

# Working more effectively with local government

An introductory guide for National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs), sports clubs and physical activity & recreation providers produced in consultation with Sport England, Sport and Recreation Alliance and the Rugby Football Union.

## Introduction

A number of sports clubs, particularly amateur sports clubs, don't fully know the role of local government and how best to engage with it. Councils are made up of members called councillors, who are elected to represent their local population. This means you have a way into the decision making process and access to people who can help you better understand local government.

Councillors (and officers) oversee everything from your planning application, business rates and obtaining an alcohol licence. Councillors are influenced by the public and are there to support you, although, they have to balance the interests of everyone in the area. Councils are currently facing cuts in their budgets, so even worthwhile causes may not be funded, due to limited resources. If you are having any difficulties in your dealings with the council, councillors can help you achieve a satisfactory outcome.

This short guide is to help you get to the right people who will give you good advice/assistance about how to achieve the aims of your club.

## Why do you need local government?

Councillors are usually elected for a four-year term, and work with local people and partners, such as sports clubs and other organisations, to agree and deliver on local priorities. Depending on where you live, there may be more than one council and set of councillors available to help you.

Within a one tier area, **unitary councils** (also called metropolitan boroughs and including all London Boroughs') are responsible for all functions that a council undertakes. In some parts of the country, unitary councils provide all the local services listed below and more.

Within a two tier area (covering a county), there **are district, borough or city councils** as well as the **county council**, which covers the whole of the county area. The responsibility for functions differ for district, borough or city councils and county councils.

County Councils	District, borough or city councils	Parish, community and town councils
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education/schools</li> <li>• Transport</li> <li>• Asset transfers</li> <li>• Public Health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business rates</li> <li>• Planning and licensing applications</li> <li>• Pitch maintenance and leasing</li> <li>• Leisure centres &amp; swimming pools</li> <li>• Asset transfers</li> <li>• Environmental health/food hygiene</li> <li>• Leasing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Play areas, play equipment and open spaces</li> <li>• Small grants to help local organisations</li> <li>• Local disputes</li> </ul>

For a large majority of issues faced by amateur sports clubs, a district, borough or city council/unitary council is likely to be your best starting point. As local councillors are elected officials, it is in their interest to assist you where possible with your questions, applications and issues. If you want assistance from your local councillor, there are two different approaches available to you:

- You can contact your local councillor online, who will be able to assist you on how best to take your query forward. They may refer you to the individual responsible for sport and physical activity, who will be able to advise/assist you regarding specific issues relating to sport or physical activity.
- Councillors should have a surgery and/or helplines. A surgery is when a local councillor gives time for their constituents to address local issues. These can be found on council websites or by calling your local council's member services office or equivalent. Some councillors may also have personal websites with this information, and may display it in places like libraries or village halls.

If difficulties arise between your club and the council, you have the right to understand why. Councillors are there to help you and are in a position to work with you, in advising or assisting you, although sometimes they need to remain impartial (for example, if they are a member of the council's planning committee). You can also view council meeting agendas, minutes and reports on your council's website. These could inform you of decisions the council has made with regard to sport and physical activity provision in your area.

## Get to know your local councillor

As many local sports clubs do not know their local councillors, it is important that you introduce yourselves and try to invite them to see your club in action. This is helpful in building up a positive relationship with your councillor and local government, for you and your club. Councillors are elected to represent their local populations, and are keen to ensure that they support you as best they can. All members of your club will be represented by councillors. This may be different to the councillors who represent the area where your club is based. Your club members should get to know who their local councillor is and inform them about your club and what it does. Increased Devolution means that councillors and councils will be keen to support local organisations to play a greater part in shaping their futures.

## Further reading and resources

- **Local Government Association (LGA)** – [www.local.gov.uk](http://www.local.gov.uk)  
The LGA is a politically-led, cross-party organisation that works on behalf of councils to ensure local government has a strong, credible voice with national government.
- **Sport and Recreation Alliance (SRA)** – [www.sportandrecreation.org.uk](http://www.sportandrecreation.org.uk)  
The SRA provide advice, support and guidance to their members (governing bodies of sport and County Sports Partnerships) who represent the games and sports sector.
- **Sport England (Club Matters)** – [www.sportenglandclubmatters.com](http://www.sportenglandclubmatters.com)  
Club Matters is Sport England's one stop shop for sports clubs. Club Matters provides free, convenient, practical resources to help you develop and run a sustainable club. With online seminars and quick tutorials, it allows you to upskill club officials to keep the club growing and working well.