

## **Statement: PS11.04**

**Cabinet – 8 February 2022**

**Re: Agenda item 11 - Leisure Facilities Investment and Procurement**

**Statement submitted by: Olly Alcock**

I am not able to attend the meeting and don't particularly require a verbal response. Rather I would like to raise a few points that have been made by anti-closure campaigners and to comment on these points. I take them as factually correct and am happy to be advised if they are incorrect:

- Over 2,000 people have signed a petition against Kingsdown Sports Centre's closure and this number is greater than the number who responded to the Mayor's consultation on the city council's sports and leisure services strategy.
- Of those who did respond to the consultation, less than 25% agreed with the proposals - with 70% disagreeing with the proposed strategy, mainly due to the decision to close KSC and the Jubilee Pool - is this correct?
- Further points that have been shared with me, concerning the data presented in the consultation are:
  1. Kingsdown Sports Centre was kept closed for four months longer than other leisure facilities during the Covid lockdown. This gives the perhaps false impression that it was less used than it actually was. Is this correct?
  2. The original report used data from the Cotham ward profile to analyse who was using KSC - ignoring the many people who use KSC from outside Cotham. If this is true, then it possibly reduces significantly the actual number of KSC users. Is this correct?
  3. The data analysis was weighted against recording accurate use of KSC compared to other similar facilities. For example, I gather that 4 people swimming at Horfield Sports Centre was counted as 4 users. However, 4 people playing badminton at KSC and 2 playing squash there were only counted as 1 user. Is this correct? If so, it clearly suggests flawed data and flawed data comparisons.
  4. The consultation documents claimed that the Centre had attracted 'few new members'. Yet, in stark contrast with this statement, KSC's membership has grown by almost 10% since 2015 - a growth greater than most of the facilities in the report.

Additionally, KSC is sited in a very diverse area of the city - not simply local residents but people working at the university, local schools and at Bristol's hospitals.. It is the only sports and leisure facility in the Cotham area that is affordable to lower-income households, many of whom, adults and children, live nearby in the council's Dove St. housing estate. I feel strongly that the growth in poverty in our city and its effects should not be overlooked. The city now has more than twice as many universal credit claimants than it did in February 2020; and we know that poverty can be an engine room for physical, emotional and mental ill health BUT that access to

affordable sports and physical exercise facilities can help to mitigate a wide range of health problems.

A number of local school students use KSC and, regardless of whether they live in Cotham, surely this is important to their physical and emotional development and, of course, in combatting the rise in obesity faced by young people.

The Cotham area has only one small park, Cotham Gardens, which is small and not wonderfully equipped; yet, in warmer weather is heavily used - thus revealing a huge demand for shared leisure and sports spaces. There are no other such affordable spaces in the area. The nearest would be St Andrews Park, some way away.

Of course, one might consider the University's indoor sports facilities but these are not inexpensive and are subject to high demand (from students and academic staff, for example). One might also mention Bannatyne's facility. However, this is expensive. I understand that my partner and I are not the only people who gave up their membership due to its costs.

The variety of services offered by KSC has always impressed me. I have played sport there, have taken my children to soft play activities there (a godsend to local parents), more recently have enjoyed seeing my kids at Tae Kwon Do and badminton classes there and have hired space there for children's birthday parties. If the notes above are accurate, then surely there is a very strong case to keep KSC open. This might involve transferring it to a socially-minded facilities operator. It might involve offering it as a community asset transfer. It could involve detailed consultation about how its current and future services could be changed, expanded and improved, to encourage greater footfall and membership. However, closing it would be a severe detriment to those who use it and, if the data flaws noted above are true, then without any reasonable justification.

I also think there's a financial risk - closing such a facility might make savings in the short term but the costs of reopening (there surely being a need) could be massive. Large spaces like KSC, if unused, can face dereliction very quickly.

I am aware that the council faces many challenges in balancing its post-covid budgets and this is no easy task. However, the clear benefits to Bristol's communities of retaining an affordable and accessible KSC, albeit not owned/managed directly by BCC, seem to me to outweigh the potential savings involved.