

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE COMMUNITY AND LEISURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL – MEETING ON 9 FEBRUARY 2021

HEALTH AND LEISURE – PREFERRED BIDDER

The Community and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Panel, at its meeting on 9 February 2021, considered the recommendations to Cabinet as set out in the report.

The Panel noted the stages of the review process from its inception, the first Task and Finish group meeting in April 2018, and the thorough and detailed work undertaken.

The Panel took into account the Customer and Staff Q&As at Appendix 3, and noted the regular meetings of the Customer Focus Groups which had taken place throughout the process. The Panel noted that overall, staff felt reassured from these briefings, particularly in regard to employment terms and conditions, and that the Council had responded well to union comments and requests. They also noted the customer protections included in the contract. Regular discussions with the schools had identified a need to detail existing informal arrangements which are now included in the Management Agreements wherever possible.

The Panel were impressed by Freedom's approach as the preferred bidder, noting that their business focused entirely on Leisure provision, and particularly their experience and expertise from running 101 other sites nationwide. The benefits from economies of scale, their pledge to reinvest any surplus share into the Council's centres, and their commitment to energy conservation measures to reduce leisure sites' impact on the environment, were also noted.

Members noted that contract performance monitoring data would be reported regularly at Panel meetings and a Contract Monitoring Officer would also provide detailed reports to the Working Group.

Whilst a minority of members queried the timing for the change, given uncertainties arising from Brexit and Covid, the Panel were reassured there was sufficient financial 'headroom' built into the contract to significantly reduce the Council's risk, whilst providing substantial income and long term investment into services, facilities and buildings.

Members thanked the Task and Finish Group for their diligence in overseeing the review, and paid tribute to the professionalism and hard work of the officers involved, for conducting such a comprehensive process to a successful outcome.

In summary, the Panel felt that the proposals represented the best option for the sustainability of the District Council's leisure services, and the health and wellbeing of the community.

RECOMMENDED:

The Panel supports the proposals in full and recommends that the Cabinet agrees recommendations 1.1 to 1.5 as set out in the report.