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Minutes of the meeting of the **DOVER LEISURE CENTRE ADVISORY GROUP** held at the Council Offices, Whitfield on Thursday, 30 June 2016 at 6.02 pm.

Present:

Chairman: Councillor T J Bartlett

Councillors: N J Collor
M D Conolly
M R Eddy
Mr P Ward

Also present: Councillor S F Bannister
Councillor P M Brivio
Councillor S J Jones
Councillor M J Ovenden
Councillor A S Pollitt
Councillor G Rapley
Councillor A F Richardson

Officers: Director of Environment and Corporate Assets
Principal Infrastructure and Delivery Officer
Principal Leisure Officer
Democratic Support Officer

11 APOLOGIES

It was noted that Councillors P M Beresford and P Walker had sent apologies for absence.

12 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that, in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4, Councillor M R Eddy had been appointed as substitute member for Councillor P Walker.

13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

It was noted that there were no declarations of interest.

14 NOTES

The notes of the meeting of the Group held on 19 May 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

15 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chairman advised Members that Agenda Item 5 (Funding Options) had been withdrawn from the agenda. This was a sensitive issue at a time when the Council was involved in discussions surrounding land acquisition for the new leisure centre. It was therefore considered inappropriate to discuss the matter at this time, but it was hoped that it would be considered at the next meeting.

16 FACILITY MIX

The Principal Leisure Officer (PLO) advised that, as requested at the last meeting, Officers had visited a 'Clip and Climb' facility at Chelsea. There were only 15 such facilities in the country; of these only one was located in a leisure centre. Officers were excited by the quality and potential of the facility which catered for children from age 4 through to adults. The operators in Chelsea had advised that peak periods for use were weekends, holidays and after school. Business was so buoyant that they had met their business plan targets for the fifth year of operation by the third year. They were also looking to fill off-peak periods with corporate events and fitness class programmes. Officers fully supported the consultants' recommendation that 'Clip and Climb' be added to the facility mix for the new leisure centre.

In response to questions, the PLO advised that she believed the facility was suitable for people with disabilities, although this would need to be verified. Comparisons had been made with Exeter which had a 150- square metre facility, similar in size to the one proposed for Dover. The consultants estimated that net revenue of £80,000 per annum could be achieved at the Dover facility. The Principal Infrastructure and Delivery Officer (PIDO) pointed out that Dover's would also have the advantage of being the only one in Kent. A facility of this size had a user capacity of 35 people and required 7 members of staff. It was confirmed that the equipment could easily be dismantled to free up space for other activities.

In respect of the spa facility, the PIDO advised that the consultants had done some further research but were not experts in this field. Their initial view was that a spa would add to the capital costs and affordability gap. Furthermore, it was not meeting a sporting need and could potentially add risk to the overall affordability of the project.

The Director of Environment and Corporate Assets (DECA) recognised that the provision of a spa would not meet a sporting need, but it would be an attractive offer for local people. Whilst a spa could make a valuable contribution to profit margins, it was accepted that it was a risky proposition. The PIDO advised that there had been a lot of interest from potential operators but, of these, fewer than half had expressed an interest if a spa were included. Those who were interested had requested more detailed information.

Councillor M D Conolly reiterated that he had been impressed with the Ramsgate spa which had proved a resounding success. His view was that the idea should not be discounted until the costs of the project were known. Even then, it might be a gamble worth taking. Councillor N J Collor agreed.

The PLO advised that the operators who had expressed an interest in the spa had indicated that they would want it included at the build stage rather than added on afterwards. The PIDO added that there would be cost and layout implications at the initial stages of the project. Further research would be needed, probably by specialist consultants who would have to be tendered for, and this would inevitably delay the project programme. The DECA added that refinements would be made to the design following consultation, which could see strong support for a spa. Moreover, it might not be necessary to engage another set of consultants as it was possible the architects could advise on layout. Councillor Conolly commented that the matter could be considered at the next meeting when a clearer picture on costs and progress should be available.

It was agreed that the update be noted.

CONSULTATION

The PLO advised that the consultation was due to be launched the following week. The methods of consultation included a questionnaire and a Question and Answer (Q&A) sheet which would be placed on the Council's website. Postings would also be made on Facebook, Twitter and other social media. A press release would be issued and adverts placed in all the local newspapers. Mailings would be made to customers who had signed up to Keep Me Posted and those on Your Leisure's database. Finally, special stakeholder consultation events were taking place on 7 July to which clubs, operators, schools, sporting networks, etc had been invited. In addition, Officers would be present at the three drop-in workshops at Dover Leisure Centre on 14, 16 and 19 July, at another at Whitfield village hall on 14 July and an all-day event at Dover Regatta on 23 July.

Referring to the Q&A sheet, Councillor M R Eddy emphasised the importance of there being good public transport linkages from the town centre to the new leisure centre. This information should be included in the sheet. The PIDO advised that a meeting was to be held with Kent County Council Highways the following week to discuss this issue. The sheet would then be updated once further information was available. The DECA added that public transport arrangements would be covered in the planning process.

Councillor Collor suggested that the Q&A sheet should include a reference to coaches. He also suggested that the first question should be changed to reflect the fact that there was no room rather than limited room to expand. The PIDO responded that the sheet would be updated during the consultation period to reflect issues raised by consultees.

In response to concerns raised by Members, Officers undertook to place an advert in newspapers on 7 July to ensure that sufficient notice was given for events commencing on 14 July. At Councillor Conolly's suggestion, Officers undertook to discuss with the Funding and Communication Manager the idea of direct approaches being made to television and radio stations.

It was agreed that the update be noted.

SOFT MARKET TESTING

The Group was advised that soft market testing for the construction of the new centre had been carried out with six contractors through the Southern Construction Framework. Three had expressed an interest, all of which were very active in the south-east and Dover and had previous experience of building leisure centres. None had indicated that the projected construction costs were unrealistic, but two out of three of those interested had expressed concern about the length of the construction programme. Whilst Officers recognised that it was ambitious, there was currently no reason to change it. The DECA advised that it had been useful to test the capacity in the market, and testing had clarified that there were a limited number of companies operating in the south-east with experience in this field. Officers would report in due course on the procurement options.

Soft market testing of potential operators had also been undertaken. Eight out of nine operators contacted had expressed an interest in tendering for the contract. Most had expressed an interest in combining the management of Tides with the new leisure centre. The majority had indicated an interest in providing finance to either centre if required. Respondents had suggested that they would be

interested in a contract of a minimum length of 10 years and up to 15 years' duration.

As reported earlier, fewer than half the respondents were interested in operating the spa or sought further information regarding viability. Some operators had suggested that the proposed parking capacity of 250 spaces would need to be increased, potentially up to 400. The majority of operators had also indicated that they were happy with the proposed facility mix. Two had suggested that the size of the sports hall should be increased to five or six courts. One operator had suggested that the 3G pitch should be full sized and another that there should be two additional five-a-side pitches. Two operators had suggested having moveable walls between the squash courts and two others had queried whether squash courts were necessary. Another had proposed a cycle studio.

Other comments had included that the fitness studio capacity should be increased to 140 stations, and one suggested that the 'Clip and Climb' facility should be removed. It was clarified that parking provision would be revised as it was now recognised, following feedback received, that 250 spaces would be insufficient. There were no plans to have moveable walls between the squash courts, visits to other facilities having indicated that acoustics could be an issue.

It was agreed that the update be noted.

19 LAND ACQUISITION

The DECA advised that the rationale behind the purchase of land for the new centre at this stage was to provide certainty that the various options for its location could be delivered. At the present time, there was the intention to build a new centre, but the Council did not own or have an interest in the plots of land where it could potentially be located. The objective was to seek to acquire an interest but not necessarily to purchase land now.

It was agreed that the update be noted.

20 NEXT STEPS

The PIDO advised that a report on the Indoor Sports Facility Strategy would go to Cabinet on 4 July. This would report on the 92 representations received during the public consultation period, along with Officer responses. The report would also recommend changes to the draft strategy for Members to consider and approve. A report on the feasibility study for Dover Leisure Centre would go to Cabinet on 5 September, with a special Cabinet meeting later that month to consider the Scrutiny Committee's recommendations.

It was agreed that the update be noted.

21 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Group was advised that the next meeting would be held on 26 July at 5.00pm. Beyond that, it was anticipated that another meeting would be held on 29 September at 5.00pm.

The PIDO agreed that, although it would be too early to report back fully on the outcome of the July consultation, this being due to end on 24 July, Officers would be able to give an informal overview of the responses received at the July meeting.

The DECA confirmed that there would be a second round of consultation as the scheme was defined. Cabinet would receive a further report, as would the Scrutiny Committee. In response to Councillor Conolly, it was clarified that the Scrutiny (Policy and Performance) Committee was the lead committee on this matter.

It was agreed to note that further meetings would be held on 26 July and 29 September 2016.

The meeting ended at 6.56 pm.