CABINET
16 MARCH 2021

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: UPDATE ON OUR MAJOR LEISURE FACILITIES

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - PLACE

EXECUTIVE MEMBER ENVIRONMENT & LEISURE: CLLR STEVE JARVIS

COUNCIL PRIORITY: RESPOND TO CHALLENGES TO THE ENVIRONMENT

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on our major leisure facilities and confirm the opening of both Letchworth and Hitchin outdoor pools this summer season. The report also includes a proposal to extend the outdoor pool season by a further one or two weeks.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Cabinet supports the decision to open both Letchworth and Hitchin outdoor pools this summer season.

2.2. That Cabinet delegate authority to the Service Director Place to take decisions regarding the extension period of the outdoor pools, which will be dependent upon Covid-19 restrictions and affordability, in consultation with the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure, the Service Director Resources and Executive Member for Finance an IT so that a timely decision can be made.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. To ensure the Council continues to deliver leisure services that support the health and wellbeing of our residents throughout the Coronavirus pandemic.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. That the outdoor pool season is not extended, and they open for the contracted 15 week season only, from the last weekend in May to the first weekend in September.

4.2. Consideration was given to extending the outdoor pools at the start of the season.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. Consultation was undertaken with our Executive Member Environment and Leisure, Cllr Steve Jarvis, deputy Cllr Adem Ruggiero-Cakir and Executive Member for Finance & IT, Cllr Ian Albert.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1. This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. On the 21 January 2021 Full Council agreed to provide financial support on an open-book basis to SLL to enable the leisure facilities to be open when Covid-19 restrictions allow. The following minute details the resolution;

RESOLVED:

(1) That financial support is provided on an open-book basis to SLL to enable the leisure facilities to be open when Covid-19 restrictions allow. The support provided will reimburse any losses. The support to SLL in 2020/21 is forecast to be £2.45m (assuming the leisure facilities will now remain closed until the 31 March 2021). Future levels of support will depend on any further restrictions and the speed of recovery. It is assumed to be an additional £2m in 2021/22, but realistic scenarios show that it could be as low as £1.3m in 2021/22 (no further restrictions), or as much as £4.4m across 2021/22 (£3.1m) and 2022/23 (£1.3m).

(2) That Council notes that the cost of not supporting SLL and closing the facilities could be as high as the cost of providing support.

(3) That (following an initial payment to cover losses to date) payments to SLL are made on a monthly basis following submission of management accounts showing the extent of any losses. These accounts will be reviewed by the Service Director: Place in consultation with the Service Director: Resources, Executive Member for Environment and Leisure and Executive Member for Finance and IT. The affordability of payments will be kept under constant review by the Service Director: Resources, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and IT. (4) That Council notes that, in the event of higher levels of support being provided, budget savings in future years (2022/23 onwards) will need to be delivered more quickly than currently forecast.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To seek approval to provide financial support on an open-book basis to SLL to enable the leisure facilities to be open when Covid-19 restrictions allow.

7.2. On 22 February 2021 the Government announced the roadmap to cautiously ease lockdown restrictions in England. Leisure facilities are due to reopen on the 12 April 2021 and SLL will work towards reopening the leisure facilities on this date. Swimming lessons and children's sports courses will resume from the opening date, fitness classes will resume on 17 May 2021, at the earliest.

7.3. Each year the outdoor pools normally open on the last weekend in May and close on the second weekend in September.

7.4. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic both Letchworth and Hitchin outdoor pools remained closed last year. This year to promote leisure, consideration will be given to extending the season by one or two weeks.

7.5. Working with SLL, Officers will monitor usage, weather conditions and any Covid-19 restrictions throughout the season so that recommendations regarding the extension period can be made.

7.6. Decisions regarding the extension period will be dependent on the above factors, the overall affordability, and made in consultation with the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure, the Service Director Resources and Executive Member for Finance an IT.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1. The costs of opening the outdoor pools for the usual period has been factored into the forecast budget agreed by Full Council on 21 January 2021. There would be an additional cost for extending the opening time.

8.2. As the contract will be on an open-book basis during 2021/22, the Council will fund the full cost of opening the outdoor pools. This will be off-set by any usage income received. There is likely to be significant demand during periods of hot weather, but if there are still social distancing measures in place then this could significantly affect the number of people who can actually use the pools, and therefore the income received. Income is also expected to be higher during school holiday periods and lower at other times. Any extension will be during term time.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Cabinet's terms of reference include at 5.6.15 the power, "to oversee the provision of all the Council's services other than those functions reserved to the Council."

9.2 The Council has wide ranging powers of general competence under the provisions of section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 which enables it to take action to the benefit of its area. Section 19 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 enables the Council to provide recreational facilities for the benefit of the community.

9.3 Due to the recent pandemic circumstances the Coronavirus Act 2020 and associated regulations and amendments established new ways of living and working. The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Business Closure) (England) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/327), set out the restrictions which applied from 2pm on 21 March 2020 requiring the temporary closure of certain retail, hospitality and leisure businesses.

9.4 The Council has responsibility to ensure compliance with all legal requirements in relation to the leisure facilities and will continue to do so.

9.5 The global pandemic has had a significant and detrimental impact on the leisure sector as a whole. The Cabinet Office has issued Procurement Policy Notes (PPN 02/20 and PPN 04/20) which advise how contracting authorities should aim to work with suppliers and provide relief to maintain business and service continuity.

9.6 PPN 04/20 advises that contracting authorities and their suppliers need to work in partnership to plan an eventual exit from any relief and transition to a new, sustainable operating model taking into account strategic and reprioritisation needs. The Council's approach, as set out in this report and reported previously, is consistent with the PPNs.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1. The financial support to SLL in 2020/21 is forecast to be £2.45m. Future levels of support will depend on any further restrictions and the speed of recovery. It is assumed to be an additional £2m in 2021/22, but realistic scenarios show that it could be as low as £1.3m in 2021/22 (no further restrictions), or as much as £4.4m across 2021/22 (£3.1m) and 2022/23 (£1.3m). This includes assumed costs and income for the outdoor pools being open for the usual period.

10.2. The following table details the additional cost of opening for an extra week at each pool;

Site	Cost Per Week
Letchworth	£12,040
Hitchin	£10,290

Any income generated would reduce these costs, but given that it will be term-time it can not be assumed that there will be significant income.

10.3. The Council has set a budget for 2021/22 making assumptions about the Covid-19 recovery for all services (including leisure). The actual budget position will depend on how lockdown restrictions are lifted and how people respond to the lifting of those restrictions (e.g. use of town car parks, leisure centre visits). The decision on whether to spend an additional £22k per week will need to be made in the context of overall affordability.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1. The main risk associated with this report is financial and is covered in section 10.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. The reopening of the pools will increase the energy and water use throughout the prescribed period. However, SLL operates an Environmental Management System accredited to IOS14001. As part of tis, each centre has its own Environmental Champion which identifies the most efficient use of water, energy and materials.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1. There are no direct human resource implications relating to this report.

16. APPENDICES

16.1. None.

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

17.1. Louise Randall, Leisure Manager
Louise.randall@north-herts.gov.uk Ext 4387

17.2. Vaughan Watson, Service Director – Place
Vaughan.watson@north-herts.gov.uk Ext 4641

17.3. Ian Couper, Service Director - Resources
ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk Ext 4243

17.4. Isabelle Alajooz, Legal Commercial Team Manager
Isabelle.Alajooz@north-herts.gov.uk Ext 4346

17.5. Reuben Ayavoo, Policy and Community Engagement Manager
Reuben.ayavoo@north-herts.gov.uk Ext 4212

17.6. Jo Keshishian, HR Operations Manager
Jo.Keshishian@north-herts.gov.uk Ext 4314

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1. None