

SOUTH RIBBLE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Scrutiny Committee

Meeting held at 6.00pm on Thursday, 16 February 2017 in Shield Room, Civic Centre, West Paddock, Leyland PR25 1DH

Present:

Cllr M J Titherington (in the chair), Cllr D Bird, Cllr C Coulton, Cllr M A Green, Cllr K J Martin (in the audience for this meeting), Cllr M V Tomlinson, Cllr Mrs K Walton, Cllr I D Watkinson, Cllr P J H Wharton, Cllr Mrs L R Woollard

In Attendance:

Darren Cranshaw (Scrutiny and Performance Officer) and Dave Lee (Democratic Services Officer)

Public Attendance: 4

Officers: 3

Other Members: Councillors Ms Bell, Bennett, Clark, Foster, Mrs Green, Hancock, Mrs Mort, Mullineaux, Nelson, Ogilvie, G Walton and Yates

| Minute No. | Description/Resolution |
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| 37 | <p>Apologies for Absence</p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs Jones and Suthers.</p> |
| 38 | <p>Declarations of Interest</p> <p>The chairman reported that Councillor Martin (Member of the Scrutiny Committee) would not be part of the committee for this meeting as he was one of the Members who asked for the Councillor Call for Action. Councillor Martin would sit in the audience.</p> <p>There were no other declarations of interest.</p> |
| 39 | <p>Councillor Call for Action</p> <p>The chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Leisure and Director of Development, Enterprise and Communities and thanked them for their attendance.</p> <p>The chairman informed the meeting that the reasoning behind the Call for Action was set out on the agenda for the meeting.</p> <p>With the permission of the committee Councillors Ms Bell, Foster and Martin addressed the meeting.</p> <p>Councillor Foster explained that this was such an important issue to Call for Action because recent reports stated that advanced plans had been developed for the closure of the current Bamber Bridge, Penwortham and Leyland Leisure Centres. Councillor Foster felt that the closure of these centres were clearly at an advanced stage and it had been ongoing for a considerable number of years. Accordingly, he asked the</p> |

committee why this had not been detailed in the Council's Corporate Plan or reported to any other areas/forums. Councillor Foster believed that any decisions to shut down the facilities would have a huge impact on local communities that they serve and he added that this was one of the things he really wanted to dwell on.

Councillor Foster said that it was all well and good to build this great new facility but it was no good to the residents of Bamber Bridge as it was miles away and there were no bus routes; no safe cycle routes; no walking routes; no access to any train stations etc. Councillor Foster pointed out that it was ludicrous to think that one leisure centre in the planned location could serve the entire borough. These leisure centres were used every minute of the day by all the community (including schools, vulnerable people, local clubs etc). Councillor Foster expressed his concern that this could then be taken away and replicated/replaced by the proposed facility which was way out of the local area. Councillor Foster was aware that there was very little support for this as the initial feedback from every area of the local community was an "absolute, overwhelming, no".

Councillor Foster indicated that he was not against investment but he would like to see reinvestment into the facilities in the local communities (in their current locations) to improve what the Council currently have. Councillor Foster felt that this was a pre-defined agenda from the onset with a preferred outcome and he said that he could not support any recommendations to the Council on this matter without proper consultation or scrutiny. Councillor Foster then referred to the recent leaked confidential report and asked what information was contained in that report and why this was not shared with Members and Scrutiny/Governance Committees. In addition, Councillor Foster asked the reason why the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Leisure conducted a tv interview on the proposed facilities a few days later after the report was leaked.

Councillor Foster commented that he did not believe that Flensberg Way (as in the Cabinet Member's interview) was central in the borough. Councillor Foster referred to backlog maintenance costs and he pointed out that this could not be used as a justification to close these existing facilities. He explained that if the Council invest and did not replace/repair what it currently have then the backlog maintenance cost would be lost.

Councillor Foster indicated that these centres were the Council's assets and we must fully ensure that everything was done under full scrutiny as a way forward (with the full support of the Council). Councillor Foster added that as a Council we could not accept the closure of these facilities and that the Scrutiny Committee had a very important role in relation to this matter.

Councillor Martin indicated that he was surprised that this came out of the blue although it had been rumoured for a while on what was going to happen. Councillor Martin referred to the measurements of where the new site was in comparison to other areas of the borough and he felt that this would only benefit to communities close to the proposed new facility. Councillor Martin commented that residents in his ward use the facilities at the local leisure centre and that they would not be able to get to the new site. He felt that the new site was predetermined without any proper consultation.

Councillor Ms Bell indicated that she wanted to represent the community that use these facilities because they live nearby which they could walk to. Councillor Ms Bell explained that the local schools use them for swimming lessons and she expressed her concern that this new site would cost them more money to travel to by transport. Councillor Ms Bell added that she was aware that some Leyland Ward Members had received an email from Barracudas Swimming Club raising concerns that this valuable facility might come to an end. Councillor Ms Bell felt that it was unreasonable to make

something central in an area where there were no transport links/walking routes. Councillor Ms Bell indicated that she was not aware of the proposed new facilities and that her friends (teachers and youth workers) who use the facilities were appalled by recent reports over the closures. Councillor Ms Bell felt that this idea had not been put out for consultation with residents and she asked the Cabinet where the monies were coming from to build this new facility.

Councillors Ms Bell, Foster and Martin then responded to a number questions asked by the committee in respect of the Call for Action.

During the course of the meeting, the chairman reminded the committee that the purpose of this meeting was not to decide whether to build a new leisure centre/close leisure centres. The committee should confine comments to the issues within the Call for Action. The purpose of this meeting was to find out how advanced; what consultation; what evidence had been brought forward; and where we were with those decisions.

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Leisure and Director of Development, Enterprise and Communities remained present to address the committee and respond to comments and enquiries.

The Cabinet Member explained that as the portfolio holder responsible for leisure he would not make any apology for looking at/reviewing future leisure options in South Ribble. This was part of the Cabinet Member's responsibilities and his aim was to make leisure fit for purpose; fit for the future; and fit for the 21st Century. The Cabinet Member provided a brief history to the committee to help to explain the gaps and the possible misconceptions. The Cabinet Member added that the thought process did start a long time ago although it was not on paper and no discussion took place with anybody. There were discussions back then with key organisations some of these being Amateur Swim Association, Sport England etc over how a 50 metre pool could be brought to Lancashire (not just for South Ribble). The Cabinet Member indicated that he was aware that the Chief Executive at the time had carried out a lot of work over this matter and it was quite clear at the time that there was a lack of deprivation in South Ribble. The Cabinet Member referred to the Local Development Framework and the commencement of those discussions/negotiations with regard to where housing, businesses and employment were going and how health and wellbeing of residents in the borough was taken into account. The Cabinet Member was aware that all members were involved in that at the time and he took particular interest in how the borough was going to develop over a period of time. The Cabinet Member added that this looked at 7000+ houses being built/new communities being created and what that offered was opportunities for leisure. This led to the risk of these existing leisure facilities being reviewed.

There was an option of "not to do anything" however the Cabinet Member indicated that he had no intentions of doing that. At the time there was an ongoing budget risk of a shortfall of £4m however the Council managed to balance this year on year. The Cabinet Member added that there was still an ongoing budget risk of over £3m. Other risks included political views and competition and one key risk was missing an opportunity. There were two leisure centres in Bamber Bridge and the tennis centre had strict constraints under the existing Long Term Agreements (LTAs) when this was built. Those arrangements would run out and what we have now was a first class leisure centre in Bamber Bridge.

The Cabinet Member stated that there had been substantial amount of work which had been undertaken on leisure through the City Deal and this was identified in the Local Development Framework for the last two years. Information of the site between

Heatherleigh and Moss Lane, Farington Moss together with detailed bus routes (defined as part of the link road) were set out in the documentation. The Cabinet Member assured the committee that there were no secrets and there was nothing planned behind closed doors ("it never had been"). The Cabinet Member commented that 85% of the people that use leisure centres travel by car; 6.7% travel by public transport; and the rest were by bikes, walking etc.

In response to what the Cabinet Member would see in the facilities going forward, the Cabinet Member agreed that he did have a grand plan and he felt that it was fit for purpose for South Ribble. The Cabinet Member noted the comments made by Barracudas Swimming Club and he confirmed that the Council, Serco and the Community Leisure Trust provided support to the club. He assured the committee that this would continue. The Cabinet Member felt that the club would almost certainly be interested to see what the new facilities would bring, some of these being an 8 lane 25 metre pool; seating capacity for 250 people; 4 lane 25 metre training pool; 10 courts sports hall etc. Several commissioned reports had been produced as part of the City Deal which detailed how leisure facilities work; how they operated; where people come from (people travel from one facility to another) etc.

In respect of how far advanced the plan was, the Cabinet Member explained that it was currently an idea which would be built/worked on and this could not proceed without a lot more work being carried out. The Cabinet Member added that information had been to several Cabinet Workshops in 2015/16 and at a recent workshop a presentation took place to consider whether the Cabinet would like to move this forward.

Responding to the feasibility of setting up a joint cross party working group, the Cabinet Member explained that he was aware that there as a working group set up in 2005 to look at leisure facilities but Conservative Members at the time felt that it did not work as a cross party working group.

In response to his comments made earlier in the meeting over deprivation in South Ribble, the Cabinet Member clarified that there was deprivation in South Ribble however compared to surrounding districts and what Sport England and the Swimming Association were looking at, South Ribble was not high up on the scale of deprivation.

In respect of when the information was going to be shared, the Cabinet Member indicated that if the report had not been leaked out of this Council there would have been a planned approach/way forward with the possibility of a cross party working group (together with the Scrutiny Committee being included in this process). The Cabinet Member added that unfortunately the information that was leaked to the press placed the authority in a very difficult situation where he had to be forced to comment to defend the Council's position. The Cabinet Member assured the committee that he could only provide facts and produce information for the Council to consider. There were no decisions made.

In respect of how the Cabinet Member would visualise the procedure from now to make a decision on this matter, he indicated that several things had made this to be brought forward a lot quicker than normal. The City Deal was moving things forward very quickly. This particular site (identified in the Local Plan) was not going to happen for a few years but with the City Deal the developers showed a lot of interest. In the light of these reasons and the information leaked, the Cabinet would need to reassess the situation and look at how to take this to the next stage.

In response to what engagement had taken place with Community Leisure Trust and Serco, the Cabinet Member indicated that the Directors of Serco were fully aware of

the future of leisure and the Trust have had input into some of the documents provided by Sport England and Knight Kavanagh & Page (KKP). A Leisure Trust Board meeting had met recently where the matter was discussed.

Responding to whether the of timings of Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) had changed and whether the Council would now be rushed into a decision on this issue, the Cabinet Member indicated that the Local Plan was originally drawn up for 15 years ahead. The northern site of Development W was toward the end of that planned period however this had moved on because of the City Deal and developers see this as a prime site. The Cabinet Member referred members to the developments in the southern side of the site and indicated that HCA was interested in looking for some confirmation on a piece of land that could be made available within the next 6 months.

In respect of who, how and how many different proposals would be consulted on, the Cabinet Member felt that he could not provide an answer to any of these questions because the format of the consultation had not yet been planned/designed at this stage. The Cabinet Member assured the committee that there would be a substantial consultation and he had noted everything said. The Cabinet Member indicated that he was fully aware that this would be one of the biggest decisions to be taken in South Ribble and acknowledged the political consequences of what that might mean. The Cabinet Member's main aim was to ensure that leisure/health and wellbeing were fit for purpose in light of the expected increase in population and transcend political differences. At this stage the matter was still being discussed at Cabinet Workshops. There were still a substantial amount of work to be carried out and there was no information on how many proposals would be put forward. The Cabinet Member indicated that although he had his own vision/option however he assumed that there would be other preferred options coming forward during the course of the process some of these being views from members, Learning Hour, this committee etc. The Cabinet Member stated that any options would have to be worked through with members. The Cabinet Member gave his assurance that a comprehensive public consultation would take place. In response to a subsequent question, the Cabinet Member added that the scope of the document by Sport England and KKP was substantial as it took into account the City Deal.

In response to what contract KKP was awarded for, the Cabinet Member confirmed that it was for the external leisure review of South Ribble in 2015. This contract was commissioned through the City Deal to conduct a survey into leisure facilities in South Ribble. This information had been considered by Cabinet but was not opened to the public as it contained confidential information. The Cabinet Member was happy to provide the committee with further information on the KKP external review of leisure in 2015, including the commissioning process, terms of reference, costs and outcomes.

Responding to what the plan was in the next 12 months in terms of member engagement, the Cabinet Member explained that he felt that he had addressed this issue earlier in the meeting. He reiterated that there would be full member engagement and that a plan would be put forward. The Cabinet Member reminded the committee that Cabinet Workshop was not a decision making body. This was where Cabinet Members have informal discussions to look at how we might start to move things forward and change things for the benefit of the people of South Ribble (this would include policies going forward).

In respect of what steps there were in developing the vision/idea (SMART way forward), the Cabinet Member felt that he could not answer this however he acknowledged that he would have to move things on/put something together very quickly. Unfortunately there were no timescales at this point in time.

In response to what assessment would take place on public health implications of the visions/idea, the Cabinet Member stated that the reports of both Sport England and KKP were heavily influenced by health and wellbeing.

Responding to the status of the leaked report, the Cabinet Member indicated that he was very disappointed with the person(s) who leaked this information as it did not help the Council, members and the community.

In respect of how members of the Council would be involved on moving the vision/idea forwards, the Cabinet Member indicated that he envisaged that the information gathered from members at the Learning Hour would then be worked on. The Cabinet supported the need for plenty of consultation with members.

Responding to the possibility of creating a cross party Member Working Group to take a review of leisure forward, the Cabinet Member indicated that he was happy to support this however he would need to discuss this further with the Cabinet. The Cabinet Member felt that the Members' Learning Hour would be a good starting point and the more members involved the better it would be. This would see the benefit of what could be proposed as a way forward.

In response to how Scrutiny Committee was going to be involved going forward, the Cabinet Member stated that he was confident that the committee would have its own views on going forward and on how it would like to be involved in the process of looking at the future of leisure. The Cabinet Member was happy to receive input from this committee as it could help look at the vast amount of details within these reports and to bring this forward. The Cabinet Member felt that this would help the process considerably.

In respect of what links there were between the work already carried out on the vision/idea and the corporate plan action to review leisure in 2017/18, the Cabinet Member explained that the reason why this was an action in the corporate plan because it was envisaged that documents would need to come forward during the course of 2017. This information would be shared by all members of the Council and the Cabinet Member expected that this would produce another piece of work going forward.

Councillor Yates in the audience asked whether there was a need to confirm that this was a review and that there was no commitment to close any leisure centres at this moment in time. The Cabinet Member confirmed that this was a review and no decision had been made. Any decisions on the future of leisure would ultimately be taken by full Council. In respect of a subsequent enquiry, the Cabinet Member indicated that he was not aware of any staff issues/suggestions on this matter at leisure centres. He added that reassurances to staff had already been given by the Community Leisure Trust and Serco (the managing agent).

Councillor Foster in the audience asked the reason why the Council consulted Directors of Serco and not members of the council about this vision/idea. He also asked what options were put forward and why it was detailed in the Cabinet's Forward Plan as a key decision. The Cabinet Member indicated that the Council continually invested between £1m - £1.6m per year in leisure facilities. The Cabinet Member said that taking into account the growing market in leisure with modern building techniques and modern design/equipment, he felt that this borough's facilities could be made a lot better. The Council had contractual arrangements with Serco up to 2021 and discussions would need to be held with them because there might be a need to review those contracts. To enable this to happen, the Council had to obtain permission from the Community Leisure Trust and Serco to look at the contracts in detail. The Cabinet

Member added that the process of options had a long way to run and he did not know at this stage what details there were in any forthcoming Cabinet papers as it had not been produced. Although this was in the Cabinet's Forward Plan, any further information would depend on what stage of the process the vision/idea was at.

In respect of what discussion the Cabinet had with Serco, the Cabinet Member indicated that this was some while ago. Serco managed leisure facility throughout the country and had vast amount of knowledge. The discussion was based on the potential opening of a new leisure facility. A combination of what the requirements might be for the area and how leisure would be provided/what facilities might look like in the future were also discussed.

Councillor Ogilvie in the audience asked whether the capacity of a single leisure facility had been looked at in detail because he was aware that various community groups and schools used 3 different facilities at present. The Cabinet Member confirmed that this had been looked at and it had formed the basis of the report. The purpose of this idea was to increase capacity for leisure and the Cabinet Member felt that the new pool/training pool would cover all eventualities.

Representatives from Barracudas Swimming Club expressed their concern over the impact this single facility would have on the swimming club and they asked at what point stakeholders would be involved in the consultation process. The Cabinet Member indicated that all stakeholders would be involved in the consultation process in shaping/influencing any proposals. The Cabinet Member explained that the water facility at leisure centres had been looked at in detail. There was pressure in the main pool at Leyland Leisure Centre because the other two pools were not proper swimming pools. Although they offered small swimming sessions/lessons they were not for serious swimming. The Cabinet Member stressed that this was just a vision and one that would need very careful and well informed consideration.

RESOLVED (unanimously) that –

1. a cross party Member Working Group is created to take a review of leisure forward and that Members be fully engaged in the review.
2. the committee welcomes the Cabinet Member's commitment to fully consult and involve residents and stakeholders in shaping options for the future of leisure facilities in South Ribble.
3. a report is presented to a future meeting on the amount spent on the leisure review over the past five years and the procurement processes that were followed.
4. the committee requests further information on the KKP external review of leisure in 2015, including the commissioning process, terms of reference, costs and outcomes.
5. the committee asks for assurance that there will be full transparency in taking the review of leisure forward.
6. the committee requests an action plan with timescales for how the leisure review will be taken forward for presentation to a future meeting.
7. the committee is fully involved at the key stages of the leisure review.

The meeting finished at 7.52pm

..... Chairman