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1. About the Organisations

The Football League Community Trust Ltd, trading as the English Football League Trust (and hereafter known as the EFL Trust), is a national charity that uses the power of football to change people's lives. It has a dedicated network of members in the form of 72 community trusts, one for each EFL club. It was established in 2007 to support the growing amount of community work carried out within the English Football League to distribute core funding from the Premier League and the Professional Footballers' Association to each community trust. Since then the EFL Trust has secured commercial and government funded contracts to deliver a range of services through its network of 72 organisations and some 30 other community-based organisations where there are geographic gaps in its reach.

The EFL Trust's mission is "to advise, support and resource the network of community trusts of EFL clubs and other Supply Chain Partners in the development of their community provision and represent their best interests to key stakeholders." The EFL Trust and supply chain network tackle society goals by inspiring people through its four core themes – sport, education, community engagement and health.

The Supply Chain Partner charities have a combined annual turnover of around £50m working on a range of projects and programmes. The EFL Trust's network engaged 1.5million people in their community work in 2015/16. The largest programme has been delivered since 2011 and is the National Citizen Service (known in this report as NCS). There is also a range of other contracts such as The Futsal Educational Programme which commenced in 2013 and offers 16 – 18 year olds the opportunity to study a BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma in Sport as well as train and play futsal. There is also the Ferrero sponsored Move and Learn and Kinder+ Sport scheme as well as the Kids Cup and the Girls Cup which run throughout the football season. The Every Player Counts programme was formed in September 2016 and is funded by a single £1.1m donation from the Wembley National Stadium Trust which enables disabled people to access football, many for the first time.

All activity is delivered through the supply chain network and so Supply Chain Partner delivery across programmes is at 100%.

The EFL Trust has embraced the Merlin principles and has continued to use the journey towards accreditation to further improve its systems and processes for future potential supply chain developments.

2. Assessment Methodology

The EFL Trust was first accredited to the Merlin Standard in January 2015 and both the original assessment and this review assessment have been voluntarily undertaken as part of its journey to achieve supply chain management excellence. The purpose of the review assessment was to gain re-accreditation against the Standard, demonstrating that the organisation was continuing to manage the supply chain effectively, to identify areas of strength and those to consider for further improvement.

Initial planning conversations took place in autumn 2016 where the scope of the Merlin Standard was discussed and agreed in accordance with the guidelines. The Supply Chain Partners were informed of the assessment and supported the process throughout. The Self-Assessment Questionnaire was completed and Pre-Assessment notes compiled that enabled the assessment team to conduct a thorough and robust assessment.

The assessment team (lead Assessor Susan Smith and team Assessors Lorna Bainbridge and Tracey Pepper) interviewed representatives from both the Prime and the Supply Chain Partners. The interviews included those involved in the strategic and day-to-day development and management of the Supply Chain Partners and in the management and delivery of the contract activity itself.

During the review assessment, written documents were presented, including those relating to communications, contractual documents, policies, finance, quality, marketing communications, evaluation report and information on contract and performance / quality management.

3. Assessment Outcome

Overall	%
Overall Outcome	81% Good
Supply Chain Design	80% Good
Commitment	86% Excellent
Conduct	75% Good
Review	83% Good

4. Areas of Significant Strength

A number of significant strengths and areas of excellence in practice were identified during this Merlin assessment and summaries of these are given below. The numbers in brackets refer to the criteria of the Standard to which the areas relate.

- The EFL Trust actively promotes and encourages the development of wider networks in order to provide comprehensive support services for customers. This pays particular regard to those customers with a range of complex needs. (1a.3)
- The recent reorganisation has led to improvements in clarity around business relationships and the single point of contact in the form of the Club Cluster Link Officer is well received by Supply Chain Partners. This enables Supply Chain Partners to effectively target their queries to the relevant person in the EFL Trust and to gain prompt and appropriate responses. (2a.4)
- Communications are open and transparent. Supply Chain Partners truly believe in development through sport and thus feel everyone is working towards the same mission and the four key principles of sport, education, community engagement and health. In addition, there are supportive and positive interactions between the EFL Trust and Supply Chain Partners which enable not only effective but trusted communications to occur. (2a.5, 3a.3)
- Supply Chain Partners are well supported and developed to become and/or remain sustainable organisations. The infrastructure grant has provided practical support for business development purposes and the process of the Capability Status compliance tool has challenged Supply Chain Partners to really think about how well equipped they are for the challenges of supply chain delivery. (2b.1)
- There are a significant number of examples of Supply Chain Partners being supported and encouraged to seek and utilise sources of funding beyond that of the EFL Trust. This means they feel that the EFL Trust is truly committed to developing them for the future. (2b.2)
- Funding arrangements are fair and appropriate as the EFL Trust undertakes rigorous financial planning with Supply Chain Partners as part of the Capability Status process. Supply Chain Partners who are football club trusts receive core payments and receive regular remittance to help understanding and confirm payment. (2c.2)
- The way in which data relating to Diversity and Equality is collected, analysed and used within the supply chain provides direction for programme and service development, and future marketing and promotion activities. This reflects external recognition of work in this regard. (3e.3)
- There are numerous examples from throughout the supply chain of how their work has a measurable impact on the wider social objectives of many of the commissioners. These include quantifiable impacts on health and wellbeing, community cohesion and reductions in anti-social behaviour. (4a.4)

5. Areas for Improvement

The following areas for improvement could be considered for review and improvement. The numbers in brackets cross-reference the findings to the relevant element and criteria of the Merlin Standard.

- Supply Chain Partners would like more proactive and meaningful feedback when they have been unsuccessful in submitting Expressions of Interest or Tender submissions. Whilst existing processes are adequate, there could be more explanation of scoring criteria and weighting in advance and more detailed feedback given post activity. Additionally, consideration should be given to the effective on-boarding and exiting of Supply Chain Partners. (2a.1 / 2c.1)
- The role and function of the Advisory Board in its refreshed form is in its infancy however it is viewed positively by a number of Supply Chain Partners. Consideration should be given to the diversity within its structure and it could be developed further to become more accountable for communications within the supply chain network. (2a.2)
- Communicate consistently about the way in which management fees are levied and clarify the support received by Supply Chain Partners where management fees are explicitly charged. (2c.8)
- Ensure that core principles expressed by the EFL Trust are mutually agreed across the supply chain in order that values are explicitly aligned and truly govern the way the supply chain operates. (3a.1)
- Ensure that lessons learned from the recent TUPE transfer process are embedded for the future. (3a.2)
- Ensure proportionate quality assurance activities take place across all contracts. Also ensure that actions arising from the monitoring of the quality of delivery are followed through to completion in order that improvements within Supply Chain Partners continue to be made on an ongoing basis. (3b.1 / 3b.2)
- Additionally, ensure data security, health and safety, and safeguarding implementation actions, and where necessary, improvement targets, are reviewed and set with Supply Chain Partners on a more regular basis and not just at the due diligence phase. (3b.4. 3b.5, 3b.6)
- Redefine good and excellent practice, more explicitly particularly post EFL Trust restructure and the recruitment of specialist / expert staff. This will assist Supply Chain Partners' understanding and ability to aspire to excellence. Also provide more opportunities for sharing of good and excellent practice and for collaboration. (3b.8, 2a.3)
- Ensure there is greater transparency and understanding regarding dispute resolution processes. This will then align with the open and transparent strength in communication. (3c.2)

- Consideration could be given to an approach to more consistently performance manage Supply Chain Partners outside of NCS delivery. This will address feedback from Supply Chain Partners who sometimes feel isolated and feel a lower level of interest is perhaps demonstrated towards them. (3d.2)

6. Areas Requiring Significant Development

Although the Merlin Standard overall has been achieved with a 'good' outcome, there is one criteria within the requirements of the Standard where limited evidence was presented and which require significant development in order to support the organisation to achieve excellence in supply chain partnership working. The numbers in brackets cross-reference the findings to the relevant element and criteria of the Merlin Standard.

- The EFL Trust should develop more robust processes to embed and monitor environmental sustainability through its supply chain. This should consistently form part of due diligence activities through the Capability Status compliance tool. (3b.7)

7. Findings Against the Merlin Standard

1) Supply Chain Design

1a) Supply Chain Design

The EFL Trust has a largely pre-defined supply chain given its role as the umbrella organisation supporting the 72 football charity organisations attached to EFL clubs in England and Wales. The EFL Trust also works with a small number of partners outside EFL which include football in the community organisations from the Premier League and other sports-based and non-sports based charities.

The EFL Trust has developed strategic partnerships with a range of partners in order to successfully achieve the aims and objectives of its contracts, such as the NCS. The EFL Trust has a proven track record of working with voluntary community and social enterprise organisations to deliver contracted programmes, and currently work with commercial and community organisations as well as small local business and local authorities on the NCS programme. Based on this knowledge and track record, the EFL Trust is proactive in encouraging organisations with the required capacity, capability and delivery track record to consider becoming part of their delivery network. The strategies, processes and activities undertaken by them to identify the scope of the supply chain necessary to meet the needs of customer groups and the requirements of the various contract continue to be robust. At a strategic level, information from both stakeholder and organisations within the supply chain is used to influence the longer-term planning and development of the supply chain and there is a detailed knowledge and understanding of customer requirements.

The EFL Trust continues to work in the main with other third-sector organisations and the vast majority of funding is used to create and sustain a more cohesive, responsible and engaged community. In all projects, the EFL Trust looks to maximise the experience of the end-user when designing the project and has had significant success in adding value to projects.

There is continued consideration that Supply Chain Partners support the geographic and customer types it is seeking to serve through its delivery of services and design supply chains accordingly. Communication about opportunities to join supply chains are a mixture of direct approaches to known and trusted partners and through open calls for partners and research. By sharing all commissioners' information, Supply Chain Partners confirm that the tendering process is open, honest and transparent. There is a clear rationale for the selection of Supply Chain Partners and scoring of Expressions of Interest takes place by an internal team which offers the opportunity for moderation. Supply Chain Partners are notified of being successful. Feedback on scoring and how future proposals might be improved is something that the organisation could develop further.

The EFL Trust's supply chain network is made up of organisations firmly embedded within their local communities, each with their own wide and diverse network of local organisations who understand the needs of the local area. The supply chain is supported to work strategically within their own local area and to be involved in a range of strategic steering groups and committees in key areas of work. In this way, the EFL Trust remains well connected and makes efforts to ensure it supports engagement in both strategic and informal networks within the communities served.

The Supply Chain Partners have their own networks as outlined which ensure that additional services including housing advice, debt advice, training and learning opportunities, English and maths provision, ESOL, interpretation and support for speakers of other languages are easily accessible to customers. One Supply Chain Partner added "*We get local sponsors to help us with transport.*"

2) Commitment

2a) Collaboration, Cooperation and Communication

Supply Chain Partners are communicated to in a number of ways before, during and after procurement such as through the EFL Trust's website, exploratory phone calls, meetings with the Senior Management Team and with the Supply Chain Managers, face-to-face discussions, pre-tender information, telephone discussions, emails, and pre-contract award negotiations and partner meetings. Supply Chain Partners confirmed that there is open dialogue with the EFL Trust's staff, although more could be done to increase transparency of scoring and providing more proactive feedback. Comments from Supply Chain Partners included *"I think recently there was weighting to a bid, but not sure"* and *"I think it was open and transparent and we had a fair chance at the bid"*. Initial mobilisation continues to include some on-boarding training delivered to partners; however this could also be improved. There are also one-to-one meetings between individual Supply Chain Partners and their Supply Chain Project Manager to discuss and agree profiles, finances, staffing, resources, performance targets and other relevant topics. There also remains the opportunity for Supply Chain Partners to meet health and safety representatives, human resources, finance and information security experts to receive information and support. Further illustrative Supply Chain Partner comments included *"Communications are very comfortable and very supportive"* and *"Everyone is contactable at the right level and are receptive to discussion"*.

Supply Chain Partners who have experience of the procurement process confirmed that communications during all stages of activity were excellent. The process was perceived to be proactive and one which pre-empted potential issues or concerns organisations might have had about new contract opportunities or indeed in joining the network. Supply Chain Partners who have experience of the procurement process confirmed that communications during all stages of activity were mainly good.

Systems and processes were designed and established during the bidding phase and throughout the procurement and service delivery cycle to meet the various commissioners' needs. As a result of monthly and quarterly meetings, information gained from Supply Chain Partners influences the way in which contracts are interpreted and the resultant design of systems and processes is accordingly consulted on; for example, the recording of data and as suggested by one Supply Chain Partner *"There is a workshop to consult over evaluation of a project"*. The Advisory Group is a group of people representing clubs at a regional level and which can influence the strategy, such as the structure of the organisation, Workforce Development Plan, as well as being the representative seeking feedback from the clubs to address issues such as Capability Status, commissioning training or matters relate to NCS payment. One Supply Chain Partner commented *"The Advisory Group is relatively new, but can see it will be of value to influence future things"*.

Staff promote and support collaboration and facilitate local, regional and national events to enable the supply chain to share ideas and best practice; however Supply Chain Partners experiences varied as outlined in the following somewhat wide-ranging illustrative quotes and this is an area for improvement.

- *"It's a true partnership with the EFL- promoting the programmes through social media, including Twitter bombs."*

- *"We work closely and in partnership with the EFL Trust."*
- *"No real collaborative working with other clubs, but I've signposted others to funding opportunities to support them with specific groups."*
- *"Don't really work with other clubs, we have our own patches – it's a bit competitive."*
- *"A lot of collaborative working with X and Y on the disability programme."*
- *"Work collaboratively with X, Y and Z, sharing resources, knowledge and information, we leave the pitch to be competitive!"*
- *"We've worked with the local clubs on joint bids and continue to share ideas and support each other."*

There are a number of current projects which require Supply Chain Partners to work together to achieve objectives; examples include partnership working on the delivery of the NCS programme as well as education programmes and projects in cities with more than one club (for example Nottingham, Sheffield, Bristol). Staff members state that *"collaboration and sharing best practice is strongly encouraged both through Link Meetings and seminars and national CPD events"*. Overall, most Supply Chain Partners confirmed that they collaborate with clubs in their own geographical area with similar agendas.

Communication channels between the EFL Trust and the supply chain network are clear and the business relationships understood. The newly restructured staff support for Supply Chain Partners will continue to provide regular, transparent and clear communications. One Supply Chain Partner commented *"Yes – the right person is always at the end of the phone"*. Supply Chain Partners additionally confirmed *"The role of the EFL Trust is to provide support, advice and guidance to build effective organisations to meet commissioner's/funder's needs, and to network with national stakeholders"*, *"There is good relationship and communication with the CCO, and in turn with the delivery staff"* and *"Changes to the EFL structure have been communicated well; understand the change from regional manager to functional roles, like governance, education ..."*.

The EFL Trust senior managers set the tone for open, honest communication, which is then modelled by staff employed to performance manage the Supply Chain Partners. There is a positive culture around communication. A very high proportion of Supply Chain Partners confirmed the communication to be two-way, open and honest as follows:

- *"Open and honest dialogue, which has improved since the re-structure."*
- *"Open and honest communication has evolved over the years, and as a result there is greater confidence in them."*
- *"I believe the communication is open and honest."*
- *"They've been open, transparent and supportive."*
- *"Staff are confident to deal with the prime contractor, which is unusual."*
- *"From the Board to volunteers we are happy to be working with EFL Trust."*
- *"Really open, honest and transparent, can't speak highly enough of them."*

Supply Chain Partners gave several examples of where they speak to their dedicated Supply Chain Project Manager for clarification and an immediate response is forthcoming. Additionally, there is an advisory body, made up of eight Supply Chain Partner representatives, that also supports open and honest communications. Regional meetings and national events actively involve suppliers and much of the input is designed by the supply chain network. The EFL Trust was found to promote a relaxed, inclusive and informal culture, responding positively to issues and ideas.

2b) Developing Supply Chain Partners

Capacity building of the whole supply chain is a key principle that governs the relationships and is subsequently built into all the interactions between the EFL Trust and its Supply Chain Partners. There is an annual flow-down grant provided to all 72 Club Trusts to support core costs. Additionally, support and guidance to develop Supply Chain Partners is offered through the annual capability status development work, ensuring Partners are all fit for purpose. Comments included *"They want us to be better"* and *"My experience was football-based and the Trust has helped me to understand governance, finance, project delivery and are now set up as a good business."* The EFL Trust is able to assist and help Supply Chain Partners to develop the skills to deal with the specific issues of the contract(s), for example by brokering support from specialists like the English Federation of Disability Sport to assist in the Every Player Counts programme. An Infrastructure grant has also been paid in 2015/16 that has enabled development activities in the Supply Chain Partners such as improving marketing, buying equipment or commissioning specialist advice to address business issues. Further Supply Chain Partner testimony included:

- *"They've helped us grow a sustainable business."*
- *"We've developed a targeted social media approach as a result of working with the Trust."*
- *"It gave us an opportunity to re-evaluate the business and ensure we have got the right people with the right skillswe are recruiting a Social Action Development Officer as a result."*

Potential future business opportunities are shared with current partners to ensure they are aware of pipeline opportunities, for example, the new Sport England programmes. Where the Supply Chain Manager becomes aware of local delivery opportunities, they share these with partners. *"We've had lots of opportunities on top of core funding such as Female Football and Disability Football"*. These may relate to new provision or provision that may enhance the range of services offered to customers. Opportunities not of interest to the EFL Trust but which may be appropriate for partners are communicated. This strength is reflected in the following Supply Chain Partner quotes:

- *"Our growth is due to the support from the EFL Trust, giving us access to funding and now able to access it from the Premiership."*
- *"We've grown from five staff to fifteen in six years."*
- *"We've really grown and increased our volumes over the past four years, from two staff, manager and delivery to a team of ten."*
- *"Increased from £50 – 60K to £150K for NCS and £30K to £110K for BTEC Scholarships."*
- *"We've not opted to bid for more contracts, but the opportunity has been there."*
- *"Once back in the league we were advised of all the funding streams... The EFL were really helpful, supporting us to complete the applications."*
- *"We needed to upgrade our IT suite and X advised me of a pot of funding... We now have a new suite."*
- *"Over the life of the contract we've grown from 25 participants to 270."*
- *"All opportunities are promoted through regional meetings, the conference, email."*
- *"The EFL are a great asset as they access funding centrally and as a result we gain more opportunities to access different funding streams."*

The EFL Trust senior managers believe that staff development is one of the principal ways to enact continuous improvement in terms of quality and performance and ultimately, impact for customers. There is direct support and development of key staff roles, especially in areas where the Supply Chain Partner may have less internal experience. There is an exciting proposal being developed to create a career pathway for NCS graduates in the community trusts. All Continuing Professional Development is centred on improving the service to the customer. One Supply Chain Partner commented "*The training is more robust and constructive*". The EFL Trust provides CPD opportunities through a range of methods including Supply Chain Partner meetings, specific training events, webinars and coaching, as well as the annual conference. This includes providing training and support for Supply Chain Partner staff in the MI (management information) system and in meeting NCS standards. Other training organised for the employees of Supply Chain Partners includes access to safeguarding training and support, reflective practice, Futsal Coach training and visits to other clubs.

2c) Contracting and Funding

There are managed processes and procedures to support procurement effectively in line with the requirements and expectations of the commissioners. To ensure a fair and transparent approach to procurement from the outset, all information is shared with Supply Chain Partners. "*It was a fair process, straight forward and support available from the EFL is required*" commented one Supply Chain Partner and another said "*You are judged on merit.*" This ensures all parties have access to the same range of information and they understand the process in place, including what is required, the scoring criteria and timeframes. Feedback was provided to Supply Chain Partners however this could be done more proactively and in greater detail. Due diligence is carried out robustly. Successful organisations are offered a contract and a 'go-live' date is agreed.

As all contracts are subject to the funding rules of the commissioners, all terms, including delivery payments, are passed on to the Supply Chain Partner. Payment profiles are discussed prior to contracting to ensure that the initial request of funding is realistic and will not put the Supply Chain Partner under any known financial risk. "*The contract is viable, it's our largest financially, but we manage it effectively to retain the contract year-on-year.*" The purpose of the EFL Trust is to create and foster good working relationships with its member organisations that share its values and ethos. As a lean and agile charity with no share-holders to satisfy, the operational structure of the EFL Trust facilitates low management costs allowing a fair and decent share of revenue to be distributed to the supply chain. Supply Chain Partners confirmed that funding arrangements and amounts are fair and that there has been dialogue about this. One Supply Chain Partner described how funding arrangements had been agreed such they received 50% of the value in advance which would help with cash flow.

Contract documentation is in place for all Supply Chain Partners and is seen to be clear and understandable. A plain English document provides clarity on key clauses and obligations. Supply Chain Partners agreed that the documentation was clear, fit for purpose and set out the obligations of each party. Various commissioners require certain aspects of the header contract to be cascaded to the supply chain and this is understood and accepted. There are clearly defined roles and responsibilities for both the Supply Chain Partner and the EFL Trust. Variations to contract are issued when required, for example changes made by the commissioner or following negotiations with the Supply Chain Partner. Any changes are fully discussed either at workshops, in meetings or through conference calls to check Supply Chain Partners' understanding.

The EFL Trust staff described how market share is discussed as part of the initial contracting activity and then negotiated with each potential partner organisation based on the contract requirements and their abilities to deliver. Post-contract there are examples within the supply chain of negotiations taking place to move market share to support successful delivery partners. Most Supply Chain Partners believe market share allocations to be fair and are aware of other organisations' delivery areas. One example is where a Supply Chain Partner has been supported in a change of market share and commented that *"The mediation was done well with EFL in my opinion"*.

At the point of contracting, partner organisations agree the payment profile. For spot purchase Supply Chain Partners, a rate for the service is agreed. Supply Chain Partners confirmed that the EFL Trust has been sympathetic in the case of contract variations and has adjusted and re-profiled to support their delivery, *"Fulfilled the initial expectations, far better than three/four years ago."* This has been a particular focus for the NCS contract, with Supply Chain Partners feeling pleased that value judgements have not been placed on the Supply Chain Partner's individual re-profiling requests. It has been a supportive process that is about the supply chain as a whole working to best effect. Comments included:

- *"We are happy to be in the supply chain with EFL."*
- *"Throughout contracting we discussed volumes and funding, the key is not to be greedy, choose a figure that matches the capability of the club."*
- *"The KPIs are outlined in the bid, so performance expectations are clear."*

The payment process is documented within the contracts and is agreed as part of the contract negotiation process. The transfer of funds within the supply chain is managed carefully. Payment terms for partners are payment within 30 days maximum from receipt of an invoice, however many payments are made within 10-14 days. *"Monthly core PFA funding is paid in a timely way after completion of the capability status."* Supply Chain Partners confirmed that payments are agreed and paid promptly by BACS transfer within agreed timescales, *"The schedules provide a clear indication of the funding available, the payments due and when – to date been really good"*.

EFL Trust funders want value for money and choose the EFL Trust because of its duty to ensure Supply Chain Partners receive as much of the generated income as possible. This in turn promotes strong local delivery and engagement, contributes to the six key strategic areas and there is recognition that any management charge is re-invested back into strengthening the supply chain in the six areas. The main contract where a management fee is levied is the NCS and there is inconsistent Supply Chain Partner knowledge about this - *"No I don't, it's none of my business"* - although all can effectively describe the support offered by the EFL either directly, as the Prime in Yorkshire and the Humber, or where it offers second tier contracts in the other five geographic areas. In 2016 the EFL Trust took zero funding or added its own resources to fund projects; examples of these are Ferrero's Move and Learn programme and the Disability Project funded by the Wembley National Stadium Trust. There are current initiatives to subsidise funding for Futsal games programme costs and investment in a new pre-NCS project and an Innovation fund to match-fund a potential Sport England bid.

3) Conduct

3a) Demonstrating Commercial and Business Integrity

The EFL Trust has set and communicated a very clear strategic direction for the organisation, supported by ambitions, values and aspirations for the supply chain network. Comments included *"We have common aims and objectives and we mirror each other"*, *"The Trust has found the balance between nurturing, offering a shoulder, supporting and commissioning"* and *"It is a partnership and we help each other out"*. Core principles that are embedded throughout procurement and service delivery and which govern the relationship between parties were shared with the Supply Chain Partners. More could be done to ensure that the core principles expressed by the EFL Trust are mutually agreed across the supply chain in order that values are explicitly aligned and truly govern the way the supply chain operates. *"Not sure about the principles, but very ethical"*.

The EFL Trust has access to the EFL human resources department on a shared-service basis and through this arrangement there is also access to an employment law specialist. Implications of transfer of staff are fully understood by EFL Trust and there is due consideration and advice taken from the named sources during initial investigations and due diligence activities of the EFL Trust as prime. In 2016 the EFL Trust accepted transfer of an employee following contract withdrawal and lessons have been learned about TUPE in this scenario.

The EFL Trust endeavours to interact with Supply Chain Partners in a way that is positive and supportive at all times. All Supply Chain Partners reported supportive and positive relationships and interactions with the Supply Chain Manager as follows:

- *"Extensive support throughout the year ...very positive."*
- *"The visits from the CEO provide staff with encouragement."*
- *"Extremely supportive and positive in dealings with the staff."*
- *"Very positive and supportive relationship."*
- *"Any performance issues they have been very supportive, like our enrolment issues."*
- *"The EFL Trust have been positive, professional and the relationship is productive."*
- *"X is very good, supportive, even though we're not always achieving target, he's realistic."*
- *"Always feel that they are at the end of the phone or email if needed, very supportive from that angle."*
- *"CCO is very supportive and really works with us."*
- *"Good relationship; they keep us up-to-date and support us all the time."*
- *"X is very understanding and supportive and advises us to stick to the plan."*

Supply Chain Partners noted that whilst no formal response times are agreed, the replies are always prompt. Good news stories are shared between partners, as are examples of best practice. Good news and best practice examples were also shared at the most recent annual conference. The advisory group plays a role in a positive interaction between parties. Club Cluster Link Officers are involved in proactive communications in the form of meetings and as an initial point of contact.

Supply Chain Partners confirmed they receive updates on various topics including legislative policies and procedures relating to contract compliance through email correspondence. All legislative and regulatory requirements of the contract are discussed at the procurement stage and checked through the Expression of Interest process.

They are also contained in the schedules of the contracts exchanged with Supply Chain Partners. More recently a Head of Governance and Quality has been appointed to support the supply chain in adhering to regulatory requirements as well as a Compliance Administrator who supports this agenda. The Supply Chain Partners confirmed that changes to regulatory and legislative requirements are communicated and subsequently checked for understanding and implementation: *"If appropriate the EFL Trust will check with the designated person that the action has been taken"*.

3b) Quality Assurance and Compliance

The quality assurance framework comprises customer experience, quality assurance and compliance. The extent of deployment is proportionate to the overall contract value and the commissioners' requirements. However, quality and compliance is managed through quality and compliance checklists and delivered by the relevant project-specific Supply Chain Manager. Queries and discussions are usually the subject of telephone conversations, and numerous site visits have taken place at Supply Chain Partner premises. All quality audits are recorded on a central register and reporting to Trustees of the summary of results is about to commence. On the NCS programme there are also plans to further develop the involvement of NCS graduates and members of the various Youth Boards in delivering quality assurance activities. Supply Chain Partners commented that *"It's quite rigorous and has got tougher each year"* and *"We can then have confidence when applying for funding bids and when being audited"*. More could be done to ensure proportionate quality assurance activities take place across all contracts and that actions arising from the monitoring of the quality of delivery are followed through to completion in order that improvements within Supply Chain Partners continue to be made on an ongoing basis.

Both the EFL Trust and Supply Chain Partners confirm there are systems in place to ensure that the findings of quality assurance activities inform and improve delivery. An example is the consistent approach to pre-phase 1 preparation for NCS and improved workbooks for the Move and Learn programme. One Supply Chain Partner not reaching the capability assessment criteria has been supported through one-to-one meetings and ongoing communication from people in the EFL Trust with specialist knowledge and is putting together an action plan to help improvement.

The information, advice and guidance (IAG) provided by the EFL Trust to the Supply Chain Partners was felt to be accurate and timely: *"It would be unimaginable if the EFL Trust weren't there"* noted one Supply Chain Partner. Other comments included *"I've been to the EFL for financial advice and to address a personal issue"* and *"The advice and guidance from the EFL is great, they're able to stand back and look at what other clubs are doing and help us"*. The EFL Trust originally achieved the **matrix** Standard in 2013 and was re-accredited in November 2016. Supply Chain Partners are aware of the importance of ensuring any IAG they provide is accurate, up-to-date and impartial. A number of Supply Chain Partners interviewed as part of this assessment confirmed that they are accredited to the **matrix** Standard.

The EFL Trust and the majority of its supply chain are registered with the Information Commissioner's Office. The due diligence and capability procedures verify that Supply Chain Partners have in place a robust data protection and security policy. Policies outline the requirements on the organisation and individuals in relation to confidentiality and security of data.

The EFL Trust also has physical security policies in place which outline the organisational security provisions as well as the responsibilities delegated to individuals to manage physical data; reference is made to internal buildings security and the availability of lockable storage for the various hierarchies of physical information. Where contractors fall short of the required standards the EFL Trust will support the development of fit-for-purpose policies. From a Supply Chain Partner perspective, this area has been of high priority in understanding the risk element. In turn, many state that they are reviewing and reflecting on their own practice and helping to re-educate staff on their responsibilities: *"We have really begun to understand more fully the risk elements of this and worked on our practical ways of working"*.

The EFL Trust has an up-to-date health and safety policy and the Supply Chain Partners' policies were discussed, checked and agreed during the due diligence phase. Health and safety was also a topic at the National Conference in September 2016 which helped Supply Chain Partners to consider myths and bring reality to the topic by using real-life examples. Ensuring health and safety policies, implementation actions, and where necessary, improvement targets, are reviewed and set with Supply Chain Partners on an ongoing basis and not just at the due diligence phase is encouraged for the forthcoming period.

The EFL Trust is committed to ensuring that children, young people and vulnerable groups are safe and protected from abuse and poor practice whilst engaged with EFL Trust projects and programmes. Since June 2015, the EFL Trust has employed its own Safeguarding Officer, primarily to offer support to the supply chain and develop guidance, policy and processes, reflecting their different requirements. A new Safeguarding Policy and Procedures for the EFL Trust has been developed which was assessed and approved by the NSPCC in 2016. These procedures have been developed to complement the specific requirements of its supply chain, particularly for NCS programmes, as it needs to ensure that information is co-ordinated from Supply Chain Partners to the NCS Trust. This has led to a new reporting model, informing analysis of trends and issues which it is able to report back into the NCS Trust on a weekly and end of delivery basis. This provides a basis to inform training needs across the network which is currently being addressed. Working closely with the EFL as the parent organisation, the EFL Trust ensures that Supply Chain Partners have access to a range of training opportunities for individuals with safeguarding responsibilities and that it develops advice and guidance documents for specific areas of the safeguarding agenda.

There is limited evidence regarding environmental sustainability. This is an area requiring significant development. The EFL Trust should develop more robust processes to embed and monitor environmental sustainability through its supply chain. This should consistently form part of due diligence activities through the Capability Status compliance tool. Supply Chain Partners commented *"This has probably not been a focus"* and *"I was asked this last time and I still have no better answer"*.

Good or excellent practice is highlighted during individual conversations or meetings between the EFL Trust and Supply Chain Partner staff, however redefining good and excellent practice more explicitly particularly post-EFL Trust restructure and the recruitment of specialist/expert staff will assist Supply Chain Partners' understanding and ability to aspire to excellence. Some Supply Chain Partners stated that excellent and best practice may not be as clear as it was and, as a result of restructure and new experts into roles, benchmarks have moved to be higher or different.

3c) Honouring Commitments

Pre-contract communication with potential partners continues to take place in a variety of ways, for example, with groups, in meetings with individual potential partners and via emails and telephone calls. These discussions include negotiation around quality, value for money and delivery. Requirements are made clear to partners at pre-contracting stage and reiterated or updated throughout the life of the contract. Any re-profiling that may be required in the future will be in consultation and negotiated in an environment of openness, honesty and trust. The majority of Supply Chain Partners confirmed this - *"there are no issues around contracts"*.

Whilst there is a dispute resolution process outlined in contracts, Supply Chain Partners felt the relationship would mean that informal methods would be their preferred initial option. Supply Chain Partners have the confidence to go directly to the senior staff in the EFL Trust if they are concerned or wish to challenge anything, however there was a lack of understanding regarding a formal dispute resolution process with some stating they would look in the contract if they needed to do so.

Within the supply chains there is an understanding of what each party is and should be doing. Delivery plans ensure that both parties are still honouring what was agreed prior to contracting. Pre-contract meetings with the potential Supply Chain Partners involve discussions around what each partner is to be allocated in terms of activity and what they would be working towards. After the contract award, meetings with the Supply Chain Manager are used to discuss and share the allocations across the supply chain. One Supply Chain Partner commented *"it is very much a partnership approach where we work alongside each other"*.

3d) Performance

Supply Chain Partners are encouraged to work collaboratively to support performance across the contract as a whole. Supply Chain Partners collaborate or mentor each other where needed, for example to develop and share policies. Comments included *"We have so many clubs and someone will always say, have you spoken to... there is always someone that can help"* and *"Peer support is so helpful"*.

There are processes in place for reviewing performance, supporting innovation, and raising issues and concerns, including scheduled contract review meetings to discuss performance, address concerns and importantly working together to find innovative solutions to problems. Supply Chain Partners described working towards Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and using either the Views or the Salesforce systems where performance is reviewed. There is also a monthly remittance advice check process that acts as a performance review if there are discrepancies in what has been paid against information put onto Views or Salesforce. Where innovation is identified, Supply Chain Partners are invited to share their approach and success at National Conference presentations.

Performance expectations appear clear to all parties and were discussed and negotiated prior to contracting and then followed through into the contract. The Supply Chain Partners have access to the EFL Trust's various operational models, and as a result can revisit performance expectations at any time. The Capability Status process was described as helping clubs to be clear on performance expectations.

A critical part of the EFL Trust's supply chain management is to regularly monitor the performance of sub-contractors and provide feedback to them that will help improve delivery and increase capacity. To this effect, the EFL Trust utilises an online monitoring system called Views and a CRM system called (Salesforce). Full expectations of recording and monitoring are detailed in contracts and full recording and technical support is offered to Supply Chain Partners. The EFL Trust employs a Management Information Co-ordinator to manage data and feedback to management of the progression of partners in relation to specific projects as well as feedback to the partner on the validity and quality of data. Supply Chain Partners confirmed *"Access to reports has improved over time"* and *"Performance information in the form of a range reports is available on a weekly/monthly basis"*.

There is a definition of Value for Money (VFM) for the EFL Trust and its supply chain which includes utilisation of specialist services already funded by other commissioners, sharing of premises and centralised negotiation of services and contracts on behalf of the supply chain. Examples include the procurement of accommodation and activities with the Youth Hostel Association for the NCS programme and services from the Dame Kelly Holmes Trust. These arrangements not only support financial savings for the supply chain but remove the need for partners to spend time and money sourcing effective services. A further example is the provision of free and reduced cost bus tickets to customers taking part in NCS programmes via a partnership agreement with First Bus South Yorkshire. Supply Chain Partners commented that:

- *"Certainly gain value for money from the EFL Trust through the support which is free of charge and the fact that they access funding centrally."*
- *"We use the funds and gifts to deliver programmes originally done by the City Council, and we have widened the participation, it's not just schools and youth clubs."*
- *"We hit every age by using the funding in different ways to achieve the overall objectives."*
- *"The programmes have developed over the years, since starting off as a man with a bag of balls, we're now a staff team of 24 providing a real service."*
- *"Participants are really enriched, have a good time, benefit and give back to the community."*

The majority of Supply Chain Partners described the importance they placed on measuring the progress of clients. This is particularly the case for the NCS Supply Chain Partners as it is a key feature of the social action element of the scheme. Methods used across all contracts vary depending on the requirements of the commissioner and include data collection, case studies, client feedback, progress towards or sustainment of education, employment or training. An illustrative quote is *"We measure the over 55s to see how their motivation has increased, their fitness and positivity"*.

3e) Promoting Diversity and Equality

All parties hold a strong commitment to diversity and equality (D&E). The Supply Chain Partners confirmed that the initial due diligence process they engaged in included sharing their policy and a commitment to being positive about equality and diversity. As part of this process, organisations are asked to provide details and copies of their own policies relating to D&E. The EFL Trust staff specialists ensure that the necessary policies are in place so that the whole of the supply chain is aligned with its own commitment to D&E. These policies and procedures are reviewed annually.

D&E is discussed during partner reviews. Training and support is monitored in Supply Chain Partners. Marketing materials, leaflets and other IAG materials given to customers are checked to ensure they conform to current legislation.

Data about D&E is monitored and shared with partners who respond accordingly to ensure that actual participation within the project reflects the requirements of the commissioner. The way in which data relating to D&E is collected, analysed and used within the supply chain provides direction for programme and service development and future marketing and promotion activities. One example is the analysis of information which identified that there were two areas of deprivation that the supply chain had failed to target and as a result started to work with the local council to attract participants to the programme. Additionally, the data is used from Salesforce when designing the programme to ensure the activities address the different genders, capabilities and abilities of participants as well as their learning needs ensuring teams are well balanced. D&E approaches have received external recognition of work, for example, one Supply Chain Partner explained *"the Home Office have recognised the work we do with the Muslim academy"*. Demographic data is used to demonstrate reach of the supply chain to potential funders and allow insight and impact data to the management team to support strategy. The EFL Trust has recently appointed Head of Governance with a view to building a governance team to include specialist Insight and Impact roles. Supply Chain Partners' testimonies are useful in illustrating this area of strong performance:

- *"The monitoring of the social mix is important and sometimes influences the areas you target, like special needs."*
- *"The social mix is monitored across the supply chain as the 5% is a final payment and based on the collective performance."*
- *"Easter was a focus on getting disabled and able-bodied participants to work together."*
- *"The data establishes whether we are attracting the right participants for the different programmes and influences future activities, for example, girls and women into football."*
- *"We have increased the participation and fan numbers of the BME, as well as have a Bangladeshi following due to the work we have done."*
- *"We have intentionally targeted deprived areas with the aim of increasing participation."*
- *"We work in an area of high deprivation as well as rural affluent, encountering different challenges; we continually track and identify different approaches to engage and increase participation."*
- *"We track schools that engage in the competition and target those for future activities."*
- *"We have 3% of black ethnicity in the area and try to target that group."*

4. Review

4a) Supply Chain Review

Stakeholder groups are clearly identified and play an active role in receiving and giving feedback on the impact of the various contracts. All parties work collaboratively with stakeholders and partners to deliver a service that meets local needs and provides value for money. For example the NCS Youth Board members are used to inform key elements of delivery of the programme including phase delivery and quality, celebration events and marketing. Engagement with MPs and government generally has improved and developed over the last few years and has enabled the EFL Trust to support supply chain partners with both financial and social projects. Feedback from MPs at a local level has informed the EFL Trust on the performance of particular Supply Chain Partners and allowed both positive and constructive feedback. The Supply Chain Partners additionally seek and share regular feedback from other local partners that they work with and from customers. There is ongoing dialogue and relationship development with other 'sports family' organisations such as the Premier League, the Professional Footballers' Association and Sport England.

Supply Chain Partners recognise the sharing of the recent strategy and action plan as the Continuous Improvement Plan for the EFL Trust. This has been recently shared at Cluster Group Meetings. Stakeholders and Supply Chain Partners are to be more actively involved in the self-assessment process and the EFL Trust will use their feedback to add value to the service and the importance of continuous improvement is being communicated to the supply chain network. Performance monitoring reviews require partners to self-assess and identify any improvements to the service required at a local level.

Supply Chain Partners are kept informed of the wider policy and strategy information of commissioners through a range of methods including emails, meetings and training events. Supply Chain Partners described that information has come through a number of sources including emails and updates from the EFL Trust, directly from the commissioners, and from their own interest in the wider policy and strategy of organisations from whom they might receive funding. Supply Chain Partners referred to the National Conference and the quality of guest speakers from inside the network and wider, including information being shared from Parliament and current national agenda themes which included safeguarding and child sexual abuse.

There are numerous examples from throughout the supply chain of how the work has a measurable impact on the wider social objectives of many of the commissioners. These include quantifiable impacts on health and wellbeing, community cohesion and reductions in anti-social behaviour. For example, anti-social behaviour programmes saved £6.8m across public services in one year in a specific borough and 15,000 hours of volunteering back into one community. Annual Reports of Supply Chain Partners have a clear link to the wider social objectives and using the power of football for improving health, inspiring education and increasing participation. For example, one club trust made a strong impact on engaging with young people with disabilities in 2015/2016 by involving 522 new users and getting involved across the country. Other Supply Chain Partners produce case studies sharing impact on the wider social objectives; an example is delivering a Disability Programme and going from no involvement to having football teams that are now competing nationally.

In the Futsal programme there is 90% retention and successful outcomes rate, contributing significantly to reducing NEETs through engaging young people in sport and learning. Supply Chain Partners' testimonies demonstrate the strength of measuring impact as follows:

- *"65% reduction on anti-social behaviour in the areas we are active in."*
- *"Our social action projects have certainly impacted on specific communities – one project continues to be running two-years later, which started with raising awareness of disabilities in schools and now has progressed to corporates."*
- *"Contributed to the different areas; health and wellbeing, participation, inclusion as well as breaking down barriers..."*
- *"Provide the opportunity for young people to volunteer and become engaged in the local community."*
- *"Increased the number of disabled participants from 2-3 to 120 over the past years."*
- *"Track the progression of Traineeships and other groups and we have gained great successes."*
- *"One of our Trustees spoke of us being far more professional and now having a social impact, not just about playing football."*
- *"These young people get exposed to positive role models, which a number miss."*

Previous to the delivery of the NCS programme, the supply chain was ring-fenced to the 72 charities attached to the EFL clubs. The need to bring in new suppliers to deliver the spread of service required by the NCS project prompted the EFL Trust to develop a wider supply chain of charity-based community engagement organisations. Services are developed and enhanced based on the feedback received to ensure the service is meeting the needs of the local community. The recent restructure is designed to enable even more effective supply chain management.

The EFL Trust's activities, and the activities of its Supply Chain Partners, are positively impacting on external stakeholders. An example is how customers have been encouraged to develop themselves and their wellbeing such as improved attainment, gaining qualifications, improved mental wellbeing and accessing skills and employment. Improving environmental sustainability is an area for improvement as outlined, however community environments are impacted positively as described earlier. Supply Chain Partner testimony illustrates this as follows:

- *"A number of participants went on to work as a volunteer and subsequently gained permanent employment – independent young people, not reliant on benefits."*
- *"The participants tend to develop social skills and grow in confidence."*
- *"We've touched the lives of the homeless, aged, young people, for the better."*
- *"Our disabled coordinator gained regional award and went forward to national."*
- *"It is rewarding and fulfilling work, as a self-employed person delivering the service I am really happy, the happiest I've been."*
- *"Staff have had the opportunity to work on their strengths and use their talents."*

Staff are equally positively impacted by the work and the following reflections capture this:

- *"Staff feel valued and appreciated."*
- *"Staff really understand the context in the way we work and now, whilst they focus on the KPIs like numbers participating, its about the difference we make to the community and social impact and as a result raised their aspirations."*
- *"A great staff team who pulls together and make a great success of the programmes – that's teamwork."*

8. Conclusion

This assessment provided the opportunity to consider the practices of the EFL Trust against the Merlin Standard. The organisation has met the requirements of the Merlin Standard, having demonstrated that its behaviours are positive and supportive, and communication is open and honest, and a true working partnership has evolved with the Supply Chain Partners. As an organisation, the EFL Trust has developed significantly in all areas but one area since the last assessment.

Whilst no significant organisational or senior staff changes or additional contracts are envisaged, should any occur then this may require a strategic review to ensure this limited life organisation continues to operate in line with the Merlin principles.

In January 2019 the EFL Trust will be required to undertake a further assessment against the Merlin Standard in order to retain the accreditation. Consideration could be made to a continuous improvement review being undertaken in January 2018. The purpose of the review would be to establish progress made against the areas recommended for further improvement following this assessment.

ASSESSMENT TYPE	REVIEW
ASSESSOR'S DECISION	STANDARD MET
LEAD ASSESSOR'S NAME	SUSAN SMITH
VISIT DATE	23/01/2017 – 26/01/2017
CLIENT ID	C11721
ASSESSMENT REFERENCE	PN102312