Risk control

Parkruns

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Parkruns

Introduction

Community runs and charity races are growing in popularity across the UK but what impact is this having on the Local Authority and what risk considerations do they need to take?

The concept of 'parkruns' began in 2004 and have long been welcomed by local authorities in supporting their health and wellbeing agenda for improving physical activity rates in communities as well as making use of public parks and open spaces. In April 2017 DCLG published a consultation paper setting out the Government's proposals to put it beyond doubt that local authorities, including parish councils, cannot charge parkrun or junior parkrun organisers for the use of public parks.

Government ministers do not consider it appropriate for local authorities to charge a volunteer community seeking to provide a free weekly event for the use of a public park. Instead there is a desire to see increasing collaboration between councils and parkrun organisers to raise participation rates and contribute further to improving the health and wellbeing of residents. Full reports on the consultation on preserving the free use of public parks and the Local Government Association (LGA) response can be downloaded from www.local.gov.uk

The outcome of the consultation is the belief that an informal approach is best to encourage collaboration and investment by sponsors such as Sport England to develop more parkruns and guarantee the sustainability of public parks so that they can be enjoyed by everyone

Local Authorities

With an ever reducing financial envelope as well as responsibility for the public health of residents, local councils have been taking innovative approaches to using their parks including providing pop up spaces or hosting local events including parkruns.

Local authorities are encouraged to build strong collaborative relationships with parkrun organisations to enable risks to be managed and events to run smoothly. Parkrun UK makes it clear on their website when runners register that they are participating at their own risk. However, health and safety is a serious consideration ahead of any event for both the local authority and the parkrun organisers and appropriate steps are taken to manage the welfare of participants.

Parkrun UK

Parkrun UK (www.parkrun.org.uk) organise free, weekly, 5km timed runs around the world. All runs are open to anyone and it is free to take part. The organisation operates through the support of sponsors and volunteers. Their aim is to have an event in every community that wants one and they encourage public contact to suggest new parks and run routes for them to consider. Each event is coordinated and the company even has a Safeguarding Lead. At the end of September 2019 they had coordinated over 150,000 events in 661 locations with 2.2 million runners.

Management of Risk

Ahead of every event, parkrun organisers and volunteers will walk the route, checking for the condition of the park and identifying any hazards for runners. A risk assessment is completed and any required remedial works to the park are undertaken ahead of the event. On the day of the run the route is usually taped round, with direction signs to ensure runners stay on the designated track for the run event. Volunteer marshals are given a briefing by the run director of the day and are then posted at intermittent points in the run route to provide assistance should it be required. A tail runner is also appointed to be the last runner in the event.

Consideration is also given to condition of the ground underfoot and the weather conditions. Where events need to be cancelled for such reasons, runners either receive notification or this is posted on the organisations website.

Policy is continuously under review and safety is a significant feature. In Norwich, significantly increased numbers of participants resulted in organisers having to ban runners from bringing their dogs with them as this was posing an increased risk (https://www.parkrun.org.uk/norwich/course/). Parkruns are covered by the UK Athletics Insurance Scheme for Clubs.

Summary

The benefits brought to local communities through the introduction of Parkruns are plentiful. Parkruns receive thousands of new joiners each week across the world and with this will bring increased risk for events as numbers grow and the management of them becomes more complex. Local Authorities should work closely alongside organisers to ensure the appropriate insurances and risk mitigations are in place in order to ensure participants are protected and the events remain the safe and fun events they should be.

References

1 LGA Briefing – LGA calls for further collaborative working between councils and parkruns (www.local.gov.uk)

2 Running Free- Consultation on Preserving the free use of public parks (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/608372/Parkrun_ConDoc.pdf)

Further information

For access to further RMP Resources you may find helpful in reducing your organisation's cost of risk, please access the RMP Resources or RMP Articles pages on our website. To join the debate follow us on our LinkedIn page.

Get in touch

For more information, please contact your broker, RMP risk control consultant or account director.

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