

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to the Executive Member for Leisure and Community for Decision 18 May 2020

Portfolio:	Leisure and Community
Subject:	Petition - Squash Courts at Fareham Leisure Centre
Report of:	Director of Leisure and Community
Corporate Priorities:	Leisure Opportunities for Health and Fun

Purpose:

To consider a petition seeking to prevent the closure of the squash courts at Fareham Leisure Centre.

Executive summary:

At the meeting on the 4th November 2019, the Executive agreed to award a 10-year contract for the management of Fareham and Holly Hill Leisure Centre to SLM, otherwise known as Everyone Active. It also agreed the capital investment for the contract, particularly at Fareham Leisure Centre, to deliver improved revenue and to expand and modernise the range of facilities it currently provides.

The capital investment proposals in the bid from Everyone Active includes the conversion of the squash courts into a large soft play area and a climbing wall. The purpose of this redevelopment of facilities is critical in delivering improvements to the revenue position.

After the decision of the Executive there has been a series of correspondence from squash players who use the facilities, challenging the decision and objecting to the loss of squash provision at Fareham Leisure Centre.

This report outlines details of two petitions that the Council received on 20 March 2020, submitted by a resident seeking to prevent the closure of the squash courts.

Recommendation/Recommended Option:

It is recommended that The Executive Member for Leisure and Community is asked to consider the contents of this report to determine if a recommendation should be submitted to the Executive to review the decision to convert the squash courts at Fareham Leisure Centre.

Reason:

The petitioner is asking the Council to reconsider its decision to support the conversion of the squash courts at Fareham Leisure Centre.

Cost of proposals:

As agreed at the November 2019 Executive, capital investment will be funded from prudential borrowing. The management fee the Council will receive for the new contract is a significant improvement on the fee currently received. The management fee, including capital financing costs shows that the new contract will be self-financing over the 10-year cost of borrowing for equipment and 30-year cost of borrowing for building works.

Appendices:

Appendix A: Copy of the petition (**Confidential**)

Appendix B: Copy of the pre-application consultation boards

Background papers:

Executive Report: Award of Contract: Leisure Centre Operator
4 November 2019 (**Confidential Report**)

Executive Report: Fareham Leisure Centre Planning Application
2 March 2020

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Executive Member Briefing Paper

Date:	18 May 2020
Subject:	Petition - Squash Courts at Fareham Leisure Centre
Briefing by:	Director of Leisure and Community
Portfolio:	Leisure and Community

INTRODUCTION

1. This report outlines details of a petition that the Council received from a resident, comprising of 166 verified signatures. A copy of the petition can be found marked Appendix A. The wording of the petition is as follows:

'I hereby give my support to the petition to prevent the closure of the leisure centre squash courts in the proposed development. I strongly urge the FBC to request alternative proposals that keep the squash facilities in the Fareham Leisure Centre to enable a richer experience and support for all groups in the local area'.

2. The table below details the breakdown of the signatories on the petition:

Total signatures on Change.org petition	168
Signatures discounted due to being unlikely to live, work or study in the Borough	31
Verified Change.Org signatures	137
E-petition signatures	29
Total signatures of support	166

3. The following provides a summary of issues raised in the correspondence from those individuals objecting to the decision to re-develop the squash courts:
 - a) There are currently 2 squash courts that are used by a local squash league, general social players, and racket ball players from all age groups in the local area.
 - b) In some instances, this is the primary fitness activity for the users.

- c) There is currently a shortage of court times with just 2 courts. For just the squash league for the 5-week Oct/Nov round we had over 57 court bookings not including friendlies – we have 10 league rounds a year. This doesn't include the non-league players and racket ball.
- d) There are no other pay to play public courts in the local area – other courts are private member clubs with high monthly membership fees.
- e) There is demand and need for the squash facilities in the leisure centre.

BACKGROUND

4. In 2018 the Council commenced a procurement process to appoint an operator for the new leisure centre contract to commence on 1 October 2020. The Council's key requirements for the new leisure centre management contract included:
 - Capital investment in both Centres, but particularly Fareham Leisure Centre to deliver improved revenue;
 - Operation of both Centres in accordance with the Council's specification which sought to deliver an improved quality of services;
 - Financial proposal which would deliver an enhanced revenue position in comparison to the current management fee that the Council receives from Everyone Active.
5. A competitive tendering process was undertaken that involved evaluation of all bids received against a specified evaluation criteria.
6. The results were included in a report outlining a recommendation that included several investment opportunities which was first scrutinised by the Leisure and Community Scrutiny Panel on the 21 October 2019. It was then presented to the Council's Executive for approval in November 2019 where it was agreed that a 10 -year contract for the management of the Fareham and Holly Hill Leisure Centres be awarded to Everyone Active.

SQUASH COURT RE-DEVELOPMENT

7. Everyone Active's bid submission included several investment opportunities, one of which was the conversion of the squash courts, and an area beneath them into a large scale soft play and climbing area.
8. The Council's standing orders do not require public input into the process of awarding the contract. The Council's requirements and evaluation criteria were set in advance and the evaluation criteria applied objectively to the solutions proposed by the bidders to deliver the Council's requirements.
9. The following provides a summary of the key rationale for converting the squash courts into alternative, modern facilities that have a wide community appeal whilst providing additional revenue to the Council:

- a. Nationally squash participation has been in decline for a number of years and this has been reflected in the reduction of the number of squash courts at Fareham Leisure Centre from three down to two.
- b. Squash court bookings by distinct members at Fareham Leisure Centre has declined by 16% since 2010, with the average number of users in 2019/20 being 179 per month or 2,148 each year.
- c. In an average month, squash court bookings consist of only 30% as squash, 25% other bookings i.e. Children's parties, and the remaining 45% of the time the courts are empty and unused. Financially this model is unsustainable.
- d. Two other squash facilities, within a 5-mile radius of Fareham Leisure Centre are available. Both offer the opportunity for the existing users of Fareham Leisure Centre to continue to play squash within the Borough. It can be seen from the table below that court hire fee at the two alternative squash facilities in the Borough are less than the current charge at Fareham Leisure Centre.

Payment Options	Fareham Leisure Centre	Abshot Country Club	Lee on the Solent Tennis Club
Pay as you go (for non-members)	£10.50 per hour (peak) £9.35 per hour (off-peak)	£5.50 per hour	£7.50 per hour
Membership	£39.99 (Squash is not included)	£39.50 (Includes squash)	£49.42 (Includes squash)

- e. Estimated footfall resulting from the addition of a large soft play area and climbing wall would be approx. 31,507 per year. This means that there is an opportunity to replace a declining activity with low numbers of participants, with a new, modern range of activities to attract increased footfall and revenue to Fareham Leisure Centre, whilst meeting popular demand.
 - f. Furthermore, the closure of two soft play facilities in Fareham in the last twelve months indicates a current lack of provision of this type within the local area.
10. Following completion of the tender submission evaluation, the bid proposal, including the re-development of the squash courts, was reported to the Leisure and Community Scrutiny Panel on 21 October 2019 before being submitted to the Council's Executive for approval on 4 November 2019.
 11. A second report was then presented to the Leisure and Community Scrutiny Panel on 25 February 2020 to scrutinise the external designs for the remodelled Fareham Leisure Centre.
 12. At the 2 March 2020 Executive meeting, it was agreed that these designs could be submitted as part of Everyone Active's planning application submission.

CONSULTATION

13. The planning application submitted by Everyone Active required pre-application consultation to be undertaken before it could be submitted. This was co-ordinated by Everyone Active and involved;
 - Writing to 183 residents living within close proximity to Fareham Leisure Centre, to make them aware of the planning application proposals, and how they could comment on them.
 - Information boards on display in the café area of the Leisure Centre for all residents and customers to view. A copy of these are attached at Appendix B
 - Two drop-in sessions held on Wednesday 19 February, from 12.00 – 3.00pm and Thursday 20 February, from 5.00 – 8.00pm at Fareham Leisure Centre where residents and customers could meet with and discuss the proposals with the Centre Manager.
 - Information made available on Fareham Leisure Centres webpage www.everyoneactive.com/farehamplans
14. Everyone Active also wrote to all customers who were known to play squash and racquetball at Fareham Leisure Centre to inform them of the proposals.

RESPONSE TO PETITION

15. Following receipt of the petitions requesting alternative proposals to maintain the current squash facilities within Fareham Leisure Centre, officers asked Everyone Active to consider if this could be achieved.
16. Everyone Active reiterated that redevelopment to Fareham Leisure Centre is designed to provide a new mix of activities that will increase footfall and usage in the centre, in accordance with the Council's requirements. Therefore, it is important for a successful proposal to ensure that the amenities are suitably expanded and enhanced to cater for an increased number of users. This will allow for an increase in use of facilities which in turn provides an increase in footfall and an increase in revenue.
17. Incorporating the squash courts into the design without compromising these principles would require an increase in the footprint of the building. The use of moveable walls to enable squash to still be played were considered, but this would substantially increase the capital cost of delivering the mix of new facilities. This in turn would have a detrimental impact on the revenue position, given that the return on squash is relatively low and in decline.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

18. The capital investment included in the tender submission from Everyone Active achieves the Council's objective of delivering an enhanced revenue position in comparison to the current management fee that the Council receives from Everyone Active.

19. Consideration has been given to the request set out in the petition to incorporate the squash courts into the redevelopment proposals. Everyone Active have reviewed the designs and consider that this cannot be achieved without compromising the design principles which would require further expansion of the building footprint. This would increase the capital investment required which would have a detrimental impact on the revenue position.

CONCLUSION

20. The Executive Member for Leisure and Community is asked to consider the contents of this report to determine if a recommendation should be submitted to the Executive to review the decision to convert the squash courts at Fareham Leisure Centre.

Enquiries:

For further information on this report please contact Emma Watts, Leisure and Community Manager (Ext. 4440)