

Redditch Borough Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee

2nd September 2014

Report from Football Task Group

Introduction

The Football Task Group was established earlier in 2014 with a number of objectives, two of which were completed in April. The remaining objective was:

“To establish the current and future need for community football in Redditch, including existing provision in the Borough, potential alternatives and how provision can be helped and supported.”

After a break during the election period, Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed in June that the Group should continue and work on this objective.

Actions undertaken

In November 2013, the Executive Committee asked Overview and Scrutiny Committee to “engage in an exercise with Officers that will seek to establish the demand for future provision within the Borough and that the Portfolio Holder and Officers hold a public consultation event to engage with residents and clubs to help to inform this exercise”.

The Task Group carried out some initial work on the outstanding objective with this in mind and actions taken include:

- reviewing participation reports produced by the FA, which showed a decline in participation in junior football in the Borough;
- via the FA, sending out a questionnaire to all clubs that play in, or include players from, Redditch seeking feedback about issues relating to participation in football;
- sending out questionnaires to local schools to find out about their facilities;
- in the Group’s during discussions with Redditch United, learning about the Club’s contribution to community football;
- understanding how pitch provision is dealt with within the local plan.

The Group also met with representatives from local football to discuss issues that concern them and ideas for improvements. This was a very helpful meeting. Whilst there were fewer attendees present than the Group had hoped to meet, those who did attend gave feedback on a variety of issues which affect participation. This included:

- availability and condition of pitches;
- lack of access to all weather pitches restricting opportunities to play during poor weather – which can lead to youngsters becoming disheartened and dropping out of playing;

- effort required by volunteers in supporting mini and junior football, especially around meeting FA requirements;
- the role of schools in supporting the sport and making facilities available;
- costs involved in supporting community football.

Prior to starting the work again this Municipal year, the Group were made aware that a Football Stakeholder Group had been established by Leisure Services to support strategic plans for developing and supporting football in the Borough. Dave Wheeler, Sports Services Manager, attended the Task Group meeting on 6th August to brief members on progress with this.

The priorities being worked on for football by the Leisure Services team are facilities development; club development and increasing participation.

During discussion, Dave Wheeler reported that a rolling programme of maintenance of the Borough's football pitches had begun with the priorities set for this year. In response to feedback from the Task Group's meeting with club and league representatives, he undertook to follow up their concerns and suggestions alongside the work with the Stakeholder group.

It became apparent during the meeting that the work planned by the Task Group in fulfilling the outstanding objective would be likely to duplicate that being done with the Stakeholder Group. The Task group has offered to share feedback gathered from clubs, schools etc. with the Stakeholder Group, together with details of additional contacts who expressed interest in the Task Group's research.

As with many scrutiny exercises, the Task Group has found the evidence and views brought forward by those who took part in the review to be very informative. In being prompted to review football in the Borough, Members have found that there is much good practice by dedicated volunteers. The group has also received suggestions about where improvements can be made to support continued participation.

Recommendations

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to RESOLVE that:

1. the activity being undertaken by Leisure Services and the Stakeholder Group to find ways of pulling resources into Redditch to support football be endorsed;
2. when the strategy is produced later in 2014 this is brought to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to inform Councillors of the outcomes;
3. in order not to duplicate work being carried out by Leisure Services in association with the FA and Football Stakeholder Group, the Task Group's activities are concluded;

and to RECOMMEND to the Executive Committee that:

4. the Executive ensure that the playing pitch strategy identifies clear links to the emerging local plan requirements for playing pitch provision.

Councillor David Bush
Chair of the Football Task Group
August 2014