



<b>Subject:</b>	Intermediate League Football
<b>Date:</b>	8 <sup>th</sup> August 2017
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Nigel Grimshaw, Director City & Neighbourhood Services Department
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Rose Crozier, Assistant Director City & Neighbourhood Services Department Stephen Walker, Portfolio and Programme Manager

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
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>	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	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 update members on the situation surrounding the review of ground criteria currently being undertaken by the Irish Football Association.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	The Committee is asked to; <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Consider the report and direct Officers to undertake a review of the use of its pitches for association football and to establish a position and policy regarding use of Council facilities to accommodate Intermediate League Football.</li></ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>
3.1	Members are reminded that at the People and Communities Committee on 10 <sup>th</sup> January 2017 it was agreed, 'given that the Irish Football Association (IFA) was currently

undertaking a review of Intermediate League Ground Criteria, which would likely result in revised standards, that representatives from the IFA be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee to discuss the proposed changes.’ The IFA has now responded to the Council’s request and has advised that the review is ongoing and that it would be premature at this time to outline proposals, it has however indicated that it will update the Committee once the review is complete. A copy of the existing ground criteria is attached as Appendix 1.

3.2 It is the understanding of Officers that it is likely that the existing facilities will require a higher standard of facilities for those clubs playing at the higher levels of local soccer. It is also possible that the IFA may require that Clubs have a greater degree of control over the facilities which they use, designated, as ‘their home’. However, while at this time the IFA is not prepared to clarify matters it does appear likely that any enhanced requirements resulting from the review is likely to have implications for the Council in terms of upgrading of facilities and security of tenure for local clubs.

3.3 Within this context Committee is asked to consider if it wishes to undertake a wider assessment of the Council’s approach to supporting local soccer clubs.

3.4 Members will be aware that there are a number of teams operating within Council facilities who play at what we refer to as Intermediate League Standard. Members will be aware that from time to time they will receive an approach from a local Club who may play at this level and who seek accommodation from the Council, Crumlin Star being a recent example of this. In addition, members may receive requests from Club playing at lower levels but who aspire to higher league status and in preparation seek the allocation of a pitch / facility which they can designate as a home pitch. Members may also receive approaches from teams seeking to upgrade facilities to meet higher standards of ground criteria, on occasion Clubs may seek Council to agree to make the changes and meet the cost, others have accessed funding from a variety of sources and seek Council consent to enhance facilities and may require Council to agree to providing security of tenure to the Clubs for an agreed period of time.

3.5 At present the Council has no clear policy on these issues or indeed criteria by which it might, in a transparent way, assess such requests. Members are therefore asked to consider whether it wishes Officers to undertake to establish such a policy.

3.6 In considering this issue at this time Members are asked to reflect on the following background position.

3.7	The Council commissioned an updated pitches baseline profile in 2013, while the baseline itself would require updating in terms of new and emerging artificial turf pitches and the changing demands for clubs it nevertheless provides some useful contextual information.
3.8	The baseline outlined the existing pitches available at that time. This is replicated as Appendix 2. The Council has since that time constructed or partially funded a number of artificial turf pitches across the city and is currently potentially funding additional pitches through BIF and LIF proposals. Council has also acquired additional pitches as part of the Local Government Reform transfer of assets at sites including Henry Jones, Fullerton / Napier Park, Brooke Leisure Centre and Sally Gardens.
3.9	Members will be aware that these facilities are used by in excess of 140 teams from across the city and indeed from beyond the Council boundary. These facilities are mainly used for competitive league and cup games and in general they are allocated to Leagues to allocate specific pitches to teams to fulfil fixture requirements.
3.10	There are exceptions to this, Members are aware that there are 7 Partner Agreements in place with local clubs and that these pitches are allocated according to an agreed sports development plan and programme of use prepared by the Partner Clubs. These Partner Agreements were awarded following a public advertisement and the application of agreed assessment criteria and run for a 5 year period from 1 <sup>st</sup> September 2015 with the option to extend for a further 2 year taking them up to 2022. In all of these facilities Clubs who are Partner Agreement holders have designated the facilities as their home pitches to respective leagues and in some cases these Clubs play in the Premier Division of the Northern Amateur Football League (Intermediate League) or in most cases a lower Division of the NAFL such Division 1A, 1B or 1C. In some cases Clubs have erected signage to identify the facility as 'the home of'.
3.11	In some instances, the IFA ground criteria may restrict the usage of all the pitches where a higher league team is playing at the same time, normally 3 pm on a Saturday. Members are asked to note that in the majority of instances Council facilities will provide more than one pitch tending to range from 2 up in excess of 20 (as is the case at Mallusk). The implication of this is therefore that not all Council facilities may be suitable or appropriate for 'Intermediate League Football'.
3.12	There are a 4 clubs currently playing at Intermediate League level and who use Council facilities: Malachians play at Shore Road Playing Facilities – Malachians have had a long standing

3.13	<p>agreement with Grove United who have a Partner agreement with the Council; East Belfast FC Tommy Patton Park on which they hold a Partner Agreement with the Council;</p>
3.14	<p>Shankill united play at the Hammer which is leased to the club following funding they secured from Sport NI under the Community Capital Programme; Immaculata play at Grosvenor recreation Centre having secured a block booking.</p>
3.15	<p>The Hammer and Grosvenor are single pitch facilities. Shore Road Playing Fields has 2 pitches which are separated by hedging and which has a temporary changing pavilion in situ and which is currently used by Malachians. Alderman Tommy Patton has 4 pitches, in this instance other Clubs cannot use the changing facilities at times when being used by East Belfast 1sts for matches.</p>
3.16	<p>In addition to these, there are 7 clubs who play in Divisions 1 A-C, and who play at Council facilities. There are also a range of other Clubs playing in lower Divisions 2 and 3 who also use Council facilities.</p>
3.17	<p>Council pitches are also used by other casual users; they are used by Junior teams playing small sided games and they are used by women's team. Women's league tends to be summer based and a number of pitches are held over and not available for winter use to accommodate this. Members may be interested to know that the baseline survey in 2013 of the 132 teams who replied to the survey 51% had male adult only teams; 27% were youth only; 16% had both adult and youth teams. Only 6% of clubs had adult female teams. Anecdotally we believe that the number of female adult teams has increased owing to an increased focus from the IFA coupled with an increased supply in the number of artificial turf pitches which enables more use of facilities. The majority of these clubs depend on Council facilities for playing pitches.</p>
3.18	<p>The purpose of providing this very brief overview is to demonstrate that the Council provides a life line to a great number of local soccer teams in the city through the provision of accessible pitches. These teams play at a variety of levels and cover all ages and genders. Council is constrained by the number of pitches it has and as some members will recall this was one of the reasons it was agreed to invest in the artificial turf pitches as a means of increasing the availability of pitch provision.</p> <p>Members are therefore asked to consider whether it wishes Officers to undertake a review of its pitch facilities, profile the level and type of use of the facility, consider the implications</p>

3.19	<p>of this use; to set out clearly the primary purpose of Council pitch provision in relation to soccer; to set out how these facilities will be used and to what extent it can support Clubs to play at the more senior league level and to consider the implications of this. A report setting out the findings and recommendation will be tabled for consideration at Committee.</p> <p><u>Financial &amp; Resources Implications</u></p> <p>None</p>
3.20	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>Equality and Good Relations implications will be considered as part of the review.</p>
3.21	
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices – Documents Attached</b>
	<p>Appendix 1 – Existing IFA Ground Criteria</p> <p>Appendix 2 – List of existing pitches owned by Belfast City Council</p>