

Rother District Council

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 6 February 2023

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

Report of: Deborah Kenneally – Head of Neighbourhood Services

Cabinet Member: Councillor Timpe

Ward(s): All

Purpose of Report: To consider the recommendations arising from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 23 January 2023, regarding the draft Rother Health and Well-Being: 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 appendix to the original report has not been reproduced here and can be accessed on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Agenda).

Decision Type: Key

Overview and Scrutiny

Recommendation(s): **Recommendation to COUNCIL:** That the draft Rother Health and Well-Being: Leisure Facilities Strategy be approved and adopted, as amended by:

- 1) additional commentary at paragraph 5.3 of the Strategy to encapsulate the points raised through the consultation concerning missing elements; and
- 2) Key Principle 2 be reworded as follows: “The Council’s role is one of deliverer as well as enabler and sign-poster to opportunities to be physically active’.

Introduction

1. Rother District Council (RDC) undertook to review leisure requirements across the district for longer-term planning and once demand for leisure services and the financial climate became clearer following COVID.
2. To be considered in conjunction with the review is the wider Playing Pitch & Leisure Facilities Strategy currently being undertaken jointly by the planning teams of both RDC and Hastings Borough Council, to ensure the new Local Plan reflects residents and sports club’s requirements into the future.
3. Consideration has been given to the fact that the current leisure management contract for Bexhill Leisure Centre and Bexhill Leisure Pool, operated by Freedom Leisure (FL), expires on 31 March 2024 and the separate Rye

Sports Centre contract, also operated by FL, expires on 31 March 2026, and so a clear direction is required for the future management of these facilities.

4. In addition to the above, it should be noted that 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.
5. 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 and Well-Being: Leisure Facilities Strategy that is realistic and achievable, and supports an active and healthy lifestyle (Minute CB21/70 refers).
6. The draft strategy was approved by Cabinet on 31 October 2022 and then went for public consultation via an online survey during November and December 2022, and the results will inform the final draft.
7. The public consultation sought comments and feedback on all aspects of the strategy, but most particularly the strategy's vision, key principles, aims and objectives, the role of town and parish councils as partners in leisure services and swimming provision. In order to gain as broad a feedback as possible, advance letters were sent to sports clubs, community organisations, parish and town councils and businesses encouraging them to respond. Posters were sent to Town Councils, Parish Councils and organisations that operate from premises, such as The Pelham, Bexhill to erect on notice boards. MyAlerts and social media was also used throughout November and December to promote the survey.

Key Results of the consultation

8. The detailed analysis of the consultation results can be seen at Appendix A Rother Health and Well-Being: Leisure Facilities Strategy Consultation Report, and a printed copy of all the responses is available in the Members' Room.
9. The total responses received was 685, of which 667 were completed online and 18 received by email or letter, with the overwhelming majority, 634, coming from Rother residents. This is regarded as an excellent level of response and allows for meaningful feedback on the draft strategy.
10. **62.5% of respondents were female, 37.5% male, with the most represented age groups being 55-74 at 53%, 35-44 at 10% and the least represented being 18-24 and over 85. Disabled responses were well-represented at 20%**
11. Although the consultation was accessible to all, 45% of respondents stated they live in Bexhill, 68% said they were Rother leisure facilities users and 32% said they were not.

The key feedback received from the consultation questions is as follows:

12. **‘Strategy Vision’ – 84% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed**
Of those that disagreed, most were concerned about Rye temporary pool closure, sustainability and impact on the environment and the Council retaining control of the services.
13. **‘Strategy Principles underpinning Vision’ – 83% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed**
Of those that disagreed, most were concerned about Rye temporary pool closure, with other comments based on funding and the need for investment, and with more emphasis requested on supporting local independent clubs.
14. **‘Strategy Aim’ – 88% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed**
Of those that disagreed, several were concerned about Rye temporary pool closure, with comments regarding liaising with town councils, leisure facilities having limited access to the disabled and that they are not inclusive enough.
15. **‘Strategy Objectives’ – 82% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed**
Of those that disagreed, several were concerned about Rye temporary pool closure, with comments regarding lack of public transport, requesting that the Council should take over the running of the centres, and with additional emphasis on local providers offering smaller facilities run by volunteers, but the buildings maintained by the Council.
16. **‘Role of town and parish councils as important partners’ – 59% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed**
A summary of those that disagree includes suggesting that this would be a further layer of bureaucracy adding to costs, and that good quality leisure provision should be provided by central Government and Sports Council, not Local Authorities or town and parish councils. Also noted was the lack of ability to fund facilities adequately.
17. **‘Anything missing’**
Numerous comments were received to this question, mainly focusing on costs and funding, public transport, disabled access to both indoor and outdoor facilities, importance of swimming across all age groups, private sector partnership schemes and the need to support local clubs.

Summary of consultation results

18. The results are strongly supportive overall of the draft strategy. There are some suggestions from the results listed in Appendix A that may be considered for adding to the strategy, including aspects of the wider joint Rother and Hastings ‘Playing Pitch and Leisure Facilities Strategy’ once it is finalised and becomes available, local clubs and volunteer sector and funding.

Next steps

19. Once the final 10 year plus strategy has been approved by the Council, officers will work with Councillors to develop an action plan that incorporates

the vision, aims and objectives of the Rother Health and Well-Being: Leisure Facilities Strategy.

Conclusion

20. The results show that there is overwhelming support for the strategy as drafted, with perhaps some additions to support future provision for the next 10 years and beyond.

Recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

21. That Cabinet be requested to recommend to Council that the draft Rother Health and Well-Being: Leisure Facilities Strategy be approved and adopted.

Financial Implications

22. 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.
23. 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

24. There is a risk that if a Rother Health and Well-Being: 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

25. 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.
26. 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

27. 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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| Chief Executive: | Malcolm Johnston |
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| Appendices: | A – OSC Minute Extract – 23 January 2023 |
| Relevant Previous Minutes: | CB09/57, CB20/22, CB21/70 |
| Background Papers: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overview & Scrutiny Committee Agenda - Monday 17 October 2022 - Agenda for Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Monday 23rd January 2023, 6.30 pm - Rother District Council (moderngov.co.uk) |
| Reference Documents: | - |

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Meeting – 23 January 2023**OSC22/45. ROTHER HEALTH AND WELL-BEING: LEISURE FACILITIES STRATEGY**
(5)

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

Rother District Council (RDC) had undertaken to review leisure requirements across the district for longer-term planning once demand for leisure services and the financial climate became clearer following COVID. To be considered in conjunction with the review, was the wider Playing Pitch and Leisure Facilities Strategy currently being undertaken jointly by the planning teams of both RDC and Hastings Borough Council, to ensure the new Local Plan reflected residents' and sports club's requirements into the future.

Consideration had been given to the fact that the current leisure management contract for Bexhill Leisure Centre and Bexhill Leisure Pool, operated by Freedom Leisure (FL), expired on 31 March 2024 and the separate Rye Sports Centre contract, also operated by FL, expired on 31 March 2026, and so a clear direction was required for the future management of these facilities. Members also noted that the leisure facilities buildings in Bexhill were coming to the end of their structural 'life' and 'patch repairs' to the current structure were no longer economical or environmentally efficient. The buildings 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.

In 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 and Well-Being: Leisure Facilities Strategy. The draft strategy was approved by Cabinet in October 2022 and then went for public consultation via an online survey during November and December 2022. The public consultation sought comments and feedback on all aspects of the strategy, but most particularly the strategy's vision, key principles, aims and objectives, the role of town and parish councils as partners in leisure services and swimming provision.

The total responses received was 685, of which 667 were completed online and 18 received by email or letter, with the overwhelming majority, 634, coming from Rother residents. Detailed analysis of the consultation results were appended to the report.

The results were strongly supportive overall of the draft strategy and it was not considered necessary to change any of the recommendations. However, some additional commentary could be added to paragraph

5.3 of the draft Strategy to better reflect some of the comments made concerning elements that were considered missing from the Strategy.

During the debate, the following points were noted:

- it was noted that the condition of playing pitches had been audited during the wet winter months as part of the emerging Playing Pitch and Leisure Facilities Strategy currently being undertaken jointly by the planning teams of both RDC and Hastings Borough Council;
- the provision of all-weather pitches at strategic locations across the district would be an ideal position with RDC working in partnership and providing the capital costs and local stakeholders running the facilities;
- it was noted, disappointedly, that only one person in the 18-24 age bracket had responded to the consultation, whereas other age groups and ethnicity had been a better representative of the demographics of the area;
- it was not surprising that the issue of the temporary closure of Rye Swimming Pool had featured in the responses and Members were pleased to note that sources of other funding were being pursued to provide a sustainable facility into the future and hopefully reopen the pool as soon as possible; and
- Members were disappointed at the lack of response from the parish and town councils across the district, with a noticeable absence from Bexhill-on-Sea Town Council and that further work to engage with these stakeholders would be required in the future.

Members were disappointed that Cabinet had not previously approved their suggested re-wording for Key Principle 2 of the Strategy that had put greater emphasis on RDC's role as a deliverer – no other organisation / private sector provider was going to develop and deliver the type and range of leisure facilities that the public wanted. The Strategy should be an aspirational document and opportunities could present themselves in the future to enable development. Members agreed to recommend for a second time that Key Principle 2 be reworded, as this could ensure that any future potential Government funding streams would be accessible, should an opportunity present itself.

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Communities, Culture and Tourism addressed the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and commended the Strategy that was considered an excellent piece of work that provided a clear approach for the next 10 years and thanks were extended to the Rachel Fowler and the team at RDC for its production. It was noted that Key Principle 2 currently stated: 'The Council's role is primarily one of enabler, sign-poster and deliverer where possible, to opportunities to be physically active'.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet be requested to recommend to Council that the draft Rother Health and Well-Being: Leisure Facilities Strategy be approved and adopted, as amended by:

- 1) additional commentary at paragraph 5.3 of the Strategy to encapsulate the points raised through the consultation concerning missing elements; and

- 2) Key Principle 2 be reworded as follows: “The Council’s role is one of deliverer as well as enabler and sign-poster to opportunities to be physically active’.