

Independent Review
into Child Sexual Abuse
in Football 1970-2005

ADDENDUM: Watford FC

Clive Sheldon KC

WARNING

This Report contains accounts of child sexual abuse. Those who have given accounts of child sexual abuse are not identified in the Report, save where explicit consent has been provided for this purpose. The identities of those who have given accounts are protected by law. It is a criminal offence pursuant to the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 1992 to publish the identity of those who have given accounts of sexual abuse.

Survivors can access information about the support that is available to them at:
www.thefa.com/football-rules-governance/safeguarding/section-9-support-for-survivors

Helplines outside of football are: NAPAC on their support line: 0808 801 0331 or NSPCC on their helpline: 0800 023 2642.

(These details are correct at the time of publication. Anyone wishing to access support services in the future should refer to the safeguarding page of The FA's website to check for up-to-date details)

Watford FC

1. In my report published on 17th March 2021, I explained that Watford FC was in the process of investigating allegations made against a former physiotherapist, Phil Edwards. I set out in my report the information that the Club had obtained by that point in time, including the various allegations of abuse that Edwards was alleged to have perpetrated. I stated that, if requested by the FA, I would issue an addendum to my report setting out the conclusions of the Club's investigation, and evaluating the adequacy of that investigation (see paragraphs 9.11.21 – 9.11.28).
2. The Club have concluded their investigation, and have shared their findings with me. The FA has asked me to issue an addendum so that the conclusions of the Club's investigation can be made known to survivors and others.
3. According to the Club they have no personnel file or payroll record to show that Edwards was ever employed by them, and there are no financial records of any invoices that Edwards submitted to the Club for professional services. The Club acknowledge, however, that Edwards did perform physiotherapy services for them. The Club have located an article in the *Watford Observer* newspaper which contains an interview with the Club's then manager, Graham Taylor, who refers to Edwards handing in his notice in October 1998 and staying around until the Club had found a new physiotherapist. As part of their investigation, the Club heard from one person that Edwards had started performing physiotherapy services for Watford FC in the summer of 1988. Another person thought that Edwards worked for the Club from 1994.

The alleged abuse

4. The Club have informed me that for the purposes of their investigation they were in touch with 29 survivors, 18 of whom provided a signed account of their experience at the Club and the alleged abuse by Edwards. One survivor gave a witness statement but did not sign it. The survivors appear to have been between the ages of 13 and 15 at the time of the alleged abuse.

5. The alleged abuse by Edwards was described in my report at paragraph 9.11.27.1. The abuse was connected to the physiotherapy treatment that Edwards had been engaged to provide. It included asking players to remove all clothing during “treatment”, requiring players to squat while they were naked and Edwards lay on the floor looking at them, conducting unnecessary groin “examinations” (for a sports hernia, a condition known as “Gilmore’s Groin”), touching a boy’s penis, and potentially digital penetration (one survivor said that Edwards “put his fingers where he shouldn’t”).
6. One survivor states that he was abused by Edwards at Vicarage Road (the Club’s stadium); the other survivors allege that they were abused at non-Club premises where Edwards conducted his physiotherapy services. Several survivors detailed how Edwards appeared to enjoy inflicting pain on them and laughed or shouted at them if they cried.
7. A number of survivors allege that Edwards befriended some of the boys and their families. It was said that Edwards had boys over to his house where he gave them alcohol, showed them pornographic films, and encouraged them to perform sexual acts with an adapted stuffed toy. Edwards was also alleged to have hosted boys at his home on behalf of the Club.
8. The Club have said that all of the survivors described Edwards as being the best physiotherapist that they had seen for treatment as he could enable recovery from injury much more quickly than others. The survivors report that being asked to be naked for treatment was something they just had to live with if it meant that they could play football. Some of the survivors have said that at the time of their treatment they did not identify Edwards’ conduct as abuse, but they later came to realise the true nature of Edwards’ behaviour as they reflected on things later on in their lives.
9. The Club concluded that evidence provided by the survivors gives a strong indication that the treatment methods used by Edwards were not only questionable, but in some cases amounted to criminal conduct. The Club have said that Edwards’ actions were

voyeuristic and inappropriate. The treatment methods used were not considered by the relevant physiotherapy agencies to be good practice or otherwise acceptable.

Alleged knowledge of the abuse

10. Several of the survivors alleged that Edwards' abusive behaviour and practice was common knowledge amongst Club staff. Many survivors have said that Edwards was referred to as "Paedo Phil", and that boys would talk openly in the changing rooms about Edwards' conduct. One former youth player does not remember the use of the term "Paedo Phil", but does remember young players referring to Edwards as "fill me up Phil".
11. Former members of staff were traced and interviewed by the investigator: all denied any knowledge of the alleged abuse by Edwards.
12. One former volunteer at the Club said that he recalled Edwards had a habit of "whacking a player's buttocks when they got off the treatment table". The volunteer explained that he picked up on this behaviour and thought it unnecessary, although he went on to say that this conduct would always be followed with laughter. The volunteer also stated that he was puzzled as to why so many young players picked up similar injuries that Edwards diagnosed, the most common being "Gilmore's Groin". He said that the treatment was not nice at all, that it was often joked about, and that Edwards said things like "how do you think I feel having to carry out the test".
13. One survivor stated that he was asked by members of staff, in the presence of the then manager Graham Taylor, about the abuse by Edwards. The survivor says that he disclosed to Graham Taylor and the other members of staff the abuse that he was experiencing. The survivor said that nothing was done, that Edwards remained in post and the abuse continued. The members of staff named by the survivor were spoken to by the investigator, and they both denied that the conversation happened. One of them said that if the disclosure had taken place, the abuse would have been dealt with by Graham Taylor. He said that "I just can't believe that Graham wouldn't have dealt with

something absolutely correctly. Everything he did was absolutely correct.” Graham Taylor died on 27th January 2017, before the Club’s investigation commenced.

14. Another survivor has alleged that another member of staff working for the Club admitted to him many years later that Graham Taylor knew about the abuse, and that Graham Taylor had told him that Edwards needed to leave the Club because of the abuse. The investigator contacted the member of staff, but they declined to engage with the investigation.
15. Another survivor has alleged that he told his host mother about the abuse, but the abuse did not stop. The investigator was unable to make contact with the host mother to ask for her account.

The Club’s conclusion as to their knowledge of the abuse

16. The Club have concluded that there is no corroborating evidence to support the survivor testimony that any staff member knew that the alleged abuse by Edwards was taking place.
17. The Club have also concluded that there was no evidence that any person at the Club outside of the coaching or medical staff had reason to know of the alleged abuse by Edwards.
18. The Club have left open whether coaching or medical staff had reason to know of the alleged abuse by Edwards. The Club have left open, therefore, whether there was material that should have put coaching and/or medical staff on notice as to potential abuse by Edwards, or of material that should have caused them to make further enquiries.

My analysis of the Club's investigation and conclusions

19. The Club's conclusion that there is no corroborating evidence to support the allegation that staff members knew about the alleged abuse by Edwards was an appropriate conclusion for the Club to reach.
20. There were two specific allegations of knowledge. First, there was the allegation made by one survivor that he discussed Edwards' abuse with members of staff and the former manager, Graham Taylor. This allegation was investigated by the Club. In circumstances where (i) the two members of staff denied that the discussion had taken place, (ii) Graham Taylor is deceased, and (iii) there is no other evidence to support the allegation, it was appropriate for the Club to conclude that this allegation could not be corroborated. The Club's approach to the evidence was consistent with the approach that I took in evaluating evidence relating to other clubs and abusers in my report (see paragraph 6.65).
21. Second, there was an allegation that another member of staff was reported to have said that Graham Taylor knew about the abuse. The Club sought to investigate this allegation, but the member of staff declined to engage with the Club's investigation and so it was not possible to take the matter any further forward. In the circumstances, it was appropriate to conclude that this allegation of knowledge of the abuse could not be corroborated.
22. The Club's conclusion that there was no evidence that non-coaching or non-medical staff (e.g. members of the Club's Board, or administrative staff) had reason to know of the alleged abuse by Edwards is an appropriate one. There were no specific allegations that those working outside of the coaching or medical sphere were made aware of the alleged abuse by Edwards, and the circumstantial evidence did not support a finding that they ought to have been so aware. There is no suggestion, for instance, that non-coaching/medical staff might have heard the banter about Edwards, or might have witnessed Edwards' conduct at the treatment table in the changing rooms.
23. The Club have left open the possibility that coaching or medical staff may have had reason to know of the alleged abuse by Edwards: that is, that there may have been

warning signs which ought to have alerted them to the possibility that something untoward was taking place and ought to have been investigated further. In my view, the Club was correct to leave open this possibility.

24. I say this because several of the survivors described the banter in the changing rooms where Edwards was called “Paedo Phil”, and it would not be surprising that this may have been heard by staff (coaching and medical staff) who worked in or around the changing room areas.

25. I am also struck by the comment from the volunteer (see paragraph 12 above) that he was aware that Edwards had a habit in the changing room of “whacking a player’s buttocks when they got off the treatment table”. If this was seen by the volunteer, it is possible that this was also seen or known by other staff who were present in the changing room.

26. I consider that the Club have carried out a detailed investigation of the allegations involving their former physiotherapist Edwards. The Club were open about their investigation, and made a public call for survivors and other witnesses to come forward. In addition to being in touch with 29 survivors, and taking signed statements from 18 of them, the Club interviewed 6 former members of staff, a former volunteer at the Club, someone who had been in business with Edwards and 2 parents of a youth player at the Club. The Club have also searched through their records to see what information they held about Edwards. In the circumstances, I consider that the Club’s investigation was adequate within the meaning of my Terms of Reference and met the standards expected by the Review.