

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
EXECUTIVE HELD IN THE COUNCIL  
CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD  
ON TUESDAY 12 JUNE 2007 AT  
7.00 PM

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PRESENT: Councillor A P Jackson (Chairman/Leader).  
Councillors M R Alexander, L O Haysey,  
T Milner, R L Parker and M J Tindale.

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors D Andrews, W Ashley, P R Ballam,  
A L Burlton, S A Bull, D Clark, N Clark,  
R N Copping, J Demonti, P Grethe, J Hedley,  
Mrs D L E Hollebbon, G McAndrew,  
M P A McMullen, J Mayes, M Pope, N C Poulton,  
W Quince, J O Ranger, S Rutland-Barsby,  
J J Taylor, J P Warren, N Wilson, M Wood,  
C Woodward and B Wrangles.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Anne Freimanis	- Chief Executive
Simon Chancellor	- Head of Accountancy Services
Simon Drinkwater	- Director of Neighbourhood Services
Philip Hamberger	- Director of Internal Services
Martin Ibrahim	- Senior Democratic Services Officer
Will O'Neill	- Head of Community and Cultural Services
Mary Orton	- Director of Customer and Community Services
Lois Prior	- Head of Strategic Direction (shared) and Communications Manager

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Roz Hawkes - Stevenage Leisure Ltd  
 George Robertson - Director of Customer and  
 Community Services  
 (designate)

66 APOLOGY

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor M G Carver.

67 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor J P Warren declared a personal interest in the matter referred to at Minutes 68 and 69 – Leisure Service Provision, on the basis that he was a governor at Freman College.

RECOMMENDED ITEMACTION68 LEISURE SERVICE OPERATIONS

**The Leader of the Council submitted a report concerning the operation of the Council’s leisure facilities. He recommended a series of operational measures designed to rectify the projected budget deficit in the current financial year and sought the Executive’s approval for a strategic management direction designed to ensure that the service became fit for purpose into the future.**

**The Leader reminded the Executive of the operating context for the leisure service. The management of the pools and associated facilities, such as gyms and sports pitches, was currently contracted to Stevenage Leisure Ltd, on a twelve-month, extendable, “open-book” arrangement, which had been put into place in October 2006. Stevenage Leisure Ltd (SLL) received a fixed management fee of £260,000 for the provision of**

**this service. In addition, East Herts financed, on a monthly basis in arrears, the operating deficit on the facilities. It was noted that none of the pools was currently a net income generator.**

**He emphasised that the wholly-owned pools at Grange Paddocks and Hartham were the focus of the Council's community provision and that the dual-use pools at Fanshawe, Leventhorpe and Freman College were focussed on schools and clubs' provision.**

**Stevenage Leisure Ltd was providing a sound and competent management service to the Council, supported by considerable professional expertise in both finance and human resources at Head Office. The company had inherited a considerable number of difficult operational issues in taking over the contract and had worked hard with the Council to resolve these and to restore the operation to an acceptable level of performance. Early results had been encouraging with gym memberships now on the increase and the take-up of places on children's swimming lessons having increased.**

**The service operation had now stabilised, however, some fundamental structural issues remained within the service. The Leader set out these issues, and detailed a number of recommendations as to the actions required to bring about the longer-term sustainability of the service and to improve the strategic fit between the service and the Council's wider community objectives.**

**The proposed measures included:**

- raising the charge per pupil for school swimming lessons from £1.25 to £1.50;**
- closing the three joint use pools at weekends to casual public swimming;**
- streamlining staffing arrangements by introducing multi-tasking; and**

multi-tasking; and

- closing all pools on Bank Holidays.

In total, these measures would generate an estimated £84,000 in the current financial year, with a full year saving of £168,000. In addition, SLL had frozen two vacant posts, which would produce further savings of £48,000. The total savings identified amounted to £132,000 in the current financial year, against a budget shortfall of £150,000. Officers would continue to work with SLL to investigate additional ways to maximise income and to manage overheads.

In respect of the longer-term direction of the service, the Leader also proposed further measures to safeguard future leisure provision. These were detailed in the report now submitted.

The Leader clarified a number of issues relating to the figures detailed in the Appendices to the report now submitted. He also clarified that savings were not proposed in respect of planned maintenance works in the pools, but that SLL were looking at the more effective use of the existing budget.

The Leader referred to Fanshawe pool and proposed deferring the recommendation to close the pool at weekends for casual public swimming, until Officers had analysed the impact of this proposal on usage of the pool. He suggested that the Executive should consider this matter again in September 2007.

A number of comments and questions were raised by Members.

Councillor M Wood referred to the Council's promotion of a healthy living lifestyle and whether this would be undermined by the Leader's proposals. He also referred to the Leader's response to a question asked at Council about whether sufficient provision had been made in the budget for leisure services and questioned the timing of

**these proposals. He suggested that energy savings might be available at Leventhorpe pool if the broken temperature gauge was repaired. Finally, he commented on the impact these proposals would have on staff morale.**

**In response, the Leader did not accept the comments on staff morale and believed that this had improved as Unison and SLL had been working together in tackling the need for reviewing terms and conditions. He confirmed that discussions were ongoing and that Unison would be involved in the proposed benchmarking exercise. He also refuted the assertion that the Council's promotion of healthy living would be compromised and referred to the partnership working with Hertfordshire County Council as part of the Every Child Matters agenda.**

**The Leader commented that his response to the Council question referred to by Councillor Wood had indicated a need for rationalising services and for making tough decisions. He detailed the cost of each swim to Council taxpayers and suggested that sufficient demand did not exist for the time periods proposed for closure. In respect of the timing, Officers had been working consistently with SLL towards developing these proposals and that this had been the first opportunity to report them.**

**Councillors P R Ballam and S A Bull expressed concern at the proposed weekend closures for their respective local pools, Fanshawe and Ward Freman. Councillor S A Bull asked if additional funding from the County Council could be sought. Councillor P R Ballam suggested that income could be increased by better marketing of the pools and improved cleanliness.**

**In response, the Leader reiterated the declining attendances at weekends and the need to focus service provision at Grange Paddocks and Hartham. He also reminded Members of the investment made during 2006/07, to improve facilities at these pools. He referred**

to ongoing discussions with the County Council and the schools on future provision at the dual-use pools, which included the level of their support.

In response to a question from Councillor J O Ranger, in respect of Unison's comment on the proposed closure of Leventhorpe on Thursdays at 5.30 pm for casual swimming, Officers confirmed that staffing rotas would be organised to fit the revisions proposed to the timetable.

Councillor N Clark referred to the concerns raised by his constituents over the proposals for Leventhorpe. He believed this was a community pool for local young people who were able to walk to the facility. He requested that risk assessments be carried before any reductions were made in planned maintenance.

In response, the Leader reiterated the need to look at the bigger picture and for making tough decisions in the short-term, which would bring long-term gain.

Councillor D Clark also expressed concern that the proposals would result in recreational facilities being unavailable for families at weekends. She suggested that the budget, which had only been agreed three months ago, was wrong and that it was difficult to have confidence in the new budget when it had not been subject to scrutiny. She also questioned the quality of the report and the lack of any usage figures that could inform the proposals.

In response, the Leader stated that the budget was not wrong and that his proposals were about affordability by seeking to realign the service to meet customer demand. Officers were continuing to work with SLL to manage the budget. He referred to the national decline in casual swimming and the need for a more focussed provision at Grange Paddocks and Hartham. He reiterated that the other three pools were primarily schools' pools with a secondary community use.

**Councillor J O Ranger reminded Members that Performance Scrutiny Committee monitored the leisure contract on a quarterly basis.**

**In response to Members' requests, the Leader undertook to circulate direct debit membership figures.**

**The Executive supported the recommendation as now detailed.**

**RECOMMENDED - that in respect of primary schools' swimming programmes, the cost per pupil be increased from the new school term from £1.25 to £1.50 and that the charging mechanism be updated in line with industry norms.**

**DCCS**

**(see also Minute 69 below)**

**RESOLVED ITEM**

**69 LEISURE SERVICE OPERATIONS**

The Leader of the Council submitted a report concerning the operation of the Council's leisure facilities. A number of proposals were detailed in the report now submitted.

The Executive approved the proposals as now detailed.

**RESOLVED – that (A) in respect of Leventhorpe and Freman College pools, casual public swimming be no longer offered at weekends from 1 July 2007;**

**DCCS**

**(B) in respect of Leventhorpe and Freman College pools, staffing numbers be streamlined by the introduction of multi-tasking;**

**DCCS**

**(C) in respect of Leventhorpe pool, casual public swimming be no longer offered on Thursdays from 5.30 pm;**

**DCCS**

(D) in respect of Fanshawe pool, a decision along the lines of (A) and (B) above be deferred, pending a further report in September 2007, providing an analysis of usage and the potential impact of the proposed weekend closure to casual swimming; DCCS

(E) all five pools be closed on bank holidays; DCCS

(F) the Chief Executive be given delegated authority to negotiate revised contractual terms with Stevenage Leisure Ltd for the operation of the service on an interim basis until the completion of the re-tendering process; CE

(G) Officers report back to the Executive on the outcome of the bench-marking exercise on staffing terms and conditions, with recommendations based on the findings of that exercise; and DCCS

(H) the Chief Executive be given delegated authority to continue discussions with Hertfordshire County Council and with Freman College, Leventhorpe and Chauncey schools, to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the pool provision on these sites, and consequently to improve the links between this provision and the extended schools programme, and the Every Child Matters strategic priorities. CE

(see also Minute 68 above)

The meeting closed at 8.08 pm

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Chairman	.....
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