

**To: City Executive Board**

**Date: 1<sup>st</sup> July 2009**

**Item Nos: 21 and 22**

**Report of: Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee**

**Title of Report: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REFERRAL BACK ON CEB DECISIONS ON:-**

**LEISURE FACILITIES STRATEGY REVIEW,  
PROJECT INITIATION DOCUMENT FOR LEISURE CENTRE INVESTMENT  
PROGRAMME AND SUBSTANTIVE DEVELOPMENT**

**Summary and Recommendations**

**Purpose of report:** To request the City Executive Board to reconsider their decisions made on these 2 items after considering the recommendations of the Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee.

**Key decision** - Yes

**Executive lead member** - Councillor Timbs

**Report approved by:**

Councillor Goddard – Chair of Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee

**Policy Framework:** Improving the local environment and quality of life, Stronger and more inclusive communities, Transform Oxford City Council by improving value for money and service performance

**Recommendation(s):**

That the CEB should reconsider the decisions made on the Leisure Facilities Strategy Review and the Project Initiation Document for Leisure Centre Investment Programme and Substantive Works after considering the following:-

**The Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee supports the CEB decisions to:**

1. Proceed now to develop a new pool at Blackbird Leys Leisure Centre
2. Close Temple Cowley and Blackbird Leys Pools on the completion of this development

**In addition the Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee recommends the CEB to:-**

3. Keep under active review during the period taken to achieve 1. and 2. longer term options, as the recession eases and development opportunities pick, up for re-siting the Ice Rink being mindful in particular of:
  - The potential for energy exchange and the net reduction of carbon emissions and costs by linking a new Ice Rink with another facility, possibly the new swimming pool. These factors will become more decisive as carbon costs escalate over the longer term.
  - The importance of retaining the maximum flexibility for development projects by the West End Development Partnership in relationship to the relocation of the Ice Rink.
  - Access arrangements to the new swimming pool and the Ice Rink not only for Oxford residents, but also for those from outside Oxford and the expected growth of population, (maybe as many as 10,000 people) living within developments South of Grenoble Road. (Improved access from across the city is already seen as a necessary part of the planning for the new pool.)
4. Encourage Fusion now and throughout the term of their contract to make and plan for the best use of energy and substantial reductions in carbon emissions from all leisure facilities
5. Explore, when consulting shortly on proposals for the new pool at Blackbird Leys Leisure Centre, the support for a family friendly pool as well as a competition pool unless it can now be demonstrated publicly that costs would be prohibitive
6. Provide more worked up plans and actions for improving access arrangements from across the city and more widely to Blackbird Leys Leisure Centre
7. Keep the committee up to date on actions at 1-6 above

## **1. Introduction and Background**

At its meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2009, the Value & Performance Scrutiny Committee considered the reports and decision of the CEB on the Leisure Facilities Strategy Review and the project Initiation Document for Leisure Centre Investment

Programme and Substantive Development. These reports had been called in for reconsideration by Councillors Goddard, Armitage, Wilkinson and Scanlon. Attached at appendix 1 are the questions asked by Councillor. Goddard in following up the call in and the responses from the Head of City Leisure. The original reports and decisions are attached on the agenda.

The committee considered the responses alongside the original reports and debated issues across a number of areas:

## **2. Strategic Planning**

The plans presented did not show a convincing picture of strategic planning for the longer term (the next 10-15 years): in particular the planning for substantial reductions in carbon emission and associated costs that could be achieved through dual siting of Leisure Centre or other developments.

It is not clear what consultation or other drivers have produced the choice of a competition pool to the exclusion of a family friendly pool.

The cost of obtaining the extra land for the development of Blackbird Leys Leisure Centre had been omitted from the costings presented to the Board.

There appeared to have been no consideration given to the possibilities of gaining more access to facilities in private schools. This could be a particularly fruitful route because of the rigorous testing of charitable status now required and private schools' desire to fulfill the "benefiting the community" test.

Officers responded that previous reviews had looked at the longer term planning for the ice rink and moving it was found to be cost prohibitive at least in the short time frame needed to replace Temple Cowley pool. Work was still needed on the costings and acquisition of the extra land at Blackbird Leys but favourable outcomes were expected. In considering a family pool, the option of a waterslide or similar facility was found to be high in terms of running costs and there was a view that these facilities in other areas were not well used. Members had other experiences of family pools.

## **3. Siting of Facilities**

Consideration did not appear to have been given to siting an Ice Rink adjacent to or within the Blackbird Leys Leisure Centre development. Exploration of this option would give the ability to test the economic and emission gains that can be obtained from dual siting. Given that access routes to Blackbird Leys were to be improved this would provide for improvements for both City and other residents. The possible population growth from development south of Grenoble Road suggested that Blackbird Leys site with improved access would be favourable for a dual ice rink/pool/leisure centre site.

Officers responded that the cost benefits from the dual siting were accepted but no detailed work had been done . They would look at areas where this existed to explore the gains in quantitative terms. The population growth south of Grenoble Road was not yet a reality and had a long way to go.

#### **4. Relationship with the West End Development Partnership**

To consider fully the long term planning for facilities, in particular the ice rink, the views and aspirations of the West End Development partnership should be considered within the report. It was understood that the Partnership wished to see the Ice Rink re-sited.

Officers responded that it was desirable to retain maximum flexibility for developments within the West End but that the Partnership had to recognise the economics of moving the Ice Rink. In the short term - over the next two or three years, in the time frame to replace Temple Cowley pool - it would be prohibitively costly to re-site the Ice Rink. However, it was not unreasonable to foresee that within the next decade an economically viable package could be able to achieve re-siting.

#### **5. Access to facilities**

The report recognised that access to Blackbird Leys Leisure Centre needs to be improved and outlines the intention to do this. The detail was insufficient to make judgments on the practicalities at present. Members considered this was crucial if strategic participation and access objectives for all residents were to be achieved.

#### **6. Consultation**

It was not always clear when and to what extent consultation had been done to support the proposals. In consultation for the specification of the new pool development at Blackbird Leys it was felt that this should be done as widely as possible and also gauge opinion on the relative merits of a competition pool and a family pool.

#### **7. Recommendations to City Executive Board**

The recommendations of the committee are detailed in the header to this report.

#### **8. Draft Minute from the meeting of the Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee**

The following is the draft minute of the Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee. In essence the Committee raised issues relating to Strategic Planning; siting of facilities; consultation; access improvements and relationship

with the West End Development.

*“During the consideration of the matter, Members asked a series of questions, focusing on the proposals for a new swimming pool and the future of the ice rink, which challenged some of the issues in the Leisure Facilities Review. These were in connection with the financial implications of the proposals, the best location for a new pool, as well as access to it from across the city, and the future location of the ice rink in the context of the rolling out of the West End Development Plan. Members also asked questions about the best use of energy and the considerations around the potential for linking a pool and ice rink building to enable heat transfer.*

*The following issues were raised;*

*It is vital to reduce energy costs and carbon emissions as Leisure facilities were a large consumer of both. This was also crucial to the Council's overall policy on these issues.*

*The costs indicated in the report to the City Executive Board should have included all available information rigorously tested. There were some omissions. Ian Brooke said that the cost and site analysis presented built on research undertaken by previous consultants. It was important not to delay the immediately necessary development. However, further analysis of the level of carbon emissions could be undertaken based on work carried out by the second placed tenderer for the leisure contract. Peter Sloman said that energy saving issues were an essential part of the Council's overall policy and so guaranteed proper consideration as part of any proposals*

*Had consideration been given to examining alternative sites for the pool and ice rink such as south of Grenoble Road? Ian Brooke said that site analysis had been undertaken by the consultants which had been endorsed by the competition board and cross party working group. Members maintained that this view could be further challenged to investigate alternative sites. Members also asked about the level of consultation generally and whether this had been as wide as it might have been, including a cross section of potential users. Ian Brooke said that there had been a lot of support from swimming clubs for the new competition pool.*

*Further comparison should be made with similar local authorities facing similar issues.*

*Members discussed the issue of access to a pool built at Blackbird Leys from other parts of the city such as Marston and the lack of a cross city bus route. There was discussion about what type of pool should be provided and the potential demand for a family leisure pool. Councillor Price said that there were ongoing discussions with the bus companies on partnership arrangements which*

*might result in improvements to bus routes. Peter Sloman said that leisure pools were becoming increasingly commercially unviable to local authorities and were no longer popular. Members had different recollections of family pools. Ian Brooke said that the new competition pool would enable a teaching pool to be used for other activities. There was also discussion of the leisure strategy aim to use school and university facilities.*

*What might be the impact on the potential for West End Development if the ice rink remained in situ? Members agreed that current economic conditions ruled out an early move. However, the future provision and siting of this facility needed to be seen in the longer term when commercial viability of a move could become achievable."*

## **9. Comments from the Board Member**

My comments support what has been said:-

1 A dual combo of ice rink and swimming pool is totally out of our budget as costs have been quoted at £35 million. Yes it makes very good sense but we just cannot afford this type of development.

2 Transport links will have to be negotiated with both local bus companies.

3 A family splash pool with flumes etc. is not financially viable and other cities have found these pools to be a loss maker.

4 It is very reasonable to have the wet and dry sports facility on the same site , as it will bring in more revenue than being on separate sites.

5 Fusion are well ahead of the game on environmental issues and we trust them to improve our goals going forward.

6 The loss of the ice rink in the West End will cause many problems with users coming in by train from the villages around Oxford. If re located then we should look for another site on this side of Oxford.

7 Shortage of brown field sites has limited our sources for the new pool and that is why BlackBird Leys is the best option for location and usage

## **10. Comments from the Strategic Director**

A family splash pool with flumes etc. is not financially viable and other cities have found these pools to be a loss maker. - Grant funding for this type of facility is also not supported by the Free Swimming Capital Modernisation Fund (the largest current fund for swimming pools). This type of facility would also not

support the health & learning agendas to the same degree as a modern purpose built competition / general swim facility.

### **11. Legal Comments**

Head of Legal Services' representative has indicated that there are no comments to be made.

### **12. Finance Comments**

Head of Finance has indicated that there are no comments to be made.

**Report Author:**

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Committee**

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