

## **Report to the Cabinet**

**Report reference:** C-031-2017/18  
**Date of meeting:** 7 December 2017



**Portfolio:** Leisure and Community Services

**Subject:** Provision of a Crèche and Changing Village Refurbishment at Loughton Leisure Centre

**Responsible Officer:** Derek Macnab (01992 564050).

**Democratic Services:** Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

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### **Decisions Required:**

(1) That given the level of ongoing subsidy required for a relatively small number of customers, and the alternative new opportunities being provided by Places for People, that the provision of a crèche at Loughton Leisure Centre is not supported; and

(2) That the Council make provision in the Capital Programme in the sum of £324,000 to fund the refurbishment of the Changing Village at Loughton Leisure Centre.

### **Executive Summary:**

Following concerns from existing crèche users at Loughton Leisure Centre, the Leisure and Community Services Portfolio holder has requested that Places for People Leisure (the Councils leisure contractor) provide a feasibility for the provision of crèche facilities at Loughton Leisure Centre. A cost estimate has been prepared for construction and an evaluation undertaken of the future revenue costs. In addition, as part of the health and fitness extension scheme at the Centre, Places for People are seeking a financial contribution to a major refurbishment of the Changing Village at the Centre. This report seeks Members' consideration of the two schemes.

### **Reasons for Proposed Decision:**

Any proposed provision of new crèche facilities or investment in the Changing Village at Loughton Leisure Centre will have potential capital and revenue implications for the Council outside of the existing agreed budget framework. Cabinet's consideration is therefore required.

### **Other Options for Action:**

With respect to crèche provision, the Cabinet is asked to decide on the only two options available, namely to provide a new purpose built crèche or not. No other available suitable location has been identified either in or close to the centre. If the Cabinet were not minded to support the Changing Village refurbishment, this could lead to a drop-off in participation as customer dissatisfaction increases and the condition of the area is such that it will require work in the medium term inevitably.

## **Report:**

### Crèche Provision

1. Members will be aware that the new 20 year Leisure Management Contract commenced in April this year. In the previous contract with SLM and the current contract with Places for People (PfP) there never has been a requirement of the Council's management partner to provide crèche facilities at Loughton Leisure Centre. The previous contractor (SLM) provided a small facility in response to local circumstances and temporary demand.
2. There has never been a purpose-built crèche at the Centre and crèche facilities were provided in the small hall (which is being redeveloped as part of the new build). Although the demand for the crèche has not been high, there are a small number of regular users.
3. PfP have always been clear that when the redevelopment of the centre started the crèche provision would cease.
4. In response to requests by local Members and a number of leisure centre users the Portfolio holder has asked PfP to estimate the cost of adding a crèche to the existing proposed redevelopment of the site.
5. Following an exhaustive examination of the development which attempted to identify areas in which a crèche could be accommodated, it was concluded that the only option would be to provide further extension to the building itself.
6. PfP have produced a budget estimate for a crèche extension which amounts to £325,000. (Attached at App 1). The crèche also requires an operational subsidy estimated at up to £25,000 per annum to cover the required staffing ratios.
7. Whilst other options had been suggested by centre users such as the use of temporary buildings, these were found to be unfeasible both in practical and Health and Safety grounds, in the longer term.
8. PfP understand the disappointment that some leisure centre users feel about the cessation of the crèche, however, they feel that some new initiatives will go some way in mitigating this.
9. They plan to encourage participation for, not only parents of young children but also young children themselves, as part of planned new extensive Under 5 activity sessions to be held during the quieter afternoon periods. This exciting initiative should increase overall participation which, coupled with Places for People's intention to allow parents with particularly young children in carrycots to be allowed, in a controlled manner, into certain exercise classes should compensate for the loss of the traditional crèche arrangements.
10. Members are asked to decide whether the expenditure represents good value for money in terms of the overall subsidy for a relatively small numbers of users amounting to an average of seven per day.

### Changing Village Refurbishment

11. In 1999 the Council received a National Lottery Sports Fund Capital Grant of £1.96m towards the construction of the new Loughton Leisure Centre. As a condition of the grant, the Council and its consultant architects were required to comply with Sport England's'

Design Guidance with respect to the swimming pool changing provision at the new Centre. As such, a “Changing Village” was provided, now a standard requirement in all modern public swimming facilities, ensuring a much safer changing environment for children as opposed to the traditional single sex facilities. This is achieved by allowing families to change together.

12. Swimming attendance at Loughton Leisure Centre has been consistently high with one of the most intensive learn to swim programmes in the region. As a result of this intensive use of the Changing Village facilities, (in particular lockers and cubicles), year 7 of their tenure, SLM Leisure Management, the Council’s previous contractor undertook a programme of refurbishment. However, by virtue of the length of the remaining contract period, it would be fair to say that, whilst the locker system and cubicles were replaced, the quality was such that once again refurbishment is required. Places for People, the Council’s new Leisure Partner, are investing in the region of £12m in new and extended facilities over the 20 years of their new contract across all the Council’s leisure facilities. At the time of tender bidders did not include any provision for upgrading the Changing Village at Loughton Leisure Centre, relying on the dilapidations schedule to simply make good existing defaults.

13. However, it is clear that with the continued high use and lack of availability of spares etc. for locker and cubicle maintenance, this has led to increasing levels of user complaints. It is apparent that a longer term solution is now required.

14. Places for People are proposing a substantial upgrade to the Health and Fitness Facilities at the Leisure Centre by extending and reconfiguring the building. They have also developed a scheme. (See App 2) to undertake a major refurbishment of the pool Changing Village which will, not only considerably upgrade the user experience, and in particular assist users with disabilities, but also increased the value of the Council’s Asset. Places for People consider it sensible, a view supported by Leisure Client Officers, to undertake the work in the same time-frame as the Health and Fitness Refurbishment, with contractors on site etc. Whilst accepting that this will have a disruptive effect on pool users (although no closures are planned) the end result will be of considerable benefit. A decision is required by Cabinet, at this point in order, to incorporate the works in the building programme.

#### **Resource Implications:**

There would be a capital cost of £325,000 for the provision of a crèche extension and an additional annual revenue subsidy of £25,000 for staffing, would be required.

- (a) The capital cost of the Changing Village refurbishment is £324,000 although no revenue contribution would be sought from the Council.

#### **Legal and Governance Implications:**

A decision to support either of the projects will need to be reflected in a variation of the Leisure Management Contract

#### **Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:**

Any extension will be constructed in accordance with current energy efficiency standards.

**Consultation Undertaken:**

PfP and officers have met with leisure centre crèche users. The Leisure Management Partnership Board have discussed and supported the Changing Village refurbishment. The Council's Leisure Client Manager has met with representatives of Disabled Swimmers at the Leisure Centre who support amendments to the changing provision.

**Background Papers:**

PfP budget estimate for the crèche extension and changing room upgrade.

**Risk Management:**

As the addition of the Crèche has come late in the design process for the main health and fitness suite extension, it presents a risk of delay to the overall programme.