

**REPORT OF: EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR LEISURE,
CULTURE AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

TO: COUNCIL FORUM

ON: 3rd DECEMBER 2015

SUBJECT LEISURE REVIEW

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To update members on the progress made on the Leisure Review, report the outcome of the consultation process which was approved at Council Forum on 1 October 2015 and present proposals and recommendations for changes in leisure provision as a consequence of undertaking the Leisure Review.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Note the results of the consultation process involving the general public and stakeholders.

2.2 Consider the proposals for changes in leisure provision as a consequence of the consultation process having been carried out.

2.3 Work in partnership with local organisations to jointly operate the facilities at Shadsworth Leisure Centre on reduced opening hours and operate the centre at nil costs to the Council.

2.4 Continue to operate Daisyfield Pools but on significantly reduced opening hours to minimise operating costs and maximise income and reduce the subsidy from £422,000 to £71,000, a saving of £351,000.

2.5 Delegate authority to the [Director of CLS] in consultation with the Executive Member for Leisure, Culture and Young People under delegated powers to undertake the work necessary to asset transfer the building(s) in 2016/17 to achieve the overall saving of £731,000 attributed to the Leisure Review.

3. BACKGROUND

At Council Forum on 1 October 2015, members approved proposals for consulting with residents, stakeholders and employees who may be affected by the outcome of the Leisure Review. The consultation process would provide an opportunity for the public, staff, schools and other interested groups to give their opinions and views and for these views to be listened to and taken on board as part of the decision making process on future pool provision. Consulting and engaging with stakeholders in this way also allowed consultees to raise concerns and issues and options that may not previously have been considered.

The consultation process took place from 2nd October 2015 to 31st October 2015. The public consultation progressed in two formats, a questionnaire and public meetings.

The consultation questionnaire was made available at Daisyfield Pools and Shadsworth Leisure Centre and on the Council's website. Additionally, questionnaires were also sent to schools, clubs and groups that represent our users and their needs.

Public meetings took place at Shadsworth Leisure Centre on 20 October 2015 and at Little Harwood Community Centre on 22 October 2015. The dates and times for the public meetings were advertised in the leisure centres, the libraries and on the Council's website. The aim of these public meetings was to collect as much intelligence from local people, partners and organisations on the value of their local swimming pool facility, to explore the possibility of it being operated differently, and what the anticipated impact could be if swimming pools were to close.

4. RESULTS OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

4.1 Questionnaires

A total of 395 questionnaires were received to the consultation on the Leisure Review, 176 questionnaires were completed at Shadsworth Leisure Centre and 214 questionnaires were completed at Daisyfield Pools, 5 questionnaires were received from schools. The questionnaires were analysed by an independent organisation and their report is available as background papers to this report. The key messages from the analysis of the questionnaires are as followed:

- Over 90% of the respondents use or work at one or both of the facilities
- The vast majority of respondents feel any closure would have a very or fairly big impact on them, with over 90% of people who use the facility every day feeling it would have a very big impact
- Over half of those people who feel a closure would have a very or fairly big impact indicated that they do not use any other leisure provision
- Over 70% of people who feel it would have a big impact currently exercise on their own in addition to visiting a leisure facility, for example running or walking
- Around three in five respondents indicated that they would not use any other leisure facility if Daisyfield or Shadsworth closed.
- When asked to explain the potential impact of a closure, the main explanations involved increased travel costs and time, a lack of suitable alternative leisure facilities in the area, detrimental impact on their health and a loss of social value gained at the local facilities
- The main alternative suggested related to charging, with people willing to pay more to keep the centres open

- Other suggestions included a review of staffing, opening hours and accessing funding opportunities
- Five schools that use the facilities for swimming sessions with their children responded. Whilst all schools did not necessarily disagree with the focus of the Leisure Review, they did feel like it would have an impact on them in relation to transport, cost and time

4.2 Public meetings

The public meeting at Shadsworth Leisure Centre was attended by 32 members of the public and the public meeting at Little Harwood Community Centre was attended by 53 members of the public. The key messages from the public meetings were as followed

- Residents expressed concern that if both Shadsworth and Daisyfield pools closed, and with an increasing population, there won't be enough pools in Blackburn to accommodate all those people who currently swim at the existing four leisure centres with pools.
- Reference was made at the Daisyfield meeting that Darwen has approximately a third of the borough's population but if both Daisyfield and Shadsworth close, it would leave Blackburn with only one pool facility at Blackburn Leisure Centre for a population three times the size of Darwen.
- There was a very articulate representation of south Asian ladies at the Daisyfield meeting who felt that Daisyfield Pools offered them appropriate facilities to meet their cultural needs in both pools; Blackburn Leisure Centre is much more limited with only the training pool able to be used in complete privacy.
- Concerns were raised at the Shadsworth meeting about where local children would swim if the facility closed
- There was specific concern from the Shadsworth public meeting regarding the cost of public transport and the lack of regular public transport.
- At both public meetings, the Council were urged to look at different models to keep the pools open; working with local clubs and the community and volunteers.
- There was a strong feeling that the facilities were not just for leisure they were much more about people's health and wellbeing and a sense of local community.

As a result of the public meetings, the Council subsequently received expressions of interest from two different local organisations that attended the public meetings and wished to become involved in the operation of Shadsworth Leisure Centre and Daisyfield Pools.

5. EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

5.1 Shadsworth Leisure Centre

Blackburn Centurions Swimming Club has submitted an expression of interest to the Council to take on a 'license to operate' exclusive use of the swimming pool at Shadsworth Leisure Centre. The club would relocate their club sessions from other pool facilities and concentrate their club activities at Shadsworth Leisure Centre.

The club would open the pool from 4.00pm to 9.30pm, Monday to Thursday and from 4.00pm to 8.00pm on Friday; the pool would remain closed at weekends. The club would retain one lane for public swimming from Monday to Thursday and they would also retain the popular Friday night junior fun session.

The club would lifeguard the pool throughout the pool opening hours with qualified volunteer lifeguards (the club already volunteer lifeguard their club only sessions) and pay the Council a fee to cover the operating costs of the pool.

The Dance school have also agreed to take exclusive use of the dance studio 1 on the first floor of the centre and would pay the Council for this exclusive use. The dance studio would operate from 4.00pm to 9.15pm from Tuesday to Friday and from 10.15am to 2.15pm on Saturdays. The dance studio would be closed on Sunday and Monday.

The remaining leisure facilities at the Shadsworth Leisure Centre include the Sports Hall, the squash courts and the gym. The Council could continue to operate these leisure facilities on reduced opening hours between 5.00pm and 9.30pm from Monday to Friday; which equates to 22.5hrs of opening. The reduced opening hours would enable the majority of the existing dry side users to continue to use the facilities so that the centre could maximise income whilst minimising operating costs.

5.2 Daisyfield Pools

The Council has received a proposal from a local company which provides a range of aquatic activities, programmes and lessons across Pennine Lancashire and further afield. The company wish to take on a 'license to operate' Daisyfield Pools. The organisation has proposed to create a charitable organisation to operate the centre and provide a pool programme to meet local community needs.

The organisation which has submitted the proposal has some experience of operating aquatic programmes in Blackburn and they have good local knowledge of the communities across Blackburn.

However, there has not been sufficient time since the public consultation ended and the proposal was submitted for the Council to fully consider and assess the financial and operational implications of the proposal and affect an asset transfer of the facility.

5.3 Private sector leisure operators

As part of the consultation process, the Council also advertised the opportunity to manage one or both Leisure Centres at nil cost to the Council on the NW CHEST website and as a result of this advert; we have received expressions of interest from two private sector leisure operators.

However due to the lack of time available since the consultation period ended; it has not been feasible to embark on a procurement process with these two companies and seek bids for the operation of Shadsworth Leisure Centre and Daisyfield Pools.

6. PROPOSALS

6.1 Shadsworth Leisure Centre

The Council could work in partnership with the Centurions swimming club and the Dance school to jointly operate the facilities at Shadsworth Leisure Centre on reduced opening hours.

This would enable the Centre to remain open to the public at the busier evening times and operate at nil costs to the Council.

6.2 Daisyfield Pools

The Council could continue to operate Daisyfield Pool on significantly reduced opening hours to minimise operating costs and maximise income by retaining the most popular casual swim sessions within the pool programme alongside a reduced public swim lesson programme.

Alongside this, the Executive Member for Culture, Leisure and Young People and the Director of Environment and Leisure could be authorised delegated powers to undertake the work necessary to asset transfer the building(s) in 2016/17 to achieve the overall saving of £731,000 attributed to the Leisure Review

In the interim, Daisyfield Pools would open for 16 hours a week from 4.00pm to 8.00pm on Wednesday and Thursday, from 4.00pm to 9.00pm on Friday and from 9.00am to 12.00 noon on Saturday for swimming lessons only. The building would be closed from Sunday to Tuesday.

The pool programme would focus on the learn to swim lessons and a range of public swimming sessions during the evenings including Ladies Only, Men and Boys and Lane Swimming. The above proposal addresses many of the concerns that were raised at the public meeting and would retain swimming provision in a pool which meets the needs of the local community, including single gender access.

There is also an opportunity to provide schools swimming sessions on one afternoon per week to support the needs of the 4 local schools who, through the consultation process strongly indicated that they would not move to Blackburn Leisure Centre due to the presence of public swimming at the same time as school swimming sessions. The school swimming sessions would have to operate at nil cost to the Council

If the aforementioned proposals were approved the operating subsidy for Daisyfield Pools would reduce from £422,000 to £71,000, a saving of £351,000.

7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The review of Leisure and swimming pool provision supports the Council's agreed financial strategy and commitment to meet efficiency targets.

The outcome of the Leisure review will be to retain sufficient leisure provision across the borough to meet the needs of residents.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Council has had unprecedented severe reductions in Central Government funding each year since 2010. In order to achieve the budget reductions, members agreed a range of Portfolio budget strategies and savings proposals at Council Forum in September 2014. The Leisure, Culture and Young People's portfolio has an overall budget savings target of £1,943m between 2015/16 and 2017/18.

Options regarding alternative ways to reduce the budget by £731,000 pa in relation to the delivery of leisure have been considered but the operation of swimming pools takes up a significant proportion of the leisure budget, it is not possible to deliver savings of £731,000 without reviewing swimming pool provision.

The proposals outlined above would provide initial savings of £660,000 pa, whilst proposals to asset transfer the building(s) were being developed.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The provision of leisure services is a discretionary activity. The Council has powers to provide as it thinks fit and deal with leisure facilities under the general power of competence provided by section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 and section 19 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976.

The Council needs to ensure that its decision makers are correctly and adequately informed. As such, a timely, adequate and effective consultation needs to be undertaken with all relevant stakeholders. The outcome of the consultation will need to be considered and taken into account when formulating any change proposals. Any change in the provisions of facilities should be subject to a reasonable notice period. Consultation (in accordance with relevant employment legislation) will also necessary with any staff that may potentially be affected by any change proposals.

Any change proposals would be subject to the Council's duties under the Equality Act 2010. This will be informed by way of an Equality Impact Assessment as outlined in this report, which will need to be considered alongside any health implications before a decision is made on any change proposals.

10. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

As part of the consultation and decision making processes both an Equality Impact Assessment and a Health Impact Assessment have been completed, supported by Public Health colleagues

Chief Officer/Member

Contact Officer: Martin Eden; Director of Environment and Leisure

Date: 19th November 2015

Background Papers:

FPM report, Sport England – 5 October 2015

Leisure Review consultation report – November 2015