

Report of the Strategic Director of Place to the meeting of Executive to be held on 5th March 2024

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Subject:

Sports Facilities Service Review

Summary statement:

The service review of Sports Facilities forms part of the Council's budget proposals for 2024/5. This report explains the progress in considering the budget savings and options for the future of the Sports Facility Service. We have commenced the strategic review and started to collate and examine the data and needs analysis information. This report highlights some of the early findings and indicates further actions which will be required as the review continues.

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY:

An initial Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been carried out for this proposed Review. At this stage the assessment is a Low/Medium impact on people with protected characteristics, as the outcome of the main review is unknown. However, it is recognised that, as specific proposals are developed, a number of communities that share a protected characteristic could be affected. It is expected that public, staff and union consultation will be carried out on changes proposed as an outcome of the review and consultation, and the EIA will be kept updated as the Review progresses. Consultees will be encouraged to comment on the proposals and any impacts they believe might be felt by particular groups of people (in line with the Public Sector Equality Duty). Where possible arrangements will be made to reduce any negative impacts of the proposals; these mitigations will be set out in the EIA.

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Overview & Scrutiny Area:

Environment and Regeneration

1. SUMMARY

The service review of Sports Facilities forms part of the Council's budget proposals for 2024/5. This report explains the progress in considering the budget savings and options for the future of the Sports Facility Service. We have commenced the strategic review and started to collate and examine the data and needs analysis information. This report highlights some of the early findings and indicates further actions which will be required as the review continues.

2. BACKGROUND – THE PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW

As has been reported many times, the challenges facing local government are unprecedented. All representative bodies such as the LGA, CCN, SIGOMA et al report significant gaps in the funding available if councils' are to continue to meet their statutory duties, much less the aspirations of their residents who tend to recognise and value non-statutory services such as those that our sports and leisure facilities currently provide.

It would be an unrealistic expectation that sufficient money will be made available for local government in general and for Bradford to continue to deliver the current level of service provision. The Council has already exhausted its reserves meaning that it is unable to balance the budget for next year without Exceptional Financial Support from Government.

The Council's 2024-25 budget will be the most difficult that the Council has experienced to date and even harder than those in the earliest stages of austerity because there is a structural budget gap of c£120m in 2023-24. It is now imperative for the Council to develop and realise a plan to attain financial sustainability. The Council's emergency response work to achieve future financial stability requires significant transformation to all aspects of the Council's activities.

Effectively the Council will require re-shaping to become affordable within the resources that are available. Therefore, there will be a reduction in the level of services provided and the number of staff employed by the Council.

As a result, whilst the Council is fully aware of the savings that have already been made to Sports Facilities previously, and would not wish to reduce services further, the financial situation outlined above means that further reductions are – regrettably – necessary and required. This will require the Council to be constantly reviewing its services and operations to provide anticipated revenue savings over the next five years.

The proposed approach to conducting the review was agreed at the 5 February meeting of the Council's Executive.

The strategic review of Sports Facilities will deliver savings of £60K in 2024/25 and further savings £1,250,000 in 2025/6.

Notwithstanding the budget pressures we recognize the importance of Sport and Physical Activity. Sport is a powerful force for good, it brings people together,

connects communities, instils important values, and inspires people. Sport is important across the life course, the social connections it creates help children to develop social skills and help maintain vital social networks in later life.

Within the available resources we want to ensure a continued sport offer that is inclusive and inspiring. One that engages people across their life, offers a range of levels from newcomers to seasoned professionals and welcomes people back into sport after transitions such as having a baby, retirement, or periods of ill health.

Within the available resources we want to challenge the inequalities that prevent or discourage people from leading active lives and enjoying the benefits of being active as participants, volunteers, coaches, working with or cheering from the touchline.

Our aim is for sustainable physical activity provision and participation in the district that's truly inclusive and properly reflective of our diverse communities.

An important point to reinforce is that the Sports Facilities service is non-statutory, although the Council' swimming pools do deliver swimming lessons as a national curriculum activity to approximately 142 Bradford Schools. Separately, there are a number of Bradford schools who make their own arrangements with other providers.

Table 1 - shows how many schools use each of the swimming pools currently operated by the Council:

Pool	Number of Schools having swimming lessons
Bowling	16
Eccleshill	26
Ilkley	12
Keighley	24
Sedbergh	32
Shipley	34

Sport England uses the Facility Planning Model as one of its principal tools in helping to assess the strategic need for certain community sports facilities, and it has been used in the assessment of Lottery funding bids for community facilities, and as a principal planning tool to assist local authorities in planning for the provision of community sports facilities.

In its simplest form, the model seeks to assess whether the capacity of existing facilities for a particular sport is capable of meeting local demand for that sport, taking into account how far people are prepared to travel to such a facility.

In order to do this, the model compares the number of facilities (supply) within an area, against the demand for that facility (demand) that the local population will produce.

Modelling suggests that each swimming pool serves a catchment population of around 70,000 people.

The supply of water space in Bradford is comparatively low when viewed against the national, study area and neighbouring authority averages. Previous studies have shown, Bradford has the lowest level of provision of all the comparable councils in West Yorkshire.

From an operating-model perspective, CBMDC continues to deliver the operational management and directly provide sports facilities whereas a number of other Councils have moved to different models of provision and operational management e.g. Joint Venture, Co-location, Cooperatives, Hybrid Trust, Community managed, etc.

Whilst the Council is the main provider of public swimming facilities in the Bradford district, it is not the only provider. There are a number of providers of public access sports halls across the district and there is a commercially competitive market for gym fitness provision in the District.

Regionally, other Councils are taking similar steps and looking to reduce the provision of sport and leisure due to financial pressures.

Jane Nickerson, Swim England's chief executive, recently is reported to have said that "a Freedom of Information requests to every council in the UK found closures were widespread across the nation". Swim England said more than 1,500 pools nationwide are now more than 40 years old and becoming unsustainable to run because of soaring costs. A recent report Securing the Future of public sport and leisure services reported that 'as many as one in four of councils are considering closing some leisure facilities in the next financial year.'

Two meetings of the Review Board and several meetings of the officer working group have now taken place.

The Review Board was provided with an overview of the Sports Facilities, services provided, budget profiles and further information gathered to date.

The board has now identified actions required to gain a greater understanding of the service and additional information while solutions and proposals are being proposed.

The working group are currently preparing an action plan and progressing the information gathering and review in order to develop options for the future of the service based on the current position.

3. PROPOSED APPROACH TO REVIEW

The driver for the Review is to find solutions for a financially sustainable model of service provision with savings of £60K in 2024/25 and £1,250,000 in 2025/26.

The outcome of the Review will be to determine the best approach and scale of Sports Facilities that the Council can continue to provide across the District within the available budget.

The review may require a rationalization of facilities, alternative provision, and different operational delivery models. It is highly likely that a solution for the savings required will need to use some or all of the example options listed.

The Council wishes to maintain flexibility in terms of practical solutions that will be considered to meet the budget pressures. This could include considering a variety of mechanisms such as the Council continuing as the operator, friends of groups providing fund raising activity, grant applications, partnership models of facility provision, volunteer support, etc.

We will keep all options open and alternative delivery models could be considered for community management and entrepreneurial activity or co-location opportunities to raise additional revenue. The Council will continue to be pragmatic and collaborative with groups that come forward showing an interest throughout the review and consultation period in the coming months. However, it must be understood that time pressures surrounding the exploration of alternative options exist. Discussions with interested parties must be incisive, robust and timely.

Energy costs and utilities form a high proportion of sports facility costs. From 2019/20 to 2022/23 energy costs rose by 275% and impacted significantly on the financial position of the Council.

Although the energy market is fluid, and costs are now falling the importance of energy saving measures cannot be underestimated. The council has invested in energy saving technology across sports facilities and will continue to explore all available options including invest to save schemes and applying for grant funding such as the Government's Swimming Pool Support Fund. Due to modern methods of construction, there is now also a major difference occurring between energy performance of new-build swimming pools versus older ones. This trend is becoming an increasingly important factor as volatility on utility prices remains a difficulty.

4. METHODOLOGY

Officers are now reviewing data from assessments carried out as part of the Facility Planning Model and review Sport England's Strategic Outcome Planning Guidance.

Consideration will be given to the use of industry best practice regarding facility catchment areas based on a 20-minute drive time for swimming pools.

The review will focus on:

- Geographic location
- Demographic Information
- Catchment areas and drive times
- Other providers

- Health inequalities
- Facility operating costs
- Usage data
- Income generation
- Value for money
- Property and asset stock-condition
- Potential for alternative operating models to be adopted
- Closure and mothballing strategies and associated costs

The review will take into account equality issues, including protected characteristics, and low income which are identified during the process.

The review will take into account utilities costs / energy performance and also need to carefully consider the Sports Facilities property and stock condition.

The outcome of the review could identify a hierarchy of provision including facilities which are:

- a.) Core Sites - Proposed to stay open and operated by the Council
- b.) Marginal Sites - Optional to remain open/close
- c.) Closure sites - Recommended to close

The options going forward will be developed into a set of proposals including a matrix based upon the methodology being proposed, that will be taken to the public through a district wide consultation and will be designed to deliver the requirements of the budget savings.

It is hoped that the recommendations particularly in terms of 'Marginal sites' are given an indication of the potential for the type of partnership that might be possible and the type of operational management being recommended. This will then be considered before final recommendations are made later in the year reflecting on the public consultation and community discussions subject to local groups wishing to come forward as has happened in Ilkley.

The new facility at Squire Lane needs to be considered as potentially part of the Sports Facility Service. Although investment in new facilities will come at a cost, there is still potential for Squire Lane to be considered for completion as it has external investment from the Levelling Up Fund and therefore would score highly in terms of the methodology being proposed.

The potential of a new facility is supported by the outcomes already being achieved at the recently completed Sedbergh Sports Centre which has reduced costs for repair and maintenance, has greater energy efficiency due to the investment in modern equipment, the user numbers are significantly higher than older facilities and the gym membership has increased by 200% more than the original estimates for the facility. In addition, improvements could be considered at the construction phase of the project to reduce the energy consumption in the longer term and enhance the financial sustainability beyond any of the current facilities in the district. Therefore, including Squire Lane in the consideration for the Sports Facilities Service review over the next 10 years is important to include.

5. TIMELINE

The timetable for the Review is as follows:

February – March: data and information analysis work and any early findings to identify savings potential.

April – June: identify options for savings that would continue to enable a sustainable service, and consultation on the early finding proposals

June – August: public, staff and union engagement on options for savings proposals

September: report on the outcome of engagement and make proposals for savings

October – November: public, staff and union consultation on savings proposals

December: report on the outcome of consultation and final decision on savings proposals

January – March 2025: implementation of final agreed proposals

6. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

The Service Managed cost of the Sport Facility Service was £5.073m for the financial year 2022/23 which represents a significant overall subsidy for the delivery of sports facilities.

The saving required for 2024/5 financial year is £60k, and a further saving of £1.25m in the 2025/26 financial year.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

Risk assessments will be carried out for individual savings proposals as required.

8. LEGAL APPRAISAL

There is no statutory duty to provide sports facilities.

It will be necessary for the Council to have regard to its public sector equality duty under the Equality Act 2010 when conducting the Sports Facility Review.

Consideration will be given to legal issues that arise in conducting the Review.

9.0. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

9.1 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

No significant implications have been identified.

9.2 TACKLING THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY IMPLICATIONS

No significant implications have been identified.

9.3 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

No significant implications have been identified.

9.4 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

No significant implications have been identified.

9.5 TRADE UNION

Trade Unions will be consulted on any staffing impact of proposals.

9.6 WARD IMPLICATIONS

There may be implications for wards arising from the conclusions of this review once finalised.

9.7 AREA COMMITTEE LOCALITY PLAN IMPLICATIONS

No significant implications have been identified at this stage.

9.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

There are no implications known at this stage, but given the level of savings required it is likely that there will be and when they are clear, the implications will be fully considered.

9.9 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT

No significant implications have been identified.

10 NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

None.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are requested to:

Note the progress made to date and information provided in this report and instruct the Strategic Director of Place to continue the Sports Facilities Review and report back to Executive when the proposals are ready for public consultation.

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None