

## CABINET

25 MARCH 2022

### REFERENCE REPORT FROM THE RESOURCES AND SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

#### A.7 JOINT USE SPORTS FACILITIES UPDATE

(Report prepared by Ian Ford)

##### **BACKGROUND**

At its meeting held on 14 March 2022 (Minute 65 refers) the Resources and Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee ("the Committee") had received an update 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.

As part of that update, the Committee was provided with a written report from the Council's Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Tourism. The report referenced, inter alia, the following matters:-

- *"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 Joint Use Facilities Transition Period and 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 the Portfolio Holder's 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 of the Council 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."*

**RESOURCES AND SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATION(S) TO CABINET**

The Resources and Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee decided to **RECOMMEND** Cabinet:-

*“That Cabinet consider allocating a level of working capital to enable community access to resume in the evenings and at weekends, with a view to councils liaising with Sport England and Active Essex to establish a body to link between the community and the Sigma Trust in the longer term. In establishing this body/company it would take into account and integrate the new Sports Facilities Strategy into their development.”*

**PORTFOLIO HOLDER COMMENT(S) AND RECOMMENDATION(S) TO CABINET**

**Portfolio Holder's Comments**

*“I would like to thank the Committee for its views on the Joint Use Sports Facilities. As Members of the Committee will be aware, although at this stage under the Sigma Trust the two facilities will not be open during school holidays and weekends, the Trust has indicated that opening hours will increase if there is a demand and financial case to do so. As the Committee are also aware, at their meeting on 25 March 2022, Cabinet will consider whether to assign a budget to support existing/newly formed clubs and organisations to make the transition from the facilities under the Council's management to that under the Sigma Trust. I will continue to work with the Chairman of the Resources and Services O & S Committee on the development of the emerging Sports and Activity Strategy.”*

**Recommendations to Cabinet:**

**That the recommendation made by the Resources and Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee be noted and the response of the Portfolio Holder thereto be endorsed.**