

AGENDA ITEM 2**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL****CABINET****27TH AUGUST 2015****LEISURE SERVICES – IMPROVING KEY FACILITIES****REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

For Members to consider a proposal to upgrade and improve fitness facilities at three leisure centres.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- 2.1 Members approve the investment plan for Bronwydd Pool, and agree that the Group Director Community and Children's Services proceed with the works immediately, from within existing resources.
- 2.2 Members approve in principle the investment plans for Rhondda Sports Centre (Ystrad) and Abercynon Leisure Centre, and agree that officers develop firm costings for the projects, and seek funding sources to deliver the projects.
- 2.3 Members request that the Group Director Community and Children's Services develops a Leisure Strategy for the County Borough that sets out a clear framework for within which Members can make decisions about our how we meet our aspirations to increase residents' participation in leisure activities.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The service changes approved by Cabinet in 2014 have now been implemented and are being embedded. These changes, which aim to deliver £1.2 million in savings per annum were based on significant reductions in staff costs achieved by a reduction in operating hours, particularly at satellite centres. These changes were followed by a comprehensive product and pricing review in April 2015, with the introduction of the new Leisure for Life card.

3.2 The Council's Leisure Service is still facing some significant challenges:

- **Providing equitable opportunities across diverse communities** – RCT is home to over 230,000 people, residing in a variety of distinctly different urban and rural communities, each with their own discrete characteristics and challenges. The demography of the county borough is changing and in particular there is a significant growth in the proportion of older people. Young people are also a focus, both in reflecting national priorities and in engaging young people in meaningful activities at an early age. There is therefore a key challenge in providing 'something for everyone' and designing and delivering services that are going to appeal and be accessible for all.
- **Meeting growing customer expectations** – the leisure and fitness opportunities on offer across the county borough are improving through an investment programme but this has not been rolled out over all our 9 centres.
- **Increasing participation rates** – Participation levels in many forms of leisure are still too low. It is estimated that less than one in three adults across the county borough are active enough in physical activity to enjoy the health benefits associated with regular participation. A key challenge is to increase the number engaged and also the frequency of participation. It's not just about getting more people to participate, it's about getting those that are active, doing more. It is also about targeting low participating groups such as older people.
- **Maintaining current levels of delivery in the challenging economic climate** – Many of the challenges identified above involve increasing participation in leisure, creating more targeted opportunities and increasing the impact of leisure. Although this would suggest a need for significant increases in investment, over the past few years there has been significant investment in some of our leisure centres such as Llantrisant, Tonyrefail, the new Sobell facility, Hawthorn Leisure Centre and the planned improvements at Hawthorn Pool. This targeted investment has increased the number of people accessing the Council's leisure facilities, and encouraged more residents to commit to regular exercise.

3.3 Cabinet will be aware that an underpinning premise/duty within the Social Services and Wellbeing Act is that the provision of wellbeing services, which promote good health and independence, will reduce the demand on more specialist and costly services. Whilst there has been much debate about the accuracy of this basic premise there is general agreement about its ambition with a recognition that it cannot be realised without a shift from a position where statutory services are reacting to people in crisis to one where greater emphasis is given to promoting and supporting self determination and improved early intervention and preventative community based service options.

- 3.4 There is clearly a vital role for community based and effective leisure provision to play in working with key partners and stakeholders to improve the health and wellbeing of our local community. Proactively responding to this agenda provides an opportunity for leisure services (within the wider wellbeing context) to position itself as a key part of the solution; helping to tackle unhealthy lifestyles, addressing the social determinants of health, offering cost effective approaches, bringing creative solutions and engaging communities, families and individuals in managing their wellbeing. Such is the recognised impact of the leisure offer that supporting physical activity has been labelled “The best buy in public health” by the National Culture and Leisure forum.
- 3.5 Leisure is a non-statutory duty for local authorities. In other words, the Council does not have a legal duty to provide leisure facilities. But one of the things the Council does have a duty to do is to protect, maintain and improve the health and wellbeing of the population in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Having an effective community based network of leisure centres is one way of helping to achieve this. After the significant service changes that have impacted on the leisure centres and their opening hours there is now a need to undertake a review of leisure services in the context of the Council’s priorities and the Social Services and Wellbeing Act requirements.
- 3.6 There is a need for the Council to develop a concise Leisure Strategy for the County Borough that will help to:
- Define the Council’s leisure role in the context of the needs of our community;
 - Be clear about what the Council is trying to do with its partners and other stakeholders;
 - Review what it is spending on its leisure facilities, including parks, play areas, sports fields, school sports facilities, and sports development;
 - Improve the Council’s ability, and that of its sports and leisure partners, to attract, and secure, external funding;
 - Provide a focus on those things that the Council needs to provide directly and those things that the Council needs to influence. It doesn’t necessarily matter who provides a leisure or sports offer as long as there are enough of them, in the right places;
 - Provide a framework and evidence with which to make decisions.
- 3.7 A Leisure Strategy covering the next 3-5 years will be developed in the coming months and will be presented to the Cabinet later within this financial year.

4. INVESTMENT PROPOSALS – WHICH CENTRES?

- 4.1 The most popular and well utilised area of the Leisure Centres is the fitness and gym facilities which in many centres at peak times are operating at capacity. Over the past 4 years, there has been significant investment in Leisure Centres, with the investments aimed at upgrading and modernising fitness facilities, these include:

- Rhondda Fach and Tonyrefail Leisure Centres in 2011;
- Llantrisant Leisure Centre in 2013;
- The new Sobell Leisure Centre in 2014;
- The new fitness equipment at Hawthorn Leisure Centre; and
- The planned investment in Hawthorn Swimming Pool.

4.2 However, Bronwydd Pool, Abercynon Leisure Centre and Rhondda Sports Centre have not had any such investment in their fitness suites within the past 8-10 years. The fitness facilities within these three leisure centres are the next priorities for investment.

Bronwydd Swimming Pool

4.3 The fitness room is very cramped and the equipment is old and increasingly unreliable. Enlarging the size of the fitness suite and providing a dedicated changing area will enable this centre to develop a gym and swim offer unique within the County Borough.

Rhondda Sports Centre

4.4 The current fitness suite of 60 stations, which was upgraded in 2007, is now urgently in need of a full refurbishment. The suite is often overcrowded and there has been a gradual loss of customers over the past three years. As a core centre, the equipment needs to be upgraded to the current generation of fully interactive kit as at Llantrisant and Sobells. There are also concerns about the poor location of the reception area, which often leads to long queues at peak times and a poor customer experience.

Abercynon Sports Centre

4.5 The quality of the facilities available now falls well below the rest of the Council's Leisure Centres. The fitness suite is too small and badly sited and the changing rooms are unable to cope with both swimming and dryside customers. In addition the reception area and corridors are in poor condition. The proposed redesign and refurbishment will enable the centre to meet the aspirations of the surrounding communities as well as attracting new customers.

5. INVESTMENT PROPOSALS – CENTRE BY CENTRE

5.1 Bronwydd Swimming Pool

- Extension of existing fitness facility into current health suite area.
- Creation of small dry change area to service fitness suite.
- Minor redecoration of public areas.

Estimated Cost

- Internal alterations/building works – £70k.

- Fitness equipment - £90k.

Total= £160k

Issues Arising

- managing customer complaints on loss of health suite.
- managing disruption to pool operation during works.
- need to explore potential to undertake essential ventilation works at the same time, to avoid further future disruption.

5.2 Rhondda Sports Centre

- Re-site fitness floor from 1st Floor mezzanine area to lesser hall, to increase number of fitness stations from 60 to 90.
- Remodelling/refurbishment of reception area.
- Updating of public circulation areas.
- Improve access from health suite to swimming pool.
- Remodelling of existing fitness suite into multi activity room.

Estimated Cost

- Internal alterations/building works - £400-500k.
- Fitness equipment - £300k.

Total = £700-800k

Issues Arising

- managing displacement of clubs using lesser hall.
- managing loss of ability to host large functions - 100 persons+.
- ensuring no closure of fitness suite during period of works.

5.3 Abercynon Leisure Centre

- Moving fitness suite from 1st Floor at the rear of the building into the current bar area.
- Conversion of the lesser hall into fitness/spinning multi activity room.
- Remodelling of reception and refurbishment of public circulation areas.
- Closure of health suite and convert into dry changing rooms.
- Remodelling of current fitness suite into Dojo/multi activity space.

Estimated Cost

- Internal alterations/building works - £270k.
- Fitness equipment - £230k.

Total = £500k

Issues Arising

- managing loss of health suite and bar area – petitions likely.
- managing displacement of lesser hall customers during works.
- ensuring no disruption to swimming/dry side activities during works.

6. FUNDING OF THE PROPOSED INVESTMENTS

- 6.1 The proposed investment in new fitness facilities across the 3 leisure centres will require funding of approximately £1.5m. The Leisure Services Department has already set aside funds over the past year along with some of its maintenance budget and is able to fund the £160,000 investment in Bronwydd Pool within its existing resources as part of the Leisure Centre Refurbishment Programme.
- 6.2 In respect of the £1.3m investment required for Abercynon and Rhondda Sports Centres, the Council's capital budget for 2015/16 is set and therefore additional funds will have to be secured for this investment, or consideration for it to be included on future capital programmes.
- 6.3 Officers will now explore all finance opportunities and will report back to Cabinet as soon as possible if Members agree in principle, for the short term priorities identified above to be progressed while the wider strategy is developed over the coming months.

7. CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 The 3 leisure centres most in need of investment into the fitness offer are Bronwydd Swimming Pool, Abercynon Leisure Centre and Rhondda Sports Centre.
- 7.2 There are sufficient funds within the existing Leisure Services resources to undertake the proposed investment programme at Bronwydd Swimming Pool. This project, if approved, could be started almost immediately.
- 7.3 Whilst the finance for the remaining projects has not yet been identified, both Rhondda Sports Centre and Abercynon Leisure Centre are in urgent need of investment. It is proposed that further development work is undertaken on these projects so that they are ready to implement, if and when finance become available.