



THE INDEPENDENT
FOOTBALL OMBUDSMAN

**The Alternative Dispute Resolution for Consumer Disputes
(Competent Authorities and Information) Regulations 2015**

ANNUAL ACTIVITY REPORT

FEBRUARY 2023

FOREWORD

The office of the Independent Football Ombudsman (IFO) was established in July 2008 by the three football authorities (The Football Association [FA], The Premier League [PL] and the English Football League [EFL]) with the agreement of Government. The role of the IFO is to investigate and adjudicate complaints which have not been resolved within football's complaints procedure. The IFO produces an Annual Report at the end of each football season. The most recent Annual Report for 2020-21 was published in July 2021. All Annual and Adjudication Reports are published on and may be downloaded from the IFO website, www.theifo.co.uk.

In February 2016 the IFO was accredited as an Approved Alternative Dispute (ADR) Body under The Alternative Dispute Resolution for Consumer Disputes (Competent Authorities and Information) Regulations 2015. The Regulations require the publication of an Annual ADR Activity Report and this publication reviews the cases investigated by the IFO in the year ending 11 February 2023.

Kevin Grix

INDEPENDENT FOOTBALL OMBUDSMAN

ANNUAL ADR ACTIVITY REPORT 2021-22

- 1. *Number of Cases:*** The IFO received 222 individual enquiries during the previous year, over 90% of which are submitted by e-mail. Some of these do not lead to a formal investigation or adjudication by the IFO. Some “complain” about generic issues within football, some comment on matters which are not within the IFO remit (such as player behaviour or referee performance) and others have disputes which are outside the IFO’s range of responsibility (for example children’s or grassroots football). The cases which were disputes between “consumer” and “trader” (as defined by the Regulations) and were investigated by the IFO totaled 162 in the year under review. Of these 9 were adjudicated by a formal published Adjudication Report (with 4 still ongoing and not closed within the period) and 149 were concluded by a letter to the complainant or conciliated.
- 2. *Types of Cases:*** The IFO deals with a great variety of cases which include sanctions imposed on supporters, stewarding and access issues at matches, demands for refunds and compensation, together with claims that there were shortcomings in the way the governing bodies [the Football Association, the Premier League and the English Football League] have been exercising their powers.
- 3. *Common problems:*** In the year under review some of the most common in-scope problems related ticketing issues and suspensions and bans.
- 4. *Recommendations:*** All IFO Adjudication Reports contain recommendations. On the issues raised in Para 3, the IFO has recommended that the quality of information and

communications regarding suspensions and bans could be improved.

5. ***Complaints refused:*** There were no cases refused during this year for the reasons set out in schedule 3 of the Regulations.
6. ***Discontinued cases:*** There were no complaints which were discontinued during the adjudication process and all cases were completed.
7. ***Time taken:*** Complaints have been dealt with within an average of 21.99 days.
8. ***Rate of Compliance:*** Like many Ombudsman and ADR schemes the findings of the IFO are non-binding on the parties. In the year under review in all but one of the cases the IFO recommendations were upheld. *(Under the agreed procedure the relevant football body is required to make a public statement of the reasons if they felt unable to implement IFO findings).*

9. *Network Co-operation:* The IFO is a member of the Ombudsman Association which is a network of some 50 ADR-type schemes. This organisation publicises good practice and arranges conferences and meetings to facilitate shared learning between members. The IFO has continued to receive the benefit of advice and support of its Advisory Panel.

Kevin Grix

INDEPENDENT FOOTBALL OMBUDSMAN

11 February 2023