

AGENDA ITEM NO 11

TITLE: Leisure Centres Improvement Programme

Committee: Commercial Services Committee

Date: 15th March 2016

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[Q219]

1. ISSUE

- 1.1. To update the Committee on developments in the authority's work with the leisure centres

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1. Members are asked to note the contents of the report.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. East Cambridgeshire is fortunate in having a wide network of community leisure facilities, well distributed across the district. They comprise:

- 3.1.1. Littleport Leisure Centre
- 3.1.2. Paradise Sports Centre (Ely)
- 3.1.3. Paradise Pools (Ely)
- 3.1.4. Ely Outdoor Sports Association (Ely Hockey, Rugby and Tennis Clubs)
- 3.1.5. Mepal Outdoor Centre
- 3.1.6. Ross Peers Sports Centre (Soham)
- 3.1.7. Burwell Sports Centre
- 3.1.8. Bottisham Sports Centre (Bottisham Village College)
- 3.1.9. Ellesmere Centre (Stetchworth)

There are also various parish, club and school facilities which contribute to the overall range of sport and leisure opportunities in the district but which are outside the scope of this report.

- 3.2. Members will be aware however that many of these facilities date back to the 1980s or early 1990s; that as community facilities they do not produce significant surpluses for reinvestment; and that most are operated by independent trusts, led by volunteers (albeit with some paid staff). They have struggled to compete with newer and larger facilities, for example in Cambridge and Newmarket; yet they remain important to their communities. For this reason, the Indoor Sports Facilities Needs Assessment, commissioned by the Authority in 2014 and completed in January 2015, identified 8 strategic objectives, which can be loosely captured under three key themes:
- 3.2.1. To secure the viability of the current network
 - 3.2.2. To develop the network, whether through improvements or new facilities as appropriate
 - 3.2.3. To improve coordination with key partners and thereby strengthen the value of the network to our communities
- 3.3. Following a service review in March 2015, it was decided to switch focus and resources from general sports and health development to targeted support to the leisure facilities, with a remit to work with the trusts to agree and implement service development plans. The purpose of this report is to bring Members up to date with the progress of this work.
- 3.4. While the focus of this report is on the work with the leisure facilities, Members will be aware that these facilities do not operate in isolation. The proposed new centre in Ely (which will supersede Paradise Pools) will enhance the leisure facility offer to the district as a whole; and the wider policy landscape has recently been more sharply defined, with the publication of a new national government Sports and Physical Activity Strategy. This focuses attention on the potential of sport and physical activity provision at local level to help address wider public sector agendas, such as health. A further report will explore this issue more fully at the Committee's next meeting.

4. WORK TO DATE

- 4.1. Consultations have been held with all of the centres – extensive in some cases, less so in others according to the issues emerging – and have generally focused on:
- 4.1.1. Broad capacity-building, including support in long-term planning and operational advice
 - 4.1.2. Building strategic partnerships – particularly with health agencies and sports bodies
 - 4.1.3. Investment and funding

4.2. Each of these issues is discussed in further detail below.

5. CAPACITY BUILDING AND STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

5.1. Work in these areas is still developing, and has so far focused on some of the larger sites, where there are specific issues and opportunities. By way of illustration however, it includes:

5.1.1. A review of the operational and governance arrangements at Littleport Leisure Centre, to help the Trust prepare for its adoption of the new dual use facility in the summer of 2017

5.1.2. Discussions with Ely Outdoor Sports Association, and with the County Sports Partnership and the England Hockey Association, around the long-term replacement of the hockey playing surface and associated business development issues

5.1.3. Initial discussions with the Trustees and management at Ross Peers Sports Centre to identify opportunities for the development both of the facilities and of the business

5.1.4. Engagement with the County's commissioned deliverer of Weight Management programmes, leading to the establishment of a programme in Littleport in the first instance; and with both County and neighbouring authorities around a wider physical activity strategy to address public health.

5.1.5. Engagement as appropriate with other sports bodies (eg the Amateur Swimming Association, in relation to its new participation strategy) and local clubs through a forum sponsored by the County Sports Partnership.

6. INVESTMENT AND FUNDING

6.1. Historically, financial support for the leisure facilities has comprised:

6.1.1. Non Domestic (ie, Business) Rate Relief – 80% of which is mandatory, and 20% awarded at the Authority's discretion. Following a review of the authority's discretionary reliefs in around 2012, these awards are now capped at £2,000 per annum. Centres are currently permitted to supplement this through Hardship Relief, which has so far made up the difference. Officers are however aware that Hardship Relief is intended only as a temporary measure, and it is proposed that this should be tapered over the course of three years and then removed completely. The financial implications of this will vary between centres, and further work and support may be needed in some cases to manage these impacts.

- 6.1.2. Service Level Agreement Grants from the Authority: originally these were introduced to support specific marketing or other development initiatives; more recently they have been treated as a general flat-rate subsidy. Following an initial review last year, the bidding process for the coming year has sought to place more emphasis on specific development projects or programmes, and the Centres have in general responded positively to this approach. A separate report to this meeting details the bids received and the proposed allocation of funding.
- 6.1.3. The general aim in these shifts is to encourage the Centres to become financially self-sufficient for day-to-day purposes, while supporting them more actively in addressing facility constraints and operational limitations in order to develop their business. It will however be appreciated that that the adjustments required – and through no fault of the organisations concerned - may be greater in some cases than others.

7. SUMMARY AND KEY ISSUES

- 7.1. The health of the network can be captured in two characteristics – financial sustainability, and community value. Public facilities must be affordable, or they will be lost; and they must be useful to their communities, or they have no purpose. While this entails some balancing and judgement, the two are not mutually exclusive, and work with the Centres is seeking to build in both areas – not least by aligning our financial support with wider capacity-building and partnership development.
- 7.2. As noted above, the Centres are – apart from Paradise Pools – operated by independent organisations; that independence is a potential strength in the network, which needs to be respected and nurtured. Engagement is therefore a two-way process, and the pace of development will be shaped by the needs and perspectives of the different organisations, which may change and develop over time. With this in mind, further reports will be provided on an annual basis as the programme proceeds.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS/EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1. There are no new budgetary implications at this stage.
- 8.2. There are no direct equality impacts at this stage, but the work with the health agencies may be expected to contribute to reducing health inequalities over time.

Background Documents**Location****Contact Officer**

East Cambs Indoor Sports Facility Strategy and Action Plan

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