

Review of the Implementation of A Structure Fit for the Future

Headline Findings

2026



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1. About the study



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About the study*

- Commissioned by England Hockey, in keeping with a commitment when SFFTf was adopted
- Online survey distributed to senior volunteers, 25 England Hockey staff, 800 club chairs from – 118 responses
- 16 group calls (c. 60 people in total) – mix of senior volunteers, some staff, some survey respondents who expressed interest
- Research work carried out Nov 2025 – Jan 2026
- Not representative samples but a broad spread of views from experienced people



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* More detail in the appendix

2. Key findings by topic



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Views on Areas

- “In my view, the structure of eight Areas is effective”
- **78% partially agree or strongly agree**
- Positive views across all obvious sub-groups
- Related questions about Area Boards and committees also generally had a majority positive view



Views on Counties/Sub-Areas

- “In my view, the structure of Counties/Sub-Areas is effective”
- **44% partially agree or strongly agree**
- **39% partially disagree or strongly disagree**
- Views slightly more positive among those in County leadership roles



Views on Area changes since 2019

“In my view, the structure of eight Areas and Counties/Sub-Areas is more effective than the model that was in place until 2019”

- **67% partially agree or strongly agree**
- 22% partially disagree or strongly disagree
- Improvement on previous Regions (dysfunctional, male-dominated, old boy network)
- Geography of the Areas is fairer in terms of sizes
- More transparency and accountability
- Improved consistency, particularly of League regulations across Areas



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Views on County changes since 2019

“In my view, the governance and delivery of the County/Sub-Area has improved since 2019”

- **38% partially agree or strongly agree**
- **36% partially disagree or strongly disagree**
- Many believed there is a general lack of understanding of the roles of Counties
- Heavy reliance on over-stretched volunteers



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Adult and Masters hockey

- “In my view, the management of Adult hockey in the Area is effective”
 - **77% partially agree or strongly agree**
- “In my view, the management of Masters hockey in the Area is effective”
 - **76% partially agree or strongly agree**



Junior hockey

- “In my view, the management of Junior hockey in the Area is effective”
- **53% partially agree or strongly agree**
- **25% partially disagree or strongly disagree**
- Views are slightly more positive among those in County leadership roles
- Recruitment and retention of volunteers to run junior hockey is a challenge
- Long travel times are an issue in some parts of the country, for example in border clubs



Management of disciplinary matters

- “In my view, the management of disciplinary matters through the Area works effectively”
- **75% partially agree or strongly agree**
- However, some believed that Areas do not always deal with disciplinary matters in a satisfactory way
- Some suggested that serious cases such as alleged sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia should be escalated to England Hockey



Officiating

- “In my view, the management of Officiating in my Area works effectively”
- **47% partially agree or strongly agree**
- **37% partially disagree or strongly disagree**
- Some believed there was a lack of understanding about EHO’s responsibilities
- Area-managed leagues often struggle to secure umpires and are reliant on club appointments – they feel the focus is on higher levels
- Concerns about quality of umpires – training plus recruitment/retention



Area websites and GMS

- “In my view, there has been progress in Area websites that make administration more effective”
- 65% partially agree or strongly agree
- “In my view, there has been progress in the Game Management System that makes administration more efficient”
- 34% partially agree or strongly agree
- **47% partially disagree or strongly disagree**



Selected other findings

- “I have confidence in the financial management of the Area/County/Sub-Area I am involved with”
- **74% partially agree or strongly agree**
- 11% partially disagree or strongly disagree
- 61% of survey respondents were aware of the Area strategy
- Many expressed concern about the state of the sport with fewer state schools playing hockey and loss of access to pitches
- Some perceived inconsistencies across Areas and Counties in approaches, such as in the strict application of rules, the use of technology for meetings, and other matters; this was believed to be driven in many cases by individual personalities



3. Summary findings



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Summary findings - 1

- Views about the Area structure are broadly positive with a majority view that Areas work more effectively than the model prior to 2019
- The new structure is believed to provide a good base to build on
- Views about the County/Sub-Area structure are mixed
- Broadly positive views:
 - Adult hockey
 - Masters hockey
 - Discipline



Summary findings - 2

- There were mixed views on the effectiveness of delivery of Junior hockey
 - Challenges included recruitment and retention of volunteers to run junior hockey
 - Long travel times are an issue in some parts of the country
- There were mixed views on Officiating
 - Area-managed leagues struggle to secure umpires and are reliant on club appointments – they feel the focus is on higher levels
 - Concerns about quality of umpires – training plus recruitment/retention
- Frustrations with GMS are believed to impact widely on the game



4. Opportunities / recommendation topics



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Opportunities / recommendation topics - 1

It is too early to make very specific recommendations but some topics clearly need to be addressed:

- Clarify the role of Counties/Sub-Areas (even if it's well understood internally)
- Consider whether the County structure needs further changes
 - Consult to determine whether they should continue as unincorporated member organisations or change status, for example becoming sub-committees of Areas
 - Consider how best to involve Counties in the structure – CSC is not believed to be an ideal model
- Increase focus on recruitment, retention, recognition and support for volunteers, particularly in relation to Junior hockey
 - Consider developing central services (e.g. for financial management) that Counties in particular can buy into
- Increase focus on Officiating for Area-managed leagues



Opportunities / recommendation topics - 2

- Seek greater consistency in the application of rules (now that the rules themselves are generally consistent)
- Consider how communication channels can be improved between levels: England Hockey, Areas, Counties/Sub-Areas, Clubs, players
 - Examples suggested were sharing meeting minutes more systematically between Counties and Areas
 - Several people cited challenges with use social media channels: X no longer feels appropriate, Juniors tend not to use Facebook, Instagram is not ideal; there is a heavy reliance on WhatsApp groups
- Continue work to improve GMS



Thank you

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