
LEISURE, ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Of a virtual meeting on Wednesday 7 October from 7.30pm to 8.45pm

Councillors present:

Chris Lloyd (Lead Member for Leisure)	Phil Williams (Lead Member
Roger Seabourne (Lead Member Community	Environmental Services and
Safety and Partnerships)	Sustainability)
Shanti Maru	Alison Scarth
Stephen Cox	Jon Tankard
Paula Hiscocks	Alison Wall
David Major	
Alex Michaels	

Also in attendance:

Alison Scott – Acting Director of Finance
Ray Figg – Head of Community Services
Rebecca Young – Interim Head of Community Partnerships
Temitope Opeyemi – Finance Manager
Josh Sills – Watersmeet Venue Manager
Joanna Hewitson – LA1 Contract / Project Manager
Kelly Barnard - Leisure Contracts and Landscape Projects Officer
Elen Roberts - Waste and Recycling Officer
Sherrie Ralton - Committee Manager
John Sewell - Area Contract Manager, Sports and Leisure Management (SLM)
Mark Leahy - Regional Contract Manager, SLM

Councillor Roger Seabourne in the Chair

LEC 18/20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Stephen King and Donna Duncan, substitutes being Councillors Stephen Cox and Shanti Maru.

LEC 19/20 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Leisure, Environment and Community Committee meeting held on 19 August 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

LEC 20/20 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

LEC 21/20 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

LEC22/20 BUDGET MONITORING

The report covered this Committees financial position over the medium term (2020 – 2023) as at Period 4 (end of July)

The Period 4 comprehensive Budget Management report had already been presented to the Policy & Resources Committee at its meeting on 7 September 2020 which sought approval to a change in the Council's 2020 - 2023 medium-term financial plan

The Finance Manager presented the report and advised that the impact of Covid-19 was reflected in the latest budget positions.

19.34 The Chair was advised that the livestream had no sound so the meeting was stopped.

19.52 The Chair was advised that livestream and sound were back so the meeting re-convened.

19.53 The Chair was advised that Councillor Alex Michaels had joined the meeting.

The following questions and points were raised by Members on the Budget Monitoring Report.

How much money was being transferred from Sustainability Projects to fund the Climate Change Officer as it was showing £29,000 and £14,580? The Interim Head of Community Partnerships advised that funding from another pot was transferred to Community Partnerships to be spent on Climate Change initiatives. Now an Officer had been appointed the funding would be allocated to deliver the strategy. The £29,000 was a rollover from another budget. The wording on the report should be amended to reflect this accordingly as it stated it was to 'fund the Climate Change officer' for which Community Partnerships already have budget. The funding will be spent on initiatives to deliver the Climate Change Strategy.

Watersmeet had a £10k reduction in rental income due to a tenant moving out. The Watersmeet Venue Manager advised that an office space had been occupied by the Sharpe Academy. They vacated the space on 20 May 2020.

Under 'Active Community Development Fund' where room hire was shown as £2000. Which rooms were being rented? The Head of Community Services advised that this was part of the Leisure Development work across the whole District.

Post meeting note: *They varied across the district, but examples included:*

- *Leisure Venues (Dance for Parkinson's, Swimming After Stroke, Get Set Programme)*
- *A number of Church Halls: Croxley Green, Mill End, South Oxhey (Yoga, Keep Fit, Tai Chi)*

- *Community Halls: Abbots Langley, Rickmansworth (Get Set Perform, Keep Fit, Tai Chi)*

Domestic refuse showed a £4,400, loss of income due to selling nappy sacks. There was £3k budget write off as income was no longer expected, could this be explained? The Head of Community Services advised that a number of nappy sack outlets across the District had been closed during Covid, therefore the income had dropped. Members asked for the wording on the report to be made clearer.

Post meeting note: *The £3,000 budget was for transport subsidy from Hertfordshire County Council and it had been moved to the garden waste and waste management budgets.*

Under Leisure facilities, which swimming pool had been mothballed? The Head of Community Services advised that it was the Sir James Altham Pool and agreed going forward it would be made clear that it was relating to the Sir James Altham Pool. The Member asked why it was showing a cost of £31,000 if it was being decommissioned. The Head of Community Services advised this was the budget carried over from last year to cover the potential decommissioning costs. This whole budget may not be required but they would have a better idea once a more detailed exercise had been carried out.

On the Community CCTV, £6,000, the Member had been advised that the camera at the Bowls Club was not working so sought clarification on which cameras were working and who would look at the film? **Post Meeting Note:** *The CCTV at the Rickmansworth bowls club is operated and owned by Three Rivers District Council and consists of three cameras which are not monitored by anyone, but are recorded on a CCTV recorder which holds the footage for a set period of time. The recorder is located within the bowls club in a secure box located in the ladies changing room. The cameras monitor the front of the building including the part of the bowling green and are serviced by ADT. Information on the Community Safety Partnership Cameras can be found here: <https://www.threerivers.gov.uk/eqcl-page/cctv>*

On Revenue, under recycling, why was the Council losing £11,900 when there was an opportunity to collect textiles? The Chair explained that the money had been lost due to the drop in market price. The Head of Community Services added that since the budget monitoring report had been compiled around two months ago there had been a slight improvement. He also added that as from next week they would be re-introducing the textile collection.

On the Capital side, why would the allotments be under review and how would they be reviewed? **Written Response:** *In December 2019 members of the Property Services Team carried out a review of the 12 allotment sites within TRDC as part of the ongoing asset management function. Each site was visited with the appropriate allotment society representative and a list of requirements and recommendations created. The works or required items were identified and carried out/delivered as necessary. There was some delay due to lock down. Most works have been completed with one small item outstanding.*

The Watersmeet income actual to date was £22,000 but the forecast outturn was £516,000. The Acting Director of Finance explained that this reflected the expectation to move out of lockdown, which had not been the case. Updated figures would be provided in period 6 Budget Monitoring.

On being put to the Committee, the recommendation in the report was declared CARRIED by the Chair, the voting being 7 For, 0 Against and 4 Abstentions.

RECOMMENDED:

That Members noted and commented on the contents of the report.

LEISURE

LEC 23/20 WATERSMEET

The Watersmeet Venue Manager gave the following update:

2019/20 was strong year for Watersmeet, building on the strong sales and momentum of the previous year, and until Covid-19, Watersmeet was on track to generate a net direct cost surplus for the third year running. However the Impact of Covid-19 resulted in a £20,000 loss of income giving a final outturn of a net direct cost of £13,000.

They continued to develop their programme of co-promoted live theatre shows increasing from 11 productions in 2018/19 to 25 productions last year selling a total of 7,465 tickets. They also showed 38 film titles selling 9,253 tickets and 11 NT live theatre screenings, selling 1,409 tickets.

The pantomime in December 2019 was Peter Pan starring Todd Carty as Captain Hook, and generated their highest gross income ever taking over £259,000 and generated the second highest number of pantomime ticket sales in the venue's recent history with 16,103 tickets sold. They also presented their first 'relaxed performance' where the house lights remained on, the pyrotechnics were removed and the sound volume reduced. This was especially well received and had improved accessibility to the Watersmeet pantomime.

The Venue hire continued to be strong with 100 separate hires covering 135 days.

In February 2019 Daybreak Nursery was taken over by new management and a good working relationship had been established with the new owners.

In September 2019 Sharpe Academy moved to new premises in Harrow, and stopped hiring Watersmeet as a result. The office space was vacated in May 2020 and they were in the process of seeking new tenants.

Friends of Watersmeet Film Society closed in November 2019. The Film Society was a valued part of the events offered at Watersmeet and they hoped to fill the hole left by them with additional Filmsmeet films in the future. Watersmeet management continued to work closely with the Friends of Watersmeet committee who continued to support the venue.

There were a number of capital works completed on the building last year including the refurbishment of the upper foyer toilets in August 2019, the ladies toilet being reconfigured to accommodate an additional cubicle. The backstage Hot Water Pipework replacement was completed including the refurbishment of the shower facility.

During the financial year since 18 March 2020, Watersmeet had remained closed to the public. The December 2020 pantomime 'Cinderella' had been postponed to December 2021 as a joint decision between the Council and Jordan Productions.

All co-promoted live theatre shows had been postponed into 2021 and the majority of hires postponed with a small number cancelled altogether.

Customers had been kept up to date via social media channels, database emails and the Watersmeet website and during lockdown and they regularly posted on social media 'ideas to do from home'.

Although the building had been closed the box office had remained open via the website 24/7 and via telephone 11am – 2pm Monday-Friday. This was operated from home by a member of the Watersmeet team.

To support the Council's priorities throughout the pandemic, a number Watersmeet staff had been redeployed, supporting a variety of teams across the Council, including working at the Food Hub, working at Grounds Maintenance and supporting the Community Partnerships team.

To utilise this period of closure a number of capital works were continuing to take place including the stage lighting rig replacement. The works include replacing the infrastructure such as lighting bars, data and power cables and replacing the old tungsten lighting fixtures themselves with energy efficient LEDs. This project had been split over two financial years with the second part due to take place next year.

Emergency exit and roof access staircases were due to be installed to fulfil the requirements of the fire risk assessment and improve the safety of workers. These works were expected to be carried out over the coming months.

In addition the technical staff were continuing to work hard carrying out essential maintenance work on the building in preparation for when Watersmeet reopens.

With regards to Hertfordshire Year of Culture there were potential plans to extend this into 2021 branded as HYOC2020+ to cover planned projects that had to be postponed due to Covid. Where possible a number of activities were now on-line.

In August 2020 an application for a grant of £175,000 was submitted to the Culture Recovery Fund, which was being administered by Arts Council England. They would hear if the application had been successful the following week. The outcome of this would influence the way forward for Watersmeet in the short term, as any funding awarded must be used by 31 March 2021.

Watersmeet's reopening plans depended on the outcome of the grant application so it was difficult to say what this would look like. Of all the events and activity Watersmeet presents, cinema was the most financially viable with social distancing in place and would likely be the best way forward if unsuccessful with the grant application.

A small number of venues including the Elgiva Theatre Chesham, Campus West in Welwyn Garden City and Wyllyotts Theatre Potters Bar had all reopened for cinema already.

A further update would be provided at the November Leisure, Environment and Community Committee Meeting.

The following points were raised by Members:

The Chair said it had been a very difficult time and thanked the Watersmeet Venue Manager and the team for their flexibility helping where needed. The stage theatre lighting replacement works had been phased over two years and asked, if they were successful with the grant, could this work be brought forward while the building was closed? The Watersmeet Venue Manager said there would be restrictions on what the grant could be used for and would seek advice from Finance regarding the capital budget.

How would the current lack of new film availability affect Watersmeet opening as a Cinema? Watersmeet were able to screen new released films 6 weeks or later after release so not having blockbusters would affect to a certain extent, but they had a number of unscreened older films that could be screened. The film distributors had made their terms more favourable to encourage screening, therefore lowering the risk.

The Watersmeet Venue Manager said the Committee would be advised as soon as the outcome of the Grant application was known.

Members noted the report.

Post Meeting Note: *The application to the Culture Recovery Fund for Watersmeet was successful and the Council has been awarded £175,000 to support the reopening of Watersmeet's live theatre programme.*

Post Meeting Note: *As some capital budgets across the Council have been re-phased from 2020/21 to 2021/22, this has allowed funds to be available to re-phase the £48,000 for the second part of the Watersmeet Stage Lighting Replacement back from 2021/22 into this year 2020/21 to enable the works to be carried out this financial year. This has been reported in Period 6 Budget Monitoring due to go to 2 November P&R Committee for approval. The Culture Recovery Fund grant cannot be used for this capital project and so is not connected to the re-phasing.*

LEC 24/20 LEISURE FACILITIES MANAGEMENT CONTRACT – SPORTS AND LEISURE MANAGEMENT (SLM) WORKPLAN

The Leisure Contracts and Landscaped Projects Officer introduced Mark Leahy the Regional Contract Manager and John Sewell, the Area Contract Manager from SLM. SLM have managed the sports and leisure facilities in Three Rivers since July 2018. They would be providing an update on the last year 2019/20 and covering Covid-19 which closed leisure facilities on Friday 20 March following Government guidelines.

John Sewell shared the screen and gave the presentation which can be accessed on the Council's Website: <https://www.threerivers.gov.uk/meeting/leisure-environment-and-community-committee-7-october-2020>

The Chair thanked SLM for the comprehensive report.

Members raised the following points:

Members noted there had been no positive Covid tests at Leisure venues.

Why was swimming for over 60s not starting until January 2021? Would it be possible to arrange outdoor table tennis and other outdoor sports? Could the squash courts be used for badminton sessions? The Area Contract Manager (SLM) advised that over 60s could swim. There was no age restriction in lanes or public swimming. Outdoor table tennis could be considered for the future. The squash courts were not suitable for badminton but were being used for table tennis. The Leisure Contracts and Landscape Projects Officer added that the free over 60s swimming was currently not being offered due to attendees having to book online before attending a session. It was therefore not possible to offer free sessions during this time as that could be open to misuse of the online booking system

A Member commented that they had enjoyed swimming in the new South Oxhey Leisure Centre Pool. It was noted swimming lesson numbers were down, was this due to Covid restrictions? The Area Contract Manager (SLM) advised that the capacity levels in classes had been reduced but extra lessons had been provided. They were promoting that there were spaces available for new users. New swim sales had been going well and the scheme size was growing.

People were reluctant to go back to an indoor building but would be willing to do classes outside. Could the Astro-turf pitch at William Penn be used for outdoor netball or exercise classes? The Area Contract Manager (SLM) said the unpredictability of the weather made outdoor exercise classes challenging. Football had started, but the rubber crumb pitch made it unsuitable for netball.

The Council pledged to be carbon neutral by 2030, how did that fit in with SLMs strategy. The Council were the third highest in the Country on 64% recycled refuse. What percentages were SLM at? The Area Contract Manager advised that they were working with the Council to review their carbon use and carbon footprint. They did not have any recycling figures for after lockdown, but pre lockdown was around 60% recycled waste. Now that the South Oxhey Leisure Centre had opened SLM hope to be nearer to 70% over the next couple of months.

What were the plans to replace the junior dance class at the new South Oxhey Leisure Centre? If there was a second lockdown, how would SLM cope? What were their contingencies? The Area Contract Manager (SLM) advised that the Dance Academy would be returning to South Oxhey on Monday 12 October. They were looking at the Chorleywood Gymnastics Club and other local clubs to grow junior usage. The Regional Contract Manager said it was unknown whether there would be another full lockdown but indications from UK Active and Government Departments were that leisure facilities were a very Covid safe environment. If lockdown restrictions tightened they felt they would be a long way down the list of activities that would have to close. If they were forced to shut again the biggest cost would be colleagues if there was no furlough scheme in place.

When would children's swimming pools re-open? The Area Contract Manager confirmed that both South Oxhey Leisure Centre and William Penn Swimming Pools were open for family and public swimming.

A Member advised that a report had been presented to the Covid 19 Sub Committee earlier in the week that had details of putting on outdoor Netball and other activities.

There were parking issues at South Oxhey Leisure Centre. The Area Contract Manager (SLM) said they were aware of this and signage would be installed to advise that there were additional parking spaces available in the car park. The Leisure Contract and Landscape Projects Officer said that Officers had raised parking concerns with the Regulatory Services Team with a view to addressing any issues. These would then be raised with Herts CC if necessary.

The Chair thanked SLM for the very comprehensive and encouraging report.

RESOLVED:

That the 12 month work plan presented by Sports and Leisure Management was noted.

ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES AND SUSTAINABILITY

LEC 25/20 CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY DRAFT STRATEGY

The Chair welcomed the new Waste and Recycling Officer to the team.

The Lead Member Environmental Services and Sustainability thanked all the Officers who had put so much work and time into this.

The LA1 Contract/Project Manager gave the following introduction to the report:

The Draft Strategy for Climate change and Sustainability was being presented in order to take it to consultation within the public and private sector, to be completed by Christmas and returned to LEC in January. The report had been produced as a result of the Climate Emergency motion passed in May 2019 aiming to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2030. The strategy was following the Green Expectations Plan and had led to Three Rivers House running entirely on clean energy. Consultation would take place with the Environmental forum, LSP, Youth Council, local area forums and Parish Councils. The recommendations in the report were to approve the proposed draft strategy, and agree Officers can consult widely including an online survey, with full details to be delegated to the Head of Service and agreed in consultation with the Lead Member for Environmental Services and sustainability.

The following points and questions were raised by Members:

On 3.2 of the report would it be possible to add working closely with Affinity and Thames Water.

The Project Manager said Affinity and Thames Water had both given presentations at the Water Sub-Group and were very involved. St Albans had launched a waterfit campaign, which was going to rotate through the area picking up the highest consumption areas first. It would be a strong part of the action plan and this would be added to the report.

Paragraph 4.1 asked for any ideas for other groups to be included. They suggested The Pensioners Forum, Rivertech and Three Rivers Museum. A link mentioned a Herts wide forest of 1.1 million trees, a Member asked where that would be planted. The third link talked about expanding the Environmental Forum, which partnerships were being looked at? Public Health implications looking at energy was felt to be too narrow, it should include walking, cycling, health and wellbeing.

The Interim Head of Community Partnerships said that the Herts wide forest was a suggestion from County that would be considered as part of the Hertfordshire Partnership now. It would not be in one particular place, it would be across the area. They agreed with the Public Health comments so would update that section.

Could verges start to be re-wilded now? Sustainably sourced timber would be better to use than recycled plastic benches. There was focus on the recycling percentage of waste but research showed that recycling was not ideal and it would be better to look at reducing total waste. The Wildlife Trust would give talks to Councils on their Local Plans and how they could be more diverse. The Youth Council had declared a climate emergency.

The Interim Head of Community Partnerships said the grass cutting of the verges had decreased and wildlife seeds had been planted so actions were being taken now. They were keen to work with the Youth Council to deliver some of the strategy.

What percentage of Three Rivers land would be included in the re-wilding?

Post Meeting Note: *We are looking to undertake a biodiversity audit on TRDC land taking into account the relation to the ecological network it sits within, in order to produce a plan of nature enhancement which incorporates opportunities for Biodiversity Net Gain on TRDC land. Each opportunity is to be measured in biodiversity units following the DEFRA matrix and ranked by biodiversity priority. It is anticipated that this will help inform some of the actions for the climate change strategy and the percentage of land as a target to re-wild.*

It was important that communities had ownership and came up with areas to be re-wilded themselves as part of the consultation.

Councillor Chris Lloyd moved, duly seconded, the recommendation in the report.

On being put to the Committee, the recommendations in the report were declared CARRIED by the Chair, the voting being unanimous.

RESOLVED:

That the Leisure, Environment and Community Committee

i) Approve the proposed draft strategy prior to consultation.

ii) Agree for officers to consult on the new draft Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy through local partnership meetings, forums and an online survey with full details to be delegated to the Chief Executive/Head of Service and agreed in consultation with the Lead Member for Environmental Services and Sustainability.

LEC 26/20 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee reviewed its work programme.

A Member asked for a report to be provided on the Woodcock Hill Cemetery. This would be discussed outside of the meeting.

Members asked for an update on the appointment of a Tree Officer and asked for a report on Anti-Social Behaviour to be provided quickly. The Head of Community Services advised that the Principal Trees and Landscape Officer interviews would be taking place mid-October. The Interim Head of Community Partnerships said they would work on providing a timeframe but were under a lot of pressure with anti-social behaviour at present.

On being put to the vote, the recommendation was declared carried by the Chair, agreed by general assent.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme and Members' comments be noted

CHAIRMAN