

LEISURE, PARKS & WASTE MANAGEMENT (OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY) COMMITTEE

12 JUNE 2019

PRESENT:

Councillors Matthews (Chairman), Banevicius (Vice-Chair), Silvester-Hall (Vice-Chair), Barnett, L Ennis, Ray, Salter, Tapper, Warfield, Westwood and M Wilcox.

(In accordance with Council Procedure Rule No.17 Councillors E. Little, Pullen, Eadie and Strachan attended the meeting).

IN PRIVATE

7 FRIARY GRANGE LEISURE CENTRE

The Committee received a report on the challenges regarding the Friary Grange Leisure Centre and to consider options to invest to continue operations over the next 5 years or to close the facility by 30 April 2020.

It was reported that due to the academisation of the Friary School Staffordshire County Council (SCC) had issued Lichfield District Council (LDC) with a 12 month notice to the 1971 Joint User Agreement and in consequence, LDC had issued Freedom Leisure with notice for the same period in order to comply with its contractual requirements. Members noted that it was the intention of the school to have use of the sports hall and all weather pitch from 1 May 2020.

It was then reported that SCC had presented LDC with a draft Heads of Terms for a 10 year full repairs and maintenance lease for the remaining elements of the site including the swimming pool however this was not favourable especially as it removed the lucrative commercial elements of the facility.

It was noted that investment was required imminently to ensure the continued use of the facility. It was noted that the condition survey carried out was only a visual one and it was most likely that estimated costs would increase when work began.

Members focused on a number of areas during their discussion and the first was clarity around the Sports England grant. It was confirmed that the grant was awarded to SCC however they entered into a Passport Agreement that transferred the obligations to LDC. It was reported that it was hoped any clawback would be reduced but if not it had been factored into the financial implications. It was noted that there was no end date to the obligations.

Short term plans if closure was agreed were discussed and it was reported that Officers were already working on potential mitigation plans. It was reported that swimming especially swimming clubs would be the most difficult to organise however neighbouring areas and private facilities could be utilised. There were concerns that there was not the capacity for Burntwood Leisure Centre to take on any more school or child swimming.

There was discussion on the merits of trying to reopen negotiations with SCC and the school to reduce the burden of the cost of investment needed to keep the centre open even if shorter term whilst a longer term plan was being formulated. It was felt that although not a statutory requirement, having leisure facilities was a desire from residents. It was reported that LDC and SCC had already been in discussions and all avenues had been explored but the county council had no intention to invest or contribute to capital works.

Longer term plans were then discussed and it was reported that it was factored into the Local Plan to have provision however this could be private suppliers. It was noted that future work would take place during the coming to determine future leisure provision requirements and how they might be met.

Staffing was discussed and what support there would be and it was confirmed that conversations with Freedom Leisure had taken place and they would manage the process and place staff in other facilities to minimise redundancies and give assistance where required.

There were requests to further negotiation with SCC to create a short term stop gap plan and concerns were raised regarding an increased impact on Burntwood Leisure Centre and residents, the overall view of the Committee was to recommend that Cabinet proceed with the preferred option. It was agreed that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee be involved in any mitigation and communications planning to aid with a smooth withdrawal.

RESOLVED: That the following be recommended to Cabinet:

1. For Lichfield District Council to exit the building by April 2020 because of the unfavourable terms of a new lease being proposed by Staffordshire County Council, the current poor condition of the building and the level of investment that would be required to make good;
2. To work with Freedom Leisure to manage an orderly withdrawal of the leisure service at Friary Grange Leisure Centre by the end of April 2020;
3. To identify any possible alternative provision for leisure centre users and consider how a transition to these could be facilitated; and
4. To develop a proposal within the next 12 months for how current and future leisure needs for the district could be met.

(The Meeting closed at 7.10 pm)

CHAIRMAN