

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of Meeting of the AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in Council Headquarters, Newtown St Boswells on Thursday, 15 February 2018 at 10.00 am

Present:- Councillors S. Bell (Chairman), H. Anderson, J. A. Fullarton, S. Hamilton, N. Richards, H. Scott, R. Tatler and E. Thornton-Nicol.
Apologies:- Councillor K. Chapman. Mr M Middlemiss.
In Attendance:- Clerk to the Council, Democratic Services Officer (P Bolson).

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman welcomed those present to the meeting.

2. ORDER OF BUSINESS.

The Chairman varied the order of business as shown on the Agenda and the Minute reflects the order in which the items were considered at the meeting.

DECISION NOTED.

URGENT BUSINESS

Under Section 50B(4)(b) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the Chairman was of the opinion that the item dealt with in the following paragraph should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency, in view of the need to make an early decision.

3. MINUTE

There had been circulated copies of the Minute of 15 January 2018. The Chairman explained that as Members were aware, Minutes that included Audit items were currently considered at the earliest meeting when Audit business was next being discussed (when the External Auditors and external Members of the Committee would be present). Due to the need for Minutes to be approved within an appropriate timescale, Members were advised that all Minutes would now be presented to the earliest Audit and Scrutiny Committee. A mechanism would also be developed to ensure that, should the External Auditors and/or external Members of the Committee not be present at every meeting, they would be able contribute to discussions as appropriate to their role.

DECISION

APPROVED the Minutes for signature by the Chairman.

4. ARTIFICIAL SPORTS PITCHES

4.1 There had been circulated copies of a Briefing Note by the Service Director Assets and Infrastructure providing an update on the use of 2G and 3G artificial pitch provision in the Scottish Borders. This item had been scrutinised in February 2017 and was being brought forward to this Committee for review as part of the Scrutiny Work Programme. Mr Martin Joyce - Service Director Assets and Infrastructure, Mr Ewan Doyle - Project Management Team Leader, and Mr Ewan Jackson – Chief Executive of Live Borders, were in attendance. Mr Joyce and Mr Doyle provided some background information and explained that the Briefing Note before Members was wide-ranging to include updates on the delivery of Selkirk and Hawick facilities; and maintenance works undertaken during 2017/18. Construction of the 2G and 3G pitches was funded by Scottish Borders Council and Sportscotland with Live Borders assuming operating responsibility with commensurate management fee. The report advised that the Galashiels 3G pitch did not

receive management fee support from SBC. Currently, Live Borders operated four 2G and two 3G artificial pitches and the report detailed the differences both in the construction and usage of each. Whilst 2G pitches were predominantly sand-dressed or sand-filled and were certified by the Federation of International Hockey, 3G facilities comprised a longer pile with rubber infill and were certified by FIFA and World Rugby. Both types of pitch were certified for competitive play respectively. There were a number of benefits from using artificial pitches, such as the availability of good quality, affordable training facilities; and the opportunity to play all year round under floodlights on consistent quality playing surfaces. These benefits contributed to increased participation by a broad spectrum of clubs, schools, development programmes and individuals across age groups and localities. Artificial pitches also relieved pressure on existing grass pitches under the responsibility of Scottish Borders Council, allowing the ground to recover and therefore reduce the maintenance costs for SBC. The report detailed usage figures for 2015/16 and 2016/17 across pitches under Live Borders management. The statistics for the 3G pitch in Hawick took account that the facility had only been operational for part of 2016/17 and that during those first four months, over 9,000 visits had been recorded. The figures also reflected that the Peebles and Selkirk 2G pitches were located within the school estate and only operated by Live Borders outwith school hours. User feedback was positive by football, rugby and hockey clubs/users and each reported an increase in the number of users. Pitch safety was a major consideration and less than 1 reported accident per 10,000 visits had been recorded for the 2016/17 reporting period. There were further synthetic pitches within the school estate as detailed in the report and these had been subject to safety inspections and maintenance repairs during 2016/17, with a future maintenance and replacement fund being established in the Council's Capital and Revenue planning process. In conclusion, Mr Doyle suggested that the increased usage figures demonstrated that improved playing surfaces helped the sustainability of local clubs and enabled more individuals and communities to participate in sport and activity whilst keeping operational costs down.

- 4.2 Mr Jackson advised Members that there had previously been some health and safety concerns in relation to artificial pitches. However, following a full review of these pitches, no evidence had been found to support these concerns and it was noted that the number of users did not decrease during or after the review. The range of people using the pitches across gender, age, ability and organisations continued to expand and the very low number of accidents was encouraging for participants. Mr Jackson also noted that the figures in Table 1 in the Briefing Note showed a decrease in usage at Selkirk but this was a system error and the numbers had, in fact, increased. He went on to explain that synthetic pitches were designed to accommodate much more frequent usage and could support professional sport such as hockey, football and rugby at a high level.
- 4.3 Officers provided clarification in response to questions from Members. Further detail was given in respect of the composition of 2G pitches and Mr Jackson advised that sand-filled pitches were deeper and well-suited to training and hockey; 3G pitches were softer and more suited to soccer and rugby. 3G pitches could also comprise a shock mat below the surface to make them more suitable for contact sport such as rugby. Grass pitches were only operational for part of a year due to weather limitations and water-based pitches also incurred higher maintenance and required some form of irrigation to be installed. Mr Joyce advised Members that artificial pitches were designed to last for around 10 years subject to usage, and confirmed that the Capital Programme included the development of further artificial pitches across the Scottish Borders. There had been concern raised in relation to problems caused by loose rubber pellets from 3G pitches finding their way into drainage systems. Mr Joyce confirmed that drainage systems were inbuilt to pitches, with water passing through membranes to Scottish Water/SEPA standards, and he was not aware of any reported issues. He would investigate this matter and a further update would be provided by the Engineering Team to Committee members in due course. The Chairman thanked officers for their attendance.

DECISION

NOTED the update and that no further review of Artificial Sports Pitches was required at this time.

The meeting concluded at 10.35 am