

TITLE: The Hive: Progress Report

Committee: Community Services Committee

Date: 26th June 2018

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[T37]

ISSUE

- 1.1. To report on the initial progress of the new leisure centre (the Hive).

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1. Members are asked to note the contents of this report.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. The opening ceremony for the Hive took place on Friday 11th May. This was followed by an 'open house' weekend prior to full public opening on Monday 14th May.
- 3.2. The purpose of this report is to report on the progress of the centre, and to identify any issues emerging.

4. ARGUMENTS AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1. The completion of the centre (two weeks ahead of the contracted finish-date) was generally smooth. There have been problems in some specific areas such as telephone connections but these should be considered the exception rather than the rule.
- 4.2. Paradise Pools closed on 30th April; the Hive opened for a test-week – for programmed swimming lessons and gym tours only - on 7th May, and fully on 14th May. There was therefore a one-week gap in swimming lessons, and a two-week gap for leisure swimming. No adverse comments were received on this issue.
- 4.3. GLL data indicates that usage over the first two weeks of full opening (ie the second half of May) was predominantly for the pools. This was to be expected, since the Hive directly replaced the previous pool facility and inherited a strong user-base. Business in other areas is expected to build over time.
- 4.4. Initial user feedback on the facilities has been positive, with the specific exceptions of the teaching pool - partly for its size, and partly for the lack of a graduated ('beach') entry area – and the absence of leisure elements such as flumes or a sauna. The learner pool is smaller overall than at

Paradise Pools, but it is consistent with Sport England and ASA recommendations, and fully capable of accommodating the lesson programme for example. It also offers – as the old pool could not – a variable depth, which will allow it to accommodate a range of activities and groups. The broader leisure elements have never been part of this scheme and this is really a historical issue, which goes back to a much earlier proposal.

- 4.5. Operationally, the greater complexity of the operation compared to Paradise Pools, the fact that this is a new contract for the operator, and the sheer volume of interest, have inevitably presented some early challenges – initially compounded by difficulties with the telephone signal and delays to some key deliveries and installations. This resulted in some points of confusion early on, but these are expected to be resolved fairly quickly.
- 4.6. Commentary in social media has tended to focus on perceived problems, and has reportedly become somewhat heated in some quarters, but in general the atmosphere ‘on the ground’ has remained positive and customer anxieties appear to be easing as this report is prepared. Officers will continue working with GLL to optimise the use and programming of the water-space, and to identify any areas where there is scope for improvement in the service.
- 4.7. Pricing is inevitably a sensitive area, and careful consideration has been given to this in order to balance affordability for users with the financial viability of the centre. Previous pricing at Paradise Pools is necessarily an influence, since that frames the expectations of both individual users and clubs with regards to swimming. Individual ‘headline’ charges for swimming are a little higher than at Paradise Pools, but this is offset by an affordable ‘leisure card’, which provides significant reductions, particularly for concessionary users and juniors. Juniors also benefit from other targeted universal offers. Charges to the swimming clubs proved more problematic, but this issue has been resolved following discussions between the parties. Again, it will be necessary to keep this under review, particularly over the first few months.
- 4.8. The programme for the centre will be key to its long-term success, and is being put in place with some consideration, and in negotiation with key clubs and sports governing bodies. GLL – in consultation always with ECDC officers – have been careful not to rush into long-term booking commitments, to ensure that interest can be properly evaluated before decisions are made.
- 4.9. So far as possible, the aim is to develop comprehensive and coherent programmes in the most popular activities, while maintaining the necessary breadth to attract the widest possible cross-section of the community. Typically this will consist of some form of open access session, with structured coaching and competition opportunities (at least for juniors, and for seniors where appropriate) through clubs. Some elements of this programme will be delivered by GLL direct, some by clubs, some by the

two working together. The clubs are therefore being encouraged to become partners in a sports development programme, rather than simply as facility-hirers. A draft partnership agreement has been formulated and it is envisaged that this will underpin most long-term bookings, though the detail will necessarily vary. It is not expected that ECDC will be directly involved in the programmes (unless exceptionally through the Let's Get Moving project) but that we will actively support such working relationships.

- 4.10. The working relationship between ECDC and GLL is currently very good, and the organisations have a shared interest in the long-term success of the centre. The focus in this early period has been on practical and stakeholder issues, and the approach based on pragmatism and regular consultation. As these initial issues are addressed the focus will shift – later than anticipated, but no less productively - towards more structured planning and evaluation processes, based upon the mechanisms within the contract; and further reports will be provided to this Committee accordingly.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS / EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1. There are no new financial commitments arising from this report.
- 5.2. An Equalities Impact Assessment was carried out for the leisure centre project in November 2016. No new considerations have emerged at this stage.

Background Documents

Location

The Grange
Ely

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