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Date as postmarked

Dear Club Secretary,

Having heard about the BMFA Child Protection Policy and getting this far you might well be thinking "What is this all about?". Having seen some of the paperwork you may also be suffering from a sinking feeling and wondering what you are faced with. However, as Corporal Jones would say "Don't panic!" and he would be right. The situation we are all faced with, and which these documents refer to, is not as daunting as it might appear.

On looking at this package, your first question will almost certainly be 'why is BMFA getting involved in these matters' and your second may be 'why is the BMFA getting my club involved in them'.

It is a fact that any Club has a statutory duty towards the protection of children under the Children Act 1989. What has been recognised by BMFA, and almost all other sporting organisations in the UK, is that this duty of care is soon likely to be backed up by specific legislation which we believe will require every National Body and individual club to have a policy to cover such matters.

Now, while BMFA cannot be responsible for how you run your club and how you care for your members, as your National Body we are responsible for giving you the best advice possible to help you fulfil the responsibilities you already have, many of which we believe will become legal requirements in the future.

To make this clearer we can draw a comparison with the BMFA Safety Codes. The Air Navigation Order (ANO) is the law but it is not particularly specific when applied to model aircraft. The BMFA Safety Codes have been drawn up to give you the best advice we can to help you to comply with the ANO. Similarly, the BMFA child protection policy provides guidance for the safety and protection of those most vulnerable within your club and, importantly, it also gives you a framework within which you can protect yourself or any of your members unwittingly falling into a situation where they may be subjected to accusations of abuse.

Why should you be concerned and involved? Perhaps a few statistics might be in order.

BMFA membership is the size of a small town (approaching 40,000) and predominantly consists of mature males. One in three hundred males have a track record of some form of sexual offence. On average an abuser will be caught after committing his 200th offence.

Statistically, therefore, we have to accept that we have some members that are a threat to our junior and vulnerable adult members and to believe otherwise would be naïve.

Even though model flying does not offer the same opportunities for abuse to occur as in other sports, such as swimming or gymnastics, national experience has shown that the majority of abuse takes place outside the club environment with the abuser having built up the trust of the vulnerable person. Such “grooming” can take place at any time and place and we cannot ignore the possibility.

To emphasise just how important this is, we should tell you that we already have three incidents on record within BMFA clubs. You will be reassured to learn that these incidents were all dealt with in an effective manner but it has happened and it will almost certainly happen again.

The BMFA Policy

The document ‘The promotion of Welfare and Care of Children and Vulnerable Adults in Model Flying’ is what BMFA has adopted as its policy. This is the document you will probably see with this letter and which will be available from the BMFA and on the BMFA website.

To be clear about this, however, this is the BMFA’s policy and it may not be exactly the way you wish to go in your club.

Club Policy

You may be tempted to think that you have to do nothing. However, given what you have already read in this letter it is very clear that this option has only a very limited life and, even today, would only be appropriate within small groups of adult flyers.

If your Club already has junior members or vulnerable adult members, you will probably be carrying out some measures already as a matter of common sense, as would be expected from a responsible parent or guardian. However, there will be some elements that your club may not have thought of or have not considered necessary.

Our strong advice to you is that you should consider your club situation and set out a policy that you can all comply with within the scope of your club activities. There are many variations that you can bring into play and set out below are just a few of them.

You could ban all juniors.

In the vast majority of cases this would be completely inappropriate and short sighted but there are some small, all adult, groups where it could be applied. The law does not insist that you have junior members, only that you have a duty of care to those that you do have.

You could institute parental control.

This is an option that many clubs might find useful. It means that your club rules would have to state that any junior member could only fly when accompanied by a parent, guardian or, for instance, someone who has the written authority to bring the child to the field and supervise them.

If you add into this the ability to have your instructors CRB checked (more about this later) then you have a policy.

You could accept the BMFA policy for use within the club.

This will obviously require more work but, in many ways, it is the appropriate decision for the larger club or one that has numbers of juniors.

If you have read the document then you are now probably asking “where on earth do we start with all of this?”. Firstly, take a deep breath and remember there is no need to rush into anything. Secondly, take your time to read through the document slowly and carefully and possibly re-read it. It will take a little time as it is necessarily comprehensive and covers all aspects of the issues

raised but do remember that it is not necessary to absorb it all in one go. There is no examination at the end of it.

The final decision to implement this Policy, Procedures and Guidelines rests with your Club as the BMFA has no remit in law or within its Constitution to enforce them upon you. However, we would urge you give them your full consideration before making any decision. If necessary implement them in stages against set target dates to allow your members to get used to the idea.

The implementation of the Policy, Procedures and Guidelines will provide benefits for all concerned and involved with the promotion, welfare and care of children and vulnerable adults in model flying and it is one of the most comprehensive policy documents available in any UK sport.

BMFA CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES

To give as much help and guidance to clubs as possible, the BMFA, as your National Body, has set up a set of services that you can tap into at any time to help you with setting up and running the child protection policies that you consider that you need. Some of these are mentioned in the BMFA Policy document but they can all be accessed no matter what policy your club decides to put in place.

Criminal Records Bureau Clearance

One of the major problem within clubs will be the question of “Criminal Records Bureau clearance” to work with children and vulnerable adults It raises all sorts of issues not least the one of privacy which is not surprising as statistically one in three males has a criminal record of one sort or another.

Therefore, it is bound to raise awkward issues for some of your members who work with vulnerable persons or children. However, the vast majority of the offences on record have no bearing on the individual’s suitability, as the offence will have no relevance to working with children or vulnerable adults.

Provided a non-judgemental approach and confidentiality is maintained throughout the clearance process this should not have any adverse effect on the individual. Equally, it is unlikely that anyone with a record of an offence that would stop them from working with vulnerable persons would actually apply for clearance.

BMFA has set up a scheme to help anyone involved in model flying to obtain CRB clearances. We are acting as an agent for Criminal Records Bureau and will pass on any applications to them in the strictest confidence. An application form is available from the BMFA office.

The scheme is FREE to anyone who applies and it will enable any club to have their instructors or anyone involved with children cleared by the CRB.

This clearance is a requirement of the full BMFA Policy but the ability to obtain clearances will also be extremely useful to those clubs that decide not to implement the full policy. The clearance of your instructors would be a very sensible move for any club, especially as the service is free to you through the BMFA.

Either way, the process of clearance helps to filter out those who are unfit to work with vulnerable persons and should be viewed as an asset not an obstacle.

Training

Relevant training courses should be available locally through Sports Coach UK. It is recommended that you visit their website – www.sportscoachuk.org for the latest information. This will provide details of courses in your area and contact details for the event organiser who will be able to advise on the availability of free places. For those without internet access, please contact the BMFA at Chacksfield House for assistance.

The full BMFA policy calls for the appointment of a Club Welfare Officer and training will be mandatory for such persons. However, as most of the training will be done locally, it may be that it will be available to, and useful for, other members

BMFA Advice

BMFA will be running a series of open house seminars where child protection and vulnerable adult issues can be freely and openly discussed.

In addition, should you have any immediate questions help is available by either e-mailing or telephoning the BMFA at Chacksfield House. You can also contact your local authorities for guidance should you wish to do so.

Remember, the BMFA is here to support you and give advice on all aspects of model flying and its associated procedures and the protection of children and vulnerable adults is no exception. All you have to do is ask for help and it will be forthcoming.

Incidents of Abuse or Suspected Abuse

The BMFA policy document has a great deal of specific information of how you should proceed in such cases and you should have it available, even if your club has not instituted the full policy.

If you are unsure about how to proceed, the BMFA is offering a completely confidential advice service and you should contact a BMFA Child Protection officer via the Leicester office.

The welfare of children and vulnerable adults is a subject that will not go away. You already have responsibilities and the current public and political stance in the UK will almost certainly mean that you will have more in the future.

However, this is a situation that can be managed, and, with a little work and the help of the BMFA, you will be able to meet your responsibilities in ways that will benefit all.

Yours sincerely,

Robin I Gowler FSMAE

BMFA Chairman

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