

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-040-2014/15
Date of meeting: 3 November 2014



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Leisure and Community Services

Subject: Leisure and Cultural Strategy

Responsible Officer: Derek Macnab (01992 564050).

Democratic Services: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

(1) That the Cabinet consider the Leisure and Cultural Strategy and comment accordingly; and

(2) Subject to Recommendation 1 above, that the Cabinet agree the Key Recommendations of the Strategy as detailed below, as the basis of the Council's future role and priorities with respect to the provision of Leisure and Cultural opportunities:

2.1 That the key aim of the District Council with respect to the future provision of Leisure and Cultural activity, is to increase the number of people actively participating, by ensuring that provision is accessible and of the highest affordable quality.

2.2 That the ability of Leisure and Cultural activities to deliver across a number of broader themes, such as Health and Wellbeing, Social Inclusion, Regeneration, Skills and Employment, Community Safety and Economic Development, is acknowledged and as such, is considered important to delivering policy objectives in these areas.

2.3 That the Leisure and Cultural Strategy sets out a medium term vision of 10 years, with a formal review after 5 years, to coincide with the length of the District Council's Corporate Plan.

2.4 That the Draft Vision Statement developed by the Community Visioning consultation exercise of the Local Plan, steers the longer term aspirations of the Leisure and Cultural Strategy.

2.5 That the Council's Leisure and Cultural Strategy takes account of National and Regional Policy, which should be kept under review.

2.6 That future service provision delivered by the Council maintains alignment to the locally relevant priorities of National/Regional grant making bodies, to maximise external funding opportunities.

2.7 That since the Council's investment in purpose built leisure facilities, represents the largest area of discretionary spend, future provision should be

delivered by the most cost effective means possible and that maximum Value for Money is sought in terms of cost and quality.

2.8 That whilst this Leisure and Cultural Strategy focuses on the role of the District Council, with respect to the services it delivers directly or plays a significant role in enabling, the conclusions of the “Epping Forest Open Space, Sport and Recreation Assessment” should form part of the key deliverables with respect to the Local Plan.

2.9 (a) That the conclusions of the Assessment Report with respect to future provision are accepted with regard to the quantitative adequacy of Swimming Pools, Health and Fitness Facilities, Squash Courts and Synthetic Pitches, based on current and future demand.

(b) That the need to provide additional sports hall provision is accepted and that the opportunity to meet the deficiency by working with Epping Forest College, is positively explored.

(c) That it is acknowledged that the current level of provision is adequate with respect to catchment standards, (although age and condition of the Council’s facilities will need to be addressed), but that future leisure facility provision is kept under review, as growth scenarios develop as part of the Local Plan.

(d) That provision of dual purpose spaces and facilities, where practically possible and affordable, are included within any development of new Leisure Facilities in the district, in order to accommodate arts, cultural and community activity.

2.10 That the current relative performance of the Council’s Leisure Facilities with respect to cost, participation and subsidy, be noted and form a key consideration with respect to future provision.

2.11 That subject to confirmation of the final results of the building condition surveys, that Waltham Abbey Pool is deemed to have reached the end of its viable life, and be replaced by a new facility in Waltham Abbey, the part of the District with amongst the poorest health outcomes, with further work undertaken on the most suitable location, and how it may be funded.

2.12 That in the medium term, depending on growth in the locality, the opportunity to re-provide a replacement facility for Epping Sports Centre should be investigated and that any new Leisure Management Contract has appropriate break clauses to enable relocation.

2.13 That now confirmation of funding for the new Ongar Academy has been confirmed, and on the basis that the site adjacent to the existing Leisure Centre remains the preferred location, negotiations are entered into with respect to a dual-use arrangement for the Leisure Centre, with the intention of increasing use and sharing cost.

2.14 That the Council’s Key Objectives with respect to Leisure Management are re-affirmed as the basis for any future management contract, with the preferred option being to outsource to either the private sector or external trust.

2.15 That the procurement approach to the new Leisure Management

Contract be by Competitive Dialogue, seeking to deliver flexibility for any partner to develop income streams to reduce costs, whilst still meeting the Council's Key Objectives with respect to participation and community access.

2.16 That based on the success of other authorities, any new management partners are encouraged to invest in new facilities, which may involve the Council in providing capital finance.

2.17 (a) That the future Community and Cultural Priorities for the Council are Community and Cultural Cohesion, Health Inequalities, Young People and Youth Unemployment, Anti-Social Behaviour, Ageing Population and Rural isolation.

(b) That the potential for a further community hub development at Hillhouse, Waltham Abbey, be positively explored with the aim of co-locating community, health and wellbeing services to improve the quality of life of residents, in this area of health inequality.

2.18 That the Council adopts the priorities of the West Essex Health and Wellbeing Strategy and continues to play a key role in the local delivery of services, which have a positive impact on addressing health inequality, allowing people to live a longer more active life.

2.19 That the Council, whilst acknowledging the important role of the voluntary sector, undertakes a review of its Grant Aid Policy and Discretionary Rate Relief Policy for Voluntary Organisations to ensure that resources are used in the most efficient way possible, and that policy priorities are met.

2.20 That the Council continues to support the work of "One Epping Forest" generally, but specifically the work of the Tourism Taskforce in delivering their Action Plan, given the economic and social benefits that increased visitors to the District can bring.

Executive Summary:

This report seeks the formal adoption of the Leisure and Cultural Strategy developed by the Portfolio Advisory Group on Leisure and Culture. The purpose of the Strategy is to provide a policy focus and identify priorities for the District Council in its role in supporting the future provision of Leisure and Cultural opportunities, to meet the needs of residents and visitors to the District. The Strategy makes a set of key recommendations, a number of which will be central to the procurement of the Council's new Leisure Management Contract in 2016.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

Contained within the Council's Key Objectives for 2014, is a requirement to develop a new Leisure and Cultural Strategy. This report seeks the formal consideration and adoption of the completed document.

Other Options for Action:

Not to adopt the Strategy, however, this would leave a policy vacuum with respect to the future delivery of the services covered by the Strategy.

Report:

1. The District Council currently provides a range of Leisure and Cultural Services to include Arts, Community and Sports/Health Development as well as the District Museum Service.
2. However, the most significant direct investment in leisure is the provision of the four Sports/Leisure Centres, managed under contract on the Council's behalf, by Sport and Leisure Management Ltd (SLM).
3. The 10 year contract with SLM is due to expire in January 2016. The Council therefore needed to start considering the future level of service it wishes to provide, and importantly, what Leisure Management procurement and contractual options it may wish to pursue.
4. All of these considerations needed to be addressed in a strategic way. This is particularly true given that there are increasing demands on the Council's resources, resulting in a need to determine future priorities, alongside the changing socio-economic and demographic make-up of the District, with future levels of growth being determined by the Local Plan.
5. Therefore, contained within the Council's Key Objectives 2014/15, is a requirement to develop a new Leisure and Cultural Strategy. This is in order to identify future need and the role that the District Council may play.
6. In order to practically develop the Strategy, a Portfolio Holder Advisory Group was established by the then Leisure and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder. Representation was achieved across the District as the Portfolio Holder wanted to engage with, and seek the views of, a wider cross section of Members.
7. From the outset, when determining the scope of the Strategy, the Portfolio Holder Advisory Group recognised that Leisure and Cultural activities produce considerable social and economic benefits to the community, as well as making a major contribution to the special character of the District. This is achieved by enhancing the general quality of life and wellbeing of residents, promoting community cohesion and assisting regeneration and economic development.
8. The Portfolio Holder Advisory Group, whilst acknowledging that there are numerous other voluntary sector clubs and organisations, as well as other private sector and public partners, who provide a broad spectrum of Leisure and Cultural opportunities, determined that the primary focus of the new Strategy should be the District Council's role going forward with respect to policy and priorities. The Strategy reflects this direction.
9. The Portfolio Holder Advisory Group met on a number of occasions and received presentations on the Council's Community and Cultural Services, the Future Provision and Procurement Options in relation to the new Leisure Management Contract, and an insight into key demographic and health issues. Site visits were also undertaken to the Council's Leisure Facilities.
10. The proposed Strategy is attached as Appendix 1. The Cabinet are asked to consider the findings and key recommendations.

Resource Implications:

The provision of Leisure and Cultural is a discretionary service provided by the District

Council. The total cost of the service is in the region of £3.6million per annum. Added value is provided by external funding, primarily in the area of Community and Cultural Services.

An indicative target of annual savings in the region of 25% (£500,000 p.a.) has been set for efficiencies on the new Leisure Management Contract which currently costs in the region of £2million per annum, although the Council may well need to invest capital in new/refurbished provision in order to deliver such revenue savings.

Legal and Governance Implications:

Local Government Act 1972 and the Community Wellbeing Act 2000 contain the relevant powers.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

Active participation in Leisure and Cultural activities has proven to improve social cohesion and has an effect in the reduction of anti-social behaviour, by providing positive alternatives. The Council's current stock of Leisure Facilities has poor energy performance. An opportunity exists to considerably improve their efficiency through investment in new buildings and enhanced energy efficiency measures.

Consultation Undertaken:

Portfolio Holder Advisory Group. Focus Group on the development of the Open Spaces, Sports and Recreation Assessment.

Background Papers:

Minutes of the Portfolio Holder Advisory Group

Risk Management:

No specific risks identified other than delay to the procurement of the new Leisure Management Contract, if the Strategy is not adopted.

Due Regard Record

This page shows **which groups of people are affected** by the subject of this report. It sets out **how they are affected** and how any **unlawful discrimination** they experience can be eliminated. It also includes information about how **access to the service(s)** subject to this report can be improved for the different groups of people; and how they can be assisted to **understand each other better** as a result of the subject of this report.

S149 Equality Act 2010 requires that due regard must be paid to this information when considering the subject of this report.

The Strategy recognises the role that active participation in Leisure and Culture can have in improving the quality of life of all residents. However, the Strategy specifically recommends that Community and Cultural Cohesion, address Health Inequalities, support Young People, tackle Anti-Social Behaviour, combat rural isolation and to address the needs of our Ageing population. The Council's Leisure Facilities have weaknesses in terms of access for people with disabilities which would be addressed by new facilities.