

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

**REPORT OF THE INTERIM ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF
REGULATION AND ENFORCEMENT
TO THE LICENSING AND PUBLIC PROTECTION COMMITTEE**

8 SEPTEMBER 2021
ALL WARDS

SAFETY AT SPORTS GROUNDS ANNUAL REPORT 2020/2021

1. **Summary**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an annual update on the regulatory activities associated with designated stadia under the Safety at Sports Grounds Act.
- 1.2 While this year has been somewhat exceptional with the national Coronavirus restrictions dictating elite sports generally take place behind closed doors, action has still been taken to ensure venue operators comply with the conditions of safety certificates.

2. **Recommendation**

- 2.1 That the content of the report be noted.

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3 Background

3.1 The City Council introduce a new form of operation during 2019/2020 in respect of its enforcement arrangements under the Safety at Sports Grounds Act 1975. This included adoption of a new policy approach political arrangements for the role of elected members on the Safety Advisory Groups operating in respect of each designated stadium. The City has three designated stadia; Villa Park, (Aston Villa FC); St Andrews, (Birmingham City FC) and Edgbaston (Warwickshire County Cricket Club).

3.2 Under the new arrangements the Regulation and Enforcement Division took responsibility for all statutory requirements under the Act, commissioning inspections through Acivico and issuing safety certificates in respect of the venues. Each site has a designated lead officer, with a nominated deputy from either the Environmental Health or Licensing Services. Colleagues in the Resilience Team took responsibility for Safety Advisory Group process.

3.3 Villa Park (AVFC)

AVFC have taken a very pragmatic and safety conscious approach to hosting matches during this pandemic situation. They have provided excellent communication of changes they have made to arrangements necessitated by the move to 'behind closed doors' football, ensuring everything complies with the requirements of the safety certificate.

Plans have been produced for the eventual return to fans in the grounds, with an absolute priority on safety. Feedback is provided on every match in a detailed and timely manner. AVFC continues to engage in a very proactive and constructive way.

The revised SAG arrangements had had very little time to take effect before the pandemic outbreak, but the use of teams and email has worked well to continue meaningful engagement.

3.4 Edgbaston Cricket Ground (WCCC)

The revised safety certificate was re-issued in time for the 2020 season and the process of sorting out plans for the 2019/2020 season were severely impacted by the Covid pandemic. This was due to the constantly changing situation and the WCCC's hope the restrictions would have been lifted to allow spectators.

The season started under a 25% capacity restriction, there have been two events as part of the Government's Event Research programme, with capacities set at 70% and then 80%. The first was a test match against New Zealand, the second a one day international against Pakistan. Both events were subject to extensive negotiations with the club to agree on how they would run, checks were carried out both in advance and during the matches, and both were considered to be successful in terms of the research programme.

Since the lifting of restrictions, the club has been operating under a full capacity certificate.

3.5 St Andrew's Stadium (BCFC)

For the period of this report the venue housed two Championship Football Clubs BCFC and Coventry City Football Club (CCFC). After the 2020/2021 season CCFC have returned to play at the Coventry Building Society Arena.

The operation of two clubs from the same venue did give rise to issues raised by the general public prior to the pandemic e.g. car parking and highways controls. With the closure of sporting venues to spectators, these issues were not raised as an issue during 2020/2021.

While the attendance at matches was controlled, issues did arise in 2021 following receipt of a confidential engineers' report undertaken as part of the club's periodic inspection programme. Following consideration of the findings it was decided with the agreement of the club to formally prevent admission to two of the four stands- this was reflected in a revised safety certificate being issued. This restriction will continue until the issues raised are remedied to the satisfaction of the lead officer.

3.6 Other venues

The new operating model has enabled proper oversight of other regulated sport venues within Birmingham, namely, Moseley Rugby Club and Perry Barr Speedway (Dual venue) each have a regulated stand under the Act.

3.7 Safety Certificates

A consistent approach was taken to the issuing of safety certificates. Officers worked with the respective venues and issued revised certificates. This included an appendix which detailed the Coronavirus restrictions required at the venues. This approach appears to have been welcomed by the Clubs.

3.8 Safety Advisory Group (SAG)

The City Council's revised approach to safety at sports grounds was put in place to ensure a more consistent and accountable review of the safety management systems at the City's sports venues, ensuring a minimum of three SAGs per season for the major venues, with the appropriate documentation being shared and considered. In 2020 the focus of the SAGs significantly changed to COVID measures and providing public health input to venues. At the end of 2020 the focus developed to reviewing capacity and the safe return of spectators to sports grounds.

The SAG meetings process is run by officers (in line with the adopted policy), ensuring an independent safety advisory process for sport, venues and major events. The SAG Chair is the City Council's Head of Resilience. The lead officers and the Head of Resilience have developed strong relationships with a range of core safety partners, the safety certificate holders and the Safety at Sports Ground Authority (SaSGA).

The role of the SAG is to provide independent advice to the local authority and venue, in relation to the safety management systems. It also ensures multi-agency engagement in the safety process and reviews the Club/Operator's required documentation in support of their capacity figures. It is not the regulator for the sites, with the Regulation and Enforcement Division providing that role, taking into account the views of the SAG, its partners and the SaSGA.

The SAG process has had good multi-agency engagement and has been able to overview safety management practice in all major venues– it has also been able to support developments and improvements based on new thinking e.g. Manchester Arena Enquiry, COVID.

3.9 Future Activity

During the 2021/2022 financial year there are changes anticipated in this field of work. All existing safety certificates will be reviewed in light of changes in Coronavirus restrictions and any other material issues that come to light. A further stadium is likely to be designated (the Alexander Stadium) following its major rebuild. The Head of Environmental Health will be taking the lead in co-ordination of all regulatory activities associated with designated stadia and the planned approach to enforcement and regulation of the sites.

An extensive SAG programme is in place for the Commonwealth Games, working with a range of partners to ensure venue safety in Birmingham and across the Game's footprint.

4. Consultation

- 4.1 No public consultation is required in respect of this report.

5. Implications for Resources

- 5.1 All costs associated with the undertaking of designated stadia inspections is met from the approved budgets.

6. Implications for Policy Priorities

- 6.1 The operation of the new policy has been generally welcomed by venues and other stakeholders. It is considered the policy does not need review at this time.

7. Public Sector Equality Duty

- 7.1 No further equality issues have been identified, as all regulatory and enforcement activities are carried in accordance with the adopted enforcement policy (2019), which was the subject of an equalities impact assessment.

INTERIM ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF REGULATION AND ENFORCEMENT

Background Papers: Nil