

**National Assembly for Wales**  
Communities, Equality and  
Local Government Committee

Inquiry into the Welsh Premier League  
– Summary of Key Recommendations

November 2012



Cynulliad  
Cenedlaethol  
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National  
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## Summary of Key Recommendations

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The Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee held an inquiry into the Welsh Premier League.

### Conclusions

It is clear from the evidence we received that the Welsh Premier League has developed significantly since it was established, in terms of the quality of players and coaches and of the infrastructure of clubs. However, if this development is to be sustained, there are many issues that will need to be addressed, and we hope that this report will go some way to achieving this.

The four key areas, which are fundamental to taking forward football in Wales:

- 3/4G pitches
- the relationship between the FAW and the Welsh Government;
- the Community Hub Model for WPL clubs; and
- the relationship between the FAW and WPL clubs.

These issues are, in our view, all linked. They can also lead to significant, long-term impact on the sustainability of the league. By putting in place measures to assist the WPL, there will be a positive effect on grassroots football, and in turn, by improving grassroots football, improvements in the WPL will naturally follow.

During the course of our inquiry, witnesses raised a number of issues that are outside our remit, including the structure of the WPL; moving the league to the summer months; and media coverage of the WPL. We have offered views on these issues, but have not made recommendations as these are not matters for us.

### 3/4G Pitches

While the success of the community hub model is not absolutely dependent on having 3/4 G pitches, if a club wants to increase the use of its facilities by the community, for obvious reasons it will need a surface that can sustain that increased use. We received much evidence of the significant benefits that can be delivered by 3/4G pitches more generally, including the obvious advantages to participation and grassroots football.

**Recommendation: The Welsh Government should develop a strategy for developing 3/4G pitches across Wales.**

**Recommendation: The FAW and Local Authorities should explore opportunities for WPL clubs wishing to develop the community hub model to seek financial support for the development of 3/4G pitches.**

### **FAW and the Welsh Government**

It is only in recent years that the FAW has developed a more outward-looking culture. This is evident in the FAW's strategic plan, published in 2012, and which sets out the FAW's ambitions for football in Wales and the WPL.

In its evidence, the FAW referred to examples of local and central governments supporting sporting bodies such as the FAW. It must be acknowledged that, historically, the relationship between the FAW and the Welsh Government has been non-existent and there is no surprise therefore that the FAW has not received the support that bodies in other countries have received. There needs to be a period of developing such relationships, over the coming years, if the FAW wishes to engage the support of the Welsh Government in delivering its strategic plan.

If the FAW wants support for the WPL from central or local government, it will need to demonstrate that it can deliver the wider policy agenda of supporting grassroots sport and improvements in levels of participation. We think that the FAW is taking great strides in this direction, particularly with the concept of clubs as community hubs, and the academy system.

**Recommendation: The FAW, Welsh Government and Sports Wales need to develop a joined up approach to developing football in Wales.**

**Recommendation: The Welsh Government and the FAW should hold discussions on how support for the WPL can play a role in delivering Government policy.**

### **Community Hub Model**

The community hub model is seen by the FAW as central to ensuring the sustainability of clubs and the WPL. We agree with this view. We feel that the WPL clubs should be seen as an excellent tool to deliver improvements in grassroots football, particularly in participation levels.

In terms of financial support, we do not believe that we can recommend, especially in the current financial climate, that the WPL should be supported directly by the Welsh Government.

However, given the potential of the community hub model, and its potential to support the delivery of wider policy objectives, we think that the FAW and the Welsh Government should explore whether there is any scope for clubs who fit this model to access existing resources.

**Recommendation: The Welsh Government should work with the FAW to develop a strategy to outline its vision for WPL clubs as community hubs, to ensure that the strategy supports the wider vision of supporting grassroots football and widening participation.**

### **The relationship between the FAW and WPL clubs (and clubs in the feeder leagues)**

One of the key themes to emerge during our evidence gathering, particularly our visits to football clubs, was a feeling amongst the clubs and the fans that the FAW and its strategies were largely irrelevant. Individual after individual told us that, despite a number of strategies being introduced, they couldn't see any improvement on the ground.

It might be that the effect of the various strategies and initiatives is not being felt yet, but there was clearly a sense of disaffection amongst those we spoke to. There is a lot of work to be done by the FAW to build relationships between it and the clubs. While the FAW's strategies are impressive and ambitious on paper, they will not succeed if they don't take the clubs (and their fans) with them.

Of course, the most effective way to build this relationship is to deliver results that are tangible, visible and improve the standing of the WPL and its clubs. However, as part of the process we think the FAW needs to prioritise communication and relationship building with the clubs.

**Recommendation: The FAW needs to prioritise communication and relationship building with the WPL clubs, because without their co-operation, it will not be possible to deliver any of their strategies.**

## Recommendations in Full

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**Recommendation 1.** The FAW, Welsh Government and Sport Wales should develop a co-ordinated approach to developing football in Wales. The Minister for Sport should report back to the Assembly on the progress of discussions.

**Recommendation 2.** The FAW and Welsh Government should explore how the WPL clubs can support the delivery of broader policy objectives and the support that the clubs can access, financial or otherwise, to do so.

**Recommendation 3.** The FAW needs to prioritise communication and relationship building with the WPL clubs, because without their co-operation, it will not be possible to deliver any of their strategies.

**Recommendation 4.** The Welsh Government should work with the FAW to develop a strategy to outline its vision for WPL clubs as community hubs, to ensure that the strategy supports the wider vision of supporting grassroots football and widening participation.

**Recommendation 5.** The Welsh Government should develop a strategy for developing 3/4G pitches across Wales.

**Recommendation 6.** The FAW and Local Authorities should explore opportunities for WPL clubs wishing to develop the community hub model to seek financial support for the development of 3/4G pitches.

**Recommendation 7.** As part of the FAW's proposed Community Hub model, the FAW and Local Authorities should work together to ensure that the clubs have assistance to reach all parts of their communities.

**Recommendation 8.** The FAW and Sport Wales should explore how the academy system can be used to support grassroots football.

**Recommendation 9.** The FAW and Sport Wales should explore whether additional financial assistance can be put in place to support young people who wish to play football, but who find it difficult to do so because of the financial demands (e.g. purchase of kit, travelling costs etc).