

# Cherwell District Council

## Executive

3 November 2014

<h3>Improvements to Bicester and Kidlington and Gosford Leisure Centres</h3>
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## Report of Director of Community and Environment

This report is public

### Purpose of report

To consider a range of service improvements to Bicester and Kidlington and Gosford Leisure Centres and facility improvements to Kidlington and Gosford Leisure Centre

### 1.0 Recommendations

The meeting is recommended:

- 1.1 To support in principle the facility improvements proposed for Kidlington and Gosford Leisure Centre subject to an acceptable outcome of further contractual negotiations.
- 1.2 To note and welcome the operational improvements put in place at Bicester and Kidlington and Gosford Leisure Centres.
- 1.3 To receive a further report on the scope for facility and customer improvements at Bicester Leisure Centre.

### 2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 For the past year or so, officers in conjunction with Cherwell Leisure Ltd (CLL) have been working in partnership with Parkwood Community Leisure (PCL), the Council's operating contractor, to improve operational standards at Bicester Leisure Centre (BLC) and Kidlington and Gosford Leisure Centre (KGLC). In late 2013 and early 2014 in particular, whilst operating standards have generally been good and in line with the agreed contract specification, there have been times when there has been inconsistencies, particularly in BLC.
- 2.2 A range of improvement measures had been agreed earlier in 2014 and have gradually been implemented over the past year by PCL. However, when the Council undertook its annual customer satisfaction survey in the early summer of 2014, it was clear from the results that, despite an overall increase in overall customer satisfaction, inconsistency of cleanliness and customer service standards in the

leisure centres did have a negative impact on the results. This was because the programme of improvements were only part completed and potentially meant that the improvement in the Council's overall customer satisfaction level could have been greater had this not been the case.

- 2.3 Consequently, officers and CLL have been in further dialogue with PCL to accelerate the remaining improvements and to ensure that previous inconsistencies of service standards are eradicated. The outcome of this dialogue has resulted in many improvements which are summarised in this report and the opportunity has been taken at the same time to explore facility improvements which may help this position and the long term performance of the centres. As a consequence of this, there has arisen an immediate opportunity to consider some facility changes and improvements at KGLC at no cost to the Council which need early consideration and a decision due to a time limited Parkwood Leisure funding opportunity. Similarly, there are potential changes which can be considered in BLC which are not contained in this report as they are not developed enough at this stage. These will therefore be the subject of a further report.

### **3.0 Report Details**

#### **Operating Improvements**

- 3.1 The operational standard concerns centred largely around inconsistent cleaning standards, delayed facility condition survey works in accordance with the lifecycle works programme, high turnover of key staff and the knock on effect of these on the customer. It is pleasing to note that since the early part of 2014, PCL have responded positively to all of these matters which can be summarised as follows;
- Improved management and operational structures.
  - Increases to salary ranges to aid staff retention.
  - Additional staff training – Support from RoSPA; Icon & National Governing Bodies of Sport.
  - Improved monitoring of performance through the Council & Pro Insight mystery visitor reports.
  - Increased cleaning resource.
  - Improved management of condition survey works. Whilst overdue in some cases, significant progress has now been made.
  - Significant 'non condition survey' improvements to the facilities (i.e. improved marketing; retail presentation; fitness & aerobics class equipment; new cleaning machines).
  - Simply more focus on detail!
- 3.2 From the above and the Council's monitoring systems, it is evident that PCL have improved their staff professionalism, have put in place measures to maintain a better and more effective management structure, addressed the cleaning issues and have improved the facilities generally. Linked to these are communication and marketing initiatives which are geared to growing their customer base.
- 3.3 In addition, PCL have a number of future developments which will include further equipment replacement, staffing changes to free up the operational rather than administrative time of key staff, further cleaning resources and targeted refurbishment activities.

### **Facility Improvements**

- 3.4 This operational review has also provided the opportunity to consider some facility changes and improvements which would benefit many customers. There is the potential to reconfigure some of BLC's health and fitness facilities to cater for the recent notable increase in users and also to create the capacity to cater for an on-going increase in numbers given the growth in population predicted for the town. However, the development of the detail of these potential changes is not sufficiently advanced to be considered at this point by the Council, nor does it have time critical funding issues so it is intended that a future report be submitted on this.
- 3.5 The same exercise for KGLC is sufficiently advanced and can benefit from some recently agreed investment by PCL. This involves a number of proposed facility changes to better reflect and cater for the current activity demand of customers. Unsurprisingly, the greatest increase in demand is around the health and fitness activity programme and as such, the following is proposed;
- Convert the existing aerobics area into a free weights and functional training area. This will increase capacity for user growth, provide a more contemporary training area and improve the overall operating performance of the centre.
  - Convert the existing crèche and multi use purpose area into a new aerobics studio. This will improve the use of a valuable and currently underutilised space and allow for an increase on the aerobics and group fitness activity programme for a growing user base.
  - Convert the Crazy Coliseum play area into a dedicated spinning studio. This is a response to spinning which is the most popular class in the centre and currently compromised in the multipurpose hall.
  - Relocate the crèche into the underutilised first floor multipurpose room overlooking the pool. Install new soft play equipment to widen the programming capacity.
  - Relocate the current vending area to the reception lobby and supplement this in the main circulation area with a healthy eating vend option.
- 3.6 These proposals (shown also in Appendix 1) are a positive move forward for the centre and will benefit a significant proportion of its users. They offer far better use of the internal space and are driven by the activities which have over the past year or so exhibited the greatest growth in demand. Overall therefore they should contribute to improved centre performance and improved customer satisfaction.
- 3.7 However, it is acknowledged that there are two negative aspects. The first is the reduced size of the relocated crèche facility which may lead to negative comment from these users. In this respect, it should be noted that it is of sufficient size to accommodate current user levels and will have the added advantage of new soft play equipment. The second negative aspect is the removal of the Crazy Coliseum play facility as it is not possible to compensate for this on a like for like basis. The proposal to address this in part is to offer free of charge the use of the soft play facilities when not used as a crèche area (NB the crèche is only used M-F mornings) and to offer free of use soft play inflatables in one of the squash courts when not in use for squash.
- 3.8 There is still further detail to be finalised regarding the effect of these PCL funded changes will have on the base contract such as utilities, lifecycle costs and

benchmarking. However, these issues are not anticipated to be problematic and it is expected that the overall performance of the centre will be improved which will be of benefit to both customers and the Council.

## **4.0 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations**

- 4.1 The Council strives for continuous improvement in its services and indeed invites entrepreneurial flair from the operator and this can be regarded as an example of that. Five years after it entered a long term contract for its modernised leisure facilities is a reasonable period for changed patterns of use to be established and improvements to be considered. The proposed improvements will benefit the biggest part of leisure centre customer growth and address the dynamic nature of the health and fitness sector.
- 4.2 By retaining these improvements within the centre's current footprint, it does however mean that users of the Crazy Coliseum will not have like for like facilities provided. The offer of free use of two soft play environments will in some way compensate for this but only in part.
- 4.3 For changes of this nature which are both customer driven and very relevant, officers have requested, that subject to the decision of the Executive, PCL are to undertake a short in centre consultation period from 4 November to gain specific and overall customer views prior to implementation to see whether there are any other improvement and mitigating measure which could be implemented.

## **5.0 Consultation**

None to date. See 4.3 above

## **6.0 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection**

- 5.1 The following alternative option has been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: Undertake no change. This is not proposed as it would mean that the centre would continue to be constrained in accommodating the growth in health and fitness demand.

## **7.0 Implications**

### **Financial and Resource Implications**

- 7.1 Further dialogue is underway with PCL and CLL to ensure that the changes are fully reconciled within the contract framework which all parties are subject to. Specific areas which require further analysis are the effect on utilities, lifecycle programme and costs and the effect on benchmarking. The five year benchmarking process is particularly important as the first period for this ends in December 2014 at the same time when these works are programmed to be undertaken.

Comments checked by: Martin Henry, Director of Resources, 030000 30 102, martin.henry@cherwellandsouthnorthants.gov.uk

### **Legal Implications**

- 7.2 It is intended that the further negotiations with PCL and CLL about the improvements will be undertaken within the existing contract framework for the centre. This is necessary to avoid the risk of changes outside the contract altering the basis of the original PCL award to such extent that a new procurement contest would need to be undertaken.

Comments checked by: Richard Hawtin, Legal Team Leader Non Contentious, 01295 221695, Richard.hawtin@cherwellandsouthnorthants.gov.uk

## **8.0 Decision Information**

### **Key Decision**

**Financial Threshold Met:** No

**Community Impact Threshold Met:** No

### **Wards Affected**

All Kidlington and surrounding wards

### **Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework**

Cherwell Thriving Communities – to provide high quality and accessible leisure opportunities

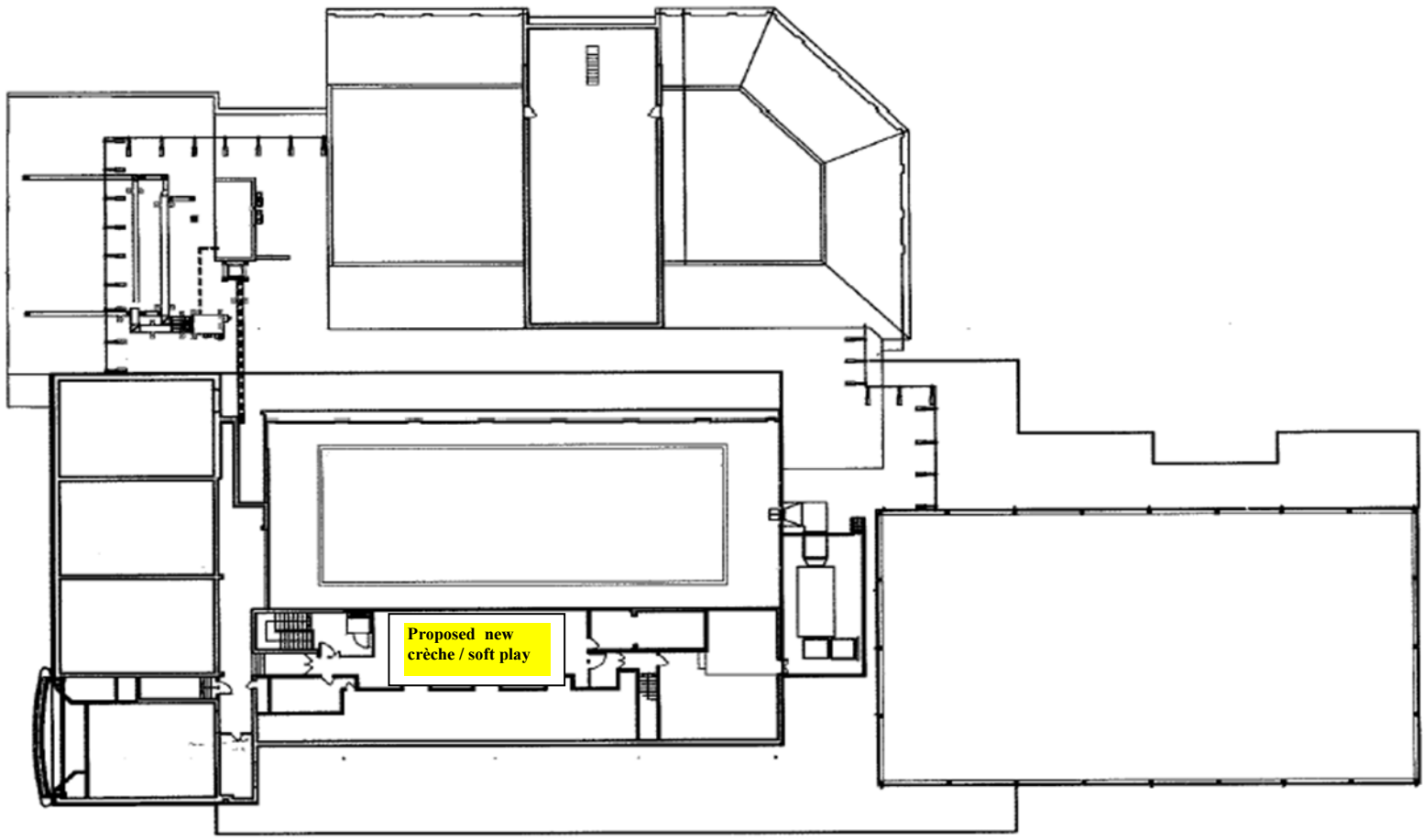
### **Lead Councillor**

Councillor George Reynolds, Deputy Leader

### **Document Information**

<b>Appendix No</b>	<b>Title</b>
Appendix 1	Kidlington Leisure Centre Facility Improvements
<b>Background Papers</b>	
None	
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Proposed new  
crèche / soft play