

SWIMMING PROVISION FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN HEREFORD CITY

PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITY: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & COMMUNITY SERVICES, AND ICT, EDUCATION & ACHIEVEMENT

CABINET

2 APRIL 2009

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To determine the future of the LEA pool and arrangements for school swimming in Hereford. To consider the longer term requirements for swimming across the whole county.

Key Decision

This is not a Key Decision.

Recommendations

THAT:

- (i) the LEA pool remain permanently closed and disposal of the site be considered as part of the Council's property strategy;
- (ii) HALO continue to work closely with schools to deliver safe, cost effective, quality assured swimming provision that will enable support achievements of curriculum targets; and
- (iii) the Council, in partnership with HALO, develop a long term strategy to support the development of swimming provision across the county.

Reasons

There is no viable business case or funding provision to support the re-opening of the LEA pool. To ensure the ongoing viability of existing public swimming facilities in the council, including access for schools provision, a longer term strategy for development will be needed.

Considerations

1. There has been considerable discussion about the future of swimming provision in Herefordshire, the best use of resources for the long term, and the role of the LEA pool at St Martin's, Hereford. Cabinet and Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee have debated the issue a number of times over the past twelve months and there has

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Andy Tector, Interim Head of Culture and Leisure on (01432) 261989

been much public interest and representation. At the Cabinet meeting of 20 November 2008 it was resolved that:

- (i) the LEA swimming pool not be reopened;
 - (ii) alternative provision from September 2008 be offered at Hereford Leisure Pool and that this provision by HALO be monitored to ensure that 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 that a viable and efficient service is provided;
 - (iv) the local community to submit a feasibility/business case to cover several years on the viability of the use of the LEA pool; and
 - (v) a report be brought back to Cabinet by Easter 2009 at the latest outlining the outcome of the process.
2. Recommendations (i) and (ii) have been carried out. Recommendation (iii) is continuing, no proposal has been submitted (recommendation (iv)) and this report seeks to fulfil recommendation (v).
 3. It is a national curriculum target that all children are able to swim 25 metres by the time they leave Primary School. It is the responsibility of schools and their governing bodies to offer opportunities to achieve this curriculum goal.
 4. In the past, 38 out of 81 primary schools have used the LEA pool. The majority of the other Primary Schools in Herefordshire use their local swimming pool managed by HALO, and the Council already invests more than £1m annually in a partnership with HALO to provide leisure services.
 5. The LEA pool was closed on health and safety grounds following the failure of a heat exchange unit. Since that time further structural issues have been identified in relation to the pool tank itself meaning that the LEA pool would now require significant capital investment (in the order of £0.5M) to re-open.

Views of Schools and Interested Parties

6. All primary schools in Herefordshire were surveyed to gather their views on swimming provision in Herefordshire, across all the pools that they use. Of the 47 responses received only 14 were in relation to Hereford Leisure Pool, the remaining 33 responses commenting on other swimming facilities used by the schools. Whilst returns from schools previously using the LEA pool were supportive of the retention of the LEA pool and expressed a number of concerns about the suitability of some of the facilities at Hereford Leisure Pool, HALO have advised that they would be able to address these concerns once a decision regarding the future of schools provision has been made and longer term adjustments to the pool programme brought into play.
7. A number of petitions and representations have been received during the past year from children and young people, schools, and amateur swimming groups who previously used the LEA pool. These have been drawn to the attention of Cabinet during its previous considerations of the issue. At its meeting on 17th February Council also debated a motion to commit funds for the necessary repair works to the LEA pool; the motion was defeated.
8. As part of the investigation into a potential business case, a group of community leaders met with the interim Head of Culture and Leisure and a representative from the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) to explore the future of the LEA pool, and overall swimming provision in Herefordshire.

9. The ASA representative was of the view that the costs of refurbishment were such that it would not be economically viable to invest in repairs or refurbishment of the LEA pool, and that the most cost effective option would be to build a new pool. The representative also advised that external funding would not be available to support this given the proximity to the Hereford Leisure Pool.
10. No business case has been received regarding community management of the LEA pool.

Capital Considerations

11. The capital investment required to repair the pool tank is estimated at a minimum of £200,000, although the ASA representative noted that the whole of the pool superstructure has a 'questionable future' and may need replacing. This is in addition the works identified in report to Cabinet of 31 July 2008 then estimated to be in the order of £72,500. A further £210,000 would be needed in the medium term to improve the thermal performance of the building and install more energy efficient plant, with further capital works likely to be required in the longer term. This brings the minimum total capital investment requirement to £482,500.

Improvements to Leisure Pool Provision

12. The ASA representative also commented on the current provision at the Hereford Leisure Pool expressing the view that the Beach Pool was not suitable for the teaching of school swimming and suggesting there was a need to make more flexible use of the complex.
13. In light of these comments the interim Head of Culture and Leisure has discussed this specific issue with HALO, who have confirmed that once there is some medium term certainty re school use of the Leisure Pool they will produce a programme that ensures schools do not have to use the Beach Pool. This position would be guaranteed through any contractual agreement with HALO.
14. The ASA representative also suggested the Council seek external funding to enable the installation of a movable floor in the diving pool at the Hereford Leisure Pool to enable the diving pool to be used in a more flexible manner by varying the depth of the pool. The costs associated with this investment are about £180,000. It is proposed that this option be explored, in liaison with HALO, in the context of the development of a long term strategy for the development of swimming provision within the county.

Free Swimming for Under 16 Year Olds and for those over 60 Years of Age

15. The Council has recently agreed to offer free swimming for under 16s and over 60s.
16. There has been a considerable debate about the impact of free swimming on the Leisure Pool. There is a view, that seems to be shared nationally, that free swimming for over 60s is unlikely to produce significant increases in the numbers of over 60s swimming and accordingly lower targets have been set to increase numbers of over 60s swimmers.
17. The greatest demand for free swimming, it is forecast, will come from the under 16s group. Because this group will be at school at the time, it is unlikely to produce extra pressure on school swimming at the Leisure Pool.

Financial Considerations

18. As previously reported the LEA swimming pool has not met its revenue costs over a number of years. The costs of schools swimming should be met from the Dedicated Schools Grant. Schools Forum considered the use of the Dedicated Schools Grant

(DSG) to support the revenue funding of the LEA pool, and the subsequent use of the Hereford Leisure Pool and recommended that the revenue funding previously used to contribute towards the running of the LEA pool should be delegated to all schools, rather than support provision for a minority of primary schools.

19. There is no provision within the capital programme to support the necessary works at the LEA pool.

Risk Management

20. It is important to ensure children can access water facilities which allow them to learn to swim and meet National Curriculum requirements. These are currently being offered through a number of pool facilities, many of them managed by HALO within the county.
21. The current LEA pool site provides a level of risk in terms of an unoccupied building. This is being managed by property services and if the site were to remain closed then steps would be taken to secure the site.

Alternative Options

To reopen the LEA pool would be unsustainable in revenue terms and would require significant capital investment.

Consultees

Schools, pupils, and a range of interested parties have provided views on the use and future of both the LEA pool, the Hereford Leisure Pool, and other pools managed by HALO at different times over the past year.

Appendices

None

Background Papers

None identified.