

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY COMMITTEE

11 MARCH 2019

QUESTION NO. 1

Colin Lee to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport:

Business Model for Leisure Services

What quantifiable and evaluative model have you used to determine your preferred option of handing all of Reading Sports and Leisure (RSL) to a third party provider/operator: 1) how does this business model compare with running RSL either as it stands, within the Council's remit, or through a specially established Trust under the control of RBC and 2) has this model been open to Council and public scrutiny - if so how?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport):

Thank you for your question Mr Lee. As very clearly set out in a public report to Policy Committee in November 2015 the Council based its decisions on a thorough review of options for improving the quality of the Borough's leisure facilities. This work was carried out on behalf of the Council by 'The Sports Consultancy', a specialist in relation to the leisure sector, and included:

- An indoor sports facilities needs assessment; and
- An options appraisal and feasibility study for the development of new leisure facilities.

(The latter document (but not the former) contains exempt information by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A (as amended) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) and is not open to public inspection in accordance with the commercial sensitivity exemption contained within Part 2 Section 43(2) of the FOI Act.)

Again as set out in the same report to Policy Committee, the conclusion of this work was that through appointing a new leisure operator there would be a significant revenue improvement compared to the current costs of the Council's provision and that with new facilities income would exceed costs of operation. This additional income potential can be used to support the capital investment needed to deliver new facilities. It was therefore agreed that the Council commenced a formal procurement process with a view to contracting with a partner leisure operator to run the Council's leisure facilities. As is normal good practice with a major procurement we will also retest these original assumptions against the proposals received to test whether the anticipated cost-benefits will be realised prior to confirming any contract.

The language is also important here because 'contracting with a partner leisure operator' is very much not simply 'handing over' but rather a more cost-effective means of delivering the Council's strategic objectives for sport and physical activity and improving the health and well-being of residents.

Finally, and as a point of clarification, establishing a Trust under the control of the local authority is no longer an option that can be pursued in the context of changes to the public sector procurement regulations.

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QUESTION NO. 2

Colin Lee to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport:

Leisure Services - third-party management

I am sure the Lead Councillor agrees with me that the evidence of third party management in Reading i.e. Rivermead and historically of AcademySport does not support an extension of this policy to all RSL centres. Please can the Lead Councillor inform the precise quantified reasons why the Council still prefers the third party route and using the decade long performance of Rivermead and AcademySport demonstrate in real terms these benefits and why they cannot be delivered in-house or via a Trust mechanism?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport):

Thank you for your question Mr Lee although I'm sorry to disappoint in not agreeing with you.

Firstly the operation of Rivermead by GLL and that of Academy Sport are very different things.

Academy Sport was set up alongside the John Madejski Academy to support that Academy's aspiration for a sports specialism to assist in their endeavours to improve educational attainment in South Reading. That this ultimately did not achieve the intended outcomes is down to a whole host of factors, including financial pressure on the school as a result of the current government's approach to funding schools. This resulted in a lack of investment in the leisure facilities over time and the Council took back the facility in order to address this and support a new approach to providing better educational opportunities in this part of the Borough. The fact that the Academy was not a specialist leisure provider with a clear focus on this area of responsibility was also a factor.

The situation with Rivermead is completely different and GLL's operation of the facility compares favourably with in-house operations. Investment in the centre in partnership with the Council has included a resurfaced artificial pitch, upgrades of mechanical and electrical systems, new and refurbished gym and a new demountable pool. Customer satisfaction of users is high and, for example, the centre has a thriving 50+ user group. GLL has also worked with the Council to accommodate day care facilities on the site for vulnerable adults. This is not indicative of poor performance by any means.

Insofar as your question reiterates the point about why the Council is seeking to partner with an external leisure operator I would refer you back to the answer to the previous question.

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QUESTION NO. 3

Colin Lee to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport:

Rivermead Contract

Please can the Lead Councillor confirm the date the externalised management contract for Rivermead will terminate and the costs associated with this? I understand notice has already been served?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport):

Thank you for your question Mr Lee, although I think that you will agree that I have already answered with regard to a similar question you asked at the Council meeting less than two weeks ago.

As previously stated, no I cannot confirm the costs of early termination of the current contract with GLL for operating Rivermead. These will not be fully determined until the start date of the new contract is confirmed with a new operator. What I can say is that there has been a successful negotiation for an exit agreement that was based on the well accepted principle that GLL should be in a 'no worse or no better' financial position than they would have been had the contract run to its completion date. In this respect I would emphasise that GLL have voluntarily entered into an agreement in order to enable the inclusion of all the Council owned leisure centres in the current procurement exercise. This unification of management across the Council's facilities will provide much more flexible access to all leisure facilities for residents and other users.

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QUESTION NO. 4

Ayo Sokale to ask the Lead Councillor for Education:

Education Funding

Could the Lead Councillor for Education explain what impacts school funding cuts of up to 8% per pupil since this Government took office have had on schools and our young people?

REPLY by Councillor Pearce (Lead Councillor for Education):

School funding is a complicated and ever changing issue. Measurements of school success have also seen many changes in recent years with floor standards and SATs adapted at Key Stage 2, coursework abolished at GCSE with a new grading system and a new linear two-year A level. Schools also have much more control over their own budgets and choose to spend their budgets in different ways, the changing of the school funding formula will mean further control for individual schools in the next couple of years.

As an economist I am well aware that a range of factors contribute to outcomes, and that it can be very difficult to isolate effects from one factor. However since I took on this post last June, I have visited over 30 of our schools in Reading and every single Head teacher has mentioned the struggles of funding to me. Many have commented that the current levels of education funding are the worst they have experienced in their careers.

We do know that Reading's schools will have seen funding cuts of £4.9m between 2015 and 2020, or £281 per pupil, for some schools this is up to £250,000 per year. The number of staff redundancies in schools in Reading has risen. Class sizes have also risen and some posts such as Special Educational Needs coordinators have been cut or reduced in hours. Isolating effects of funding cuts may be difficult, but if in your job you received a pay cut, lost a colleague in your team and had your workload increased, what do you think the impacts may be?

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QUESTION NO. 6

Richard Stainthorp to ask the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities:

Support for Community Groups

Could the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities please advise me about some of the work the Council are doing to support local community and neighbourhood groups, in particular how have the Council helped these groups through the challenges austerity has caused?

REPLY by Councillor James (Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities):

In June we awarded contracts valuing £4m over the next four years, to voluntary sector organisations, through our Narrowing the Gap Framework. These contracts provide services needed and best delivered in the community to: tackle poverty; support cohesion and integration, contribute to maintaining thriving communities and promote preventative health and care. These services include food parcels, affordable furniture, homelessness, refugee and asylum support, advice services and support for new and emerging community groups to apply for funding or find accommodation.

In addition, the work of our Neighbourhood Initiatives Team is focussed on those neighbourhoods which are most socially deprived. Within these neighbourhoods our Neighbourhood Initiatives Officers work with local people and a range of other services, agencies and stakeholders to support the delivery of community-led initiatives that impact on community safety, crime reduction, health, social cohesion, poverty and economic development. The Team also supports community-based organisations to help them identify additional sources of funding, resources and training.

The Wellbeing Team includes two neighbourhood officers whose remit is to work with communities to develop support for health and wellbeing, including strengthening community connections to reduce the health risks of loneliness and social isolation. These officers have worked with a range of groups to develop and promote services, recruit volunteers, secure funding and training.

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QUESTION NO. 7

Richard Stainthorp to ask the Lead Councillor for Education:

Recruitment and Retention of Teachers

Can the Lead Councillor for Education give a view on the impact real term cuts in teacher pay are having on the current recruitment and retention crisis in teaching, and what the Local Council can do to help with this?

REPLY by Councillor Pearce (Lead Councillor for Education):

Last year the independent school teachers review body asked for all teachers to receive a 3.5% pay increase. The government announced in July last year a 3.5 per cent pay rise for teachers on the main range. However, it also said teachers on the upper ranges will get 2 per cent and leaders will receive 1.5 per cent, going against the School Teachers' Review Body recommendations. Interestingly, MP's recently voted themselves inflation busting pay rises, austerity and public sector pay restraint has not reached them yet it seems.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies analysis of the teacher pay settlement estimates that about 60 per cent of teachers will receive pay increases below the current 2.4 per cent headline measure of inflation. Therefore most teachers have yet again received a real terms pay cut, at a time when real wages elsewhere are now rising.

The announcement of a 3.5% pay rise for teachers on the main pay range may help with recruitment and retention for teachers early in their career, but for those teachers with more experience, and it is these who are leaving the profession in larger numbers, this will do little to help.

We cannot indicate at present what effect the settlement has had upon recruitment and retention in Reading. Currently, the Local Authority provides information on its website about teaching in Reading. Brighter Futures for Children will look to enhance this information further to make Reading a more attractive place to teach, and will be working on a recruitment and retention package for our teachers soon.

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QUESTION NO. 8

Richard Stainthorp to ask the Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation:

Nature Reserves

Can the Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation tell me how many nature reserves Reading Borough Council has and how are they being managed?

REPLY by Councillor Hacker (Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation):

Reading Borough Council has three sites designated as Local Nature Reserves:

- Clayfield Copse and Blackhouse Woods
- Fobney Island
- West Reading Woodlands (Blundells Copse, Lousehill Copse)

Clayfield Copse and the West Reading Woodlands are managed according to ten-year Management Plans, currently 2013-23. These plans are detailed, but the work essentially involves management of the woodland edge to improve its biodiversity, some rotational clearance, and renewing of coppice. Woodland works are carried out by Council staff in the winter, out of the bird-nesting season and when trees are dormant.

The Council has a partnership agreement with The Conservation Volunteers (TVC) to improve the biodiversity of Lousehill Copse through a series of initiatives over two years from February 2018 to February 2020. These include:

- bramble clearance
- clearing paths
- building steps
- repairing bridges
- installing a pond dipping platform
- creating habitats for slowworms, hedgehogs and insects
- putting up bird boxes
- planting wildflowers
- litterpicking

The improvements to the site have not only been good for biodiversity; the woodland is now well used by local schools and families.

TCV has also applied for funding from the Network Rail Biodiversity Offset Programme to undertake the following works:

- Blundell's Copse: re-establishing the coppicing regime, removing invasive species and controlling bracken, including partial removal of the bracken patch and replacement by native trees
- Clayfield Copse & Blackhouse Woods: re-establishing the coppicing regime, thinning dense trees, opening rides, clearing encroaching bramble and removing invasive species
- Bugs Bottom: re-establishing the coppicing regime, removing snowberry and undertaking tree planting to improve connectivity and bolster the existing thin wildlife corridor along the central strip

Fobney Island is divided into two areas: the eastern end allows public access; the western end is closed to the public and intervention in terms of maintenance is minimal. Management of the eastern end involves annual cutting of the wildflower meadow in the autumn and periodic mowing of the path margins to prevent vegetation from growing into the paths. Other tasks are arranged at regular intervals by the Friends of Fobney Island. The Friends of Fobney Island also monitor water levels and carry out or arrange seasonal surveys of flora and fauna.

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QUESTION NO. 9

Ayo Sokale to ask the Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care:

CQC Inspection

I understand that the Care Quality Commission recently visited Reading to undertake a review. Can the Lead Member for Adult Social Care please inform me of their findings?

REPLY by Councillor Jones (Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care):

The review was carried out under Section 48 of the Health and Social Care Act 2008. This gives the Care Quality Commission (CQC) the ability to explore issues wider than the regulatory work. This review at Reading followed on from 20 previous reviews carried out between August 2017 and July 2018, the findings from which were published in a report called 'Beyond Barriers: How older people move between health and social care in England'.

The review process consisted of analysis of the local area performance data, an analysis of a range of information available from national data collections, as well as CQC's own data. The Reading system were also asked to put together a system overview information return (SOIR). The SOIR was sent prior to on-site fieldwork and system leaders to give their own perspective on the challenges faced in their local area, as well as an opportunity to share what is working well.

The local system reviews look at how people, with a particular focus on those over 65 years of age, move between health and social care.

The final report was published by CQC on their website on 17th January 2019.

The report was launched at a summit held with system leaders on 16th January 2019. The resulting findings of the report were formed into an action plan. Development of the action plan, which will be monitored by a Department of Health and Social Care Partner allocated by CQC, was facilitated by the Social Care Institute for Excellence as commissioned by CQC. It was on the whole a positive review of Health and Social Care Integration in Reading with some clear findings that could further enhance the system.

The resulting action plan and development is managed via the Health and Wellbeing Board and the action plan and report will be presented at the next meeting on 15th March 2019.

The key findings were split into four subject areas - some of the findings are detailed below:

Strategic engagement and Governance

Partners were asked to consider how the Health and Wellbeing Strategy engages all system partners.

More work was to be done on understanding the Governance of the Wider West Berkshire system collaboration through the organisations collectively referred to as the Berkshire West 7.

How scrutiny of those decisions is taken to align with Strategy, particularly with a focus on the Adults Children and Education Committee holding health leaders to account.

Operational Delivery and Workforce

It was cited that workforce modelling needs to be more inclusive across all partners and include the voluntary sector.

There is a need to look at how better identification of risk could encourage a more preventative approach for people with deteriorating conditions.

There is an opportunity with the Connected Care implementation plan that will ensure greater information is shared across Health and Social Care Partners.

There needs to be improved clarity of process and more training to staff in the Continuing Healthcare funding procedures and processes.

Commissioning and Market Management

There is an opportunity to develop a greater range of services to target prevention and early intervention.

Likewise more joint commissioning opportunities across partners could be harnessed through the development of a joint commissioning strategy.

Communication and Engagement

All system partners needs to be engaged and included in the development of the next Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

All levels of staff across the organisations need to be communicated to and involved in the future integration plans. Develop multi agency forums for information sharing and to aid discussion on better joint working.

There needs to be better information on carers' services available and better use of carers in helping to develop strategies going forward.

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COUNCILLOR QUESTION 1

Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:

Climate Emergency Action

Following Reading Council declaring a climate emergency, can the Lead Councillor confirm approximately which meeting of the Policy and Strategic Environment committees a climate emergency report will come back to?

REPLY by Councillor Page (Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport):

I thank Cllr White for his question.

An initial report on the Council motion has been submitted to the Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport (SEPT) Committee meeting next Monday 18th March.

The report recommends that the Committee instructs officers to bring a report to the following SEPT Committee meeting, in July 2019, on further potential measures that could accelerate the timescale for reducing carbon dioxide emissions to zero by 2030.

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COUNCILLOR QUESTION 2

Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Children:

Exempting young people leaving care from Council Tax

Please can I get an update on the Council's progress investigating implementing the Children's Society's campaign to exempt young people leaving care from having to pay council tax?

REPLY by Councillor Terry (Lead Councillor for Children):

The potential to introduce a care leavers' exemption was considered as part of the 2019/20 initial budget options but it was unclear how this might be best achieved given the huge pressure on the Council to cut its budget. I asked for further work which could not be completed in time for the budget meeting. I have asked officers from Children's Services and Revenues and Benefits to provide a more detailed report on how such a scheme could be implemented, the issues in implementing an exemption for care leavers, and the financial impact on the Council. The report will be presented to Policy Committee in due course.