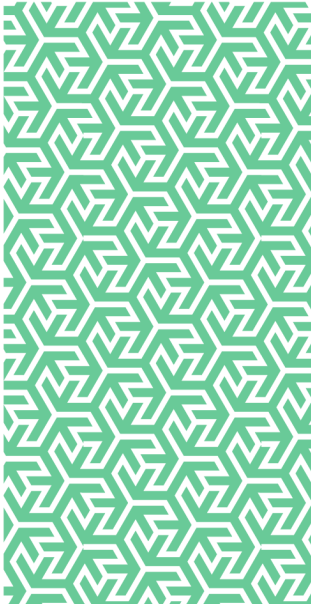


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Risk control
Parkruns



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Risk Control Parkruns

Introduction

Community runs and charity races are now commonplace 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 'park runs' began in 2004 and have long since 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.

Government ministers do not consider it appropriate for local authorities to charge¹ a volunteer community seeking to provide a free weekly event for the use of a public park and so local authorities, including parish councils, cannot charge parkrun or junior parkrun organisers for the use of public parks². 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.

Local Authorities

With an ever reducing financial envelope as well as responsibility for the public health of residents; local councils have been innovative in their approaches to new uses of park spaces - including providing pop up stalls or hosting local events including park runs.

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 are 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 members of the public to contact them to suggest new parks and run routes for them to consider.

Each event is coordinated and the company even has a Safeguarding Lead.

Saturday morning parkrun events are 5K and on Sunday mornings, there are 2K junior park runs for children aged four to fourteen³. As at the 7th April 2022, there had been 190,991 coordinated completed events at 759 parkrun locations, with 39.1 million people who finished a run⁴.

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.

Parkrun's 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/>). Park runs are covered by the UK Athletics Insurance Scheme for Clubs.

COVID-19 Impact on Park Runs

In the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic, Parkrun operators closed future planned parkrun events in March 2020.

As a worldwide organisation – Parkrun complied with restrictions imposed in each territory and closely monitored country specific guidance on if and when runs could be reinstated as restrictions were eased.

In August 2020, Parkrun produced and published a COVID-19 Framework and set of frequently asked questions for their plans on how they would operate safely when permitted to do so in each territory whilst there would still be an underlying level of the virus present⁵.

Parkrun provide regular updates on the status of runs on the blog section of their website. As at 1st January 2022 parkrun events take place in 759 locations around the UK every Saturday.

Summary

The benefits brought to local communities through the introduction of Park runs are plentiful. Local authorities should prepare for the reintroduction of runs as Government restrictions ease once the virus is at a manageable level.

Park runs 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 park runs.
<https://www.local.gov.uk/>
- 2 Preserving the free use of public parks consultation.
[Summary of responses and the Government response.pdf](#)
- 3 Parkrun: home
<https://www.parkrun.org.uk/>
- 4 Parkrun events
<https://www.parkrun.org.uk/events>
- 5 Parkrun COVID 19 framework
<https://volunteer.parkrun.com/principles/open-with-covid-19-management-system>

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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