

Statement: PS11.02

Cabinet – 8 February 2022

Re: Agenda item 11 - Leisure Facilities Investment and Procurement

Statement submitted by: Paul Collins

I ask the Mayor to take into account the following matters and delay his decision on whether to withdraw funding/close Kingsdown Sports Centre:

1. The council is relying on misleading and inaccurate information.
2. The council has failed to properly involve young people in its decisions.
3. The council has not been transparent in its decision making.

The council is relying on misleading and inaccurate information

Some of the information that is meant to inform the decision-making process and has been put before the Mayor and those consulted is arguably misleading.

In relation to the draft Investment Strategy's description of those attending the Kingsdown Sports Centre, my understanding is that it does not reflect the actual number of individuals. For example, a booking for a badminton court at Kingsdown Sports Centre where four people attend is regarded by the council as one person in attendance (described as a 'unit attendance'). That represents flawed and misleading data on use of the centre.

The council has confirmed in their response to a Freedom of Information request (17 January 2021) that (1) the average monthly membership between April 2018 and January 2019 was 889 and (2) the average monthly membership between April 2019 and January 2020 was 1,173. That data does not show that Kingsdown Sports Centre is not attracting 'few' new members nor that it is not retaining members. The council has also confirmed that membership numbers for previous years (i.e. before April 2018) is not available. Therefore, the council has very little data on which to make the statement referred to above.

Further, Table 1 at page 31 of the Draft Leisure Investment Strategy (and now Table 1 of page 27 of the Final Leisure Investment Strategy) shows a 9% increase in attendance at Kingsdown Sports Centre between 2015-20 (the highest increase in attendance of the facilities listed).

All references in the draft Investment Strategy to the Kingsdown Sports Centre attracting few new members and retaining members has been removed from the final strategy document and has not been corrected, or referred to at all, in the Report to this Cabinet meeting. The absence of a proper explanation for the removal of that statement would suggest the statement was false and misleading.

The council's failure to properly involve young people in its decisions

The consultation process adopted by the council in this matter was not in line with the council's Code of Good Practice on Consultation requirement to reach out to hard-to-reach groups

The published Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) recognises that there is a statistically significant number of young people in the ward where Kingsdown is situated (i.e. Cotham ward). To mitigate that, the council states there is alternative provision in the area, including the facilities operated by Bristol University, but has not provided any explanation or evidence to support their statement that those facilities would be used.

The EqIA states that responses were under-represented in terms of population proportion from young people and under 24-year-olds.

Section 2.3 of The Consultation and Engagement Report of 21 January 2022 sets out how the consultation was communicated to 'reach as broad a range of audiences as possible to maximise response rate'.

The EqIA states that responses to the consultation were monitored throughout the consultation and because of the low numbers of respondents from younger people and that 'efforts were made by the council's external communications team to reach out to those specific communities'. However, there is no explanation of what those efforts were, how they were designed to maximise the response rate of those targeted, nor how effective those efforts were. The council's own data shows that of the 1,988 responses to the consultation received, less than 20 responses were from under 18-year-olds. That suggests the council's efforts to reach younger people were not adequate and points towards a major flaw in the consultation process that results in a flawed decision to the detriment of young people.

The council's lack of transparency

Important and relevant information that the Mayor seeks to rely on in making his decision has still not been made public, despite the council stating its disclosure would, 'provide accountability of public spending and would aid in the transparency in the actions of the council'.

This is still a live issue and will continue to be, even after today's meeting and decision. A complaint about the council's approach has been made to the council and depending on the council's response to the complaint, the Information regulator may pursue contempt of court proceedings against the council, which it has previously threatened.