

Key Decision Required:	YES	In the Forward Plan:	YES
-------------------------------	------------	-----------------------------	------------

CABINET

17 DECEMBER 2021

REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR LEISURE AND TOURISM

A.5 THE FUTURE OF JOINT USE SPORTS FACILITIES

(Report prepared by Mike Carran and Lee Heley)

PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

Community use agreements with the Sigma Trust for the two Joint Use Sports Facilities at Brightlingsea and Harwich Sports Centres are due to end on 31 December 2021. This paper sets out options for consideration by Cabinet and a recommendation on how to proceed.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Over a period of 30 years and 15 years respectively, the Council has managed community use arrangements at Brightlingsea (BSC) and Harwich Sports Centres (HSC). Agreements with the respective schools have enabled the Council to open facilities to the public on these non-Council owned sites after curriculum hours, and in some cases for daytime use also.
- In August 2021, the Council in conjunction with the Sigma Trust decided to extend the agreements for five months, from their original expiry date of 31 July 2021, until 31 December 2021. This was to ensure all appropriate residents and stakeholders were consulted and an evaluation could be undertaken for a considered decision by Cabinet on the Council's future involvement.
- The combined subsidy for managing community use facilities on the school sites is £146,969 and prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, combined attendances decreased year on year from 68,832 to 61,864 (between 2017 and 2019). In order to address that decline, a significant investment programme is considered necessary.
- The Council's own facilities at Dovercourt and Walton have been subject to investment over recent years and a refurbishment is close to completion at Clacton Leisure Centre. The Joint Use Facilities also require investment and Cabinet would need to consider the viability of investing in facilities which the Council does not own. This should also be considered in the context of longer term investment requirements for the three facilities under the Council's ownership at Clacton Leisure Centre (CLC), Dovercourt Bay Lifestyles (DBL) and Walton on the Naze Lifestyles (WONL).
- In order to establish local views on current and future community use of these facilities prior to a Cabinet decision, a six week consultation exercise was carried out. The consultation focussed on those facilities incorporated into the Joint Use Agreements and the full breakdown of this exercise is set out in Appendix C. Consultation has also taken place with both Brightlingsea and Harwich Town Councils, to establish opinions and whether they would consider future involvement

in the operation of BSC and HSC respectively. Officers could facilitate further discussions with the respective Town Councils and the Trust, to establish if there is appetite for involvement in opening the facilities for community use. This would also apply to any health partners, who may consider opening up a dialogue.

- The Schools which host the Joint Use Sports Facilities at BSC and HSC are managed by the Sigma Trust, who also retain responsibility for Clacton County High School. BSC has been under the Trust's management since 1 January 2019 and HSC from 1 June 2017. Consultation with the Sigma Trust has also taken place.
- How people access physical activity changed throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, with a visible increase in those exercising in public open space and making use of the natural environment. This included walking, running, cycling and water sports such as Stand up Paddle Boarding. Involvement with partners in the Sport England Local Delivery Pilot is one of the Council's key priorities for 2021/22 and that scheme has invested in alternative activities which do not rely on built facilities, such as Essex Pedal Power and community 'gamification' such as Street Tag and Beat the Street.
- A Sports Facilities Strategy was due to be brought forward for consideration by Cabinet in 2020, but postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As there was significant turbulence in the leisure sector and wider economy, largely instigated by two national lockdowns, it was not considered appropriate to adopt a strategy at that time. Proposals are in place to develop the sports facilities strategy by March 2022.
- The aim in taking decisions on the future of the joint-use agreement is to sustain the greatest use of facilities for sport and leisure, while reducing significant pressure on the council's overall financial position. In addition, to look at meeting the Council's strategic ambitions for sport and leisure in improving local activity levels and opportunities for improving health outcomes.
- It is recommended that Cabinet follow Option C and note that the Joint Use Agreements for BSC and HSC on sites outside of the Council's ownership, expire on 31 December 2021.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

Cabinet is asked to:

- a) note that the Joint Use Agreements for the Harwich and Brightlingsea Sports Centres managed by Sigma Trust end on 31 December 2021;**
- b) consider the development of the leisure and sports offer within the District through the emerging Sports Facility Strategy at its meeting in March 2022;**
- c) in the light of b) postpone consideration of the reallocation of the Joint Use Facilities budget; and**
- d) Propose that officers:**
 - a. engage with health partners and the Town Councils to consider if they wish to enter discussions with the Sigma Trust; and**

b. Signpost existing Joint Use Facilities customers to appropriate alternative provision.

PART 2 – IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

DELIVERING PRIORITIES

The District's Sports Facilities contribute to the following priorities set out in the Council's Corporate Plan:

Improving the financial efficiency of the Council's Sports Facilities would support the target for '*strong finances and governance*', through strong financial management to achieve a balanced annual budget.

Under the banner of the Council's Community Leadership through Partnership objective, the Corporate Plan sets out a partnership with Sport England and Active Essex to increase and improve local physical activity and wellbeing. In partnership with Essex County Council, Basildon Council and Colchester Borough Council, the Council is part of a ground breaking 'Local Delivery Pilot' Sport England scheme, to pilot new activity schemes.

FINANCE, OTHER RESOURCES AND RISK

Finance and other resources

The following breakdown of costs for opening the Joint Use Facilities is taken from 2018/19, which was the last full year of operation prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. It should be noted that there is a difference between the budgeted cost and the actual subsidy, which was largely due to a reduction in income generated. Attendances declined over the three year period the attendances were evaluated, which may be due to the overall quality of facilities.

Sports Facilities	Budget Cost 2018/19 (£)	Actual Subsidy 2018/19 (£)
Brightlingsea Sports Centre	62,390	76,513
Harwich Sports Centre	61,090	70,456
Total	123,480	146,969

Note: These figures are based on the last full year of operation in 2018/19.

The following table shows the budget allocated for 2021/22, to reflect the current and future financial position:

Sports Facilities	Budget 2021/22 (£)
Brightlingsea Sports Centre	68,880
Harwich Sports Centre	62,410
Total	131,290

The annual direct cost of operating Manningtree Sports Centre was £55,300. This subsidy ended after that agreement expired on 31 July 2021 and savings have been realised.

Risk

There is a risk that attendances accrued at the Joint Use Facilities would be lost if the facilities are not open for community use. Under these circumstances, it is recommended a system be implemented to signpost customers to other facilities.

If Cabinet are minded to continue with the Joint Use of the facilities, consideration would

need to be given to investment in the facilities, and the subsequent financial viability given the wider Sports Facilities under the Council's ownership.

LEGAL

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Consideration has been given to the implications of the proposed decision in respect of the following and any significant issues are set out below.

The Council has a statutory responsibility to consult when considering alternative service provision or external funding. The consultation process included online and face to face evaluations for residents and customers. Further to this, consultation has also taken place with both Brightlingsea and Harwich Town Councils and the Sigma Trust.

If Cabinet select Option C and note the expiry of the Joint Use Agreements, the Reorganisation Policy will be initiated and work with those permanent members of staff employed at the Joint Use Facilities, to find suitable alternative employment. This process and procedure will comply with employment law and the Council's Reorganisation Policy. It is expected that there are suitable alternative positions for those contracted staff within the Council's existing Sports Facilities establishment. Consultation will commence with those affected staff in January 2022.

Crime and Disorder / Equality and Diversity / Health Inequalities / Area or Ward affected / Consultation/Public Engagement.

Area or Ward Affected

The two joint use Sports Facilities are located in Brightlingsea and Dovercourt All Saints Wards respectively. The Sports Facilities, also attract users from other parts of the District.

Equality & Diversity

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed in the event of the Council ceasing involvement with the respective Sports Centres. One of the key issues identified are potential additional travel issues which may impact on those without access to a car. The Council will provide a signposting service, to ensure customers are aware of alternative facilities both inside and outside of the District. The Council will work with Sigma Trust to explore whether block bookings, clubs and other hirers can be accommodated within BSC and HSC. Furthermore, the recent refurbishments at CLC, DBL and WONL ensure that accessibility and facilities for those with disabilities are of a high standard at those sites owned by the Council. As such, customers relocating to alternative facilities in the District should experience a higher level of service.

Health Inequalities

Engaging in physical activity has a proven benefit to health outcomes. The key driver for the emerging Sports Facilities strategy will be to encourage more people to become active, more frequently. The Council's involvement in the Sport England Local Delivery Pilot project is a key priority and looks at new ways of encouraging physical activity, outside of traditional sports facilities. The Council continues to work with partners and in particular Active Essex, to address the challenges around physical activity levels.

Consultation/Public Engagement

A consultation exercise was undertaken with residents from 13 September 2021 until 24 October 2021. The scope and questions were agreed with the Cabinet Member for Leisure and Tourism and the key information is set out below:

- 495 people completed the questionnaire
- 94% believed the facilities were a valuable part of the community
- 78% said losing these facilities would impact on their ability to access physical activities
- 68% said they would continue to use the facilities if there were managed by another operator

Free text comments in the consultation highlight a range of issues, including the age of facilities given the price of entry. Due consideration has been given to the consultation responses and comments raised and a full breakdown is provided in Appendix C.

Consultation has also taken place with both Brightlingsea and Harwich Town Councils, to establish their opinions and whether they would consider future involvement in the operation of BSC and HSC respectively. Both organisations stated that they were open to discuss future involvement. There is potential for the Council to support both organisations in exploring the feasibility of operating BSC and HSC respectively.

Options for Consideration

The following options are set out for consideration by Cabinet:

	Option	Issues to consider
Option A	Renew Joint Use Agreements'	<p>The current subsidy of the Joint Use Facilities is almost £147,000 and attracts approximately 66,000 combined visits per annum. The subsidy per attendance between the two facilities is £2.23.</p> <p>Feedback from the consultation highlighted the standard of the Joint Use Facilities is well below the Council's other facilities, and other providers.</p>
Option B	Continue with Joint Use Agreements on revised terms and opening hours	<p>There is potential to reduce the current subsidy by discussing new terms for the Joint Use Agreements. Furthermore, a reduction in opening hours would also reduce overheads, such as employee costs. Unless significant investment is made into the facilities however, the standard of customer offer will be far lower than that of the facilities under the ownership of the Council. Cabinet will need to consider the viability of investment into facilities it does not own, in the context of the long term financial sustainability of its own stock. It should be noted that there would be an interim period where agreements would continue on the current terms and conditions (and subsequently</p>

		existing subsidy), whilst new arrangements were put in place.
Option C (recommended)	Agreements End	If agreements end, the current level of attendances would be lost in those facilities, so Cabinet should consider signposting customers to alternative facilities to retain the current level of activity. The Council will work with Sigma Trust to explore whether block bookings, clubs and other hirers can be accommodated within BSC and HSC. A decision on the best use of the Joint Use Facilities budget should be addressed in the light of the Council's wider financial position and the Sports Facilities Strategy, due in March 2022.

PART 3 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION

BACKGROUND

Scope of the Joint Use Sports Facilities

The scope of the community use agreements at BSC and HSC, includes the following:

Brightlingsea Sports Centre

Facilities: Two Sports Halls, two Fitness Suites, two Squash Courts and a Dance Studio.

Subsidy: £62,390

Attendances: Approximately 33,108 visits per year (at pre Covid levels). It should be noted that this includes the artificial grass pitch, despite this facility falling outside of the agreement).

Harwich Sports Centre

Facilities: Sports Hall, two Squash Courts, four Tennis Courts and a Hard Court Area (free to use multi use games area)

Subsidy: £70,456

Attendances: Approximately 32,792 visits per year (at pre Covid levels).

Note: Due to the impact of Covid-19 on the Council's Sports Facilities, the subsidy provided is the last full financial year which was not impacted by national restrictions (2018/19).

In addition to the three Joint Use Facilities, the Council has the following three further Sports Facilities, under direct ownership and management:

Clacton Leisure Centre

Dovercourt Bay Lifestyles

Walton-on-the-Naze Lifestyles

Over recent years, there has been significant investment at the Dovercourt and Walton facilities as part of a refurbishment programme to improve the Council's leisure stock. In addition to this, work is near completion on a £575,000 refurbishment of Clacton Leisure Centre. As a District with historically low levels of participation in sport, the Council has invested significant sums in encouraging increased activity and offering high-quality facilities.

Prior to the pandemic, there was an aspiration to bring forward a Sports Facilities

Strategy and set out a plan to develop the leisure stock over the lifetime of the Council's financial plan. The recommendations in the strategy were underpinned by the financial position at that time, together with the number of pre-paid members. Due to the restrictions placed on the Sports Facilities opening over the last 18 months, the position has changed significantly since that time, and the strategy will be considered by Cabinet at its March 2022 meeting.

The Covid-19 pandemic required the Council's Sports Facilities to shut for periods during 2020/21 and operating restrictions have been in place even when allowed to open. As such, usage across the service was 7.5% down in June 2021 compared to June 2019 and live pre-paid memberships (direct debits and annual memberships) have also decreased by 10% within this period. The number of memberships has been rising month on month and in September, the number of pre-paid members, passed that of pre Covid levels.

The Council also managed Community Use facilities at Manningtree Sports Centre until 31 July 2021. The governing Alpha Trust, took a decision not to renew that agreement and as such, the school took responsibility for community use from 1 August 2021. Manningtree High School committed to making all its facilities available for community hire for sports and leisure activities following the end of their agreement with the Council

Physical Activity Levels in Tendring

- 'Inactivity' in Tendring remained the same year on year between 2017/18 and 2018/19 and increased 3.4% in 2019/20, sitting alongside Basildon and Braintree;
- 'Active' activity levels in Tendring were at 56.8% in the year 2017/18, which was one of the lowest, and this decreased further by 2.4% in 2018/19; however, it saw a rise of 3.4% in 2019/20 and was slightly ahead of Harlow and Basildon Districts;
- 'Fairly active' levels in Tendring were reasonably high in 2017/18 compared to other Districts and increased in 18/19 by 2.7%, the highest across all Districts. Unfortunately, it became the lowest level at 10.2% in 19/20, sitting alongside Basildon and Braintree;

Note: Tendring has a larger older population than other Essex Districts, and the survey did not include some gentle activity such as gardening.

BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR THE DECISION

JOINT USE SPORTS FACILITIES REPORT, 3 August 2021

APPENDICES

Appendix A Joint Use Attendance Figures

Appendix B Financial Breakdown

Appendix C Joint Use Consultation Exercise