

Musselburgh Racecourse – future decided by the council

East Lothian Council met today and agreed, apparently unanimously, to operate Musselburgh Racecourse as a type of council committee, at least for the moment.

The governance of the racecourse has been under review following last year's demands from the British Horseracing Authority.



A report on the workings of the Musselburgh Joint Racing Committee (MJRC) was carried out by Pinsent Masons in agreement with Lothians Racing Syndicate and East Lothian Council which together make up the MJRC. This report called for a variety of options as to the way the racecourse would be run in future.

At today's meeting the councillors agreed on the option of taking the racecourse 'in house' and running it as a council committee, with all employees taken on by East Lothian Council.

The plan is to set up the Musselburgh Racing Associated Committee (MRAC) with four councillors and two committee members who will represent racing interests. The membership of this kind of committee must be by two-thirds majority in favour of the council.

Councillors also believe they can provide a new sub-committee which will 'potentially improve stakeholder balance'.

Speaking after today's meeting, Councillor Fiona O'Donnell said: "Musselburgh Racecourse has been a home to horseracing for more than 200 years. It is a much-loved venue which we want to see continue operating successfully – in the interests of racegoers, our economy, the local community and its valued employees.

"It is clear that the current governance arrangements cannot continue. An independent governance review was undertaken as a licence requirement of the BHA and I am pleased that the council unanimously has agreed to implement the required changes.

"The council has done all it can to work constructively with the LRS and I have personally met and updated racecourse employees, who are its greatest asset, throughout this difficult process.

"I am pleased with the progress made as we look to secure Musselburgh Racecourse's future and ensure we have a stronger governance structure comprising the right balance of skills and experience. That is what we will deliver."

Lothians Racing Syndicate have a different view of the outcome of today's meeting.

John Prideaux, chairman of the Lothians Racing Syndicate, said: "Today's decision by East Lothian Council has ridden roughshod over legally binding provisions contained in a Minute of Agreement concerning the management of Musselburgh Racecourse.

"This Minute of Agreement remains in force and cannot be altered without the approval of both parties of the Musselburgh Joint Racing Committee, that is East Lothian Council and the Lothians Racing Syndicate, but the Council have ignored this important fact because it does not fit with their desire to assume overall control of the racecourse.

"The racecourse staff have a contract of employment with MJRC but continue to be treated with contempt and have been told they are to become Council employees without any reference to their current employer.

"The LRS will resist any attempt to have the current Minute of Agreement rescinded and we call on the British Horseracing Authority to carefully consider if East Lothian Council's decision is genuinely in the best interests of Musselburgh Racecourse, its staff and racing in Scotland."

The council says it will consider at a future meeting whether the interim arrangements are working or whether the racecourse should be set up as an arms' length company or outsourced.