

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

21 NOVEMBER 2017

RHONDDA FACH LEISURE CENTRE – INVESTMENT AND RECONFIGURATION OPPORTUNITIES

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR FOR PUBLIC HEALTH AND
PROTECTION IN DISCUSSION WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO
HOLDER, COUNCILLOR A. CRIMMINGS**

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to inform Members of the outcomes of the consultation initiated by Cabinet in relation to the proposed implementation of a programme of changes at Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre and to feedback on the outcome of preliminary discussions with the Head Teacher of Ferndale Community School.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 2.1 Notes the widespread support of those who responded to the consultation for investment into Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre to make it more sustainable;
- 2.2 Considers the outcome of the consultation and other matters as outlined in the report (together with its appendix) in respect of the proposed remodelling of Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre;
- 2.3 Decides on whether or not, and if so how, it wishes to proceed with implementation of the proposed remodelling of Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre giving consideration to the following proposals consulted upon: -

To invest over £500,000 and modernise the facilities provided by changing the Leisure Centre into a substantial dry side leisure facility, concentrating on fitness and indoor sports including:

- A new fitness facility
- A new indoor 3G sports pitch

- Closure of the swimming pool and increasing the swimming capacity nearby in other leisure facilities within the Rhondda
 - Develop partnerships with local sporting clubs to create sporting pathways
 - Utilise part of the building for Council office accommodation;
- 2.4 Notes that the Headteacher of Ferndale Community School has agreed to work with the Council towards providing increased opportunities for public swimming at the school pool; and
- 2.5 Subject to 2.3 above agree that the funding implications relating to the remodelling of the Leisure Centre be subject to a future report of the Group Director, Corporate & Frontline Services.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The range of responses to the consultation on the proposals to re-configure Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre into a dry side centre is extremely wide. There is undoubtedly a split in opinion between those who welcome the proposal as consulted upon and those who welcomed investment in the Leisure Centre subject to the pool being retained (and in some cases improved as part of that investment). However there is generally significant support for the Council to invest and to provide residents with a better offer that provides a sustainable future for the Leisure Centre.
- 3.2 Should the Council decide to progress the preferred option of remodelling Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre into a dry side facility there will be loss of opportunity for public swimming. It is therefore important that alternative options are considered as part of the decision making process. The Headteacher of Ferndale Community School has agreed to work with colleagues in Leisure and Education to extend the hours available for public swimming.
- 3.3 There is a strong business case to close the poorly designed swimming pool on the grounds that it will never be a viable proposition in its current configuration. The costs of providing a conventional swimming tank are estimated to be well in excess of £1million. The proposed reconfiguration of the centre into a dry side/fitness facility and the conversion of the top floor into office accommodation represents a cost effective and sustainable use of this underused leisure facility.

4 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre is the largest in RCT. The Centre has always struggled to generate the level of custom appropriate to a building of this size. In particular, the swimming pool has always under performed in comparison to other Council run pools.

- 4.2 The main issue is that due to the design of the pool there is very little capacity for the full range of aquatic activities offered at the other pools resulting in significantly lower customer numbers.
- 4.3 In contrast the dry side and fitness usage at Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre has remained stable over the past few years. However there is plenty of room for improvement as the Centre only achieves 68% of its latent demand.
- 4.4 In September 2017 Cabinet considered an ambitious plan to reconfigure the layout of the building. This involved closing the pool and re-siting a brand new fitness suite in the pool hall and developing a new indoor 3G facility in the rear hall. These developments would free up the 1st floor of the centre which could be developed as office space as part of the Council's accommodation strategy.
- 4.5 Cabinet agreed, at its meeting on [28th September 2017](#) to initiate a consultation to consider the option put forward for the remodelling of the Leisure Centre.
- 4.6 Cabinet also agreed that officers hold preliminary discussions with the Head Teacher of Ferndale Community School to explore opportunities to make the school pool more accessible to the public including potentially utilising the free swim grant from Welsh Government to support additional opening hours.
- 4.7 In addition officers have had discussions with All Wales 3G/ATP Collaboration Group on the specific proposals to convert a sports hall into an indoor 3G surface.
- 4.8 This report presents the results of the consultation with service users together with a report on the preliminary discussions with the Headteacher of Ferndale Community School and discussions on the indoor 3G proposal.

5 CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The full consultation report is at Appendix 1. The aim of the consultation was to gather the views of Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre users and other interested parties on the proposals. The consultation period ran for 4 weeks from the 6th October to the 3rd November 2017.
- 5.2 The methodology adopted included an on-line questionnaire, 2 drop in engagement events and 3 separate visits to the centre by consultation with tablet surveys to target respondents using the classes, gym and swimming pool at peak times. In addition an email was sent to all Leisure for Life members registered to the Centre, and there were

letters sent to key stakeholders including AMs and MPs, local Councillors and clubs and organisation who regularly use the centre. Finally, an engagement session was held with young people at Ferndale Community School and with young people at a half term play scheme. The consultation exercise was promoted on social media and supported with a dedicated email address and freepost address if needed.

5.3 Overall over 250 people engaged directly in the consultation process. The response breakdown was as follows:

- 156 online responses;
- 1 letter;
- 5 emails;
- 72 people attended the 2 drop in sessions held in the centre;
- A large poster from young people attending the play scheme;
- 8 posters and letters from young people;
- 21 young people engaged at the play scheme directly;
- 21 young people attended the session in Ferndale Community School.

5.4 The key findings arising from the 156 online responses to the consultation can be summarised as follows:

- 77.6% of respondents supported the proposed investment. However this was often suggested on the basis that the pool would remain open or be part of the investment;
- 43.2% of respondents supported the preferred option for investment;
- 49.7% did not support the preferred options for investment and thought that the pool should not be closed;
- 40.95% of respondents stated that they would be more likely to use the centre if the preferred option went ahead;
- Of those who said no the responses were again based on the swimming pool aspect of the proposal;
- 64.5% of respondents stated that if the facility was remodelled the Council should increase the capacity of nearby alternative pools (Bronwydd Swimming Pool, Ystrad Sports Centre and Ferndale Community School);
- 47.4% of respondents said they would make use of the new fitness facility. Again, a similar number of residents said they would not use the centre if the pool was closed;
- 25.8% of respondents said they would use a new 3G facility;
- There were a number of suggestions on other options for the Council to consider in relation to the remodelling of the Centre, many of which were suggestions for the pool and in particularly dissatisfaction with the proposed closure.

5.5 The key findings arising from the drop in and focussed engagement events:

72 people attended the drop in engagement events. The following themes summarise the discussions that took place:

- Investment is needed in the centre;
- Positive response to the new gym from existing users;
- Issues with the existing swimming alternatives being too busy/waiting lists;
- The existing pool should be invested in;
- Health impacts of closing the swimming pool;
- The impact on children and young people;
- The impact on people with a disability;
- Impact on older people;
- Transport issues for getting to other alternatives.

5.6 Engagement with young people was mixed, but the general consensus was that they liked the idea of the proposed new 3G pitch, but not at the expense of the swimming pool. If the swimming pool closes some would stop swimming and swimming lessons, reporting that they wouldn't be able to get to the alternatives.

5.7 Preliminary discussions were held with the Headteacher of Ferndale Community School on 9th November 2017. The outcome of the meeting is that the Headteacher has agreed to work with Leisure Services and 21st Century Schools to explore how the school's sports facilities including the swimming pool, can be made more accessible to the public. Whilst the pool itself is in good condition there are some upgrading works required to improve the general appearance and standard of the changing rooms. If Cabinet decide to proceed with the preferred proposals as consulted upon then further meetings would be held to agree how such provision could be put in place. This proposal would including delivering the Welsh Government funded Free School Swimming Initiative.

5.8 As part of the consultation process, officers also discussed the proposed indoor 3G with the All Wales ATP/3G Collaboration Group, which is made up of representatives from Sport Wales, Welsh Rugby Union, Football Association of Wales Trust, Hockey Wales and Welsh Athletics. The group's main purpose is to work collaboratively with local authorities to develop and deliver a strategic approach to the delivery of both ATP and 3G facilities.

5.9 The All Wales ATP/3G Collaboration group were very receptive to the proposal and felt that it offered, alongside the hockey facilities at Darren Park ATP top quality training facilities for both pay and play

participants and local clubs at an affordable price. The group are keen to work with local authority to maximise usage by mini and juniors, both for central venue tournaments and over the winter period vastly reducing the level of cancelled training sessions due to inclement weather.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Cabinet Members will be fully aware and mindful of the general equality duty introduced by the Equality Act 2010 and the specific public sector equality duties applicable to the Council as a local Council in Wales.
- 6.2 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (Public Sector Single Equality Duty) requires public authorities to demonstrate in decision making that they have paid 'due regard' to the need to:
- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimization;
 - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it;
 - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 6.3 A specific question was asked in the on-line questionnaire to reflect the legal duty the Council has in looking at how its decisions affect people with particular characteristics. 52 people provided a response and the full consultation report has the details of the responses received and the comments made.
- 6.4 The relevant protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation. The Council must have due regard to the impact of any of the proposals on those with a protected characteristic. The Council has a specific duty to publish information to demonstrate how they have paid due regard to the aims above as part of their decision making. Undertaking an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) screening exercise (and if necessary full EqIA) would be evidence that the Council has considered its legal obligations in making the decision on the recommendations in this report.
- 6.5 In developing this proposal, an Equality Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken to ensure that:
- The Council meets the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duties; and
 - Due regard has been taken on the likely impact of the decision in terms of equality and discrimination.

- 6.6 The EqIA screenings undertaken prior to and following the conclusion of the consultation exercise determined that a full EqIA was not required. The screening form can be accessed by contacting the author of the report or the Executive & Regulatory Business Unit.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There would be a saving of approximately £100k per annum as a result of closing the swimming pool. Further work is required to assess impact upon staff rotas, income levels and operational costs, although these are not anticipated to be significant. The on-going maintenance of the 3G pitch would be covered within the existing budget allocated to the service.
- 7.2 The cost of the new fitness suite equipment would be approximately £250k. The cost of the indoor 3G pitch conversion would be approximately £150k. The funding for these improvement works would be considered as part of forthcoming reports on wider investment opportunities.
- 7.3 There would also be further significant financial savings to the Council through the additional accommodation created from the reconfiguration of the premises but these, net of the cost of remodelling (which added to the costs highlighted in paragraph 7.2 above, is likely to mean a total gross investment in the centre of over £500,000), would need to be quantified as part of the Council's wider accommodation strategy.
- 7.4 If Members support the proposed recommendations, the Director of Corporate Estates would be requested to prepare the necessary plans and quantify the costs of the provision of the additional accommodation and reconfiguration of the building.
- 7.5 The funding implications relating to the implementation of any proposals to remodel the Leisure Centre should be the subject of a future report of the Group Director, Corporate & Frontline Services.

8 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Whilst there was no statutory duty on the Council to consult on the proposal, it was recommended that a consultation be initiated prior to any decision(s) being made in relation to it given the impact of the decision and expectation of service users/stakeholders.
- 8.2 Where consultation is undertaken, it should be done when proposals are at a formative stage; give sufficient reasons for any proposal to permit intelligent consideration and allow adequate time for consideration and response.

- 8.3 Cabinet are now required to give conscientious consideration to the outcome of the consultation process prior to any decision(s) being made on the proposal.
- 8.4 The consultation exercise described in section 5 and attached as Appendix 1 gives the Cabinet information from service users/stakeholders to consider as part of their decision making process.

9 LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN/ OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES AND FUTURE GENERATIONS – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

- 9.1 The remodelling of the Leisure Centre presents an opportunity to develop a different offer for the facility and its community. The new offer would focus on utilising the space in a more effective and efficient way for the benefit of users, getting “more people, more active, more often” (RCT CBC Leisure Strategy, Corporate Plan).
- 9.2 The increased levels of physical activity would have a positive impact on people's lives by improving health and wellbeing and reducing levels of obesity significantly contributing to creating a healthier Rhondda Cynon Taf (Well-being of Future Generations Act, Cwm Taf Plan, and Corporate Plan).
- 9.3 The proposal presents an opportunity to re-establish the facility as key to developing an attractive, viable, safe and well-connected community within the Rhondda Fach and wider Rhondda valley. The re-modelled facility would establish itself as a focal point for residents to live independent and fulfilled lives using sport and recreation as the tool for engagement (Well-being of Future Generations Act, and Corporate Plan).
- 9.4 The proposed office accommodation would support the Council's strategy to reduce its accommodation floor space by 20% by 2020 (Corporate Plan, Council Asset Management) through releasing accommodation elsewhere, consolidating staff in fewer buildings and making better use of our assets.

10 CONCLUSION

- 10.1 The Council needs to change the way it offers leisure services at Rhondda Fach Sports Centre. The closure of the swimming pool would enable a radical re-modelling of the building and contribute a saving of up to £100K to the Council's medium term financial plan.

- 10.2 The pool hall represents a major opportunity to re-design the fitness programme and enable the service to develop an offer that would be unique in RCT and better suit the demands of the locality.
- 10.3 There is a good opportunity to work with Ferndale Community School to upgrade the sporting landscape in the Rhondda Fach valley. This could be achieved by extending the aquatic offer at the school and by creating a two centre sporting hub that seeks to promote sport and physical activity in a deprived part of the County Borough.
- 10.4 The Consultation exercise has provided members with a range of feedback from service users/stake holders for consideration. There is significant level of support for the preferred investment proposal which will need to be considered against the majority view that the pool should remain.
- 10.5 Cabinet should now consider the outcome of the consultation and other matters as outlined in the report (together with its appendix) in respect of the proposed remodelling of Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre.
- 10.6 Cabinet should then decide on whether or not, and if so how, it wishes to proceed with implementation of the proposed remodelling of Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre giving consideration to the following proposals consulted upon: -

To invest over £500,000 and modernise the facilities provided by changing the Leisure Centre into a substantial dry side leisure facility, concentrating on fitness and indoor sports including:

- A new fitness facility
 - A new indoor 3G sports pitch
 - Closure of the swimming pool and increasing the swimming capacity nearby in other leisure facilities within the Rhondda
 - Develop partnerships with local sporting clubs to create sporting pathways
 - Utilise part of the building for Council office accommodation.
- 10.7 Subject to the decision taken in respect of paragraph 10.6 above it is recommended that the funding implications relating to the remodelling of the Leisure Centre be subject to a future report of the Group Director, Corporate & Frontline Services.

Other Information

Relevant Scrutiny Committee: Public Service Delivery, Communities and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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Background Papers

Cabinet – 28th September 2017

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