SUMMARY GUIDE OF CLUB STRUCTURES

ENGLAND HOCKEY

Club Structures Matter: A Practical Guide for Hockey Clubs

Why understanding your club's legal status matters

Most people join a hockey club because they love the sport, not because they enjoy legal structures, governance, or paperwork. Yet the way your club is legally registered has a major influence on its future success, resilience, and ability to grow.

Many clubs have operated successfully for decades as informal or unincorporated associations. However, what worked when a club was smaller may not be the best option as responsibilities, risks, ambitions, and opportunities increase - whether your club is looking to improve facilities, apply for grants, recruit staff, attract investment, secure a lease, protect volunteers from personal liability, or simply ensure it remains sustainable for future generations, your legal structure matters.

This summary of {MAIN GUIDE} has been produced to help clubs understand the main legal structure options available to them and the advantages, limitations, and implications of each.

Questions every club should ask itself

The guide suggests clubs should consider their legal structure from five different perspectives:

1. **How much risk are we (and our management committee) exposed to?**

Many clubs are unincorporated. This means committee members and, in some circumstances, members themselves can be personally liable for debts, contracts, leases, employment responsibilities, and other obligations. Incorporating (adopting a legal form) creates a separate legal entity that can significantly reduce this personal risk.

2. **What funding might the club want to apply for in the future?**

Different legal forms offer access to different types funding opportunities. Some structures are better suited to trading activities, others to grants, social investment, community shares, or tax reliefs. The structure a club chooses will influence the opportunities available to it in the future.

3. **Where does the club want to be in 10 years time?**

A club's legal form can influence how easily it can evolve, expand activities, attract new partners, or respond to a changing world. Some structures offer greater flexibility; while others provide stronger protection of a club's original purpose.

4. **How well are the club's assets protected?**

Pitches, clubhouses, equipment, cash reserves, and other assets represent years of effort and investment by the club and its members. Different legal structures provide different levels of protection to ensure these assets can best continue to enable hockey to be played and enjoyed in the wider community into the future.

5. **Who should have a (legal) voice in the club's decision-making?**

Legal structures inform how members, volunteers, local communities, and others have a voice in a club's decision-making. Some structures place greater emphasis on democratic membership and community accountability than others.

The main options available

Unincorporated Club

This remains the most common arrangement for all sports clubs in England. It is simple, flexible, and requires minimal administration. However, it offers the least protection from personal liability and can make accessing larger funding opportunities more difficult.

Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG)

Often seen as the next step for growing clubs. A CLG provides limited liability, flexibility in governance, and a relatively low administrative requirement compared with other incorporated forms.

Community Interest Company (CIC)

A CIC combines many of the advantages of a company with additional automatic protections for community benefit. It includes an asset lock and external regulation designed to ensure the organisation remains focused on serving its community.

Community Benefit Society (CBS)

Usually used where a club wishes to deepen wider community ownership, or raise investment through community shares. CBSs are strongly democratic, community-focused organisations with long-established roots in the community business sector.

Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)
Charitable status offers the strongest access to grants, Gift Aid, and tax reliefs, together with high public trust. However, it also brings greater regulation, reporting requirements, and restrictions on certain types of trading activities.

Community Amateur Sports Club (CASC) Status
CASC is not a legal structure but a tax status, which most of the above options can apply for. It can provide tax reliefs and Gift Aid opportunities, (particularly useful for smaller clubs), but it comes with eligibility criteria and some limitations.

There is no single "best" structure for hockey clubs
A small volunteer-led club with few assets may be perfectly suited to remaining unincorporated. A growing club employing staff and managing significant facilities may benefit from incorporation. A club seeking major grant funding may wish to explore charitable status. A club wanting to involve the local community in ownership and investment may find a Community Benefit Society attractive.

The right choice depends on your club's ambitions, risks, assets, culture, and future plans.

Next steps
The full guide provides detailed comparisons, practical guidance, and explanations of each option. Every club committee, trustee board, or management group should consider reading it as the basis for a wider discussion about their club's future.