

LEISURE – BEST VALUE REVIEW: THE WAY FORWARD

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report introduces Members to the findings of the internal officer Best Value Working Group looking into leisure services and also the consultant's report which looks at the options available to the Authority, to replace the existing contract which expires in March 2002. On the basis of the information now supplied, Members are asked to consider the way forward in terms of the future provision of leisure services within the District.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 At Leisure Sub Committee in June, Members received an officer presentation in respect of Best Value in relation to Leisure Services. At that meeting Members outlined some of the strengths and weaknesses they perceived in connection with the delivery of leisure services within the District. At the same meeting, the Council's leisure consultants, PMP, outlined how they would undertake the process of reviewing the Council's Leisure Services, the timescales involved, and the consultation exercises that they planned to carry out.
- 2.2 Both the internal officer group and PMP have been working closely together over the last few months. Much of the officer work has provided the base information upon which PMP have taken the process forward. The officer group has also looked at leisure within the District in the wider context, whereas PMP have focussed very much on the leisure contract and its future replacement.
- 2.3 Last month PMP gave a Member presentation in relation to the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and their initial views on the options available to the Authority in respect of future contract provision.
- 2.4 Both the internal officer group and PMP have now drawn up their respective reports in relation to leisure provision within the District. The reports complement each other and provide Members with the fullest possible information to aid the decision making process as the way forward.

3 THE PROCESS OF BEST VALUE

- 3.1 As Councils review their services using Best Value principles, each service review is expected to incorporate the four 'C's, namely:-
- To challenge why and how a service is being provided
 - To compare the services with the performance that others are achieving
 - To consult with local tax payers, service users and the wider community on how the service can be improved
 - To demonstrate competitiveness of the service's performance.
- 3.2 The internal officer group has been working on how the service is currently provided, what it costs, what are its strengths and weaknesses, and comparing it where appropriate both with past performance and with information from elsewhere. The consultants, in their review of the service, have taken this information, carried out a consultation exercise, and added their own knowledge and expertise as part of the challenge and comparison process to bring forward recommendations for Members to consider.
- 3.3 A key question of the best value process is to ask the question "Should we be providing the service at all?" Both the officer and consultants' conclusion to this is that whilst the Council should be looking to redefine and improve leisure services in a number of ways, there is no basis for a wholesale withdrawal of the service as such. Whilst not a statutory front-line service specifically in its own right, there is now an overall responsibility placed on the Council through the Local Government Act 2000 for the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of residents. In addition there are strong linkages to the Crime & Disorder, Housing & Health agendas now associated with leisure provision.

4 THE WAY FORWARD

- 4.1 With the information now to hand, Members need to determine how they wish to proceed in connection with the renewal of the Leisure Services Contract – what form it should take, what facilities should be included/excluded, what other aspects should be covered, duration, financial commitment, etc.

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- 4.2 It is also important that a decision is reached as quickly as possible. The Consultants' report sets out in more detail a proposed timetable for ensuring that a replacement contract is in position by the necessary date.
- 4.3 Other issues have emerged from the work carried out both internally and by the Consultants and Members need to consider how these aspects should be dealt with. For example, from the work done internally it is suggested that the Planning Policy Sub Committee needs to look at issues such as tourism and its promotion as part of the Local Plan Review process. Also, it is clear that whilst information is available in relation to throughput, usage, and customer satisfaction in relation to the existing contract, there is limited information as to how these figures compare with other similar facilities outside of the District. Clearly, it would be useful if in any future contract such information could be made available on a regular basis to ensure that performance comparisons can be made.

5 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Provision of leisure services can have an impact in relation to Crime and Disorder issues.

6 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The provision of leisure facilities, depending on their nature, can do much to add to the attractiveness of the District's environment. In addition, the location and design of facilities can have environmental implications in terms of accessibility, journey time, and energy consumed.

7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

7. There are no financial implications arising directly out of this report. However, the outcome of this process has the potential to deliver both savings and quality improvements to the existing service provision.

8 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Leisure complements the Council's statutory obligations. In addition, the Local Government Act 2000 recognises the wider social, economic and environmental responsibilities of Councils.

9 PARISH IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Leisure services are provided on a District-wide basis. Parish Councils have been consulted by the Consultants as part of the process.

10 RECOMMENDATION

It is proposed that the Sub Committee considers the contents of both the Consultants' report and the internal officer report in relation to Leisure Service provision and recommends to Council on the best way forward.

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