

Appendix 1

Cheshire East Council Leisure Facilities **A Potential Vision for the Future**

1. Background

- 1.1 Cheshire East Council inherited a range of main leisure facilities from the former Congleton, Macclesfield and Crewe & Nantwich Borough Council's on the 1st April 2009.
- 1.2 A complete review of the leisure facility service undertaken by external consultants PMP on behalf of a special leisure facilities cabinet sub committee identified that the inherited service was, despite the age and condition of the buildings, an efficient well managed and high quality service with high levels of use and cost recovery in comparison with similar services elsewhere in the country.
- 1.3 The consultants concluded that there would be very little to be gained at this stage from the new authority, particularly financially, from transferring the management of the existing leisure facilities into a trust or other alternative management arrangement.
- 1.4 As a consequence, the Cabinet Sub Committee agreed to recommend to Cabinet that the leisure facilities service should remain managed in house for the immediate future although it did agree that a further market testing exercise should be undertaken to ascertain interest in investment in and management of the golf course at Malkins Bank.
- 1.5 As a result of this decision, and in liaison with Sport England, work is now also being undertaken to review and recommend an appropriate medium term strategy for the future of the remainder of the inherited leisure facilities to ensure that they remain affordable and appropriate to contribute to the strategic health and well being aspirations for local people as set out in the current community and corporate strategies.

2. Current Leisure Facilities

- 2.1 The current main leisure facilities inherited by Cheshire East can be categorised as follows;

Type A – Principal towns and Key Service Centres with community swimming pools

These facilities are highly regarded and extensively used by the local community. The more complex nature of the skills and expertise required to operate and programme such facilities safely and efficiently and to ensure the widest possible community access and support make professional leisure management support essential. From an operational perspective managing a pool alongside the remaining on site leisure facilities is also considered the most efficient approach to such a facility. Stand alone pools without supporting facilities being the most expensive option in terms of management arrangements.

Type B - Joint Use High Schools with dry sports facilities only

In the main, these facilities are only available for community use in the evenings and weekends during term time plus day time during school holiday periods.

Type C – Other stand alone dry sports facilities

These are more specialist facilities, including playing fields. Malkins Bank is already the subject of an external market testing exercise to see whether a specialist golf operator working to a service contract would be a more appropriate management option.

Type D – All other school, voluntary or private sports and leisure facilities with the potential for wider community use but not currently directly financially supported for community leisure activities by the Council

These include all other non “joint use” high schools, primary schools, voluntary sector clubs and facilities and even private sector facilities that have the potential for wider community access if it were supported financially by the Council.

- 2.2 Attendances for the entire Cheshire East leisure facility service were 2,729,284 in 2009-10, the first full year of the new Council. This compares with a total of 2,581,792 attendances in the previous year, the last year of the former authority areas, a 6% increase year on year. The biggest increases in attendances were amongst the young (16 years and under) and the elderly (60 years and over), the key targeted groups.
- 2.3 Of the attendances in 2009-10, the Type A facilities tend to be the busiest as they involve swimming pools with a diverse community swimming programme, including casual public swimming.

3. Proposed Strategic Approach

- 3.1 Type A facilities have a very high community profile, are highly valued by the local community and there are no real alternatives locally which offer the same universal swimming programmes and wider community access. These facilities, involving pools, also require the highest levels of professional leisure management expertise and experience but are the least attractive to others to operate without transferring all or most of the current budgets involved. Given they involve valuable and valued community swimming pools, it is not recommended that these facilities are considered for transfer at this stage although they would need to be reviewed on a site by site basis.
- 3.2 Of the remaining facilities listed within Type B or Type C, it could be possible, given the right safeguards, service level agreements and client monitoring to negotiate the transfer of the operation of some or all of these facilities to other partners, including High School Governors and Town or Parish Councils.
- 3.3 In most cases, any potential transfer of Type B or Type C facilities to another partner may be met by a demand by the potential new partner for a complete transfer of all or most of the current revenue budget available to support these community facilities and programmes. However, if it were possible to negotiate transfers without having to pass over the same revenue commitments, the savings made could be considered for investing in widening the community use of all of the facilities included in the Type D category, many of which will be much closer to local people who currently live to far away from the existing main council facilities.
- 3.4 If it were possible to move towards this level of direct and indirect provision, the Council would remain responsible for the main community swimming pools and appropriately located main centres of excellence. By following this strategy the Council could also then concentrate its limited resources on a “less but better” approach to improving the physical quality and efficiency of these valued community facilities rather than trying to constantly spread declining resources even more thinly to try and maintain a large building stock.

4. Summary

- 4.1 The Council's leisure facilities currently provide an efficient and effective service with attendances and income increasing, however, the building stock is out dated, in some cases not very appropriately located and the revenue expenditure required to maintain the current service in the current limited locations may not be the most effective way of widening out access to health and leisure activities to a wider cross section of the population.
- 4.2 Main community swimming pools and their associate programmes including casual access to swimming for the entire population are very unlikely to be replicated by the private sector, are highly valued by local communities and require a level of professional expertise and experience in terms of programming and operation not generally available in schools or small voluntary sports clubs. Where indoor sports facilities are also provide alongside a swimming pool, the overall facility is far more cost effective and can act as a hub or centre of excellence often offering spectator facilities, supporting a wider network of sports facilities and programmes delivered more locally at high schools, primary schools and at voluntary sports clubs and community centres as appropriate.
- 4.3 If it were possible to transfer via negotiated service level agreements some or all of the facilities currently offering dry sports facilities only in Type B and Type C to high schools, town or parish councils or appropriately resourced larger voluntary sports clubs or groups, and without having to transfer all of the current revenue budgets required to operate these facilities in house, these savings could then be used to pump prime and encourage via new service level agreements other high schools, primary schools and voluntary groups in Type D to consider extending community access to their facilities to help widen the availability of leisure facilities more people in their immediate localities.
- 4.4 The less but better approach and the retention of Type A centres of excellence would also support amalgamation of other leisure and health and well being services such as civic hall or library services to a single building location and, depending upon their interest, could also be extended to co – located partnerships with health services.