

## **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **CABINET**

**28<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2017**

### **RHONDDA FACH LEISURE CENTRE – INVESTMENT & RECONFIGURATION OPPORTUNITIES**

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

**AUTHOR:** David Batten, Head of Leisure, Parks & Countryside. Tel. No. 01443 562202

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To seek Cabinet approval to initiate a consultation on the proposed implementation of a programme of changes at Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre, which would allow the reconfiguration of the centre into a substantial dry side leisure facility and contribute to the Council's medium term financial plan.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 2.1 Initiates a consultation on potential investment and reconfiguration opportunities for Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre.
- 2.2 Subject to agreement to 2.1, undertake a focussed consultation with service users to consider the option of remodelling of Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre to include the closure of the swimming pool, remodelling of the pool hall, balcony and cafe to provide a new fitness facility and conversion of half the rear sports hall into a 3G surface to accommodate 5-a-side football and rugby training facilities. In addition, this would support the aspiration to work with partners and deliver a new Netball facility at the centre.
- 2.3 Notes that as part of the proposed remodelling identified areas of the existing facilities would be converted into office accommodation as part of the Council's Accommodation Strategy.
- 2.3 Approves, subject to agreement of 2.1 above, to officers holding preliminary discussions with the Head Teacher of Ferndale Community School to explore opportunities to make the school pool more

accessible, including potentially utilising the free swim grant to support additional public opening hours.

- 2.4 Subject to 2.1 above, agrees to receive a further report summarising the results of the consultation process and feedback received prior to any decision being made in relation to the remodelling proposal outlined in the report.

### **3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 The swimming pool at Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre is significantly underused in comparison with all other Council pools. As a leisure pool, the design of the pool does not lend itself to school swimming/junior learn to swim.
- 3.2 Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre is the Council's largest Leisure facility. The closure of the swimming pool and the reconfiguration of the fitness and dry side offer onto the ground floor, provides an opportunity for alternative use.
- 3.3 The footprint of Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre provides a flexible opportunity to integrate office accommodation into the premises, capable of accommodating approximately 150 staff whilst allowing the ongoing leisure use.
- 3.4 The recommendations seek authority from Cabinet to initiate a consultation process to obtain the views of key stakeholders and service users on the proposal outlined in the report prior to any decision(s) being made in relation to it.

### **4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 Rhondda Borough Council built Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre in 1995. The centre itself is the largest in RCT, and provides a range of Leisure opportunities including leisure pool, health suite, fitness suite, free weights areas, 2 sports halls (1 x 8 court, 1 x 3 court), and 2 squash courts.
- 4.2 The centre has always struggled to generate the level of custom appropriate to a building of this size. Whilst the cost of the facility has been significantly reduced over the past 10 years, largely by a reduction in staff costs to reflect the level of activity, the building is still under utilised.
- 4.3 In particular, the swimming pool has always under performed in comparison to other Council run pools. Appendix 1 gives details of swimming/aquatic usage at all the Council's public swimming pools for

2016/17. The main issue is that due to the design of the pool there is very little capacity for school swimming and junior learn to swim. The pool also does not lend itself to the traditional lane swimming by adults which is the mainstay of casual usage.

- 4.4 Overall, usage at Rhondda Fach pool during 2016/17 was 26,885, which is significantly lower than all the other pools. In comparison Tonyrefail Leisure Centre pool has usage figures for the same period of 46,679, significantly higher than Rhondda Fach Sport Centre pool despite less public swimming time being available due to the school swimming lessons and the junior learn to swim programme. All other pools have far higher and sustainable usage levels between 65,000 and 110,000 in 2016/17.
- 4.5 The dry side and fitness usage has remained stable over the past few years, and Leisure for Life membership has levelled off, with an average of 477 members over the past 3 years. This represents 68% of the current latent demand for this centre, so there is certainly room for improvement.
- 4.6 Over the past few years, officers have considered a number of options for redevelopment of the centre, with a view to increasing the number of customers. Amongst the options considered have been a climbing centre, trampolining centre and soft play zone. However, each of these options would require considerable capital investment and there is no known demand to support a business case.
- 4.7 In the absence of any known demand for these alternative uses, the Council has two options; to invest in the enhancement of the current leisure offer at the facility through its remodelling or to leave the facility as it is. The latter of these two options would result in the centre continuing to be underutilised.
- 4.8 In looking to plan a sustainable future for the centre officers have concluded that rather than trying out new initiatives, the centre should develop a plan that concentrates on what currently works and could be improved. Essentially this would mean concentrating on fitness and indoor sports and ceasing to deliver wet side activities. Closing the swimming pool and redeveloping the pool hall into a fitness centre would both reduce the cost of the service and enable the development of a unique fitness offer in what could be a great space. The remodelled fitness offer could combine the traditional cardio and resistance equipment and provide an enhanced cross training element to the space. This would make it a unique offer within RCT Leisure, and allow the Council to tap into a new and expanding fitness market, which would appeal to many of the established sports clubs in the area.

- 4.9 To compliment this development, the Council would convert one section of the main hall into the Council's first indoor 3G facility, subject to approval of resources. This would enable the Council to revitalise what was once a strong 5-a-side football offer, as well as providing an indoor training facility for hire by local clubs and associations.
- 4.10 It is also proposed the Council explore the potential to develop partnerships with local organisations to develop the facility as a centre for Netball. Thereby closing a gap in current service provision, further enhancing the Council's sports development offer, increasing opportunities for women and girls to participate in sport and making better use of the available space.
- 4.11 The relocation of the fitness offer into the pool hall would free up the whole of the under-utilised 1<sup>st</sup> floor of the centre, which, when combined with underused areas on the ground floor has the potential to provide opportunities for alternative use as office accommodation. There is a large rough area at the rear of the centre, which could be properly surfaced as a car park to service any enhanced use of the building.
- 4.12 The Council has an ambitious target for office accommodation reduction by 2020; therefore, there is a need to intensify use of existing premises that are being retained.
- 4.13 It is considered that the aquatic programme in Rhondda Fach Sports Centre could easily be assimilated into other leisure facilities that are located nearby, for example, Bronwydd Pool and Ystrad Sports Centre both of which have a comprehensive, well-established programme of activities. There is also a full 25-metre pool at Ferndale Community School, which currently offers a level of public swimming time. The school is about to receive a new 3G synthetic pitch that will see a dramatic improvement in the standard of sports facilities in the area. This is a timely opportunity to enter into preliminary discussions with the Head Teacher to see if there is a way forward to minimise and mitigate the impact of the proposed closure of the pool in Tylorstown by the Council providing enhanced support for the school pool, potentially utilising the free swim grant to support additional public opening hours.

## **5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 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

5.3 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.

5.4 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.

5.5 The EqIA screening undertaken has found that a full EqIA is not required at this time. The screening form can be accessed by contacting the author of the report or the Cabinet Business officer.

## **6. CONSULTATION**

6.1 It is proposed that the Council undertakes a focussed 4-week consultation on the remodelling proposal, which includes the proposal to close the swimming pool at the leisure centre and remodel the fitness offer, the outcomes of which would be reported to Cabinet prior to any final decision(s) being made.

## **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)**

7.1 There would be approximately up to £100k per annum saving from the closure of 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 ongoing 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, 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 will be requested to prepare the necessary plans and quantify the costs of the provision of the additional accommodation and reconfiguration of the building.

## **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 Whilst there is no statutory duty on the Council to consult on the proposal it is 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. Cabinet would then be required to give conscientious consideration to the outcome of the consultation process prior to any decision(s) being made on the proposal.

## **9. LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/SIP/ FUTURE GENERATIONS – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

- 9.1 The remodelling of the 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 (Single Integrated Plan, 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 remodelled 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, Single Integrated Plan, 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 remodelling 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 redesign 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.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

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**Background Papers**

None.

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## APPENDIX 1

### Pool Usage comparison for 2016/17

Site	Casual Swimming	Club use	School use	Junior swim lessons	Welsh Government Free Swims	Total
Llantrisant LC	35158	8716	28362	25536	13301	<b>111073</b>
Sobell LC	34326	10730	12625	21900	15425	<b>95006</b>
Rhondda Sport	27288	20711	15984	12224	11750	<b>87957</b>
Abercynon Sport Centre	10744	14817	12518	20660	7401	<b>66140</b>
Bronwydd Swimming pool	26107	9822	7495	13363	8065	<b>64852</b>
Tonyrefail LC	9624	12752	5705	10574	8024	<b>46679</b>
Rhondda Fach SC	14775	0	439	3712	7959	<b>26885</b>