



Corporate and Environmental
Overview & Scrutiny Committee
11 July 2019

Cabinet
10 September 2019

Report of: Director of Leisure and Environment

Relevant Portfolio Holder : Councillor Y. Gagen

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SUBJECT: ABBEY LANE PLAYING FIELDS – REVIEW OF FUNDING

Wards affected: Burscough wards

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To review the £15,000 revenue funding given annually to Burscough Dynamo Football Club to support the maintenance of Abbey Lane Playing Fields.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO CORPORATE & ENVIRONMENTAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

2.1 Members note the content of this review and approve the following recommendations to Cabinet

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

3.1 Members agree that the allocation of £15,000 revenue budget, to support the maintenance of the new drainage system at Abbey Lane Playing Fields, will no longer be made available from 2020/21.

3.2 Members also approve that should Burscough Dynamo Football Club, who run the facility, require further financial support they be advised to contact the Council so that their needs can be considered.

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1. In September 2013 Cabinet gave approval to enter into a long term lease with Burscough Dynamo Football Club (the "Club"), formerly called Burscough Juniors Football Club, for the changing pavilion and pitches located at Abbey Lane Playing Fields, with provision for the Club to seek funding for improvements to the site, with restrictions that the site should be used for multi-sports activities.
- 4.2 This decision was made following a prolonged period where the poor condition of the pitches had limited and finally closed the site for use. The condition of pitches was investigated and the cost of improvements to allow them to be re-used was assessed.
- 4.3 Working together the Club and the Council were able to attract funding from the Football Foundation (£98,000) and Sport England (£65,000) to add to a capital funding allocation by the Council of £100,000, and capital works were undertaken in 2016/17. Play re-commenced at the facility in 2017.
- 4.4 The lease to the Club involved them taking on full maintenance responsibilities for the building and pitches, with the exception of the cricket squares which the Council undertook to maintain. The Football Foundation, in their grant offer, included an indication of the annual maintenance costs of £44,000 based upon estimates from the Football Foundation.
- 4.5 In the Cabinet report in 2013 it was indicated in the resource implications that the revenue budget sum of £15,000 for maintenance would remain to be utilised towards supporting the annual cost of maintenance of the new drainage system.
- 4.6 At its meeting on 12 October 2017 the Corporate and Environmental Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to undertake a review entitled "Community Involvement in Service Delivery". This resulted in a report to Council with recommendations including "That in the interest of prudent financial management the £15,000 revenue funding given to Abbey Lane each year be reviewed in the context of the overall programme of grants given to voluntary organisations."

5.0 CURRENT POSITION

- 5.1 The Club have now operated their facilities for almost two years. They are an FA Charter Standard club and currently run both gender teams from under 6 through to open age. They are affiliated to 7 local leagues and make their facilities available to many other clubs and community groups on a hire basis.
- 5.2 Efficient management and maintenance of the pitches and drainage system has resulted in annual costs running at approximately £35,000. The annual revenue allocation of £15,000 from the Council has supported these costs over the last two years.

6.0 KEY ISSUES

- 6.1 When assessing whether financial support would be provided by the Council to a voluntary community organisation such as this Club the method of support would normally be either through a reducing subsidy to the organisation, based upon the on-going maintenance costs, and taken from existing maintenance budgets, or a one off grant through our Grants to Voluntary Organisations.
- 6.2 In previous cases a three year programme of subsidy has been provided with two thirds of the maintenance costs provided in year one, one third in year two, and zero subsidy in year three.
- 6.3 A further way in which funding support could have been provided would have been through the Councils Grants to Voluntary Organisations programme. This involves a small grants scheme involving grants up to £500, and larger grants on a one off basis taken, on a priority basis, from an annual programme budget of £136,000. A one off grant in this situation would have been based upon the projected annual maintenance costs.
- 6.4 At Abbey Lane the project involved substantial capital investment which required a projected annual maintenance of £35-£40,000. This requirement was far higher than existing budgets which a reducing subsidy would have been based upon, and also far greater than any one-off grant that may have been available, hence the decision to allocate the full existing maintenance budget on an on-going basis.
- 6.5 This arrangement did not conform with normal processes but was deemed necessary to ensure protection of the investment from the Council and other providers.
- 6.6 The amount that has been allocated from existing budgets to the project is currently £30,000. If a decision had been made to allocate a reducing subsidy then this would have been based upon projected costs and would have been in the region of £35,000 over a three year period. If a Grant to Voluntary Organisations had been bid for it would have been in the region of £30,000, and would have precluded a further bid within 3 years.
- 6.7 We are, therefore, in a situation whereby whichever route had been taken to support this scheme the amounts allocated at this stage would have been similar. Any further allocation of the existing maintenance budget would therefore create a disproportionate level of funding provided to support this community organisation over and above any other.

7.0 PROPOSALS

- 7.1 To provide an equitable system of providing support to community organisations it is proposed that the current method of allocating the existing Council maintenance budget of £15,000, to support the maintenance of the

new drainage system, cease at the end of the current year, and the Club be advised accordingly.

- 7.2 Should the Club require support from the Council in the future then they will be able to bid for a Grant to Voluntary Organisations, and their bid be considered on a priority basis against other bids through the approved process.

8.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The support provided to date has supported the development of a community sports club in providing facilities to allow the development of healthy outdoor activity for the local community, and has had a positive impact on health, inclusion and community use of the site.

9.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Agreement to the proposal to cease the maintenance grant allocation to the Abbey Lane scheme will create a future annual saving of £15,000 from next year.

10.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 10.1 Providing adequate maintenance support is a crucial element of protecting the capital investment in the Abbey Lane facility and ensuring that the new drainage system remains in good condition and helps to provide good quality playing pitches for the local community. Failure to maintain the system would result in a loss of reputation of the Council and the potential of other funders re-claiming their grant allocations. Discussions with the Club have shown that they are now established at the site with a financially sustainable operation and no longer rely upon funding from the Council.
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