

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Monday 28 June 2010 at 6.00pm

- Panel Members Present** Councillor L. Harrison (Chair)
Councillor S. Coughlan (Vice-Chair)
Councillor I. Azam
Councillor L. Beeley
Councillor P. Bott
Councillor C. Creaney
Councillor J. Rochelle
Councillor K. Sears
Councillor D. Shires
- Portfolio Holders Present** Councillor A. Andrew – Deputy Leader
Councillor A. Harris – Leisure, Culture and Environment
- Other Members Present** Councillor R. Burley
Councillor D. Coughlan
Councillor P. Hughes
Councillor T. Oliver
Councillor K. Phillips
Councillor I. Shires
Councillor I. Robertson
Councillor G. Wilkes
- Officers Present** Keith Stone – Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods
Chris Holliday – Head of Leisure and Community Health
Ben Percival – Sports and Leisure Service Manager
Craig Goodall – Acting Principal Scrutiny Officer
- Witnesses Present** Anthea Cooper – Centre Manager, Bryntysilio Outdoor Education Centre

07/10 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillors O. Bennett, R. Martin and G. Perry.

08/10 SUBSTITUTIONS

The following substitutions were made for the duration of the meeting:

Member	Substitute
O. Bennett	J. Rochelle
R. Martin	I. Azam
G. Perry	L. Beeley

09/10 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

Councillor S. Coughlan declared a personal interest in item 6 'Call in of Cabinet decision on Willenhall Leisure Centre'.

10/10 **MINUTES**

Councillor D. Shires requested that her name be deleted from item '01/10 **MINUTES**' where she was listed as having apologised for the meeting. She was already correctly listed as present.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes, as amended, of the meeting held on 8 June 2010, copies having been previously circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

11/10 **DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY**

The Panel noted the available development opportunity.

12/10 **CALL-IN OF CABINET DECISION ON WILLENHALL LEISURE CENTRE**

A Member who called in the decision questioned whether the meeting was legally constituted as all known interested parties, with regard to the Cabinet decisions on Willenhall Leisure Centre and Bryntysilio Outdoor Education Centre, had not been invited to the meeting as set out in a call-in guidance note contained in Part 5.7 of the Constitution.

The meeting adjourned at 6.10 p.m.

The meeting reconvened at 6.35 p.m.

The Acting Principal Scrutiny Officer advised the Panel that the meeting was legally constituted and could proceed as the section of the Constitution referred to was only guidance.

Members discussed this and felt that the meeting should seek the views of as many people as possible and that the meeting should be adjourned until such time as everyone could be got together.

The Acting Principal Scrutiny Officer advised the Panel that the call-ins needed to be heard before 1 July 2010. After this time Cabinet could choose to implement the decision as the timescales outlined within Part 4.5 of the Constitution would have been breached.

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Environment gave assurances that they wanted the call-in meeting to take on board as

many views as possible and would ensure that the decisions would not be implemented if the Panel could not reconvene before 1 July 2010.

RESOLVED:

That, if required, Cabinet defer implementation of the decisions made at their meeting on 9 June 2010, regarding Willenhall Leisure Centre and Bryntysilio Outdoor Education Centre, until the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel has had time to reconvene and invite all known interested parties to attend and speak at the meeting considering the call-in of the two decisions.

The meeting adjourned at 6.49 p.m.

The meeting reconvened at 6.00pm on Friday 9 July 2010

- Panel Members Present**
- Councillor L. Harrison (Chair)
 - Councillor S. Coughlan (Vice-Chair)
 - Councillor I. Azam
 - Councillor L. Beeley
 - Councillor P. Bott
 - Councillor C. Creaney
 - Councillor K. Sears
 - Councillor D. Shires
- Portfolio Holders Present**
- Councillor A. Harris – Leisure, Culture and Environment
 - Councillor M. Bird - Leader
 - Councillor C. Towe – Finance and Personnel
- Other Members Present**
- Councillor R. Burley
 - Councillor D. Coughlan
 - Councillor T. Oliver
 - Councillor I. Shires
 - Councillor I. Robertson
- Officers Present**
- Jamie Morris – Executive Director, Neighbourhoods
 - Ben Percival – Sports and Leisure Service Manager
 - Craig Goodall – Acting Principal Scrutiny Officer
- Invited Parties Present**
- Gill Mitchell – Friends of Willenhall Leisure Centre
 - Gwyn Davies – Friends of Willenhall Leisure Centre
 - Elaine Ward – Friends of Willenhall Leisure Centre
 - Les Robinson – User at Willenhall Leisure Centre
 - David Huxley – Aston Arena
 - Bob Cooper – Aston Arena
 - Jim Crabtree – Chair of the School Holiday Camp trust for Walsall
 - Anthea Cooper – Centre Manager, Bryntysilio Outdoor Education Centre
 - Wanda Michiewicz – Aldridge School
 - Megan Gallaham – Alumwell School
 - Nigel Smith – Old Hill School
 - Jackie Smith – Bluecoat School
 - Rod Dixon – Croft Primary School

12/10 CALL-IN OF CABINET DECISION ON WILLENHALL LEISURE CENTRE

Members heard a range of opinions from a variety of interested parties including:

- Members who called the decision in

- Friends of Willenhall Leisure Centre
- A range of centre users
- Aston Arena
- A letter from St Giles School (annexed).

The Panel took on board the following points from the invited interested parties:

- If the leisure centre was lost now it would never be replaced removing the opportunity for the completed leisure centre strategy to propose a leisure centre in Willenhall.
- Willenhall was a deprived area which was illustrated by the health inequalities in the borough. If the leisure centre was removed health inequalities in the Willenhall area could increase.
- It was suggested that all leisure centres in the borough should be under one umbrella where the better performing centres supported the poorly performing ones.
- All leisure centres in Walsall required a subsidy.
- Schools relocated to other swimming pools could stop swimming lessons due to additional transport costs.
- It was suggested that advertising of events could have been improved.
- The pool at the leisure centre was perfect for long distance swimming training.
- A community involvement company could probably take over the operation of the leisure centre if desirable. This had been investigated by local Councillors and was considered a viable option moving forward.
- Questions were asked about the how the quote for the repair of the roof were ascertained. If a community involvement company was established it was possible that a grant could be gained to fund the roof repairs.
- Willenhall Operatic Society were interested in returning to the leisure centre if it stayed open otherwise they would use facilities in Dudley.

The Panel took on board the following points from the Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Environment:

- The benefits of Willenhall Leisure Centre were not in doubt, however, the Councils budget was being reduced and leisure centres were not a statutory service. Closing Willenhall Leisure Centre provided the greatest savings for the least service impact. There were many other facilities within a two mile radius that local residents could use.
- Reports by Sports England and Strategic Leisure had identified an over provision of swimming pools in the borough.
- The recent theft of lead on the roof would cost £200,000 to repair and £20,000 for temporary repairs. This quote had been gained through the Councils Property Services Team.
- In the last 5 years the leisure centre had cost £2m to operate.
- School swimming classes had been relocated.
- Free swimming places were to remain in place for a further two months.
- Establishing a community involvement company was an option that could

be explored if the decision was taken to close the centre. Even if this option was pursued in the future it would require a strong partner to drive the centre forward and be subject to a tender process.

- Sports England and Strategic Leisure had undertaken two separate studies with different methodologies and both concluded that the borough had too much water space.
- Discounted swimming lessons were not being offered at other leisure centres to reduce use at Willenhall Leisure Centre, rather residents were being told that if Willenhall Leisure Centre did close then the lessons they purchased for use at Willenhall would be reallocated elsewhere.
- An exit strategy to close the leisure centre would be developed once a final decision on the centres future had been taken by Cabinet.
- The long term aim was for leisure centres to return a surplus to the Council budget.

It was moved and seconded, that:

- 1. Willenhall Leisure Centre be kept open until the strategic leisure centre review is completed, and;**
- 2. if Willenhall Leisure Centre is closed then the centre be preserved for a potential reopening until the strategic leisure centre review is completed.**

The vote was lost 5 votes to 4 with the Chair using her second and casting vote.

RESOLVED:

THAT:

- 1. the report detailing the damage to the roof at Willenhall Leisure Centre and the proposed costs for repairs be circulated to the Panel;**
and;
- 2. Councillor S. Coughlan be allowed to inspect the damaged roof at Willenhall Leisure Centre under the supervision of Property Services.**

13/10 CALL IN OF CABINET DECISION ON BRYNTYSILIO OUTDOOR EDUCATION CENTRE

The Panel considered the call-in of the Cabinet decision taken on 9 June 2010 to cease provision of outdoor residential education at Bryntysilio Outdoor Education Centre (BOEC) that had been called in by five Members of the Labour Group.

Members heard a range of opinions from a variety of interested parties including:

- Members who called the decision in.

- The Chair of the School Holiday Camp Trust for Walsall.
- The BOEC Manager.
- A selection of teachers and staff from schools that use BOEC.

The Panel took on board the following points from the invited interested parties:

- BOEC was a fantastic facility based in world heritage site that provided a unique experience for Walsall children. The contrast of the location the centre was based in compared to Walsall was a part of the experience.
- The quality of the activities offered at BOEC was higher as they took place across North Wales rather than within the grounds of the centre as happens at many other outdoor education centres.
- The experience of visiting BOEC had a large impact on children. Examples of children gaining more confidence and belief after visiting the centre were given.
- Increasing the bed spaces at the centre would increase income.
- The new capacity at the centre had not filled as schools planned their activities two years in advance. Therefore time was required for schools to change their plans and take up the increased capacity. The schools representatives present were confident that every new place would be filled given time.
- The School Holiday Camp Trust for Walsall had a 40 year history of collaboration with Walsall Council. The Trustees wished to continue this relationship and work with the centre management to implement the 23 recommendations on the future of the centre that the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel made in late 2009.
- The Centre Manager stated that it was possible to operate the centre on a vastly reduced budget if extra time was allowed for the centre to work together with the School Holiday Camp Trust for Walsall.
- Some local schools were undertaking fundraising activities to help pay for the conversion of the top lodge.
- Marketing of the centre could be improved.

The Panel took on board the following points from the Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Environment:

- BOEC was a high quality outdoor education centre but this came at a high cost. The centre had cost the Council £2.5m over the last five years.
- It cost the Council £350 per a child that visited the centre and cheaper alternatives were available. Alternative providers would be offered to schools by the Council. Some had already been investigated including some in Wales.
- Attempts had been made to improve efficiency at BOEC by changing staff contracts and working hours. A small increase in capacity had also taken place.
- It was not possible to use capital funding to operate the centre.
- It was possible that the Camp Trust could run the centre if the Council decided to withdraw.

- The reinstatement of the centre would be a key strand of the Councils exit strategy. The liability for reinstatement would lie with the Council even if it continued to use BOEC.

The following are the principle points from the ensuing discussion:

- All recommendations by the Community Services Scrutiny and Performance Panel directly concerning the centre had implemented by centre staff. For example the eco-garden.
- Three companies had been contacted regarding external sponsorship of the centre. Some Panel Members felt that more effort could have been made with this recommendation.
- Some Members were disappointed with the current operating cost of the centre following the centre managers claim that operating costs could be vastly reduced. This led some Members to suggest that the Council should continue sourcing residential outdoor education from Bryntysilio but only by offering a reduced budget moving forward.

It was moved and seconded, that:

Bryntysilio Outdoor Education Centre should stay open with a negotiated reduction in subsidy whilst the opportunity offered by the Centre Manager and School Holiday Camp Trust for Walsall to form a partnership model is explored to deliver financial savings over two years and secure the centres future.

The vote was lost 5 votes to 4 with the Chair using her second and casting vote.

14/10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the date of the next meeting was 3 August 2010.

The meeting terminated at 8.51 p.m.

Signed:

Date: