

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

21 JANUARY 2021

PRESENT:

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

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

36 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Banevicius.

37 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Councillor Baker declared a personal interest in Item 5 – New Leisure Centre Update as the Chair of the Member Task Group

38 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting were circulated, agreed and signed as a correct record.

39 WORK PROGRAMME

The work programme was circulated to the Committee. It was noted that any request for additions onto the work programme should be sent to the Chairman.

RESOLVED: That the work programme be noted.

40 NEW LEISURE CENTRE PREFERRED SITE

The Committee received a report on the proposed outline configuration for the new Leisure facility to allow for feasibility to be progressed and then outline planning permission. It was noted that Cabinet had agreed Stychbrook Park as the preferred site. It was noted that the Member Task Group had considered different options for the design of the site and mix of facilities to bring forward for the Committee to consider. It was also noted that this configuration was not as yet final and was a holistic view.

It was reported that the Task Group had considered evidence on what the leisure centre should offer however it became quickly apparent that it would require too much of a significant outlay in build costs so the configuration proposed was one that would offer the best for residents providing the required swimming pool and fitness suite as well as an additional 3G pitch. It was reported that the costs for this proposed configuration was estimated at £12m with £5m set aside in the MTFs and other funding sources identified. However, it was noted that there would still be a funding gap. It was noted that the original and more ambitious proposals were estimated at £17m costs.

It was asked if any lost trees or hedges would be replaced or replanted especially in light of the noted climate emergency. It was reported that the Cabinet Member for Waste was considering a District wide approach and this would be part of it.

It was asked whether a 100 station fitness suite was required as the ANOG stated that this would be a surplus and if not, if this space could be used differently for example a further community room. It was reported that the suite could be configured and reduced if wished. It was noted that the junior suite that would be incorporated was currently lacking in the district.

It was then asked if there had been any consultation with Stakeholders as this would be vital and it was reported that it was part of the communications plan and it would be better to approach them with an outline design and configuration in mind to gain their views that could then feed into the planning process as well as pitches for funding.

It was noted that there was a process to follow and many things could change along the way. It was agreed that any of these changes be reported to the Committee to consider.

It was then asked whether there was an intention to keep the car park at the site and it was reported that it was subject to Highways and planning approvals.

Accessibility was discussed and it was noted that disability access, family access and transportation to and from the site would be part of the agenda for the next Task Group meeting as it was deemed important. It was also reported that the group would be continuously considering funding opportunities.

It was felt that the wish list could be revisited and facilities added that would not raise the costs to that highest level reported. It was reported that the one element that would have been most benefit and desire would have been a separate teaching pool and not a floating floor in the one main pool however the costs for that were just too much. Other facilities including squash courts are not used enough to warrant inclusion.

It was requested that any physical design of the building be sympathetic to the area and this was agreed however it was noted that planning would be outline to begin with.

- RESOLVED: 1) That the report be noted;
- 2) That the proposed outline configuration for the new leisure centre be supported; and
- 3) That the work of the Member Task Group in developing the proposed outline configuration for the new leisure centre be acknowledged.

41 LEISURE CENTRES RE-OPENING UPDATE

The Committee received a report giving an update to the reopening of the current leisure centres as well as the essential work at Friary Grange.

It was reported that operating had been very challenging due to the pandemic and since the last update, there had been a further three Covid-19 tier changes and two further national lockdowns. However there was some limited information that could be gathered from the three months that the centres were open and all three key activities of swimming, fitness and group exercise showed positive signs of recovery. Social distancing and the need to book all activities made like for like comparisons difficult. It was reported that Freedom Leisure were able to deliver a credible and well received covid secure operation and Officers and customers were reassured that government guidelines were covered. It was then reported that the third national lockdown was likely to straddle the peak trading months and this was of concern and

extend the impact on attendance and revenue for the whole of 2021 and potentially beyond. The Committee was informed that Officers continued to work with Freedom Leisure to model this impact and performance but this would be of restricted value until out of the current situation and because of this, the Cabinet Member requested that Leisure Centre Performance become a standing item on the Committee's work programme to monitor.

It was then reported that progress had been greatly made on repair works at FGLC and contractors were doing a good job in challenging circumstances. It was noted that the majority of works had been completed and it was expected to be completed before the current lockdown ended meaning there would be no or very little disruption for customers when reopened.

It was asked if there was any update on the final level of support from the Council to Freedom Leisure and it was reported that there were ongoing discussions between the two parties and at the moment the Council had not exceeded the £407k but noted that there was a third national lockdown and this would have a bearing and were working with Freedom to calculate what, if any additional costs there would be. It was noted that any updates would be reported to the Committee. When asked where the figure of £1.03m came from it was reported that at the outset when anticipating the reopening of centres a broad spectrum of what costs may be and worse case scenarios were given.

It was asked what would happen to FGLC after the Council left, especially after the money spent on works, and it was felt it was too far in the future to consider at this point.

It was noted that the government had recently announced the National Leisure Recovery Fund giving Authorities the ability to claim back lost income but only applied from December 2020 to March 2021 and it was asked if a claim from Lichfield would be submitted and it was reported that the application had already been submitted and it was noted that Sports England was the body evaluating it. It was noted that the LGA were trying to get funds backdated for Leisure centres backdated to the summer months when the effects were first being experienced.

It was then reported that the Cabinet Member and Officers attended a LGA event on reimagining the future of public leisure services and it been very useful.

The reported risk of Freedom Leisure ceasing trading was discussed and it was suggested that this be further managed through financial due diligence monitoring. It was reported that this could be undertaken and Officers had sight their organisational cash flow and were currently reassured. It was noted that Freedom Leisure operated 100 sites and so unlikely that the two from Lichfield would have a big impact on their viability as a business alone. It was also reported that the Council was in communications with the other client Authorities that Freedom Leisure and all were taking a similar approach.

RESOLVED: 1) That the report be noted; and
2) That leisure centre performance be a standing item for the Committee for 2020/21 and 2021/22.

42 CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19): RECOVERY PLAN SCRUTINY

The Committee received a report on the Council's Covid-19 Recovery Plan updating them on the activity and ongoing issues around recovery and provide a narrative regarding the progress and achievements against the plan developed and issued in May 2020. It was reported that whilst this had been a significant body of work, the longer term impacts of the pandemic on both the authority and the district as a whole were yet to be fully quantified.

The recovery plan was split into four areas of focus; maintaining key services; helping those in need; supporting our businesses and keeping you informed and to support scrutiny of the plan, and due to its broad and overlapping nature, each committee dealt with relevant topics and areas under their remit.

The Leader of the Council answered questions and advised on matters raised.

The Committee wished to record their thanks to all staff across the Council and specifically to the Waste, Operational, Parks and Leisure departments personnel who have continued throughout this difficult time and provide much valued services to residents.

It was noted that planning applications had increased during the pandemic and that it showed residents were spending the time on home improvements and it was asked if there were any plans to expand the service team to accommodate this increase in work. It was reported that the spike seen in applications was similar in all authorities so recruitment would not be as easy so it managing expectations of residents was just as important.

It was then asked if there would be a review of the Additional Resource Grant discretionary criteria to ensure all that could be supported were. It was reported that a process of review of that criteria was indeed happening. It was also reported that there was an additional grant for training and start-up businesses coming shortly.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

(The Meeting closed at 7.10 pm)

CHAIRMAN