



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Parks and Leisure Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Partnership Agreements – Engagement on ‘Draft Playing Pitches Agreement Policy’</b>
<b>Date:</b>	13 February 2014
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks & Leisure
<b>Contact Officers:</b>	Caroline Wilson, Neighbourhood and Development Manager Maria McAleer, Policy and Business Development Officer

<b>1.</b>	<b>Relevant Background Information</b>
	<p>Members will be aware that over the years the Council has reviewed ‘facility management agreements’ (FMAs). In 2011 it was agreed that a fundamental revision was needed and a framework and set of criteria established to ensure requests for such arrangements would be assessed on a consistent basis.</p> <p>The draft Playing Pitches Agreements policy (attached at appendix one) seeks to provide the flexibility required to enable mutually beneficial partnership arrangements to be developed that add value to the Council’s service delivery, balancing public access with dedicated use. This was considered and agreed by Committee in December 2012.</p> <p>In September 2013, Council agreed to undertake an engagement process with relevant partners to consider this draft policy.</p>

<b>2.</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
	In October 2013, three engagement workshops took place at Council venues citywide with over 50 participants. At each workshop, Council Officers gave a

presentation on partner agreements, the draft policy which only applies to standard grass pitches and the outcomes Council is seeking to achieve.

Independent facilitators from the Interaction Institute for Social Change (IISC) facilitated discussion around these areas. The workshops provided an opportunity to hear the views of and engage with current partners (FMAs holders, representative bodies and sporting codes from all levels) on the draft policy.

IISC summarised the key issues arising from the consultation:

**Overall policy direction:**

- More clarity is required around the details of the proposals to enable partners to provide more detailed feedback on potential implications. That said, some felt that the *“partnership agreements are a good idea as they could assist in ensuring better and more efficient usage of pitches”*.
- There was also support for the Council's wider objectives of trying to enhance inclusion, address inequalities, promote participation and enhance wellbeing across the city.
- Some participants felt if the overall responsibility for pitch upkeep resides with the Council that this could work out better for the clubs.
- There was concern that the policy may take little account of the increase in usage which has taken place over the last few years. Over the years many FMA holders have built up good working relationships with council parks and leisure staff. There was some concern that the new arrangements may not ensure continuity in terms of the provision of skilled and knowledgeable Council staff that play a pivotal role at in ensuring standards and quality of provision at grass pitches across Belfast.
- The issue of provision for intermediate level was raised and it was noted that there is little available at the moment. It is therefore *“important that governing bodies work in partnership with the Council and grass roots to solve problems”*, particularly in relation to the rules and regulations of the various sporting associations.
- There was a broad agreement amongst consultees that increased grass pitches provision was needed and that the welcome introduction of 3G will not fully address this issue.

**Future criteria for partner agreements:**

- Questions raised were around what the criteria for applications will be, with a suggestion that flexibility will be required in terms of how policies / assessments are applied to specific issues and contexts.
- The issue of how a small club could run a big facility was raised with participants asking if there are likely to be options such as portioning up larger sites or having an agreement with one club to take on just one or two pitches.

**Pitches management:**

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many of the questions raised were to do with the details of who would run the site, with queries on specific tasks such as pitch marking, setting up pitches for games and cleaning up afterwards.</li> <li>• There were questions as to how a new centralised system would work in practice. Concerns were expressed about the potential for conflict over bookings and it was suggested that changes in the current booking system is required.</li> </ul> <p><b>Specific sporting code related issues.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved provision for rugby was raised as an issue.</li> <li>• There was concern over how cricket provision at City of Belfast Playing Fields at Mallusk will be managed as there are currently two teams using it.</li> </ul> <p><b>Next steps</b></p> <p>Following the initial engagement stage, it is proposed that officers continue discussions with relevant partners including current FMA holders, Sports NI and sporting associations.</p> <p>This will allow a full examination of the complex issues emerging from recent engagement and for a robust partnership agreements framework to be brought back to Committee for its consideration. This framework will include arrangements for capacity-building, seeking expressions of interest, distributing grant-aid, facilitating bookings systems and maintenance of pitches. It will also consider issues related to intermediate provision.</p> <p>The Council is currently finalising the update of the baseline study on supply and demand for pitches in the city. This is a useful context piece for the next stages of development of the partnership agreements.</p>
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<b>3.</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
	<p><u>Financial</u></p> <p>Existing FMA payments will be re-distributed in the form of grant aid for active sports development plans. The total figure available for this has not yet been defined.</p> <p><u>Human Resources</u></p> <p>Ongoing officer time from a range of officers across the department will be dedicated to implementation and ongoing management in the medium to long term.</p> <p><u>Assets and Other Implications</u></p> <p>It is proposed within the draft policy that new partnership agreements will impact on future management of assets. Legal services will continue to provide advice on this for the Committee’s consideration.</p>

<b>4.</b>	<b>Equality Implications</b>
	The policy will be screened in line with the Council's existing equality screening process.

<b>5.</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
	Members are asked to note the update report and provide feedback on the issues raised.

<b>6.</b>	<b>Decision Tracking</b>
	A report outlining the final draft partnership agreements framework and implementation process will be brought to Committee by September 2014.

<b>7.</b>	<b>Key to Abbreviations</b>
	<p>FMA's – Facilities Management Agreements</p> <p>IISC-Interaction Institute for Social Change</p> <p>GAA – Gaelic Athletic Association</p>

<b>8.</b>	<b>Documents Attached</b>
	Appendix One: 'Draft Playing Pitches Agreement Policy '.