

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-021-2008/09
Date of meeting: 1 September 2008



Portfolio: Leisure and Young People.
Subject: Loughton Leisure Centre – Remedial Work.
Responsible Officer: Laura MacNeill (01992–564223).
Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992–564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

To identify and commit in 2008/09 a Capital Estimate from the General Contingency fund of £46,000 for the completion of works to Loughton Leisure Centre

Executive Summary:

Loughton Leisure Centre (LLC) is one of the 4 District leisure centres whose operation and management are contracted to SLM Ltd. As part of the contract SLM are responsible for the maintenance of equipment such as that providing heating and hot water.

Difficulties have been experienced with the heating of hot water at the LLC since it first opened in 2003. A number of different solutions have been explored but the difficulties have persisted. In 2008, the Council commissioned an independent inspection of the hot water system from Silcock Dawson and Partners. They have determined that the faults with the system most probably arise from the original design of the Centre, and, that being the case, the responsibility for providing and funding the remedy rests with the Council, not SLM.

The effective operation of the LLC is key to the provision of high quality leisure services to the users of the centre. This is reflected in the Council's Best Value Performance Plan under "Fit for Life" through the provision of facilities which will encourage a healthy life style

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

The independent report shows that the problems stem from the original design and therefore the work falls to the Council to undertake. There have been many complaints regarding the temperature of the water delivered at the showers. Furthermore, due to temperature issues in the plant room itself there have been failures of other equipment which have health and safety implications or have prevented the use of a number of the water features available at the pool

Other Options for Action:

The only alternative option is to do nothing at this time, which would inevitably result in further complaints from the public, possible health and safety problems and a lessening of service to the public. There is also a risk of claims from the external contractor for loss of income and increased maintenance costs

Report:

1. Problems with the hot water supply were first experienced in the year of opening, 2003. On at least 2 occasions LLC was unable to supply heated water due to the heating cylinder circulation pump failing. After the second replacement pump, LLC was informed that the pumps were failing due to scale build up within them. This build up of scale then started to affect the heat exchangers on the cylinders, and these were examined by engineers and treated with descaler.

2. It was believed that these issues arose from the non-existence of any water softener or water conditioning on the entire water system. In early 2004 a water conditioner was installed on the mains riser in the water tank room. For the rest of the year LLC continued to experience problems, and consideration was given to the installation of back up pumps and heat exchangers so that when one set became scaled up, they could be replaced immediately, and the scaled ones taken away to be treated and then retained as back up. However, it was decided not to undertake these works.

3. Consideration was then given to whether the water conditioning had caused any loose scale in the water system to make its way to the pumps/exchangers etc, so in 2005 an engineer treated and descaled the two heat exchangers on the shower and sink cylinders for the Pool changing area. This exercise demonstrated that the system was as good as it possibly could be in terms of the degree of scaling.

4. Despite this activity, at busy times the Pool showers still ran cold. Engineers therefore looked at all the different parts of the system but had eventually to conclude that the heat exchangers and stored hot water was not sufficient to keep up with the demand for hot water at the showers.

5. In 2006, the heat exchanger on the shower cylinder failed again due to a build up of scale. An engineer again descaled both the heat exchangers as it was felt that it would only be a matter of time before the sink heat exchanger failed. Cold showers at peak times for the next 18 months continued to be experienced by pool users.

6. In late 2007 the heat exchangers on all 4 heating cylinders (showers and sinks Poolside plus Showers and sinks dryside) failed which meant no heated water could be supplied to customers. This coincided with the failure of the latest pressurisation units. The pressurisation units were replaced, and again all 4 heat exchangers were flushed through.

7. All the above works have been undertaken, in accordance with contractual requirements, by SLM Ltd. However, given the on-going nature of the problems and the possibility that the installation had not been 'fit for purpose' from the outset, SLM raised these concerns with the Council. It was decided that the appropriate action was to commission an independent specialist engineer's report, and Silcock Dawson & Partners were appointed to undertake this exercise.

8. The specialist report highlighted a number of issues, which have been considered by the Council's Facilities Management Group. They have concluded that the nature of the problems points clearly towards these being original design and construction issues and therefore are the responsibility of the Council to remedy and not SLM. The issues are summarised in the table below:

Issue	Estimated Cost
Hot water supply issues	
Increase capacity of hot water storage system	£23,000
Pump replacements	£4,000
Set up appropriate annual maintenance programme	£1,000
Professional fees	£5,000
Contingency (making good, centre closures, temporary hot water provision etc)	£8,000
Sub total	£41,000
Other issues	
Replacement of inadequate chemical dosing lines	£2,500
Replacement of pneumatic valves to circulating pumps	£2,500
Sub total	£5,000
Total	£46,000

9. The above works are in addition to a range of other remedial works which the Council has undertaken, at its expense, which the Council believes arise from problems with the original design and construction. The Council's Legal Officers are currently engaged in collating information so that Counsel's advice can be sought on the likely success of pursuing the original architectural practice for the costs of those remedial works. However, until such time as that advice is received the Council is duty bound to undertake works for which it is contractually responsible.

10. Every effort will be made by SLM, working with the Council, to limit the disruption caused to users of the LLC, including where practical, working whilst the centre is not in use.

Resource Implications:

As set out in paragraph (8) above, there is a requirement for the expenditure of £46,000 to undertake essential remedial works to LLC. The current capital programme does not contain provision for this expenditure and therefore the report seeks approval to draw down on the capital contingency fund in the sum of £46,000.

Legal and Governance Implications:

Contract with SLM requires the Council to meet these costs since the independent specialist appointed is of the view that they are related to original design shortcomings. There are no human rights issues associated with this decision. The works include those relating to the health & safety of employees and users of the LLC

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

The effective operation of the centre's heating and associated plant will provide hot water to the centre's users whilst reducing energy use and emissions of potential greenhouse gases to atmosphere.

Consultation Undertaken:

SLM Ltd

Background Papers:

Previous Cabinet reports on issues around the original design and construction of the centre
Report from the Council's appointed specialists, Silcock Dawson & Partners

Impact Assessments:

There are no direct equality and diversity issues associated with this report other than a general position that the availability of adequate and reliable hot water at the centre ensures that all users of all age and gender groups can use the facilities provided. The risks are around those associated with any maintenance project of this type in that unforeseen works or problems arise for which there is inadequate funding identified.