REPORT TO: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE’S SERVICES COMMITTEE ON 2 MARCH 2011

SUBJECT: LINING AND MAINTENANCE OF GRASS BASED FOOTBALL PITCHES

BY: HEAD OF DIRECT SERVICES

1. REASON FOR REPORT

1.1 To inform Committee of the regimes currently employed in the maintenance of grass based pitches along with alternatives and costs.

1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section D 13 of the Councils’ Administrative scheme related to the provision of recreational, sporting, cultural and social activities.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 The Committee note the current and alternative methods and costs associated with lining and maintaining grassed sports pitches.

2.2 It is recommended that the Committee approve the current maintenance regime and that the Grounds Maintenance Trading Organisation continue to employ the most cost effective methods to meet end user needs.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 A report by the Director of Educational Services was submitted to the Children’s and Young Persons Committee on 08 December 2010 in response to a request for further information on the lining and maintenance of grass sports pitches. The Committee noted the information received and requested that a further detailed report be submitted to a future meeting of this Committee on other alternatives and costs for lining pitches.

Current Method of Lining

3.2 Dialogue takes place between Educational Services who hire out sports pitches and Environmental Services who maintain the sports pitches and the various football league set ups regarding the management and maintenance of football pitches throughout Moray.

Lining of pitches is carried out using a water based pitch lining paint. The average material cost incurred per pitch per year is £222 and the total cost per pitch per year to line is £406.

In order for the paint to adhere to the blade of grass the lines must be cleared of grass clippings. To leave the clippings in place means that the line will be kicked out during play and will require to be re-lined in advance of each booking. Currently where there is an excess of clippings the lines are cleared
using a pedestrian rotary mower. There is a difference in the height of cut between the pedestrian mower and the tractor mounted mower. It is felt that this may be visually intrusive but the requirement to clear the lines of grass clippings remains whichever type of lining material is used. It is not felt that this affects the playability of the pitch.

**Alternative Methods of Lining**

3.3 Powder based paint at an estimated annual material cost per pitch per year of £358 and the total cost per pitch per year to line is £542.

3.4 Resin based aerosol paint at an estimated annual material cost per pitch per year of £324 and the total cost per pitch per year to line is £508.

This product is extremely flammable and is classified as an irritant.

3.5 Use of an approved water based pitch lining paint containing weedkiller at an estimated annual material cost per pitch per year of £45 and the total cost per pitch per year to line is £72.

This method kills off the grass and should only be contemplated where there is no requirement to provide a white line as a maximum of 4 applications per year are recommended and must be marked. Health and safety considerations are paramount when it comes to operator safety and public confidence. Adding an herbicide or other chemical grass suppressant to a line marking paint without it being a Ministerially Approved Pesticide Product (MAPP) is illegal.

The laws of the game do not insist that a white line is provided however all lines must be visible and be no more than 12 cm in width. The use of weed killer within the paint mix may lead to a wider line being created over time. The manufacturer’s guidelines indicate that after 6 weeks the lines start to become indistinct and an alternative method of marking as described in para. 3.2 is required.

The total cost for the combined method of paragraphs 3.2 and 3.5 is £478 per pitch per year.

3.6 Install a semi permanent artificial turf line at a cost of £1,600 per pitch. This would require a substantial initial financial investment.

If the current fenced in pitches were to adopt this method there would be a one off cost of £8,000.

If all pitches that are available for let adopt this method there would be a one off cost of £25,600.

There is a risk that the line may be prone to vandalism and may require specialised machinery to effect a repair. There is also be a hazard to users whose studded footwear may get caught in the different material causing
injury and consultation with the Scottish Football Association indicates that it would be considered a danger to players and would not be allowed for competitive matches. By installing a permanent line the ability to move the boundary lines to minimise wear and tear no longer is an option.

3.7 Install a thermoplastic semi permanent line. It has not been possible to source a company that can provide this service. This method is only applicable on artificial surfaces.

3.8 Transfer responsibility for lining of pitches to users. This is problematic as there will be no control over the materials used in a public open space and there is the potential for conflict where a pitch is used by more than one club in terms of overall responsibility.

3.9 Increase the frequency of cutting to remove the need to remove the visually intrusive grass clippings.

3.10 A report was sourced through APSE (Association for Public Service Excellence) summarising lining methods employed by other authorities.

92% of the respondents use water based lining paint
8% of the respondents use a resin based aerosol paint.

Of the respondents who use water based lining paint 28% added weedkiller to their mix. 18% did not require to provide a white line and so used an approved paint that has a weedkiller already in the mixture. 54% did not allow the use of weed killers in any form.

3.11 From the APSE report it can be concluded that The Moray Council has adopted the method that has been agreed by the majority of the Local Authorities and that it is the most cost effective.

4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Single Outcome Agreement/Service Improvement Plan

This Report is consistent with the Corporate Development Plan commitment to Sound Management of Resources.

(b) Policy and Legal

There are no Policy and Legal implications.

(c) Financial Implications

The choices are therefore continue with the current method and frequency of lining at no additional cost.
Do not clear the lines but increase the frequency of markings at an additional cost of £406 per pitch per year. There are 16 pitches available for hire and this method if adopted would incur an additional annual cost of £6,496.

Increase the frequency of grass cutting to a weekly cut whilst retaining the fortnightly marking regime. This will prevent the build up of grass clippings and provide a better playing surface at an additional cost of £400 per pitch per year. There are 16 pitches available for hire and this method if adopted would incur an additional annual cost of £6,400.

If the increase in marking frequency is approved as well as an increase in grass cutting this would incur an additional annual cost of £12,896.

(d) Risk Implications

The use of proprietary pitch marking paint containing weedkiller should only be carried out where there is no requirement to provide a white line as a maximum of 4 applications per year is recommended. The addition of a quantity of weedkiller to the non-proprietary white marking paint material may lead to a prosecution as the altered product is not authorised by the Chemicals Regulation Directorate.

The installation of a semi permanent artificial turf line may be prone to vandalism and may require specialised machinery to effect a repair. Users with studded footwear may get caught in the different material causing injury and this would be considered a danger to players and would not be allowed for competitive matches.

(e) Staffing Implications

There are no staffing implications associated with the recommendations contained within this report.

(f) Property Implications

If the responsibility for lining of pitches is transferred to a variety of users then control over the standards employed will be compromised.

(g) Equalities

None

(h) Consultations

Nick Goodchild, Educational Resources Manager has been consulted and agrees with the contents of the report.
John Fleming, Scottish Football Association, Referee Development Officer was consulted and his comments are contained within the report.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 That dialogue continues with user groups regarding the methods associated with lining and maintaining grassed sports pitches and that the Lands and Parks Section continue to employ the most cost effective method of pitch marking.

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Background Papers: None

Ref: KK/MAS/901598