

Planning Committee

Annual Report - Safety of Sports Grounds April 2017 - March 2018

Report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities

1. Executive Summary

This report informs the Committee of the work of the Safety of Sports Grounds team carried out during the last financial year. It explains the County Council's statutory obligations under the relevant legislation and outlines the activity carried out to ensure that these duties have been met. This Report details the performance of the team and highlights how this work influences the Council's priority outcomes. Finally, it advises the Committee of the future workload planning for the team to ensure that the Council will continue to meet its statutory obligations in this area.

2. Background

Staffordshire County Council is responsible for administering the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975, and the Fire Safety and Safety at Sports Grounds Act 1987, in respect of sports grounds in Staffordshire.

This responsibility covers designated grounds which are sports grounds with a capacity of over 10,000 (5,000 for football). They are designated under the 1975 Act and require a safety certificate granted by the local authority. Staffordshire County Council has responsibility for the designated ground at Burton Albion Football Club.

Sports stadiums which are not designated but contain a covered stand with a capacity of over 500 standing or seated spectators require a safety certificate under the Act, granted by the local authority. Staffordshire County Council has responsibility for the following eight regulated stands:

- Staffordshire County Showground – displays / exhibitions.
- Hednesford Hills Raceway – stock car racing.
- Hednesford Town Football Club – football.
- Leek Town Football Club – football.
- Newcastle Stadium – speedway.
- Stafford Rangers Football Club – football.
- Tamworth Football Club – football.
- Uttoxeter Racecourse – horse racing.

The Act places a statutory duty on the Local Authority and the Emergency Services to provide advice and guidance to managers of sports grounds on their responsibility under the Act, and how best to discharge their responsibility.

It is the responsibility of the County Council to form and administer a Safety Advisory Group (SAG) for each stadium. Each SAG is chaired by a member of the County Council and has representatives from the sports club and other partners. The SAG brings key partners (emergency services, emergency planning and other key local authority officers) together to plan and prepare for spectator safety. The involvement of the SAG does not absolve the ground management of the ultimate responsibility for spectator safety. When applying the guidance and recommendations, the principal objective is “to secure reasonable safety at the sports ground when it is in use for the specified activity” (section 2(1) of the Safety of Sports Ground Act 1975).

During May 2011, following a full review of the Safety of Sports Grounds function, the Audit Committee abolished the Safety of Sports Grounds Panel. It was agreed that the Planning Committee should receive an annual report on the work of the Spectator Safety Officer team. This report covers the period for the last financial year.

3. Outcomes

During the year commencing April 2017, all the premises listed above received inspection visits, support or advice to ensure the efficacy of the safety of spectator controls.

The criteria listed below form the basis of the inspections at each site:

- Construction and maintenance of the premise
- Operation and management
- Training and development of safety staff
- Fire safety
- Provision of adequate medical facilities
- Appropriate contingency plans are in place and tested

Issues identified by these inspections have been subsequently addressed, to ensure the safety of all spectators, including those with disabilities, the elderly, families and children.

The attendance of people at these stadia using local businesses and services clearly influences the Council’s priority outcome “*Feel safer, happier and more supported in and by their community.*”

4. Capacity/ Capability

The resources applied to this task were drawn from a designated officer employed within the Trading Standards Investigation Team within Regulatory Services, and the Safety of Sports Grounds work forms part of their overall activity. This enables the resourcing for a specialist area to be managed efficiently.

The designated officer who carried out the inspection work provided comprehensive reports to the Safety Advisory Group and relevant sports

grounds following inspection. Several officers within the trading standards team have been trained to provide support to the designated officers should strategic and tactical emergency meetings become necessary providing contingency and resilience for the statutory service. Additional administrative support has been provided to the designated officer from within the trading standards team to ensure any issues are addressed prioritised by risk associated with each stand.

Support and advice is also available, where required, from the Community Protection Manager who holds the FSOA (Football Safety Officers Association) Certificate in Event and Match Day Safety Management.

The resources committed to this activity during 2017/18 equated to approximately 0.5fte. To ensure there is an appropriate use of resource during 2018 /19 the risk for each regulated stand has been reviewed enabling the highest risk stands to be prioritised for attention.

5. Performance

The statutory duty under the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975 requires that every local authority should enforce within their area the provisions of the Act and of regulations made under it, and for that purpose to arrange for the periodical inspection of designated sports grounds. The Act stipulates that “periodical” means at least once in every twelve months. Home Office guidance, which relates to stands with a capacity of less than 2000, recommends inspection once every alternate calendar year.

In 2017/18 the designated ground at Burton Albion received two during event inspections, two non-event inspections and two safety advisory group meetings.

During 2017 / 18, six of the eight regulated stands were inspected, in addition six regulated stands were visited during an event. In line with the risk assessments carried out, some of the inspections were lighter touch than others. The County Showground, one of two stands that didn't receive an inspection, will receive an inspection during 2018/19 in line with the above guidance.

The other regulated stand which didn't receive an inspection during 2017/18 is Newcastle Speedway. The speedway has seen dramatic reductions in spectator attendance, and a consequential reduction in income. The operator has been reluctant to engage with the service, however discussions are taking place with both the operator and certificate holder to ensure a satisfactory level of spectator safety is maintained.

Burton Albion were relegated last season, returning to Division One after two seasons in the championship. Spectator numbers are likely to reduce and as such the risk associated with the ground for the authority is slightly reduced for 2018/19.

The Safety of Sports Grounds team, along with key SAG partners, provides support and guidance to the management of the sports grounds to facilitate on-going crowd safety whilst ensuring that regulation is not over burdensome or restrictive on the growth of the venue. This support and guidance enables the business to progress, develop and on occasion diversify from the intended use of the venue

6. Plans for current year and subsequent years

Following on from the outcome from the Hillsborough Inquests where the jury found errors and omissions in the safety certification and oversight, and that a lack of pre-match and contingency planning contributed to the deaths, it is important that we maintain an appropriate level of resource is allocated to this area of work

The inspection programme during 2017/18 has informed the planning of inspections for the current year and future years which will continue to be risk based.

The highest risk is assessed as Burton Albion Football Club due its size, inspection on both non-event and event days will continue to be a priority.

There have been changes made to the Safety Certificate template produced by the Sports Grounds Safety Authority (SGSA) in recent months, and subsequent changes to ensure counter terrorism, anti-social behaviour and safety of all personnel in the ground including the Club's employees are also addressed. A process of recertifying stadia will be implemented to ensure these changes are reflected.

7. Conclusion

The Safety of Sports Ground team achieved their business objectives; they carried out inspections at all designated grounds and 6 of the 8 regulated stands, gave remedial advice where necessary and ensured that Staffordshire County Council met its statutory obligations in respect of the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975, and the Fire Safety and Safety at Sports Grounds Act 1987.

Appendix 1

Equalities implications:

There are no specific equalities implications raised by this report. Safe access and movement within venues, particularly in the event of an emergency for all users is considered as part of the safety team's inspections. The Safety of Spectator inspections take into consideration the safety of all spectators, particularly those with disabilities, the elderly, families and children.

Legal implications:

The Team fulfil responsibilities the County Council has under the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975, and the Fire Safety and Safety at Sports Grounds Act 1987, in respect of Sports Grounds in Staffordshire.

Resource and Value for money implications:

The team have initiated a risk-based approach to inspection which will take into account "earned recognition" for those grounds who are reaching the appropriate standards of spectator safety. This will ensure the limited resources available to the team are focussed where they are most needed. Whilst providing support and guidance to the relevant sports clubs, the team are clear that the ultimate responsibility for spectator safety lies with the club. The Team will review the risk assessment for premises with a view to assessing whether the level of prioritisation is appropriate.

Risk implications:

Risk to spectators and others attending venues is a primary consideration during inspections. Responsibility for the spectator's safety always lies with the certificate holder and ground management. The holder and ground management must produce a written statement of safety policy, operations manual and risk assessments (including fire and medical) for spectator safety. These documents must take into consideration the safety of all spectators, including those with disabilities, the elderly, families and children.

Climate Change implications:

The newly implemented risk-based approach to inspections will ensure that only those stadia that require a visit will be visited. This will reduce mileage travelled by staff and improve the carbon foot print of the team, thereby reducing any impact on climate change.

Health Impact Assessment screening:

By improving spectator safety at regulated and designated stadia the health and wellbeing of all spectators, including those with disabilities, the elderly, families and children will be enhanced. The Environmental conditions experienced by spectators at sporting events will be improved

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