



Grassroots Strategy 2024-28

HERTFORDSHIRE FOOTBALL IN 2024

Football is by far the largest sport in our county with a breadth and depth of participation that reaches into every community

42,497 Male Players	7,651 Female Players	631 Disability Players	83% Teams in England Football Accredited Clubs
1,262 Registered Referees	105 Female Referees	6,164 Registered Coaches	93% Youth teams with a qualified coach
49 Full size 3G pitches listed on The FA Pitch Register	36 Wildcats Centres	3,927 Registered Volunteers	- Thriving 3 Star Community Clubs
214 Grass pitches achieved a Pitch Power rating of Good	12 Squad Girls Centres	2 Comets Centres	3 Just Play Centres

INTRODUCTION

The scale and influence of grassroots football means it is uniquely positioned to change lives for the better, bringing people together, creating opportunities and improving the health and wellbeing of those involved

We are extremely proud of the positive impact the game has in our communities and the responsibility this places on us to nurture it. At the launch of our last strategy, we were concerned with ensuring these benefits weren't lost in the disruption of the pandemic. Today we can say that the dedication and resilience of the thousands of people who make the game happen across Hertfordshire have helped it to bounce back stronger than ever.

With participation at record levels and further growth predicted in the years ahead, our challenge is to ensure that everyone can access high quality opportunities, playing the game in a way that suits them. It is fantastic to see more people than ever wanting to get involved in football, but we understand this puts increasing pressure on resources that are already being stretched by the ongoing cost of living crisis.

It's clear that we'll need more quality pitches, coaches, referees and volunteers if we are to ensure football continues to grow in the right way, delivering experiences that are focused on fun and enjoyment. We must always strive to raise standards and ensure that the game has structures in place at every level that are fit for the future, with institutions that are sustainable, representative, and financially robust.

The best coaches will tell you that you can never take success for granted. For football to keep its special place at the heart of our communities, we must also stand firm against those who would spoil things for others through their poor behaviour. We all have a part to play in creating a safe and positive environment where everyone can come together and share their love of the game, free from abuse and discrimination.

Together we can build a bigger, stronger and more inclusive game for everyone to enjoy.



Karl Lingham
CEO and Senior Safeguarding Lead, Hertfordshire FA



THE VALUE OF GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL TO SOCIETY

Most get involved in football because of their love of the game, without ever stopping to think about the wider benefits that it brings to our communities

We often talk about the unique power of football to improve lives and drive positive change in society, but it's not always been possible to estimate how big an impact it has. In recent years The FA have looked to quantify this by calculating the social, health and economic return on investment from grassroots football.

The latest Social Return on Investment Report from The FA provides robust and compelling evidence of the significant value that the grassroots game contributes. A staggering £15.9bn across the whole of England, of which our share in Hertfordshire is more than £492m based on participation in the county.

Below are some of the key figures that show how grassroots football makes a real difference to people in Hertfordshire, improving physical and mental health in people young and old.

Health Impact of Grassroots Football in Hertfordshire

- 4,731 reduction in cases of childhood obesity
- 1,425 reduction in cases of depression and anxiety in children
- 3,923 reduction in physical health disorders in adults (e.g. Heart Disease, Diabetes, Stroke)
- 1,713 reduction in cases of depression and anxiety in disorders in adults

Football can help tackle a number of big issues facing society

Grassroots football delivers positive outcomes for our society outside of the game too. For example it provides children with opportunities to learn about teamwork, build relationships and trust others, so it's no surprise that childhood football participation is also linked to a reduction in juvenile crimes.

Regular sport participation is also associated with improved educational performance, through increased leadership, confidence and resilience, which in turn improves future earnings potential. All these statistics and the narrative behind them appear in the full report, which you can read on [The FA website](#).





480

respondents completed
our local survey on the
state of the game in
Hertfordshire

DEVELOPING OUR NEW STRATEGY

Based on comprehensive consultation with stakeholders, we have worked to ensure this strategy reflects our local football landscape while also being aligned with broader trends across the country

In the summer of 2023 The FA undertook their most comprehensive grassroots football consultation to date, designed to hear the views of grassroots participants directly. The consultation was called 'A Conversation About Our Game' and it actively sought the views of those who make football happen week-in week-out.

At a national level this began with a series of in-person events across the country attended by players, coaches, parents/carers, referees, club and league representatives, and other football partners. This was followed by an online survey, which collected data from over 48,000 responses.

In Hertfordshire we have also undertaken our own consultation to supplement this, including a Youth Football Review and our own online survey. We also sought feedback from our football Committees, each of which is made up of people involved in specific areas of the game in our county.

Together this work helps ensure that our strategy for the next four years is based on what participants want and need. It allows us to combine an awareness of national trends with an understanding of our local football landscape, to ensure our work over this period is tailored to deliver for the game in our county.

Our thanks go out to everyone has given their time to take part in this consultation.

Our 2024-28 priorities are directly based on key findings from these consultations:

- Players want a wider range of football formats and opportunities, at times and in places that suit them
- Women and girls need more and better playing opportunities to keep pace in line with demand
- Worsening behaviours – on and off the field – need to be tackled
- More improved and new football pitches are desperately needed
- Volunteers, coaches, and referees need more support with the increasing pressures of running the game
- Clubs need more support to develop as they grow into significant institutions in their local communities
- Participants want to feel better connected and more informed to make their football lives easier
- There is important work still to be done to ensure that football is run in the right way



STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES

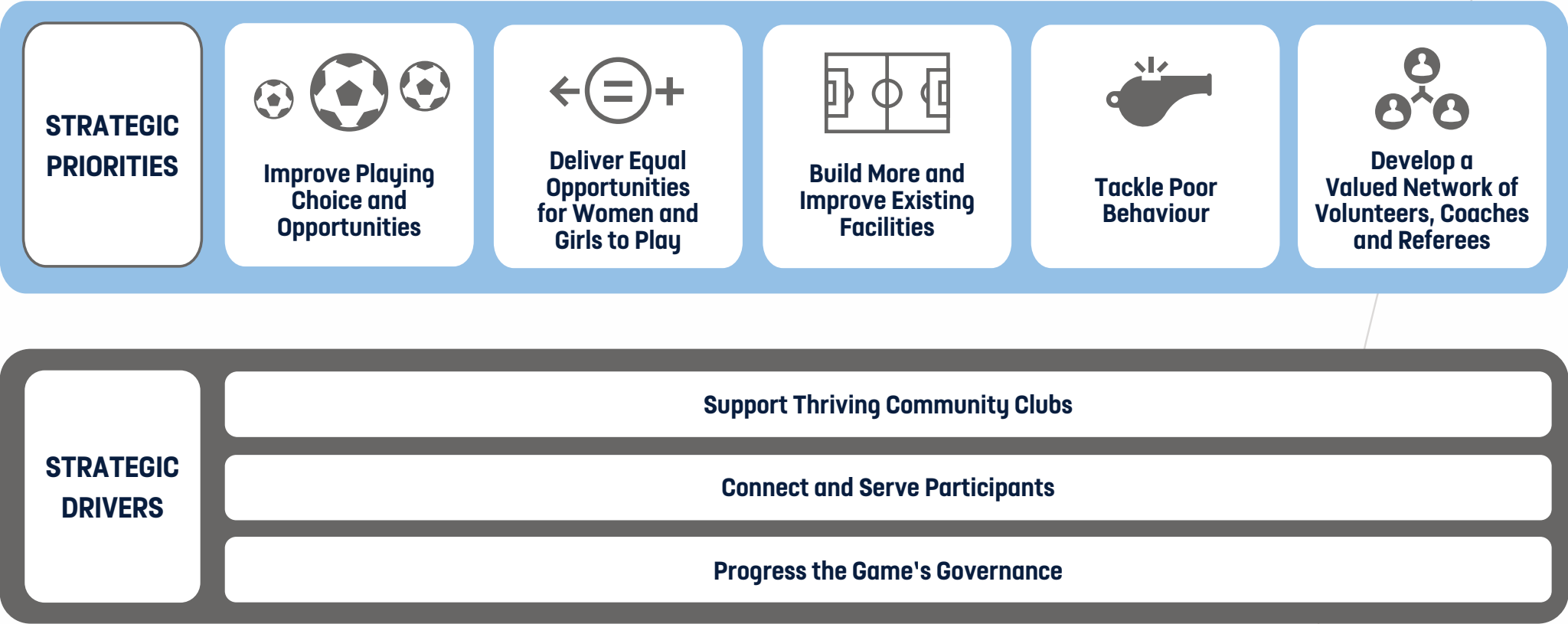
In developing this strategy we have been guided by a number key principles which ensure that we set goals that are clear, attainable and relate directly to priorities of our stakeholders



GRASSROOTS STRATEGY 2024-2028

OUR PURPOSE: Inspiring Positive Change Through Football

– *by* uniting communities, creating opportunities and improving health and wellbeing





95%

of children who play football say it helps them to be fitter and healthier

IMPROVE PLAYING CHOICE AND OPPORTUNITIES

Build on existing quality provision across the county by supporting new and varied playing opportunities, giving everyone a chance to play the game in a way that suits them best

Football today is reflective of a modern and on-demand world – people want to play where and how they want in a location, format and environment that suits them. It is vital that we meet this demand by providing a rich and varied menu of opportunities that give everyone the chance to play their way.

This includes growing walking football, developing more sessional football and continuing to improve the appeal of more traditional formats. We must also continue to develop and improve the youth game to offer children more enjoyable football formats that support their development. There is also more to be done in filling the activity gap among disabled people that had widened as a result of the pandemic.

Evolve the youth game

- Embed the 'Play Phase' philosophy for ages 4-6 and continue preparation for Youth Format reviews
- Encourage development of appropriate provision for transitional stages of the game (e.g. youth to adult)
- Enable Clubs to provide local offers and work with Leagues to deliver adaptable youth formats

Create more opportunities to play safe, inclusive, sessional football

- Evaluate the current Small Sided Football landscape to identify strengths and areas to develop
- Support the development of more casual and competitive Walking Football opportunities
- Utilise 'Just Play' and Club recreational activities to provide sessional offers for targeted groups

Improve team football for adult male players

- Work with Adult Committee representatives to sustain and grow adult League football offer
- Work with Leagues to increase uptake of England Football Accreditation, supporting the development of more inclusive and sustainable clubs
- Support Safeguarding changes for Open Age Football

Support the disability game to grow and thrive

- Support growth of club and league activity through restructure of competitions to meet growing demand
- Support Clubs to provide Comets as an initial offering
- Provide specific training and support to volunteer network, which provides confidence, knowledge and guidance through mentors, ambassadors and peers



Success Measures

- Increase number of registered male players to 42,976
- Increase number of registered disability players to 765
- Increase number of local Comets and Just Play centres

DELIVER EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

Ensuring that every woman and girl who wants to play football has an opportunity to do so in a safe and enjoyable setting and in a way that suits their lifestyle

The growth in the female game in recent years has been incredible. The amazing success of the Lionesses has super-charged the demand for women and girls to play and we have worked hard to meet it by providing more playing opportunities and programmes, supporting a 56% increase in players in our county since 2021.

However, female teams still only account for 16% of the total in Hertfordshire and women and girls still do not have equal opportunities to play in all schools and communities. Simply put, the job is not yet done. We need to create more opportunities in casual and flexible formats and do more to ensure that the environment in football is safe, welcoming and inclusive, removing barriers for women and girls to participate.

Sustain and grow more playing opportunities in schools

- Expand the coverage of Barclays Girls Football Schools Partnerships across Hertfordshire
- Link Barclays Girls Football Schools to clubs to enable easy transition to regular participation
- Support Hertfordshire Schools FA to provide equal competition structures and opportunities for girls

Extend and enhance sessional opportunities to play

- Use Wildcats, Squad and Just Play programmes to enhance provision of casual opportunities for girls
- Develop current football facilities to be welcoming and inclusive for female focused football offerings
- Embed understanding of female specific health needs in football activities within schools, clubs and leagues

Create more team playing opportunities

- Support England Football Accredited Clubs to deliver provision of a full female pathway
- Support Leagues and Clubs to offer varied playing opportunities and competition structures
- Deliver dedicated Female Football hubs created through facility development work

Deliver safe and inclusive environments for women and girls to thrive

- Increase opportunities for more females to be represented at all levels of the game
- Expand the provision of sessional and walking football opportunities for the 'forgotten generation' of women
- Working with HSP to expand provision of female football activities in high IMD areas



Success Measures

- Increase number of registered female players to 10,742
- Increase number of Wildcats centres to 63
- Increase number of Squad Girls centres to 32



86%

of girls who play football say that it has helped them to become more confident



£4.3m

invested in Hertfordshire pitches by the Football Foundation in the 2023-24 season

BUILD MORE AND IMPROVE EXISTING FACILITIES

Increase the quality and quantity of grassroots football pitches and facilities across Hertfordshire to better meet the growing demand

Improving the quality of grass pitches is crucial in helping to reduce the number of games postponed due to adverse weather, but also has a significant impact on players enjoyment of the game, being cited as a reason why many drop out from playing. We have already seen significant progress across the county, made possible via significant investment from the Football Foundation, but there is still a long way to go.

That's why we need to build on the work we've done in recent years to continue to transform the quality of existing grass pitches and build more new 3G pitches. It's also why we need to fund more inclusive and accessible facilities, all while ensuring a keen focus on environmental sustainability.

Transform grass pitch quality

- Increase number of grass pitches inspected and improved through Pitch Power process
- Develop and deliver CPD for Groundskeepers to build their knowledge and skills from professional experts
- Work with Local Authorities on Local Plans to support the creation of new quality grass pitches

Create inclusive and accessible facilities

- Use sites identified through Local Football Facility Plans to create female football hubs and disability access
- Ensure all new changing pavilions meet Sport England and Football Foundation design requirements
- Use Football Foundation Community Toolkit within each project to ensure they meet local demand

Build more 3G pitches

- Refresh Local Football Facility Plans to strategically identify key football hubs in areas with most need
- Explore opportunities for female football hubs
- Invest in sites of strategic interest within each Local Authority, expanding opportunities for Hertfordshire FA operational control

Improve environmental sustainability

- Focus on sustainability across all of our operations and encourage local Clubs and Leagues to follow suit
- Utilise Football Foundation guidelines to improve environmental sustainability within facility projects
- Collaborate with partners around Active Travel Plans and environmental sustainability



Success Measures

- Increase number of full size 3G pitches in the county to 60
- Increase number of grass pitches rated as Good or better to 383
- 10 Local Football Facility Plans refreshed to reflect current needs

TACKLE POOR BEHAVIOUR

Ensuring enjoyment is at the forefront of playing, volunteering or officiating grassroots football, with a decline in cases of poor behaviour and increased reporting of discrimination

Football should be safe, fun and inclusive for everyone. While most participants play the game and behave in the right way, we face a stubborn and enduring problem; some persist in poor behaviour, ruining the game for others. We know that participants want more done to tackle poor behaviour on the pitch and on the sidelines.

As well as sanctions for those who don't meet the accepted standards, we need better ways to celebrate good behaviour, such as providing awards and recognition. If this is combined with a drive towards collective responsibility, together we can change things for the better. We've made a start with new measures being introduced in recent years, but it is clear there is more to do along this ongoing journey.

Apply tougher sanctions

- Maintain a clear set of regulations on how behaviour will be managed and sanctions imposed
- Share sanctions outcomes when applied, educating and raising awareness through transparency
- Work with clubs and leagues to ensure all are up-to-date on serious cases and suspended participants

Drive collective responsibility across the game to raise standards

- Deliver quarterly training for match officials and coaches on how to manage poor behaviour
- Collaborate with Leagues to embed positive football environments which prioritise enjoyment
- Clear guidance on Safeguarding, Discipline and Poor Practice and how each needs to be dealt with

Promote positive behaviour

- Obtain positive behaviour examples and celebrate through social media and our website
- Offer tangible rewards for positive behaviour (e.g. equipment, apparel or discounts)
- Identify challenging areas and use video content to engage participants and change behaviour

Deliver learning opportunities and training

- Provide online training for participants which promote on positive behaviour
- Provide training to managers, coaches and spectators on how to encourage positive behaviour
- Create an online training which outlines expectations, best practice and how to manage Poor Practice



Success Measures

- Increased awareness of sanctions and how these are applied
- Engagement by clubs and leagues promoting positive behaviour
- Effective use of Club Action Plans to combat poor behaviour

1161

cautions issued for dissent in Hertfordshire grassroots football during the 2023-24 season



13%

more volunteers, coaches and referees needed to support the growth of the game over the next 4 years



DEVELOP A VALUED NETWORK OF VOLUNTEERS

Grow the number of grassroots volunteers, coaches and referees while ensuring they all feel valued and supported to fulfil their roles in the game.

The grassroots game would not exist without those who choose to give up their own time to make it happen. This workforce is crucial and yet we know that many don't feel valued, with a lack of appreciation one of the main reasons why volunteers leave football. For the game to have a healthy future, it is vital that clubs and leagues are better able to recruit and retain these dedicated individuals.

We also know that there is a perceived lack of accessible, affordable, high quality education for volunteers. To help the game continue to grow, we must do more to support volunteers, to celebrate and reward the amazing work they do and ensure they have the learning and development they need to effectively fulfil their roles.

Grow the number of people running the game

- Use both The FA and other platforms to highlight opportunities to attract new volunteers into football
- Use Club House to support clubs to recruit volunteers, with safeguarding and inclusion at heart of process
- Deliver FA Volunteer People Plan workshops with Herts Sports & Physical Activity Partnership

Support those running the game to learn and develop

- Utilise Buddle workshops in collaboration with Herts Sports & Physical Activity Partnership
- Use online courses and England Accredited Club Workshops to develop skills of volunteers
- Expand delivery of the Hertfordshire FA Young Leaders Award and Junior Coach Award

Improve the diversity of those running the game

- Continue to expand our Youth Council and support clubs in developing their own Youth Forums
- Raise awareness and support opportunities for those from diverse backgrounds to get involved in football
- Use insight and data to create relevant and targeted campaigns within specific Local Authorities

Celebrate and reward those running the game

- Promote and support the England Football Family reward scheme for volunteers
- Local delivery of the England Football Grassroots Awards and FA Referee Recognition Awards
- Find additional ways to recognise and reward good practice e.g. 'Accredited Club Spotlight'



Success Measures

- Increase number of registered referees to 1,500
- Increase number of registered coaches to 6,965
- Increase number of registered volunteers to 4,457

SUPPORT THRIVING COMMUNITY CLUBS

Nurturing a network of thriving community clubs so that they can be well run, grow in a sustainable way and provide a brilliant football offer to their local communities

Hertfordshire leads the country in terms of the size and quality of the grassroots clubs in our area and we are proud to support them in continuing to set the standards to which others aspire. Their scale means the ability to provide comprehensive football opportunities, but they can also act as community hubs, accessible places for people to meet, socialise and learn, creating community cohesion, inside and outside football.

We aim to equip clubs with the ability to evaluate and maximise their community impact, engaging local stakeholders and sourcing investment. We are committed to supplying the tools and skills needed for clubs to thrive, enabling them to provide invaluable economic, health and social benefits to their local communities.

Ensure clubs grow opportunities and provide a quality experience

- Use the Accreditation Club and League renewal process to review pathway opportunities
- Grow and develop our 2* and 3* Club network
- Expand the opportunities available where existing provision is limited (e.g. transitional age groups, walking football, sessional opportunities for parents)

Support the current and future generation of club leaders

- Deliver 'Game On' Workshops to provide development opportunities to future leaders
- Provide leadership development opportunities for Club volunteers through Accredited Club meetings
- Deliver a consistent offer for ongoing learning and development across the Volunteer workforce

Help clubs to become more sustainable

- Implement The FA Club Programme for 2* and 3* England Football Accredited Clubs
- Form stronger connections between National League clubs and 3* England Accredited Clubs in their area
- Utilise the knowledge of FA Club Consultants to support specific clubs where required

Equip clubs to add value to their local communities

- Use Club Impact Assessment Tool to support clubs to work with their local communities
- Embed The FA 'Greater Game' initiative to support young people's health and wellbeing
- Utilise local partnerships to support communities; i.e. food/boot banks, charity partners, referee academies



Success Measures

- 24 Accredited Community Clubs which are classed as 'thriving'
- 85% of teams are part of England Football Accredited Clubs
- More Clubs achieve 2* and 3* status by offering additional pathways

3

of the Top 10 biggest grassroots clubs in the country are in Hertfordshire



94%

of teams completed their affiliation for 2023-24 with no intervention needed from our staff

CONNECT AND SERVE PARTICIPANTS

Deliver customer focused service and support so that all involved can dedicate their time to enjoying the game and creating opportunities for others to do so

The game is brimming with opportunities to play, volunteer, and learn, but it's not always easy for people to find them. By sharing the right information in the right way at the right time, we can connect more people more meaningfully into the game. Behind the scenes, we'll ensure that when people reach out to us, they can expect the same high-quality service.

As The FA continues to deliver game-changing digital tools to help the grassroots community play and run the game, we support our local clubs, leagues and participants to help them make the most of these services, easing the administrative burden so they can focus on what they do best.

Make it easier to find information and opportunities to play, learn and volunteer

- Engage with clubs and leagues to co-ordinate in promoting opportunities throughout football
- Promotion of key information through social media and other platforms relevant to the customer
- Update the structure of our website so it is clearer and easier to navigate

Support the development of digital tools to make running the game easier

- Share updates through our website and social media of the changes and enhancements to FA systems
- Provide bespoke support to customers who need additional assistance to access and use FA systems
- Develop online CPD for Coaches and Clubs to share best practice and provide development opportunities

Improve our customer service and communications

- Implement Freshdesk throughout the business to reduce time taken to respond to general enquiries
- Promote best practice and highlight more of the work that we do, both online and through social media
- Continue to work towards achieving the Customer Service Excellence Standard for Sport

Explore digital opportunities to enhance the football experience

- Work with the FA to test new systems and updates to ensure they are effective for volunteers
- Use knowledge gained from Digital workshops to enhance our own platforms
- Encourage local Leagues to join The FA's League Management Systems for best user experience



Success Measures

- Achieve Customer Service Excellence Standard for Sport
- Average response times through service platform improved
- Expanded presence across more social media channels

PROGRESS THE GAME'S GOVERNANCE

Effective, modern organisations with the structures and processes in place to offer the best possible service to the game at a local level both now and in the future

Ensuring grassroots football is run in the right way is non-negotiable. We must ensure it is safe, financially robust, and well governed at all levels. To help achieve high-quality governance processes and procedures, we are working towards compliance with the Code of Governance for Sport. We also continue to demonstrate through independent assessments that we meet and aim to exceed The FA's Safeguarding 365 Standard.

To provide effective support tailored to the needs of the local football community, it is important that institutions across the game are suitably representative of those within it. We will work to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to use their voice to influence positive change.

Promote the highest levels of governance across the grassroots network

- Achieve The FA's Code of Governance by May 2025
- Implement the Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan from the Inclusion Advisory Group led by the Board
- Work with local Leagues to promote the benefits of utilising The FA's systems to be more effective and reduce their administrative time

Support the grassroots game to be financially robust

- Appoint a Financial Director to lead and develop the financial aspect of our operations
- Become financially sustainable with reserves of at least eight months as required by the Financial Code
- Seek opportunities to diversify income (e.g. increase number of 3G facilities run by the Association)

Ensure a representative range of voices can be heard

- Have a workforce which reflects our community and the demographic makeup of the County
- Create modern football working groups to reflect and promote diversity of football across Hertfordshire
- Review, implement and deliver our annual Operations Plan to meet the specific needs of our County

Support the grassroots game to be safe and well run

- Continue to achieve and where possible exceed the The FA's Safeguarding 365 Standards
- Manage Safeguarding and Poor Practice, working with all departments to best support our customers
- Continue to improve the efficiency of investigations to reduce time taken to conclude on discipline cases



Success Measures

- Achieve The FA's Code of Governance by May 2025
- Continue to achieve The FA's Safeguarding 365 Standard
- Increase the diversity of the workforce across grassroots



£4985

raised for good causes
through our charity
competitions in the
2023-24 season

OUR VALUED PARTNERS

Working together to achieve shared goals

From the countless volunteers who keep the game going across grassroots, to local and national organisations who share a common purpose, it's a real team effort. We are proud to have close relationships with our partners and working together we can maximise the positive impact of football on our communities.



HERTFORDSHIRE FOOTBALL IN 2028

We look forward to supporting an even bigger, stronger, and more inclusive football community by the end of this strategy

42,976	10,742	765	85%
Male Players	Female Players	Disability Players	Teams in England Football Accredited Clubs
1,500	200	6,965	92%
Registered Referees	Female Referees	Registered Coaches	Youth teams with a qualified coach
60	63	4,457	24
Full size 3G pitches listed on The FA Pitch Register	Wildcats Centres	Registered Volunteers	Thriving 3 Star Community Clubs
383	32	17	61
Grass pitches achieved a Pitch Power rating of Good	Squad Girls Centres	Comets Centres	Just Play Centres

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