



THE SHOT PAPERS

THE ADMIN TRAP.

THE CLUB THAT RUNS ON WHATSAPP.

Grassroots clubs are held together with WhatsApp threads, spreadsheets and one exhausted volunteer. This paper is about what that costs, who ends up paying it, and what it would take to give every volunteer their evenings back.

FOR CLUB SECRETARIES · CHAIRS · VOLUNTEERS

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THE ARGUMENT IN ONE PAGE

One practical question keeps surfacing in conversations with coach educators and club volunteers: "what app do people use?" Clubs are paying real money for software that does not fit the job, stitching the gaps with WhatsApp and spreadsheets, and the bill lands on one volunteer's evenings. The answer is not another tool. It is one free place that gives volunteers their time back.

FIVE FINDINGS

1. **It is the same conversation everywhere.** Fixtures in one app, subs in a spreadsheet, messages in a WhatsApp thread with sixty parents, and one exhausted volunteer holding all of it together.
2. **The workforce is shrinking.** England has 10.5 million sport volunteers, 1.7 million fewer than at the 2016-17 peak, and their work is worth £8.2 billion a year in social value.
3. **Fragmentation is the tax.** Clubs pay for several products, one for fixtures, one for payments, one for messaging, and none of them talk to each other. The volunteer is the integration.
4. **Child safety is delegated to the club.** On mainstream team apps the account and messaging rules are loose enough that safeguarding becomes club policy rather than platform design.
5. **Time is the real currency.** Clubs tell us, consistently, that admin is the biggest hidden cost in their week. Every hour of it is an hour of coaching lost.

Every hour of admin is an hour of coaching lost. A club's software should be measured in volunteer evenings returned, not features shipped.

This paper sets out the problem in numbers, why the current answers fail, the principle any club can adopt tomorrow, and only then what we built against it. The product arrives last on purpose. The argument has to stand up without it.

1 THE SAME CONVERSATION

Everywhere I go it is the same conversation. Different sport, different county, different accent, same story.

I have had it in clubhouse kitchens and on touchlines, in county meeting rooms and on video calls. The fixtures live in one app. The subs live in a spreadsheet that only one person understands. The messages live in a WhatsApp thread with sixty parents in it, where Sunday's kick-off time is buried under forty replies about a lost boot bag. The safeguarding certificates are in a drawer, or a folder, or somewhere. And the whole operation is held together by one volunteer, usually the secretary or a parent who made the mistake of being reliable, who has not had a free evening all season.

Earlier this year I spoke with coach educators and club volunteers about the systems they use. Different clubs had bought different products, but the frustration was consistent: real money going out for software that still left fixtures, payments, messages and records split across several places. The detail changed. The underlying problem did not.

The same practical question keeps surfacing around coaching courses and club conversations. It is not about tactics, session design, difficult parents or how to manage a squad of mixed abilities. It is "what app do people use?"

"What app do people use?"

A RECURRING QUESTION IN CLUB AND COACH-EDUCATION CONVERSATIONS · 2026

Sit with that for a second. Before many volunteers have taken a single session, they already know the thing most likely to grind them down is not the coaching. It is the admin. The question underneath "what app do people use?" is really "who is going to give me my evenings back?", and right now the answer across too many clubs is nobody.

2 THE PROBLEM IN NUMBERS

The admin trap is not a niche complaint. It sits on top of the largest volunteer workforce in the country, and that workforce is shrinking.



Start with the workforce. Some 10.5 million people volunteer in sport in England, and Sport England values their work at £8.2 billion a year in social value. That is the engine of grassroots sport: not the governing bodies, not the facilities, the volunteers. And the engine is losing power. There are 1.7 million fewer sport volunteers than at the 2016-17 peak. Nobody resigns from volunteering with a letter. They just stop putting their hand up, and the job lands on whoever is left.

Now look at who does the coaching. Around 3.1 million UK adults, 6% of the adult population, coached sport or physical activity in the last twelve months, and 62% of youth coaching is delivered by volunteers (UK Coaching, 2024). The same study shows the share of coaches who are paid rose from 38% to 53% between 2022 and 2024. Read those two lines together and the direction is clear: as volunteering gets harder, delivery gets more professional and more expensive, and the families and clubs who cannot pay are the first to lose out.



The money at stake dwarfs anything on a club's balance sheet. Community sport and physical activity generate £122.9 billion a year in social value in England, and inequality of access, the gap between who could take part and who actually does, costs an estimated £19.6 billion of it every year (Sport England with Sheffield Hallam University and Manchester Metropolitan University, 2023/24). Every volunteer who burns out on admin, every club that folds because nobody would take the secretary's job, adds to that bill.

One number is deliberately missing from this page: the hours volunteers spend on admin each week. No reliable national figure exists, and we will not invent one. What clubs tell us, consistently, is that admin is the biggest hidden cost in their week. We report that as experience, not as a statistic.

3 WHY THE CURRENT ANSWERS FAIL

The clubs in those conversations had paid for software. They had done the responsible thing. The problem is not that clubs choose badly. It is that everything on offer shares the same three design faults.

BUILT FOR THE ADULT ADMINISTRATOR

Team admin tools are built for the person collecting money and setting fixtures. That is the paying customer, so that is who the product serves. Everyone else is an afterthought. The player has no reason to open the app between matches. The parent gets notifications, not insight. The coach gets a register, not a curriculum. The child, the reason the whole club exists, barely features in the design at all except as a name on a list. Software built for the administrator will always feel like admin, because that is exactly what it is.

FRAGMENTED PAID PRODUCTS THAT DO NOT TALK TO EACH OTHER

Because no single product covers the club's real life, clubs end up paying for several: one for fixtures, one for payments, one for messaging, a website somewhere else, and WhatsApp filling every gap in between. Clubs tell us they hold two, three, sometimes four separate paid subscriptions at once; we report that as club experience, not a measured statistic. Each product adds a login, a data export and a re-keying job. None of them share a member list. The integration layer between them is a human being, unpaid, at ten o'clock at night.

LOOSE RULES LEAVE CHILD SAFETY TO THE CLUB

This is the fault that should worry every committee most. On mainstream team apps the account and messaging rules are loose enough that child safety becomes club policy rather than platform design. On many of them there is nothing structural to stop a teenager setting up a team and privately messaging younger children; whether that happens is left to vigilance, settings pages and codes of conduct. The volunteer becomes the safeguarding layer as well as the admin department. The law is moving against this: the UK Online Safety Act's age-assurance duties have been enforceable since July 2025, with real fines already issued. Platforms that treat safeguarding as a toggle are on the wrong side of where regulation, and every parent, is heading.

EVERY HOUR OF ADMIN IS AN HOUR OF COACHING LOST

And underneath all three faults sits the cost nobody prices: time. To be straight about the evidence, no sourced national figure for volunteer admin hours exists, so we will not print one. But the pattern clubs report to us is unanimous: the chasing, the re-keying, the forwarding of the same message across three group chats eats the evenings that were volunteered for coaching. When the job becomes admin, people stop volunteering for it. A country 1.7 million volunteers down from its peak cannot afford tools that make the job bigger.

The failure is not that your club picked the wrong app. It is that everything on offer was built to administrate a team, and your club is a community built around children.

4 THE PRINCIPLE: EVENINGS BACK

Volunteers do not need another tool. They need their evenings back. Any club, and any platform, can be held against that standard, whether or not it ever uses ours.

1

ONE PLACE OR NO PLACE

Fixtures, attendance, comms and membership belong in a single system with a single member list. The moment a job spans two systems, the volunteer becomes the integration, and the integration is the job that burns people out.

2

FREE AT THE BASE, FOREVER

The club, team and coach layer must be free, permanently. Any per-head charge at club level taxes exactly the volunteers and families the system depends on, and reaches only the clubs that can pay. With participation inequality already costing an estimated £19.6 billion a year, the base layer of sport cannot be a subscription.

3

SAFETY IS STRUCTURE, NOT SETTINGS

Age-tiered accounts, guardian visibility and adult-to-child messaging rules belong in the architecture, where they cannot be switched off, misconfigured or forgotten. If unsupervised contact between an adult and a child is possible by default, the design is wrong, whatever the settings page says.

4

COUNT EVENINGS, NOT FEATURES

The only measure of club software that matters is hours per week returned to the volunteer. Not features shipped, not modules bundled. If the secretary's Tuesday night is still spent chasing and re-keying, the tool has failed, however long its feature list.

Here is a test any committee can run this month, before any purchasing decision. List every system your club touched in the last month, including WhatsApp and the spreadsheets. Count the logins. Count the places the same child's details are stored. Then ask the person who holds it all together how many evenings it took, and how many they would keep doing it for. That conversation, honestly had, will tell you more than any product demo.

Every hour of admin is an hour of coaching lost. The job of club software is to give that hour back.

5 WHAT WE BUILT

We built SHOT Clubhouse's club layer against the four principles on the previous page, because we lived this problem before we built anything.

ONE PLACE

The Clubhouse puts fixtures, attendance, comms and membership in one place, for every team in the club, on one member list. Nothing to stitch together, nothing to export and re-key, no third group chat. The parent sees what they need without wading through sixty replies. The coach takes the register in seconds. The secretary stops being the integration layer between four products, because there are not four products.

FREE FOREVER

The club layer is free for every club, team, school and coach, permanently. Admin free forever. No card. No catch. That is a product decision, not a promotion: the base layer of grassroots sport should never be a subscription, because the moment it is, the system only reaches the families who can pay. Paid development tools sit alongside for those who want them, and nothing in the club admin layer is gated behind them.

SAFEGUARDING AS ARCHITECTURE

Child safety is built into the structure, not offered as a settings page. Accounts are age-tiered, so what a child can see and do is set by who they are, not by how carefully a volunteer configured a toggle. Guardians have visibility of younger accounts. And there is no unsupervised adult-to-child messaging, by design; the platform does not rely on the club to police what the architecture should make impossible. The volunteer goes back to being a coach, not an unpaid moderation team.

WHAT THAT MEANS FOR THE VOLUNTEER

Put together, the point of all of it is the answer to the question on every coaching course. When a new volunteer asks "what app do people use?", we want the honest answer to be one place, free, safe by design, that costs nothing and hands back the evenings. Not a shrug, and not a subscription to something that is not really fit for purpose.

Admin free forever. No card. No catch.



TAKE YOUR SHOT

Running a club on group chats and goodwill? You do not have to. And you do not have to take our word for any of this to act on it.

- **Club secretaries and chairs:** run the test in Part Four at your next committee meeting. Count the systems, the logins and the evenings. Then move one team onto the Clubhouse and compare the week. It is free, for every team in the club, forever.
- **Volunteers and coaches:** the question you asked on your course has an answer now. One place for fixtures, attendance, comms and membership, with nothing to pay and nothing to stitch together. Bring your team and keep your evenings.
- **Leagues and county bodies:** hold every platform your clubs use, including ours, to the four principles in this paper, and especially to safety as structure. If unsupervised adult-to-child contact is possible by default, ask why.
- **Funders and partners:** the volunteer workforce is 1.7 million down and carrying £8.2 billion a year of social value. Fund the infrastructure that gives volunteers their time back, and ask every grantee what their software costs them in evenings, not just pounds.

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SOURCES

- Sport England, volunteering in sport data, November 2024 (10.5 million sport volunteers in England; £8.2 billion annual social value; 1.7 million fewer volunteers than 2016-17)
- UK Coaching, Coaching in the UK Population Study, 2024 (6% of UK adults, around 3.1 million, coached in the last 12 months; 62% of youth coaching voluntary; paid share of coaches 38% to 53%, 2022-24)
- Sport England / Sheffield Hallam University / Manchester Metropolitan University, Social value of community sport and physical activity in England, 2023/24 (£122.9 billion annual social value; £19.6 billion estimated annual cost of participation inequality)
- Ofcom / UK Government, Online Safety Act age-assurance enforcement, from July 2025

The opening account combines recurring observations from SHOT's conversations with clubs and coach educators during 2026; no individual is quoted or described. Claims described as what clubs tell us, including subscription counts and admin hours, are drawn from those conversations and reported as experience, not measured statistics. No sourced national figure for volunteer admin hours exists.