

Corporate Scrutiny Committee

15th March 2010

Leisure Facilities Review Update:

Background to the Review

1. A review of leisure facilities was initiated because the original Two Unitary Councils business case stated that a saving of £1,000,000 could be generated across Cheshire through delivering leisure in a different way.
2. To progress the review the Cabinet established a Cabinet Sub-Committee to oversee the process. This began meeting in April 2009 and assessed the inherited position in terms of the leisure facilities.
3. The Sub-Committee agreed to the appointment of consultants (PMPGenesis) to review the performance of the inherited facilities and to consider alternative options for the future delivery of the Service. They began their work in June and reported in November.
4. The report concluded that the performance was mixed with some performing strongly and others not so well (to be expected with the merging of three District's Services). Income was deemed to be good compared to market averages, and with the exception of two facilities staff costs were below average with the service described as lean in terms of staff costs to income. The percentage cost recovery was good at about half the facilities. The poorer performing facilities were those that the predecessor authorities had already identified as being in need of replacement or significant refurbishment.
5. The Consultants concluded that the '...circumstances do not suggest that a trust will significantly improve on the in-house position, given the already positive financial performance' Nonetheless their recommendation was that a Trust should be considered the preferred delivery option.
6. The Consultant's report was received during the budget setting process for 2010-2011 and was analysed by the finance team as part of the budget challenge of the Health and Wellbeing Service. Their conclusion was that taking into account the overall financial position of the Authority the establishment of a new trust was not beneficial at this point in time.
7. The Budget Challenge process also prompted a conclusion that the most significant questions in relation to Leisure Services were not, "Through what mechanism are those Services to be delivered?", but rather, "What are Leisure Services for?" and "How much Leisure Service can we afford?"

8. As thinking has developed within the Council about its Transformation Programme a wide range of opportunities and potential connections has been identified for Leisure Services. It became increasingly clear that it was likely to be more fruitful to put effort and energy into exploring those opportunities and potential connections at the present time than into the work required for the setting up of a specific delivery mechanism. Some of those opportunities and connections are identified below.

New Opportunities

9. A Strategy for Leisure Services will need to sit appropriately within the Council's Transformation Programme. For example, it will need to comply with the Project Management disciplines which are being developed for the implementation and monitoring of that Programme. Its ambitions will need to be genuinely transformational and not just about tinkering around the edges of current practice and service. In particular, it will need to show how Leisure Services are to meet the transformational outcomes which were set out in the Administration's Budget Report to Full Council on 25th February 2010. Those outcomes are that transformed services should be more:-
 - **Local** – Services more fully based out in localities and, where appropriate, owned in those localities so that they are more easily accessible and more readily responsive to local people.
 - **Joined Up** – Services more extensively co-located with those of partners, and based out in non-Council settings locally.
 - **Sustainable** – a smaller set of Services, built around the Council's core businesses and affordable with the resources likely to be available.
 - **Focused on outcomes** – a more tightly focused set of Services, directed towards achieving agreed objectives and outcomes.
 - **Preventive** – Services which give much higher priority to prevention.
 - **Innovative** – Services which encourage their staff to use their experience, intelligence and creativity to solve problems and to improve the experience of those who use the Services.
 - **High Quality** – a set of Services committed to enhancing quality.
10. *The Localism Agenda*
The Council is developing a clear Localism Strategy, and the Leisure Services Strategy will need to be in harmony with that. One aspect of the Localism Strategy is around the devolution of responsibilities, resources and services to a local level. Some time ago at least one Parish Council expressed interest in becoming much more closely involved in the management of its local Leisure Centre. The Strategy will need to set targets for achieving greater ownership and engagement on the part of Parish and Town Councils.
11. *Personalisation*

Cheshire East Council recently participated in a research project undertaken by Demos and the Centre for Disability Research at Lancaster University. That research looked at the views of people who use Social Care Services and who are likely to become holders of Personal Budgets. One of the significant findings was that disabled adults are very interested in using their Personal Budgets to purchase Leisure Services for themselves. There is a real market opportunity there, and a Strategy for Leisure Services must show how the service will gear itself up to respond to that.

12. *Building Schools for the Future*

It is not known for how long, and to what extent, the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme will be continued. However, Cheshire East Council has put in an Expression Of Interest. The possibility exists of drawing significant Capital Resources into Cheshire East for the development of Schools. One option is to consider those development possibilities very widely, embracing the provision not just of education services but of a range of other services, including Leisure Services. Even if those possibilities do not come to fruition, the Council does have Leisure Services adjacent to schools within Cheshire East. The Strategy will need to address that issue and clarify whether and how those relationships are to be taken forward, particularly as Foundation Schools are likely to proliferate over time.

13. *Integrated Care Programme*

A great deal of work is going into the Integrated Care Programme, an initiative to explore the development of much greater integration between the Council and the NHS locally. Leisure Services should not stand outside this initiative. Positive work has already been done to explore with the Primary Care Trust the opportunities for further developing the provision of Exercise On Prescription across Cheshire East. There will be opportunities for co-location with NHS Partners to be explored. The contribution of Leisure Services to health improvement will need to feature very significantly in any strategy.

14. *Local Opportunities*

The Strategy should clarify how specific local opportunities are to be tackled. For example, significant interest has been expressed by Wilmslow High School about the possibility of drawing Council Leisure Services onto its campus as part of a larger ambition to promote a "Wilmslow Culture Corridor". Within Crewe there is a positive vision for rationalising existing Leisure Services provision, with a view to creating a state of the art facility which, in addition to its leisure outputs, might contribute positively to local regeneration.

15. *Think Family*

The Cabinet has already commissioned the development of a Think Family Strategy. A Strategy for Leisure Services will need to show how it can contribute towards the Think Family agenda. It is not uncommon for relatively unfit parents to sit watching their children swim energetically in our pools. One

objective must be to reprioritise efforts to engaging whole family participation in exercise to reduce obesity and promote greater health and wellbeing.

16. *Extra Care Housing*

The Council is still pursuing its interest in a Round Five PFI bid for resources to develop additional Extra Care Housing. In the specification for Extra Care Housing provision is made within units for Leisure activities. There are real opportunities for outreach into Extra Care Housing units, in order to stimulate more exercise and activity, with obvious preventive impact.

17. *Asset Strategy*

Considerable work is underway across the Authority at present to develop an Asset Strategy. Cabinet Members recently met with officers to undertake an "Asset Challenge" in order to explore the scope for rationalising the Council's current holdings. One of our ambitions must be to reduce the extent of our commitment to Building Based Services. If we are serious about engagement in local communities we will need to reprioritise Outreach into those communities, away from our traditional building bases. A Strategy for Leisure Services must show how Outreach is to be reprioritised and developed. There are serious issues to be addressed too, in terms of the state of repair of a number of our Centres, with the prospect of high levels of expenditure upon repair and maintenance.

18. *Health Improvement*

The Chief Executive now chairs a Commission on a sub-regional basis, focussing upon Health Improvement. That Commission has identified Alcohol Misuse as one of its priorities. The Cheshire East Local Strategic Partnership has similarly identified Alcohol Misuse as a major area for concern which it will wish to see its Thematic Partnerships addressing as they commission services. The Strategy for transforming Leisure Services should show how they will contribute to addressing what is widely agreed locally to be a major problem. For instance, Leisure Services have a contribution to make in terms of diversionary activity for young people.

19. Officers concluded as a result of this thinking that a recommendation be made to the Cabinet Sub-Committee that it was better to explore these opportunities as part of a leisure strategy at this point in time. This was the decision made by the Sub-Committee and the recommendation was put to the Cabinet at a briefing which was accepted. Consequently the Sub-Committee and Officers will now draft a framework for developing the leisure strategy. This will, of course, need to include a needs assessment to establish the thoughts of local people.

20. This does not mean that the Service is paralysed. Much improvement is already underway and new ways of working have been introduced. These include:

- Introducing the free swimming scheme;
- Reviewing capital investment needs and improving customer experience through swim free capital monies and DDA monies for example at Crewe Pool, Wilmslow and Nantwich;
- Improvements being made at Shavington (interactive equipment installed) and Sandbach (new gym);
- Working with Children and Families to ensure we are fully engaged in the Building Schools for the Future discussions;
- Working with Sport England to complete the Facility Improvement process;
- Working with Performance and Policy to initiate the needs assessment to determine Cheshire East residents requirements in relation to leisure;
- Identifying and progressing opportunities to initiate physical activity with targeted communities in non leisure centre venues (eg SureStart centres);
- Engaged in discussions around local service delivery and devolution and considering with regard to playing pitches and pavilions for example;
- Discussing opportunities with the PCT to introduce exercise on prescription scheme across the Authority;
- Also discussing with the PCT engagement in 'care pathways' to help ensure the Service is part of the preventative activity to keep people in good health;
- Discussing the Service's role in reablement and personalisation with Adult Social Care to identify opportunities for the Service to be commissioned to deliver services for their client groups;
- Engaging consultants to review the management options for our two golf courses;
- Developing a new culture within the Service that is customer focused

21. Positive outcomes from the first 10 months of Cheshire East running leisure facilities include:

- Growth in total participation in sport and recreation of 2% compared to the previous year (1.86 million visits to end of February 2010)
- Swim Free participation has seen the authority ranked 11th in usage out of all councils participating (253). Total free swims to date being 110,380 (16's & under), 50,978 (60 & over) with 33,900 registered on the scheme.
- Participation by older people in sport and recreation has increased by 27% compared to previous year.