

Meeting COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE

Portfolio Area CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND LEISURE

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SPORTS & LEISURE SCRUTINY REVIEW

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To consider the draft report and recommendations of the Community Select Committee Scrutiny review into Sports & Leisure, which the Committee will consider and make any final changes to the report and recommendations and then circulate to the Executive Portfolio Holder for a response.

2 BACKGROUND & SCRUTINY ISSUE IDENTIFIED

2.1 The issue of scrutinising Sports & Leisure was agreed by the Select Committee as a scrutiny review item when it met on 1 April 2019 to agree the Committee’s work programme for 2019/20.

2.1.1 Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the reviews findings and recommendations

2.1.2 The report, findings and process of the review were conducted prior to the Covid-19 Pandemic, as such the Chair and Assistant Director has suggested that the report should still go forward for consideration by the Committee but prior to sign off and circulation to the Executive Portfolio holder for Children, Young People and Leisure, the impact of Covid-19 should be reflected in the report and accordingly the recommendations have been adjusted to reflect this.

2.2 Scope and Focus of the review

2.2.1 The Committee met on 4 June 2019 and agreed a scope for the review of the Sports & Leisure, which it agreed should focus on making sports and leisure opportunities accessible to all of the community, in particular:

- To check if the Council's website can be updated to include links to public and private providers of sports and leisure facilities and services
- To get a better understanding of booking arrangements for events at the Gordon Craig Theatre
- To determine the split of Stevenage versus non-Stevenage clientele at Stevenage sports and leisure facilities and events
- To assess the affordability of Stevenage sports and leisure facilities and events
- To make a comparison of Stevenage sports and leisure against offers in other similar-sized local authorities
- To ensure that event organisers use a diverse range of publicity methods including the traditional leaflets and posters and also social media platforms

2.2.3 The scope of the review also identified the following issues:

How do people know about what sports and leisure opportunities there are across the town, including public and private sector provision and in sports clubs and societies?

- What take up is there in each sector?
- What are the barriers to people getting involved, including access, and cost/affordability?
- What is the number of local people that use these services and for service users outside of the town where do they come from?
- What can be done to increase local take up?
- What access is there for people from the following characteristic groups:- young, old, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, disability?

2.2.4 Aims:

- To make sure that the Council's web site directs local residents to all of the relevant opportunities and offers available
- To ensure that where possible local residents have good access to local opportunities for sports, leisure, clubs & societies, whether this is provided by the local authority, voluntary or private sector
- That the review establishes ways/recommendations to make the cultural, leisure and sporting opportunities accessible to all

2.3 Data requested by Members:

2.3.1 Members requested attendance figures for events at the Gordon Craig Theatre. Members were informed that membership details from sports and leisure providers and registers for events such as parkrun were unlikely to be able to be used as a source as had been requested as this information could be subject to data protection limitations. Members also requested background

documents on the budgets for SBC sports and leisure facilities and the subsidy per visit.

2.4 Process of the review

2.4.1 The Committee met formally on 5 occasions in 2019/20 to undertake the review. The Committee met as follows: On 4 June to agree the scope. On 3 July to receive an officer presentation on sports and leisure provision in Stevenage and on 17 September to receive an update on a series of site visits and to interview the Executive Portfolio Holders for Children Young People & Leisure and to receive information on funding for SLL, 4 November, to interview Herts Sports Partnership and to receive input from Members and finally on 9 January 2019 to interview Stevenage Sporting Futures and sign off and agree the draft recommendations of the review.

2.4.2 The Committee interviewed the following people:

- Cllr Richard Henry, Executive Portfolio Holder for Executive Portfolio Holder(s) for Children, Young People and Leisure
- Rob Gregory, Assistant Director Communities & Neighbourhoods
- Geoff Caine, Culture Wellbeing & Leisure Services Manager
- Ryan Ansell, Sports & Leisure Development Officer
- External witness - John O'Callaghan (Herts Sports Partnership Board Member) – provide insight on the County context
- External witness – Louise Gallagher-Smith (Stevenage Sporting Futures)
- External witness – Allan Prescott – Stevenage Leisure Limited (SLL)
- External witness – Chair of Youth Council

2.4.3 The following desktop research was undertaken by Members:

- Affordability and barriers – Cllrs C Parris and L Rossati
- Access – Cllrs T Callaghan and S Mead
- Local take up – Cllr S Mead
- Websites and online sports and leisure advertisements – Cllr J Mead
- Older Persons – Cllr M Notley

3 REVIEW FINDINGS

3.1 Conclusions of the Community Select Committee

3.1.1 Based on the input provided to and carried out by Members conducting the review and by Officers supporting the review the Committee have made the following conclusions.

Key findings of the review:

3.2 Surveys - Evidence from various surveys with local people. Members were keen to find out what local people thought about the facilities so informal

surveys were undertaken with residents via their surgeries and residents groups as well as an officer survey of some older peoples groups including Irish Network, Renaissance Group at Chells Manor Community Centre, Age Concern and with the Youth Council. This provided Members with useful insight into what was popular, where the gaps are and what the barriers are for people.

3.3 Site visits - During the summer in 2019 there were a series of officer and Member site visits to SLL run facilities including Fairlands Valley Park Sailing Centre, Ropes Course & Cycling Hub, Aqua Park, Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre including Gordon Craig Theatre, Stevenage Swimming Pool and the Stevenage Golf & Conference Centre, evidence from these visits formed a significant evidence base and influenced the reviews recommendations –

3.3.1 Site visit to Fairlands Valley Park Sailing Centre Ropes Course, Cycling Centre & Aqua Park. –Water based activities are popular especially the pedalos which were introduced in 2018, the more formal sailing options are used by groups and schools. The Penguin Falls facility is popular with families. The Ropes Course and climbing wall are well used especially for birthday parties and available for families and individuals to hire as well as group bookings, the price for a 45 minute session has been reduced to £15 for adults and £10 for Children. The free to use Aqua Park is very popular with families, light refreshments are available at the facility but there is a need for more toilets and changing facilities as well as issues with parking. The Cycling Centre offers hire and bike servicing facilities but needs better advertising and signing to make people aware that it's there. The food offer is limited and could do with expanding to include more variety and healthy options. In Summary the visit demonstrated that the excellent park and facilities offer a wide range of paid for and free activities in a vital open space. Overall the facilities are very well run but need support in terms of marketing and some improvements that would make the offer even more popular.

3.3.2 Site visit to Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre (SALC) & Swimming Centre – The SALC offers a range of sport and leisure facilities. There is a well-equipped gym which is in frequent use and offers an anti-gravity treadmill for disabled users. The centre also offers a range of fitness classes including spinning cycling as well as varied sports facilities such as indoor football, badminton, squash and bowls. The 501 seater theatre is well used and offers comfortable and generous seating as well as a spacious area for production companies that use the facility. The Swimming Centre is working at capacity with demand outstripping the supply of available swimming slots. What is on offer is at affordable rates and provides for a mix of users from casual swimmers to School use. There are also other facilities like the wellness spa, Kinesis studio and NHS referrals which the centre offers.

3.3.3 Site visit to Golf and Conference Centre – There has been considerable investment on the golf course and with the conference centre. The golf club now has circa 350 members and growing, with annual membership £750 a

year for 7 day a week or £550 for 5 day a week annual membership, or just £30 for a single round of golf, this is a lot cheaper than any comparable private club in the area. The Conference Centre offers a range of rooms for hire and the main conference room is now used for weddings and other social functions at reasonable rates in a pleasant location. The number of female and junior golf members is small but the centre is working on expanding these numbers.

- 3.4 Disabled access – The SALC and Swimming Centre both use the accessible.co.uk criteria which describe the type of facilities that are available, but these are not easy for users to find on the SALC & Swimming Centre websites. Members have suggested that all community facilities/Council owned facilities in Stevenage should be linked to the www.accessable.co.uk website, which allowed disabled users to ascertain whether or not a facility was able to cater for their needs. There is a variety of disabled access equipment at all of the facilities including a rare anti-gravity treadmill that people with lower limb impaired function can use.
- 3.5 Leisure Centre Cost – Members found through their research of the facilities and comparison with other authorities that the facilities are affordable, however it would be good to provide offers targeted at low waged people on Universal Credit so they can access classes as even the affordable prices are out of reach for those on benefits.
- 3.6 Gordon Craig Theatre customer base – Previously Members had expressed concern that the theatre was not being used predominantly by local residents. However, based on the data that SLL collect from customers it is clearly mostly local patrons with 30% coming from SG1 & SG2 post codes. The GC Theatre is also popular with visitors from surrounding towns because of the rail and road links. A large number of patrons are classified as unknown but are also likely to include local people.
- 3.7 Community Centres – accessible to all on price with varying costs but timing is an issue, as many classes are during the working day so not accessible to all. There is a challenge for Community Centres as they need to have their building and various rooms available to hire (often in the evening) to support their income due to the lack of core grant support but this means that they have limited time slots available for all of the community, they are therefore catering for older people and parent and toddler groups but not many other groups.
- 3.8 SBC & SLL Joint Innovation Group – Members were informed 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 and that the Group would soon be carrying out a review of operations at the Stevenage Golf and Conference Centre.
- 3.9 Sport England – The review was encouraged by the interview with the Executive Portfolio Holder for (Children, Young People and Leisure) during

this session it was reported that Sport England's Regional Director 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 meeting to discuss Stevenage's progress towards its sports objectives and funding options.

3.10 Limited number of 3G football pitches

During interviews with officers and confirmed with other external witnesses it became clear that there is a limited number of 3G astro-turf pitches in Stevenage. The 3G pitch at the Valley was a good facility but had limited community use, so there is a need for an expansion of local facilities so sites at Chells Pavilion and at Ridlins Playing Fields are being considered as possible additional sites, which could have a greater use by the community.

3.11 Youth Council – safe areas & activities in parks for young people to access

The Youth Council provided input to the review based on the type of things that young people would like to see provided that could be free to use, this included equipment and areas created in parks for older children and youths to meet at and also activities in parks possibly to include local bands as well as youth clubs based in community centres.

3.12 Expansion of basketball equipment

3.12.1 Members were keen to promote the use and provision of Basketball hoops around the towns parks and open spaces as it was seen that this appeals to younger people and children alike. It is an informal sport that can be played by a small number of people or even by an individual and once the infrastructure is provided the only equipment that is required is a basketball that can be purchased relatively cheaply. Following investigation by officers it is has been reported that there are currently 22 basketball hoops in various parks around the town. Some of these need repairing or replacing the nets.

3.12.2 The height and size of the basketball hoops that are already provided vary a lot so would appeal to various ages from younger children to older teenagers up to adult size. To provide a new infrastructure varies a lot in price ranging from the expensive which would be the case if it's not very accessible to install to provide hard core and concrete/tarmac hard standing, line painting, post, back board and hoop which would potentially cost thousands to provide. However, installing a post and hoop onto a pre-existing hard standing area would cost circa £500-£800 for the equipment and then an installation charge (either external contractor or our workforce) on top so approx. £1000 - £1500. So at the lower end some Councillors could use some of their LCB funds to provide a new hoop and area on an existing hardstanding and at the more expensive end bids could be sought/recommended to the Executive to provide.

3.13 King George V Playing Fields Tennis Courts

3.13.1 Members have recommended that the tennis courts at King George V playing fields should either be repaired and made good or an alternative use can be developed such as a multi-use games area (MUGA).

3.14 Clarity over the future funding of the replacement athletics running track at Ridlins and associated buildings

3.14.1 During interviews with witnesses it became clear that the running track at Ridlins was at the end of its useable life and there needed to be a strategy for its future replacement, this would also need to include key maintenance of the buildings. Cleaning and patching of the track had taken place over the past 5 years, the facility is in need of complete refurbishment, the cost of which is estimated in the region of £1Million, of which a new running track was the most pressing and would cost circa £250,000. The facility is expensive to maintain, as income is minimal and annual expenditure is in the region of £200,000. It should be noted that the athletics club serves both Stevenage and North Herts residents so North Herts District Council should be approached about any future funding solution.

3.15 Equalities & Diversity

3.15.1 Equalities and Diversity issues are covered in relation to disabled access at 3.4 and are also addressed via surveys with older peoples groups and the youth council.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

| Original Recommendations | Officer Assessment of impact of Covid-19 on ability to deliver the recommendation |
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| <u>Accessibility to sports & leisure opportunities linked to health benefits</u> | |
| 4.1 Opportunities be offered on a subsidised basis – (i) Subsidised leisure activities could be linked to the Stevenage Primary Care Network Social Prescribing Co-ordinators where residents could apply for a subsidy to take advantage of one of the services (for example sailing or the climbing wall) and (ii) to consider the introduction of “cheap months” for certain activities to encourage those on limited means to take up leisure activities. | On hold due to Covid-19 and SLL’s critical financial position. The Sailing Centre is closed due to government restrictions and at this stage it is unclear when the facilities will re-open. |
| 4.2 Opportunities be offered on a subsidised basis – (i) Subsidised leisure activities could be linked to the Stevenage Primary Care Network Social Prescribing Co-ordinators where residents could apply for a subsidy to take advantage of one of the services (for example sailing or the climbing wall) and (ii) to consider the | On hold due to Covid-19 and SLL’s critical financial position, plus the Sailing Centre is closed due to government restrictions and at this stage we do not know when it will be able to re-open. |

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| <p>introduction of “cheap months” for certain activities to encourage those on limited means to take up leisure activities.</p> | |
| <p>4.3 The Healthy hub is recognised as an innovative strategy. There is an issue facing accessibility however. Patients referred to the hub for weight loss are required to pay for the service. As there is a strong connection between poor diet and poverty, the area needs to be considered. Members are aware of cases where residents have been referred to the hub for weight loss services but after attending an initial appointment and being made aware of the cost, have not returned. Officers in discussion with the Executive Portfolio Holder to consider the possibility of funding via a grant system (perhaps sponsored by local businesses – or social prescribing from public health funds).</p> | <p>Due to the current restrictions in place and the vulnerability of customers the Healthy Hub is closed at present. When it re-opens officers will discuss with SLL and the Portfolio Holder opportunities to tackle the affordability of support for those whose financial position presents a barrier.</p> |
| <p>4.4 The parking provision for the Aqua Park needs to be reviewed and improved, owing to high demand in the summer months.</p> | <p>Due to the restrictions in place this year the Aqua Park has been closed throughout the season. Officers will discuss with SDS, the Asset team and planners the opportunity to improve parking.</p> |
| <p>4.5 Aqua Park toilet/changing room provision needs to be improved.</p> | <p>The existing building is designed within a small footprint to house the plant room, kiosk and toilets, the development of new toilets will increase the footprint of the building significantly and will be at a high capital cost. However officers will discuss how additional toilet facilities can be integrated into the building and report back to the committee.</p> |
| <p>4.6 Stevenage Golf Centre - That the offer to attract local women to play golf at Stevenage Golf Centre be looked at, including better changing facilities. In addition, offers to attract more young people also be considered.</p> | <p>Since the visit by the committee the washroom facilities within the centre have benefited from a major refurbishment. During the Covid-19 crisis golf has seen an upsurge in usage. Officers will work with SLL to improve the opportunities for women, girls and young people to make use of the golf facilities.</p> |
| <p>4.7 Opportunities for apprenticeships for young people could be extended further – (i) for Apprenticeships, the leisure and sports offer should be highlighted at</p> | <p>SLL do currently employ a number of apprentices. Workforce planning is however being impacted by the current SLL financial position due to Covid-19.</p> |

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| <p>Schools and Colleges as an employment route for young people, and (ii) Saturday positions for young people for example at the sailing centre or swimming pool should be explored.</p> <p><u>Marketing opportunities and use of the website</u></p> | |
| <p>4.8 Officers should consider offering a two for one offer to encourage multiple uses of SLL sites</p> | <p>On hold due to Covid-19, limited availability of facilities and services restricts numbers in leisure buildings and SLL's critical financial position.</p> |
| <p>4.9 Links should be provided from the Council's website to local sporting clubs and activities in particular free events in order to promote various forms of physical activity and mental wellbeing.</p> | <p>The new SBC website has now been launched. This will provide the opportunity to create links to external organisations and services available to public. Social media activity can further be enhanced to promote health and wellbeing activity.</p> |
| <p>4.10 The sailing centre operators to liaise with the SBC communications team regarding adding the cost of boat hire and courses on the SBC web site as well as video links with publicity material to promote the range of activities at the Sailing Centre to maximise the use of the facility. In addition the Council should launch a campaign to raise the profile of activities at the Sailing Centre and to address the misconception that sailing was an elitist activity.</p> | <p>On hold until Sailing Centre can re-open, however this presents an opportunity to re-think the range and availability of activities at the sailing centre and new ways of marketing and promoting these.</p> |
| <p>4.11 Marketing of the conference centre at the golf course to support maximising the use of the Golf Course facilities amongst staff on the intranet should be pursued to make staff aware of the function rooms for social occasions which could enhance the income that could be reinvested into the facilities and offer.</p> | <p>This is on hold as the conferencing and events service is closed at Stevenage Golf & Conference Centre due to Government restrictions.</p> |
| <p>4.12 Advertising boards should be erected in prominent places around the Fairlands Valley Park and Sailing Centre.</p> | <p>Officers will work with colleagues in SDS and SLL to look at opportunities to improve or update signage in key areas of the park.</p> |
| <p>4.13 The cycle hub needs to provide clearer</p> | <p>The Cycle Hub is closed and we are hoping to re-</p> |

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| <p>advertising of its services on the exterior of the building along with opening times.</p> | <p>launch and re-open soon, subject to Government restrictions. This will provide an opportunity to create better signage and publicity as recommended.</p> |
| <p>4.14 Consideration be given to the establishment of a standardised corporate brand for Sport Stevenage/Active Stevenage/Healthy Stevenage.</p> | <p>Officers will discuss this with the Communications Manager as part of the corporate review of council brands that is currently being undertaken.</p> |
| <p>4.15 A process be developed to ensure that Community Development Officers and Community Wardens be regularly briefed on the sporting/leisure activities on offer in their respective neighbourhood areas.</p> | <p>An integral part of the newly launched Cooperative Neighbourhoods model includes key leisure and wellness staff from Communities and Neighbourhoods within each one of the six teams. Community health, wellbeing leisure and sports activities will be a key part of developing this programme within the communities.</p> |
| <p>4.16 Consideration be given, possibly through the Stevenage Sports Partnership or Sporting Futures, to encouraging local schools to display advertising material relating to sports and leisure activities.</p> | <p>Officers will discuss opportunities with the local schools sports partnerships to the best methods of promoting leisure facilities and services through the schools in Stevenage.</p> |
| <p><u>Infrastructure improvements</u></p> | |
| <p>4.17 At Fairlands Valley Park the high ropes area could be developed by providing a seating area under a canopy to attract family events such as children's birthday parties with refreshments that could be included in the package in conjunction with the cafe.</p> | <p>Due to the current crisis the climbing facilities at the Sailing Centre are currently closed. When the facility re-opens officers will discuss with SLL improved opportunities for enhancing the packages and uses of the climbing facilities.</p> |
| <p>4.18 There is a shortage of accessible 3G football pitches in Stevenage. Two potential sites at Chells Pavilion and at Ridlins Playing Fields were being considered as additional sites, the review supports the case for these sites to provide more community use of informal sports use including small sided football.</p> | <p>The newly publish agreed Local Football Facility Plan provides a comprehensive audit of existing football facilities and a targeted plan for extending the portfolio of football facilities in Stevenage, the plan incorporates 3G pitches, small sided pitches, indoor facilities, pavilions and changing rooms.</p> |
| <p>4.19 Following surveys and input from the Youth Council, young people have asked for more equipment/areas in parks for</p> | <p>SLL and SBC worked together to provide a range of activities in Fairlands Valley Park in 2018 and</p> |

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| <p>older children, as well as more activities in parks including local bands and youth clubs to go to with friends.</p> | <p>2019. The programme was due to be expanding in 2020 and has therefore had to be cancelled, although SBC did provide pop up play and fitness classes in our parks throughout the summer holidays. Officers will work on developing this and other programmes for 2021.</p> |
| <p>4.20 Basketball was promoted as an activity that is popular with young people and was accessible to many with only the need for a basketball once the infrastructure was in place. Officer to consider further sites in parks to provide these facilities and as well as funding via planning gain sources and parks maintenance, Members could be encouraged to work together using their LCBs funds for additional informal basketball hoops and hard standings around Stevenage.</p> | <p>During July/August 2020 SBC signed up for 'project swish'. This project from Basketball England gave us free nets to add to our current hoops in Stevenage Parks. We installed nets in 8 parks across Stevenage and have requested more nets from Basketball England.</p> <p>We are also having initial discussions with Basketball England, Herts Basketball association and SBC parks for basketball development. Unused tennis courts at KGV highlighted as a potential spot for development.</p> |
| <p>4.21 If funding can be sourced, officers look at improving the tennis courts at King George V Playing Fields which are in a state of disrepair, subject to funding, consideration be given to the possibility of adapting the tennis courts at King George V Playing Fields into use for other physical activities should their continued use for tennis prove unviable.</p> | <p>Due to Covid-19, funding streams for such improvements from bodies like Sport England have been frozen. If further capital programmes are announced this will be considered.</p> |
| <p>4.22 Clarity be provided regarding the future viability of Ridlins Athletics Track and associated facilities, linked into the forthcoming locality reviews.</p> | <p>The future opportunities for Ridlins Athletic Stadium will be considered through the locality review process.</p> |
| <p><u>Liaison between SBC and SLL</u></p> | |
| <p>4.23 Cleaning and litter picking at Fairlands Valley Park including the lakes and the aqua splash park needs to improve as, at the time of the Member site visit, this was being cited as a problem "grey area" between SLL and SBC Environmental Services regarding who should do what and how often at peak times in the summer.</p> | <p>Prior to the re-opening of the Sailing Centre and the Aqua Park officers will discuss with SDS and SLL methods of improved litter picking at the park</p> |

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| <p>4.24 Officers discuss with the current Café operator at Fairlands Valley Park the possible introduction of some healthy food options on the menu to provide choice for those who would like to purchase a healthy option and should also include alternative dietary requirements (such as vegetarian and vegan options).</p> | <p>The Café is currently closed due to the Covid-19 crisis, a limited kiosk and patio service is available. SBC will however discuss with SLL and its franchised Café operator the potential for extending the healthy options menu at the site.</p> |
| <p>4.25 That SLL enhance their current booking systems to better capture demographics data to see where customers are coming from and how and where any future public health campaigns could target resources. Implications</p> | <p>We will work closely with SLL to try to improve data capture at the leisure facilities and use the data to target specific areas and demographics within the town.</p> |

Financial Implications

- 5.1 A number of the recommendations made in the report could have a financial implication in the Executive agree to those recommendations.

Legal Implications

- 5.2 There are no direct legal implications to the report.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 5.3 The Equalities and Diversity implications for the review are contained at paragraph 3.15.1 in the report.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Surveys completed

APPENDICES

- A Community Select Committee Sports & Leisure Scrutiny Review Scoping document.