

Statement: PS11.07

Cabinet – 8 February 2022

Re: Agenda item 11 - Leisure Facilities Investment and Procurement

Statement submitted by: Gene Joyner

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. Whilst the centre serves the local community, it also draws users from wider Bristol and beyond.
2. The ethnic and socioeconomic mix of users is far more diverse than has been suggested by the council.
3. The way in which badminton and squash court bookings are accounted for significantly under-estimates the number of actual users.

The centre draws users from wider Bristol and beyond

As Chair of Avon Badminton Association and Chair of Bristol and District Badminton Club, (a club that has played at Kingsdown since it first opened), I know from our membership that we have members who travel to the centre from local addresses, but also members from some of the more deprived areas of Bristol, as well as from the outskirts of the city; from North Somerset, Bath and even South Wales.

There are two main reasons for Kingsdown's broad appeal. The first is the quality of Badminton; Bristol and District count 'National' and 'International' Badminton Champions as part of their membership, but it also incubates and develops raw talent - it is a club for competitive badminton players and not just the elite. The second reason is that as a venue for Badminton, it's hall, unlike the other sports centres, was purposely designed for badminton. The sprung wooden floor, the colour of the walls, the height and the lighting, make this the best venue anywhere in the South West for the sport. For the entire city of Bristol, it's a unique and very special facility.

The ethnic and socioeconomic mix of users is far more diverse than report suggested

The suggestion that Kingsdown primarily caters to an affluent local community is very wrong. I am very much an example of the wider diversity of its users. My ethnicity includes West Indian and British heritage, I grew up in Easton. When I started playing badminton, I used Easton Leisure Centre, and the other sports centres, along with the Baptist Mills Youth Club, but the favourite place for me and my mates was always Kingsdown. Due to the variety of activities that use the various halls such as 'keep fit' classes, basketball, table tennis, etc., even with the choice of Horfield, Easton, St. Pauls, and Kingsdown, booking a court at a time suitable for you, and your mates wasn't always possible.

Back in the day, living in Easton, booking and playing in a venue like the University would have been very intimidating and was not a place we would have naturally considered or felt particularly comfortable in. Losing Kingsdown would certainly limit the opportunities even further for young black social players, as I was many years ago, to be nurtured and developed and go on and achieve unimaginable success. Opportunities, that saw me represent England, as well as win, National and European Championship gold medals.

The way in which badminton and squash court bookings are accounted for significantly underestimates the number of actual users

Kingsdown badminton and squash court bookings are counted by the council as one user when most people will know, the minimum number to play a game is two, but the reality is that very often there can be as many as four or even eight people (four on, and four off), sharing a court that has been registered to just that one person who booked the court. At Bristol and District Badminton Club we have had as many as 30 or more players turn up to the three courts, we use for our club nights. I suspect, this is a similar situation with Beaufort Park (another badminton club that use the hall), and also for the squash court bookings.

The council's assessment and the focus on gym users, along with the underestimate of Badminton and Squash users, gives a very misleading view of the actual number of users of Kingsdown Sports Centre.