

Resumption of live sport

Brief guidance note

2 June 2020



Purpose

Live sport is resuming in England in the coming weeks, with horse racing having restarted on Monday 1 June; Premier League and EFL Championship football due to commence on 17 and 20 June respectively; three international cricket tests set to take place in July, and other sports likely to follow later in summer.

At the current time, it has yet to be confirmed where all football games will be played.¹ The default position is that football games will be played at their usual venues, although neutral venues are being advocated by some parts of the police for a small number of high profile games where there is a greater risk of fans gathering outside the grounds at the home stadium of competing teams. All games will be played with no spectators present ('behind closed doors').

We recognise that councils and individual councillors may have different views on the desirability of the resumption of live sport in their areas at this time. This note provides a brief overview of councils' regulatory responsibilities where there is a relevant sports ground in their area, to assist senior officers and members in seeking assurance on this issue. More detailed guidance for operational leads has been developed by the Sports Grounds Safety Authority (SGSA)² and is available [here](#).

Legislative responsibilities

The Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975 requires councils as certifying authorities to issue safety certificates in respect of designated grounds (including the grounds of football clubs in the four Premier and Football Leagues and other major sports grounds in England). Safety certificates in respect of regulated stands at other types of sports grounds are issued under the Fire Safety and Safety at Places of Sports Act 1987.

Responsibility for this function within councils may sit in different places. Typically, in unitary authorities this responsibility tends to sit with the building control function; in two tier areas, county councils are responsible for issuing safety certificates, and the responsibility may sit with a number of different teams, including trading standards and emergency planning; additionally, in areas with combined fire authorities, the fire service may take on this role.

Safety Certificates and Safety Advisory Groups

Stadium safety certificates set out the requirements to ensure the reasonable safety of those attending events (or otherwise in the ground). They cover a variety of different issues and will typically be backed up by an operations manual setting out how events and safety at the ground will be managed.

Councils are supported in their work on safety certificates by Safety Advisory Groups (SAG). Some councils may operate a SAG in relation to each ground in their area, while some may have a SAG for all the grounds under their controls. As with other types of events, [SAGs](#)

¹ The England -West Indies cricket games are due to take place at the Ageas Bowl in Hampshire and at Old Trafford.

² From a safety perspective, the regulation of English Premier and Football League clubs is split between the Sports Grounds Safety Authority (SGSA) and councils. While the SGSA is responsible for issuing licences to clubs enabling them to admit spectators, councils issue safety certificates in relation to the clubs' stadiums.

provide a forum for councils, the police, fire service, ambulance services and others to discuss and ensure the safety of events taking place in their areas, including engaging with stadium and event operators. The frequency of SAG meetings will vary, but the SGSA suggests that they should meet at least twice a year, including in relation to events requiring specific attention or consideration.³

While a safety certificate does not extend to what happens outside a stadium, the SAG is the appropriate forum for considering these issues in relation to sports events in stadiums.

Preparing for the resumption of live sport

As football clubs and other sports prepare to host live sport again, there are likely to be two key requirements for councils.

Reviewing stadium safety certificates, to ensure these are up to date

Councils will need to liaise with clubs to ensure that stadium safety certificates are up to date, and that the safety of grounds is being effectively managed following the long gap between fixtures. As most safety certificates are predicated on the basis of a stadium operating at full capacity (eg, in terms of the number of stewards required, first aid provision etc) it is likely that amendments will be required to certificates to reflect the changed operating conditions and ensure scalability of requirements. The SGSA has provided advice on how councils could do this.

It is important however to be clear that neither the stadium safety certificate nor the SGSA licence are primarily focused on the safety and security of the ground from a COVID-19 perspective. It will be the responsibility of clubs, as owners of the ground, to ensure they are COVID-19 secure, based on the most up to date guidance from Public Health England and others. However, councils will wish to review what steps have been taken to update operation manuals for each ground to reflect the very different circumstances in which they will be operating.

In relation to COVID-19, district and unitary councils generally have enforcement responsibility for the Health and Safety at Work Act in relation to sports grounds. While it is not expected that councils will necessarily undertake proactive health and safety work in this area, it may be helpful to include an environmental health perspective within the relevant SAG.

Holding a SAG meeting in relation to grounds in their areas

It is also expected that councils will convene virtual SAG meetings in relation to sports events taking place in their areas. Councils have a legal duty to consult with the police and fire service in relation to safety certificates; additionally, the SAG would be the appropriate forum for discussing concerns about fans congregating in the vicinity of grounds (or elsewhere), how to manage this and any communications around it.

Further information

Further information is available from the [SGSA website](#) or please contact ellie.greenwood@local.gov.uk

³ SAGs may take place less frequently in relation to smaller sports grounds with designated stands.