There are however no records which capture this conversation or indicate that the allegations were discussed with Higgins, MAN1 or the board. MAN1 was clear that BM1 never made him aware of any such conversation then or later, and neither was he aware of BM1 having any conversation about this with anyone else at the Club.
106. In his part-time role, Higgins apparently used to invite the best players to train at the Club and as Under 16s they were expected to attend two nights a week, at weekends and in school holidays. From descriptions we have received, it appears that Higgins had full access to Club facilities in evenings and at weekends at the Club and it was rare for any full-time staff or management to be around at those times. One of the board members, BM4, told us that he would very occasionally observe youth matches.
107. MAN1 recalled that Higgins would also have been responsible for coordinating arrangements when young players came together from the various areas for trials. Training sessions held at the Dell, were generally run by coaches and Higgins, we were told, would more often than not train the boys he had personally recruited. We were

⁴⁴ *Independent Review into Child Sexual Abuse in Football 1970-2005 Clive Sheldon QC March 2021- pages 537 and 538*

⁴⁵ *Local Education Authorities (LEAs) had responsibilities for state education under the Education Act 1996. Following the introduction of the Children Act 2004, the functions of education and children's social services were combined, and the term "LEA" is obsolete*

told by several individuals that Higgins was the one who *'ruled the roost and was in charge'*. Several men who spoke with us recalled that Higgins chose his own coaches and unlike him, some, we were told, were not particularly skilled at football coaching. We were given to understand that the culture was one in which Higgins *'was in complete control of everything.'* We even heard from some individuals about Higgins' dismissive and rejecting attitude towards boys who had girlfriends and the extent to which he controlled their personal lives insisting that girlfriends were *'not allowed'*.

'He encouraged us not to have girlfriends... he found out I'd been seeing a girl...he booted me around the gym that night... he spent ten minutes annihilating me.'

'He found out we had girlfriends and called us in and said he was releasing us-we knew the rules.'

'It was tough; I had no-one to talk to at all. You weren't allowed girlfriends.'
'A couple of girls liked me; I had to go home and tell them I'm not allowed to talk to girls. He controlled everything.'

'He always said girlfriends were a no-no.'

108. According to Board minutes, following a complaint that was made against him in April 1979, the details of which are unknown, Higgins resigned, a few days later. We found no further references in any board minutes or documents relating to Higgins' decision to leave, but at some point, his resignation must have been withdrawn as he remained working for the Club.

'He was able to move to other clubs and he got results. He was able to carry on despite concerns. He was a phenomenal coach...'

109. Higgins was, according to records, highly successful in developing talented players who went on to play professional football in the Club and elsewhere. Higgins was still working for the Club as the Youth Development Officer in 1984, when STF5 was appointed by MAN1. STF5 was allegedly told by MAN1 that he might experience some *resistance 'from Higgins 'as he had applied for the job but had been turned down.'* Whilst MAN1 cannot recall this exact conversation, he confirms it would very likely have taken place as Higgins was a difficult individual and one who, in the view of MAN1, was full of his own self-importance. We understand from MAN1 that he did not directly manage Higgins and they had very little direct contact.
110. STF5 told us, he did in fact experience some resentment from Higgins, but it did not interfere to any significant degree with their working relationship. We heard of times where STF5 wanted two or three young players to play up with the First team, but Higgins was often resistant to them doing so, leading at times to tension between him and STF5, who reportedly told Higgins *'he would have to cut the cord'*. We were given to understand this referred to Higgins' reluctance to *'let go'* of some the boys whom he trained.
111. Minutes from a board meeting in early May 1985, refer to Higgins' having tendered his resignation on the expiry of his current contract at the end of June 1985. However, we were also told by another employee, STF8, that he was personally embroiled in a heated argument between Higgins and MAN1 sometime around June/July 1985. STF8 recalled a conversation in which Higgins told him that MAN1 *'has sacked me... he [MAN1] is off to [a different Club] and has sacked me'*. STF8 remembers being sent back and forth between the two men, who were in different rooms, relaying messages between them – he could not recall the content of these - with Higgins telling STF8 *'you've got to decide whose side you are on'*.
112. MAN1 told us he had no recollection of this specific incident but said there were growing concerns about Higgins' loyalty to the Club, which he seemed to be using to further his own commercial activities. MAN1 recalled it was for this reason he remembers sacking Higgins around the summer of 1985.

113. We were told by STF8 that he never knew the details of why MAN1 had 'sacked' Higgins, he only knew that just after the altercation, MAN1 did leave the Club to take up another post and Higgins orchestrated a group of parents to pressure the Club into maintaining his contract. It would appear that Higgins did not leave the Club and he continued to work under the next manager, MAN2, with his contract being renewed by the board in August 1985 for another three years. Board minutes from this time refer to '*reservations*' being expressed by BM3 about this course of action. We were told by BM3 that he could not recall why he would have made that remark but considered it likely that it related to Higgins using his contact with the Club to promote his own soccer school. This view was supported by MAN1 who said this was an ongoing issue with Higgins.
114. Higgins had continued to run his own training Centre at Slough, called the 'London Selection Centre'; boys were recruited from there by Higgins and invited to train at the Dell.⁴⁶ According to records, this arrangement was however causing consternation with the FA and the Football League in that it was believed to be contravening FA rules in place at the time.⁴⁷ According to board minutes held on 2.2.1989, it was agreed that a meeting would take place with representatives from these bodies and the '*Vice-chairman, the Secretary and the Youth Development Officer*' from the Club to discuss these concerns.
115. In early February, we heard from STF5 that when returning in a minibus from a match, he overheard boys asking who '*had gone to Higgins' house 'and if [Higgins] 'had put his hand down their pants.'*' The boys were apparently asked to explain these remarks, but they did not respond. STF5 recalled that his concerns increased significantly when he observed the distressed reaction of one of the boys who was later asked about the conversation, STF5 told us he knew that something was not right and the following morning, according to STF5, he and STF10 asked the boys about comments made on the minibus but no further information emerged.
116. STF5 shared what had they had overheard with MAN2 and STF5 told us that the response from MAN2 was that he would '*f... ing sack him*'. We understand that he was however persuaded by STF5 to report the matter to the Chairman so the board of directors could be

⁴⁶ *The Dell was the name of the stadium and training ground at Southampton Football Club.*

⁴⁷ *FA rules stated that only boys of 14+ living within the catchment area could, if already signed, train at professional football clubs.*

informed. STF5 remembered that MAN2 told him the following day that he had reported the allegation to the Chairman who had been asked for the matter to be left with them. However, they also indicated that someone should speak with Higgins, and we were told by STF5 that MAN2 indicated that the person best placed to do this was STF5 as he had overheard the remarks.

117. According to STF5, upon being told about what had been said, Higgins allegedly threatened to sue anyone who repeated the allegations and, '*stormed off*'. STF5 did not see Higgins again and learnt a week or so later that Higgins had left the Club. According to STF5, no-one at the Club spoke to himself or to his knowledge with the boys or anyone else about the allegations. There is no evidence that the Club took any action in relation to the reported concerns other than to accept Higgins' resignation.
118. The planned meeting with the representatives from the FA and the Football League took place on the 23.2.1989. Minutes from that meeting held by the Club show that a board member (BM4) and a member of staff (STF1) were present but the Youth Development Officer, i.e., Higgins, was not in attendance. Minutes from that meeting, clearly state that the representatives from the Football Association and the Football League were told that [Higgins] '*would be leaving the Club's employment at the end of the season*' but '*the Club was not prepared to reveal the reasons behind the termination of Mr Higgins' employment*'.⁴⁸
119. According to minutes from a board meeting which took place on 2.3.89, Higgins' resignation was confirmed. It appears to have been submitted a few days after the conversation with STF5. We were told that a letter was sent to Higgins accepting his resignation and including settlement terms. The Club have been unable to locate this letter, but board minutes suggest that Higgins was granted leave of absence from 10th April 1989 and his employment with the Club formally ended on 31.5.1989.
120. The April board minutes refer to BM4 advising the board of the need for a Code of Conduct and showed that he and MAN2 were, according to the minutes, tasked with progressing that action. The following month, minutes of a board meeting refer to a query from the Football League seeking information about Higgins' Soccer Academy activities. It would

⁴⁸ Minutes from that meeting were produced and circulated by STF1

appear from the minutes that the Club responded to this request. In board minutes from May 1989, there is an item under the heading *'Bob Higgins' Soccer Academy*, which states *'A circular letter has been received advising all Clubs that the Authorities are opposed to this organisation's activities.'*

121. It would seem, from the various conversations we have had with individuals, that at some point between early March and June 1989, police came to the Club to gather information about Higgins, following an allegation made by a family member in respect of their young son who attended the Bob Higgins Soccer Academy. STF5, the employee who had overheard the conversation on the minibus, told us he assumed the police were there because they had been contacted by the Club following the allegations made against Higgins in February. However, he was advised by the police that this was not so, and they had no knowledge of any report having been made by the Club. From what we can gather from slightly different accounts, it would appear that police subsequently spoke with a number of boys, and the information they gathered led to the police investigation, which culminated with Higgins being charged in January 1990 with sexual offences against six boys.
122. In June 1989, board minutes state that *'After serious consideration it was agreed that [BM4] and [BM6] bring to the attention of the police the Club's concern over stories circulating about incidents involving this former member of staff.'* This would imply that until that point, the information shared by STF5 and STF10 had not been passed onto the police. There is no record of any action being taken by Club officials.
123. In July 1989, Higgins was appointed as Youth Development Officer for the Malta Football Association (MFA).
124. In January 1990, Higgins was charged with a number of sexual offences against six boys, whilst in the employ of Southampton Football Club. Two members of the MFA apparently travelled to the UK, and informed Higgins, of his suspension from the MFA. During the period of his suspension, it would appear that Higgins continued to operate the Bob Higgins Soccer Academy in Southampton, and it appears from board minutes that MAN2 continue to liaise with Higgins in relation to players for whom he was an agent, and who continued to play under contract with the Club.

125. In January 1992, Higgins was acquitted at Southampton Crown Court on all six counts of sexual abuse. We understand there was no contact made before or after between the Club and any of the boys who had alleged abuse.
126. In January 1997, Higgins was featured on the Dispatches documentary Soccer's Foul Play in connection with allegations of sexual abuse made by a former Southampton youth player whose allegations had led to the trial in 1991/1992. Hampshire Constabulary and Hampshire Social Services took steps to prevent Higgins from being involved with children by sending a letter, seen by us, to schools and football Clubs in the area. Higgins continued however, to operate youth coaching sessions in the counties of Hampshire and Wiltshire through his own football business by then called 'Soccer Academy Limited'.
127. Following disclosures by Andy Woodward⁴⁹ in 2016 in relation to Barry Bennell, a number of individuals came forward and described the sexual abuse they alleged had been inflicted upon them by Higgins. Their accounts prompted a police investigation which culminated in a trial at Salisbury Crown Court in 2018, where Higgins faced fifty counts of sexual abuse. Higgins was found guilty of one count, not guilty of another and faced retrial on forty-eight other counts after the jury failed to reach verdicts.⁵⁰
128. Following a retrial at Bournemouth Crown Court on 29th May 2019, Higgins was found guilty of 45 charges of indecent assault against 23 teenage boys over a twenty-five-year period.

⁴⁹ *Andy Woodward was a professional footballer who disclosed he had been a victim of repeated child sexual abuse by Barry Bennell (later convicted as a paedophile) while a trainee at Crewe Alexandra in the 1980s*

⁵⁰ *Ex-football coach Bob Higgins found guilty of indecent assault | UK news | The Guardian*

Section 7

Findings and conclusions

129. It can be tempting, in reviewing non-recent child abuse, to locate these abuses in a 'past' social or historical context and make a clear distinction between '*that was then, when things were different*' and the present day. The implication of this view suggests some attitudes and behaviours are confined to the past and are no longer a problem in the present. Institutions and organisations subject to various reviews have, however, been rightly criticised for using this narrative to justify actions taken in the past and to therefore avoid accountability.⁵¹
130. The purpose of independent reviews is to learn lessons from the past and support improvements in how organisations, going forward, can better safeguard and protect children. This means it is not enough just to describe what happened and who did or did not do what, without seeking to also understand why decisions to act or not to act were taken at the time and what influenced the decisions that were taken. Only by exploring these issues and listening to the voices of adults who were abused, as children, can learning for the future be achieved.

Lines of enquiry

131. We identified eight lines of enquiry to provide a framework around which we could review what happened, and to explore as far as possible who knew what and when. We were acutely mindful of the dangers of hindsight bias but wanted to understand why certain actions and decisions were or were not taken at key points when Higgins worked for the Club. We also wanted to know how or if children involved with the Club today are better protected than when Higgins was an employee.

⁵¹ Alexis Jay (2014) *Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse*

132. The lines of enquiry are listed below and our comments and conclusions reached in relation to each of these areas, follow: -

- Higgins as an employee of the Club.
- The Club's response to concerns raised about Higgins' behaviour pre-1989.
- Rumours about Higgins.
- The first trial in 1991.
- The response of the Club to the allegations aired in the Dispatches programme in 1997.
- The Club's response to allegations which emerged in 2016.
- The retrial of Higgins in 2019.
- The Club's response to survivors between 2016 and 2021.

Higgins as an employee of the Club

133. It is 19 years since Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman died at the hands of a college caretaker, Ian Huntley. Alongside other lessons, their tragic deaths highlighted flaws in the ways in which adults were recruited and selected to work with children and young people. Our learning from what happened to Holly and Jessica, eventually led to the establishment of the current disclosure and barring service (DBS)⁵², and importantly, a recognition of the need for all organisations to have in place robust processes for ensuring that staff who work for them or on their behalf, in any capacity, are safe to do so.

134. Today, safe recruitment is well recognised as central to the safeguarding of children and young people^{53,54}. All organisations which employ staff or volunteers to work with children and young people have a duty to safeguard and promote their welfare and this is made clear in relevant government guidance.⁵⁵ This includes ensuring that organisations adopt safe recruitment and selection procedures which prevent unsuitable persons from gaining

⁵² Originally introduced as CRB, Criminal Records Bureau, these checks were first introduced in 2002

⁵³ Safer Recruitment, Child Protection in Sport Unit, Jan2021

⁵⁴ Safer Recruitment NSPCC March 2021

⁵⁵ Working Together to Safeguarding Children HM Government 2018

access to children. These expectations are also now made clear in various rules and safeguarding standards across the leagues within football.⁵⁶

135. When Higgins was first contracted by the Club in the mid-1970s, no such arrangements were in place, and there were no safeguarding standards or requirements set at that time by the Football Association. Even if the Club had undertaken the checks and references required today, it cannot be said with any certainty that any concerning information about Higgins would have come to light at that time. Higgins did not have a criminal record and was appointed, as was usual practice at the time, on the basis of his reputation and a commendation from the manager of his previous employer, Crystal Palace Football Club.
136. Like other sporting organisations, the Club wanted to attract individuals who would do their job well and enhance the reputation and status of the Club. The appointment of Higgins at that time and his subsequent performance in bringing through talented footballers no doubt later provided evidence to the board that the appointment was a good move and one which was clearly of benefit to the Club.
137. From conversations with some current and former members of staff, it appears that Higgins was given a first contract to work part-time sometime around 1975 and a second contract to work full-time as the Club's Youth Development Officer in early July 1980. The Club has been unable to locate any contracts or access to any detailed payroll or budget information relating to claims or expenses paid to Higgins during his time as a scout or as an employee. The Club have advised us that many documents from this period were lost or destroyed, and that this was not just those relating to Higgins. We were told by the Club that *'everything other than the statute books and some of the payment books were lost or destroyed when the Club moved its facilities from the Dell to St. Mary's site in 2001'*.
138. During conversations with the men who, as young boys, stayed at Higgins' house at different times over a period of several years, we tried to find out about what costs may

⁵⁶https://www.efl.com/siteassets/image/202021/general-news-images/safeguarding-stadards-guide_2021-22-final-version-1.pdf. <https://resources.premierleague.com/premierleague/document/2021/08/09/5f80604b-44fa-498e-9f91-c222611287f3/Season-2021-22-PL-Safeguarding-Standards.pdf>
<https://www.thefa.com/football-rules-governance/safeguarding>

have been incurred by Higgins for transporting, feeding, and accommodating the boys who stayed at his home. We were told that boys would often be collected at train or bus stations or from airports, by either Higgins, his father-in-law or a coach, and also that Higgins frequently used his car to transport boys to and from various sites. Not every individual who spoke with us could recall meals being provided, although some thought that when they stayed overnight at Higgins house, they would probably have had breakfast.

'He used to say to my parents he can stay at my house- it was all done on a trust basis.'

139. Speaking individually to BM3 and BM4, we were told there was an assumption that boys who needed overnight stays were accommodated in a local hotel, at a boarding house or stayed with families. Both individuals said they were not sure that they were ever told or knew that boys were staying at Higgins' house. They also could not recall ever having questioned, as a board, how much was being spent on accommodation for boys or recall any questions being raised at any time about Higgins' expenses. It would seem the issue of where boys stayed was not considered as a matter for the board and it was left to Higgins to organise any accommodation needed.

'I understand now some boys used to come up and stay with Bob Higgins. If I had known at the time, I wouldn't have thought anything of it. He had a wife and two children.'

'I'm not sure I knew that at the time' (boys staying at Bob Higgins' house).

'If I had known, it wouldn't have been seen as an issue.'⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Independent Review into Child Sexual Abuse in Football 1970-2005 Clive Sheldon QC, March 2021

'There was never any permission needed to stay at his house; it was all word of mouth.'

140. It is not unreasonable to assume that Higgins would have claimed for expenses if, having boys stay overnight, he would be out of pocket. We are also of the view that Higgins would have claimed mileage expenses for using his car to transport boys from place to place as often as he did. We heard from one individual that he could recall Higgins' father-in-law, who was often present at evening training sessions, reimbursing expenses in cash to some boys after training. These payments would have needed to be accounted for both in terms of obtaining cash to pay out and confirming payments had been made appropriately. It has however not been possible to ascertain what payments were made to boys as there are no receipts or evidence of expenses being paid or claimed back by Higgins.

'I remember him saying he'd sign off bed and breakfast expenses; we could claim travel plus expenses. A lot of the lads would be put up by Bob or local Southampton people.'

141. Club finances were a standing agenda item at board meetings, and it is fair to expect, that like any other organisation, the financial accounts were subject to careful scrutiny. We have been unable to determine the extent of any budget allocated for youth development activities or find any evidence of any expenses being paid for costs incurred whilst boys stayed with him. We were advised that accountability and oversight of any spending would have rested with the relevant manager in post at the time. There was however at least one accountant on the board during the 1970s and 1980s, who managed and had oversight of the Club's accounts and it would seem unlikely therefore that any untoward or unusual spending would not be queried. We were aware that some boys stayed with other families, and it is of course possible, that any costs incurred by Higgins could have been included in those figures.

142. Without access to any documentation, we simply do not know whether Higgins falsely claimed for hotel accommodation for boys who stayed overnight with him, whether he

claimed anything at all, or whether the nature of accommodation provided to meet the needs of these boys was simply never questioned at board level or detailed within any allocated budget. It is our view that it would have been unlikely that there was not some allocation of funds for this purpose. We were told by some individuals that they didn't recall being aware that boys ever stayed at Higgins house and yet by others that there was 'an awareness' of boys going to or staying at Higgins' home, which some former staff advised us they thought was rather unusual given his family circumstances.

'I just thought it was odd ...-if you're a married man and [all these] kids are coming around all the time.'

'At the time, a lot of things seemed normal which wouldn't be today. It was just a feeling that something wasn't right. No one said anything. You can't put your finger on it as no-one said anything. I never heard anything....'

'I went round his house -he always had kids back too.'

143. According to Sheldon⁵⁸, one board member told him that [Higgins] 'was the Youth Development Officer, players would come from other parts of the country sometimes just for a trial, literally for a 24-hour trial or something like that. So, staying overnight with the Youth Development Officer and his family, I mean, if one had known about it, it wouldn't have meant anything'.
144. This board member also told us that he could not recollect dates or anything in relation to that sort of arrangement, but said that even had he known, it would not have been regarded as unusual.

⁵⁸ Sheldon report paragraph 9.3.78.

145. Another board member who spoke with us said, that if they had been aware that boys stayed with Higgins, they would have been unlikely to question its appropriateness, as they were aware that Higgins lived with his wife and young son, so there was no reason to assume anything untoward was happening.

Conclusion 1: *There was no managerial oversight to ensure that accommodation provided to boys needing overnight stays was appropriate. There is no evidence that the Club authorised or refused to authorise arrangements made by Higgins for boys to stay at his house. Regardless of whether the Club permitted such arrangements or simply took no action in this regard, board members were neglectful not to have addressed the issue of boys' accommodation arrangements when they were staying away from home.*

The Club's response to concerns raised about Higgins' pre-1989

146. As previously mentioned, a Headteacher had raised concerns about Higgins in 1974.⁵⁹ This individual is reported to have told BM1 about inappropriate behaviour by Higgins and that he had falsified his credentials by claiming to have worked for Chelsea Football Club. It would appear from Sheldon's report⁶⁰ that the Headteacher had previously contacted some amateur Clubs in the area and '*got the impression that [Higgins] was not to be trusted with young boys.*'

147. According to the police reports seen by Sheldon, the response to the Headteacher by BM1, was to threaten legal action. We wondered if, having been a manager at the Club, this was an attempt by BM1 to protect the reputation of the Club, rather than to protect Higgins. There are however no records at the Club pertaining to this conversation, and BM1 sadly passed away in 2003. We have been unable to gather any more information about this allegation, other than that provided in Sheldon's report; the Club confirmed they have no other information available regarding this matter.

⁵⁹ Sheldon report paragraph 9.3.62.

⁶⁰ Sheldon report paragraph 9.3.62.5

148. It is our view, that even if the concerns about Higgins were dismissed outright, BM1 would have been unlikely to have kept this information to himself. The allegations would, in our view, have more likely than not have been discussed with other board members and/or the Chairman, as the Club employed Higgins. Although not board members at the time, no-one we spoke to could remember any reference ever being made to this incident and there are no records which indicate the matter was discussed at board level. This may have been the first-time questions had been raised about Higgins' behaviour and it is impossible to say for certain whether the implications of 'inappropriate' behaviour, at that time, would have been fully understood by BM1 or anyone else to whom he may have spoken to in the Club.
149. BM1 sat on the board of directors until 1993. We have not seen or heard any evidence to suggest the allegation made in 1974 was brought to the attention of the board fifteen years later in February 1989, when further allegations were made against Higgins.
150. There is certainly no evidence to suggest any further enquiries were made with the parent, other staff or with the Headteacher concerned. We cannot know if Higgins was spoken to about the allegations. Even, if he had been asked, he would, in our view like many perpetrators, have denied any wrongdoing and would have explained that concerns about his behaviour were misplaced, and his actions misunderstood. The fact that Higgins was able to abuse children for so long without challenge shows he was adept at explaining, rationalising, minimising, or simply denying any suggestions of him acting inappropriately.

Conclusion 2: *It is our view that it is more likely than not that BM1 would have spoken to someone on the board about Higgins' alleged behaviour. There are however no records to confirm this. Those consulted cannot recall any references ever being made to that incident even when allegations about Higgins were raised in February 1989.*

151. It is possible that a brief reference made in board minutes in April 1974, just after this allegation had been reported to BM1, to 'Higgins' cooperation' was in relation to this matter. We acknowledge this cannot be confirmed but with the absence of any other

information to the contrary, we consider that it is reasonable to consider this as one possible hypothesis.

152. Higgins was employed by the Club as a part-time coach and scout the following year, in 1975. We have seen no records to suggest any further concerns were raised, until April 1979 when board minutes indicate that MAN1 was given the task, by the board, of speaking with Higgins after a *'complaint had been received about this scout'*. We do not know the nature of that complaint and have found no record of any conversation which took place between MAN1 and Higgins and no later reference to it in minutes of board meetings. MAN1 has advised that he has no knowledge of this complaint nor its nature but has stressed that it would not have been related to any issues concerning abuse and emphasised that the only issues raised at the time related to Higgins' commercial activities.
153. The fact that this complaint was brought to the attention of the board and noted in minutes of a board meeting however suggests to us that it was considered serious and significant enough for it to be raised at a level higher than that of the Club manager. We were unable to find out any more about this complaint *'against the scout'* [Higgins'] and were particularly mindful of the dangers of hindsight bias in assigning meaning to information based on an assumption. However, we did query why, if the complaint had been in relation to Higgins' commercial or financial activities, the minutes did not refer to this in line with minutes from other board meetings where this matter had been raised.
154. We were left to wonder why the outcome of MAN1's discussion with Higgins was not discussed or reported at the next board meeting as would be expected.
155. We do know, however, that soon after MAN1 had been asked to speak with Higgins in April 1979, Higgins tendered his resignation which was accepted, and this was noted in minutes of an April board meeting which took place two weeks later. The reason for his resignation is not recorded but it was evident that the board discussed who would take over aspects of his role, once he had left, so his departure was accepted as a given.

Conclusion 3: *There is evidence that the board were aware of a complaint made against Higgins in 1979 relating to Higgins. We do not know the nature of the complaint, but it seems likely it was linked to Higgins' leaving the Club less than two weeks later. The Club did not keep a record of what happened or their response.*

156. We do not have any information about where Higgins was or where he was working between April 1979 and July 1980 and no-one, we spoke to had any recollection about any contact Higgins may have had with the Club during that time. It would appear however, that Higgins was then offered and accepted the post of full-time Youth Development Officer with the Club in July 1980. MAN1 told us the appointment was based purely on football merits and that there were no rumours or issues about Higgins which may have questioned the wisdom of offering him a position with the Club. MAN1 also pointed out that Higgins had worked for or on behalf of the Club for many years at this point.
157. We have carefully considered whether what was known about Higgins at that point should have prevented the Club from offering him a role working with children and young people. The complaint from the school had happened five years previously and the outcome of that and the 'complaint' in 1979, whilst may have been linked to Higgins' resignation at the time, were not progressed and had no repercussions, as far as we are aware, for him or for the Club. There is no evidence that any further concerns were raised about Higgins.
158. It could be argued that it is only with hindsight, that the appointment of Higgins' in 1980 could now be questioned. The responsibility to ensure that any employee or contracted individual was not only competent but also safe to work with children would, we were told have rested with MAN1. At that time, the need to properly vet and do background checks on individuals was not common practice and especially not in sporting organisations. MAN1 told us that Higgins, once appointed, reported to the Coaching Team which was led by an individual who has since passed away.
159. Much of the information available to the public about sexual abuse of children at that time often came only via the sensationalist headlines in the tabloid media. There was already

evidence that Higgins was a successful and effective coach, and he was as a result, offered another contact with the Club. Only those adults who were around at the time will know the extent to which they may have 'wondered' about Higgins' behaviours towards boys although we have been told it was never a concern.

Conclusion 4: *Although there were possibly two occasions, five years apart, when concerns had been raised about Higgin's behaviour, the absence of any recorded information makes it difficult to conclude that Higgins should not have been offered a second contract by the Club in 1980.*

160. It would appear that neither board members nor managers had, or were given, any information at the time to suggest a need to monitor Higgins' behaviours. We were, however, told by other individuals who spoke with us, those rumours about Higgins were circulating in 1980s.

Rumours about Higgins

161. Higgins, according to what we have read and have been told, was well known in the football world. We heard evidence that whilst he may not have always been well liked by some colleagues, he was well respected as a coach and had a proven record in developing the careers of players well known in football. This success did, of course, impact on the reputation of Southampton Football Club and he was clearly regarded as an asset to the Club.

162. We were told by a number of individuals that whilst the Club has no records which would indicate any complaints or allegations were made against Higgins after his reappointment until early 1989, rumours about Higgins were circulating widely in football circles in the 1980s. The issue of who heard the rumours and how far they extended is a vexed one. Board members and an ex-manager with whom we spoke were clear they never heard any rumours relating to Higgins' sexual interest in boys.

163. It is difficult to accept that over a period of several years, stories and rumours about Higgins were not shared with or reported to anyone in the Club. Difficult to prove and impossible to verify in terms of who knew what, it is nevertheless rather strange that stories about Higgins, seemingly widely circulated, never reached senior officials.

'If there were any rumours at all we didn't hear anything.'

164. During numerous conversations we were told that Higgins' skills as a coach and a 'star-maker' were well-known within the football industry. We are therefore of the view that even notwithstanding football talk, human tendencies would have ensured that discussions about his prowess and success as a football coach would more likely than not, have been accompanied by stories about his behaviours towards, and interest in boys. The tendency to gossip is, after all, a known aspect of human behaviour.⁶¹

165. The majority of the men who contributed to this review remembered how when they were boys, remarks were often made by coaches from other clubs such as 'Dodgy Bob' 'back stalls Bob', and comments such as 'has he been messing around with you then?' They also remembered remarks made by peers during matches and off-site, such as 'you one of Bob's boys?'; the sexual inferences contained in these comments being well understood.

166. The following references about Higgins relate to other clubs and have been extracted from some of our conversations with individuals and from media reports. They confirm to us that Higgins' behaviours were known about if not openly discussed:

- *'My son was playing for [CLUB1] and there were rumours then about Higgins, it was commonly known that Higgins had boys staying at his house.'*
- *'When I left and went to [CLUB2], Higgins tried to become my agent. My father spoke with the Youth Development Office there, who said no way would he deal with [Higgins.]'*
- *'In [CLUB3] lads would ask 'Are you one of Bob's boys?' How's Uncle Bob?'*

⁶¹Better Than Its Reputation? *Frontiers in Psychology* 2019

- *One well-known football manager during the 80's and 90's who was involved with many of the South's football Clubs is on record as having told journalists in interviews that there were always rumours about Higgins' behaviour and boys⁶².*
- *[CLUB4] 'I was asked in changing rooms if Bob had been playing around with me'.*
- *'I recall some parents said something to my Dad..., he was warned about [Higgins] by one Dad – not to trust [Higgins].'*

167. We have seen evidence that in October 1987, the FA sent a letter to all Clubs advising them not to have contact with Higgins and to contact them for more information. It has not been possible to clarify the purpose of sending out this letter, but it was circulated after the FA had intervened to support a boy's transfer to another club because he did not want to return to play for Southampton. We were told there were rumours about why the FA chose this course of action but there is nothing to evidence the board or manager sought to understand why the boy did not want to return to the Club. For the FA to have circulated a letter of this nature so widely would suggest serious concerns about Higgins but we were unable to confirm if these related to Higgins' behaviour towards boys.

168. Perpetrators whose professional roles bring them into contact with children can, without undue suspicion, use their position and authority with ease, to create opportunities to spend time with children and to shield themselves from suspicion, should any concerns be reported. As the youth coach, Higgins was able to create and maximise opportunities to be alone with boys and his position allowed him to deflect and discredit any concerns that were raised.

169. Despite the numerous and persistent stories that appear to have surrounded Higgins over many years about his behaviours towards and with boys, there is little to evidence that anyone queried or challenged him about his actions.

⁶² *ITV interview 23.5.2019: <https://www.itv.com/news/meridian/2019-05-23/harry-redknapp-there-were-always-rumours-about-bob-higgins>*

'It couldn't be the case no-one knew. The entertainment evenings happened at these nights.

The massages happened at these nights. Other coaches were there.

I was only abused by Bob Higgins, but people must have realised things weren't right.'

170. We were, however, frequently told about conversations held amongst the adults involved in football, which made reference to Higgins keeping the company of boys and questions being raised about the nature of those contacts. We heard that some parents even advised others to keep their son away from 'Bob'. Some former staff members confirmed their view that questions about the appropriateness and nature of Higgins' behaviour were 'out there'. We were also told by some former board members and an ex-manager that any conversations about Higgins' behaviour until 1989, related only to his loyalty and actions in terms of his commercial activities outside the Club.

'My gut instinct was that it was an open secret.'

'It seemed a lot more people were aware of it. It was definitely out there.'

'It was just a feeling something wasn't right; no one said anything. You can't put your finger on it as I never heard anything...bathing, sitting in the back of the car with lads, if you went round his house, he always had kids back there too; they sat at his feet.'

171. It is difficult to accept, despite the assertions of individuals to the contrary, that these rumours did not reach the ears of officials in the Club and were not, at some level discussed, if not by the Club, then between individuals. It is equally possible that if conversations did take place, then senior officials might have concluded that the stories circulating were based on nothing more than professional jealousies and were just

malicious gossip fuelled by other Clubs: it has been suggested to us that without any concrete evidence they would anyway, have been powerless to act.

172. It is important to place this thinking into context. The sexual abuse of children was still at that time not widely discussed or acknowledged and most allegations of child sexual abuse at that time, did not come to the attention of authorities until many years later. In the aftermath of the Jimmy Savile scandal, a national operation, called Operation Hydrant, was set up in 2014 to coordinate and respond to claims of non-recent child sexual abuse. The national lead for child protection and abuse investigations at the time, said *“We are now having to come to terms, as a society, and recognise and accept, that during the 1970s and 1980s in particular, there was widespread sexual abuse of children taking place”*,⁶³ [which was not recognised or reported.] Given what we have been told about Higgins and the power and control he exerted, it is not difficult to understand why boys would have struggled to know what to report and to whom.

‘There should have been someone else at the Club with just as much power whom we could speak to.’

‘For 2 years we never saw Higgins’ management; there was no dialogue.

It was almost like he had his own cult, his own team, his own squad.

There was never anyone who checked if we were ok. ‘

173. We are also mindful of Higgins’ skills and prowess as a football coach and the benefits reaped by the Club as a result of Higgins performance. Several individuals we spoke to questioned whether Higgins’ success on behalf of the Club was a factor in the Club seeming to turn *‘a blind eye’* to rumours about Higgins. We have found no evidence to suggest this was the case.

⁶³ *Guardian newspaper 5. Feb 2020*

174. One coach could however remember Higgins discussing what was said about him.

'I never saw anything- but there were always rumours. He [Higgins] said it was people making things up.'

'He went for walks with them; touching boys; the massages.

Other coaches knew what was going on.'

175. We have found no additional information in relation to the alleged sacking of Higgins by MAN1 in June 1985, just before he moved to another Club. However, the account given to us by one individual about that situation, as described in paragraph 111, suggests that MAN1, did have some concerns about Higgins. MAN1 told us that these concerns were not however about Higgins' behaviour towards boys and had he known or been told of any such behaviour, he would have *'got rid'*. The concerns he held, we were told, related to Higgins' soccer academies and his lack of loyalty to the Club.

176. It is difficult to understand how senior officials in the Club did not hear of rumours about Higgins, over a period of 15 years, when we have heard that so many other people had. However, the former board members and manager with whom we spoke repeatedly confirmed that Higgins was valued by the Club as a youth development officer and for his proven track record in football. They apparently had no concerns about him save for his loyalty, trust and commercial activities, which culminated in MAN1's efforts to sack him in 1985. It is therefore somewhat surprising that after MAN1 had left the Club, Higgins, was offered a new contract by the board.

177. In our view rumours very rarely remain hidden in any organisation. It is our experience that most senior managers in organisations would want to be informed about rumours or informal information so they could be kept well informed about the risks they were carrying at any one time.

Conclusion 5: *It is our view that, despite assertions to the contrary, the board and/or management must at some point have heard or been told about stories circulating about Higgins and if this was so, they failed to take any action to find out whether there could be any substance to the rumours. By not doing so, either intentionally or by default, the Club failed to put the safety and welfare of boys concerned first.*

178. There is much to evidence that knowledge and awareness about sexual abuse in the 1970s and 1980s was influenced by views that adults who abused children were paedophiles and their abusive behaviours would be easily identifiable; the notion of ‘dirty old men in raincoats’ were still evident then as was a mistaken belief held by some, that only homosexuals would sexually abuse young boys. Higgins’ persona did not fit with these descriptions; he was seen as a charismatic figure, married with a child and good at his job, which he was seen to do always in plain sight.
179. At the time, there was no child protection guidance provided to those working within football and no training on this aspect of working with children and young people. Although aware that children could be physically abused, the possibility of sexual abuse happening, we were told, sat outside the experience of the men sitting on the Club’s board, and the possibility that Higgins was a risk to children was therefore, we were told, never considered.
180. In February 1987, following the intervention of a South-East Regional Coach, we were told the Club agreed to release a young player from a two-year schoolboy contract which had been signed only four months earlier. This boy had been selected to attend Lilleshall,⁶⁴ the national sports centre, but according to information which we were given, the boy had told a FA Regional Coach that he did not want to go back to Southampton FC as he would have to stay at Higgins’ house, and this made him feel ‘uncomfortable’. The Sheldon report includes information from this coach who said his concern about this boy’s response to

⁶⁴ A national Sports Centre used at the time by the Football Association as a residential football training facility for talented boys selected from Clubs.

staying with Higgins in his home was such that they were '*formally raised with Southampton FC*' by the Chairman of the FA who had personally spoken to Higgins⁶⁵. According to the Sheldon report, the Chairman of the FA told Sheldon he could not recall a conversation with Higgins. Neither it would seem could any senior official in the Club recall any concerns being raised with them or that any questions were asked about the circumstances which led to a young player being transferred to another Club. Details of this are recorded in FA archives which confirm that the move as described did take place.⁶⁶

181. According to Sheldon, there is support for the coach's account in the evidence that the young player provided to the police when they first began to investigate allegations of abuse by Higgins in 2018.
182. We have been unable to find any information which would suggest that MAN2 or any board member sought to understand or address the reasons behind this young boy's sudden and unexpected move to another Club.

Conclusion 6: *There is no evidence that the Club took any action to explore or understand why a talented young player, selected by the FA to train at its national training ground, did not want to return to play for the Club, despite being signed only a few months earlier. Had they done so, it is possible that Higgins' abuse might have been detected earlier.*

183. A letter sent to MAN2 by the Chairman of the FA in October 1987 expressed concern about the Bob Higgins Soccer Academy and noted that there were '*a number of other matters which are causing us disquiet...*', although no further details are provided.
184. We have been unable to confirm if MAN2 shared this letter with the Chairman or any other member of the board, but we are of the view, that it would undoubtedly have been brought to their attention, given its author. There is a brief minute from the Club's Board meeting in October 1987, which states that the Chairman [of SFC] '*will meet the Youth*

⁶⁵ Sheldon report Paragraph 8.4.58

⁶⁶ Sheldon report Paragraph 8.4.63

Development Officer to discuss a further contract' but there are no references then or later to the letter from the Chairman of the FA.

185. It is our view, that the reluctance by the Chairman of the FA to specify these matters '*of disquiet*' were linked to reports about Higgins' inappropriate behaviour towards boys and possibly in relation to the transfer of the young boy to another Club. It is difficult to understand why else concerns would not be specified.
186. This suggests to us that Higgins' conduct was already being called into question but without any clear evidence, individuals were not prepared to voice concerns out loud or to commit these to paper. If the letter was indeed casting aspersions on a member of staff, an expected response from any employer would have been for this to be shared with the individual and then challenged, or at least for further information sought about the issues which were of concern. The Club took neither of these actions.

Conclusion 7: *The letter from the Chairman of the Football Association to the Club in October 1987, provided information which suggested there were questions being asked about Higgins' behaviours. It is our view that the board would have been made aware of this letter so knew there were some issues which were causing 'disquiet' but took no action, leaving boys vulnerable and Higgins free to continue abusing them.*

187. Some of the men spoke to us about their memories of how gifted and talented young players would suddenly stop playing for the Club. We were told that Higgins made it clear that it was he who had control over the boys' careers and when boys suddenly left, sometimes after being frequently disparaged by Higgins; this was to them clear evidence of Higgins' power and influence. This would have made it exceedingly difficult for any boy to come forward at that time to tell anyone what was happening to them.
188. We also heard from men, that as young adolescents, they were often confused about their relationship with Higgins, who could alternate between offering care and affection with rejection, humiliation and physical and emotional abuse. Many talked of not being scared of him but wanting, and needing, to be noticed by him; in reality they had been

purposefully groomed by him and exploited to such an extent that they craved his attention and affection and felt bereft when this was withdrawn.

'He kind of bullied you a bit as a player.

He was kind of really nice one minute then horrible emotionally and physically.'

189. We heard from former staff too that they noticed Higgins appeared to have his 'favourites.'

'He had his favourites – ones he perceived could go all the way.

He took them round to the houses of successful ones.... he showed them big houses and said this could be you. It was sycophantic, sickening to see.

They were taken round, given kit, tickets, made to feel they were the next big thing.'

190. It seems that boys, without exception were acutely aware of the influence and authority he exerted over their lives. All believed that speaking out would subject them to ridicule and embarrassment and jeopardise their football careers. We also heard of fears for the ramifications for their families, who had made such sacrifices. Their families and the boys at the time believed that if they spoke out these sacrifices would have been for nothing; for many it was just the way it was, and they had no sense of being able to speak up or say anything about it.

'If I had spoken out who would have believed me? - He was a brilliant coach.'

'The selection of schoolboys was mainly down to Higgins so his influence and power over the boys was immense.'

191. Higgins had immense leverage over these young people, all of whom were desperate to progress to professional football and who had been carefully and purposefully groomed by him and who did indeed hold the key to their futures.

The Club's response to concerns raised about Higgins' behaviour in 1989

192. Without any documentation and relying only on memory recall from individuals, we found there were some discrepancies in reports about what happened in February 1989. We have pieced together information presented to us and, based on what we believe to be a plausible and most likely account of what took place between February and June 1989, offer a view of what we believe is most likely to have happened.

193. According to information gathered from conversations and court transcripts, STF5's concern at overhearing the concerning comments by boys on the minibus on 13th February 1989⁶⁷ was shared with MAN2 who apparently informed the Chairman the following day. There is nothing to indicate a board meeting was held, so it is fair to assume that the information was passed to and discussed with BM3. A decision was taken that STF5 should speak to Higgins.

'I don't think we were ever told exactly what was said but we were told Bob behaved inappropriately in some way-my words. We had to make decision about this-the decision was that STF5 should speak to Bob.'

194. STF5's conversation with Higgins apparently resulted in him threatening to 'sue' if the allegations were repeated, before 'storming off'. STF5 recalls he reported back to MAN2 and was, from his recollection, told that the response from the Chairman, had been 'leave it with us, we'll report it to the police'. STF5 was not asked then or at any time later to

⁶⁷ This date can be confirmed as the fixture referred to in conversations has been verified.

speak with the Chairman or to provide any report relating to what had been said by any of the boys or by Higgins when he was confronted about his alleged behaviour.

195. It is important to reflect on the composition of the board during the Season 1988/1989. From board minutes, it would appear there were seven board members supported by a company secretary, STF1. BM3 was an accountant and the Chairman, and two other Board members were solicitors, one of whom, BM4 was the vice-chair and the youth development link for the board. This individual often worked alongside the local authority in child protection/child welfare legal matters relating to children and families. Also, a member of the board at the time was BM1, the same person who had dealt with the concerns about Higgins, 15 years previously.
196. We were provided with all relevant paperwork available from the Club but found no documentation or paperwork relating to the concerns highlighted by STF5. There is no evidence that there were any further inquiries made about what had been said. Board minutes suggest that only a few days after the conversation with STF5, Higgins tendered his resignation with effect from 31.5.1989. This was accepted by the Board and noted in the minutes of the March 1989 meeting. It was agreed that Higgins' would leave the Club at the end of April.
197. The comments that were overheard on the minibus amounted to allegations of sexual abuse by Higgins, an employee of the Club; they were serious allegations which had potentially significant consequences for the boys and also for the Club. However, according to a transcript of a conversation BM4 had with Sheldon, BM4 said he could not remember the detail of exactly what was shared with the board, but it was probably '*not something really serious otherwise [the board] would have had to have done something instantly*'.⁶⁸
198. There are no records of any discussions at board level about what had been said and individuals with whom we spoke could not recall any conversation although they acknowledge that they must have taken place. It is our view that board members would have been highly sensitive to any potential damage which could arise as a result of the

⁶⁸ Epiq transcript 28 January 2018. Page 24

allegations and they would, very likely, also have also considered the possible risk of any legal challenge by Higgins, alleging slander or libel. BM4 told us *'[Higgins] was the kind of person who would storm out; you had to be fairly careful. He was the kind of person who would sue anyone.'*

199. There is no evidence we have seen or heard which refers to the board making any links between what was being alleged by boys and the letter sent by the Chairman of the FA two years previously referring to *'matters of disquiet'*. Neither does there appear to have been any reference made by BM1, who was still a board member to allegations which had been made years previously.
200. It is possible the board may not have known how best to manage these developments, and they undoubtedly would have been reassured to know that Higgins was to leave their employ. Whatever discussions may have taken place, and it is our view that discussions did take place, it is clear from all accounts that there was no attempt to ensure that boys involved were supported or that their welfare and safety needs were addressed.
201. We have heard slightly different recollections from the ex-board members who spoke with us about their reaction upon hearing about the allegations against Higgins. BM3 recalled that STF5's substantial experience of working with young people meant he would not have raised concerns if they were not serious, whilst BM4 referred to *'a throwaway line'*⁶⁹ implying, as far as we can ascertain, that what they heard was not necessarily serious. We are satisfied that the board would, at the very least, have been made aware that the *'remarks 'overheard by STF5 related to some sort of sexual contact Higgins had with boys.*
202. BM4 suggested that at the time, he would have urged the board to be cautious and not to undertake any investigation themselves to avoid compromising any subsequent police investigation. However, as Sheldon points out in his report⁷⁰ it is difficult to accept such a rationale for not making enquiries as to what had happened on the basis that it would

⁶⁹ Court transcript and transcript of interview with Sheldon

⁷⁰ Sheldon Report Para 9.3.109

interfere with any police investigation. The Club was not aware at that time that the police were investigating Higgins.

203. It was however, not until June 1989, that the Board decided the police should be contacted, board minutes state that: '*[BM4 and [BM6] [should bring to the attention of the police, the Club's concern over stories circulating about incidents involving this former member of staff.]*' BM4 shared his thoughts with us that perhaps '*one or two more lads came forward with allegations after Higgins had left the Club*' and this possibly influenced the decision to then report the matter to the police.
204. There is however no evidence to suggest the matter was in fact reported as requested by the board. BM4 confirmed to us that he certainly made no contact with police and believed that BM6 would have been charged with that task as his firm were the Club's solicitors. BM4 recalled a conversation he had with BM6 who according to BM4 said he could not remember having contacted the police to make the said report. It has not been possible to verify this conversation as BM6 has since died.
205. It seems clear that the action to '*report the stories to police*' was never followed through but neither did the board seek to ensure that this action had been completed by BM4 and BM6. There are no references in board minutes to the police investigations which began in June 1989 and although some individuals believe that police became involved as a result of a Club report, we heard evidence that this was not the case. Board minutes make no further reference to Higgins and the allegations that were made. It is almost as if with Higgins having left their employment, the issue of what had been alleged became immaterial, despite the fact that boys who made the allegation were still playing for and involved with the Club.
206. Following concerns raised by the FA and the FL, about 'Bob Higgins Soccer Academy'⁷¹ a meeting had already been set up for 23 February 1989, and this meeting went ahead, as planned, with two board members BM4 and STF1 in attendance, but without Higgins.

⁷¹ This was the 'Bob Higgins Soccer Academy' which Higgins set up as his own business, but which operated outside of FA and FL rules and regulations.

207. It is clear from minutes seen by us that the Club representatives indicated at that meeting that Higgins' would *'be leaving the Club at the end of the season'*, but the notes also state that the *'Club was not prepared to reveal the reasons behind the termination of Mr Higgins' employment'*. It is our view, that had Higgins' employment been terminated purely because of a failure to adhere to FA and FL rules, this would have been clearly stated as it would have been in the interests of the Club to do so, allowing them to demonstrate their compliance with regulations. The notes of the meeting imply however, there was another reason for Higgins leaving the Club which BM4 and STF1 were not prepared to discuss or state on record.
208. This left us to conclude that between receiving information about what happened on the minibus on 13.2.1989 and the meeting with the FA and FL on 23.2.1989, board members were aware of concerns about Higgins' behaviours and a decision had been take not to share the reason for Higgins leaving the Club. Whether Higgins was asked to leave his employ, resigned himself or it was a mutually agreed decision, we do not know. The individuals who spoke with us insist they cannot remember, not only what they did after the allegation was brought to their attention, but also any detail of the allegation itself. This, we find is surprising even with the passing of time, given that the allegation related to possible sexual abuse of boys by an employee, and it might reasonably be expected that the information shared about Higgins would have been particularly memorable.
209. We have struggled to understand why there was no decision to report the matter at that time to the police; the information shared by STF5 was sufficiently serious to warrant immediate police contact. BM4 worked as a solicitor specialising in work with children and families and in our view, it is not unreasonable to expect he would have been aware of the seriousness of the allegation.
210. BM4 told us, that from his recollection, there was no need to report the matter to the police as they were already involved but this does not fit with information contained in board minutes or with that which has been provided by others who contributed to the review. Whilst we acknowledge the difficulty in trying to accurately recall events and decisions which took place three decades previously, and there is a lack of clarity about the

board's response to the allegations made against Higgins, there is no evidence that any report was ever made to the police. By not reporting to the authorities what they had been told, the Club failed to act responsibly in the interests of the children to whom they owed a duty of care. There is also no evidence to indicate that the board sought to clarify with STF5 what the boys had said, took steps to ensure the boys were well supported or made any arrangements to speak with parents.

Conclusion 8: *When information about Higgins' alleged sexual abuse of boys was brought to their attention in 1989, the board did not immediately report to the police that a crime may have been committed by a member of their staff; they took 4 months before noting that this action should be taken but failed to ensure that BM4 and BM6 had made contact with Police as they had been asked to do.*

211. According to some individuals we spoke to, police entered the Club a 'few weeks/a couple of months' after the allegations were made in February 1989. Whilst there are varying references to this time period, it seems likely, from what we can piece together that police came to the Club sometime between March and early June 1989. There are however no police records which can verify this, a point discussed later in this report.
212. STF5 told us that on speaking to the police when they arrived at the Club, he learnt that they were making enquiries about Higgins in connection to a different complaint against him, one which had been reported to police by a parent whose son who had attended Higgins' Soccer Academy; they were visiting the Club because they knew that Higgins was employed there. STF5, told us the police said they knew nothing of the allegations that had been made against Higgins and had no knowledge of any report having been made by the Club. By this point Higgins' had already left his employment with the Club.
213. After speaking to STF5, it appears that police then spoke with a number of boys including one of the boys who told them about being sexually abused by Higgins. The information gathered by police at that time led to the investigation which culminated in charges being made against Higgins in January 1990.

'No one at the Club came back to us and said anything about it. They had two solicitors on the board, but no help or advice was offered before the case or after the case.'

214. Having considered all the information available to us, we would conclude on the balance of probabilities, that the Club waited until Higgins' contract had formally ended before making a decision to contact the police. Board members had clearly discussed concerns about Higgins, this is evident from the way the note in the board minutes has been written -.... *'After serious consideration'* - but where and when this discussion took place is unclear, there is certainly no record available that we have seen.
215. It is inconceivable, in our view, that there would not have been discussions at board level about the implications for the Club in the light of these developments. However, we were told by board members who contributed to the review, that they could not recall any such discussions taking place and neither could they remember being interviewed by police at any point, which strengthens the view that no police reports by the Club were ever made.
216. We were told by STF5 that he was not asked at any time to meet with board members to provide an account of his conversations with police officers nor did anyone at the Club discuss with him, how as the youth team manager, he might ensure the boys concerned were supported and were safe.
217. We can find no evidence that the board made any further enquiries about what may have happened; no further information was sought from the boys in question, the individuals who had spoken to the boys were never asked to present their findings verbally or through a written report to the board or to the Chairman. This, despite the fact that information was being passed to the board via MAN2, who had not spoken to the boys on this matter and who was not present when Higgins was confronted by the STF5.
218. It is our view, based on the timing of his departure and the accounts of what happened that have been shared with us, that Higgins' leaving the Club was directly related to the allegations made about his behaviour. We have, however, been unable to confirm whether

he left his employment of his own accord, or his contract was purposefully terminated by the Club.

'They didn't speak to one former player. There should have been conversations with former players. Not enough effort was put in to considering the issues. "

219. From speaking to a number of men, who were young boys at the Club around this time, none could recall any conversations or meetings which sought to explain Higgins' seemingly sudden disappearance. We were told by some that they had heard Higgins' had been *'fiddling his expenses'* but none can recall being given any explanation. The fact that STF5 was still around apparently provided some continuity and we had a sense that training and matches carried on much as usual, with the Club later employing a Community Officer to take over some of Higgins' responsibilities.

Conclusion 9 *The Club took no action to explain to boys why their coach had suddenly left the Club or to communicate with them about what was happening after their initial disclosures. They were offered no support and were left to make sense for themselves of all that happened. The Club failed in its duty of care towards these boys.*

220. A decision was taken by the board in September 1989 to cancel the Sotonia Cup competition for 1990, despite its apparent success in previous years. Board minutes indicate that the tournament was to be relaunched in 1991 with a greater emphasis on community involvement.

221. At the time, the Club used the voluntary services of a chaplain, commissioned on the advice of STF5 to provide boys with pastoral and confidential support. Due to ill-health, this individual was unable to meet with us and we understand no records were kept of any individual sessions which may have been held with boys around this time.

222. It was not until the second trial in 2018 that the boys who had made statements to the police about Higgins sometime between March and June 1989 became aware that each of

them had spoken out and were to be witnesses at the 1991 trial. No-one at the Club appears to have discussed with the boys either individually or together why Higgins had left. We formed the view that the allegations were almost dealt with as though they were a matter which concerned only the Police, the boys and Higgins, and not the Club.

223. We were told by one of the men who was a boy at the Club at the time that he had advised the Club that the date of Higgins' trial had been fixed for early 1990 and he had queried with MAN2 whether he should continue with the Club or request a transfer. It would seem that within a matter of days he was informed that the Club had accepted this as a transfer request, he was paid a sum of money and transferred to another Club. We understand that transfer arrangements rarely happen in such haste, but this former young player believed, and still believes that his move was accelerated by the Club, because of the forthcoming court case. This individual recalled that no approach was made to him to enquire about his welfare nor as far he was aware, to any of the other boys on the minibus that day.
224. We considered whether at that time, in the early part of 1989, it would have been expected that a football board of directors and/or a football manager of a Club with a youth team would have understood the seriousness of what had been alleged or understood the need to ensure the boys were well supported. We were especially mindful of the cultural myths prevalent at that time and the social attitudes and stereotypes about men and masculinity which may well have prevented those present understanding that boys as well as girls could also be sexually abused.
225. However even without any child protection procedures in place, when STF5 and STF1 heard what had happened, their response was swift; the allegation was reported to the Club Manager who immediately reported it to the board, demonstrating to us that what the boys alleged to have happened was taken seriously by those individuals. It is highly likely that even if the adults sitting on the board knew little about the sexual abuse of children, they were alerted to information which suggested that an employee had possibly sexually assaulted a child or children to whom they owed a duty of care.

226. We could not find any evidence that the Club formally advised the FA about the allegations made against Higgins and none of the individuals we spoke to can recall doing so on behalf of the Club. We understand that clubs were not required to report any allegation of abuse or concern to the FA until the late 1990s and there was no guidance or advice available at the time to help clubs manage allegations of abuse by adults in their employ. The FA knew about Higgins, as soon as he had been charged in January 1990, but they were also clearly aware of circulating stories and rumours about Higgins long before he was charged as can be evidenced by the Chairman's remarks in his 1987 letter where he referred to '*matters of disquiet*', which in our view, very likely referred to Higgins sexual behaviours towards boys.
227. We had sight of a letter dated 27 April 1989 sent by the secretary of the Football League Limited written also on behalf of the FA and the English Football League (EFL) to '*Managers of All Clubs*'. The letter was apparently circulated following an invitation by Bob Higgins for Clubs to become involved in his academy. Entitled '*The Bob Higgins Soccer Academy*', the letter states [we] are '*opposed to the activities of this organisation and asks that 'all Clubs which might be thinking of becoming involved to give this office the opportunity of appraising them of the situation before taking any steps in this direction.'*' It is our view that had this letter been circulated in response to concerns that Higgins' Football Soccer Academy was not operating in line with FA and FL rules, it would have said so. However, the wording of the letter, implies to us something else, something we believe they were unwilling to put down on paper, possibly for fear of any litigation by Higgins.
228. It seems more likely than not that this communication was in response to the circumstances which led to Higgins's parting company with Southampton Football Club. We have no information which suggests that the allegations surrounding Higgins at that time were shared with the FA, the FL or the EFL but from our point of view, this letter is a strong indication that worries about Higgins' were clearly circulating a matter of weeks after comments made on the minibus came to light.
229. According to board minutes from April 1989, BM4 proposed that the Club should produce a Code of Conduct and would progress this with the manager. The Club maintained some contact with Higgins as he remained the agent for some players who remained on contract

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with the Club. In February 1990, minutes from the board meeting state that '*[BM4] reported on discussions he has had with [STF5]. It is apparent that the influence of the former Development Officer, Mr Higgins, is still causing difficulties.* The notes do not specify what these difficulties were.

230. The next reference to Higgins, after that date is found in board meetings minutes of March 1990 indicating that he was to appear in court in April 1991. Later in 1990, the Board minutes continue to reflect that there were '*problems [still] being experienced by (STF5) as a result of the 'Higgins' situation*'.

The first trial in 1991

231. Higgins was charged in January 1990 of two accounts of indecent assault⁷² relating to two players; three weeks later he was charged with four further accounts of indecent assault in relation to four other players. He appeared before a Magistrates Court in June 1990 where he pleaded not guilty to all charges. We understand that no-one from Southampton Football Club attended this or any other hearings.
232. According to information contained in Magistrate's ledgers⁷³, it would appear the prosecution intended to proceed against Higgins on a single case of indictment containing the charges relating to the six players. This meant that all six youths would have been asked to give evidence against Higgins in the same trial. However, the presiding Judge decided that the indictment should be split, so only the first two charges would be heard at a first trial. Consequently, in June 1991, Higgins appeared in court on only two counts of indecent assault against two boys in the Club. The Jury returned a not guilty verdict to the first count which related to one young person, and the trial judge directed the Jury to enter a not guilty verdict with respect to the other charge. The Judge, it appears then ordered

⁷² Under the Sexual Offences Act 2003, indecent assault is a term used to cover a range of sexual offences or sexual assault, including sexual activity with a person who is underage. A conviction for indecent assault relies on whether a reasonable person would believe an activity to be indecent, even if the defendant does not accept the activity to be indecent.

⁷³ This information was provided to us by, Hampshire Constabulary, who were seeking information about the decisions and outcome of this trial.

that the remaining charges relating to the four other young people should be considered separately, i.e., there should be 4 separate trials. It has not been possible to establish what prompted this decision or the rationale for it.

233. At the January 1992 hearing the prosecution at Southampton Crown Court apparently offered no evidence on any of the offences alleged to have taken place between January 1985 and January 1989 and not guilty verdicts were recorded. We have assumed that a case management decision must have been taken by the prosecution prior to the court hearing but in the absence of any paperwork we have been unable to determine why this was the case. This could however answer the question raised by some men as to why the prosecuting barrister, according to what we have been told, was 'changed' on the morning of the hearing; it is possible this may have been because there was no intention to offer any evidence.
234. The sexual abuse described by those six young players is consistent with the abuse later described in the 2019 trial which led to Higgins' conviction. It is impossible, to imagine what it must have felt like for the young boys at the time having disclosed their abuse to learn that the systems aimed at protecting them did not work and that Higgins would be left to continue his abuse for another 20 years.
235. In common law there are two separate standards of proof - proof '*beyond reasonable doubt*' and proof based on the '*balance of probabilities*.' The former is the standard adopted while dealing with criminal cases, essentially, a judge and jurors have to be convinced that there is '*no doubt*' that something is true, whilst the latter means that what is alleged is '*more likely than not to have happened*'. This explains how even when people are acquitted in a court of law, they can still lose their jobs because their employer works on a lesser burden of proof.
236. Evidence often involves one person's word against another's and can therefore be inconclusive and conflicting, and easy to cast doubt upon. While it is accepted societal attitudes have changed since over the last two decade, giving more victims the confidence to come forward, there remains a view by some that "the scales of justice" still remain

heavily balanced in favour of perpetrators. According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), in the year ending 2019 around one in five (21%) child abuse-flagged prosecutions were unsuccessful in securing a conviction with 44% of cases acquitted after trial. An acquittal does not necessarily mean that the crime did not happen, only that it could not be proved that the defendant was guilty of the crime. The complexity of investigating child abuse offences, which are particularly sensitive in nature and occurred a long time in the past, make these criminal processes particularly difficult.⁷⁴

237. As with Higgins, even if the slightest reasonable doubt as to the guilt of the accused is created in the mind of the Court, defendants are given the benefit of the doubt and are found not guilty. As a clever and manipulative abuser, who at all three trials produced love letters from *'infatuated young boys'* and had supporting evidence from a *'loving family'*, Higgins worked hard to create doubt in the minds of the judge and jury.
238. There were some who queried with us, whether the decisions and actions taken during the trial in 1991 were influenced by factors outside of the legal process. We have been unable to find evidence to support this assertion but are aware that for some this view prevails and questions continue to be asked about why certain decisions were taken and why importantly, there are no papers available from any agency pertaining to the trial of Higgins in 1990. Although outside the remit of this review, we felt this issue was important and should be acknowledged.
239. We sought the help of, Hampshire Constabulary, to see if any key documents and court transcripts could be accessed to help us understand the decisions that were taken. However, no helpful records could be found.
240. Information was accessed from Magistrates Court ledgers which only shows that on March 9, 1990, Higgins appeared in court charged with six indecent assault offences and he was remanded on unconditional bail, a further three times before being acquitted in June 1991

⁷⁴ ONS: *Child abuse and the criminal justice system, England and Wales: Year ending March 2019.*

on two accounts and acquitted in relation to 4 other charges in January 1992. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) confirmed to Hampshire Constabulary that at that time all records were retained for only 7 years and no records were kept, especially if the prosecution, like that relating to Higgins, ended in acquittal. No police records could be found, which given the length of time since the court case was said to be not unusual.

241. In April 2006, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) released Management of Police Information (MoPI) guidance which defined the lawful basis upon which police information could be collected and used. The guidance document set out, for the first time, detailed processes for the collection, recording, sharing, review, retention and disposal of information that supports the business of policing and compliance with the law. MoPI guidance now makes clear that any records which relate to child sexual abuse must be retained for 100 years and reviewed every ten⁷⁵; No such practice, of course, applied at that time Higgins was being investigated.

Conclusion 10: *We have found no evidence to suggest there was a deliberate ploy by any agency or individual to purposefully destroy evidence relating to the investigation and/or the prosecution of Higgins between 1990 and 1992.*

242. We would have expected, given that Higgins was charged with offences which related to the time he was employed by the Club, that there would have been reference in board meetings to the outcome of his trial. None could be found.

243. It is our view, mentioned previously, that Higgins' behaviour was seen by the Club as a matter for police and Courts and not an issue about which they needed to be concerned.

The response of the Club to the allegations aired in the Dispatches programme in 1997

244. After the acquittals in 1992 there was no further attention given to abuse by Higgins. He remained working in various football clubs coaching young players. It was not until January

⁷⁵ National Guidance on the minimum standards for the Retention and Disposal of Police Records (2016)

1997, that concerns about his behaviour again emerged when Channel 4 broadcast a programme called 'Soccer's Foul Play'⁷⁶ about abuse in football. The Dispatches documentary explored the handling of abuse allegations within the sporting context, particularly in football and examined what the authorities and particularly the FA, were doing to protect children.

245. The programme claimed that child abusers were able to secure positions as coaches for school-age teams with little risk of discovery. It named Bennell as one such paedophile and referred to the fact that two years earlier, Bennell had been sentenced in the United States to his first jail term for child sexual offences and deported back to the UK where he was charged with further sexual offences.
246. Allegations against Higgins were also aired during the programme with references to soap water massages which he had given to boys when they were naked and baptising boys in his bath at home. According to press reports⁷⁷, Higgins apparently sent a one-and-a-half-page response to Dispatches in which he denied all allegations of abuse. He said he baptised players at their request and that they wore football shorts at all times.⁷⁸ By 1997, Higgins was working for a non-league club.
247. We cannot ascertain the extent of media coverage after the programme was aired and surprisingly there was no public outcry that the men identified in the programme could still have access to children. It is likely however that the content of the programme would nevertheless have generated interest and concern in football circles. After the programme both Hampshire and Southampton children's services consulted police and wrote to local youth organisations expressing concern about Higgins and urging parents to '*make an informed choice about his contact with your child/ren*'. This was a highly significant move taken by statutory authorities and highlighted the level of concern about Higgins.

⁷⁶ [Dispatches - Soccer's Foul Play - YouTube](#)

⁷⁷ Guardian newspaper Dec 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2016/dec/05/football-league-warned-all-its-clubs-about-bob-higgins-in-1989>

⁷⁸ *ibid*

248. We were curious to know what conversations would have been had at this point by the board of directors and staff who knew Higgins but have found no evidence of any reference to Higgins in any board meeting minutes. By then Higgins had been employed elsewhere for almost eight years. However, it would seem reasonable to think that the board would have reflected on the actions of their former employee and considered whether any allegations or complaints might subsequently emerge following the programme. We have neither seen nor heard any evidence which suggest any such discussions took place then or even later when letters were circulated about Higgins by the FA, Hampshire Constabulary and children's services. If any discussions did take place, and none of the board members or staff who contributed to the review can recall being party to any such discussions, they were not recorded.
249. It was around this time, that football Academies were established, and clubs were required to demonstrate that they had child protection policies in place before the FA would issue a club with a licence to operate. Almost three years later, due process appears to have been followed when the Club suspended a member of staff charged with sex offences against children when the individual had worked in a non-football setting. The individual was found not guilty but did not return to work for the Club.
250. In 2007, the FA advised that clubs should ensure that Academies had a safeguarding officer in post. However, it was not until 2012, that a part-time safeguarding officer was appointed to the Club.

The Club's response to allegations which emerged in 2016

251. Further developments took place in November 2016, when Andy Woodward, an ex-football player, waived his right to anonymity and spoke openly about having been sexually abused by the youth coach, Bennell. In doing so, Andy Woodward helped to expose widespread child abuse throughout the sport as hundreds of other victims followed him in coming forward and talked publicly about being abused by former coaches and scouts in the 1970s,

1980s and 1990s. This led to a surge of further allegations, as well as allegations that some clubs had covered up allegations which had previously made.

252. In October 2016, almost nineteen years after the Dispatches programme had first been aired, and almost 28 years after boys in the Club had alleged abuse by Higgins, the Club was contacted by police as part of their ongoing investigations and asked for information and almost about Higgins.

The second trial of Higgins in 2019

253. Higgins, was brought to trial in May 2018, accused of 50 counts of indecent assault against 24 complainants between 1971 and 1996. Higgins pleaded not guilty on all accounts.

254. Court transcripts show that the jury heard that the victims held "*unfounded shame*" and were not able to disclose what happened to them until Andy Woodward disclosed assaults carried out on him by Barry Bennell. Information was presented to the jury that Higgins played '*love songs*' while driving players around in his car and encouraged boys to write love letters and display affection towards him.

255. After an eight-week trial in Salisbury Crown Court, the jury found Higgins guilty of one count of indecent assault and not guilty of another, but they failed to reach verdicts on the remaining 48 charges. This meant Higgins had to face a retrial and he was released on conditional bail.

256. A juror's task is never easy but in trials which focus on the sexual abuse of children, that task is even more difficult, given the inherent privacy and secrecy of the crime, which often lacks physical evidence and corroborating witnesses. In these cases, jurors must base their decisions largely on the testimony of alleged victims. In Higgins' second trial, the jury was unable to reach a verdict in which 10 or more jurors agreed and this led to a retrial which took place in Bournemouth Crown Court.

The retrial of Higgins in 2019

257. In May 2019, Higgins, then aged 66, faced a retrial at Bournemouth Crown Court. He was found guilty of 45 counts of indecent assault between 1971 and 1996 and not guilty of five counts of indecent assault. The jury was unable to reach a verdict on the final count. Some of those consulted referred back to the earlier trial and how at that time the investigation had not been widened to consider whether other boys than those who spoke up on the minibus had been affected. Others spoke about the impact the first trial would have had on potential witnesses who may not have come forward because they had heard about the outcome of the former trial.
258. What emerged from the proceedings in 2019 is that more schoolboy players, some as young as 11, came forward to say they were abused by Higgins. We were told that police believed and continue to believe there were many more victims who did not or could not come forward.
259. Higgins was sentenced to imprisonment for twenty-four years and three months. As well as the prison sentence, Higgins was ordered to sign the sex offenders' register and was also banned from working with children and made subject to a supervision order on his release.

'In 1988/89 the police just went to young players who were at the Academy and didn't widen the investigation to previous cohorts.'

'The answer to why people didn't come forward might have been because they heard about (a former boy who spoke out) in 1991. It was a travesty.'

Conclusion 11 *It is our view that the board of directors failed to take responsibility and minimised and disregarded significant concerns about Higgins and did not take action when they should have done. The Club persistently failed in exercising a duty of care to boys and this left them and other boys vulnerable to ongoing abuse by Higgins which impacted upon their lives as children and the adults they became.*

The Club's response to survivors between 2016 and 2021

260. After the conclusion of the trial, Southampton Football Club offered an *'unreserved apology'* to the former children abused by Higgins. The Club explained that they had been advised by the police not to contact victims or witnesses until after Higgins had been sentenced so a fair trial could be assured.

261. It is clear that the Club's actions and responses today still make a huge difference to those who have been affected. There are mixed responses in this regard, and it is important the Club is aware of these. The Club's lack of proactive, individual contact with victims post the trial has been the cause of anger and frustration for some and their views are shared here:

'I got annoyed a bit by their lack of response. I know they said they were waiting for the verdict. I got in touch and said I thought they could have done something a bit more personal than a general statement.'

'A couple of days before Higgins got sentenced the Club issued its statement- that meant a huge amount to me.'

*'No-one blamed the Club, but it had a responsibility, a moral responsibility.
The moral responsibility bothers everyone more.'*

*'I'm interested in what the Club will say after the review.
They've never been in contact; not even a letter of apology.'*

262. The Club has advised us that they have issued a number of letters of apology to victims who have made contact with them and has met with a number of the men abused by

Higgins who chose to request a meeting. There are however still a significant number of men with whom the Club has had no contact.

263. Many football clubs in the UK have liability insurance that covers them for claims including those which emerge from victims of child sex abuse, which has resulted in recognition of damages and some financial compensation to some of those who were affected. As an increasing number of claims are being made in line with disclosures of abuse, we understand from various media reports⁷⁹ that insurers have pledged to improve the compensation process. The Association of British Insurers (ABI) said: *“Recent revelations regarding abuse in football are very distressing and at the heart of it are the victims and survivors who have been abused.... the industry has submitted suggestions about how the civil justice compensation system could be improved”*.

264. Nevertheless, we heard from some men whose experience of seeking redress through compensation claims both in terms of their own legal representatives and the response of the insurer’s solicitors has been particularly stressful and for some, demeaning. Views have been expressed to us that the needs and best interests of some individuals have not been well served through the legal processes related to claims. This is also an issue, which is beyond the remit of this review, but one which is worthy of note and should be tackled by the relevant bodies, which should include the Solicitors Regulation Authority.

⁷⁹ *Guardian December 2016.*

Section 8

Safeguarding arrangements in Southampton Football Club in 2021.

265. In recent years Barnardo's have been engaged by the Premier League to conduct short notice audits of the safeguarding arrangements in place within each of its Member Clubs and their Charitable Community Organisations ('CCOs'). In this capacity Barnardo's have been able to undertake an audit of SFC's current safeguarding arrangements. The audit in Season 2020/21 has been carried out by a separate team of auditors and as a review team we have had sight of the audit outcome.
266. In addition to this we have consulted the Head of Safeguarding & Governance ('HOS') who has provided the information detailed in the section below regarding current safeguarding arrangements and more recent developments since her appointment last year. The HOS is managed by the Club's Chief Legal and Risk Officer who actively takes on the role of the Club's senior safeguarding lead ('SSL') and who has verified the information shared below.
267. The Club now has a fully functioning Safeguarding Board, which meets regularly and includes three independent representatives from the police, adult services, LADO⁸⁰, Southampton Safeguarding Partnership and the Premier League. The Safeguarding Board has clear terms of reference which outline its functions and responsibilities
268. A mental health and wellbeing action group has been established, Club wide. This includes independent representation including the CEO from Sporting Chance and Solent NHS Partnership Trust. There is evidence that the Club is committed through the engagement of key partners on these groups to ensure transparent governance.
269. There is evidence that there is a strong safeguarding infrastructure in place which is supported by a wider network of safeguarding champions developed across all areas of the

⁸⁰ The LADO provides management and oversight of individual cases of allegations of abuse made against those who work with children. Their role is to give advice and guidance to employers and voluntary organisations; liaise with the police and other agencies and monitor the progress of cases to ensure that they are dealt with as quickly as possible consistent with a thorough and fair process.

Club. As a review team we were advised that plans are already underway to look at the learning from this review and to cascade this across the Club.

270. Safer recruitment processes are in place and the Club advised it will be undertaking 'mini-audits' itself to ensure full implementation of the processes. A DBS risk panel is also in place so that decision making regarding DBS outcomes is not made by any one individual alone.
271. The Club have been considering some of the learnings from Sheldon and have informed us they are keen to enable both children and parents to speak out about any concerns however low level they might seem when exiting the Club. With this in mind they have established a system for undertaking anonymous surveys to ask players and parents for their views and also explore whether the Club could do anything better still. The HOS commented on learning from the historic abuse by Higgins and stated that '*players stopped playing -but no one asked why.*' The use of anonymous surveys is intended to be an additional mechanism to allow all relevant stakeholders to speak up about any worries so that the context can be looked in to whenever a concern arises. The management team will be involved across the process so that they can collectively review feedback received. This serves as another way for the Club to proactively gather feedback relating to the safety of young players and sits alongside the Club's whistleblowing/'*Speak Up*' channels.
272. Safeguarding leads are now involved in multi-disciplinary team meetings and work closely with player care, performance psychology and medical staff. When asked about visibility of safeguarding personnel at various activities we were told that there is a high level of visibility across everything and that aim of the Club's Safeguarding strategy was to ensure that '*the safeguarding team's DNA was across everything.*'
273. The HOS advised us that she has ensured that a safeguarding session with all scholars has been held with herself and one of the safeguarding lead managers from outside of the Academy and with no other staff present. It was clear that the HOS fully understands the importance of ensuring her own visibility, along with easy accessibility to herself as well as the importance of developing relationships to enable people to speak up if the need arises.
274. The Club's safeguarding strategy, safeguarding policy, and a mental health strategy is on the Club's website and can be accessed by anyone. Details about the Barnardo's review has

also been included on the together with contact details should anyone which to contact the Club or the review team.

275. A most positive development which we heard about was that *'a survivor had come up with the idea of a speak up speak out campaign'* and the Club is already codesigning this with the survivor to be launched in the safeguarding week. The Club advised there was *'positive collaboration'* which they welcomed with those affected by Higgins' abuse.

Section 9

Responses from individuals who were given extracts from this report

276. Extracts from this report were sent to four individuals and/or their families⁸¹ with a request for them to review these extracts. The extracts included paragraphs from within the report which could be construed as being critical of their actions and/or their decision-making at the time of their involvement with the Club.
277. We received responses from the individuals we contacted and reviewed our conclusions in the light of their comments. Where specific feedback was given relating to particular paragraphs this has been incorporated within the report at relevant points. Feedback was provided to us by former board members on behalf of themselves and, in their words, *'on behalf of deceased board colleagues who have had no opportunity to contribute.'*
278. In addition to the more specific comments relating to particular paragraphs we received some overarching feedback which we have reflected in this section.
279. Those who provided feedback acknowledged the harm caused by Higgins to those he had abused. One individual stated that he *'commended all those who provided evidence'* against Higgins and stressed that feedback provided by former board members was not intended in any way to detract from this.
280. Within the report we have explained how we were told by numerous people who contributed to this review, about rumours which persisted over a period of years; former board members and management stressed to us these were *'never picked up by, reported to or shared with, board members or employees at the Club'*.
281. Those who responded asserted that as board members or as managers at the time they were not aware of any rumours about Higgins' behaviour towards boys. All concerned stated clearly that any suggestion that any board member or managers had any awareness of rumours was simply not true.

⁸¹ Family members were contacted and given the option to respond on behalf of one individual who, because of ill-health could not respond themselves.

282. One view was also said that our report casts aspersions on *'highly respected professional men in Southampton and 'country gentlemen' of the highest integrity and it is 'genuinely libellous to suggest that any of them were either aware of or suspected the behaviour of Bob Higgins and did nothing about it; or indeed even discussed the subject between themselves, formally or informally.'* We also received feedback refuting any suggestion that Higgins' *'success at his job would in any way influence how he was dealt with.'*
283. It was also clearly stated by one individual that he believed that in relation to the report we had produced, *'views were expressed on the basis that we professionals know about these things' or 'they must have known' and with respect, this is a million miles away from genuine evidence and is categorically untrue.'*
284. We are grateful for all of the feedback received and have carefully considered all comments received before reaching our conclusions.

Summary of conclusions and concluding remarks

Summary of conclusions reached through this review

Conclusion 1: *There was no managerial oversight to ensure that accommodation provided to boys needing overnight stays was appropriate. There is no evidence that the Club authorised or refused to authorise arrangements made by Higgins for boys to stay at his house. Regardless of whether the Club permitted such arrangements or simply took no action in this regard, board members were neglectful not to have addressed the issue of boys' accommodation arrangements when they were staying away from home.*

Conclusion 2: *It is our view that it is more likely than not that BM1 would have spoken to someone on the board about Higgins' alleged behaviour. There are however no records to confirm this. Those consulted cannot recall any references ever being made to that incident even when allegations about Higgins were raised in February 1989.*

Conclusion 3: *There is evidence that the board were aware of a complaint made against Higgins in 1979 relating to Higgins. We do not know the nature of the complaint, but it seems likely it was linked to Higgins' leaving the Club less than two weeks later. The Club did not keep a record of what happened or their response.*

Conclusion 4: *Although there were possibly two occasions, five years apart, when concerns had been raised about Higgin's behaviour, the absence of any recorded information makes it difficult to conclude that Higgins should not have been offered a second contract by the Club in 1980.*

Conclusion 5: *It is our view that, despite assertions to the contrary, the board and/or management must at some point have heard or been told about stories circulating about Higgins and if this was so, they failed to take any action to find out whether there could be any substance to the rumours. By not doing so, either intentionally or by default, the Club failed to put the safety and welfare of boys concerned first.*

Conclusion 6: *There is no evidence that the Club took any action to explore or understand why a talented young player, selected by the FA to train at its national training ground, did not want to return to play for the Club, despite being signed only a few months earlier. Had they done so, it is possible that Higgins' abuse might have been detected earlier.*

Conclusion 7: *The letter from the Chairman of the Football Association to the Club in October 1987, provided information which suggested there were questions being asked about Higgins' behaviours. It is our view that the Board of Directors were highly likely to have been informed about this letter and knew there were some issues which caused 'disquiet' but took no action, leaving boys vulnerable and Higgins free to continue abusing them.*

Conclusion 8: *When information about Higgins' alleged sexual abuse of boys was brought to their attention in 1989, the board did not immediately report to the police that a crime may have been committed by a member of their staff; they took 4 months before noting that this action should be taken but failed to ensure that BM4 and BM6 had made contact with Police as they had been asked to do.*

Conclusion 9: *The Club took no action to explain to boys why their coach had suddenly left the Club or to communicate with them about what was happening after their initial disclosures. They were offered no support and were left to make sense for themselves of all that happened. The Club failed in its duty of care towards these boys.*

Conclusion 10: *We have found no evidence to suggest there was a deliberate ploy by any agency or individual to purposefully destroy evidence relating to the investigation and/or the prosecution of Higgins between 1990 and 1992.*

Conclusion 11 *It is our view that it was convenient for the board to minimise and disregard significant concerns about Higgins and not take action when they should have done. The Club persistently failed in exercising a duty of care to boys and this left them and other boys vulnerable to ongoing abuse by Higgins which impacted upon their lives as children and the adults they became.*

Concluding Remarks

'He had a bath in front of the kids having a shower.

It wouldn't happen today but, in those times, it was acceptable'.

285. It is our view that the argument that 'things were different then' and society did not understand child sexual abuse two and three decades ago in the way we do now, is flawed. Regardless of what we know now, adults who were charged with the care of children and young people even then, owed them a duty of care which, in our professional judgment, was disregarded by those who were responsible for the safety and well-being of boys who played with the Club.
286. The issue of who knew about the rumours cannot be stated with any certainty and we know that Higgins' abuse towards young boys was not reported by the boys themselves to the adults around them. We can fully understand why they were unwilling or unable to take that course of action. The issue we felt was particularly significant was the fact that the individuals who sat on the board, at the time Higgins' abuse came to light in 1989, did not act promptly to report his abuse to the statutory authorities and neither did they take any steps which demonstrated the welfare of the boys was their first consideration. This failure to report or act was a dramatic let-down for boys entrusted to the care of Higgins.
287. It is important to note there were also bystanders in other football settings who had neither the courage nor the inclination to openly report their suspicions about Higgins, despite the rumours and his frequent contact with other known abusers. The stories surrounding Higgins seem to have been rife and, in our view, there is no doubt that suspicions were aroused, and adults should have acted on these rather than simply shrug off what might be happening because there was '*no evidence*'. Members of board at the

time to minimise and disregard what was said about Higgins in February 1989 and placed the responsibility for *'these matters'* elsewhere.

288. Whilst knowledge or awareness about rumours cannot be proven, it is nevertheless a fact that when concerns about Higgins' sexual abuse of boys was brought to the attention of the individuals who sat on the board in February 1989, this information was not reported to the police as it should have been. Board minutes indicate two board members were tasked with reporting 'stories' about Higgins to the police 4 months later and then, only after Higgins had left the Club. We acknowledge there is a difference between "hard" knowledge of someone's abusive activities brought about by actual detailed allegations and suspicion brought about by hearsay or by hearing of situations which raise questions and alarm. We believe that what the boys were overheard saying was not however a *'throwaway line'* but was information about alleged sexual abuse of boys by a member of staff which should have been immediately acted upon.
289. It has certainly not been our intention to appear as arrogant professionals in undertaking this review. Rather we have attempted to place the decisions and actions taken or not taken within the context of what was likely to have been known at the time. However, we are clear that we found: no evidence that board members were concerned enough about what had been alleged, to speak directly with the staff members who spoke with the distressed boys; no evidence that police were informed about the allegations, regardless of whether board members believed them to be true; no evidence which suggested concern for the boys welfare and no evidence that any thought was given as to how parents would be informed about what had happened. Given the seriousness of what had been alleged, it was the responsibility of the board to ensure these actions were progressed and this did not happen.
290. This review is not a forensic task and we have not reached conclusions to the same level of proof required and established by criminal inquiries. Our objective was to explore what can be learnt from the past to make it less likely that in future, someone like Higgins can gain access to boys and abuse his position of trust. Since the purpose of the review was to

answer the questions set by the term of reference and identify lessons from what was said or believed to have happened, we have considered information and reached our conclusions ‘*on the balance of probability*’ accepting that a degree of informed speculation has also been required to make sense of some things so to derive learning.

291. We have been careful not to measure the actions of the past by the safeguarding standards of today, but it is an unavoidable fact that adults in Southampton Football Club during the time Higgins worked for them or on their behalf did not consider the welfare and well-being of the boys involved with the Club as their prime consideration. This was specifically evident when allegations were made against Higgins by the boys to whom they owed a duty of care. It is our view that if we are to ensure that children and young participating in football and other sports are well protected, then accountability at all levels of the organisation is key; responsibilities to act need to be clearly mandated and the wellbeing and protection of children and young people must remain a genuine priority.⁸².
292. In recent years, the pace and quality of change in football to better protect children and young people has intensified and this of course is welcomed as is the move to ensure independent auditing of safeguarding arrangements in the Clubs operating under Premier League and EFL rules. In addition, the risks inherent in grassroots football generally and the unregulated role of agents do need to be further considered and this issue, going forward should be carefully explored by football authorities in some detail. Whilst the need for structural, systemic, and cultural changes in football have been recognised, such changes, whilst being purposefully created need also to be carefully and deliberately maintained.
293. The impact of and damage caused by Higgins’ abuse of children in his care during the time he was employed by Southampton Football Club is incalculable. The damage to their physical and mental health as they grew up, their relationships, their families and even their ability to confidently parent has been devastating.
294. It is these individuals who, in our view have paid the price for what seems to be the inertia of board members who failed to ensure that young boys, in contact with Higgins, were as

⁸² *Independent Review into sexual abuse in Scottish Football. Feb 2021*

well protected as they should have been. We do not believe there was any deliberation or malign intent by these individuals, it is our view they simply did not consider the well-being of boys as their responsibility and once Higgins had left their employ saw no reason to alert anyone about the allegations that had been made against him.

295. Sentencing Higgins in 2019, His Honour Judge Peter Crabtree OBE said:

'There is no doubt that you were good at spotting talent, such that many went on to be successful, some even at international level. But there was another side of you, one that came to light when you began abusing XX. This evolved into systematic abuse of the boys you coached, most of whom were carefully groomed – that process included gifts, shirts, and boots, tracksuits and taking a number of them to watch first division football matches. Many if not all of them saw you as a father figure, especially for a number of boys who had no father and were vulnerable. You would play love songs in your car and encourage boys to touch you or touch them as they came to and from training. Many of your victims stayed overnight under the guise of participating in extra training. Little did their parents know that they were also being encouraged to participate in stroking and cuddling, this became normalised and paved the way for your abuse. It escalated into more in the living room and bedroom. There were more opportunities when you would give soapy massages – you inserted a finger in a number of boys – you used your power to assert over the boys with confidence they would not share their experiences. They recognised you held the key to achieve their dreams – to become apprentices at Southampton and professional at Peterborough – they idolised you and were prepared to, and did do, anything to realise their dreams. Those who you abused you knew it would be difficult to disclose what you'd done – the culture at the time prevented that. You took steps to avoid detections; you sustained and befriended many of the parents themselves – including going on holiday with them – encouraged them to write to you and express love.'

Higgins was sentenced to 24 years, and 3 months

ANNEXE A

Chronology and Timeline

The chronology below has been compiled with reference to notes of conversations held, transcripts and a number of key sources which are in the public domain and have been referenced. Some dates are confirmed as they have been extracted from minutes/reports whilst other dates are captured from witness statements and conversations with individuals. The table also includes text in italics which refers to the introduction of legislation and statutory guidance as it relates to football.

Pre-1971		BH involved with Queens Park Rangers.
1971-1973		BH employed as a youth coach by Crystal Palace (CP).
1971		BH sets up a training centre in Northolt.
1973		New First Team Manager appointed by SFC -stayed to 1985.
1973 -75		BH London Selection centre recruiting for SFC.
1974		Football Association Handbook ⁸³ refers to rules and regulations around contracts drawn up between club's and child players from the age of 13. Rules for investigating complaints of misconduct includes a duty to report the FA.
Around 1974		Headteacher from school contacts BM1 to share concerns about Higgins.
1974	Apr	Board minutes: [BM1] refers to the 'BH' co-operation'.
1975		BH offered a contract by SFC 'scouting and running 'new football centre' in Slough.
1976	Jul	Board minutes: Board agreed that BH should be paid an honorarium of £200.
1976	Nov	Board minutes: Board agreed that BH should be paid the sum of £250 for his assistance in signing two players to the Club.
1979		BH approached by SFC to work part-time scouting and youth development.
1979	Apr 12	Board minutes: Complaint made against BH. MAN1 asked to make further enquiries (No details). BH tendered his resignation.
1979	Apr 26	Board minutes confirm BH's resignation and acknowledge the need to consider the Club's contact with the London Selection Centre.
1980		No board minutes available.

⁸³ *The FA Handbook was first published in 1960 and is updated annually.*

1980		BH formally appointed as Youth Development Officer.
1981		No board minutes available.
1982		No board minutes available.
1982		Football Association Handbook issued similar to previous version. Sanctions are referred to for those who have behaved in a way that was 'ungentlemanly, or likely to bring the game into disrepute.'
1982		Club Secretary appointed.
1984		STF5 appointed as Youth Team Manager.
1985	May	Board Minutes BH has tendered resignation from end of June (extended for 6 weeks to allow Sotonia Cup).
1985	Jun	MAN1 left SFC.
1985	Jun	New Manager appointed (to 1991).
1985	Aug	Board Minutes: 3-year contract agreed for BH [of Directors] expressed reservations.
1986		The FA's School of Excellence was established at Lilleshall, Shropshire.
1986	Feb	Board Minutes: BH cancels event to cut expenditure.
1986	Jul	Letter sent to parents of young players at Crewe, inviting them to join re Sotonia International tournament in Southampton,
1986	Nov	Board Minutes: BH, attends national event with STF5 and BM4.
1987	Feb	BH agrees following FA intervention to release young person from schoolboy contract.
1987	Aug	BM4 joins Board of Directors.
1987	Oct	Board Minutes: BM3 to meet with BH to discuss a further contract.
1987	Oct 9	Letter from Chairman of Football Association to Club outlining concerns about BH Soccer Academy and ' <i>a number of other matters which are causing us disquiet</i> '...
1988	Jan	Board Minutes: Change of Club Chairman (BM3).
1988	Feb	Board Minutes: Contracts for STF5 and BH extended.
1988	Dec	Board Minutes: BH ' <i>not settled in his position</i> '. BM4 meets with BH and STF5.
1989	Feb 2	Board minutes: ' <i>The Football League agrees to a meeting to discuss the BH Soccer Academy with the Vice-Chairman, Secretary and Youth Development Officer. Necessary arrangements are made.</i>
1989	Feb 13-	STF5 overhears remarks on minibus. Advises MAN2 next day and is told the Board will inform police.

1989	Feb 23	Minutes of Meeting: BM4/STF1 attend mtg with FA and FL. Minutes indicate that BH's employment with the Club had ' <i>terminated</i> ' but they would not reveal the reason for this'.
1989	Mar	Board Minutes: Reference to Higgins' resignation 31.5.89. Board agreed he could take leave of absence from 10.4.89.
1989	Apr	BH leaves SFC.
1989	Apr	Board Minutes: Need for Code of Conduct acknowledged. BM4 and BM5 to action.
1989	Apr	Board Minutes: Query from Football league re BH's activities.
1989	May	Board Minutes: Letter from Football League to clubs advising against use of Higgins' Football Academies.
1989	Jun	Board Minutes: BH solicitors request increase in settlement fee – refused. ' <i>After serious consideration it was agreed that BM4 and BM6 bring to the attention of the Police the Club's concern over stories circulating about incidents involving this former member of staff.</i> '
1989	Jul	BH appointed as Youth Development Officer for the Malta Football Association (MFA)
1989	Sep	Board Minutes: Notes of scouts weekend together in September.
1989	Dec	Board Minutes: BM4 expresses concern that the actions of BH are still impacting on relationships with local schools.
1990	Jan	BH charged with sexual abuse offences. Suspended from role with Malta Football Association (MFA) but continued to operate Bob Higgins Academy in Southampton.
1990	Jan	Board Minutes: Community Officer appointed.
1990	Mar	Board Minutes: It is understood that this former employee [Higgins] will appear in court on 6 April 1990.
1990	Apr	BH appears in Court, charged with sexual offences against boys. Pleads not guilty.
1990	Aug	Board Minutes: BM4 shares info about negative media coverage and impact on youth development work.
1990	Oct	Board Minutes: BM4 raises problems still experienced by STF5 because of the ' <i>BH situation.</i> '
1990		BH suspended from post by MFA.
1991		The Children Act 1989 becomes law; its first principle is that the child's welfare is paramount.
1991	May	Board Minutes: BM3 in conversation with BH re previous players.
1991	Jul	Board Minutes: MAN2 leaves SFC.

1991	Dec	Board Minutes: Acknowledgement by BM4 of Children Act 1989.
1992	Jan	BH acquitted of remaining 4 charges.
1993	Dec	MAN1 returns to SFC as Director of Football.
1994		The FA Handbook states, <i>'that for clubs to be granted a licence to operate, they must have 'the players' welfare at heart'</i> .
1994	Jun	BH returns to UK from Malta.
1995		The FA Handbook refers to staff in clubs needing to be <i>'subject to the requirements of the Children Act 1989.'</i>
1995		STF5 as manager of 1 st Team (until 1996).
1995		BH joins Peterborough FC as Youth Team Manager (May).
1995		Barry Bennell convicted in Florida.
1996		Change of Club Chairman.
1996		National Child Protection Conference in Sport. Child Protection in Sport task force established.
1996	Apr	BH leaves Peterborough by mutual consent (April).
1997	Jan	<i>'FA send letter out to all Clubs outlining FA's approach to child protection. SFC did not respond'</i> – Sheldon.
1997	Jan	Dispatches programme. 'Foul Play': Allegations made against Higgins.
1997		BH approached by journalists following the Dispatches programme, denies allegations.
1997	Oct	Hampshire Constabulary and children's services send out warning letter to schools and youth groups warning about BH.
1997	Oct	The FA produced a <i>'Charter For Quality'</i> , ⁸⁴ which had its focus on welfare of young players.
1998/1999		⁸⁵ FA required clubs to have child protection officer in place and introduced measures for criminal background checks.
1999		Protection of Children Act 1999 preventing paedophiles from gaining access to employment with children.
2000	May	The FA publicises its child protection policy for the first time.
2000		Child Protection in Sport established (CPSU).
2001		FA opened case file on BH.
2001		BH sacked as manager of Bashley FC, then acted in an advisory role to Winchester City FC where he left after his position was described as

⁸⁴ *Football Education For Young Players "A Charter For Quality", October 1997*

⁸⁵ *1998/99 Programme for Excellence Regulations.*

		'untenable'.
2001	June	The FA produces its Child Protection Procedures and Practices Handbook.
2001		SFC considers need for safeguarding policy.
2002		FA commissioned Professor Celia Brackenridge ⁸⁶ to undertake research into child protection and football.
2003		FA amended its standard of proof against staff so civil standards would be applied if allegations were made. (i.e., balance of probabilities).
2006		Change of Club Chairman in SFC.
2007		The FA Handbook from 2007 onwards refers to Safeguarding and the appointment of Safeguarding Officers in Academies.
2007		Change of Club Chairman.
2008		Change of Club Chairman.
2009		Change of Club Chairman.
2012		SFC appoints part-time safeguarding officer who reports to CEO.
2012		BH began working with Fleet Town FC.
2013		Full-time safeguarding officer appointed to Club.
2013	Oct	Hampshire Constabulary follow up allegation against Higgins by a Peterborough player.
2014		Change of Club Chairman.
2015		Housemaster at school where Higgins allegedly trained boys convicted of child abuse for offences which took place between 1975 and 1988.
2016	Oct	Police contact SFC about historic allegations against BH.
2016	Nov	Dispatches: Soccer's Foul Play (repeat of 1997 programme).
2017	June	Safeguarding Officer report to Legal in Club.
2018		Club's first engagement with Clive Sheldon QC.
2018	Dec	Review of safeguarding provision in Club.
2019	Feb	BH convicted of 45 sexual abuse offences against boys (Feb).
2019	April	Decision to undertake independent review of Higgins involvement with Club.

⁸⁶ Celia Brackenridge OBE was a British sportswoman, campaigner and academic. In the mid-1980s, Brackenridge founded the Women's Sports Foundation UK and also conducted research into the physical and sexual abuse of young sportspeople by coaches.

2019	April	Premier League Safeguarding Audit completed.
2019	Nov	Barnardo's begins independent review of Higgins involvement with Club and board's response to allegations.
2019	Dec	Head of Safeguarding role created.
2019	Dec	Club started to meet with victims and survivors.
2020	Feb	Club Safeguarding Board established.
2020	Mar	New safeguarding policy launched.
2021	Mar	New Club safeguarding strategy launched.
2021	Mar	Club Mental & Emotional Wellbeing Strategy launched.
2021	Nov	Barnardo's report finalised.

The response from Southampton Football Club to the report and its conclusions.⁸⁷

“Why did nobody do anything?”

This was an extremely difficult and uncomfortable question that we were asked at a meeting with an incredibly brave and dignified family member of one of the men abused by Bob Higgins. That person has suffered greatly and, quite rightly, wanted to understand how their close relative could have suffered abuse while pursuing their dream to become a professional footballer.

At the time, there was simply no answer we could provide.

Since then, we have been determined to find an appropriate response for all of the victims and survivors of abuse at the Club as well as their families. We hope that the work completed by Barnardo’s may finally help us all to understand how it could be that a predatory paedophile was allowed to operate seemingly undetected at Southampton Football Club for more than a decade before going on to work elsewhere in football until 2016.

We should start by clearly stating that the current Board of Directors at Southampton Football Club fully accept all of the findings of the review conducted by Barnardo’s.

Our aims when we commissioned this report were:

- to understand who knew or should have known that sexual abuse of children was occurring at the Club;
- what could have been done to prevent that abuse; and
- what could have been done to better support the children who suffered that abuse.

It remains very important to us that everyone has an opportunity to read the report in full, and we have not sought to edit or influence the content in any way.

It has taken a long time for the victims and survivors to be heard so we hope that this report will provide them with at least some of the answers that they might be looking for. The Club will use this report to make sure that we continue to develop our current safeguarding and speaking up practices so that we can help keep children and people with vulnerabilities safe.

We are extremely grateful to everyone who took time to speak to the Barnardo’s review team, especially the men who were subjected to abuse while growing up. We appreciate how difficult engaging with this process has been for those speaking out. Those men have suffered so greatly

⁸⁷ *This is the response from Southampton Football Club to the report and its conclusions which the Club asked to be included in the final document.*

for so many years. We appreciate their courage in assisting this review and we will continue to stand with them and offer our support to them should any of the conclusions of this review be challenged.

Bob Higgins held the dreams of so many young boys in his hands. He completely betrayed the trust of those boys and their families. We now know that Higgins had unfettered power at Southampton Football Club and that those in senior positions did nothing to make sure that there were suitable controls in place to prevent abuse from occurring.

We doubt that anybody at the Club at that time wanted the abuse to occur. However, equally, no one in a position of power did anything to properly find out what was going on, to take action to make sure that the abuse was stopped and properly reported once it had been discovered or to offer support those who were targeted by Higgins.

Those holding power at the Club should have known what was going on at a much earlier stage. We have seen evidence that even when senior figures did find out about the allegations of abuse at the time, they seemed to do nothing to act and still failed to properly report the abuse. These failings, shockingly, left Bob Higgins free to work in football until his arrest in 2016.

Everyone working at the Club today is truly and deeply sorry for the harm and subsequent anguish that the victims and survivors of the abuse carried out by Bob Higgins have suffered over the course of so many years.

We are sorry for the impact on them and their families. It is very clear that the Club completely failed to protect so many young people from suffering abuse over a long period of time. This failure was then compounded by the complete lack of support for those boys who were brave enough to speak up about the abuse. There is no excuse for that.

Having seen the Barnardo's report, we are in a position to now understand that the harm caused to so many young people was the result of a complete institutional failure by the Club to protect them. Too many people in senior positions at the Club, the FA and the Football League failed to ask the right questions or simply chose to do nothing about the abuse that was occurring on their watch.

Regardless of when this abuse happened, there should have been far more done to prevent it. Once the abuse was discovered and reported, it is clear that many people involved in senior positions at the Club should have done so much more to support the children who had been abused and to prevent Higgins from being able to continue to offend, either at Southampton or anywhere else.

There were simply so many missed opportunities to end the disgraceful, horrific abuse carried out. From the first rumblings about his behaviour in 1974 through to the Dispatches programme that aired in 1997, a whole string of people at clubs, the Football Association, the English Football

League and the Police had the chance to properly investigate or report the rumoured behaviour of Higgins. Instead, they chose not to act and not to believe those who spoke up which meant that Higgins did not finally face justice until 2019.

The Club can offer no excuse for this failure to act.

We have heard that some former employees of the Club are of the opinion that these events should have a different standard applied to them because they happened so long ago. We fundamentally disagree with this view.

We are not applying a new standard in saying that child abuse is wrong and that all clubs in the 1970s, 1980s and very early 1990s should have been able to protect all of the young people under their care.

For us, this report is not about finding anyone to blame. However, it is important that we understand the reasons why the abuse at the Club happened and how it could last for so long. By doing that and being open with our views, we hope to make sure that everyone is able to learn and improve what they do from this very sad situation.

The Barnardo's review, like the Sheldon Review before it, describes a pattern of failure to listen to children, failure to believe them, failure to look into rumours or unusual patterns of behaviour and a complete failure of the Club's most senior leaders to do anything to prevent abuse or do anything about it. It cannot be possible that anyone could fail to regard any coach having so many children stay at their house or engage in so many extremely odd behaviours around children as highly unusual and inappropriate.

This is not to apply a contemporary filter to events. This behaviour was wrong and too many people failed to see what was going on, failed to ask the right questions and failed to act appropriately.

We recognise that some of the former Club staff and Directors may disagree and criticise our position. We are prepared for that and will take the time to explain why we feel this way. Our view is that this abuse could and should have been prevented and was hidden for far too long. We do not always get things right now, but we have to be open to learning and improvement when things go wrong.

We are sorry that no one supported the boys who bravely spoke up back in 1990 about the abuse that they suffered. We have spoken directly to some of those who reported abuse to the Police in 1990 and we are left feeling very uncomfortable with how the trials in 1990/1991 seem to have been conducted. There are no surviving records from those cases and so we will never know what really happened.

It is very clear that senior staff at the Club could have offered considerable support to the boys who complained of abuse at that time. Very sadly those men may never truly get the justice that they seek in relation to their cases because of the lack of support they received and the current “double jeopardy” rules that exist in England & Wales.

We have been truly inspired by how the victims we spoke to still wish to engage with the Club despite having had to suffer so many years of injustice. We hope to be able to continue to work with them and others who were abused while they were at the Club as they have done so much to help us understand the awful experiences they have endured.

Since Hampshire Police first contacted the Club about allegations of abuse that they received in October 2016, we have been determined to work openly with them to help find the truth about what went on at the Club and to bring Bob Higgins to justice.

We have seen and heard that some victims and survivors of abuse are unhappy with the fact that we have not contacted them directly. While we have put out communications to try to make sure that everyone who wants to speak to us knows that we will listen to them, we accept the criticism because we have not been able to speak with everyone. This is something that we will try to find a way to put right as it is important that we continue to learn from this feedback.

We have not wanted to initiate contact with everyone because we have no way of knowing whether every individual wants to speak to us. We did not want to risk making anybody’s feelings worse or to bring back past trauma. However, we would like to take this opportunity to invite anyone who was abused during their time at the Club, or their family members, and who wishes to speak with us to let us know.

We will be setting up some different ways to allow people to contact us so that, hopefully, there is a suitable channel available to everyone and we will try to find a better way to actively reach everyone impacted by Higgins’ abuse.

Southampton Football Club today is a far different place than it was in the past. We now have an established Safeguarding Team, regular safeguarding audits, clear reporting processes and a far better governance structure that means that safeguarding is properly considered at all Board meetings.

Most importantly, we have embedded an open culture where everyone is committed to the important task of making sure that we proactively protect all children, young people and anyone else who is vulnerable under our care. We work closely with the Premier League, the Police and external professional partners so that they have oversight of what we do and how we handle concerns raised to us.

However, existing and new threats to the safety of the boys and girls in our Academies remain very real. This means that we have to always be vigilant and encourage people to speak up when they see something that makes them uncomfortable or concerned.

It is important that we continue the progress that we have made in being able to actively protect everyone's physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. Sometimes this may involve taking difficult or unpopular decisions, but we must never shy away from doing that.

None of the steps we have taken to improve the safety of the young players that we work with now lessens the pain or suffering of anyone abused by Bob Higgins. However, we do hope that this report shows how them that their experiences have helped to shape a world where it is far more difficult for anyone to be able to carry out such horrific sexual abuse.

We feel it is right to end with the same question we began with. "*Why did nobody do anything?*"

Regrettably, we have to conclude that it was because it was simply easier not to see the signs of potential abuse, not to listen to the children who were abused, not to properly challenge Higgins and not to stand up against his disgraceful behaviour. Too many people, at the Club and in other organisations, knew or should have known what was going on. They all failed to act. For so many boys to be abused while pursuing a dream to become a footballer is unforgiveable and completely inexcusable.

To all of the victims and survivors and their families – we are sorry.

We realise that many people may wish to speak with us as the result of this report and our response. Anyone who has questions for us or would like to find out how we might be able to support them should contact:

*Kim Mundy, the Club's Head of Safeguarding, kmundy@saintsfc.co.uk;
or Tim Greenwell, the Club's Senior Safeguarding Lead, tgreenwell@saintsfc.co.uk*

We would particularly like to hear from any of the victims and survivors of abuse who would like to receive more information from us. All questions and conversations will be handled openly, sensitively and in the strictest confidentiality.

For anyone who wants to seek help independently from the Club, Sporting Chance offers a specialist service for individuals who have suffered historic abuse within a football environment. This is twenty-four-hour access to a confidential one-to-one therapy. The phone number is 07585 900000. Individuals can also email support@sportingchanceclinic.com (emails are responded to in office hours Monday to Friday).

All therapy is funded by the FA and can include access to additional specialist services such as Psychiatric Assessment and Addiction Services including residential admission.

Information about Barnardo's and our Training and Consultancy

Barnardo's is a leading UK children's charity with over 150 years of history and experience in supporting the most vulnerable children, young people, and families across the country. In 2019/2020, Barnardo's supported work with 358,800 children, young people, parents, and carers across over 800 services and partnerships throughout the UK, thanks to our 7,822 paid colleagues and 14,000 volunteers. From day one, Barnardo's ambition has remained the same: to achieve better outcomes for more children and young people and ensure no child is left behind, regardless of their circumstances.

Barnardo's Training and Consultancy

Within Barnardo's, our Training and Consultancy division is a well-established and experienced provider of Safeguarding Consultancy. Informed by our extensive expertise and in line with Barnardo's core mission and corporate strategy, our objective is to provide independent consultancy advice and support to other organisations to promote improvements and encourage best practice in safeguarding children, young people, and adults at risk. On a daily basis we are concerned with supporting other agencies to continuously improve.

Our team undertakes independent time-limited reviews and audits to help other organisations understand what is working well and know what needs to change or improve; we focus on not just identifying areas for development but also in helping others understand why changes might be needed and making suggestions as to how best to achieve the change needed. Our focus is on ascertaining whether safeguarding arrangements are sufficiently robust or not, and in identifying how continuous improvement and good practice can be achieved.

We also undertake reviews of policy, procedures, and practice, historic and current, as well as independent investigations; this work helps us understand what can go wrong and ensures our delivery and audits of arrangements today is informed by lessons learnt. Ultimately, the focus of

our activities is on ensuring organisations can continuously improve their practice and embed a safeguarding culture to achieve better outcomes for any children and young people.

Barnardo's Training and Consultancy is well-recognised for its specialist safeguarding consultancy work and within sport and football particularly. Our team bring their experience from managing and advising on child protection in other sectors and settings to help achieve change. Each review and consultancy project we undertake is unique but what remains the same is our commitment to listen to the voices of those affected.

The Review Team-

Following initial discussion with SFC, it was confirmed that Julie Dugdale, Head of Business in Barnardo's Training and Consultancy ('BTC') and Linda Richardson, a Safeguarding Consultant with BTC⁸⁸, would form the review team. Both individuals have extensive experience in undertaking safeguarding reviews/audits for various organisations, including those within the football sector.

Julie Dugdale, Head of Business

Julie leads Business Barnardo's Training and Consultancy as Head of Business. Julie is a registered and qualified Social Worker with over twenty years' senior management experience; Julie has worked across local authorities and children's charities throughout her career. All of her work has involved safeguarding children and young people whether as a practitioner, manager or by advising and supporting others in a consultancy capacity.

Julie leads a team of Safeguarding Consultants who undertake specialist safeguarding consultancy reviews, complete safeguarding audits and deliver safeguarding training. Julie has worked as part of a team responsible for recent independent safeguarding reviews requested within the football sector, as well as within schools, and various charities.

Julie has undertaken work internationally within the education and sports sector. Julie has a strong commitment to working together and previously worked for Government Office as Strategic Lead role regarding the engagement of the voluntary, faith and community sector. On a personal level Julie is committed to ensuring through all her work that the voice and views of those who are affected by child abuse are listened to and used to influence and improve how we safeguard children.

⁸⁸ For more information, please see Appendix 1.

Linda Richardson, Safeguarding Consultant

Linda qualified as a social worker in 1978 and has worked with children and families for over 40 years in residential, voluntary and statutory settings. Linda has extensive fieldwork and management experience in child protection and safeguarding and has worked in both the UK and in other parts of Europe. Working with colleagues from other disciplines, Linda produced various toolkits, training programmes, policies and procedures in relation to safeguarding children. From 2006 until 2011, Linda worked as a Safeguarding Advisor for Government Office Northwest offering support and challenge on a range of safeguarding issues to local authorities and safeguarding boards in the Northwest region. Linda was actively involved at a national level establishing the role of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and authored the Guidance for Safe Working Practice document in 2007, guidance which is still in use today.

Linda has worked as a Safeguarding Consultant with Barnardo's Training and Consultancy for over 11 years. She is an accredited reviewer with the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) and also works as an independent author and chair for Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, formally known as Serious Case Reviews.

Terms of Reference

Scope and Terms of Reference

Barnardo's Training and Consultancy (BTC)⁸⁹ were appointed to undertake an independent review into the sexual abuse perpetrated by Higgins at times when he had links with and was in the employ of Southampton Football Club (SFC). The review is required to:

- explore and comment upon on the links Higgins had with SFC
- investigate who knew or suspected Higgins of inappropriate or abusive behaviours and what actions were taken as a result of these and/or any reported concerns
- examine what actions, if any, were taken by SFC and other football officials to safeguard and protect boys, when reported or suspected concerns came to light
- explore the extent to which lessons have been learnt and children involved with SFC today are better protected.
- produce a report outlining findings from the review report, offering, where appropriate, recommendations.

In undertaking this review the Club requested that Barnardo's:

- gave particular consideration to the context of childcare policy, legislation, and guidance at the time, as well as any safeguarding arrangements through which the Club fulfilled its responsibilities.
- took into account practice as it developed over key periods
- focused on whether the duties owed to children engaged with the Club were fulfilled in a satisfactory manner and the care and support provided was 'good enough.'
- identified implications and/or any learning to help inform future practice.
- ensure that those contributing are offered every opportunity for meetings with the reviewers and offered the opportunity to meet with the Club should they wish to do so.

89 Barnardo's is one of the UK's leading children's charities, and works directly with over 200,000 children, young people and their families every year. Barnardo's run over 900 vital services across the UK, including a Training and Consultancy service supporting the safeguarding agenda for statutory, voluntary and private organisations working with and on behalf of children and young people.

Underpinning Principles

Barnardo's has a set of principles which underpins all aspects of any work undertaken. It was acknowledged by all parties that the review team would:

- ensure that each person consulted as part of this review would be treated with respect and the unique perspective of every individual acknowledged.
- be mindful of how participating in a review of this nature can impact on individuals and their families.
- ensure the review process was independent and not influenced or directed by SFC or any other agency or ongoing inquiries.
- make all key decisions about the way in which the review was conducted, progressed, and reported.
- ensure that where appropriate, key professionals, would be offered opportunities to comment on any criticisms or reflections of their actions, judgements, or decision-making in the final report
- ensure confidentiality throughout and after completion of this review. Ensure all documentation related to the review would be retained for an agreed length of time and then be disposed of securely.
- be informed by best practice and an understanding of long-standing responsibilities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
- ensure the review was child-focused and represented as far as possible, the voices of young boys, now adults, abused by an adult in whom they placed their trust.

Contact details of organisations who offer support

Relevant support agencies

The following services provide support as detailed below: -

SPORTING CHANCE

Sporting Chance provide a [nationwide therapy and counselling network](#) which enables clients to access confidential, professional support to work through issues which not only impact on their quality of life. Confidential support can be accessed by telephoning [0870 220 0714](tel:08702200714) or by emailing info@sportingchanceclinic.com

Please note the following quote from one of our conversations: -

'Could Barnardo's make it clear to people they can approach Sporting Chance without having to come forward and disclose abuse.'

CHILDLINE

Youth people and children can access confidential support via Childline by telephoning 0800 1111 or emailing them through their website www.childline.org.uk

NSPCC

NSPCC state that 'If you're worried about a child, even if you are unsure, you can speak to us about your concerns. Whether you want to report child abuse and neglect or aren't sure what to do, we're here to listen, offer advice and support and can take the next steps if a child is in danger. Our telephone lines are open **Monday to Friday 8am – 10pm or 9am – 6pm at the weekends**. You can contact us online or by email **24 hours a day, 365 days a year.**'

[Call 0808 800 5000](tel:08088005000)

[Report online](#)

[Email help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)

KICK IT OUT

Kick It Out provide an online reporting form through which an incident of discrimination in football can be reported: - [Online Reporting Form | Kick It Out](#). Other methods through which concerns can be reported include: -

- Via an [award-winning](#) app which includes a 'remain anonymous' button contained within the reporting form. The app can be downloaded through the [Apple Store](#) or [Google Play](#).
 - By calling 0800 169 9414 and speaking directly to a Kick It Out staff member.
 - By contacting Kick It Out directly on Twitter, [@kickitout](#), or by contacting the organisation's Reporting Officers on [@kickitoutreport](#).
 - By privately message Kick It Out on its Facebook page [here](#).
- By emailing report@kickitout.org.