

Statement: CS011.02

Cabinet – 8 February 2022

Re: Agenda item 11 - Leisure Facilities Investment and Procurement

Statement submitted by: Councillor Guy Poultney

Kingsdown Sports Centre is a much-loved and well-used community asset in Cotham. It draws in a diverse range of people from across the city to improve their physical and mental health. It hosts national and international medal winners. It brings together people of differing age groups, genders, ethnicities and backgrounds. It is exactly the sort of community facility we should value and support.

The community, sports centre users, and local councillors object to the council's proposal to stop operating the sports centre in the strongest possible terms, and ask that cabinet include Kingsdown in the procurement package for leisure services.

Over the past few months several important pieces of information have come to light, and the report relies on heavily flawed data to conclude that Kingsdown should not be included in the procurement package:

- One dataset used was the Cotham Ward profile. We know from the previously presented petition of sports centre users, and the petition presented today that many people use the sports centre from across the city because of its proximity to where they work (rather than live); e.g. St. Michael's Hospital, The Bristol Royal Infirmary, and Bristol University. The original cabinet report did not take these users into account.
- The report seems to rely on usage data that made the centre look less well-used than it is compared to other facilities. For example, four people going swimming in Horfield are counted as four users, while four playing badminton, or two people playing squash in Kingsdown are only counted as one. There is a significant likelihood that whole teams and groups are being counted as a single user each time they visit.
- Kingsdown Sports Centre was kept closed for four months longer than other leisure facilities during the Covid lockdowns. This made it look less well-used than it actually was.
- Despite this, while the report claimed that the Centre had attracted 'few new members', the centre's membership has grown by almost 10% since 2015 - the most of any of the facilities in the report.
The data overall misrepresents how many people are using the centre, where they're from, and what they're using it for. The report fails to acknowledge that, in spite of everything, the number of members has grown faster than the other leisure facilities in the report.

We have also now seen the results of the council's consultation, and know the following:

- More than 70% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the overall approach.
- Less than a quarter of people agreed or strongly agreed with the overall approach.
- It seems an overall majority of people who responded did not support the strategy and specifically cite the need to keep Kingsdown Sports Centre and Jubilee Pool open as the reason.
- This is despite the choice made by cabinet to not include these options in the consultation.

Despite everything, the staff at Kingsdown Sports Centre have remained professional, courteous, and helpful. Their dedication to the communities they work with has been exemplary and should be an inspiration to us all.

I also feel it's important to thank the volunteers, sports centre users and members of the community who have helped support the campaign to keep Kingsdown Sports Centre operating as a council-run facility.

I would note that more people have signed the petition to keep Kingsdown Sports Centre open than participated in the consultation. My ward partner's inbox and mine have been flooded since this policy was announced. There is huge support for keeping Kingsdown open as a civic sports centre.

Please consider the option supported by the community, the sports centre users, the local councillors, and council's own consultation. We ask cabinet to include Kingsdown Sports Centre in the procurement package for leisure services.