

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL - MEETING 29 NOVEMBER 2023

MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR HARPER - BRIEFING

Wording of motion:

At the Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee held on 5th March 2019 (minute 146) a report was presented on the Future of Sports and Leisure Provision. This was the start of an active process to look at future options for the Maidstone Leisure Centre in Mote Park. This work was conducted with support from the National Sports Council. Over 2019 into early 2021, it became clear that the options were a major refurbishment or a new build for the leisure centre to have a long-term future. During 2021 site visits were undertaken to other new leisure centres and a consensus was developing towards the need for a new building. Since the move to a Cabinet structure in May 2022 the process has slowed or stopped. There is no clarity now on the way forward and the current management contract is coming to an end with no proposals for the future of the Leisure Centre.

In the 2022/23 budget an additional provision of £1m a year was put into the budget to reflect the aging building and its increasing costs with a view that by 2029/30 there would either have been a major refurbishment of the building, parts of which date to the 1970's or a full rebuild. Despite this issue and a request for an update, there are no proposals for the continuation of a leisure centre into the middle of the century.

In February 2023 the Economic Regeneration and Leisure Policy Advisory Committee received a report on the impact to the Council of the long-term revenue costs of the Leisure Centre, including doing nothing, refurbishment and new build. In revenue terms if there is no refurbishment to the Centre and it remains largely as now the yearly costs to the Council by 2039/40 will be around £2.3/2.4m and increasing yearly, whilst a new build would only cost £0.5m (and reducing yearly), saving £1.8/1.9m every year.

At that meeting it was stated that to do anything would be too costly to the Council, and that there was no provision in the capital programme. All that was agreed was for a minor scheme to improve circulation space and energy efficiency to be implemented next year.

That was 9 months ago, the problem will not go away by simply ignoring it. What we are asking for is that this issue be taken forward by the Council and a full progress report to agree a timetable on the process to when a final decision and either a full refurbishment or new build is proceeded with is submitted to the Communities, Leisure and Arts Policy Advisory Committee.

It is therefore proposed that:

The Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Arts provide a full progress report on the options to the Communities, Leisure and Arts Policy Advisory Committee, no later than its meeting in February 2024, including agreeing a timetable on the process and a key decision-making timeline as to when a final

decision is required to ensure that either a full refurbishment or new build is completed 2031.

Background information

Optimum timing of new investment

The reports cited in the question demonstrate that the condition of the leisure centre and options for the future including its potential refurbishment or replacement have been under active consideration by members for some time. It has always been recognised that a new leisure centre will require very significant capital investment, but over time the condition of the existing leisure centre will itself require investment in order to keep it open. From a financial viewpoint, the decision to be made is therefore at what point the costs of keeping the existing centre open outweigh the costs of a new leisure centre, bearing in mind the lifetime costs of each option.

It must be stressed that the Council has maintained its commitment to providing good quality and affordable leisure facilities to residents throughout. Indeed, by taking over the former David Lloyd Club at Lockmeadow earlier this year, the Council is now providing another leisure facility in the centre of the town, catering to the commercial market, and has significantly improved the quality of the facilities on offer there.

Previous consideration by members

To illustrate the point about active consideration of the timing of new investment, the capital programme for the five years commencing 2024/25 was considered by the former Economic Regeneration and Leisure Policy Advisory Committee at its meeting on 10 January 2023. At that point, no new leisure centre was included in the five-year programme, but it was stated the end of the five year planning period would likely be the optimum time to initiate the construction of a new facility. Work was continuing in the background on the location, design and facilities to be provided.

Current position

More recently, the Communities Leisure and Arts Policy Advisory Committee considered an extension to the existing contract with Maidstone Leisure Trust and Serco Leisure Limited at its meeting on 3 October 2023. A report setting out the details is included on the PAC's agenda for 9 January 2024. If agreed by Cabinet, this extension would run until 2031, being approximately the date which was previously estimated to be the optimum time for the replacement of the existing facilities with a new leisure centre.

The variables affecting timing of investment in a new leisure centre, including the Council's access to capital funding, competing capital expenditure priorities, building costs, and the cost of maintaining the existing facility, will remain under review. The options (refurbishment versus replacement) remain under review and the necessary preparatory steps for the construction of a new leisure centre are being taken. These include monitoring progress with the construction of Passiv Haus style leisure centres elsewhere in the country and taking all available opportunities to bid for grant funding for feasibility and other work, with a view to construction of a new leisure centre at the appropriate time.

In the meantime, as agreed by Cabinet at its meeting on 8 February 2023, a significant interim investment in the leisure centre of £2 million for improvement works will be undertaken over the next 12 months to ensure that the facility remains attractive and up-to-date. This figure has been updated in the MTFS Capital Programme report to be considered by the Community Leisure and Arts PAC on 9 January, along with a provision of £60 million for a new Leisure Centre. The Capital Programme will then be considered in its entirety by Cabinet on 24 January 2024 and by Council in February 2024.

Conclusion

Given the proposed contract extension arrangements and capital expenditure plans, as summarised above and described in more detail in reports on the PAC Agenda for 9 January 2024, the requirement for a progress report (as requested in the motion) has been superseded.