

## RECORD OF DECISION MADE UNDER DELEGATED AUTHORITY

### \*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

Any interest to declare/ or conflict and any dispensation granted – N/A

#### SERVICE DIRECTORATE: PLACE

#### 1. DECISION TAKEN

- 1.1 To use North Herts Leisure Centre, Hitchin Swim Centre and Royston Leisure Centre main pools for swimming lessons from 4-6pm, one day a week, instead of casual swimming.
- 1.2 To extend Letchworth and Hitchin Outdoor Pools opening hours for two hours (6:30pm to 8:30pm), once a week for ten weeks from 14 June 2021 up to and including week commencing 23 August 2021. This will be on a Tuesday at Hitchin and on a Friday at Letchworth.
- 1.3 To agree the provision of a temporary ice rink at Letchworth Outdoor Pool for Christmas.

#### 2. DECISION TAKERS

Councillor Steve Jarvis, Executive Member for Environment & Leisure and Vaughan Watson, Service Director – Place.

#### 3. DATE DECISION TAKEN:

26<sup>th</sup> May 2021

#### 4. REASON FOR DECISION

- 4.1 Due to social distancing rules, the centres' have been unable to run multiple activities in the pool at any one time to limit the mixing of customers. Therefore, swimming lessons and casual swimming have not been running at the same time.

As the planned lifting of restrictions approaches, SLL have proposed a one-year trial of sole use of the pool for aqua-ed lessons for an additional one day for two hours per week at each facility. By allowing sole usage of the pool, the entire pool space can be utilised for aqua ed lessons. The proposal would be that this happens on a Tuesday for North Herts Leisure Centre, Wednesday for Hitchin Swim Centre and Friday for Royston Leisure Centre. The days have been selected to be different at each centre so there is an opportunity for casual swim still available at two of the three centre's each day in North Herts for the public.

Generally, 4-6pm are quieter slots for casual swimming and popular times for swimming lessons; therefore, this would be the proposed closure times. By introducing these sessions immediately after the lifting of restrictions, this would minimise the impact on casual swimmers as there has not been the opportunity for these sessions since March 2020.

- 4.2 The potential for additional casual swimming hours at the outdoor pools has been looked into further and taking in to account bookings for clubs and private hire, it has been proposed to extend the opening of the pool for an extra two hours, 6.30-

8.30pm on a Tuesday at Hitchin Swim Centre and 6.30-8.30pm on a Friday at Letchworth Outdoor Pool.

The additional hours will commence in the Summer months, for a ten-week period from week commencing 21st June 2021 up to and including week commencing 23 August 2021.

- 4.3 In 2019, Letchworth Outdoor Pool ran the ice rink for the first time which was very well received by the community and SLL believe it would be popular again this Winter.

Having fully reviewed the 2019 winter season in early 2020, SLL are looking to increase the ice rink size this year to allow a higher capacity to maximise usage and income at peak times.

## **5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 5.1 To allow the pools to open to the public for casual swimming at the usual times therefore not meeting swimming lesson demands and making full utilisation of the pool.
- 5.2 To only open the outdoor pools to the public at the usual times, therefore not allowing extra capacity and meeting the demand from the public for extra outdoor swim times, especially after having had no outdoor pool swim options last year.
- 5.3 To not host the ice rink for this Christmas, missing out on the opportunity to ensure the facility is being put to use outside of the usual season.

## **6. CONSULTATION (INCLUDING THE EFFECT ON STAKEHOLDERS, PARTNERS AND THE PUBLIC)**

The Executive Member – Environment and Leisure, Councillor Steve Jarvis, the Executive Member – Finance and IT, Councillor Ian Albert, Service Director – Place, Vaughan Watson and Service Director – Resources, Ian Couper have been consulted and support the trial. This was also reported to Leadership team on 10 May 2021 for their consideration.

## **7. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS**

- 7.1 Since being able to reopen (with measures in place) on 12 April, Aqua Ed swimming lessons have been extremely popular with most sessions being at, or almost at, full capacity. When looking at pre-covid casual swimming figures at the proposed closure times, the usage of the pool for casual users is fairly low, not making full usage of the pool.
- 7.2 As we all know, swimming is a very important life skill which is proving more and more popular all the time. There are waiting lists for swimming lessons so opening up the pool for an extra couple of hours at each centre will allow for more of the public (especially children) learning to swim, as well as increased usage of the pool when it would normally be fairly quiet.
- 7.3 Swim England have stated “Swimming and water safety is a vital life skill that every child should have. Aside from the numerous health and wellbeing benefits of swimming, learning how to swim, and about the importance of water safety, are skills that could one day save a life.

It should also be noted that by maximising the opportunities for children (and adults) to learn to swim, increased casual usage of the swimming pools should be expected in the future due to larger numbers of competent swimmers within the local area

- 7.4 Consideration and approval as already been provided by Cabinet on extending the pool opening hour for up to two hours per week for two months, but this proposal is extending by a further two weeks to maximise on the lighter evenings and commence from the anticipated date the govt will lift restrictions on the 21<sup>st</sup> June for ten weeks. This is further discussed in section 8 of the report.
- 7.5 In 2019 SLL proposed and was agreed to provide a Xmas ice skating rink at Letchworth Outdoor Pool, this was welcomed by the community and was very popular. SLL have negotiated for Xmas 2021 a no fee for late cancellation relating to COVID with the ice rink provider, minimising any financial risks. The rink is planned to be larger increasing potential usage.
- 7.6 SLL have also planned to improve their online booking system, revise opening hours to maximise usage and profitability and provide a wider promotional campaign, including targeting schools and business as well as families.

## **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1. Under section 14.6.9 (b) (vi) of the Council's constitution, the Service Director – Place has authority to exercise functions, powers and duties relating to leisure management (including sport centres, swimming pools, sports and recreation grounds and leisure strategy development) except those reserved to Council, Cabinet or a Committee.

The decision to close North Herts Leisure Centre, Hitchin Swim Centre and Royston Leisure Centre main pools for casual swimming from 4-6pm, one day a week, to allow for more swimming lessons is a decision that may be exercised under the powers in section 14.6.9 (b) (vi) as above.

- 8.2. At the Cabinet meeting on 16 March 2021, Cabinet resolved that: -
- a. the extension of the opening season and the extension of opening hours by 2 hours on one evening a week for a period of 2 months for each outdoor pool be supported; and
  - b. the Service Director Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure, the Service Director Resources and Executive Member for Finance an IT be authorised to take decisions regarding the extension period of the outdoor pools which will be dependent on Covid-19 restrictions and affordability.

Officers seek to temporarily extend the opening hours of the outdoor pools for a period of 10 weeks and seek to rely on the delegated authority in (b) above.

- 8.3. At the Cabinet meeting on 21 July 2020, Cabinet resolved that Officers continue to work with SLL to agree ways in which income can be maximised and costs minimised whilst ensuring that operations continue to meet Covid-29 and other safety requirements.

The temporary provision of the ice rink during the 2021 Christmas period amounts to an effort by Officers and SLL to maximise income generating opportunities.

## 9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Cabinet resolved in meetings on 21 July 2020, 24 September 2020 and 21 January 2021 respectively to provide financial support to SLL due to the impact of Covid-19 on the provision of the services. This means that the contract is currently operating on an open-book basis where the Council will take the full benefit of any decreased costs/ increased income, but will also be exposed to the full impact of any increased cost/ reduced income. Officers are of the view that these decisions could result in significant financial implications for the Council. For the extension of the outdoor pool opening times the cost implication has already been considered and approved by Cabinet. It is expected that the decision to extend the availability of the pools for swimming lessons and agreeing to the temporary ice rink, would both generate a net surplus. These will therefore reduce the financial support that the Council would need to provide.

## 10. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There is the possibility of a negative customer reaction in relation to the reduction in times that the pool is available for casual swimming. This will be monitored and balanced against the take-up of swimming lessons. This may mean we would look to review sooner than the end of the one-year trial.
- 10.2 There is a risk that the temporary ice rink may be affected by Covid-19 restrictions. This will be kept under review and mitigating measures put in place wherever possible.

## 11. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 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.

## 12. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 The Social Value Act and "go local" policy do not apply to this decision.

## 13. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 There will be no impact.

## 14. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 14.1 Cabinet Papers dated 21 July 2020 and 16 March 2021

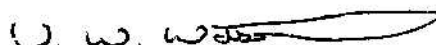
**Signature of Executive Member - Environment & Leisure**

**Date:** 26 May 2021



**Signature of Service Director – Place**

**Date:** 26 May 2021



**This is an executive decision that cannot be implemented until 5 clear working days have elapsed after the decision has been taken to allow for scrutiny call-in.**