

LEISURE CENTRE MANAGEMENT AGREEMENTS

(Report by Head of Administration and General Manager, Leisure)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Members will be aware that the Council is actively involved in the management and funding of the 5 jointly provided Leisure Centres on secondary school campuses in Huntingdonshire at St Ivo, Huntingdon, St Neots, Ramsey and Sawtry. Changes in education governance arrangements and the way in which the County Council now funds education provision have led to proposals to change the basis of the funding and management of the Centres as set out in this report.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Centres have originated in different ways. The initial construction of some, St Ivo, Huntingdon and St Neots, was jointly funded by the County and District Councils to meet a need for sports provision at the secondary schools while at the same time providing leisure facilities for public usage. Others, Ramsey and Sawtry, involved the District Council enhancing and extending existing school sports facilities provided by the County Council and/or the local community. Subsequent developments and extensions have been largely funded by the District Council, with Huntingdon Town Council funding the majority of the cost of the original sports hall at Huntingdon.
- 2.2 The principle from the outset has been the added value and shared cost benefits of making the facilities available during term time days by children of both the site-secondary and neighbouring primary schools (the latter for swimming only) and by the public in the evenings, weekends and during school holidays. A complicated funding formula is used to determine the proportion of the revenue costs met by the County and District Councils but the whole of the cost of major repairs and refurbishment has been met by the District until recently when the County has agreed to meet a proportion of the expenditure based upon agreed usage.
- 2.3 Each Centre is managed by a formally constituted joint committee comprising representatives of the District and County Councils, the respective school governing bodies and in some cases, town council, community association and users representatives.

3. The Need for Change

- 3.1 Legislative change affecting the education service in recent years has altered the basis of the governance and funding arrangements for schools which has substantially reduced the role of the County Council as the local education authority. Governing bodies now own the land and premises that comprise the schools and most funding for education provision has been delegated to schools to manage their own affairs. The continued central funding of the joint leisure centres in Huntingdonshire by the County Council has become something of an anachronism, the continuation of which is difficult for the County Council to justify.

- 3.2 The situation in Huntingdonshire is unique in the county: none of the schools in the other Districts have jointly provided leisure provision of this nature. The remaining two secondary schools (Hinchingsbrooke and Longsands) in Huntingdonshire have and plan to make available sports and leisure facilities directly. The County Council is therefore anxious to dispense with the central funding of the leisure centres and to delegate the budgets to the secondary and primary schools that currently use the facilities.
- 3.3 The need to meet the leisure needs of the local population and improve the financial viability of the centres has increasingly led the District Council to develop sports and play facilities that generate income and which, consequently, are used less in proportion by the schools. Conversely alterations to the national curriculum can change the emphasis on sport in schools at both secondary and primary level and it has become more difficult to justify the educational proportion of the cost of the higher standards of facility required for public use.
- 3.4 Increasingly, it has become necessary to manage the leisure centres as a single combined business unit with policies affecting all centres being made centrally rather than centres taking individual, autonomous decisions in isolation. In recent years, the Impressions brand, marketing and health and safety all have been co-ordinated and managed centrally by specialist staff and this trend has continued with a recent restructuring of the leisure staffing establishment that has given individual centre and deputy managers responsibility for certain centralised functions, while retaining management responsibility for their individual centres.
- 3.5 The developments referred to have detracted from the need for separate management committees for the leisure centres which increasingly have fewer decisions to take that affect the individual centres. Attendance at meetings of the management committees has been patchy in recent years with some recording no attendance by a County Council or governing body representative for some years.

4. Proposals for Change

- 4.1 Discussions have been taking place with the County Council and the secondary schools on a new model for the management and funding of the leisure centres.
- 4.2 The County Council's intention to delegate the budget for the leisure centres to the secondary and primary schools (the latter for swimming only) necessitates a new funding structure to meet revenue expenditure. With effect from the start of the academic year in September 2009, it is proposed that schools will retain priority usage of the majority of the pool and some of the other facilities in the centres during term time school hours for which they will be charged an hourly rate for actual usage. Any time that is not required by the schools will be sold to the general public by the District Council. There will be no change in terms of public use at evenings, weekends and school holidays. The existing allocation of revenue expenditure will continue until the end of August, with the County Council meeting the relevant proportion of the annual cost until that time.
- 4.3 It is not expected that this change will lead to an increase in income but all parties will have an incentive to make full use of the facilities. The discussions thus far have already identified anomalies and timetable gaps which can be used to make facilities available for greater public daytime use.

- 4.4 The County Council will continue to meet a proportion of the cost of capital repairs identified in the quinquennial condition survey based upon educational usage of the facilities.
- 4.5 Responsibility for the management of the centres will be exclusively undertaken by the District Council which dispenses with the necessity for the retention of the management committees. Their demise will result in annual savings of in excess of £20,000 in external audit fees, plus the administrative cost of servicing meetings and preparing separate accounts for each centre. It is proposed that the committees cease to exist with effect from the end of the current financial year to avoid additional audit fees in 2009/10.
- 4.6 Having regard to the priority for both the County and District Council to promote healthy lifestyles and reduce childhood obesity, it is proposed that a new body be established to provide an active leisure forum for joint discussion and the future development of facilities. This would not be a formally constituted body in the same way as the management committees and suggested terms of reference are outlined in the Annex attached.
- 4.7 Executive responsibility for the leisure centres will revert to the District Council, but to assist the Executive Councillor for Leisure in his portfolio responsibility and provide a local focus for community representation, it is proposed that one district councillor from the notional catchment area should act as the advocate for each centre and the first point of contact on local issues for the centre manager and his staff.

5. Management Agreements

- 5.1 Management agreements exist between the County Council and the District Council and in some cases individual governing bodies for the ownership, management and funding of the leisure centres. The oldest of the agreements has now expired and management arrangements are continuing on a year to year basis. New agreements will be required that provide agreed terms for the County Council's capital contribution towards the ongoing maintenance of the facilities and with each of the secondary school governing bodies with regard to the management of the centres by the District Council, priority usage, charging, access etc. It is unlikely that current negotiations will be completed by the end of the current financial year and the centres will continue to function under the existing arrangements until such time as the new agreements have been concluded satisfactorily.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 It had been intended that this report would have been considered by each of the 5 management committees prior to despatch of the agenda for Cabinet. As a result of the recent adverse weather conditions however, the meetings of both the St Neots and St Ives committees were postponed for one week and any comments from those committees will be reported verbally to Cabinet when it meets.
- 6.2 No objections were raised by the Ramsey Committee. The Huntingdon Committee has recommended that a place be allocated on the active leisure forum for a representative of Huntingdon Town Council in view of the capital investment by the Town Council in the initial construction of the sports hall. The Sawtry Committee had no objection but preferred the use of an alternative term to the word 'forum' as the name of the proposed active leisure forum and wished to ensure that members of the public are aware who

to contact in the event of any future complaints about the operation of the centre.

- 6.3 The report has been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery). The only comments made related to a suggestion that Somersham and Alconbury & The Stukeleys wards should be included in the nominal catchment areas of St Ives and Huntingdon respectively for the purposes of the forum and for a longer period of notice to be given of forum meetings. The latter view was endorsed by the Sawtry Committee.
- 6.4 Huntingdon Town Council has drawn attention to the fact that the lease between the District Council and the Town for the occupation of the sports hall at Huntingdon contains provision for a management committee on which the Town is entitled to two voting representatives or such number as equates to 25% of the committee's membership. Further discussions will be taking place with the Town Council in this respect.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 The existing joint provision arrangements between the County and District Councils have worked well for almost 40 years since St Ivo Recreation Centre was first envisaged. They have resulted in first class leisure facilities for school children and the general public in Huntingdonshire which has encouraged annually increasing usage levels. However, the changing economic and educational environment calls for a new approach that modernises the way in which leisure provision is delivered. It is anticipated that the changes will be cost positive, but this will be dependent on on-going, regular school use which will require close liaison and co-operation with school staff.
- 7.2 Minor changes have been recommended to the format of the active leisure forum as a result of the meetings thus far of the management committees and the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery). Cabinet is invited to consider those recommendations if it is minded to establish the forum as proposed.

8. Recommendation

- 8.1 It is therefore

RECOMMENDED

- (a) that the Cabinet endorse the proposals contained in this report for the future management and funding arrangements for the leisure centres at St Ivo, Huntingdon, St Neots, Ramsey and Sawtry;
- (b) that responsibility for the leisure centres be undertaken by the District Council with effect from the new financial year;
- (c) that the existing five management committees be wound up with effect from the end of the current financial year;
- (d) that an active leisure forum be established in accordance with the terms of reference set out in the attached Annex; and
- (e) that the existing management agreements be substituted by new agreements to be agreed with the County Council and the individual secondary school governing bodies, plus an amendment to the lease

of Huntingdon sports hall, and that the Head of Administration be authorised to determine the final content of the agreements, after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Leisure and General Manager, Leisure.

Background Papers:

Existing management agreements for St Ivo, Huntingdon, St Neots, Ramsey and Sawtry leisure centres.-

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