

Chairman's Report 2023-24

Report to end of July, ahead of Suffolk VA AGM

Summary

Thanks

Firstly I'd like to thank all the volunteers, teachers and other school / college staff who help provide volleyball opportunities both in Suffolk and further afield providing opportunities for our county's people.

Overview

As far as I know involvement in community clubs is relatively stable.

Introduction of Mixed Intermediate League is filling the void which had opened up for players below regional level after Ipswich VC did not resume their indoor series after the pandemic.

Participation in 2023-24 inter-school events was significantly down compared with last year. Having been missing from the Suffolk PE & Sports Network calendar since the pandemic volleyball is included in the 2024-25 calendar. I hope this will address the downturn. See section on this at end of this report.

[Detail aligned with priorities from Volleyball England's strategic plan](#)

Volleyball For Life (coaches, officials, talent)

Achievements:

- Team Suffolk continuing to provide opportunities for talented juniors on top of those provided by schools, clubs and East Region Development Camps
- Hosted officiating workshop for those we expect to officiate in our local league but not ready / interested in Grade IV

Ongoing work:

- Need to replace two Team Suffolk coaches

Future plan:

- Support Ipswich Ravens as they consider hosting Assistant Coach course
- May repeat Officiating Workshop in Bury St Edmunds.

SUFFOLK VOLLEYBALL ASSOCIATION

Get Keep Grow (clubs, membership, volunteers, volleyball growth)

Achievements:

- Ipswich Ravens doing an exemplary job incentivising and developing future leaders and sharing the load of running their club
- Team Suffolk continuing to provide opportunities juniors who can't be accommodated in community clubs
- Put out feelers regarding new club in Woodbridge, assisted with grant application

Ongoing work:

- Need to replace two Team Suffolk coaches
- Support schools in Haverhill, Bury St Edmunds, Claydon & Woodbridge to improve equipment and / or help establish community clubs in their areas.

Future plan: Encourage above schools to affiliate with VE as junior clubs so they can receive VE / VE Foundation support.

An Ace Service (competitions / administering regional, area, local league)

Achievements:

- Established Suffolk Mixed Intermediate League
- NVL: Newmarket VC 4th in M2C.
- Eastern Region:
 - Men: Bury Bobcats & Team Suffolk regularly competing
 - Ladies: Bury Bobcats didn't play in Oct or Nov, but have since

Ongoing work:

Future plan:

Challenges / barriers:

- Once again unsuccessful in attempts to encourage Ipswich & Bury to contest Suffolk Ladies Cup.
- Other than Bury competing in Eastern Region and inter-school events, no ladies matches in Suffolk at any level, not even friendlies.
- After entering since 2016-17 Ipswich VC ladies had already withdrawn at end of 2021-22 season. Aside from elite Essex Rebels team closest female NVL teams are Tendring / Norwich Spikers / Cambridge / Team Essex.
- Stowmarket men withdrew from NVL. They are now competing in Chelmsford League and Cambridgeshire League. With Newmarket and Bury Bobcats also in Cambridgeshire League results from that to be used to determine who will contest Ron Ames Cup.

News from Volleyball England

Most of this was received via participation in Regions and Counties (RaC) Discord server / attendance at quarterly RaC Community of Practice calls and from their Club Newsletters.

1. Safeguarding
 - Everyone in volleyball has a responsibility for safeguarding the welfare of children, young people and adults.
 - In addition to their Safeguarding & Protecting Children Policy, this year Volleyball England has adopted its first Safeguarding Adults Policy. There's also now a nationwide network of Sport Welfare Officers embedded in Active Partnerships (e.g. Active Suffolk).
 - Club Secretaries / Welfare Officers will have received emails regarding both. To affiliate for 2024-25 clubs will need to have appropriate safeguarding policies in-place depending on which type of members they have.
2. NVL
 - a. Post padding is a requirement in FIVB rules. Now NVL too.
 - b. Conditions for new entrant into NVL now include:
 - i. The Regional / Area Association or Club should provide name(s) and letter(s) of support from evidence of referee development such that a minimum of one registered referee(s), minimum Grade 3R, not currently officiating in the National League, but are prepared to do so.
 - ii. A consultation regarding cap on entries in NVL was held. This was accepted and the NVL is now full. Thirteen teams who applied were not accepted this year. VE want to see improved standards across a variety of areas. All NVL teams will now be required to self-review annually by 15th Feb. Existing and prospective teams can learn more in section A of the [NVL regulations](#).
3. Referee fee (VE have increased by £10 per match), so Div 3 is now £25 per match (single-header) or £56/£60 for triangular.
4. 21 Assistant Coach courses were run last year, but not all are open courses
5. Level 3 / Head Coach course will no longer be run. Environment-specific continuous professional development will replace this
6. Volunteer recruitment and retention
 - a. Case studies - See bottom of <https://www.volleyballengland.org/clubs/develop-your-club/retaining-volunteers>
 - b. Duty to Care – who cares for committee members, refs, coaches, ...
 - c. Volunteer pin badges – VE are re-launching bronze, silver and gold pins for those serving five, ten or twenty years. We can nominate people for these

Topics for new committee to consider

1. Suggested Governance Action Plan
 - a. Sub-committees (Team Suffolk, Competitions, Volunteer “Workforce”, Finance and / or Funding, Schools, ...?)
 - b. Succession planning
 - c. Should some activities be run for VE Foundation (which is a Charitable Company with limited liability)?
2. Team Suffolk
3. Mixed Intermediate League
4. Additional indoor competitions
 - a. Review recommended referee payments in light of VE increase for NVL
 - b. Review points for leagues with best-of-five matches¹
5. Officiating Workshop – West Suffolk (21 / 22nd Sept is Workforce weekend)
6. Continue supporting schools
 - a. Suffolk PE & Sports Network events
 - b. Additional events for most-engaged schools
 - c. Help finding funding for improved equipment
 - i. Haverhill – Castle Manor – Long net plus central support
 - ii. Bury St Edmunds – County Upper – Floor plugs + installation, posts and bespoke length nets
 - iii. Claydon High – Floor plugs + installation, bespoke length nets
 - iv. Farlingaye - Floor plugs + installation, posts and bespoke length nets
 - d. Support development of new community clubs at Farlingaye, Castle Manor, Claydon
7. Volunteer support

¹ NVL criteria for determining league positions now:

- In all Divisions, three points will be awarded to the team winning a match should the score be 3-0 or 3-1. Two points will be awarded to the winning team and one point to the losing team should the score be 3-2.
- In the event of a tie at the end of the playing season in the Super Leagues any division, the teams will be classified in the order of: (1) Set quotient; number of total sets won / number of total sets lost (2) Point’s quotient; number of total points scored / number of total points conceded (during all sets)
- If two teams are still tied, they will be classified in terms of the matches between the two teams
 - I wondered whether, due to small numbers of teams per division, we should apply this criterion over sets quotient / points quotient but decided not to advocate for it; I’d prefer to reward the teams who put in consistent effort throughout season rather than bring in big guns for match against biggest rival.

Governance Health Check

Volleyball England created a Governance Health Check self-assessment tool in line with Sport England's "A code for Sports Governance".

We completed this in September and scored 29.5 out of 44. Scores between 14 and 34 imply:

Efforts have been made to improve the association's governance. The association should identify the gaps and take the help of an action plan to fill in the existing gaps to achieve a minimum standard of governance.

Areas for improvement identified by tool are listed below. A suggested governance action plan more tailored to our position follows these.

1. The association is properly constituted, has a clear purpose, and, if membership-based, is inclusive and accessible. (Scored 6 out of 10)
 - a. The committee should decide the maximum term allowed for the committee members and record it in the constitution to encourage regular elections and provide opportunities.
 - b. The committee should update the constitution with the details of the committee meeting in line with the recommended Constitution by Volleyball England.
 - c. The committee should review the constitution and update in line with the Volleyball England recommended constitution and aim to review it regularly.
2. The committee meets regularly, and decision-making is recorded (Scored 6 out of 7)
 - a. The committee should aim to meet quarterly and record the minutes of the meeting and get them approved before the next committee meeting.
3. The association seeks to ensure diverse viewpoints are considered and that its decision-making groups have the skills and diversity needed to operate effectively. recorded (Scored 6 out of 7)
 - a. Create and implement either a skills matrix or a role descriptions document for key roles in the committee.
4. Committee members are subject to regular election and ideally should serve at most nine years. (Scored 2 out of 3)
 - a. The committee should update the constitution and specify the maximum term for the committee members before the next AGM.
5. The association shares information on its governance, structure, activities, and financial position to enable stakeholders to have a good understanding of them. (Scored 3 out of 3)
 - a. No improvement required
6. Conflicts of interest are recognised, managed and recorded. At least three of the people on the governing committee are neither related to, nor cohabiting with other committee members. (Scored 1 out of 3)
 - a. The committee should adopt a conflict of interest policy or create a register of interests and actively manage conflict of interests.
 - b. The committee must start managing conflicts of interest. If there is a conflict of interest, exclude the relevant member from decision-making,
7. Appropriate financial procedures and practices are in place and can evidence appropriate oversight of financial planning, financial decision-making and processing are not managed by one person alone and accounts which are independently scrutinised. (Scored 5 out of 7)
 - a. The committee should create a written document on how the association's finances are managed. This could simply be part of the constitution.
 - b. The association's financial procedures document should clearly state the role of two independent people in carrying out a transaction.
8. The association assesses and manages organisational risks and liabilities appropriately. (Scored 0.5 out of 4)
 - a. The association must have a risk management process in place.
 - b. The association should record all the discussions around risk management and aim to develop a risk management strategy/risk register.
 - c. All committee members should be made aware of the potential personal liability for committee members of an unincorporated association.
 - d. The committee should urgently review the pros/cons of being unincorporated and consider the available options.
 - e. The committee should carry out a risk assessment to ensure they minimise the potential risk to the committee members.
 - f. The committee should continue to carry out risk assessments yearly and sought to legal advice when doing so.

Suggested Governance Action Plan

1. Constitution & purpose
 - a. Consider practicalities of maximum terms – VE have provided further guidance on succession planning
 - b. Form sub-committees with clear responsibilities
 - c. Ask VE for template area association constitution
2. The governing committee meets regularly, and decision-making is recorded
 - a. No change – WhatsApp is sufficient for committee's needs
3. Diverse viewpoints, decision making groups have skills needed to operate effectively
 - a. Continue work on terms of reference for committee and skills matrix / role descriptions (Secretary already has role description)
4. Committee tenure
 - a. Need to commence succession planning before implementing max terms
5. Openness
 - a. No action required
6. Conflicts of interest
 - a. Low priority to address these points
7. Financial management
 - a. If we apply for grants need to change bank mandate to require two signatories
8. Organisational risk and liability
 - a. Ensure all committee members are aware of the potential personal liability for committee members
 - b. Consider initiating a risk register / risk management strategy or recording a risk management discussion

Schools Volleyball – 2023-24

Following the pandemic volleyball was withdrawn from the Suffolk PE & Sports Network (SPESN) calendar due to not being played widely throughout the county. We were able to continue organising our own events during this time. Participation in 2023-24 inter-school events was significantly down compared with last year. Was 2022-2023 a boom year with few SGO-organised events in which we stepped into the post-pandemic void? I'm pleased that we're back in the Suffolk PE & Sports Network (SPESN) calendar with three 4v4 events (U19, U15, U13) in the county-wide calendar for 2024-25. We expect U15 area events to be scheduled after the summer.

The Suffolk VA planned ten events in 2023-24. With help from the schools seven were delivered. Additionally we supported a Year 11 county final.

Our participation numbers for 2023-24 are below. These exclude the Year 10 and 11 county finals to reduce double-counting. They show an average of 26 boys per event and 21 girls. The Year 10 county final had similar numbers.

Castle Manor would have participated in U16, U14 and U13 if there was opposition for them but with entries not collected centrally at the start of the year Stowmarket didn't participate at all this year. We didn't hear anything from Thomas Gainsborough. St Benedict's would have participated if west Suffolk events were at County High. County High had problems with their net until after Christmas. I understand their head of PE is moving on but am pleased to learn the people taking on the role have been good supporters of volleyball in the past.

Finborough hosted for us in 2021-22 but comms with them have been very erratic this year.

In previous years our U19 event has been around capacity for boys. It was good to see four girls teams this year after only having two in 2022-23 (one of which was Castle Manor's U16s). In previous years Castle Manor and Claydon have both brought their U16s but neither did this year so there would have been space for more teams. One and Suffolk New College often show interest in participating but rarely do (although Suffolk New College often do well in Association of Colleges events. We could consider opening up the U19s to East Norfolk Sixth Form College (Great Yarmouth). They've had a volleyball team for many years and presumably teach Suffolk children so would be good to show their students that volleyball activity does exist in Suffolk.

2023-24 schools volleyball participation:

	U15 - East		U16 - West		U15 - West		U16 - East		U19 - County		U14 - East		U14 - West		U13 - East		U13 - West	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Castle Manor Academy					4	6											11	4
County High					8	6											4	3
King Edward VI																		
Thomas Gainsborough																		
St Benedict's					7	4											4	5
Stowmarket																		
Abbeygate VI form									8	4								
Claydon	13	11					16	12			13	8						
Copleston	4	5							4	4								
Farlingaye	4	9					8	12	7	8	7	12						
Holbrook	10	4									9	7						
Ipswich Academy							4											
Kesgrave	5	4																
St Alban's									4									
TOTAL	36	33	0	0	19	16	28	24	23	16	29	27	0	0	0	0	19	12

Total excl. County Finals		
M	F	All
154	128	282