

## Standard Operating Procedure:

### Response to misinformation and fake news



**Purpose:** This policy outlines the club's approach to identifying, addressing, and mitigating the impact of misinformation or fake news. The aim is to protect the integrity and reputation of the club, its staff, players, fans, directors, owners, and other stakeholders.

**Scope:** This SOP applies to all incidents involving misinformation or disinformation related to:

- Transfers, injuries and internal club matters
- Club financials, sponsorships, or legal issues
- Fan relationships or public perception
- All club employees, representatives, players, coaching staff, directors or owners
- Official club partners and affiliates
- Media relations and communications departments

**Objective:** To establish a consistent and effective process for identifying, assessing, and responding to fake news that affects the football club's reputation, stakeholders, or operations.

The club is committed to:

- Accuracy: Ensuring all club communications are factual and verified
- Transparency: Responding appropriately and swiftly to false claims
- Respect: Maintaining professional standards in rebuttals or responses
- Proactivity: Monitoring media channels to detect and assess misinformation

#### Roles & Responsibilities:

Role	Responsibilities
Media team	Detect and flag potential fake news/ misinformation
Digital Content Manager & Social Media Manager	<b>Assess severity– KEY PRIORITY</b>  Investigate the credibility of reports involving the club  Recommend and coordinate response strategy  <b>Communicate directly with the information source to address the issue (no comms from players or club staff to the source)</b>  Communicate with any club staff in the first instance  Draft and release official club statements/response when needed  Serve as the official voice of the club in responding to fake news  Conduct briefings and issue corrections where false narratives have circulated  Contact police, media authorities and employer organisations as required

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Legal support	Advise on defamation, privacy, or legal action Assess legal implications of malicious or defamatory content Initiate action (e.g., cease-and-desist letters, legal complaints) where appropriate
CEO	Approve high-risk responses
Media team	Implement responses across digital channels
Finance team	Support in case of digital threats or impersonation
Board	Review and approve SOP/policies Review/respond to incidents

#### Definitions:

- For this policy, “fake news” refers to:
  - Deliberately fabricated information presented as factual
  - Misleading or manipulated content that falsely implicates the club, staff, or players
  - Unverified rumours published as news
  - Impersonation or use of the club’s identity to spread false information
- Misinformation: Inaccurate information shared without harmful intent
- Disinformation: Deliberately false information intended to cause harm

#### Procedure:

##### Step 1:

##### Identification, Detection and Flagging

- Monitor media, social media, and fan platforms daily
- Staff or fans may report suspicious content via designated contact point
- Log the incident in the Fake News Tracker (maintained by media team) with:
  - Date/time spotted
  - Platform and source (e.g., account name, URL)
  - Summary of claim

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### **Step 2:**

#### **Initial Assessment - CRITICAL**

- Responsible: Digital Content Manager & Social Media Manager
- Action:
  - Verify claim using internal records or trusted sources
  - Determine the impact, potential risks, and audience reach
  - Classify:
    - Low Risk: Limited visibility, no damage
    - Medium Risk: Gaining traction, potentially misleading
    - High Risk: Viral, harmful, or defamatory
  - Assess options:
    - Ignore (low risk)
    - Quiet correction through direct media engagement (low-risk/medium)
    - Public rebuttal via social media, press release, or press conference (medium/high)
    - Legal action in cases of reputational harm or defamation (high)
- Document assessment outcome and rationale
- High risk – inform CEO and board immediately

### **Step 3:**

#### **Strategic Response Planning**

- Responsible: Media, Legal, and Executive staff
- Action:
  - Choose response strategy:
    - Ignore: If it is harmless or self-correcting
    - Clarify: Issue factual correction without direct confrontation
    - Refute: Publicly debunk the claim and issue official statement
    - Legal Action: Pursue takedown, cease-and-desist, or litigation
  - Identify approved spokesperson(s)

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### **Step 4:**

#### **Execution of Response**

- Responsible: Media Team, Digital Content Manager, Social Media Manager
- Go direct to source and seek rectification / take-down etc
- Channels: Club website, verified social media accounts, press release, email to partners
- Tone and Style: Calm, factual, professional, and transparent
- Include:
  - Verified facts
  - Rebuttal of falsehoods (if needed)
  - Links to credible information

### **Step 5:**

#### **Stakeholder Engagement**

- Inform affected employees or departments promptly
- Provide talking points or guidance on how to handle enquiries
- Offer support to individuals targeted by misinformation
- Notify and brief:
  - Club executives
  - Players and coaching staff (if involved)
  - Sponsors or partners (if relevant)
  - Fan groups or Supporters' Liaison Officer (if relevant)
- Provide internal talking points and FAQs.

### **Step 6:**

#### **Post-Response Monitoring**

- Track:
  - Social media sentiment
  - Reach and engagement of official response
  - Any follow-up misinformation
- Adjust strategy if new developments arise.

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### **Step 7:**

#### **Documentation and Review**

- File all incident records including:
  - Original fake news content (screenshots or links)
  - Assessment notes
  - Final response issued
  - Stakeholders involved
  - Lessons learned
- Conduct internal debrief within 1 week.
- Update SOP, Policies or training materials if needed.
- Deal with internal compliance breaches

#### **Other related, SOPs, Tools and Templates**

- Fake News Tracker (Spreadsheet/CRM tool)
- Response Templates (see below):
  - Holding statement
  - Correction notice
  - Legal notice (pre-approved by Legal team)
  - Rebuttable statements

#### **Training and Awareness**

- Media literacy training for staff and players
- Workshops on responding to fake news
- Guidelines on the responsible use of personal and club-affiliated social media accounts
- Conduct quarterly media and fake news awareness training for:
  - Media team
  - First-team players and coaches
  - Key administrative staff

#### **Review and Evaluation:**


- This SOP should be reviewed annually or after any major fake news incident
- Suggestions for improvement can be submitted to the Digital Content Manager and Social Media Manager

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### SOP Approval

Document filename	250620 SOP Fake news FINAL	
Preparation date	250609	CEO
Reviewed date	250620	1921 board
Next review	By 30 June 2026	1921 board
Signed		Nigel Clibbens Chief Executive

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## **Appendices**

### **Example clarification**

#### **Subject: Clarification Regarding Recent False Claims**

Carlisle United is aware of recent claims circulating on *[platform/media outlet]* concerning *[briefly state the topic – e.g., a supposed player transfer, injury, internal dispute, or financial allegation]*.

We would like to state clearly and unequivocally that:

*[Insert accurate and factual correction – e.g., “There has been no agreement or negotiation involving the transfer of Player X.”]*

These claims are entirely false and do not reflect the facts of the situation.

*[Optional: If necessary, include a short, neutral explanation – e.g., “Player X remains fully committed to the club and is training as scheduled.”]*

#### **Our Position**

Carlisle United operates with a commitment to transparency, professionalism, and respect for all parties involved. We strongly discourage the spread of misinformation, which undermines the trust between the club, its fans, and the wider football community.

#### **Action Taken**

- [We have contacted the relevant platform(s) to request the removal or correction of the false content]
- [Our legal team is reviewing the matter for potential further action if necessary]
- [We are engaging directly with the individual(s) or outlet responsible to address this]

#### **For Supporters and Media Partners**

We appreciate the ongoing support of our fans [and partners], and we ask that you rely on the club’s official channels for accurate information. Official updates will always be published via:

- Our website: <https://www.carlisleunited.co.uk/>
- Social Media: @officialcufc
- Verified press releases through trusted media outlets

#### **Media Contact**

For press enquiries, please contact:

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Digital Content Manager  
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