

Report from the Assistant Director Governance and ICT

Yearsley Pool Scrutiny Review Update Report

Summary to Review

1. This report and Annex A provides details of the current financial arrangements and usage figures for Yearsley Pool as well as evidence gathered to date by the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Committee as part of its agreed consultation.

Background

2. In September 2014 Cabinet considered an update report on the Community Stadium and Leisure Complex and agreed that the Council should review the future of Yearsley Pool, to be completed by January 2016 (six months prior to the opening of the New Stadium Leisure Centre - NSLC).
3. At the same meeting Cabinet confirmed Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) as preferred bidder to operate the new Community Stadium, NSLC and Energise for the next 18 years. As part of their bid GLL agreed that they would operate Yearsley Pool until the NSLC opens.
4. The Cabinet paper noted that during the procurement process options for investment into Yearsley Pool were considered by bidders. However, bidders concluded that it would require considerable investment and better car parking facilities, which to date have not been secured, making it too expensive with a limited leisure offer compared with other options.
5. The cost to the Council of operating Yearsley has been consistently over £250k per annum over the last five years and this made it a commercially unattractive option as part of the future leisure management contract for the City.

6. The report to Cabinet also noted that the future operation of Yearsley would need to be considered six months prior to the opening of the NSLC, providing the option for the operator to continue with the management if it can be operated without the Council subsidy, or exploring other operational structures with the community and stakeholders if the operator decides not to take up that option. This will be linked to decisions and options that may arise regarding potential investment into the wider Yearsley site.
7. Since then campaigners against the plan have claimed that the loss of funding could put the pool under threat. A petition to safeguard the pool, co-ordinated by the Yearsley Pool Action Group (YPAG), has been signed by more than 6,600 people.
8. As a result of the public interest in the loss of the Council subsidy and concern over the future of Yearsley Pool, Cllr Aspden submitted a scrutiny topic with the aim of safeguarding the pool's long-term future.
9. Cllr Aspden's proposal for a scrutiny review was initially put to the Learning & Culture Overview & Scrutiny Committee but because of their busy workload Learning & Culture OSC Members agreed that the topic submission should be presented to Corporate & Scrutiny Management Committee (CSMC) for their consideration.
10. At a meeting in January 2015 CSMC decided to proceed with the review and agreed the review aim: "To investigate ways to reduce the subsidy given to Yearsley Swimming Pool while securing its long term future."
11. They also agreed to appoint an Ad Hoc Scrutiny Committee consisting of five members (two Labour, one Conservative, one Liberal Democrat and one Independent) to undertake the scrutiny review on their behalf and tasked them with agreeing the review objectives. Following the meeting the agreed nominations for membership of the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Committee were Cllrs Boyce, McIlveen, Richardson, Aspden and Watson.
12. The Ad Hoc Scrutiny Committee met for the first time on 24 February when Cllr Aspden was appointed Chair and the Committee agreed the objectives and a timetable to complete the review – Annex B.

Consultation

13. Residents and pool users were invited to send their comments and concerns to the Committee and are included in Annex C. All names and contact details have been logged and saved.

14. In addition to comments from individual pool users there are also emails from York City Baths Club (Annex D); Yorkshire Regional Canoe Polo Club; Overland Underwater SWCUBA; Aqua fit; Team Jorvik, York Octopush (underwater hockey) and York Triathlon Club.
15. Subsequently a public consultation meeting was held on 16 March 2015 at the 68 Youth and Community Centre in Monkton Road, York, to gather information to support Objective iii): “To understand the value added by Yearsley Pool to both the local community and the city over and above those being made available at the new leisure complex.”

Information Gathered

16. Many of the emails stress the importance of retaining Yearsley Pool because of its 50 yard pool length and extended lane width which allow swimmers long-course training opportunities that are not available at any other pool in the city. Others note the pool’s proximity to the city centre and the health benefits the facility offers.
17. Before the consultation meeting, Ad Hoc Committee Members were given a guided tour of Yearsley by the centre manager and were shown work which had been undertaken to reduce running costs and the limitations of the site which currently prevent expansion and the addition of other leisure facilities.
18. The consultation meeting began with a series of round table discussions at which people could air their concerns with individual Ad Hoc Committee Members. The comments were noted and again many stressed that Yearsley was a unique facility for the city because of its length. It was also noted by many that Yearsley was the only pool within comfortable walking distance of the city centre.
19. Suggestions of how to reduce the council subsidy to the pool included examining extra revenue streams by installing a gym on the flat roof of the changing rooms, increasing the marketing of the pool, attracting more users, increasing admission charges but including a membership scheme for regular users and enhancing links to schools. Savings could be made by a review of staffing and by swimming clubs and private users providing their own lifeguards. There were also suggestions that volunteers take over the functions of some paid staff.
20. The attendees then received a presentation by the Yearsley Pool Action Group which was launched in 1999 when there was an earlier threat to the facility.

21. YPAG stress that the pool tank was designed and built to a high standard without steel reinforcements so there is no corrosion and a structural survey concluded there is no evidence of concrete failure.
22. The group pointed out that generations of children had learned to swim at the pool, which has produced Olympians and nurtured world class talent in a variety of water sports. However, the group felt the pool's greatest contribution was to the health and fitness of the people of York and the wider community.
23. YPAG also pointed out that Yearsley is York's only long-length pool so is the best pool in the region for clubs, endurance and fitness swimming without continual turning. The width of the lanes allows swimmers to overtake and swim at their own pace.
24. The action group hopes that rather than follow a voluntary model there is still the option to run the pool professionally with a leaner budget and with some income-generating add-ons, principally a gym.
25. A GP at the meeting noted that the health benefits of the pool were fairly obvious in a city with two rivers where swim safety is of paramount importance. The length of the pool meant people were able to build up stamina and improve cardiac functions while it reduced the chances of users being bumped by other swimmers.
26. A former pool manager pointed out that since refurbishments in 2007 the pool has run at a lower cost than it had in the past.
27. Representatives from York Triathlon Club, York City Baths Club and York Canoe Club all maintained that the length of the pool was essential for their various sports. The loss of the facility would have a massive impact on their clubs.
28. To support objective ii) the Yearsley Pool centre manager has provided information on the current funding arrangements and usage figures for Yearsley Pool – Annex A. This provides details of the pool's income and expenditure as well as user figures for 2013/2014. He will be in attendance at this meeting to answer any questions which may arise.

Analysis

29. All the emails received are in favour of safeguarding the long-term future of Yearsley Pool.

30. The consultation meeting was attended by about 50 people and again all were in favour of safeguarding the long-term future of the pool.

Options

31. There are no options at this stage.

Council Plan

32. The review will support the Build Strong Communities and Protect Vulnerable People elements of the Council Plan 2011-15.

Implications

33. There are no implications associated with this report. Any implications arising from the recommendations made in the draft final report will be identified and addressed.

Risk Management

34. There are no risks associated with this report.

Recommendations

35. In support of Objectives ii) and iii) the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

- consider the funding arrangements and user figures detailed in Annex A.
- consider the consultation feedback shown above and in Annex C and D.

Reason: To support the Ad Hoc Committee's consideration of the possible future options for Yearsley Pool

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**Report
Approved**



Date
17/3/15

Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Annexes

- Annex A – Yearsley Pool Finance and Usage Summary.
- Annex B – Review objectives and timetable.
- Annex C – Public responses via email.
- Annex D – York City Baths Club.

Abbreviations

- CSMC – Corporate & Scrutiny Management Committee
- GLL – Greenwich Leisure Limited
- NSLC – New Stadium Leisure Centre
- YPAG – Yearsley Pool Action Group