

Working Group Report to the Economy, Residents and Communities Health and Care / Learning and Skills

Working Group:	Joint Scrutiny Working Group – Leisure Review
Meetings Held:	From May 2023 – January 2024

Matters Considered:

The purpose of the Working Group was to examine, scrutinise and seek assurance on the effectiveness and impact of the Officer Working Group processes for the Leisure Review. In particular the Working Group considered the reliability, breadth, and depth of the information that the Officer Working Group had accessed while undertaking the Review.

The Working Group were not required to consider the potential outcomes and recommendations of the officer group and understood that the process would be undertaken by the Scrutiny Committees when the draft final report and recommendations were produced later in the year for consideration by Cabinet.

The Working Group were tasked to examine, scrutinise, and seek assurance around each element of the Leisure Review Workstreams, including:

1. The financial sustainability of the contract
2. The interaction with the school's service
3. Communication / engagement with stakeholders
4. Data / insight
5. Consideration of accessibility, poverty, equality agendas
6. The consideration of alternative delivery models
7. The conclusion of the asset review of the centres
8. Communications and engagement

Outcomes / Concerns / Observations:

- officers from the services were commended on the significant number of detailed documents, data, analysis, and officer time provided.
- questions, queries, and challenges aimed at officers were answered with complete clarity and confirmation although some information requested was not provided.
- aligned timelines with the Officer Working Group supported information to be shared at the earliest availability.
- Initial concerns were raised around resources and assurance sought to ensure that the process and officer work could be conducted and concluded comprehensively, that all options were being explored, budget processes and sustainability considered. Members received the required assurance.
- It was stressed that the pace in which the Council undertook the review was crucial to residents, staff and all those involved in the leisure industry. Timescales were realistic for the process to be conducted, completed and for proposals to be compiled and presented in a timely manner.
- the Working Group stressed the importance of the links identified between internal parties and officers, officers were encouraged to strengthen links to enable the Working Group to be kept informed and provide support during the process.
- It was noted that the information provided, and data analysis was only related to the Leisure Facilities run under the Freedom Leisure contract and did not include other leisure facilities run in the authority by charities, sports clubs, and other bodies.

The eight elements of the process scrutinised provided:

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- assurance that all investigative aspects were thoroughly researched, and a full and comprehensive data set was provided to benchmark and provide comparisons.
- valuable insights were gained from external guests providing first hand experiences to the Working Group to gain further understanding and knowledge of potential alternative options for the management and control of leisure facilities.
- the approach to engagement was all-inclusive and evidence demonstrated the expansive range reached and the return of valuable data received. Engagement methods and the span of reach were encouraged by the Working Group to ensure that as many of the residents in Powys took part as possible through the survey undertaken.
- Members received details regarding the level of school utilisation of facilities and examples of how facilities are being used to support individual residents' wellbeing goals and health preventions, although the group did not receive sufficient input from Schools, Health, or Social Services.
- confirmation was received from officers in respect to regular updates on performance from Freedom Leisure together with feedback from Sport Development and other services the data received is subject to compliance and internal audit checks.
- Consideration was given to the Council's Corporate & Strategic Equality Plan that sets out the Stronger, Fairer, Greener Vision for the future and includes the well-being key priority objectives.

The documents provided and scrutinised included:

- a full cost matrix with Finance Officers on hand to explain each step of the process and how the different elements of the review fed in to produce proposals for consideration. This included the provision of an interactive model that officers can use in the future that provided a very good analysis of the potential impact on service delivery to users and the available alternatives
- a summary of the detailed condition surveys and decarbonisation assessments offered evidence demonstrating that processes had been undertaken to a high standard and consistent throughout. Members also received details of the methods used to assess the revenue and capital requirements needed to meet the authority's aspirations for conditions of the building in the portfolio.
- an in-depth review of the condition survey was undertaken, and the processes followed by officers, in respect to the dry and wet facilities provided at the Leisure Centre in Ystradgynlais.
- a presentation from a Trustee of the Hay on Wye Swimming Pool and the Manager of Crickhowell Sports Centre was given to provide two different delivery models in respect of a charity run pool and a School managed dry sports facility.
- full analysis of the public engagement survey and the lengths taken to ensure inclusivity for the residents and how the results were a fundamental part in demonstrating how wide and varied the leisure offer was within Powys.

Information not provided Working Group.

- members expressed concern that some of the financial performance data of each Leisure Centre was not accessible to be shared.
- payments to Freedom Leisure were not split between dry use facilities and pool use which the Working Groups felt schools would struggle with costings.

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- Information was provided for the number of schools using each pool, but the number of hours of swimming undertaken by schools over the year for each pool was not provided. (But now available)

Conclusions:

- overall, the Working Group concluded that each element had been considered and conducted thoroughly for the best outcome for the residents of Powys and the Council as a whole.
- that from the results of the customer survey, the facilities were seen to be a very valuable facility for each of the localities that they were based in.
- that the running and operational costs of the current portfolio of assets, can be met within the Council's current budget for the service and that Freedom Leisure appear to be running the centres at a profit. However, the capital requirement and investment exceeds the budget available now and, in the future, this will now need to be reviewed in light of the budget proposals for 2024-25 and future years.
- that there was an apparent significant difference, based on the figures presented, in the cost per activity across each of the centres. Although the lack of a full breakdown of the £2m+ paid by the Schools Service for its use of the facilities places a level of unreliability on these figures.
- that following the completion of the condition surveys and other property work that the authority has a significant capital investment requirement to bring the current portfolio of assets up to its condition target and to meet net Zero carbon targets.
- that a number of the dry side facilities were essential to meet the curriculum requirements of the Co-located high school site.
- that the draft report produced contains the full dashboard analysis of the data for leisure facilities in the county managed and run by other providers. And the total number of hours delivered to meet health and wellbeing needs are presented on a per centre basis (referrals & Welsh Government schemes).
- Assurance was provided that the School Service as part of the Schools Transformation Programme works closely with the Leisure Team to provide total costs of delivering the school curriculum including all transport cost as well as direct delivery.

**Recommendations to the Economy, Residents and Communities / Health and Care / Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committees:
Recommendations to the Cabinet;**

Scrutiny's Recommendation	Accept (plus Action & timescale)	Partially Accept (plus rationale, action & timescale)	Reject (plus Rationale)
1. When Scrutiny is undertaken on the final report the members of the scrutiny committee/s should be provided with the full financial performance and activity data.			

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2. That a more detailed analysis of the school usage of swimming pools would be considered in future evaluations. For example the distance in which schools travel to facilities and the full transport cost and provision.			
3. To ensure that the total cost of delivering the school curriculum include all transport cost as well as direct delivery.			