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## Report of the Acting Chief Recreation Officer

### Scrutiny Board (Culture & Leisure)

Date: 11 February 2008

### Subject: Outdoor Bowls Provision

#### Electoral wards affected:

All

#### Specific implications for:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

## Executive Summary

1. This briefing note provides an update on the provision of outdoor bowls in Leeds. This includes an outline of Council provided facilities and their maintenance, information on usage, and issues that arise.
2. Leeds City Council is the major provider of Crown Green Bowls facilities throughout Leeds. There are 53 sites containing 76 bowling greens, with a total of 62 pavilions and related facilities.
3. Issues have been identified with distribution and usage of facilities; access to bowling greens and facilities; quality of facilities; management arrangements and the level of subsidy.
4. A bowls strategy is proposed to address issues identified.

## 1.0 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This briefing note provides an update on the provision of outdoor bowls in Leeds. It includes an outline of Council provided facilities and their maintenance, information on usage, issues that arise, and areas for further study to address these issues.

## 2.0 Background information

- 2.1 Leeds City Council is the major provider of Crown Green Bowls facilities throughout Leeds. The Fixed Asset return in March 2007 identified 53 sites containing 76 bowling greens. Information provided by the Property Services team in the former Learning and Leisure Department, reveals a total of 62 pavilions and, where applicable, storage facilities. There are also private outdoor bowls facilities in Leeds, however a full assessment of these has not been carried out.
- 2.2 Bowling greens require intense maintenance, including for example cutting the grass 3 times a week during the main bowls season, applying fertiliser, treatment against moss and disease, along with other tasks to maintain the green surface and surrounds. Parks and Countryside are responsible for maintenance and the overall standard of green maintenance is regarded as good, although a formal assessment has not been conducted. The cost of grounds maintenance for each green is estimated at £7,439, a total of £565,376 per annum.
- 2.3 A licence from 1<sup>st</sup> July 1985 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 1988 was drawn up on the 12<sup>th</sup> March 1987 with the then Leeds and District Bowling Association (now the Leeds Bowling Association). As part of the agreement a payment was required annually for the right to use the facilities. The licence has now expired and since then the Wharfedale Bowling Association has formed and also undertakes this role for specific sites not included within the Leeds Bowling Association. Garforth Bowls Association now also submit fees to the Council each year for sites in this area. Overall net income in 2007/08 is £8,606. This includes an allowance of £1,990 deducted for maintenance of pavilion interiors under the terms of the original licence.
- 2.4 Surveys were conducted in 2001 and again in 2003, in order to assess usage and views of Council facilities. The 2003 survey of all 54 bowling clubs, which had a response rate of 87%, revealed total membership estimated at 3,328, a reduction of 437 compared to the 2001 survey. Club membership also varies and in 2003, the survey revealed that club membership ranged from 26 to 120, with each club having on average 68 members.
- 2.5 It is also possible to gain an understanding of membership profile. From the 2003 survey, 99.9% of members were white, 76% were retired, and 66% were male. A typical member could therefore be described as a white, retired male. There is evidence however that there is wide participation by women.

### 3.0 Main issues

- 3.1 From the information above several issues arise which are developed and summarised in this section.
- 3.2 **Distribution and usage of facilities.** In general there is a view that more demand for facilities exists in the outer areas of the City, whereas the inner city area contains examples of where the number of greens is more than adequate to meet demand. There are examples where 1 green has to accommodate around 85 members, compared to 3 greens available for 26 members.
- 3.3 **Access to bowling greens and facilities.** Due to efforts to prevent vandalism, a number of bowling greens were fenced during the 1990s. Whilst this has been effective, it has also made it difficult to obtain open access at these sites. It should be noted that there is still pressure from bowling club members to fence bowling greens. The surveys conducted in 2001 and 2003 reveal that membership is declining, along with casual use. From the membership profile highlighted in 2.5, it is also clear that participation does not represent the diversity of the population in Leeds. What is not clear is whether there are any barriers to discourage participation from such as people from different ethnic backgrounds, disabled people or young people. Equally, marketing activity to promote greater access needs further assessment to determine how issues around declining membership and representation can be addressed.
- 3.4 **Quality of facilities.** Opinions from the survey state that 47% regard bowling greens as 'good'; however 13% state that they are 'poor'. There has not been however a formal assessment of green quality. Condition surveys on the pavilions have been conducted at 15 sites in 2003. From these surveys 7% were judged to be in a 'good' condition, 73% in a 'satisfactory' condition, 13% in a 'poor' condition and 7% in a 'bad' condition. Whilst the majority are satisfactory it is unclear whether this is a representative survey of the entire pavilion stock of 62 buildings.
- 3.5 **Management Arrangements.** The present licensing arrangement needs reviewing as it expired nearly 20 years ago and there are now 3 bowls associations who represent clubs and make payment to the Council. It is not clear whether these bowls associations represent all clubs who use Council facilities, and it is possible that some clubs who use Council facilities could be represented by associations outside Leeds. There are charging policies which are subject to an officer delegated decision, however implementation of this charging policy falls to the bowls associations. The allowance of £1,990 made for the Bowls Associations to maintain pavilion interiors is based on an historic arrangement.
- 3.6 **Level of subsidy.** From the information above the net subsidy provided by Leeds City Council to bowls is in the region of £556,770 per annum for the greens alone. This represents a subsidy per player of £167 per annum. This level of subsidy can vary from £858 per member to £88 per member. In addition, since the expiry of the licence, payment arrangements are unclear and clubs also have access to pavilions during winter and therefore can incur costs to the Council for heat and other utilities. Any ongoing structural maintenance of pavilions such as boilers, roofs and windows that require replacement/repairs are an additional cost to the Council.

## 4.0 Legal and resource implications

- 4.1 There is a need to review current licensing arrangements and address issues identified in determining that the Council is satisfied in providing the current level of subsidy.

## 5.0 Implications for council policy and governance

- 5.1 Given the issues identified, there is a need to develop a bowls strategy which should seek to address the following:

➤ **Supply/Demand**

- Consideration of the supply and demand for bowling greens, evaluation also to take into account the impact of wholly privately operated clubs and indoor bowling facilities.
- Proposals on the number and distribution of greens in relation to demand.

➤ **Management**

- Review of past and present licence arrangements with proposals regarding clauses for model licences.
- Review of the financial arrangements for charges to both clubs and individual players.
- Consideration of alternative maintenance methods and proposals to reduce the existing high maintenance costs for bowling greens and associated facilities.
- An assessment of the quality of bowling greens and facilities compared to the demand.
- A proposed method for improving access to bowling for non members.

➤ **Declining Demand**

- An appraisal of the Club membership in Leeds compared to national or regional trends in bowls.
- An appraisal of the number of casual users of bowling greens compared to national or regional trends.
- Proposals on how to promote wider participation.

➤ **Equal Opportunities**

- Consideration of issues regarding representation of BME groups in bowls and proposals to redress any imbalances.

## 6.0 Recommendation

- 6.1 That the contents of the above briefing note are noted.