



THE INDEPENDENT
FOOTBALL OMBUDSMAN

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

ANNUAL ACTIVITY
REPORT

FEBRUARY 2018

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 2016-17 was published in August 2017. 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 2018.



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1. **Number of Cases:** The IFO receives some 1700-1800 messages each year, over 90% of which are submitted by e-mail. Most 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 totalled 23 in the year under review. Of these 16 were adjudicated by a formal published Adjudication Report and 7 were concluded by a letter to the complainant.

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 there were two issues which recurred:
 - Disciplining of supporters following accusations of mis-selling of tickets, commonly referred to as “ticket touting”
 - Problems at matches due to standing supporters and the lack of appropriate response by stewards and stadium managers.

4. **Recommendations**: All IFO Adjudication Reports contain recommendations. On the issues raised in Para 3, the IFO recommended that sanctions imposed on supporters should be fair and proportionate; and that football bodies must address the standing issue, including a trial of “safe standing” sections at grounds.
5. **Complaints refused**: There was no disputes which the IFO refused to deal with.
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 the range of 30-60 days with the average around 45 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 12.5% of the cases the IFO recommendations were not implemented. Under the agreed procedure the relevant football body is required to make a public statement of the reasons for not implementing the IFO findings. The club involved has failed to make such a statement and the matter has been referred to the governing body.
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 the specific benefit of advice and support from the Furniture Ombudsman who is a member of the IFO Advisory Panel.

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