

RESOURCES AND SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14 MARCH 2022

REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR LEISURE AND TOURISM

A.6 JOINT USE SPORTS FACILITIES UPDATE

(Report prepared by Mike Carran)

PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To update the committee on progress with the Joint Use Sports Centre transition process at Brightlingsea and Harwich, following the end of joint use agreements with the Sigma Trust on 31 December 2021.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- At their meeting on 17 December 2021, Cabinet determined the following in relation to the Joint Use Agreements for and Brightlingsea Sports Centre (BSC) and Harwich Sport Centre (HSC):
 - (a) *notes that the Joint Use Agreements between the Council and the Sigma Trust for the Harwich and Brightlingsea Sports Centres end on 31 December 2021;*
 - (b) *agrees to the provision of transitional support from existing resources, for up to three months, to extend the community use of the facilities where possible;*
 - (c) *invites representatives from the relevant Town Councils and the Sigma Trust to join an engagement group to meet during the transition period to work through the operations of providing community use from the facilities;*
- The Cabinet report highlighted that *‘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.’* The Council would have needed to invest significantly in the facilities to ensure they were fit for purpose and financially viable and stem the decline in attendances set out in the report.
- Following on from the Cabinet report, Sigma Trust have agreed to keep their facilities open to the community and are working with Council Officers to accommodate as many of the existing customer base as possible. Updates are being provided to the respective Town Councils via the engagement group which has met regularly since the start of 2022.
- The Council has arranged for a single point of contact at both sites, who are available to support existing users/hirers. These Officers have and will continue to support hirers who may have challenges in making the transition.
- To date over 90% of current hirers (50 out of 55) at Brightlingsea and Harwich Sports Centres have either agreed and signed new booking forms with Sigma Trust, or agreed in principal to the new conditions and Sigma are awaiting forms to be returned.
- There has been a trend at Brightlingsea towards block bookings and at Harwich towards more casual use. As the Sigma Trust cannot accommodate casual use, an action plan was devised of how casual use could be converted to hirers. The plan which is being worked

through by the single point of contact at each site is set out in Section 2 of this report.

- In addition to the work above, local people have been asked if they are interested in establishing a new club or clubs, which would allow racket sports to continue under the management of the Sigma Trust. The deadline for responses has now passed and a meeting with those interested is being arranged. Around 20 people have come forward in Harwich and there has been no response in Brightlingsea to date.
- Given the level of interest shown by users in Harwich to form a club, the Council will work closely to support the formation of a racket sports club to block book from the Sigma Trust, and will look to invest to support its development.
- The Leader agreed at Council in February 2022 to include the proposal for investment in sports facilities in Harwich and Brightlingsea to come forward through the Corporate Investment Plan. He reiterated this point at Cabinet February 2022, and agreed that officers will develop options to be considered by Cabinet in March.
- Once the transition period is over on 31 March 2022 hirers of both facilities will become customers of the Sigma Trust, while arrangements for the Squash Courts at Harwich will be developed and reported to Cabinet in March. The booking process which has been set in place by the Trust, will also allow new customers use of the facilities.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

- a) **That the committee note the contents of this report**

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 combined subsidy for managing community use facilities on the school sites is £146,969.

A proposal will come to Cabinet in March for investment of some of this funding in 2022/23 to support sport, which will include racquet sports in Harwich.

Risk

In order to mitigate against facilities not being open for community use, the transition period was agreed to accommodate as many existing customers as possible with the opening hours provided by Sigma Trust.

LEGAL

The proposals are within the Council's powers. Any allocation of budget will be in accordance with the Budget and Policy Framework, as set out in Part 5 of the Council's Constitution.

In the December Cabinet report, the following passage was set out in relation to the consultation process, which commenced on 13 September 2021:

'Whilst the provision of Leisure Services is a discretionary function, the Council is under a legal obligation to undertake public consultation if it is considering altering or ceasing a service delivered to the public and community. Furthermore, any future changes will be subject to an Equality Impact Assessment taking into account the outcome of the public consultation'

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.

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.

Consultation/Public Engagement

As set out in the December Cabinet Report, 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.

Joint Use Facilities Transition Period and Engagement Group

Transition Plan

The following plan was devised in partnership with Sigma Trust to accommodate as many existing users from the management of the Council to that of the Trust.

TRANSITION STRAND 1	TRANSITION STRAND 2	TRANSITION STRAND 3
<p>Name: Block Bookings A:</p> <p>Description: Where existing bookings could be accommodated by Sigma Trust without any changes to their current times.</p>	<p>Name: Casual Use A</p> <p>Description: Explore whether any existing casual use can be changed to Block Bookings</p>	<p>Name: Fitness Suite (Brightlingsea)</p> <p>Description: Explore whether an organisation was able to take over the running of the Fitness Suite in a hire agreement with the Trust</p>
<p>Name: Block Bookings B:</p> <p>Description: Where bookings cannot be accommodated at their current day/time, but can be altered to suit the user and the school</p>	<p>Name: Fitness Classes</p> <p>Description: Explore whether existing Fitness Classes can be changed from in-house to hirer</p>	<p>Name: Address outstanding challenges or barriers to bookings</p> <p>Description: Explore options for those bookings which cannot be accommodated through any of the alternative means in strand 1 or 2</p>
<p>Name: New Sigma Hire Agreement forms</p> <p>Description: Confirm future hire process with Sigma</p>	<p>Name: Club Conversion</p> <p>Description: Explore whether any existing casual use can be changed to club use (e.g. racket sports) *</p>	

Updates following action plan

- Following the Cabinet Meeting in December, an engagement group was set up with Council and Sigma Trust Officers, together with representatives from the respective Town Councils. This allowed Officers to share a plan of action for transition and update Town Councils on progress;
- Following an initial meeting set up with both Town Councils and Council Officers in December, by Friday 25 February there will have been four meetings of the engagement group. The last three of those meetings were specific to each of the Sports Centres/Town Councils, in order to concentrate on the topics that impact on Brightlingsea and Harwich respectively;
- At this stage, under the Sigma Trust, opening hours will change to reflect the demand for bookings. The Trust have indicated that opening hours will increase if there is a demand and financial case to do so;
- Over 90% of current hirers (50 out of 55) at Brightlingsea and Harwich Sports Centres have either agreed and signed new booking forms with Sigma Trust, or agreed in principal to the new conditions and Sigma are awaiting forms to be returned;
- Council Officers and Sigma Trust are actively working with the remaining hirers to allocate

them a slot. There is a strong confidence that the majority of those can be accommodated with support from Officers;

- To date there is currently no proposal from organisations to manage the gym at Brightlingsea Sports Centre. As it stands therefore, the gym would no longer be available for public use following the end of the transition period;
- All Sports Centre Members have received a letter explaining their options and the other facilities available to them;
- Council Officers are working with any individuals/organisations who are not as yet accommodated within the new timetable.
- Council officers are working with Harwich users to develop community use for racquet sports.

PART 3 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION

BACKGROUND

The following timelines sets out the key dates in **2021** for the decision making process in relation to the Joint Use Sports Facilities at Brightlingsea and Harwich:

27 July: The intention to submit a Cabinet report on the Joint Use Sports Facilities, was entered on the Forward Plan;

20 August: Communication was sent to all appropriate Ward Members to update that a decision would be published imminently in relation to the Joint Use Sports Facilities (the decision eventually published on 24 August);

24 August: An executive decision was published to extend the Joint Use Agreements, undertake a consultation exercise and agree that an options report would be brought forward for consideration by Cabinet in December 2021;

13 September: Joint Use Sports Centre consultation commences for 6 weeks

9 December 2021: Publication of the Cabinet Report on the Joint Use Sports Facilities

13 December 2021: Resources and Services Overview and Scrutiny Meeting to discuss the Joint Use Sports Facilities

17 December: Cabinet considered a report on the Joint Use Sports Facilities at Brightlingsea and Harwich. A decision was taken to note the end of the Joint Use Facility Agreements.

As set out in the December Cabinet report, 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 Manningree 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

FUTURE OF JOINT USE SPORTS FACILITIES, 17 DECEMBER 2021

APPENDICES

None

