



CORPORATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
10 October 2019

CABINET
5 November 2019

Report of: Corporate Director of Place & Community

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 That the allocation of £15,000 revenue budget, to support the maintenance of the new drainage system at Abbey Lane Playing Fields, be continued in 2019/20, then reduced incrementally by £5,000 a year until it is phase out in 2022/23.

3.2 That the revenue savings made by reducing this budget allocation be used for projects to improve and develop other Council greenspace and recreational land.

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."
- 4.7 This revenue funding was reviewed and a proposal to stop the allocation was presented to Committee on 11th July 2019. At this meeting Members were concerned that stopping this allocation totally at this time may create hardship for the Club and further information was requested before a decision was made.
- 4.8 It was requested that the Club be given the opportunity to provide more information on their financial position, and also be given the opportunity to attend the next Corp O & S Committee to provide a presentation to Members on the Club, its management of the Abbey Lane facility, and the impact of the removal of the revenue grant.

5.0 CURRENT POSITION

- 5.1 The Club have provided a written statement on its current operation and its view of the impact of the proposal to cut the revenue funding (see appendix 1 – Letter from Burscough Dynamo Football Club). In this statement the Club confirms that it is operating efficiently and managing the facility well, however, removal of the revenue grant which is meant specifically to maintain the new drainage system on the pitches, in line with Football Association and Sport England funding requirements, would cause them difficulties. It would mean that this revenue grant would have to be replaced by their own funding which would reduce the availability to undertake other site maintenance issues like fence repair and replacement, and tree management, which have accumulated over the years.
- 5.2 The Club have requested that the proposal to cut the grant totally from this year be replaced with a £5,000 incremental reduction of the grant over the next 3 years. In effect this would mean a gradual reduction of the allocation until it ceases totally in 2022/23.
- 5.3 The Club have also accepted the offer to present their case to Members at the next committee.

6.0 KEY ISSUES

- 6.1 Should Members wish to accept the proposal for a reducing subsidy at this facility this would be more in line with the process undertaken at other community based community transfers including Skelmersdale Community Centres and The Civic.
- 6.2 The initial allocation of the £15,000 revenue budget to contribute towards the maintenance of pitch drainage was set up to give the main external grant funders the confidence that their investment was going to be protected. To maintain this confidence the Club should, as part of their annual reporting, provide the Council with information to show that this maintenance has been undertaken.

7.0 PROPOSALS

- 7.1 The Club have requested that the current £15,000 revenue budget for pitch drainage maintenance at Abbey Lane Playing Fields be reduced annually from next year by increments of £5,000. They feel that this method of reduction will allow the Club to undertake long standing maintenance issues at the site without creating significant financial difficulties. This would seem to be a reasonable compromise to an immediate total removal of the budget and it is proposed that Members accept this proposal.

- 7.2 The revenue savings that this incremental reduction in allocation will create (£5,000 in 2020/21, £10,000 in 2021/22, and £15,000 from 2022/23) could be used for projects to help to improve other greenspace and recreational land owned by the Council. It is proposed therefore that the savings be put to this use.

8.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. The funding 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 Should the proposal to cut the grant totally from this year be replaced with an incremental reduction of the grant over the next 3 years this would mean retaining the £15,000 revenue allocation in 2019/20, reducing it to £10,000 in 2020/21, and £5,000 in 2021/22, with the grant finally ceasing in 2022/23.
- 9.2 Should Members agree to the proposal in 7.2 the savings generated would be used to undertake improvement projects to other areas of Council owned greenspace and recreational land.

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. The Club will prioritise maintenance of the drainage system and provide annual reports to show that this is being undertaken, and will use their reducing subsidy from the Council to offset the costs of other outstanding maintenance issues.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 - Letter from Burscough Dynamo Football Club
Appendix 2 - Equality Impact Assessment
Appendix 3 - Minute of Corporate and Environmental Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 10 October 2019

