

Recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 9 November 2023: Abbeycroft Leisure Strategic Partnership

Report number:	CAB/WS/23/054	
Report to and date:	Cabinet	5 December 2023
Cabinet members:	Councillor Ian Shipp Cabinet Member for Leisure Tel: 07368 134769 Email: ian.shipp@westsuffolk.gov.uk	
Lead officers:	Jill Korwin Strategic Director Tel: 01284 757252 Email: jill.korwin@westsuffolk.gov.uk Darren Dixon Service Manager (Leisure and Facilities) Tel: 01284 757678 Email: darren.dixon@westsuffolk.gov.uk	

Decisions Plan:

The decisions made as a result of this report will usually be published within 48 hours and cannot be actioned until five clear working days of the publication of the decision have elapsed. This item is included on the Decisions Plan.

Wards impacted: All wards

Recommendation: It is recommended that Cabinet approves:

- 1. Officers be instructed to update the Collaboration Agreement between Abbeycroft Leisure and West Suffolk Council noting no fundamental revisions are required on the principles of the current agreement. However, some technical changes may be required and the approach to health funding which is currently dealt with through side letters should be clarified.**
- 2. Cabinet requests Abbeycroft and West Suffolk Council to work collaboratively to promote the activities and programmes delivered at the leisure centres, ensuring residents are aware of what they deliver and provide (which can be reflected in further revisions to the Collaboration Agreement).**
- 3. Cabinet and officers work with providers and partners to secure additional long-term and sustainable external funding streams (particularly on health improvement interventions).**
- 4. Cabinet asks officers to explore further capital investment in the leisure offer and facility mix across the leisure centre sites through business cases where appropriate to provide outcomes and financial benefits through invest to save/earn initiatives with Abbeycroft.**
- 5. Subject to the outcome of the condition surveys of each Leisure Centre, Cabinet to consider the extension of the Council's Net Zero Fund as part of the 2024 to 2025 budget development process to include a programme of improvements (where appropriate and where they meet the outcomes of the fund) to upgrade and improve the facilities to maximise energy efficiency, support Net Zero and carbon reduction targets, and extend the life span of the facilities.**

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- 6. As part of the 2024 to 2025 West Suffolk Council budget development, consideration should also be given to whether the extraordinary utility support grant should be continued and phased out in the short-term (linked to market expectations around utility costs).**

1. Context to this report

- 1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20 July 2023, resolved to establish the Abbeycroft Leisure Strategic Partnership Task and Finish Group (the Group) to:
- review the Council’s partnership with Abbeycroft Leisure between 2019 and 2023 against the current Collaboration Agreement between the two organisations; and
 - review the current Collaboration Agreement outcomes.
- 1.2 The Group comprised five councillors, namely Councillors Peter Armitage, Sarah Broughton, Rowena Lindberg, Andy Neal and Marion Rushbrook. The Group met on two occasions. At its first meeting on 20 September 2023 the Group elected Councillor Marion Rushbrook as Chair and discussed and agreed the approach to the review and member leads on key lines of enquiry. The last meeting was held on 24 October 2023 when the Group considered its findings.
- 1.3 Between meetings, members of the Group attended the Abbeycroft Leisure’s launch of its annual report on 28 September 2023 and toured the Bury St Edmunds Leisure Centre; all leisure centres were visited and task group members held various meetings during October with Abbeycroft Leisure’s Chief Executive; senior staff and trustees of the Abbeycroft Board; and the Deputy Director of Integration (West Suffolk Alliance). The meetings explored a range of issues including working in partnership with health and financial performance.

2. Members approach to the review

- 2.1 The Group agreed to focus on six key lines of enquiry in the review:
- a. To review the current Collaboration Agreement between Abbeycroft Leisure and West Suffolk Council and its shared objectives to ensure it optimises delivery, outcomes, efficiency and financial performance.
 - b. To review the performance of Abbeycroft against the envisaged outcomes in the Agreement for the period 2019 to 2023.
 - c. To review the financial performance of Abbeycroft against the agreed management fee reduction plan and examine the impact of the support West Suffolk Council (the Council) provided Abbeycroft during and post-Covid.
 - d. To review the health and community outcomes of Abbeycroft’s work, and alignment to the Council’s objectives and opportunities to develop this further.

- e. To consider the impact of the Council's Leisure Investment Fund against the approved business cases including its impact on the management fee which the Council paid Abbeycroft (which has now reached zero).
- f. To consider a number of extraordinary factors which have impacted the leisure industry from closures due to Covid, its role in recovery and the energy crisis and inflation and the wide performance of public sector leisure in this time.

3. Proposed recommendations to Cabinet

3.1 The Group was asked to make recommendations to feed into the planned review of the current Collaboration and Funding Agreement between West Suffolk Council and Abbeycroft Leisure which was finalised in 2019 (and covers the period 2017 to 2032 with scope to extend for two further five-year periods). The agreement provides for the delivery of common objectives by reference to service outcomes and operates on an open book basis with quarterly reviews overseen by the Cabinet Member for Leisure.

3.2 The Group felt that from their findings set out in Report number [OAS/WS/23/019](#), Abbeycroft was strongly compliant with the existing Collaboration Agreement and demonstrated they had optimised delivery, outcomes, efficiency and financial performance in challenging conditions. It also noted the strength of the partnership between the Council and Abbeycroft and the way in which they had worked together to address challenges, particularly through Covid and in response to the energy crisis.

Recommendation one

Officers be instructed to update the Collaboration Agreement noting no fundamental revisions are required on the principles of the current agreement. However, the Group noted some technical changes may be required and the approach to health funding which is currently dealt with through side letters should be clarified.

Recommendation two

Cabinet request Abbeycroft and West Suffolk Council to work collaboratively to promote the activities and programmes delivered at the leisure centres, ensuring residents are aware of what they deliver and provide (which can be reflected in further revisions to the Collaboration agreement).

Recommendation three

Cabinet and officers work with providers and partners to secure additional long-term and sustainable external funding streams (particularly on health improvement interventions)

Recommendation four

Cabinet asks officers to explore further capital investment in the leisure offer and facility mix across the leisure centre sites through business cases where appropriate to provide outcomes and financial benefits through invest to save/earn initiatives with Abbeycroft.

Recommendation five

Subject to the outcome of the condition surveys of each Leisure Centre, Cabinet to consider the extension of the Councils Net Zero Fund as part the 2024 to 2025 budget development process, to include a programme of improvements (where appropriate and where the meet the outcomes of the fund) to upgrade and improve the facilities to maximise energy efficiency, support Net Zero and carbon reduction targets, and extend the life span of the facilities.

Recommendation six

As part of the 2024 to 2025 West Suffolk Council budget development, consideration should also be given to whether the extraordinary utility support grant should be continued and phased out in the short term (linked to market expectations around utility costs).

4. Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 9 November 2023

- 4.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 9 November 2023 scrutinised Report number [OAS/WS/23/019](#) in detail, presented by the Chair of the Task and Finish Group and asked questions to which comprehensive responses were provided. In particular discussions were held on what was specifically available for residents in rural areas and membership recovery following covid.
- 4.2 The Committee then discussed **Exempt Appendix 1** and went into 'private' session to discuss this in more detail.
- 4.3 At the conclusion of the Committee's consideration of the report and vote, the Committee recommended, with no amendments, that Cabinet approves the recommendations as set out in section 3 above, and which are also set out on page two of this report.

5. Alternative options that been considered

- 5.1 The Group was not asked to look at alternative delivery options other than changes to the Collaboration and Funding Agreement.

6. Consultation and engagement undertaken

6.1 The Group sought comments from Councillors and user consultation undertaken by Abbeycroft.

7. Risk associated with the proposals

7.1 No identified risks associated with the proposals.

8. Implications arising from the review

8.1 Financial – No change to existing arrangement; any additional investment would be subject to separate business cases or reports.

8.2 Legal compliance – No legal compliance issues identified.

8.3 Personal data processing – No issues identified.

8.4 Equalities – Opportunities to increase access and additional programmes for SEND children and young people.

8.5 Crime and disorder – No issues identified.

8.6 Safeguarding – No issues identified.

8.7 Environment or sustainability – No issues identified.

8.8 HR or staffing – No issues identified.

8.9 Changes to existing policies – None identified.

8.10 External organisations (such as businesses, community groups) – No issues, only identification of the importance of partnership working.

9. Appendices referenced in this report

9.1 **EXEMPT Appendix 1** – Abbeycroft Overview October 2023 –
Confidential

10. Background documents associated with this report

10.1 [Accounts and annual returns, ABBEYCROFT LEISURE - 1117138, Register of Charities - The Charity Commission](#)