

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 17 September 2019

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Sarah Mead (Chair), Margaret Notley (Vice-Chair), Stephen Booth, Adrian Brown, Alex Farquharson, Liz Harrington, John Mead and Claire Parris

Start / End Start Time: 6.00pm
Time: End Time: 7.30pm

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors T Callaghan and L Rossati.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - 3 JULY 2019**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Community Select Committee meeting held on 3 July 2019 are approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 **SPORTS & LEISURE SCRUTINY REVIEW**

The Portfolio Holder (Children, Young People and Leisure) gave introductory remarks on previous sports and leisure reviews, current developments and future plans for sports and leisure in Stevenage. The Portfolio Holder mentioned that the Stevenage Leisure Limited (SLL) contract was the Council's largest contract outside the regeneration projects. Members were informed that substantial savings had been made following the Select Committee's reviews of 2014 and 2017.

Members were informed that the current SLL contract would expire in 2023. It was pointed out that the changing nature of sports and leisure offers would be a factor in the contract review. The Portfolio Holder highlighted the work of the Leisure Innovation Group and Leisure Partnership Board and informed the Committee that he was a member of the Local Government Association's (LGA) Culture, Tourism & Sport Board. The Board had strategic oversight of all the LGA's policy and improvement activity in relation to libraries, the visitor economy, sport and physical activity, the arts, museums, public parks and heritage. The Board also supported Portfolio Holders and officers to lead transformational change of cultural, tourism and sport services and seize development opportunities. It was reported that Sport England's Regional Director, Chris Perks, was impressed by Stevenage's sporting ambitions and innovative ideas including regional partnerships and the sports and

health and well-being linkage. Plans were in place to invite Sport England Regional Director to a future meeting to discuss Stevenage's progress towards its sports objectives and funding options.

The Assistant Director (Communities and Neighbourhoods) informed the Committee that the joint SBC/SLL Innovation Group looked at options for contract development and ideas to increase footfall. The Group had introduced the Pay and Play service at Fairlands Valley Park and Sailing Centre and made changes to theatre and community programming at the Gordon Craig Theatre. It was reported that the Group would soon be carrying out a review of operations at the Stevenage Golf and Conference Centre.

The Committee made the following comments:

- The “Pay and Play” offer at the Council’s sports and leisure facilities was a positive development
- The reduction in fees for the SoChallenging high ropes course had contributed to an increase in the number of participants
- SBC and SLL must focus on key users and target key groups including older people, people with disabilities and medical referrals for sports and exercise
- Some gym users were attracted to private gyms by offers of easy access for long periods of the day (24 hour opening for some providers)
- Opening times for SBC sports and leisure facilities such as gyms should be revised to cater for those who worked unsocial hours
- There was scope to increase revenue through offering a combination of products at venues or a multiple-date/multiple venue package, for example gym and theatre access for one user or family
- The Innovation Group should consider hosting themed events and music groups at the Fairlands Valley Park
- Efforts should be made to debunk the perception that sailing and events at the Fairlands Valley Sailing Centre were elitist
- Improve access to the Sailing Centre reception
- Advertising boards should be placed outside the Cycling Hub and at prominent places around Fairlands Valley Park
- The online booking system for the Sailing Centre should be user-friendly
- Allowing local students to work at the Sailing Centre or around the Fairlands Valley Park in lieu of sailing course fees
- The current provision of toilet facilities at Fairlands Valley Park was inadequate. Some of the public conveniences such as those at the Splash Park currently serve as informal changing rooms as well
- There was a huge demand for car parking spaces particularly at peak times. The Council should consider providing additional parking spaces or reconfiguring the area to increase the number of parking spaces
- Adequate car parking provision was vital particularly to attract visitors from out of Stevenage
- Visitors who use car parks at the Park could be encouraged to make a donation towards upkeep of the car park and possible future expansion
- There were reports of problems created by geese and other bird species. The birds fouled on pavements, buildings and other features in the Park. One way

of minimising this nuisance was to remove food sources. The Council should continue education campaigns against feeding birds with bread but to use appropriate food such as grains which could be purchased from facilities at the Park

- The screening of art films at the Gordon Craig Centre appeared not to be popular which makes this economically unviable
- There had been serviceability issues for the lift at Gordon Craig in the recent past

Members suggested that the sports and leisure offer be linked to the Cultural Strategy. The Committee also highlighted the benefits of providing links to private sports clubs and leisure providers via the SBC website. Members also suggested using the iconic Vincent motorbike to promote the sports, leisure and culture offer of Stevenage. Members mentioned creating a public trail (or using existing cycleways) featuring drawings, paintings and replicas of the Vincent motorbike. If this proposal was adopted, schools could be invited to participate in the design of the trail features.

The Assistant Director informed Members that the Innovation Group had considered the idea of pop-up swimming pools. It was pointed out that finding a suitable location and the capital outlay would be the main challenges for the project. SLL was not in a position to invest in pop-up pools in Stevenage given that there were a few years remaining on the current contract. It was noted that health and safety compliance would be a significant factor on any decision relating to pop-up pools.

The Assistant Director acknowledged that there was need for clarity on the cleaning regime at Fairlands Valley Park. SBC Parks team and SLL had cleaning responsibilities in and around the Park. It was reported that Communities and Neighbourhoods and Stevenage Direct Services officers would soon be meeting to discuss short-term cleaning arrangements at the Fairlands Valley Park. The Portfolio Holder indicated that the cleaning regime and overall management of the Park would form part of the contract review.

The Portfolio Holder acknowledged that the regeneration programme was likely to introduce competitors to the SBC sports offer. It was noted that the SBC offer was competitive because it catered for wider demographics and offered more specialised and personalised training than most of the private gym providers. Members were informed that revenue and attendance figures at Fairlands Valley Park events had increased due to the setting up of market stalls alongside other events in the Park. The Portfolio Holder indicated that the Council was liaising with Sports Stevenage regarding submitting a bid for marketing and website upgrades to Sport England.

With regard to art films, the Portfolio Holder informed the Committee that there would be adverse financial implications if undersubscribed films were shown in large capacity rooms at the Gordon Craig Centre. SLL was looking at screening art films in the small rooms for small audiences. Art films could also be offered as part of the community package. Members were informed that an art club had started screening art films at Roaring Meg. The attendance at the art club film shows was reasonable. The Portfolio Holder announced that the Council recently started a pilot for a “meanwhile use” arrangement in the town centre. As part of this arrangement, SBC

invited applications from artists and groups for short-term use of temporarily empty buildings such as shops until they can be brought back into commercial use. This arrangement eliminated the potential problem of empty shops and it helped to keep the area vibrant. This arrangement also gave publicity to the artists. If successful, the project would be rolled out to other parts of the town.

The Stevenage Regional Contract Manager for SLL also confirmed that SBC's sports offer would be affected by the introduction of new sports providers. The impact of the new players would be assessed once the new providers were operational. The SBC offer had advantages of loyal clientele, highly-regarded trainers and well-being specialists.

The Stevenage Regional Contract Manager for SLL announced that a pilot to host afternoon tea parties at the Golf Centre had been a success. Members suggested that the events be promoted to wider sections of the town as well as with staff. The Committee also suggested that gift cards for tea parties be included in the Golf Centre offer. The Manager acknowledged the problems with the lift at the Gordon Craig Theatre. The lift was now serviceable following repair by a contractor that had been recommended by the Council.

The Committee thanked officers for the reports and for facilitating site visits. Members noted that availability for site visits had been affected by other commitments but officers reiterated that further visits would be arranged if required. The Innovation Group should consider reviewing the marketing strategy, improving online accessibility and addressing the increasing demand for use of the swimming pool.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the Scrutiny Officer schedules interviews as outlined in the scoping document
2. That Members submit review research documents to the Scrutiny Officer
3. That Members provided information relating to sports and leisure surveys carried out at resident meetings
4. That the capacity of the Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre Theatre be changed from 750 to 500 (site visit notes – page 9 of the agenda pack)
5. That breakfast service be referenced as one of the services provided by the Stevenage Golf & Conference Centre

4 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

5 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That, under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraphs 1 to 7 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by SI 2006 No. 88
2. That, having considered the reasons for the following items being in Part II, it be determined that maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure

6 **PART II - SPORTS & LEISURE SCRUTINY REVIEW**

The Committee received a presentation on Stevenage Leisure Limited (SLL). The Committee also received customer demographic information (age, post code and ward usage breakdown) and customer behaviour analysis.

It was **RESOLVED** that the update be noted.

7 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR