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Paul Lawrence and Jane Meagher
City of Edinburgh Council
Sent via email

24th September 2025

Dear Paul and Jane,

As the MP for Edinburgh South, I want to raise a serious concern about the future of Edinburgh South Community Football Club (ESCFC).

As you'll know, this is a club that has been at the heart of our community for decades. It is the second biggest community football club in Scotland, with more than 1,000 players across 75 teams. Behind the club's success is an army of more than 200 volunteers, who together contribute over 40,000 hours of unpaid time every single year. That is the equivalent of more than £600,000 at the Real Living Wage, donated in-kind by local people to support their community. From coaching to safeguarding, administration to mentoring, this commitment is priceless to the young people and families who benefit.

But right now, that success is under threat. Every week, 5–10 children are being turned away because there aren't enough pitches. Six full teams, that is 120 kids, are facing the prospect of having nowhere to train from September. Senior teams are being shunted between half a dozen different venues, which is completely unsustainable.

The club has been in talks with the Council for over seven years, yet they are no further forward. Edinburgh Leisure has not responded since March regarding long-term Astro pitch availability, and the club still lacks the necessary land security to plan and grow. This cannot be allowed to continue. The Council must now step up and act.

This lack of facilities and security means the club has missed out on major funding opportunities, such as the £8.6m Scottish FA *Pitching In* fund. That is money that could have been invested right here in South Edinburgh, building pitches and giving more children the chance to play.

Ian Murray MP
Labour Member of Parliament for Edinburgh South

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What makes this even more urgent is the scale of the wider community impact ESCFC delivers. I have seen first-hand how the club provides far more than football. To highlight just some examples:

- A free After School club
- Holiday camps with on average 600 free weekly places provided across the year, including In Service days
- Free mental health counselling and physiotherapy
- Racism and disability awareness training sessions
- Free use of club facilities to local schools
- Subscription discounts and fee waivers for families in need
- A boot exchange programme, ensuring no child is excluded because of cost, and regular donations of used kit to children in Malawi
- Club kits provided at no additional cost to every child, ensuring full participation regardless of background
- A completely free Soccer School every Saturday for 5–8 year olds, engaging up to 120 children each week in football in a safe and welcoming environment

This list is far from exhaustive. ESCFC delivers much more for families, schools and the wider community than can be captured in a single letter. The key point is clear: the club's ethos of *"if you want to play, you play"* runs through everything it does, and it manages to remain one of the cheapest community football clubs in Edinburgh. Yet without a dedicated pitch and long-term security across its facilities, all of these benefits are at risk — and it is the children and families who need them most who would lose out.

That community commitment has been formally recognised by the SFA. ESCFC is a Platinum-level accredited club, the highest level of recognition the SFA awards, and has also been chosen as the SFA's South East nomination for the National Community Club of the Year award. The Council cannot allow a club of this standing, delivering this scale of community benefit, to be held back by lack of facilities and short-term agreements. The time for warm words is over. What is needed now is action.

So I write today to outline what the club needs to thrive, and ask for your support to make it happen:

- A new full-size Astroturf pitch at Inch Park to act as a proper home for ESCFC
- Guaranteed access to the new Liberton High School Astro

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- Better use of existing facilities like Gracemount and Holyrood
- Formal Council backing for ESCFC to help run the Gracemount High facilities
- Long-term leases at Inch Park, Double Hedges (Kirkbrae), Morgans, Fernieside Recreation Ground, and Drum Park

These are practical, deliverable steps. With the Council's support, the club can keep growing and ensure no child is turned away.

While we had a productive meeting with council officials last week, we need to progress this quickly. One of the outcomes was that the estates team would be asked to look at Inch Park Nursery, now that its future uses are settled, and master plan it with the requirements of ESCFC for an SFA-compliant facility included. I would be grateful for an update on whether this has been actioned.

The club would also be delighted to host you both at Inch Park so you can see for yourselves the brilliant work they are doing and the challenges they are facing.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to hearing from you about how you can support this vital part of our community to thrive and grow over the coming years.

Best wishes,

Ian Murray
Labour MP for Edinburgh South

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