

Minutes of a meeting of the Leisure Services Committee held at the Oakwood Centre on Tuesday 15 November 2022 at 8:00 pm

Present: *Councillors D. Smith (Chairman); N. Al-Sanjari; R. Horskins; C. Jewell; V. Lewis; A. Swaddle*

Officers present: *K. Murray, Deputy Town Clerk; E. Whitesmith, Leisure Services Manager; M. Filmore, Committee Officer*

Also present: *Councillor K. Baker
2 members of the public*

35. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bragg and Heap.

36. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

37. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15 NOVEMBER 2022**

RESOLVED:

- ◆ That the minutes of the Leisure Services Committee meeting of 15 November 2022 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

38. **BUDGETARY CONTROL**

Members reviewed the Budgetary Control report.

Members noted that expenditure in relation to the allotments was significantly under the budgeted amount. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that spending was largely responsive. He highlighted that work was currently being undertaken in relation to a water leak identified at the site which could lead to further expenditure, advising that the supply to the affected area had been isolated and that the Maintenance Team were currently investigating.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note Report No. LS 1/23.

39. **WOODFORD PARK LEISURE CENTRE, SPORTS DEVELOPMENT AND ACTIVITIES**

The Leisure Services Manager presented Report No. LS 2/23.

With regards to gym membership cancellations, the Leisure Services Manager advised that two recent leavers had advised that their reason for cancellation was to move to a gym which offers family membership. It was noted that this reason had been cited by a small number of other leavers at the last committee meeting. The Leisure Services Manager advised that the possibility of offering family membership at Woodford Park Leisure Centre was being investigated, highlighting that Loddon Valley previously had set times when under 16's were permitted to use the gym.

In response to a query as to whether any consideration had taken place regarding the impact of the recently opened Palmer Park Leisure Centre, the Leisure Services Manager advised that, similarly to when Bulmershe Leisure Centre opened, it was felt that the offering of that centre was different to that of Woodford Park Leisure Centre. It was

reasoned that it would not be possible to compete for those members who wanted to swim, who would attend other facilities, but that Woodford Park provides a different type of gym; one with a community feel and with a membership predominantly made up of those over the age of 35.

Members noted that the free parking offered at Woodford Park Leisure Centre was a benefit over other centres in the area, and it was commented that Wokingham Borough Council may look to introduce car park charges at Bulmershe Leisure Centre. However Members also noted that the introduction of proposed car park charge increases at Wokingham Borough Council car parks in the area might push car users to park at Woodford Park Leisure Centre. The Leisure Service Manager stated that he didn't feel this would be an issue, but could keep an eye on the situation.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note Report No. LS 1/23.

40. **PARKS AND BUILDINGS**

The Deputy Town Clerk presented Report No. LS 3/23.

He advised Members that Council staff had a positive meeting with the Allotments Tenants Committee recently, and that Officers would be attending their AGM in March.

Following a query regarding the installation of new fire alarms at Coronation and Chapel Halls, the Deputy Town Clerk advised these were to replace pre-existing off the shelf systems which had been in place but which had been identified as a potential risk. Whilst the old system was not dangerous, the new alarms installed are considered more fit for purpose.

Following a concern raised regarding the lack of lighting around Woodford Park, and the number of residents that use the park during as a thoroughfare and for recreation after sunset, Members requested that the Deputy Town Clerk consider adding the installation of lighting to the Capital Project list. Members noted, however, that any lighting solution considered would need to be sensitive to the area and to the environmental impact on wildlife.

Members also suggested the possibility of improving the pathways around the playing field to the north of the Leisure Centre in Woodford Park. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that this was being considered, with the potential for using either bonded gravel or an even more basic surface, to help prevent the pathway from getting muddy or flooded. He noted that this would be a large project, but that it could be completed in phases.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note Report No. LS 16/22.
- ◆ For the Deputy Town Clerk to add the installation of lighting at suitable locations in Woodford Park to the Capital Projects list, for consideration.

41. **CHARGES 2023/24**

The Leisure Services Manager set out the proposed charges in relation to the Leisure Centre and outdoor sports facilities.

Members noted that the rate increase being proposed for the hire of tennis and table tennis facilities by OAP's and under-18s was nearly 10%, which was higher than other proposed charge increases. The Leisure Services Manager advised that a 50p increase had been added to each charging group for those facilities for consistency and ease of managing payments. Members discussed whether the increase was too high, with option of

not increasing those rates considered. The Leisure Services Manager suggested that the impact of any change in charge rates with regards to the tennis facilities would be low as these are seldom used, but that the impact would be slightly higher when considering the hire of table tennis facilities. He also advised that he was unaware of any queries being received when the table tennis rates increased by 30p last year.

Members queried what the definition of 'concessions' was in relation to the Healthy Habits (HH) card, and whether those individuals received the Adult HH or OAP / Under-18's HH rates. The Leisure Services Manager advised he would need to review the Healthy Habits application form to advise on the specific criteria to be considered as a concession, but advised that he believed concessions were charged Adult HH rates. Members determined to recommend to the newly formed Leisure Services Committee in the next municipal year, following elections, that a working group be set up to work with the Leisure Services Manager to consider the charging structure at the Leisure Centre.

The Deputy Town Clerk set out the proposed charges in relation to the community halls and the memorial ground, highlighting that all charges had been increased by approximately 10% to try and keep in line with inflation, with some rounding to the nearest 10p. He advised that significant cost increases were expected in the following financial year, specifically those relating to energy and staffing costs, however demand remains strong and so it is not perceived that the proposed increases would have a negative impact on the hire of facilities.

Following a query regarding the 'Brownies / Guides' rate, the Deputy Town Clerk noted that this was a historically low rate offered to Brownies and Guides groups who hired halls. It was noted that this rate would also be offered to any other uniformed youth organisation, and so the Committee recommended that the name of the charge rate be amended to reflect this.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note Report No. LS 4/23.
- ◆ To recommend to the newly formed Leisure Services Committee in the next municipal year that a working group be formed to work with the Leisure Services Manager to review the charging structure at Woodford Park Leisure Centre.
- ◆ To change the name of the 'Brownies / Guides' rate to become the 'Uniformed Youth Organisations' rate.
- ◆ To recommend that the proposed charges for 2023/24, as set out in the Budget Appendix, be approved.

Voting: For: 4 Against: 0 Abstentions: 1 No Vote: 1

42. **REVISED ESTIMATES 2022/23**

Members noted that the revised estimates for 2022/23 reflected a reduction in expenditure of approximately £15k, and an increase in income of approximately £42k when compared to the original budget, making an overall reduction of £57k.

Following a query regarding income relating to the Grounds Maintenance Depot, the Deputy Town Clerk advised that this related to income received from Earley Town Council regarding the upkeep of Bulmershe Open Space.

In response to a query as to why there had been a 23% increase in expenditure compared to the 2021/22 financial year, Members noted this was largely due to increased staffing and energy costs.

A query was raised as to why, in relation to the Leisure Centre, lighting and heating costs had reduced from 2021/22. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that this was because electricity costs had lowered due to the use of solar panels, the move to LED lighting throughout the building, and the fact the Council were 3 years into a 20-year fixed energy rate. However, Members also noted that there was now expenditure associated with gas heating, and that this expenditure covered the reduction in the lighting and heating budget. Members requested that further analysis of the benefit of the introduction of solar panels and LED lighting be provided at the end of the year to the Committee.

Following a question as to why expenditure on vending had increased significantly, the Leisure Service Manager advised that this was because vending sales had been higher than expected, but noted that any higher expenditure directly correlated to higher vending sales income.

Councillor Jewell raised a concern that the proposed budget in relation to Youth Services for 2023/24 had only increased by £1k, suggesting this was a reduction in real terms and that the increase should be around 10% to keep up with inflation. Members noted that none of the allocated Youth Services budget had been spent during 2022/23, which the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed was because no submissions had been received to the Council's Youth Service tender.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that, whilst the budget proposes to set aside £27k for the provision of Youth Services, this had been based on the provision of detached youth work. He advised that, should the Council determine to consider providing a different form of Youth Service, and should the budget not cover this, any increased spending could be taken to the Strategy & Resources Committee for consideration.

Following discussion on the matter of the proposed Youth Services budget for 2023/24, Councillor Jewell proposed, seconded by Councillor Al-Sanjari, that the proposed budget be set at £28,600, a 10% / £2,600 increase on the 2022/23 budget. Councillor Jewell and Councillor Al-Sanjari requested that their vote be recorded and, following a query from the Committee Officer, the Chairman confirmed that he would like a recorded vote. Following a vote it was:

RESOLVED:

- ◆ That the proposal to increase the proposed Youth Service budget to £28,600, proposed by Councillor Jewell, be defeated.

Voting: For: 2 Against: 2 Abstentions: 2 No Vote: 0

For	Against	Abstention	No Vote
Cllr N Al-Sanjari	Cllr D Smith	Cllr R Horskins	
Cllr C Jewell	Cllr A Swaddle	Cllr V Lewis	

Following an equality of votes the Chairman provided a casting vote and voted against the proposal.

It was noted by Members that the discussion regarding the proposed Youth Services budget for 2023/24 actually related to the following agenda item, and not the revised 2022/23 estimates. Members returned to the considering the revised 2022/23 estimates and:

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note Report No. LS 5/23.

- ◆ That the Deputy Town Clerk to provide data on the benefit of introducing solar panels and LED lighting in Council buildings at the end of the financial year.
- ◆ To recommend that the Revised Budget Estimates for 2022/23, as set out in the Budget Appendix, be approved.

Voting: For: 6 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0 No Vote: 0

43. **BUDGET ESTIMATES 2023/24**

The Deputy Town Clerk advised Members that the budget estimates for 2023/24 reflected a £95k net increase from the 2022/23 budget. The increase was mainly due to increased staffing, superannuation, and energy costs.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note Report No. LS 6/23.
- ◆ To recommend that the Budget Estimates for 2023/24, as set out in the Budget Appendix, be approved.

Voting: For: 4 Against: 1 Abstentions: 1 No Vote: 0

44. **COMMUNITY YOUTH PARTNERSHIP**

Members noted that the Youth Services working party had met informally with Earley Town Council to discuss the possibility of joint working with regards to the provision of youth services. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that there was some overlap between what each Council wished to provide, but that Earley Town Council potentially had some building space available which could act as a hub and would make the provision of detached youth work in Woodley more achievable. He advised Members that the plan was now to invite back some youth service providers to find out if a more attractive service offer can be developed.

With regards to the cancellation of the scheduled Community Youth Partnership meeting, the Deputy Town Clerk advised that, with no current Youth Service provision provided by the Council, the Town Council have nothing to input to this meeting. Other Youth Service providers who sit on the Partnership would be continuing with their work, and more information regarding any Council youth service would be provided to them when known.

Members suggested it was urgent that the Youth Service working party meet formally, and suggested they meet in February. It was noted that the Youth Service working party reports to the Strategy & Resources Committee, and the Deputy Town Clerk advised that an update on the current process would be provided to the next of that committee.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note that the meeting of the Community Youth Partnership, due to be held on 4 January 2023, had been cancelled.

45. **LODDON MEAD OPEN SPACE UPDATE**

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that he did not have an update on the Loddon Mead Open Space. Councillor Swaddle noted that when she visited before Christmas there was a large cardboard box full of spray paint cans. It was suggested these would be collected by Wokingham Borough Council who own the land. Members recommended Wokingham be pushed to provide a proper recycling bin for spray cans at the site.

46. **SEATING LOCATIONS IN WOODLEY**

Members noted there was budget provided for the installation of four seats in 2023/24. A suggestion was made to ask members of the public for views on where these seats would best be located, and to provide them with the list collated by Councillor Heap. However, it

was noted that some of the suggested locations may not be viable, as factors such as land ownership and utilities would obviously impact whether seats can be installed in particular locations.

It was also noted that the list did not include possible bus shelter locations, and a suggestion was made that in some locations it would be easier to install a shelter rather than just a seat, especially where hardstanding has already been provided by Wokingham Borough Council at a bus stop.

Members recommended this item be deferred until the next meeting of the committee in order to further understand the viability of the locations suggested. Members also agreed that communication should be put out to the public asking for suggestions of possible seating locations, with the caveat of stating that the viability of any suggested location would need to be considered.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note the proposed list of locations in Woodley for the installation of seats, included in the agenda.
- ◆ To publicise a request for suggested new seating locations in Woodley, with the caveat that the viability of installing a seat at suggested locations will need to be considered.

47. **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

There were no future agenda items highlighted by Members.

48. **PUBLICITY AND WEBSITE**

There were additional no publicity and website items highlighted by Members, other than those already highlighted during the meeting..

The meeting closed at 9:30 pm
