

DARTFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 19 October 2021 at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT: Councillor Sacha Gosine (Chairman)
Councillor Brian Garden (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Emma Ben Moussa
Councillor John Burrell
Councillor Rosanna M Currans
Councillor Paul Cutler
Councillor Peter Harman
Councillor Danny Nicklen
Councillor Adrian Oakley-Dow
Councillor Victoria Oguntope
Councillor Tom Oliver
Councillor Julie A Ozog
Councillor Ellenor E Palmer
Councillor Denzil J Reynolds
Councillor Lucas J Reynolds
Councillor Mrs Rebecca F Storey

ABSENT: Councillor Sue Butterfill
Councillor Avtar Sandhu MBE

Dartford Borough Council Officers:-

Caroline Hicks – Director of Growth & Communities
Stephen Jefferson – Leisure & Communities Officer

PRESENT TO RESPOND TO ISSUES RAISED BY THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:

Harry Bright – Chairman of Dartford Cricket C
Jeremy Kite MBE – Director, Dartford Football Club

CABINET MEMBERS: Jeremy Kite MBE, Leader of the Council

14. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors S P Butterfill and A S Sandhu MBE.

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Leader of the Council attending in his Cabinet capacity, declared a personal interest as a Director of Dartford Football Club in respect of agenda item 8 – Princes Park Annual Update 2020-21. He advised the Committee

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that he would be responding on behalf of the Club for that item, not as a Dartford Borough Councillor.

16. CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13 JULY 2021

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 13 July 2021 were confirmed as an accurate account of those proceedings.

17. URGENT ITEMS

The Chairman confirmed that there were no urgent items for the Committee to consider.

18. TO CONSIDER REFERENCES FROM OTHER COMMITTEES (IF ANY)

There were no references from other Committees for Members to consider.

19. CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

The Chairman had no specific points to bring to the Committee's attention, but repeated his previous request that Members from all political groups give consideration to additional items to supplement the current 2021-22 Work Plan, or on a draw-down basis as set out in the Committee's Protocol. He noted in this context that the current Work Plan had no substantive items scheduled for January or April 2022.

20. REGULATION 9 NOTICE [FORWARD PLAN]

At the Chairman's request, the Committee Clerk reminded Members that the Regulation 9 Notice [Forward Plan] was for the Committee to note, and that forthcoming topics for consideration by Cabinet could be drawn-down by the Committee prior to Cabinet consideration and implementation and subsequently at any time.

RESOLVED:

That Members note the contents of the Regulation 9 Notice [Forward Plan] for the period 15 September 2021 to 31 January 2022.

21. PRINCES PARK ANNUAL UPDATE 2020-21

The covering report from the Communities and Leisure Officer enclosed at Appendix A, the 2020-21 Annual Report on Princes Park from Dartford Football Club (DFC).

The Leader of the Council confirmed his earlier declaration [Min. No. 15 refers], that he would respond to any questions in his role as a Director of Dartford Football Club (DFC) not a Councillor, and that Officers would respond to any questions regarding Council areas of responsibility for Princes Park.

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The Vice-Chairman commended the DFC 2020-21 Annual Report on Princes Park [Appendix A in the papers] to the Committee for approval. He said that the DFC report was a comprehensive record of all the activities being managed by the Club in the Park on behalf of the Council under the terms of the SLA (Service Level Agreement). He noted in particular the improvements made to the golf facilities in Princes Park [Appendix A second and third paras refer], but proposed that future reports should include comparative data for the previous year, and a forecast of aims and objectives for the ensuing year, to help build a more comprehensive picture of progress.

The Leader of the Council, speaking in his capacity as a Director of Dartford Football Club, thanked the Vice-Chairman for his positive comments and noted his proposals regarding future annual reports from DFC regarding the activities and amenities managed in the Park on behalf of the Council under the terms of the SLA. He advised that the golf facility in particular had improved significantly under the management of Mr Paul Page a golf professional. The course now benefitted from improved drainage and was an excellent facility for both club level players and beginners of which he was one. Lessons were also available from Mr Page under the community outreach programme.

In response to a variety of other questions from individual Members, the Leader of the Council gave the following responses on behalf of DFC:

- London City Lionesses and Charlton Under 23's had enjoyed good seasons at Princes Park in the period under review and it was possible that those arrangements would continue;
- Dartford Ladies team continued to flourish and the Club had made a commitment to support the Ladies team on an equal basis with the Men's team;
- DFC had a special relationship with the Leigh Academy given their very close proximity and the inter-linked nature of the Academy and Park sites, which negated any travel costs for Academy pupils
- All Dartford schools were eligible to benefit from DFC training in Princes Park, but he was aware that travel costs for some schools remained a problem and could be prohibitive;
- Primary schools were catered for on a Saturday morning, on all playing surfaces, prior to match days in the afternoon;
- SCL provided a full-time education and football development programme for 16-18 year olds for 50 students, in addition to the Club's pre-Academy (7-16 years old's) and Academy programmes;
- A visit to Princes Park for the Committee and any other Members to see the various facilities DFC provided would be welcomed.

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In concluding his response to Members' questions, in his role as a DFC Director, the Leader of the Council stressed the benefits of the several successful social outreach programmes and diversity of teams delivered thanks to the Council's support, which significantly aided social cohesion in the Borough, and opened up the game to a variety of different groups. He said that written reports could only go some way to measure the huge social capital reaped from sport and that grassroots football remained an extremely effective way to instil values, provide a focus for activity and a sense of wellbeing, particularly to young people.

The Director of Growth & Communities advised Members that communities needed sports facilities, theatres and cultural facilities and that SLAs (Service Level Agreements) were an excellent vehicle to achieve the Council's aims to provide those amenities for residents. SLAs varied and were individual to each service provision, but all SLAs needed outcomes, and year on year data in future annual reports would help achieve that aim.

Officers confirmed that the Council payment of £90,000 to DFC to deliver all sporting services in Princes Park under the terms of the current SLA annually, remained unchanged for the current financial cycle to 31 March 2022, but remained under review on an annual basis.

The Vice-Chairman next addressed the excellent role Princes Park had played during the Pandemic as a regional base for the St. John's Ambulance Service, a COVID-19 vaccination centre and in the distribution of food and other aid products during the various periods of lock-down. He proposed that the Chairman of Scrutiny write to the NHS to highlight the vital role that the facilities at Princes Park had played in helping to combat the effects of the Pandemic for Dartford residents, and to encourage the NHS to continue to use Princes Park facilities in the future e.g. for the COVID-19 booster jab.

The Leader of the Council acknowledged the vital role the DFC and the Princes Park facilities had played during the Pandemic, particularly for young people who, in his view, were more likely to accept help in a football club setting, than in a hospital or other NHS environment.

Members supported the proposal that the Chairman write to the NHS praising the role played by Princes Park during the Pandemic and for its future use to help combat the effects of COVID-19 in the Dartford community.

At the conclusion of discussion, the Leader of the Council resumed his role as a Cabinet Member for the remainder of the proceedings.

RESOLVED:

1. That Members note the contents of the Dartford Football Club 2020-21 Annual Report for Princes Park [Appendix A to the papers];
2. That future annual reports on Princes Park from Dartford Football Club include comparative data for the previous year's operation, and aims and targets for the ensuing year;
3. That the Chairman of the Committee write to the NHS at an appropriate level, to praise the significant role facilities at Princes Park played in

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combating COVID-19 and its effects in the community during the Pandemic, and to recommend continued use of those facilities by the NHS to combat COVID-19 going forward;

4. That the Committee and all Members undertake a site visit to Princes Park at a date to be agreed with the Club by Officers.

22. **DARTFORD CRICKET CLUB IN HESKETH PARK ANNUAL UPDATE 2020-21**

The report from the Communities and Leisure Officer updated the Committee regarding community use of the Dartford Cricket Club Ltd.'s pavilion in Hesketh Park for the year ending October 2021. Details of that use in the period under reviews were set out in the Club's Community Use Information – October 2021 leaflet, attached as Appendix A to the report.

The Chairman welcomed Mr Harry Bright, Chairman of Dartford Cricket Club Ltd (DCC) to the proceedings, and invited Members to pose questions on the report and attached appendix.

The Vice-Chairman expressed his concern at the lack of detail in the DCC leaflet. In particular a lack of comparative data from the previous 2020 season, and an absence of any stated aims or targets for the forthcoming 2022 season.

The Leisure and Communities Officer reminded Members that the DCC paid the Council rent for the use of the Pavilion building in Hesketh Park under a 25 year lease agreement [report para 3.1 refers]. An SLA was not appropriate to a rental agreement and the DCC were not obliged to identify specific annual aims and objections as part of their tenancy arrangements with the Council. However, as the operator of a facility that had benefitted from significant Council investment, DCC were invited to submit a short annual review for publication which *summarised* their activities and links with the community [report 3.2 and 3.3 and Cabinet Min. No. 59 of 2016 refer], as set out in Appendix A to the report.

Mr Bright, DCC Chairman, advised Members that due to the Pandemic, DCC had been in almost continuous lock-down in the period under review, a situation which had inevitably impacted on the Club's performance. The Government's Furlough scheme had helped the Club to retain staff and more games had now been played in the 2021 reporting period than in 2019. The Junior cricket team continued to flourish and the Senior team had been promoted to the higher Division. The Club continued to attract a good social, gender and ethnic mix to its activities, and had continued to be a point of reference for St. John's Ambulance training for S.E. England. But the Club's finances were limited and the Pandemic had imposed a considerable fiscal strain on its activities in the period under review.

He advised Members that the Club's requirement to maintain the Outfield playing surface in Hesketh Park under the terms of its rental agreement with the Council had been a major financial burden during the Pandemic. The

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Outfield had been devastated during the successive periods of COVID-19 lock-down, when Hesketh Park had been subjected to vastly increased levels of foot-fall as the public sought respite from lock-down and undertook a wide selection of recreational activities in the park, including impromptu games of football.

Hesketh Park as a whole had also suffered from an infestation of Leather Jacket beetles which had further damaged the turf in the Outfield. Fox and domestic pet activity had exacerbated that damage to the Outfield resulting in deep holes in the playing surface. The Outfield had now repaired and re-seeded back to pre-Pandemic standards and was now ready for the new 2022 season. He acknowledged the 'thin' nature of the Club's October 2021 Community Use Information leaflet and undertook to provide greater detail in the Club's 2022 document.

The Ward Member for Newtown supported the DCC Chairman in his comments to the Committee. He continued to hold his constituent surgeries in the Pavilion building in Hesketh Park and praised the Club's efforts overall, in what had been a very challenging 2 year period for the DCC, particularly in terms of the repair to the Outfield and the significant financial burden that had imposed on the Club.

In response to further questions from individual Members the DCC Chairman confirmed the following additional points:

- Particular success stories in the period under review had been the hosting of the 'Quantum Games' and maintaining coaching for the 5-8 and 8-11 year old groups;
- Sky T.V. and other 'luxury' facilities offered by the Club in the Pavilion had been withdrawn in an effort to balance day to day running costs;
- The Club was aiming to establish a fiscal reserve in the coming months to finance much needed repairs including; to the Pavilion façade, the half-yearly lift inspection, and repair work related to the extensive leak from a drinks dispensing machine.

The Leader of the Council addressed Members in his capacity as the Chairman of Cabinet. He advised that it was not always appropriate for the Council to impose increased metrics or targets on tenants of a Council property. But where the tenant agreed to do so, it was always likely to be helpful. The annual update provided by the Club was to inform the Committee of DCC's community activity undertaken at a sports facility that had benefitted from substantial Council investment [Cabinet Min No. 59 refers]. The Council's policy was to invest in sports and leisure facilities and he pointed to investments in cricket, rugby, football and the Fairfield pool & sports centre. These were all means of investing in the community, and engendering greater social inclusion through the provision of sporting facilities accessible to all in society: not to make a profit.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Committee note the report.

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23. REVIEW 2021-22 WORK PLAN

The report from the Committee Co-ordinator attached at Appendix A the current 2021-22 Work Plan for the Committee and sought Members views on the addition of further items or the re-scheduling of existing items.

The Chairman noted the absence of any substantive items in the Work Plan for the Committee's meetings due to be held in January and April 2022, notwithstanding the addition of any subsequent items through the draw-down process prior to each meeting.

In subsequent discussion Members identified a report from Dartford Valley Rugby Club, and scrutiny of the Council's Local Impact Report (LIR) on the London Resort Development Consent Order [due to be presented to Cabinet on 27 January 2022], as two topics to be added to the current 2021-22 Work Plan, with timings to be confirmed by Officers in due course.

RESOLVED:

1. That Members note the contents of the Committee's current Work Plan as set out in Appendix A to the report;
2. That Members agree the additions to the Work Plan detailed above, subject to specific timing proposals from Officers.

Post Meeting Note

Subsequent discussions by Officers with Dartford Valley Rugby Club, indicate that an initial report from the Club to the Committee would be most appropriate in April 2022, following completion of the current 2021-22 financial year and playing season.

The Head of Planning Services subsequently advised that her LIR report to Cabinet was unlikely to go to Cabinet before been moved back to March 2022 at the earliest [separate email to all Committee Members refers], which again indicates scrutiny of this topic by the Committee in April 2022.

The meeting closed at 7.55 pm

Councillor S Gosine
CHAIRMAN

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