



Mr Mark Dacombe
T/CEO
Shire of Merredin
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Dear Mark

Sports Club Fees and Return to Sport under COVID-19

I am writing on behalf of the Merredin Sports Council members regarding the following:

- Review of Sports Fee structure, as endorsed at the October 2019 Council meeting;
- Fees for winter sports affected by COVID-19; and
- Returning to sport under COVID-19.

The Sports Council have been trying to resolve the Sports Fees for over 12 months, with little support from the Shire or Belgravia.

The Sports Council set up a Working Group to review the fee structure and provide Council with a summary of the sports' concerns and issues relating to the management of the recreation centre and the current fee structure, with a proposal for Council's consideration (attached).

Secondly, COVID-19 has impacted everyone's lives over the past few months, but with restrictions slowly being lifted, sports in Merredin are looking at resuming in the near future, which raises concerns regarding fees and areas of responsibility. Attached is Sports Council's comments and proposal for winter sports fees.

A copy of this letter and attachments has been sent to all Councillors, to ensure they are abreast of all information.

The Sports Council would appreciate the above items being discussed and a response forthcoming by the end of June, as some winter sports may be considering commencing in July.

Kind regards

for 

Donna Crook
Chairperson
Merredin Sports Council

11 June 2020

Sports Fees – Timeline of Communication and Actions

Sports Council were aware in early 2019 that the Sports Fees were due to be increased by 5% in January 2020 and initiated discussions with sports and Shire to review the fee structure, as sports were struggling with current fees, without having an additional 5% increase.

April 2019

Discussions with Shire (DCEO) regarding sports fees so they can be factored into the draft Management Plan – Belgravia.

July 2019

DCEO attended Sports Council meeting and suggested sports decide on options for fees to go to Council.

August 2019

Sports Council wrote to Shire and all Councillors seeking fees remain frozen until a review is undertaken.

September 2019

Shire CEO advised the Sports Council need to negotiate with Belgravia regarding the fees.

October 2019

Sports Council representatives met with Belgravia regarding fees. Were advised there is a set amount listed in contract for sports fees. The contract is between Belgravia and Shire, there is no agreement/contract between Belgravia/Shire and Sports.

October 2019

Sports Council representatives attended Council meeting. Council agreed that 2020/21 fees not be set until Sports Council and Belgravia review fees.

February 2020

Sports Council working group met and discussed the overall management of the Recreation Centre, fees and lines of communication. The summary of the meeting is attached with a proposed fee structure.

Sports Council Working Group Meeting - Fee Review

Belgravia

- ***What service is provided by Belgravia?*** Constant queries by sports on who is required to clean, who maintenance should be reported to, who is responsible for which areas. There have been instances where sports have been requested to clean toilets to ensure they stay clean for the duration of a carnival etc – not appropriate. Clubs paying a premium in fees but still required to set up and pack up (eg. Goal posts inside courts etc). Fine to expect sports to set up but then a premium in fees should not be charged.
- ***What contributions are required to be made by Belgravia to Sports?*** Sports have been told that there are various KPI's within the Belgravia/Shire contract, one of which is a contribution of \$20,000 per year to Sports. Whilst there has been limited clarity and information provided to sports on this matter, it would appear that this target has not been reached since the contract commenced. Who is responsible for checking that the KPI's within in the contract have been reached? Is anything done/when they are not reached? Sports are well aware of the importance of commercial confidentiality however if sports are unaware of what service should be provided to them, what contributions are required from Belgravia, and are not provided with any detail of these contributions (eg. Friday night meal payments) how can these KPI's be checked appropriately?

Current Issues with Service provided by Belgravia:

- ***Lack of clarity regarding who is responsible for which areas?***
- Outside sports are constantly pushing enquiries between the Shire & Belgravia (who are each saying the other is responsible). Common response from Belgravia is that they are only responsible for sports that operate within the four walls of the MRCLC. How does that work for sports that are operating outside? Or those that are operating both inside & outside? Why are sports that are operating on outside sports grounds/surfaces required to pay a membership fee when by Belgravia's own statements, they are not required to provide any assistance with these sports outside of provision of bar/kitchen facilities.
- No clear lines of communication with regards to reporting issues, especially with outdoor sports or maintenance required. If outdoor sports need to report to Shire, who is the contact? How do we ensure that we get a timely response and not shunted back and forth between MSC & Belgravia.
- ***Equal treatment for sports needed.*** Sports such as football have bins provided and emptied. Other outdoor sports are having to empty their own bins despite repeated requests over the last few years that bins are not being emptied in a timely manner (often several weeks between them being emptied). Who is responsible for rubbish removal?
- ***Sports request their bookings to take priority over casual users.***
- ***Opening hours of Centre and Bar to take into account sports playing times.***

Change of Fee Structure

- ***Sports propose a change in fee structure to align with the original 2013 fee structure, allowing fluctuations in membership to be reflected and ensuring a more equitable fee is charged.***
- A per person, per sport fee of \$50 is proposed.
- In order to encourage and promote junior sport, it is proposed to charge a \$500 flat fee for Junior Associations (ie. Netball, Basketball, Football, Cricket, etc)
- In order to encourage junior sport transition to senior sport (where there is often a decline in participation) no fee for Junior Members Under 16.
- Fees to be collected by sports and remitted at the conclusion of the season.
- Annual fees collected held in reserve by Shire for resurfacing to meet the 1/3 contribution required by funding bodies to secure funding (eg. DSR)
- Current fee structure does not allow for any fluctuations in memberships and/or associated usage changes.
- Many sports usage of the centre has varied greatly over the past five years but no adjustments have been made to reflect this.

Resurfacing v Usage Fees

- ***It is the view of Sports that their annual fees paid for all sports should be held in reserve for resurfacing costs? Current structure is not sustainable!***
- The current user fee alone is not sustainable to sports who generally have a decline in membership but also a decline in volunteer base as would be the case in many volunteer agencies/community groups. In many sports the annual fee paid to Belgravia is a significant portion of their fees they receive, with still significant costs to each sport required to be paid for various state sporting affiliations, insurance and running costs. There are sports whose annual fee paid to Belgravia alone exceeds the membership revenue they receive. These sports cannot simply raise membership to cover these fees as they must stay competitive with nearby clubs.
- Sporting clubs are having to fundraise simply to meet the cost of their Belgravia fees and required affiliations and insurances etc. On top of this they then need to fundraise to put funds into reserve for resurfacing. This is NOT sustainable. It is creating volunteer burn-out and may result in folding of clubs that would otherwise be able to continue if they weren't burdened with these ongoing exorbitant costs. Whilst all sports believe that a contribution is necessary, volunteers at these clubs should be spending their time and effort fundraising for additional resources, increased participation and better equipment rather than constantly needing to raise huge funds for resurfacing.
- Clubs that have high resurfacing costs generally do not have high maintenance costs (eg. Bowls, Hockey/Tennis turf, outside Basketball/Netball courts). Several clubs already do the majority of their own maintenance in a volunteer capacity (cleaning, marking, rubbish removal). Why do these clubs pay an annual club to Belgravia? What do they receive for it?
- Has the Shire provided a commitment to resurface the various Turfs/Courts? Are volunteers currently spending copious amounts of their time to fundraise for resurfacing that may not even go ahead? A commitment and structured time frame is required to enable sports to plan appropriately. At this stage Council has requested the individual Sports and the Sports Councils Strategic Plans but have not been provided any tangible timeframe in return.
- ***Current process for year on year increase of fees (5% per year) is excessive.*** This increase over the past 5 years, when almost all clubs have experienced decline in numbers is grossly inappropriate.

- **Cost recovery view.** Other community service areas (Mdn Pool, Community Library, Visitor Centre etc) do not seem to be expected to recover a certain percentage of costs. If sports (particularly those that are paying an annual contribution with very little service provision) weren't expected to pay such a high annual fee then their volunteer time could be better spent growing participation in their sports. Hopefully in turn that would result in sports being healthier financially and with a stronger membership base to continue to fundraise for the benefit of sport throughout the Shire.

Friday Night Meals

- **Clubs have not been paid for their 2019 Friday Night Meal volunteer time.**
- Several clubs (at least 4) have reported that they have not been paid for their 2019 Friday Night meal volunteer time. The process as advised to sports, was that Belgravia would calculate the profit for the night (again, no transparency in calculation), and communicate this to sports so that they could invoice Belgravia. Sports cannot create an invoice until the amount is communicated. Some sports have volunteered on nights which have seemed to be quite successful with only a small amount of funds received. Without transparency on the calculation and timely payment for volunteer time this process is not acceptable to sports.
- **The \$20,000 required to be provided to sports by way of Friday Night Meals etc, be taken off the annual fees paid by Sports so that the funds are actually received.**
- Currently it is believed that less than \$20,000 has been provided over an almost 2 year period??? Sports believe a more appropriate way to ensure that sports actually receive these funds be that it is taken off their annual fees.
- Several sports also mentioned that the Rec Centre staff were at times, not particularly welcoming to families/children.

Summary of Proposal

- Change of current annual fee structure to a **per person, per sport fee of \$50**. Fee to be collected by the sports and remitted at the conclusion of the season.
- Junior members (U/16 no charge)
- Junior associations to pay \$500 per season (eg. Jnr Football/Cricket)
- Better transparency with regards to the service and contributions Belgravia is required to provide and whether they are meeting this service provision.
- Clear lines of communication. Sports need to know exactly who they contact for maintenance, cleaning, damage and service issues. Lines need to be clear in which instances to contact the Shire or Belgravia.
- Fee structure to be reviewed regularly – **every two years??**
- All fees paid by sports to be held in reserve for Resurfacing (allocated per sport to account for sports contribution to resurfacing to satisfy DSR funding contribution criteria).
- **The \$20,000 contribution from Belgravia to be offset against sports annual fees.**
- Outstanding (2019) Friday night meals payments to clubs to be calculated and paid.

COVID-19 effect on Sports

Fees

Winter sports are currently looking at playing shorter seasons or may even decide not play at all. This raises concern about what fees may be charged to these sports and will have an impact on whether or not their season proceeds.

There has been no communication to the Sports from the Shire or Belgravia and with no agreements in place with the sports, the Sports Council assume that if winter sports decide to play a reduced season or not play at all, then the sports fees will be waived for this winter season.

The Sports Council, as outlined in the summary of the Working Group meeting support the fee of \$50 per player for those sports that play and for the fees to be collected by the sports and remitted at the conclusion of the season.

Responsibilities

The Sports are aware of their responsibilities in regard to returning to their sport and ensuring the correct requirements are adhered to in relation of COVID-19 for their players and spectators.

As Belgravia are the facility manager, it is presumed all COVID-19 venue requirements - access, physical distancing, hygiene and attendance measures will be implemented and followed by Belgravia staff and that they would communicate with sports should any requirements relate or affect them.