

Appendix A Feedback on customer comments

This document summarised issues raised in 12 complaint letters received by Lichfield District Council following the decision to close Friary Grange Leisure Centre. The document aims to provide a summary response to each issue raised.

Health and wellbeing

Issues raised	Comment/response from Lichfield District Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of the opportunity to exercise and its impact on quality of life • Legal responsibility of the council • Obesity crisis • Undertakings in Health and Wellbeing Strategy • Impact of exercise on physical and mental health • Importance of preventative measures to reduce demand on NHS and social care 	<p>Lichfield District Council fully appreciates and agrees with all comments/observations that relate to the importance of physical activity in helping to keep minds and bodies healthy, as a preventative measure against obesity and other health related issues, and in relation to improving quality of life, and reducing costs/demands on NHS and social care services. It is important to note however that Lichfield District Council has no statutory duty or legislative requirement to address such issues in the community, or to provide leisure centres. The public health budget sits with Staffordshire County Council. Lichfield District Council has no access to NHS budgets, irrespective of any preventative measures it could deliver. Equally no government grants are allocated for the running of leisure centres or delivery of health initiatives.</p> <p>Local government funding is under severe pressure and choices about what discretionary services can be delivered, and in what way, are being made by councils across the country.</p> <p>Lichfield District Council's Strategic Plan 2016-2020 includes an aim to support a healthy community. The council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy shows the multitude of activities the council undertakes to support and encourage healthier lifestyles, in addition to the provision of leisure centres – including maintaining local pitches, providing local parks and more.</p> <p>One way the council can support healthy lifestyles is through the provision of a leisure centre/swimming pool, however it is well documented nationally that the majority of leisure pursuits people undertake are done outside of a leisure centre, whether that's walking or running in local streets/parks, cycling or team sports to name but a few. This is echoed in Lichfield District, where based on current evidence around 4% of the district's total population (approximately 3,500 people) use Friary Grange Leisure Centre regularly, with some using it multiple times a week.</p> <p>Should the leisure centre close, the cardiac rehabilitation programme that supports 24 customers will be provided elsewhere in the district as part of the proposed mitigation strategy.</p>

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Children and young people

Issues raised	Comment/response from Lichfield District Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of activities • Prevention and reduction of anti-social behaviour (ASB) • Health and wellbeing of young people • Safety – learning to swim 	<p>Lichfield District Council recognises that providing activities for children and young people is a challenge for all councils in all areas of the country. Just as traditionally district councils have been a provider of leisure centres, county councils have had the responsibility for provision of youth services, including youth centres and activities to prevent ASB. Many of these have now closed across the country.</p> <p>As part of the partnership work on community safety Lichfield District Council invests in work to address ASB and provide activities for young people.</p> <p>Some of this work is also funded by the Office of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner (OPFCC). It includes projects such as Getin2it and Mediation. A budget of £59,000 is provided by OPFCC, which also needs to address other community safety issues such as alcohol misuse, domestic violence and public reassurance. Lichfield District Council also receives £21,000 from the OPFCC to run SPACE activities in the school holidays which are fundamentally diversionary activities. There were 81 SPACE participants in 2019.</p> <p>Lichfield District Council recognises and supports the aspiration for a cinema/other leisure based activities in Lichfield city and the potential opportunity for this is being assessed through the masterplan for Lichfield city centre.</p> <p>Issues relating to health and wellbeing of young people and water safety are addressed in the swimming section (see overleaf).</p>

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Swimming

Issues raised	Comment/response from Lichfield District Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of learning to swim • Importance for Health and wellbeing • Continuity and access for swimming club • Impact on schools 	<p>Lichfield District Council fully recognises the significant local concern about the loss of a swimming pool in Lichfield city were the centre to close. Swimming is one of the few sports/activities that requires a specific setting/facility and providing and maintaining a pool is very costly.</p> <p>The council also recognises the vital role swimming lessons play in preventing tragic loss of life. That said, it is not a district council responsibility to provide swimming and water safety lessons – this is a responsibility of the Staffordshire County Council (the local education authority) and such lessons are part of the national curriculum for primary school aged children. It is the only sport included in the national curriculum. Staffordshire County Council have confirmed there will be no issue for schools continuing to provide swimming and water safety lessons at alternative facilities should the leisure centre close.</p> <p>Lichfield Swimming Club members account for over half the attendance numbers for swimming at Friary Grange Leisure Centre. The club has about 150 members, some swimming up to eight times a week. The council fully appreciates the closure of the pool will be a damaging blow to Lichfield Swimming Club and its members. It also recognises there are limited practical opportunities to relocate the club activities, especially given the desire for more pool time to be set aside for the club under the existing arrangements.</p> <p>The council fully recognises the health and wellbeing benefits Lichfield Swimming Club delivers, as well as the support network and development opportunities it provides to its members. It also recognises the dedication of the many volunteers who give their own time freely to support the club. The council also fully acknowledges the difference the club has made to the lives of many local young people on an individual/personal level.</p> <p>The council has worked with Lichfield Swimming Club to explore alternative options should the council withdraw from the running of the leisure centre. Whilst the council fully recognises the club’s ambitions to achieve independent management of the pool, the enquiry was explored but after careful scrutiny it was decided that the council could not enter into a project with the club at a site with such complexities.</p>

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Alternative options

Issues raised	Comment/response from Lichfield District Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distance to other facilities • Impact of travelling on environment • Availability of public transport • Lack of skilled cardiac support elsewhere • Affordability of other options for users • Keeping all activities together to allow cross subsidisation 	<p>Lichfield District Council fully recognises Lichfield city residents naturally expect a leisure centre/pool facility to be provided locally, as it is a facility that has been provided to date. However, it is important to recognise that residents living outside of Lichfield and Burntwood have to travel a significant distance to access a pool/leisure facility – whether that’s Friary Grange or Burntwood leisure centre, or a private facility.</p> <p>The council fully appreciates that facilities located close to key centres (such as Lichfield and Burntwood) are more accessible and help to reduce car journeys. The council fully acknowledges that closure of Friary Grange Leisure Centre could lead to increased car journeys/carbon footprint.</p> <p>The council recognises that not all members of the community can choose to use a private gym as an alternative, where membership fees can be prohibitive. Whilst the council explored ways to enable local residents to access private facilities in the district at a subsidised rate as part of its mitigation plan, this has not been possible.</p> <p>Public transport is available from Lichfield Bus station to Chasetown, this is via National Express West Midland 10A which has buses running roughly every 30 minutes.</p> <p>We understand that the sports hall and astro turf pitches at Friary Grange Leisure Centre will be made available to the public outside of school hours and will be operated by the schools trust from April 2020.</p> <p>As part of the mitigation plan, should the centre close a new location for cardiac rehab with qualified and suitably trained support will be provided elsewhere in the district.</p>

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Future provision

Issues raised	Comment/response from Lichfield District Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use Birmingham Road site to provide a new pool • More houses will lead to increased demand for leisure centre • LDC have £29m in reserve and have more than enough money 	<p>Lichfield District Council acknowledges suggestions to use the vacant Birmingham Road site for a new leisure centre. The future of this site and its role in ensuring the continued vibrancy and economic success of Lichfield city centre is currently under review. Any decision about the use of the site for leisure provision would need to be supported by sound evidence that it is the best site for such facilities, and the financial impact/opportunity costs would need to be fully understood before any such decision could be taken.</p> <p>The council is currently reviewing its Local Plan and, as part of this, it will consider the districts infrastructure needs, including leisure facilities. The requirement to meet current and future needs will be clearly identified, and this will become part of the package of measures that developers will be asked to support as new sites in the district are developed. This process will not however guarantee the provision of a new leisure centre, and not within the next five years.</p> <p>It has been suggested that the council has adequate funds to repair Friary Grange Leisure Centre and develop a new one. The council's financial position is very challenging. Whilst the council has £4.3m in available reserves, this funding needs to full range of council projects and services and not just the leisure centre/the provision of leisure. The council is also facing a revenue funding gap of £612,000 2020/2021 which will rise to £1.099m in 2023/2024. As with any investment, the council must consider the percentage of its population that will benefit from any discretionary investment.</p>

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Partner roles

Issues raised	Comment/response from Lichfield District Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County Council position – reference made to their responsibilities and then options for involvement in future provision • School position- reference made to the impact of Academisation • Support from NHS family in respect of preventative activity • Freedom Leisure (FL) – some expressions of concern about performance of the operators 	<p>Lichfield District Council has worked with Staffordshire County Council as the landlord and owner of the building to secure an option for a shorter term lease for elements of Friary Grange Leisure Centre (not including sports hall and astro turf pitches) from April 2020, with acceptable break clauses and no liability for the existing condition of the building (although necessary works to keep the building safe/compliant will still need to be undertaken). This option is analysed further in the body of the report.</p> <p>In addition, the council asked Staffordshire County Council how they propose to meet the primary school swimming provision if Friary Grange Leisure Centre closes. We were hopeful they could offer some financial support to maintain the pool in the short term to enable swimming lesson provision to continue on site. However they have responded that :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Each school makes their own arrangements for swimming as part of their individual curriculum planning. Some do this directly with providers of swimming pools, others do it collectively through Entrust’s school swimming team. If a decision is made to close the pool, schools will need to find alternative provision, either individually or collectively. As a comparison there is no council managed swimming pool in Tamworth and schools are still able to discharge their responsibilities.</i> • <i>Transport costs are already incurred by each school as every school using the pool at Friary, with the exception of Friary themselves, arrive by coach. SCC does not fund the transport costs directly and therefore there is no “saving” that could be transferred to the District Council.</i> <p>We also asked Staffordshire County Council how they view their Public Health responsibilities. They responded:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The county council has a programme to improve and protect health and well-being including information, advice and guidance; growing and signposting to community assets; commissioning specialist services; modifying the environment; and ensuring coverage and quality of immunisation and screening programmes.</i> <p>The Friary School has confirmed they will make the sports hall and astro turf pitch available to the public through their own arrangements from April 2020. They have confirmed they do not want to work jointly with the council to operate the leisure centre.</p> <p>The council has worked closely with Freedom Leisure. The way in which staff were briefed has been addressed with them and dependent on the outcome of the Cabinet meeting, further consultation with staff will take place. Issues relating to use of the pool by the swimming club and the ability for more income by allowing more club time has been raised with Freedom Leisure. In respect of the contract Freedom Leisure have with Lichfield District Council, there has been no breaches and performance is satisfactory. Freedom Leisure have confirmed they will continue to operate the pool, gym and squash courts, under the current contract, should a decision be taken to keep the facilities open.</p>