

Safety at Sports Grounds

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SUMMARY

This is the annual report to inform the Committee of the action taken by officers in respect of the Council's responsibilities under the Safety at Sports Grounds Act 1975 and the Fire and Safety at Places of Sport Act 1987. The Committee is asked to provide comments before submission to the Cabinet Member for Finance Property and Business Services, for approval.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee notes the report and provides comments, which can be included in the final report to the Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Business Services.

(The Committee may wish to particularly note Appendices A & B. Following any comments from RESPOC, a recommendation will be made to the Cabinet Member to maintain the previous year's inspection levels at sports grounds, during 2014)

REASONS FOR OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

The Council is the enforcing authority under the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975 and the Fire Safety and Safety of Places of Sport Act 1987. Following the publication of Lord Chief Justice Taylor's final report in January 1990 in respect of Hillsborough disaster (The Taylor Report), the Council decided to review its inspection and reporting regimes for enclosed sports grounds in the borough.

A Safety Advisory Group (SAG) was set up, with the Metropolitan Police Service, the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority and the London Ambulance Service. S.A.G. identified the enclosed sports grounds detailed in Appendix A as premises that should be inspected at least annually.

Alternative options considered

For 2014, to increase, decrease, or maintain the levels of safety inspections, compared to 2013.

Information

1. Following the Taylor report, local authorities were advised to review their arrangements for discharging their responsibilities under the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975 and the Fire Safety and Safety of Places of Sport Act 1987. In addition, local authorities were advised to ensure that an accountable structure was in place, whereby the enforcing department/personnel were regularly and effectively supervised by senior officers who would then report direct to elected Members on actions instigated. The object was to ensure that senior officers and elected Members were fully aware of the actions being instigated on their behalf in the discharge of the Authority's duties.
2. The enforcement framework for the safety of spectators at sporting events comes from:
 - a) Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975
 - b) The Fire Safety and Safety of Places of Sport Act 1987

- c) The Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds (5th edition Department of Culture, Media and Sport).
3. The Fire Safety and Safety of Places of Sport Act 1987 makes provision for the safety of stands at sports grounds. It requires the local authority to issue a safety certificate in respect of covered spectator stands which accommodate 500 or more people. There are currently no spectator stands which fall into this category within the Borough.
 4. The Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975 makes provision for safety at sports stadia and other sports grounds. It governs the issue of safety certificates in respect of “designated sports grounds”. It is for the Secretary of State to set the criteria for designation and in the case of football grounds the trigger spectator capacity for designation is 5,000. For other sports stadia it is 10,000. The act also empowers a local authority to issue a Prohibition Notice in respect of all or part of any sports ground, irrespective as to whether or not it is a “designated” ground, where it feels that spectators cannot be accommodated safely. The legislation also requires the local authority to consult the police and fire authorities in respect of safety at sports grounds within their boundaries. It also places a duty on the Council to conduct periodic inspections of any “designated” sports ground and at any sports ground at which there is a regulated spectator stand which is subject to a safety certificate.
 5. None of the sports grounds listed in Appendix A are ‘designated’ and are therefore not subject to a safety certificate. However, if the Council or a member of the Safety Advisory Group were of the opinion that the unrestricted admission of spectators to a ground for a particular game or event could present a significant safety risk, then the Council would have a duty to use its powers under Section 10 of the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975 to serve a ‘Prohibition Notice’. The Prohibition Notice would stipulate the number of people that the Council has determined that could be safely accommodated within the sports ground.
 6. The Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds advises the managers/owners of sports grounds to consult with the Local Authority, the Fire Brigade, the Ambulance Service and the Metropolitan Police in regard to safety issues. In order to ensure good liaison between all the responsible authorities, the Council required the Licensing Service to organise the Safety Advisory Group inspections and to co-ordinate the input, observations and advice from each authority, which is then to be transmitted in a single communication to the managers/owners of the sports grounds. The Licensing Service Manager acts on behalf of the Council as the Senior Liaison Officer for the Safety Advisory Group.
 7. Whenever the Licensing Service, or any member of the Safety Advisory Group, becomes aware of a particular game or event that may attract large numbers of spectators (normally in excess of 1,000), the Licensing Service Manager contacts the club’s officials to request that they submit their risk assessments, emergency contingency plans etc. for consideration and approval prior to the proposed event. If time permits, Licensing will convene a meeting of the Safety Advisory Group at the ground to discuss the club’s proposed safety plans/arrangements. Licensing then, on behalf of the S.A.G, advises the Club’s management team of any additional safety precautions that they require to be implemented to ensure the safety of the spectators. In addition, S.A.G informs the club’s management team of the maximum number of persons that may be admitted into the stadium / ground.
 8. If the Safety Advisory Group was concerned that the Club’s management were not going to follow their advice, Licensing may issue a ‘Prohibition Notice’ on behalf of the Council.

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The Licensing Service Manager would report back to the Deputy Director of Public Safety to seek an instruction as to whether or not a notice under section 10 of the Sports Grounds Act 1975 should be issued.

9. The procedures and inspections detailed in this report and as set out in Appendix A are considered as reasonable and correct in discharging the Council's responsibilities under the legislation. These procedures and inspections were implemented in 2013.
10. The Cabinet Member for Finance Property & Business Services can decide whether to maintain these procedures and inspections in 2014. Alternatively, the level of inspections can be increased, or decreased.

Conclusion

The Cabinet Member for Finance Property & Business Services is advised by the Licensing Services Manager that the inspection and reporting regimes as detailed in Appendix A comply with the recommendations and guidelines issued by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

Financial Implications

The recommendation to approve the report and action taken has no direct financial implications beyond the existing budget allocations, if the previous levels of inspections are maintained.

Legal Implications

Members will note that the Council is responsible for regulating the safety of sports grounds. The legislation imposes a duty on the Council to carry out periodic inspections of grounds to ensure compliance with legal requirements.

As indicated in the report, officers are required to advise Members of the inspections they carry out. This requirement stems from guidance which was issued following inquiries into the Bradford Stadium fire and the Hillsborough Stadium disaster.

If the Council failed to carry out regular inspections of the relevant sports grounds, it would be in breach of its statutory duty.

EXTERNAL CONSULTATIONS CARRIED OUT

When required (as set out in Appendix A, see item 3) the following authorities are consulted:-

The Metropolitan Police Service
The London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority
The London Ambulance Service

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975
Interim Report on Hillsborough Stadium Disaster
Final Report on Hillsborough Stadium Disaster
The Fire Safety and Safety of Places of Sport Act 1987
The Safety of Places of Sport Regulations 1988 (SI 1988/1807)
Home Office Circular 11/1990

The Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds (5th edition issued by the Department of Culture Media and Sport)

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APPENDIX A

Standard Procedures In Place under The Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975 and The Fire Safety And Safety Of Places Of Sports Act 1987

1. The Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975 defines Sports Grounds as; 'A place where sports or other competitive activities take place in the open air and where accommodation has been provided for spectators, consisting of artificial structures or of natural structures artificially modified for the purpose.'
2. The following enclosed sports grounds meet the above definition and are inspected once a year and recommendations are made to the management of each club on measures that they should implement to improve safety. Brief details of each club are set out in Appendix B.
 - AFC Hayes Football Club
 - Gaelic Athletic Stadium
 - Harefield Football Club
 - Hillingdon Athletics Stadium
 - Hillingdon Borough Football Club
 - Northwood Football Club
 - Uxbridge Football Club
 - Wealdstone Football Club
3. The Hayes FC site is being redeveloped for housing after the merger of Hayes and Yeading Football Clubs in 2009 to form Hayes & Yeading United FC. The ground at Beaconsfield Road, Hayes is being redeveloped, due for completion in early 2014. Meanwhile, the team has relocated to a ground in Surrey.
4. Whenever it becomes known that a larger than average number of spectator (normally over 1,000) may be attracted to a special game/event, Licensing consults the S.A.G. to seek any requirements. S.A.G requirements/recommendations are then communicated to the club's management committee. If necessary, enforcement action is instigated to ensure the safety of the spectators who may be attracted to that particular game/event. This procedure is also implemented whenever Uxbridge Cricket Club is used for "special" matches that attract large numbers of spectators e.g when Middlesex County Cricket Club stage 20:20 games at the ground, and the annual Gaelic Football matches at the Gaelic Athletic Club.
5. Whenever possible, a licensing officer attends the special game/event to ensure that the Safety Advisory Group's requirements/recommendations are being implemented.

Reporting Procedures

- a) The Council's Licensing Services Manager is primarily responsible for ensuring the matters detailed above are implemented. This manager reports to the Public Protection Service Manager.
- b) An annual report is prepared by the Licensing Service Manager which is submitted to the Deputy Director of Public Safety for approval.
- c) Once approved by the Deputy Director, the report is submitted to the Residents & Environmental Services Policy Overview Committee (RESPOC), for consideration and approval.

- d) Following scrutiny by RESPOC, the report is submitted to the Cabinet Member for Finance, Property & Business Services for consideration.

APPENDIX B

Guidance on safety of spectators at sports grounds is detailed in the publication "Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds" (The Green Guide). The guide contains very detailed specific safety requirements. The following is just a very brief resume for each ground. If required, full detailed information on each ground can be obtained from the Licensing Service.

AFC Hayes Football Ground

This ground is not suitable for large numbers of spectators in that it does not have:-

- a) An emergency lighting system.
- b) A public address system with a secondary source of power.
- c) A suitable alternative means of escape route
- d) Crush barriers.

Gaelic Athletic Association Sports Ground

This ground does not have:-

- a) An emergency lighting system.
- b) A public address system.
- c) A suitable purpose made alternative means of escape route.
- d) Crush barriers.

In addition to its normal weekly games the ground is usually used once a year for a "special" game between two professional Gaelic Football Clubs. Such games normally attract approximately 3,000 to 4,000 spectators. Prior to this "special" match, the club notifies Licensing, and members of the Safety Advisory Group are consulted.

Following consideration of the club's safety proposals by the SAG, Licensing notifies the club of any additional safety measures that may be required in order to safe guard the large numbers of spectators that are to be accommodated within the ground.

Whenever possible, a licensing officer attends the match to monitor the number of spectators present and to check that the S.A.G.'s safety requirements are being implemented.

Harefield Football Club

This ground could accommodate about 1,000 spectators. However, additional safety measures should be implemented in the event of a game that would attract that number of people.

- a) The installed emergency lighting system is limited and does not cover all the public areas
- b) A public address system with a secondary source of power
- c) Crush barriers have not been installed.

Hillingdon Athletics Stadium

The stadium's public address system does not have a secondary source of power.

The stadium does not have a designated alternative means of escape route for spectators and participants should the main/exit route not be available (e.g. a suspect package in a car parked immediately in front of the main entrance to the stadium).

Note:- Whenever the stadium is used for an event that attracts a large number of participants and spectators, such as a combined schools sports meeting, the Sports and Leisure Team and

Fusion (the stadium managers) inform Licensing and an agreement is made on the maximum accommodation number and the additional safety provisions.

Hillingdon Borough Football Club

This ground is not suitable for large numbers of spectators because;

- a) Exit A and Exit B are located immediately adjacent to the main social club-house building, consequently a fire or suspect package would effectively remove these two exit routes.
- b) Exit C is remote from the social club-house, however this alternative means of escape pathway is routed up to, and adjacent to, the social club-house.
- c) The installed public address system does not have a secondary source of power.
- d) The ground has not been provided with crush barriers.
- e) The ground is in a general state of disrepair.

Spectator capacity has been reduced to 250, due to the state of the ground as above, and the lack of emergency procedures.

Northwood Football Club

This ground is not suitable for large numbers of spectators in that it does not have:-

- a) An emergency lighting system.
- b) A public address system with a secondary source of power.
- c) Adequate identification and signage for the main and alternative entrances / exits to the ground.
- d) Crush barriers.

Occasionally this ground is used for a "special" game that attracts many more spectators than the normal league games, for example, Northwood sometimes play a pre-season friendly match against a Championship side and such games attract large numbers of spectators. When notified of these occasions, SAG is consulted on additional safety measures and these are passed onto the club's management committee.

Wealdstone (formally Ruislip Manor) Football Club

Overall, this ground could not permanently accommodate large numbers of spectators as it does not have;

- a) Emergency lighting systems;
- b) Crush barriers.

Annually, a number of large games are played at this ground. On these occasions a SAG meeting is convened (if time permits) to obtain SAG requirements / recommendations. At this meeting, a spectator capacity is set, usually around 2000.

If possible, a licensing officer will attend the match to monitor the number of spectators admitted into the ground and to check to see if the S.A.G's recommendations are implemented.

Uxbridge Football Club

This ground is not suitable for large numbers of spectators as it does not have;-

- a) A comprehensive emergency lighting system
- b) A secondary power supply for the public address system.
- c) Crush barriers.

Notes:-

The safe accommodation of spectators depends on all the factors, set out in the Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds document. Particular consideration must be given to each individual ground's infrastructure, such as the pitch perimeter fence, the structural stability of walls and fences, the disposition and size of exits and the experience, competency and training of the management team and stewards.

All the above clubs are advised to consult with the Council and the Safety Advisory Group before any matches are staged that could attract more than the normal match day numbers.