

## CABINET

17 DECEMBER 2021

### ADDENDUM REPORT OF THE LEISURE & TOURISM PORTFOLIO HOLDER

#### **A.5 THE FUTURE OF JOINT USE SPORTS FACILITIES**

(Report prepared by Keith Durran)

##### **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

To report to cabinet the comments and recommendations made by the Resources and Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee in relation to the future of the Joint Use Sports Facilities report.

##### **BACKGROUND**

At its meeting held on 13 December 2021 (Minute 45 refers) the Resources and Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee (“the Committee”) had scrutinised the Joint Use Agreement report that was to go to Cabinet on 17 December 2021.

The report submitted to the Committee outlined the Community use agreements with the Sigma Trust for the Joint Use Sports Facilities at Brightlingsea and Harwich Sports Centres. The term of the agreements was until 31 December 2021. This paper set out options for consideration by Cabinet and a recommendation on how to proceed.

The Committee heard that over a period of 30 years and 15 years respectively, the Council had managed community use arrangements at Brightlingsea and Harwich Sports Centres on the basis of the allocated element of the relevant school buildings. Agreements with the respective schools had enabled the Council to open facilities to the public on those non-Council owned sites after curriculum hours and, in some cases, for daytime use also. The schools were Colne Community School & College in Brightlingsea and the Harwich & Dovercourt High School in Harwich.

Members also heard that 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. That 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.

It was reported to the Committee that the combined subsidy for managing community use facilities on the school sites was £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 was considered necessary.

The report outlined that the Council’s own facilities at Dovercourt and Walton had been subject to investment over recent years and a refurbishment was close to completion at Clacton Leisure Centre. The Joint Use Facilities also required investment and Cabinet would need to consider the viability of investing in facilities which the Council did not own. That 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, Dovercourt Bay Lifestyles and Walton on the Naze Lifestyles.

The Committee heard that in order to establish local views on current and future community use of those facilities prior to a Cabinet decision, a six week consultation exercise had been carried out. The consultation focused on those facilities incorporated into the Joint Use Agreements. During the consultation Brightlingsea and

Harwich Town Councils had been approached to establish opinions and whether they would consider future involvement in the operation of Brightlingsea and Harwich Sports Centres respectively. Officers could facilitate further discussions with the respective Town Councils and the Sigma Trust, to establish if there was appetite for involvement in opening the facilities for community use. That would also apply to any health partners, who may have considered opening up a dialogue.

The Schools which host the Joint Use Sports Facilities at Brightlingsea and Harwich Sports Centres were operated by the Sigma Trust, who also retained responsibility for Clacton County High School. BSC had been under the Trust's management since 1 January 2019 and Harwich Sports Centres from 1 June 2017. Discussions with the Sigma Trust had also taken place during the consultation period.

The Committee heard how a Sports Facilities Strategy was due to be brought forward for consideration by Cabinet in 2020, but it had been 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 was to sustain the greatest use of facilities for sport and leisure, while reducing significant pressure on the council's overall financial position. In addition, it would look at meeting the Council's strategic ambitions for sport and leisure in improving local activity levels and opportunities for improving health outcomes.

The Committee was advised that the current Joint Use Facilities Agreements would end on 31 December 2021, the Council was not seeking to extend the Agreements and any community use of the facilities at the two schools concerned would be determined by the Sigma Trust. The Portfolio Holder indicated that this did not mean the two centres would close and that the ending of the agreements was entirely amicable between the Council and the Sigma Trust. He also pointed to the separate agreement between the Council and the Sigma Trust in respect of artificial pitch use at the Vista Road Recreation Ground in Clacton (adjacent to Clacton Leisure Centre).

With the permission of the Chairman, Councillor Steady had addressed the Committee on the subject matter of this item.

In response to a question, the Committee was advised by the Assistant Director (Economic Growth & Leisure) that an invitation to a representative of the Sigma Trust had not been made to attend the meeting in response to the request for such an invitation to be made by a Member of the Committee.

## **RESOURCES AND SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMENTS TO CABINET**

After a detailed discussion the Committee had **RECOMMENDED** to Cabinet:-

- a) the proposal to Cabinet in the report to it on the joint use sports facilities at Brightlingsea and Harwich is placed on hold (and appropriate steps taken to facilitate this status quo continuing), to allow the proposal to be considered:
  - (i) within the context of the Council's emerging Sports Facility Strategy (due to be published in March 2022); and
  - (ii) in conjunction with the future intentions of the Sigma Trust (which are, as yet, unknown).

- b) It adopts the above as it will allow an all-encompassing scrutiny of the future provision of Council sports facility provision and, as the Joint Use Facilities Budget is not to be immediately reallocated, there is no immediate need for this decision to be implemented.

[Note: In respect of appropriate steps in the above recommendation it was agreed that this shall include approaching the Sigma Trust on the issue, discussing the proposal and agreeing the extension of the agreement should the Sigma Trust agree to this.]

The Committee also **RESOLVED** to:

- (a) authorise the Chairman to discuss with the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Tourism the possibility of establishing a group of Members to consider the emerging Sports Facilities Strategy (including the provision for sports in Brightlingsea and Harwich).
- (b) note that the following were adopted statements by this Council in respect of sports and leisure provision:

Page 108 of Section 2 of Tendring District Local Plan 2013-2023 and beyond –in respect of provision for Healthy Places.

*“Indoor sports facilities including sports halls, health and fitness facilities and swimming pools are classed as ‘Community Facilities’ and are protected through Policy HP2. The Council will work with partners to improve the provision of indoor sports facilities in the District and will support proposals for new facilities subject to meeting the requirements of other policies in this Local Plan and may consider the use of all delivery mechanisms including Community Infrastructure Levy to help deliver new and improved existing Indoor sports facilities to meet the needs of a growing population”.*

Page 30 of the Playing Pitch Strategy and Action Plan for Tendring District Council and its partners (June 2017)

*“Recommendation c – Maximise community use of education sites where there is a need to do so given the mix of provider in Tendring, there is a need for the Council and NGBs to work with other partners, for example, town and parish councils to help maximise use of outdoor sports facilities and in particular grass pitches and AGPs”.*

## **PORTFOLIO HOLDER RECOMMENDATION(S) TO CABINET**

### **Recommendations to Cabinet:**

- a) that the recommendations and comments made by the Resources and Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee be noted.
- b) that Cabinet has regard to the Resources and Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee’s recommendations and comments in making its decision on this matter.