

Staff at Musselburgh Racecourse may take strike action

We are told that the latest meeting of the Musselburgh Joint Racing Committee yesterday broke up without any of the current problems facing the racecourse being resolved.

Staff at the course may be considering industrial action to try and force the council to rethink.



Members of the Lothians Racing Syndicate (LRS) will now report back to the British Horseracing Authority (BHA) which demanded better governance at the track last year.

This must now cast some doubt over the future of Musselburgh as it depends on the BHA to grant it a license. The temporary licence will expire on 7 April.

When the BHA acted last year Pinsent Masons were commissioned to report independently on the way the racecourse was run. But that report has not ever been made public and East Lothian Council which owns the common good land on which the track is located decided last month at a private meeting to run the course themselves.

Until now the council along with the LRS has run the course in the form of the MJRC. Now they want to run it as an associate committee of the council and all staff will be council employees.

The LRS have reacted with fury saying that this is nothing short of a power grab and have claimed that Musselburgh's standing as a premier racing venue will suffer. They point out that staff morale may be low but the prize money will also diminish and capital investment with it.

LRS chairman John Prideaux believes there is a strong likelihood that racecourse staff will request the GMB union to hold a ballot which could potentially result in industrial action taking place in May.

Mr Prideaux said: "There had been a complete break down of trust with East Lothian Council members and it is plain their only interest is in railroading through this ill-thought out proposal to take complete control of the racecourse.

"They have ignored the bulk of the Pinsent Masons' report which was commissioned to put in place proper governance at the racecourse and to secure its long-term future, following years of damaging mismanagement by ELC members. Instead, they have cherry-picked from the report to force upon the racecourse staff – and the race going community – a solution which suits only their own agenda."

Prior to the BHA granting a renewal of the racecourse's licence to race on 7 April, East Lothian Council have to submit detailed proposals by 23 March on how the racecourse is

to be governed in the long term.

Mr Prideaux added: "The LRS will submit its own report which will highlight the many inadequacies of the Council's plans on future governance of the racecourse. It is highly likely that staff, who to a man and woman are opposed to becoming council employees, will seek to take industrial action at the first race meeting to be held after ELC has forced them to change employer."

The first scheduled meeting after the temporary licence expires is Thursday 3 May.