

## **Utilita Energy – Written evidence (NPS0143)**

Submission by Utilita Energy – Creators and publishers of the State of Play Report (Sept 2020) and the Final Whistle Report (Feb 2021). Links to reports are below.

In response to the following question:

*How can local delivery, including funding structures, of sport and recreation be improved to ensure that people of all ages and abilities are able to lead an active lifestyle? For example, how successfully do local authorities and other bodies such as Active Partnerships, Leisure Trusts, local sports clubs, and charities work together, and how might coordination be improved?*

### **The impact Covid-19 has had on our clubs**

1.0 Every grassroots football club in the UK has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.1 Since the State of Play Report in September 2020, a further 3,440 (+5%) of grassroots football clubs say the pandemic has majorly impacted their club's finances and 12 percent have said their club will not recover - resulting in the closure of more than 5K clubs.

1.2 Sadly, only time will reveal the full picture, however. Grassroots clubs say the worst is yet to come, with many saying they are in 'standby mode' - having batten down the hatches and made every effort to reduce their outgoings. It will only be when football is set to return that they'll understand the full extent of the damage done, and what their future holds. The majority of club secretaries surveyed said they are concerned for the future of grassroots football in the UK (67%).

### **2.1 What are the main areas of concern for grassroots football clubs today?**

2.2 PEOPLE - A shortage of volunteers will increase the 'single person point of failure' crisis that has existed in grassroots football for a long time, meaning training and games cannot go ahead if that one person isn't available.

2.3 PLAYERS - A lack of interest from existing players and the increasing challenge to attract new players to a 'stop-start season'. A lack of players means a lack of teams, and a lack of teams means a lack of leagues - the start of the end.

2.4 PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH - reduced fitness levels and impact on mental health of community members will have a detrimental impact on a positive return to grassroots football.

2.5 FINANCIAL - A lack of income through subs, sponsorship or fundraising ability.

2.6 FACILITIES - Already underfunded and ill-maintained before the pandemic, the state of Government-owned training facilities are in constant decline, despite the rising cost to hire them.

2.7 The impact on grassroots football clubs' finances has been devastating. 96% of clubs have seen a reduction in income, but by how much?

- 30% of grassroots clubs' finances are down by 1-30%
- 39% of grassroots clubs' finances are down by 31-60%
- 27% of grassroots clubs' finances are down by 61-100%

### **3.0 What grassroots football clubs need**

3.1 When asked what intervention would give clubs a chance to recover from the pandemic, the main five solutions listed by grassroots club secretaries were:

- Subsidised government / council-owned training facilities - 66%
- Subsidised league fees - 52%
- Subsidised or removal of county FA affiliation fees - 49%
- Subsidised government / council pitch fees - 47%
- Government to make a recommendation for state schools to provide access for grassroots football clubs to train or hold tournaments - 40%

3.2 Almost all (98%) of football community members say the obvious intervention that would be most welcome is for national Government and local councils to subsidise the state-owned training facilities for clubs, or open access to state schools outside of teaching hours, for grassroots clubs to share their facilities.

### **4.0 The high price of grassroots training facilities**

4.1 Around 95 percent of grassroots football training facilities are Government-owned. The cost of hiring council-owned training facilities for grassroots clubs varies wildly across the UK. Just one hour spent training on an all-weather pitch can cost anywhere between £30-£200.

4.2 The average grassroots football club will spend around £26,000 per season on hiring local, council-owned training facilities, which amounts to £1.1 billion of income for the local councils. With 5,000+ clubs on the brink of closure, the income a council can generate by hiring out sports facilities will be severely reduced, putting facilities at greater risk of deterioration or closure, which will impact the clubs that manage to survive.

### **Reports / methodology**

[https://utilita.co.uk/downloads/switch-before-pitch/SB4P\\_State-of-Play-Report.pdf](https://utilita.co.uk/downloads/switch-before-pitch/SB4P_State-of-Play-Report.pdf)

[https://utilita.co.uk/downloads/switch-before-pitch/The\\_Final\\_Whistle\\_Report\\_WEB\\_6.pdf](https://utilita.co.uk/downloads/switch-before-pitch/The_Final_Whistle_Report_WEB_6.pdf)

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