

## Rother District Council

**Report to:** Cabinet

**Date:** 31 October 2022

**Title:** Rother Health, Well-Being and Leisure Facilities Strategy

**Report of:** Deborah Kenneally – Head of Neighbourhood Services

**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Timpe

**Ward(s):** All

**Purpose of Report:** To consider the recommendation arising from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 17 October 2022, regarding the proposed Rother Health, Well-Being and Leisure Facilities Strategy. The report and recommendations arising are reproduced below and the Minutes of that meeting (Appendix A) should be read in conjunction with this report.

(The appendices to the original report have not been reproduced here and can be accessed on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Agenda).

**Decision Type:** Key

### Overview and Scrutiny

**Recommendation(s):** It be **RESOLVED:** That Cabinet be requested to:

- 1) amend the name of the Strategy to 'Rother Health and Well-Being: Leisure Facilities Strategy';
- 2) reword Key Principle 2 of the Strategy to 'The Council's role is one of deliverer as well as enabler and sign-poster to opportunities to be physically active';
- 3) reword Key Principle 6 of the Strategy to 'All new provision should be designed to achieve carbon neutrality and be as energy efficient as possible'; and
- 4) approve the draft Health, Well-Being and Leisure Facilities Strategy prior to public consultation commencing in November 2022, taking into account points raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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### Introduction

1. The Corporate Plan 2014 included a priority regarding the development of the former Bexhill High School site as a leisure destination which consisted of building a new leisure centre including a swimming pool, and residential housing.
2. Following a review by the Project Steering Group in June 2020, Cabinet, at their meeting on 27 July 2020 (Minute CB20/22 refers), approved the

suspension of the above project given the COVID-19 pandemic, its impact on leisure facilities and future use, and uncertainty surrounding Council finances.

3. Rother District Council (RDC) undertook to review leisure requirements in the longer-term, including the possibility of a new facility in Bexhill, as demand for leisure services and the financial climate became clearer. In the meantime, it was agreed that a new contract to maintain existing leisure services up to 31 March 2024 would be procured.
4. The new leisure management contract for Bexhill Leisure Centre and Bexhill Leisure Pool, operated by Freedom Leisure (FL), commenced on 1 April 2021 and will expire on 31 March 2024. The separate Rye Sports Centre contract, also operated by FL, expires on 31 March 2026.
5. The leisure facilities buildings in Bexhill are coming to the end of their structural 'life' and patch repairs to the current structure are no longer economical or environmentally efficient. The buildings are in need of major refurbishment or replacement and it is therefore important that a strategy is agreed for the provision of appropriate leisure facilities for the future.
6. On 10 January 2022, Cabinet approved the appointment of a leisure strategist to complete market research on residents' use and requirements from built leisure facilities across the district and on health and well-being in general to inform a draft Health, Well-Being and Leisure Facilities Strategy that is realistic and achievable, and supports an active and healthy lifestyle (Minute CB21/70 refers).

### **Strategists' Brief**

7. The strategists' scope includes the following:
  - Identify and engage with a broad spectrum of people across Rother District that accurately reflects the demographic nature of the district.
  - Through using a variety of methods, which may include interviews, focus groups and sample groups, gather specific data on who are current users of leisure facilities and what they use, including Council owned sites; who are not using leisure facilities and why; what facilities current consumers and potential users would wish to have.
  - Gather information on the barriers preventing people using facilities and how these may be overcome.
  - Identify and map current provision of leisure facilities including the type, quality and access for the public. This should build on previous strategy data and use Sport England Methodology and tools to comply with the Sport England Assessing Needs and Opportunities guidance.
  - Undertake a district wide survey with stakeholders, clubs, residents and groups to identify views of current provision and future needs.
  - Consult with agreed stakeholders to identify opportunities and partnerships including the NHS & Public Health, education partners, RDC officers and Members, Active Sussex and the Active Rother Partnership.

- Develop the Strategy to build on and compliment the strengths of the local area including its natural assets, built and other outdoor physical activity opportunities.
- Establish the role of physical activity in contributing to Rother communities' health and well-being, Rother's Public Health Strategy, Active Rother Partnership, East Sussex Healthy Weight Plan and RDC's Corporate Plan.
- Review of national and local relevant strategies and policies, including Moving Communities' trends, demographic data specific to Rother, and industry best practise.
- Review of each facility in relation to key strategic factors: meeting local need; community capacity; adjacency to/competition with other provision; financial (cost, investment, income generation); building condition; catchment areas; unmet demand; key users e.g. schools for curriculum delivery.
- Draft a Health, Well-Being and Leisure Facilities Strategy, informed by the above research, that includes setting out:
  - Existing provision – facilities and services.
  - Development of national and local strategic context and policy.
  - Assessment of the Rother demographic data.
  - A Needs Analysis for Rother (facilities and services, supply and demand).
  - A new Vision and Strategic Framework for Physical Activity facility provision in Rother – why, what, where, and how this links to and reflects shared priorities for Rother.
  - Delivering the Vision (this will reflect review and assessment of all other aspects of the brief), and what this means in terms of facilities, finance, timescales, resources (Interventions and Commitment).

### **Health, Well-Being and Leisure Facilities Strategy**

8. Please find attached at Appendix B the draft Health, Well-Being and Leisure Facilities Strategy for consideration and amendments prior to public consultation.
9. The timetable and process for review, amendments and final approval is as follows: -
  - O&SC -17 October -review draft and make recommendations for changes to Cabinet.
  - Cabinet -31 October -agree recommendations and any amendments to be made to the draft strategy.
  - November - December -public consultation on final draft strategy
  - O&SC - 23 January 2023- report on results of public consultation
  - Cabinet - 6 February 2023 -final draft strategy for approval
  - Full Council 20 February 2023

Please note: no new proposals can be added to the draft strategy once it has gone to public consultation; proposals included in the consultation can be amended following responses from members of the public.

10. In addition to the above, it should be noted that the current Freedom Leisure contract expires on 31 March 2024 and so time is short in which to procure a new contract if required. It is therefore important that the above timetable is met.

## **Conclusion**

11. The current contract with Freedom Leisure to operate Bexhill built leisure facilities ends on 31 March 2024 and the Bexhill buildings need major refurbishment or replacement prior to a new contract. It is important that the Council has a realistic and achievable strategy in place to ensure continuity of provision of leisure facilities that promotes health and well-being and an active lifestyle across Rother District.

## **Recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

12. That Cabinet be requested to approve the draft Rother Health, Well-Being and Leisure Facilities Strategy prior to public consultation commencing in November 2022.

## **Financial Implications**

13. On the 27 July 2020, Cabinet agreed to suspend the proposed redevelopment of the Bexhill Leisure Centre (Minute CB20/22 refers). Therefore, any recommendations arising from the strategists' report that require significant investment would be unfunded. Should Members decide to proceed with these recommendations funding would need to be identified before commencement.
14. Failure to have a strategy in place may mean further Council funding will be spent on maintaining old, inefficient buildings that may not meet the needs of residents and could mean sites cannot remain open.

## **Risk Implications**

15. There is a risk that if a Rother Health, Well-Being and Leisure Facilities Strategy is not agreed and in place there will be a delay to decisions on the future of built leisure facilities in Rother District and how they will be managed and operated in the future, and this may result in loss of service.

## **Environmental Impact**

16. Fully understanding the needs and requirements of residents in the Rother District, and then providing appropriate leisure facilities to meet these needs, is vital to support the community's health and well-being.
17. The existing built facilities are old and beyond their useful structural lifespan and no longer meet the environmental and 'climate change' aspirations of the future.

## **Equalities Impact**

18. Equalities – a new strategy may improve the offering and inclusiveness of the sites, including making them more welcoming for disabled people.

Other Implications	Applies?	Other Implications	Applies?
Human Rights	No	Equalities and Diversity	Yes
Crime and Disorder	No	Consultation	No
Environmental	Yes	Access to Information	No
Risk Management	Yes	Exempt from publication	No

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Appendices:	A – OSC Minute Extract – 17 October 2022
Relevant Previous Minutes:	CB09/57, CB20/22, CB21/70
Background Papers:	- <a href="#">Overview &amp; Scrutiny Committee Agenda - Monday 17 October 2022</a>
Reference Documents:	-

**Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Meeting – 17 October 2022**

**OSC22/26. ROTHER HEALTH, WELL-BEING AND LEISURE FACILITIES  
(5) STRATEGY**

Members received the report of the Head of Neighbourhood Services which outlined the draft Rother Health, Well-Being and Leisure Facilities Strategy for Members' consideration, prior to public consultation and final approval by Cabinet and full Council.

Cabinet, in July 2020, had approved the suspension of the project in the Corporate Plan 2014 to develop the former Bexhill High School site as a leisure destination, which consisted of building a new leisure centre including a swimming pool and residential housing, given the COVID-19 pandemic, its impact on leisure facilities and future use, and uncertainty surrounding Council finances. It was agreed that a new contract to maintain existing leisure services up to 31 March 2024 would be procured.

The new leisure management contract for Bexhill Leisure Centre and Bexhill Leisure Pool, operated by Freedom Leisure (FL), commenced on 1 April 2021 and was due to expire on 31 March 2024. The separate Rye Sports Centre contract, also operated by FL, was due to expire on 31 March 2026. The buildings in Bexhill were in need of major refurbishment or replacement and it was therefore important that a strategy was agreed for the provision of appropriate leisure facilities for the future.

On 10 January 2022, Cabinet approved the appointment of a leisure strategist to complete market research on residents' use and requirements from leisure facilities across the district and on health and well-being in general to inform a draft Health, Well-Being and Leisure Facilities Strategy that was realistic and achievable, and supported an active and healthy lifestyle. The draft Rother Health, Well-Being and Leisure Facilities Strategy was attached at Appendix B to the report for Members' consideration and amendments prior to public consultation. Members were led through the Strategy by Rachel Fowler, Managing Director, Strategic Leisure Limited who completed the independent market research and drafted the Strategy report

Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and the following points were noted during the discussions:

- leisure facilities were part of an overall health and well-being strategy and Members felt that the current title of the Strategy was misleading. Members therefore recommended and agreed that Cabinet consider amending the title of the Strategy to 'Rother Health and Well-Being: Leisure Facilities Strategy';
- Members suggested consideration be given to adding dancing into the Strategy as a known popular activity amongst the residents of Rother, with both physical and social benefits;
- there was no mention of concessions for residents on low incomes,

young people or of any local membership options in the Strategy. Members suggested consideration be given to incorporating these into the Strategy;

- the research provided a representative sample of the population of Rother and the detailed data could be found in the appendices to the Strategy;
- East Sussex Public Health had been consulted with and were very supportive of the Strategy. Working locally with GPs would be challenging and would need to form part of the implementation plan;
- nationally, leisure centres had seen a return of approximately 75% of their users from before the COVID-19 pandemic. Habits had changed and many users were continuing to exercise at home or outside, rather than choosing to go back to indoor centres;
- the largest proportion of returning leisure centre users were to swimming pools, with gym users being second;
- Members were keen to ensure that high quality, accessible to all wet facilities would be a priority, as the need had been demonstrated by the results of the research;
- Members did not consider the Council's role in the Strategy to be purely one of an enabler and sign-poster to opportunities to be physically active, as implied in the key principles of the Strategy. Members recommended that Cabinet consider rewording this principle to the Council being a deliverer as well as an enabler and sign-poster;
- Members were keen to ensure that the Gullivers site in Sidley be incorporated into the Strategy;
- references to the use of technology may attract more young people to leisure facilities and increased physical activity, such as virtual reality and video games;
- Members paid tribute to the Council's Community Grants Scheme in developing rural communities, which had enabled partnership working with parish councils to deliver leisure facilities such as the community pools and outdoor gym in Etchingham. This was a scheme that Members felt played an important role in the Strategy;
- Members requested consideration be given to adding the wording '...and be as energy efficient as possible' to key principle 6 in the Strategy, as achieving carbon neutrality in all new leisure provision was not enough;
- FL had recently announced the temporary closure of the swimming pool in Rye due to rising utility costs. Members recommended and agreed to explore the reasons further. Swimming was important for both physical and mental health and was the most requested activity in the market research survey, particularly lane swimming which was offered at the Rye pool. Representatives from FL and Rye Town Council would therefore be invited to the next meeting of the Committee to discuss further.

The Chair thanked Rachel Fowler for her detailed presentation of the Strategy and the Committee for their comments, which would be reported to Cabinet.

**RESOLVED:** That:

- 1) Cabinet be requested to amend the name of the Strategy to

‘Rother Health and Well-Being: Leisure Facilities Strategy’;

- 2) Cabinet be requested to reword Key Principle 2 of the Strategy to ‘The Council’s role is one of deliverer as well as enabler and sign-poster to opportunities to be physically active’;
- 3) Cabinet be requested to reword Key Principle 6 of the Strategy to ‘All new provision should be designed to achieve carbon neutrality and be as energy efficient as possible’;
- 4) Cabinet be requested to approve the draft Health, Well-Being and Leisure Facilities Strategy prior to public consultation commencing in November 2022, taking into account points raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and
- 5) representatives from Freedom Leisure and Rye Town Council be invited to the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee scheduled to be held on 21 November 2022 to discuss the temporary closure of Rye Swimming Pool.

(Councillor J. Barnes declared a Personal Interest in this matter as Vice-Chair of Etchingham Trust for Sports and Recreation and in accordance with the Members’ Code of Conduct remained in the meeting during the consideration thereof).

(Councillor Maynard declared a Personal Interest in this matter as Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health, East Sussex County Council and in accordance with the Members’ Code of Conduct remained in the meeting during the consideration thereof).