

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

23 SEPTEMBER 2020

PRESENT:

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

(In accordance with Council Procedure Rule No.17 Councillors Cox, Eadie and E. Little and J. Grange as Ward Member attended the meeting).

29 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Westwood (Vice-Chairman)

30 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Councillor Baker declared a personal interest as her husband was a user of the Cardio rehabilitation service at Friary Grange Leisure Centre.

Councillor Ray declared a personal interest as he was a member of the Friends of Friary Grange.

31 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting were circulated and agreed as a correct record subject to the amendment of Councillor Westwood as Vice-Chairman.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the previous meeting be signed as a correct record.

32 WORK PROGRAMME

The work programme was circulated and it was requested that an item be added or a briefing paper circulated on the usage of the outdoor gyms as there had been two new ones opened as well as the existing ones and they would play a vital role in getting people active. This was agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED: That the work programme be agreed and amended where necessary.

33 NEW LICHFIELD LEISURE CENTRE PREFERRED SITE

The Committee received a report on the review of suitable sites around the City centre for the proposed new Leisure Centre. It was reported that there were eight potential sites and after evaluation, Stychbrook Park was deemed the most suitable as most likely to be delivered in the timeframe and as already Council owned land, more cost effective. It was reported that the Member Task Group, created to consider matters regarding the project, had also investigated the options and too were recommending the proposed site.

The members of the Task Group were thanked for their hard work to date on the new leisure centre project.

The Committee were overall in agreement with the proposed site however there were some concerns that it be removing some open space from the area and it was asked if it could be considered if other green open space could be created to mitigate this loss. It was noted that the wooded area would be protected and it would bring vital leisure provision to an area where it was most required. It was also noted that the site had good transport links and this could be increased further with cycle paths. It was also reported that the preferred site did allow for the ability to co-locate with other facilities and other sports if required.

It was also noted that further sites could still be considered if this preferred site was dismissed during site investigations. Further sites suggested included Beacon Park at the end of Greenhough Road although noted that was on Greenbelt land. The other was the BRS site although noted it was a constrained site and may be more costly to build due to being in the conservation area however it was felt it may help driving footfall to the city centre.

It was felt that it would be essential to include the community in steps of the project and requested that a meeting with key stakeholders take place to aid this. It was reported that this would be as part of the project plan.

RESOLVED: (1) That the report be noted;

(2) That the recommendation that Stychbrook Park as the preferred site for the new leisure centre be supported; and

(3) That the work of the New Leisure Centre Member Task Group in developing the site appraisal and bringing forward the recommended preferred site be acknowledged and noted.

34 LEISURE CENTRE RE-OPENING UPDATE

The Committee received a report giving an update to the re-opening of the leisure centres following the mandated closures due to Covid-19. It was reported that Burntwood Leisure Centre (BLC) had reopened on the 25 July 2020 and Friary Grange Leisure Centre (FGLC) would reopen at the end of October. It was reported that Freedom Leisure had designed and implemented a Covid-19 safe operating environment.

It was noted that performance of BLC following reopening had given mixed results with fitness participation remaining strong but swimming significantly reduced. It was also reported that costs had been higher and income lower than Freedom Leisure has estimated pre-reopening, however performance was in line with what officers predicted and as reported in the recent Money Matters report.

It was reported that new guidance stated that indoor sports were to be included in the rule of six however due to the measures put in place, activities such as group exercise, swimming and fitness should be greatly unaffected.

The Committee asked if figures from the same time last year could be sent to allow for comparison, it was identified that these were already presented in the report.

Members were pleased to note that FGLC would now be opened and were heartened by the usage numbers considering the pandemic climate.

It was asked what Freedom Leisure were doing to actively promoting leisure in the district as marketing would be required to communicate that both centres would be opened but also best utilise the financial support given by the Council and help prevent losses as much as possible. It was reported that funding support was based on Freedom's initial estimates so much of the

business risk of under-performance still sat with Freedom Leisure. It was also reported that the agreement was an open book and so all figures were known as a safeguard.

It was queried what central admin costs there were and if the additional costs were that from Freedom Leisure. It was noted that updates on all financial figures would be given when available and it was asked if this could also include usage. It was also asked if projections on income including school use and private swimming lessons were available and how that could affect matters going forward. It was reported that this would be difficult to do at this time. It was suggested that some market research on the likelihood of swimming take up in the future may be beneficial.

It was reported that Officers met with Freedom on a weekly basis including at senior level to discuss performance and it was noted that it was still early in the re-opening phase and already changes had been made.

It was reported that the Council was still lobbying MPs on the matter that outsourced leisure arrangements were not covered by government income guarantee funding.

RESOLVED: (1) That the report be noted; and

(2) That financial and usage information be reported to the Committee regularly through briefing papers or reports if required.

35 THE FUTURE PROVISION OF THE DRY RECYCLING SERVICE

The Committee received a report on the proposals for Dry Material Recycling (DMR) once the current contract the Joint Waste Service has as part of the six Waste Collection Authorities with Biffa when it expires in 2022.

It was reported that the market for DMR had changed recently with focus on quality of the materials and the nature of comingled collections were creating issues and Biffa had already expressed that to continue and be viable, they would require a dual-stream collection with separate fibre or costs would rise significantly.

It was then reported that the commodity market was currently volatile and with other factors including the pending National Resource and Waste Strategy, re-procurement of a DMR contact would be challenging.

The Committee were reminded that the collection of DMR was done on behalf of Staffordshire County Council (SCC) and so it was proposed to start a formal procurement process and invite bids for the contact and once completed evaluate them along with the option of returning the requirement back to SCC.

It was noted that it was frustrating as many materials were advertised as recyclable however the contractor would still not accept them as not economically viable so although residents may believe they are putting the right waste in the blue bin, it was still requiring sorting. It was felt that education and communication was vital. It was requested that information be given on where all the recycling went around the world once collected.

It was felt that a short term solution without getting tied into a contract until the government strategy was known. It was recognised that if the decision to go dual stream was taken now, there would be additional costs in supplying extra bags or bins and extra collection rounds. It was noted that there was an option to extend the current contract with Biffa to 2024. It was reported that meetings had taken place with Biffa to discuss options. It was reported that more would be know early in 2021.

It was noted that the government strategy should be released at the same time as the contract expires and there was concern whether a snap decision would be required. It was reported that the strategy may also hopefully bring good news with packaging and materials manufacturers covering some if not all of the cost of collection and disposal.

There was also concern that due to national financial impact Covid-19, government commitments to reimburse out of pocket cost may not materialise as hoped and local authorities may be left trying to pick up extra costs including implementing changes in recycling and waste collections.

RESOLVED: That the approach undertaken to determine the future of the Dry Recycling Service be endorsed.

(The Meeting closed at 7.31 pm)

CHAIRMAN