

CITY OF PLYMOUTH

Report: Overview and Scrutiny Panel – Leisure and Environmental Services

Subject: Leisure Action Plan

Committee: Scrutiny Commission
City Council

15th August, 2002
30th September, 2002

3/SP/L&ES/DE

Part:

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SC - 33 02/03

Executive Summary:

The purpose of this report is to seek the approval of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission to submit recommendations to the Executive Committee following a meeting of the scrutiny panel responsible for reviewing the Leisure Action Plan.

Corporate Strategy:

The establishment of Overview and Scrutiny Panels forms part of the corporate strategy for implementation of that part of the modernisation agenda relative to new democratic arrangements.

Financial Implications:

The report identifies that because of a lack of investment over the last 20 years a poor service is currently being provided. However, a number of improvements have been made over the last 18 months and further work has yet to be undertaken. This will include trying to reduce the subsidy as a result of the initiatives to increase income, application to Sport England for 50% of the cost of a new facility at £10m and securing further funding from trust options and the City Council's capital programme.

Recommendations

- (1) Officers continue to implement proposed actions 1 to 29 of the Action Plan for Sport and Recreation and provide Members with an update at the next meeting of the panel on 11th September 2002;
- (2) the thanks of the Chairman be extended to Members for their participation during the meeting and to the Officers for their presentation.

REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL – ENVIRONMENTAL AND LEISURE SERVICES

Leisure Action Plan

1.0 Introduction

The Scrutiny Commission agreed a work programme for Overview and Scrutiny Panels at its meeting on 20th June 2002. It was agreed that a number of topics would be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel – Leisure and Environmental Services – the second of which would be the Leisure Action Plan.

1.1 The Panel met on 17th July, 2002, to consider the proposal for a Leisure Action Plan. Details of the plan were presented by the Head of Community, Leisure and Learning and members were given the opportunity to comment and ask questions. Their views and recommendations would subsequently be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission at its meeting on 15th August and the City Council at its meeting on 30th September, 2002.

1.2 As negotiations concerning the proposed leisure trust were still ongoing and officers did not feel they were at a stage where recommendations could be made, the Panel resolved that the matter be brought back for further discussion and scrutiny once negotiations had progressed to the next stage. A second meeting to consider this item would be held on 11th September 2002.

Panel Structure

Councillors

Councillor Fry, in the Chair.

Councillor Angel, Vice-Chairman.

Councillors Martin Leaves and Mrs. P.D. Nicholson.

Apology for absence: Councillor Mrs. Jones.

Officers in Attendance

James Coulton

Alison Bradley

Daphne Evans

Head of Community Leisure and Learning

Principal Leisure Facilities Manager

Democratic Support Officer

Objectives

To consider key work programmes and issues relating to the Leisure Action Plan as presented by the lead officers, with a view to formulating a report of recommendations to be submitted to the City Council meeting on 30th September, 2002, subject to approval by the Scrutiny Commission.

4.0 Background Papers:

Summary Inspection Report by the Audit Commission

Year 1 Review – Action Plan for Sport and Recreation

5.0 The Detail

5.1 The summary of the Inspection report by the Audit Commission and the Year 1 Review – Action Plan for Sport and Recreation was submitted by the Head of Community Leisure and Learning (OSP L&ES 3 02/03) which highlighted that -

- (i) as a result of an inspection made by the Audit Commission towards the end of last year, the standard of service provided by the Leisure facilities in Plymouth was considered poor and unlikely to improve;
- (ii) the quality of the service was considered poor owing to a lack of investment over the last 20 years;

whilst the Audit Commission acknowledged a number of incremental improvements which had been made over the last 18 months, they did not consider these substantive or significant enough to rectify the problem;

the Audit Commission had been shown a customer care training package, which had been developed specifically for leisure centre staff, but which had not yet been implemented owing to a major restructure in the Leisure Department last year and the uncertainty attached to staff being in post and that in view of this, training would have been counter-productive. The Audit Commission had still shown this as a weakness;

the Principal Leisure Facilities Manager had started 4 months ago and one of the first duties of her post had been to draw up an Action Plan for Sport and Recreation;

- (vi) this 7 page report had 23 separate recommendations under 5 headings and tried to provide better access to leisure centres by reviewing pool programmes and facilities, providing quality assurance programmes, a competitive operation and improving corporate directives and corporate support;

it was important to increase the opportunity of reducing the subsidy by securing capital to develop facilities to increase income;

although a small gym was available in the Mayflower Centre, it was considered that a larger and better facility could be provided in the old café at Central Park pool which had now been closed;

this would enable the service to address a niche in the market, it was necessary to build up a database of customers and aim to provide affordable membership at £20/£25 per month, rather than £50 or £60 per month as in the private sector and provide a range of price options – direct debit of £20/£25 a month or £2/£3 per visit and formulate a special programme for disadvantaged people in order to make leisure facilities accessible to all;

- (x) that there were no other additional activity spaces available and subsequently there was limited scope for creating additional revenue;

in order to secure funding of £10m for a new leisure centre, a bid for 50% of the cost would have to be submitted to the Sport England Lottery, with further match funding being provided by Trust Options and the City Council's capital programme;

a bid of this nature took approximately 7 months to formulate for submission, 18 months to 2 years to secure the final product, 3 to 4 years for the facility to be opened and that the authority was into the first 12 months of the process;

the bid was a 2-stage process and a reply on the first stage was expected towards the end of September 2002, with final approval being given by Easter 2003 and that the Leisure Action Plan had been the subject of a Best Value Review published in 2002;

the benefits of setting up a Trust for a project of this nature meant a better chance of securing funds from outside the local authority and less restrictions;

around 50 or 60 authorities had set up Trusts including Bristol, Edinburgh, Sheffield and Birmingham, with at least 1 local authority incorporating all services for funding such as museums and libraries within their respective trust;

should Plymouth Marketing Bureau Ltd. become part of the trust, our local tourist facilities such as Smeatons Tower and the Dome and events such as the firework championships could be marketed better and the joining of private and public partnerships would provide better facilities.

6.0 Comments

The Panel and Officers commented on the report as follows –

- (a) the Head of Community Leisure and Learning was aware that the Leisure facilities in Plymouth were poor and had informed the Audit Commission of this, but had pointed out the improvements made;
- (b) James Coulton had been aggrieved for the staff of the Leisure Department who had tried hard to offer a good service to the public in spite of the facility deficiencies and a major restructure at the end of 2001;
- (c) people's expectations were higher and they expected a high standard of facilities and equipment at leisure centres;
- (d) other local authorities had asked for our sports plan from Sport England;
- (e) the Improvement and Development Agency had complemented the city on the organisation and execution of big events.

7.0 **Recommendations**

- (1) Officers continue to implement proposed actions 1 to 29 of the Action Plan for Sport and Recreation and provide Members with an update at the next meeting of the Panel on 11th September 2002;
- (2) the thanks of the Chairman be extended to Members for their participation during the meeting and to the Officers for their presentation.