



Report of the Director of Learning and Leisure

Executive Board

Date: 20th September 2006

Subject: South Leeds Sports Centre Deputation

Electoral wards affected:

Specific implications for:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the gap

Eligible for call In

Not eligible for call in
(details contained in the report)

Executive Summary

Following the withdrawal of a Sure Start grant for a major refurbishment of South Leeds Sports Centre options have been considered as to its future. In determining whether to reopen or permanently close the site a number of key factors have been considered, namely participation trends, budgets, future capital investment needs, views of the local community and impacts of the new Swimming and Diving Centre.

After considering all of the information provided and taking into account the public opinion expressed over recent weeks, it is proposed to re-open the Sports Centre, as soon as is practically possible.

On re-opening throughput and income/expenditure will be monitored in detail over the coming months in order to assess the value of the facility to the local community and the impact of the new 50m Swimming and Diving Centre at the John Charles Centre for Sport.

1.0 Purpose of this report

1.1 The report provides contextual information in relation to representations made by the SPLASH group at full council on the 19th July 2006.

1.2 The report seeks to inform members of;

- Summary of the deputation
- The background to the current closure of South Leeds Sports centre
- The options considered for its future
- The ongoing budget and capital challenges the service faces.

2.0 Background information

2.1 The deputation made by the SPLASH group asserted that the existing South Leeds Sports Centre should reopen as soon as possible. Their key arguments can be summarised as follows;

- The sports centre plays a valuable social role in the local community and is well used
- Proposals to shut the centre are being based on very recent throughput figures, that are misleading
- Local people, schools and community groups will be deprived of their local sports centre

2.2 South Leeds Sports centre was built in 1980 and consists of a 25m swimming pool, sports hall and multi use rooms. There is also outdoor changing provision for the grass pitches adjacent to the centre. Its design is almost identical to Scott Hall and Fearnville Leisure Centres. Access to changing rooms for the outdoor pitches stopped 10 years ago.

2.3 Early in 2004 a scheme was developed that sought to refurbish the changing rooms at South Leeds Sports Centre using a mixture of council capital and SRB funding. Approximately £500k was allocated to the scheme from both Council and SRB sources. From September 2004 the Sport and Active Recreation Service also started to further review the funding position of all of its sports centres supported by a Scrutiny Board working party.

2.4 Informal discussions with SureStart local programme commenced in 2003 with more formal approaches being made in 2004 to Learning and Leisure Department to consider the possibility of co-locating facilities at South Leeds Sports Centre.

The planned scheme;

- Provided the means to build a brand new entrance/reception facility
- Created a way of specifically generating new sustained usage through greater family involvement during the daytime and evenings.
- Provided a mix of additional facilities that could be utilised in the evening by leisure centre users

2.5 Unfortunately Sure Start decided not to proceed with this scheme although the centre had already closed in preparation for work to commence. It has remained closed since. Sure Starts contribution towards the total scheme was to be approximately £800,000. Sure Start investment is now being directed towards other initiatives in the immediate local area.

3.0 Main issues

3.1 Falling levels of use and increasing costs

During 2003, 2004 and then into 2005 the leisure centre began to experience falls in levels of use. Some of the falls in usage in 2005 were attributable to the potential closure of the site for refurbishment but the figures for 2003 and 2004 still show falling numbers of visits and relatively low numbers of visits overall.

Table 1 below illustrates the usage levels of South Leeds Sports Centre. It is also compared with Scott Hall Sports Centre which is an identical design but sits on a main arterial route in and out of the city.

Table 1

Throughput levels of South Leeds Sports Centre.

	2002/3	2003/4	2004/5	2005/6
South Leeds Sports Centre	114700	103659	98991	N/A
Scott Hall Sports Centre (similar sports centre)	232161	283970	264222	233016

It was anticipated that the new combined scheme would significantly help increase levels of use from their levels in 2003 and 2004. A simple refurbishment of the leisure centre changing rooms would not have had the same level of impact.

3.2 The impact of falling attendances and increasing costs (utility costs) have had the overall effect of increasing the costs of providing the service. Prior to the December 2005 closure, the Centre was operating at an increasing deficit. In 2002/2003 the annual deficit for the Centre was £145,155.* This increased to £216,000* in 2003/2004 and increased again to £297,704* in 2004/2005. This was despite efforts by Management and Staff taking steps to halt the trend. At the time of closure, at Period 9, the deficit was £236,481*.

* Figures excluding Support Services.

3.3 Potential impact of new Swimming and Diving centre

The new swimming and diving centre is due to open in 2007. Whilst it is accepted that some local residents in and around the existing South Leeds Sports Centre may not travel to the new facility it is without doubt that its opening will affect the levels of use of South Leeds Sports Centre further. The prospect of a further declining user base must be an important consideration. The majority of the schools current usage can be accommodated at the new Swimming and Diving Centre (a much shorter distance than having to travel to Morley as some now have to do). A new bus route will run from Holbeck to the new Swimming and Diving Centre every half an hour.

3.4 City wide Capital investment needs

Through 2005 the ongoing review of Leeds leisure centre provision helped pave the way for the existing PFI bid currently in development. In terms of the investment needs of the cities leisure centres there is currently a significant funding gap between money confirmed or potentially available and money yet to be found. It's estimated that there is at least £90m required to invest in the city's leisure centre stock and this

excludes £23m worth of investment already underway. The £30m PFI credits the city has been allocated will help address part of the gap but there remains a huge challenge.

3.5 In terms of the condition of South Leeds Sports Centre it's estimated that at least £1.75m will be required to invest in refurbishment to at least secure a 20 year life and to provide the significant levels of improvement needed.

3.6 Recent surveys have identified essential works that are recommended to be undertaken prior to the Centre reopening. The level of funding required to address these works is estimated by Property Management Section at £71,000 for maintenance and repairs and a further £70,000 to adapt the passenger lift to conform to DDA requirements. It must be stressed that these works are for essential works only and in no way address refurbishment costs. The funding for refurbishment will still need to be identified.

3.7 Any decision to reopen South Leeds Sports centre must consider the pressures on capital funding city wide and the increasing and relatively large operating costs of the existing site as it stands.

3.8 Regeneration of South Leeds

A critical tension to be considered with South Leeds Sports Centre lies in the fact it is located in the heart of a highly deprived area. This point is justifiably highlighted by the SPLASH deputation. Like other sites in similar areas of the city the costs of providing the service are high due to the relatively low numbers of users. Whilst a key strategic aim of the Council is to protect vulnerable groups and help regenerate local communities there are limited funds to meet all the possible requirements when it comes to the provision of major sports facilities such as swimming pools.

3.9 Whilst considerable investment is being made in school sport through Central Government the same is not true in terms of community sport. In addition to the challenge of providing swimming pools and sports halls there is a real challenge to try and invest in voluntary sector sports facilities and playing pitches. All things considered it is fully recognised that the community sports infrastructure in South Leeds should be developed to coincide with the wider regeneration aspirations. The City Council has been relatively successful in recent years in securing funding for other community based outdoor sports facilities in this area, such as Cross Flatts Park £450K and Hugh Gaitskell £1 million.

3.10 The future challenge for the City Council is to ensure that its leisure facilities are both effective and sustainable within the resources it has available. Increasingly, too, there has been a reduction in special funds that can be used to support sport in these disadvantaged communities e.g. lottery, and therefore any future sports provision must be carefully planned.

3.11 Options considered

In light of the current position it is sensible to review the future of South Leeds Sports Centre given the difficult investment choices that need to be made to secure a network of good quality, accessible leisure centres across Leeds in the future. A range of options have been considered. However the overriding consideration must be the long term sustainability of the current South Leeds Sports Centre. The main options to consider therefore are as follows;

- **Centre to reopen** - If the site was to reopen some critical works will need undertaking prior to opening. These could then be followed by further essential works identified. The total approximate cost for the works is approximately £70k. Estimates are currently being updated and need to take into account the length of time the building has remained closed. It will take between 3 and 4

months to be operational given the time to procure the works and recruit the staff needed. The operating costs are likely to continue to rise without a major refurbishment (hence the original planned scheme) and are likely to be further adversely impacted upon by the opening of the new swimming and diving centre.

- **Centre remains closed** - Savings, both revenue and capital can be used to reinvest city wide and support local sports development work.
- **New Outdoor Sport development** - This option would be to keep the leisure centre closed and work up a proposal to develop the outdoor sports facilities. With the possibility of retaining the sports hall. A feasibility study is required.

4.0 Implications for council policy and governance

4.1 None

5.0 Legal and resource implications

5.1 Savings from the closure of the South Leeds Sports Centre could be utilised to support Council sports initiatives city wide, as well the development of new outdoor sports facilities in the South Leeds area.

5.2 Any re-opening of the facility will need to include a certain amount of capital expenditure to bring the facility back to a useable condition. This will lead to a further pressure on already stretched resources. Revised estimates of the necessary expenditure required for the facility will be obtained as soon as possible.

5.3 If South Leeds Sports Centre is to reopen then the situation must be kept under regular review to monitor levels of usage, costs and the impact of other developments, namely the new 50m pool at the John Charles Centre for Sport.

6.0 Conclusions

6.1 The choice to close South Leeds Sports Centre would be a difficult one, but could be taken in recognition of its cost to run, falling attendances and the absence of capital funding to address major investment requirements city wide.

6.2 Furthermore with a new swimming and diving centre due to open shortly the operational viability of the existing facility will be severely compromised, without a different sports focus.

6.3 Equally however, a final opportunity could be provided for the sports centre to demonstrate its' value within the local community and show that it can be an important local sports resource.

7.0 Recommendations

7.1 Members are asked to consider, after taking account of the information provided, if they wish to reopen South Leeds Sports Centre.