Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel

Agenda Item No. 7

28 JUNE 2010

Bryntysilio Outdoor Education Centre – Call In

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Councillor A. Harris – Leisure and Culture

Report:

At its meeting on 9 June 2010 Cabinet approved a decision to cease provision of outdoor residential education from Bryntysilio. A copy of the Cabinet decision notice and Cabinet report from the meeting is appended to this report.

In line with provisions contained within Part 4.5 of the Walsall Council Constitution the decision was 'called in' by on 16 June 2010 by the following five Members:

Councillor Tim Oliver
Councillor Rose Burley
Councillor Keith Chambers
Councillor Kath Phillips
Councillor Ian Robertson

The reason for the call in was:

The Labour Group wish to call in the Cabinet decision to cease the provision of residential outdoor education at Bryntysilio based on:

- 1. loss of amenity to the children of Walsall
- and lack of due consideration of the financial implications of reinstatement as indicated by the trustees of the Walsall School Holiday Camp Fund

A copy of the received call-in notice is appended to this report.

The Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel are invited to review the decision taken in light of the call-in and are able to make recommendations to Cabinet on alternative courses of action should Members wish to do so.

Recommendations:

That Members consider the call-in of 'Bryntysilio Outdoor Education Centre' and consider whether they wish to make any recommendations to Cabinet.

Contact Officer:

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FORM S&PP 2



WALSALL MBC NOTICE TO THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE CALL-IN OF CABINET DECISION BY COUNCIL MEMBERS

DATE

W.	all'	MEMBERS					
We, the undersigned members, under the provisions of paragraph 17(c)(ii) of the Scrutiny and Performance Panel Rules, request the Chief Executive to invite the Chairman of the:							
	Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel to call in the following item considered by Cabinet:						
Item	number:1	6					
Repo	ort title:Br	yntysilio Outdoor Education Centre					
Date	of Cabinet r	neeting:9th June 2010					
for c	onsideration b	by the above named Scrutiny and Performance Panel for	the following reasons:				
The	Labour Gr dential outo	oup wish to call in the Cabinet decision to ceal loor education service at Bryntisilio based on:	se the provision of				
	- and	of amenity to the children of Walsall; lack of due consideration of the financi tatement as indicated by the trustees of t					
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Note 1: Paragraph 17(c)(ii) of the Scrutiny and Performance Panel Rules enables 5 Members of the Council (not being members of the relevant Scrutiny and Performance Panel) to give notice to the Chief Executive to invite the Chairman of the relevant Scrutiny and Performance Panel to exercise the powers of call-in for the reasons set out in the request.

Note 2: This form should be completed and date of publication of the decision notice. Signed	nd returned to the	Cabinet Office	within 4 working	days of the
date of publication of the decision notice.				
			10	
Signed_	_ Date received _	1001	UNX PU	

(Chief Executive)

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Decision Detail

Bryntysilio Outdoor Education Centre

Details

Meeting: Cabinet 09 June 2010

Status: Published

Item: 16

Details: (1) That approval be given to the

cessation of the provision of a residential outdoor education service at Bryntysilio. (2) That a further report be received from officers on an

exit strategy.

Documents

There are no documents associated with this

decision.

History

Meeting/Member

Cabinet, 09 June 2010

Status

09/06/2010

Date Reached

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Published







Cabinet – 9 June 2010

Bryntysilio Outdoor Education Centre

Portfolio: Councillor A Harris - Leisure, Culture & Environment

Service: Sports and Leisure

Wards: All

Key decision: Yes

Forward plan: Yes

1. Summary of report

This report provides a three-month update on the progress of the revised operation of Bryntysilio Outdoor Education Centre as detailed in the report to Cabinet on 3 February 2010 following the Community Scrutiny and Performance Working Group's previous report and recommendations to Cabinet.

Redesigning the service delivery model has proven a success with schools that currently use Bryntysilio accepting this change and, as a consequence, successfully distilling the previous seven days operation into five. However, the planned larger capacity at Bryntysilio has so far at not attracted new schools to use the centre. The latter element was the fundamental goal of the service review – to increase the number of children accessing Bryntysilio and, in so doing, reduce costs.

The revenue savings from the service redesign would be sufficient to cover the cost of increasing the capacity without overspending. However, early indications are that the increased capacity will not be as well used as originally hoped and, without the additional income anticipated from this, savings in future years will be much lower than projected.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is asked to:

- 2.1 Approve cessation of the provision of a residential outdoor education service at Bryntysilio.
- 2.2 Receive a further report from officers on an exit strategy.

3. Background information

Bryntysilio Outdoor Education Centre is used as Walsall's venue for residential outdoor education in Llangollen, North Wales. The centre currently provides accommodation for 36 children plus visiting staff at a time. It has a complement of 18 staff employed by the Council. Approximately 1,400 children make five-day curriculum visits to Bryntysilio per annum. The Council leases the premises from the Official Custodian of Charities; the Charity of the School Holiday Camp Fund of Walsall (the Camp Trust), The Camp Trust uses the centre to provide free holidays to a further 400 "underprivileged and disadvantaged" children during school holiday weeks.

The Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel appointed a Working Group to consider the centre's operation and future in 2009 based on two key concerns: that the centre could only offer outdoor education opportunities for fewer than 40% of Walsall Children and was costing the Council an annual subsidy of approximately £0.501m.

The headline recommendation of the Working Group was that the Council should continue to use Bryntysilio to deliver residential outdoor education, though in a revised format. The Working Group made 23 recommendations, the details of which along with a progress report for each action are presented as **Appendix A**. However, the key recommendation was that the Council should continue to use Bryntysilio based on the implementation of a revised service model, with two principal alterations, these being:

- move delivery to schools from a seven-day to a five-day operation to better reflect current practices in residential outdoor education and to manage costs, and;
- ii. increase capacity to accommodate up to two school groups simultaneously, thereby making the centre available to more children. It was anticipated that this could generate additional income to significantly reduce the subsidy required.

The proposal was to achieve this by spending approximately £0.100m from the 2010/11 Bryntysilio revenue budget by 31 July 2010 to increase the capacity and allow the accommodation of two simultaneous schools groups from mid-September 2010; with beds for approximately 60 children. This would then provide the opportunity to recoup the £0.100m investment between mid-September 2010 and March 2011. There would be no net saving in 2010/11. However, this approach would make the required investment available to facilitate savings in future years. On this basis it was anticipated that the revised service plan could deliver a revenue saving of £0.218m from 2011/12 onwards.

Two alternative options were also considered by the Scrutiny Working Group but discarded. Firstly, to maintain the status quo; which members of the Scrutiny Working Group discarded as it was the financial weaknesses that led to the Scrutiny Panel's analysis of the centre in the first place. Secondly, to cease the existing service and replace it by the procurement of outdoor education services from elsewhere, potentially at no net cost to the Council. This option

was considered but, it was felt that given the strong support for Bryntysilio, efforts should be made to first rectify the existing problems.

The Working Group did acknowledge that whilst the alternative provision that they looked at, such as that provided by Staffordshire County Council, was at no cost to the Council and was a credible alternative to Bryntysilio, there was a difference in the style and atmosphere of the centres. This made it very difficult for Bryntysilio to compete on a like-for-like basis. In the event that Council choose to terminate the lease and end the use of Bryntysilio, this is likely to be the option that Walsall would pursue to ensure continuity of residential outdoor education provision.

At their meeting on 3 February 2010, Cabinet approved the recommendation, supporting a revised option whereby the investment of up to £0.100m was deferred pending a review six months after the implementation of the recommendations; and also to receive an update report after three months (this report).

During this six month period, it was intended that limited improvements could be made to the premises to facilitate a more modest 12 bed increase in capacity to 48 beds and to market test this increased provision. It was intended that this would be at no net cost as the cost of the increase would be recouped in-year from additional revenue from the capacity.

Since Cabinet approval in February, a number of positive steps have been made. The instructional staff has been reduced from five to four with the loss of the final instructor paid on teachers' terms and conditions (although the Centre Manager and assistant remain employed on teachers' terms and conditions). A further two instructors have been re-employed on lower salaries better reflecting the market rate within the industry. A similar process with the domestic staff is also underway.

The launch of the revised programme, reducing the standard schools delivery from seven days to five and reducing the amount of instruction directly delivered by the Bryntysilio staff has been well received by schools, with bookings actually increasing modestly. The revised programme allows us to manage costs (such as the reduction in staffing explained above) and also to free-up weekends for more lucrative commercial bookings.

However, the intention to make modest improvements to increase the capacity by 12 has been more problematic. Having reviewed the project with Property Services, by adapting the Top Lodge (the previous residence of the former Head of Centre) it would be possible to increase the capacity by 14 children (plus 2 staff); the cost estimate for this is £68,689. A breakdown of this cost is presented as **Appendix B** and this is considered the most basic scheme practicable.

Bookings secured to date for 2010/11 are both a success and a disappointment. Despite moving from 7 days operation to 5 days in September we have retained all the usage (in fact enjoying a 5.9% growth) – this succeeds in the aspiration to consolidate the existing usage spread over 7-day bookings into a more cost-effective 5-day model.

However, the problem is that in addition to the higher than anticipated costs of the works, schools' initial appetite for the increased capacity has been far lower than originally suggested by current and potential users. Growth is 5.9% and to date only one "new" school (i.e. a school not using Bryntysilio in previous years) has booked. It is important to note that this is the current situation and schools have until 1 July to reply.

The bookings are detailed in Table 1 below and a full breakdown of school bookings is presented as **Appendix C**.

Table 1 – Bryntysilio school bookings 2008/9 – 2010/11

	2008/9	2010/11	Change
Weekday usage	5,225 bed-nights*	6,755 bed-nights	+1,530 (+29%)
Weekend usage	1,518 bed-nights	388	-1,130 (-74%)
Total usage	6,743 bed-nights	7,143 bed-nights	+400 (5.9%)

^{*} due to the varying length of stay at Bryntysilio (schools previously had a mix of 2, 3, 4, 5, & 7 day bookings) we measure performance based on the number of bed-nights (number of children x length of stay) rather than simply the number of children.

It was originally intended that the increased usage would generate sufficient extra revenue to repay the capital cost of increasing the capacity and deliver additional revenue approaching £0.218m in 2011/12. Whilst the bookings outlined above will deliver increased income, this alone will be insufficient to cover the £69k capital costs and will fall significantly short of the £0.218m previously anticipated in future years.

With service delivery dropping from 7 days to 5 the following in-year savings have been identified:-

<u>Table 2</u> – Identified savings

Measure	Saving		
Teacher redundancy	25,000		
Cook redundancy	8,000		
Reduction in weekend domestic cover	12,000		
Provisions savings	12,000		
Equipment savings	12,000		
Total	£69,000		

These measures should be sufficient to fund the conversion of the Top Lodge from within the existing revenue budget without leading to an overspend.

Conclusion

At the three-month review stage redesigning the service delivery model has proven a success with schools currently using Bryntysilio accepting this change and successfully distilling the seven days usage into five. However, to-date the planned larger capacity at Bryntysilio has not attracted new schools to use the

centre. The latter element was the fundamental goal of the service review, to increase the number of children accessing Bryntysilio and in doing so reduce costs. At this stage there are three potential options:

Option 1

Continue with the investment of the £69,000 in the conversion of the Top Lodge. This would allow the action plan for the improvement in the performance of Bryntysilio to continue and (due to the revenue efficiencies identified) should not lead to an in-year overspend. However, all attempts to attract new schools to Bryntysilio to date have failed, which calls into question the fundamental premise behind the action plan – that usage of Bryntysilio has historically been limited by its capacity and if this was expanded, usage (and revenue) would easily increase to fill the larger capacity. On this basis, it may be unwise to continue with a flawed action plan and invest £69,000 in a facility for which there seems little demand.

Option 2

To cancel/postpone the investment and continue with the service as it currently is. The implementation of the efficiency measures in Table 2 will save in the region of £70,000 per annum (over 10% of revenue costs) significantly streamlining the service. However, abandoning plans to increase the capacity removes any prospect of addressing the key concerns from the original scrutiny process - the limited access by Walsall children and the aberrantly high running costs.

Option 3

A further option identified by the Scrutiny Working Group was to externalise the provision of residential outdoor education and cease the service at Bryntysilio. This option would see the Council cease direct provision of residential outdoor education and procuring the service from neighbouring authorities. The Scrutiny Group found that neighbouring authorities had sufficient spare capacity and that this provision could be delivered at a lower charge to the pupils and at no net cost to Walsall Council.

The fundamental aim of the action plan recommended by the Scrutiny Working Group was to increase usage and reduce costs, delivering a full year saving of £0.218m. At this stage it seems unlikely that is achievable; usage will increase modestly and revenue savings will be only £70,000. If we proceed with Option 1 we risk spending £69,000 with no likelihood of significant return, if we choose Option 2 we avoid spending the £69,000 but, abandon any prospect of significantly addressing either usage or costs. In the original action plan a review at six months (September) was proposed, at which a decision would be made whether to continue with the service or consider alternative provision (Option 3). Given the findings to date and the need to decide about the £69,000 investment it may be more prudent to make the fundamental decision about the future of the service now.

The Council's lease on Bryntysilio expired in 2007 and we are currently a "tenant at will". As such we can cease our tenancy at extremely short notice (3 months

notice). However under the terms of the previous lease the Council had full liability for the maintenance of the premises and as such upon vacating the premises we can expect to be served with a schedule of dilapidations. A full independent condition survey of the premises has yet to be completed (recommendation 10 from the Scrutiny working group) however based on the condition survey commissioned by the Camp Trust in 2009 the dilapidations may be in the region of £300k - £400k. Discussions with the Local Planning Authority (Denbighshire Council) are underway to explore the scope for an enabling development on the site to help the Council meet its objectives.

4.0 Resource considerations

4.1 Financial:

- 4.1.1 The current subsidy per child per week is £364. This will reduce to £350 based on the increase in numbers anticipated.
- 4.1.2 If the Top Lodge is converted at a cost of £69,000, this should not lead to an overspend. However, the works would now need to be funded from in-year efficiencies and not by increased revenue as originally planned.
- 4.1.3 The recommendation of the Scrutiny Working Group to continue with the operation of Bryntysilio was in part based on a projection that the service would be able to generate additional income which would contribute up to £218,000 towards the Council's savings targets required in 2011/12 and future years. However, this savings target has yet to be included in the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The current position suggests that any future contribution to savings targets will be based on efficiency measures rather than increased revenue and as such will be much smaller.
- **4.2 Legal:** The legal position is that the lease expired on 25 December 2007 and as such the Council is currently "holding over" or a "tenant at will". As this is deemed a business tenancy, the landlord may be able to compel a longer lease (6 years); which would essentially tie the Council into the service for the next 6 years or require the "buy out" of the lease if this proved unacceptable or unaffordable.

Officers have been advised that if the Council were to cease its operation of Bryntysilio that, a one-off dilapidations cost of up to £0.4m would be incurred by Property Services to reinstate and repair the building to its original condition.

4.3 Staffing: The revised operating model has led to the termination of one teacher's employment and the revision of the grading of the remaining two instructors – these actions have now been completed. The next stage is to review the domestic staffing. Whilst their grades will be addressed in line with the Single Status review we are likely to need to lose one post and one member of domestic staff is currently at risk.

In the event that we cease the operation of Bryntysilio, the 18 staff at Bryntysilio would be put at risk of redundancy. The cost of making these staff redundant is estimated as £72,000, with a further £19,000 pension liabilities. Given that these

staff all currently live in North Wales the likelihood of mitigating the redundancies through redeployment is small.

5. Citizen impact

There should be no impact on the public as all options involve either continuation or replacement of the existing service.

6. Community safety

There are no direct community safety implications although there is anecdotal evidence that activities provided through outdoor education offer children an introduction into diversionary opportunities that may give them an interest and self belief that helps avoid anti-social behaviour.

7. Environmental impact

One of the working group's recommendations is to increase capacity at the centre which may include the construction of a new building on the site. The initial proposal however is to refurbish the Top Lodge building.

8. Performance and risk management issues

- 8.1 **Risk**: The risks associated with the service are presented in Section 4.
- 8.2 **Performance management**: The performance of the centre is being robustly managed and forms the basis of this report.

There is no direct impact on the Local Area Agreement or National Indictor Set.

9. Equality implications

Any action will be subject to an equality impact assessment; however initial screening indicates that no negative impact is likely from any option.

10. Consultation

None yet.

Background papers

Cabinet report dated 3 February 2010.

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26 May 2010

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Councillor A Harris Portfolio Holder

26 May 2010

Bryntysilio Scrutiny Recommendations – Update

	Scrutiny Recommendation	Update			
1.	the Council should continue to use Bryntysilio Hall to deliver residential outdoor education but not in its current format;	N/a			
2.	the Council, Camp Trust and Centre Management re-establish positive and engaged attitudes and work together closely to ensure the long-term sustainability of the centre;	Currently attempting to implement a schedule of meetings with the Trustees in conjunction with Constitutional Services.			
3.	the centre should develop a short, medium and long term business plan incorporating:	The centre has produced a short-term business plan focusing on the implementation of these recommendations and delivering the revised operating template.			
	 a. plans to increase capacity at the centre either through a new low- cost accommodation block or through adaptation of the staff house and top lodge; 	A scheme agreed and costed with Property Services – awaiting decision from members regarding funding.			
	 utilising visiting teaching staff to deliver further activities rather than employee further instructor staff; 	The new programme from September 2010 includes school directed days. This was presented to the Secondary and Primary Head's Forum and well received. Schools have booked the centre for 2010/11 on this basis.			
	 c. plans to move the centre to a standard Monday – Friday operation; 	This was presented to the Secondary and Primary Head's Forum and well received. Schools are now booking the centre for 2010/11 on this basis.			
	 d. plans to develop commercial weekend activities at the site; 	Working with Llangollen tourist office / Llangollen international eis on promoting opportunities. Interest from Fire service / golf club / pro-adventure etc			
	e. a comprehensive marketing strategy;	Currently focusing on "core" business – schools use. All schools contacted by letter, e-mail and telephone, plus attendance at primary & secondary heads forums.			
	f. plans to work with local partners;	Not progressed yet			
	g. plans to work with Denbighshire County Council;	Denbighshire CC supportive, but have been clear they will not support us to access local schools (they have their own outdoor education service)			
	h. plans to maximise sponsorship and external income;	Mayor's office (Walsall) contacted with regard to Public subscription. Mountain walk-fund-raising day in July(involving Walsall children)			
4.	the employment of teaching staff delivering outdoor education should be formally reviewed in line with outdoor education practice elsewhere with the view to employing instructor staff;	Completed – the employment of the last remaining teacher (excluding management team) was terminated in April. The salary of the remaining instructional staff was also revised downwards.			
5.	Fees to schools for using the centre should rise each year;	This has been implemented with charges rising again this year.			
6.	there should be a minimum charge per group visit to the centre;	Schools are now required to declare numbers in advance of visiting – unacceptably low bookings will not be continued.			
7.	cancellation fees should be introduced at the centre;	Cancellation fees now implemented from academic year 2010/11			

Scrutiny Recommendation	Update
8. following the initial investment required to increase capacity at the centre further investment should only be provided if the centre is delivering on its income targets which should be negotiated by Cabinet;	N/a
9. an eco-garden be developed at the centre;	Not yet progressed
a new condition survey of the centre is carried out on the following terms: a. the surveyor and remit is jointly agreed by the Council and Camp Trust; b. the survey includes an investigation into the possible need for further specialist surveys;	Agreeing specification with Property Services / the Camp Trust.
11. no large scale repair work should take place at the centre until the new survey, and any additional surveys as required, have been completed;	Works will reflect the priorities from the condition survey.
local contractors to the centre are employed to complete any agreed repair work;	This is being done for all small-scale/handyman type work. Larger works (renovation of the Top Lodge) is still commissioned through Walsall Council.
the Council should sign a one-year rolling lease for the centre with the Camp Trust	This has subsequently proven not possible & lease negotiations are on hold pending the outcome of the six month review.
 14. the new lease should reduce the number of holiday weeks available to the Camp Trust; 15. the operational costs of Camp Trust holiday weeks should no longer be funded by the Council; 	These will all be pursued as part of the lease negotiations, these are not currently being
16. the Camp Trust should strengthen its definition of a 'disadvantaged child';17. the Camp Trust should work with local partners to identify disadvantaged children;	progressed pending the outcome of the six month review.
 the provision of free accommodation to the Head of Centre should be reviewed; 	Not yet progressed
 the current issues regarding the employment of a caretaker/premise supervisor need to be resolved as a matter of urgency; 	The case is being actively progressed with HRD/ Occupational Health and is approaching final conclusion.
Walsall Children's Services – Serco be approached regarding the possibility of corporate sponsorship at the centre;	This was pursued but the opportunity was not taken up by Serco
21. the centre should remain under the management of Sports and Leisure Services;	N/a
22. the centre should not continue at any cost. If the centre cannot deliver a substantial income stream then the future of the centre should be seriously reconsidered;	Ongoing
23. The Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel re-establish a working group to review progress with the recommendations contained in this report six months after Cabinet have made their decision on the future of Bryntysilio.	To be included in the 2010/11 Community Services Scrutiny work-plan.

Top Lodge Cost Estimate

ltem	£
Electrical rewire	
Removal & installation of new kitchen	
Installation of new fire doors	
Installation of 2 new shower rooms	
Modification of existing bathroom	
New carpets	
New vinyl	
Stud partition & door in boiler room	
As fitted drawings	
O&Ms (H&S Manual)	
Hot water storage	
Bunk Beds	
Staff room adjacent works	
Contingency	
	58,829
Asbestos survey	600
Building regs	300
Professional fees (15%)	8,959
Total	68,688

School Bookings 2010/11

	Week			Weekend		
Week Commencing	Nos	School 1	School 2	Top Lodge?	Nos	School
19th April	42	Busill Jones primary			20	gifted & talented
26-Apr	45	Pelsall Village school			30	Chuckery Primary
4th May	39	St Francis of Assisi			30	Leamore Primary
10th May	30	Frank F Harrison			30	Bluecoat Juniors
17th May	29	St. Peters Primary			24	Busill Jones Prim
24th may	36	Woodlands Primary			30	Becon Primary
7th June	36	St. Giles Primary			30	Caldmore Prim.
14th June	36	Hillary Primary				
21st June	20	Old Hall/Mary Elliot				
25th June	36	Alumwell juniors (7day)				
5th July	36	St James Primary				
12th July	36	Pinfold Primary/Elmwood				
19th July	30	Castle/Jane Lane				
6th Sept	26	County Bridge Primary				
13th Sept	40	Pool Hayes Secondary				
20th Sept	21	Croft Primary				
27th Sept	32	Leighswood Primary				
4th Oct	48	Leighs wood Primary	Shire Oak	Yes		
11th Oct	48	Fibbersley Primary	Shire Oak	Yes		
18th oct	44	Bentley West Primary	King Charles	Yes		
1st Nov	29	Rushall JMI				
8th nov	30	Pool Hayes Secondary				
15th Nov	30	Willenhall Secondary				
22nd Nov	30	Streetly Secondary				
29th Nov	30	Grace Academy				
6th Dec	30					
13th Dec	30	Joseph Leckie				
10th jan	36					
17th Jan	30	Shelfield Secondary				
24th Jan	30	Brownhills Secondary				
31st Jan	35	Aldridge Secondary				
9th Feb	30	Chuckery Primary				
14th Feb	30	Shelfield Secondary				
28th Feb	50	Alumwell Secondary		Yes		
9th March	50	Pinfold Street JMI		Yes		
14th March	30	Frank F Harrison				
21st March	35	Bluecoat Juniors				
28th March	36	Woodlands Primary				
4th April	40	Busill Jones Primary				
Average occupancy	34.5	,	Aver	age occupancy	27.7	1
Total children	1351			Total children	194	1
Nights stay				Nights stay	2	1
W'kday bed nights	6,755		W'k	end bed nights	388	1
Total bed nights	7,143			- 1		<u>-1</u>