

Andrew Hassard
Belfast City Council
Parks and Leisure Department
Adelaide Exchange
24-26 Adelaide Street
Belfast
BT2 8GD

22 May 2012

Dear Andrew,

Thank you for your letter of 15 May. I have been away from the office and only became aware of it yesterday.

I have spoken already to Alderman Rodgers in regard to this matter, and had a very positive meeting with him the week before last. He did inform me of the motion and said as a result of our meeting he would ask the Council not to write to UTV in regard to this matter until he'd spoken with the IFA to establish the facts.

I enclose the body of a letter sent to all IFA League chairmen and managers which states UTV's position in regard to this issue.

For the avoidance of any doubt, UTV has not decided to stop showing local football, we are committed to comprehensive news and sports coverage across all our news programming.

What has changed in recent years is that UTV has stopped paying for 'news highlight rights' to all sports in Northern Ireland. As a result of this, those close to the IFA appear to be briefing that UTV will not be allowed into the grounds next season, thereby potentially preventing UTV from covering the sport in our local news.

If anyone from the Council had called prior to the motion being made public I would have happily briefed them on this issue.

While I understand the motion is now on public record I would hope the Council will either amend or withdraw the motion now that it is clear it is based on incorrect information.

I am happy to discuss this and the motion at any time you require further briefing.

Yours sincerely,



Michael Wilson
Managing Director

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11th April 2012

I am writing to all of the Chairmen and Managers of the Irish League clubs following the various press reports over the Easter period regarding UTV Television's commitment to local football.

I believe as the primary stakeholders in the sport you should be fully briefed on UTV's discussions to date with the IFA as the weekend reports do not reflect our true position.

In 2010 UTV wrote to the Chief Executives of Football, Rugby and GAA in Northern Ireland stating that the company was no longer willing to pay for news access to sporting events. No other broadcasters in the UK or Ireland pay for this access. In the letter we stated that the commercial conditions in our region were no different to any other, and that the practice of paying for news access should end when the current contracts with each sport expired. Newspapers or photo agencies do not pay for access to cover games so television news bulletins should be no different.

In the past two seasons our contracts for Rugby and the GAA have ended and through positive dialogue our coverage has continued of both sports. Indeed, UTV sent a team to New Zealand to cover the Rugby World Cup and our relationships with both Ulster Rugby and the GAA have never been stronger.

In other words the ending of the commercial deal has brought about a different way of operating that has led to new forms of co-operation between both the sports and UTV.

Our contract with the IFA runs until the end of this season. I have met with the Chief Executive of the IFA on one occasion and with the rights representative of the IFA on at least two more. Senior members of UTV's Communications Team have met with other members of the IFA management to see if any sort of sponsorship partnerships can be put in place with football in Northern Ireland as we have with the other two major sporting bodies. These to date have been unsuccessful.

UTV has made it very clear in these negotiations that the only thing we are taking off the table is the rights fee. UTV is continuing to offer and still wants to cover football games, to send crews and reporters to grounds as we do now. Perhaps most importantly to the sport, we want to maintain our relationship and we would hope as we have with other sports, to build on our existing coverage.

We wish to cover football on the same terms as we now cover all sports in Northern Ireland – as a successful, commercial, public service broadcaster. UTV Live is the most watched regional news in Northern Ireland by some margin.

In the coming season, with your continued co-operation, UTV's sport team will still want to be attend training, post-match press conferences and covering football related stories across our output on television, radio and online. We look forward to continuing our good working relationship with all the clubs and promoting the sport in our programming.

UTV is not walking away from football. We are still prepared to commit many hundreds of thousands of pounds of technical facilities, reporting skills and editorial airtime to the sport. If football is lost from our news programming next year, it will be because football has walked away from UTV. Indeed we are very happy to discuss how we cover your club and the sport if you feel it would be of benefit. I am more than happy to meet with you or with a delegation from the clubs at any time.

Throughout this process with all the sports, UTV has been completely transparent about our view on the future of payments for sports rights for news coverage; we are treating all sports equally.

As a matter of complete openness I will be sending a copy of this letter to the Chief Executive of the IFA.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Wilson
Managing Director
UTV Television