



<b>Subject:</b>	IFA Intermediate Football League Restructuring and Ground Criteria
<b>Date:</b>	10 <sup>th</sup> September 2019
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Nigel Grimshaw, Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services
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<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
<b>Is this report restricted?</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b>	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Call-in</b>	
<b>Is the decision eligible for Call-in?</b>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues</b>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to advise Members of the IFA proposals to restructure Intermediate League football in Northern Ireland and the associated changes to ground/pitch criteria.
1.2	The proposed Intermediate Football restructuring and changes to ground criteria are far reaching and will impact significantly on clubs and the Council.
1.3	The Council currently provides pitch allocations at current intermediate standard for 13 teams at 12 sites across the city. Ground alterations required to meet the new IFA ground criteria are extensive and potentially expensive.

	In additional to the financial impact, ground changes would fundamentally change the level and flexibility of use to the detriment of cross sports code and community programming.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	The Committee is asked to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Note the IFA proposals to restructure Intermediate League Football in Northern Ireland and the potential impacts for the Council and clubs.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>
	<u>Key Issues</u>
3.1	The full IFA Intermediate Football restructuring proposal is attached at <b>Appendix 1</b> and the new IFA Intermediate League Ground Criteria is attached in full at <b>Appendix 2</b> .
3.2	The most significant change included within the restructure is a reduction from circa 117 teams to 56 teams (both totals exclude 12 'Premier Intermediate League' teams) playing at 'intermediate' level.
3.3	The new structure will have four regional divisions below the Premier Intermediate League (1 North/North West, 2 Greater Belfast and 1 South/South East). Each division will have 14 teams.
3.4	Under the current structure there are 13 intermediate teams playing 'home' matches on 12 Council owned pitches. The teams in question, the designated pitches and the new ground criteria compliance matrix is attached at <b>Appendix 3</b> .
3.5	The timeline for implementation is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>August 2019 – Expressions of interest for entry into new IFA intermediate structure</li> <li>January 2020 – IFA commence tender process to appoint league operators</li> <li>January 2021 – IFA final inspection of facilities against new ground criteria</li> <li>May 2021 – Confirmation of 68 teams (inc. 12 Premier Intermediate League) to play in new intermediate football league structure</li> <li>May 2021 – Allocation of teams to leagues</li> <li>August 2021 Kick off first season of new Intermediate Football League Structure</li> </ul>
3.6	In following the above timeframe, it would be essential that teams selected for inclusion in the new leagues are confirmed at the earliest possible date. With final pitch inspections

scheduled for January 2021, it is assumed that the IFA will at least have a shortlist of potential intermediate league teams early in 2020. If this is not available it is likely that lead in time for ground alterations would be inadequate if the final 68 teams are to be confirmed by May 2021.

3.7 At this point there is no way of knowing how many or which of the 13 intermediate teams currently playing on BCC facilities will qualify and be included in the 28 teams to play in the 2 new Greater Belfast divisions. We can be reasonably certain that not all will be included.

3.8 Any current intermediate teams not included in the new intermediate structure will be placed in the 'Junior League' structure. The new Intermediate Football ground criteria will not apply to Junior leagues. Consequently any potential impact on Council will reduce as some of the 12 grounds listed in Appendix 3 will not be required to meet the new ground criteria.

3.9 The new IFA Intermediate Football ground criteria that sits alongside the league restructuring is substantially different and considerably more stringent than those set out in the current regulations.

Appendix 2 sets out details of specific ground requirements under the following 10 key headings:

- Pitch & playing surface
- Artificial surfaces
- Football ground boundary and environs
- Run off areas and dug outs
- Access to football grounds
- Exiting ground
- Access to pitch for players and officials
- Changing room accommodation
- First aid
- Football ground capacity and spectator accommodation

In summary none of the 12 BCC grounds detailed in Appendix 3 currently meet all of the new IFA ground criteria.

3.10	<p>While some of the new requirements could be easily and inexpensively met (for example marked technical areas and no additional sports post stored within the pitch area), others present substantial and potentially expensive challenges. For example, provision of secure ground perimeter boundaries, changing room dimensions and covered spectator stand/terracing. It should be noted that none of the Council's current grounds with Intermediate League accreditation meet the new ground perimeter boundary or the covered stand requirements. 7 of the 12 sites do not meet the new home/away dressing room capacity requirement of 15m<sup>2</sup>.</p>
3.11	<p>The matrix in Appendix 3 includes the findings of preliminary high level ground assessments carried out by Council Officers. These assessment were non-expert cursory inspections. All white cells indicate areas of compliance with the new criteria.</p> <p><u>Financial &amp; Resource Implications</u></p>
3.12	<p>Financial implications cannot be assessed until teams/grounds included in the new Intermediate Football League structure are confirmed. Costs would depend entirely on how many and which specific grounds are included. It is reasonable to assume that, given the scale of alterations required, any cost implications are substantial.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</u></p>
3.13	<p>Equality and good relations issues may arise in relation to 'exclusive use' elements of the new ground criteria. These clauses would directly impact on the level and flexibility of use, potentially to the detriment of multi sports code booking allocations and community programming.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices – Documents Attached</b>
	<p>Appendix 1 – IFA Intermediate Football Restructuring  Appendix 2 – IFA Intermediate Football Ground Criteria  Appendix 3 – IFA Intermediate Football Ground Criteria, BCC current compliance matrix</p>