

Extract from the Minutes of Cabinet held 31st July 2008 and approved at Cabinet on 11th September 2008.

31. SWIMMING PROVISION FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN HEREFORD CITY

The Cabinet Member ICT, Education and Achievement advised that since the publication of the LEA Swimming Pool report in the cabinet agenda there had been amendments made to the original recommendations to more fully explain the proposals. It was stated that a more evidence based report was required to look holistically at the issues, as they did not just relate to the LEA pool, but to the LAA agenda, the Olympics, encouraging swimming and providing services in a competitive way. It was also stated that HALO were experts in the provision of leisure facilities and there was a need to ensure there was a quality provision, as currently there was concern over this. Additionally an examination was needed of what is required and how to address the rising costs to schools.

A Member in attendance stated it was felt the report did not provide the overall cost to be incurred to bring the HALO leisure pool up to standard. The change over period in getting the children in and out of the pool would mean the children only had 20 minutes of actual swimming time. The cost of transporting the children would also be extensive. It was felt that additional capacity would be required even though an independent report stated it would not. At a site visit it was stated that the public use would out of necessity be limited in the main leisure pool to accommodate the schools. It was felt that the public needed to be consulted if any of the public swimming time was to be taken away.

The Leader of the Council stated that the recommendation clearly stated that any alternative provision needed to be monitored. A Member in attendance suggested that the minimum amount of maintenance should be carried out at the pool in order to prevent further deterioration. Cabinet was advised that petitions and emails had been received in support of the pool, however, a further report was proposed for Easter 2009, when a business case could be set out and the monitoring analysed. Cabinet was reminded that 38 schools were affected and a number of schools had stated they would not use the leisure pool. Cabinet was urged to reconsider its proposal and not to close the LEA pool but to find the money to bring it up to modern standards.

The Leader acknowledged that this was an emotive issue and reminded cabinet that there were four pools in the county fit for purpose and that in the current climate energy costs must be considered. He added that the school transportation bill was rising and that Herefordshire Council was the third lowest funded for children's services in the country. He added that without government support authorities were being forced into difficult positions, but it was essential to ensure that there was access to swimming provision for every child.

Cabinet was reminded that the amended recommendations called upon the community and HALO to work together to provide a suitable provision to an acceptable standard and to work with all clubs and other organisations, however, time was needed for officers to put a clear business case forward. It was stated that 27 schools had already agreed to the HALO offer. Cabinet was reminded that HALO provided good value for money and discussion would be held with them over service provision. The Chairman of Children's Services Scrutiny Committee stated that

HALO provided a fantastic service, but there was concern over the loss of public swimming time and that an hour per day for children to swim was not sufficient. Therefore, the LEA pool needed to be reopened and that money should be found from the reserves to fund it. Cabinet was reminded of the costs of running a swimming pool and that no pool was financially viable. However, it was important to take on the views of the public, as outlined in the report and to ensure that as an efficient and viable service as possible was provided.

RESOLVED

THAT:

- (i) the LEA swimming pool not be reopened;**
- (ii) alternative provision from September 2008 be offered at Hereford Leisure Pool and that the provision by HALO be monitored to ensure the needs of schools and other users continue to be met;**
- (iii) close collaboration and partnership working be undertaken between the Council and HALO with schools, clubs and other users of the LEA pool to ensure a viable and efficient service is provided; and**
- (iv) a report be brought back to Cabinet by Easter 2009 at the latest outlining the outcome of the process.**