

Committee(s): Community and Health Committee	Date: 28 June 2021
Subject: Brentwood Centre update report	Wards Affected: ALL
Report of: Kim Anderson	Public
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Summary

The report provides an update for Members on the Brentwood Centre and the work that is being undertaken.

Main Report

Introduction and Background

1. As Members will be aware Brentwood Leisure Trust went into administration on 6 November 2020 and the Brentwood Centre came back under direct control of Brentwood Borough Council.
2. It was agreed by the administration that the facility should re-open as soon as possible in line with the relaxation of the national lockdown restrictions at the beginning of December 2020.
3. The Council required some leisure expertise to reopen the Centre and Strategic Leisure Management were appointed to provide consultancy support.
4. Works were undertaken to the main reception area and for the replacement of internal and external signage. The Centre's gym was relocated in the International Hall to allow for social distancing and to maximise capacity for usage. Any essential compliance works were also undertaken which included Fire, Water and Alarm. Initially security staff were on site to cover any out of hours.
5. Recruitment for staff through an agency was undertaken which included general manager, and heads of department, together with duty managers and lifeguards.

6. As part of the phased re-opening the Centre initially opened on restricted hours to minimise staff requirements until membership and income enabled greater opening hours and the provision of more activities.
7. A new booking system was installed which enabled the public to join at home and book swim, gym sessions and 3G football pitch.
8. Due to continued restrictions in December swim and gym was available together with the 3G pitch.
9. Unfortunately, a third lockdown meant that the Brentwood Centre was forced to close after 3 weeks of being re-opened. As staff were appointed after October 2020 there was no option for the Council to furlough staff, so staff were employed continually and to work through areas of the centre that needed to be cleared.
10. The Brentwood Centre was also identified as a key site to start rolling out the vaccination programme in December and also providing a mobile testing site in the car park.
11. The Council was able to apply to the National Leisure Recovery Fund for some financial support and to date the Council has received £117,552 to support the Brentwood Centre.
12. After the Government announcements and the road map for recovery, leisure centres were able to re-open on 12 April 2021, again this was for swim, gym and outdoor activities only. The Centre did provide some virtual classes for existing members and also moved some of the group exercise classes outside which proved to be very successful.
13. From the 17 May indoor group exercise was able to re-commence and the Centre has also increased its hours of operation. The recent government announcement means that the current restrictions remain in place until 21 July 2021.
14. Two events have also taken place at the Centre, an Antiques Fair and an outdoor Cinema.

15. Plans and costings are being finalised to move the gym out of the International Hall back to its original location to allow greater usage of the hall for events and sports.
16. The Vaccination Centre is likely to remain until August to continue the roll out of the vaccination programme. There is also discussion whether a booster programme for over 50's continues at the Centre through September/October but this is still to be confirmed.

Issue, Options and Analysis of Options

17. A report on the future procurement options for the Centre was presented to March Community and Health Committee. The immediate pressure is to appoint a 3rd party operator to manage the facilities on the Council's behalf. Officers are working with our present consultants to establish a longer-term plan that will enable the centre some security in its provision moving forward. Officers will update the Leisure Strategy Working Group as discussions progress.
18. The appointment of a 3rd party operator will reduce the Council's financial pressures in relation to business rates and staff.
19. Nationally, leisure centres are still under financial pressure due to the three lockdowns and inability to generate significant income. The District Council's Network are currently campaigning to the Department of Culture Media and Sport for additional support so that these vital leisure services survive the pandemic.
20. A Brentwood Centre Working Group has also been established under Audit and Scrutiny Committee which will look at the following workstreams:
 - a. Decision making process
 - b. Audit reviews
 - c. Reports and minutes
 - d. Finance
 - e. Asset management
 - f. Future plans

Reasons for Recommendation

21. The report is to provide an update to Members and is for information only.

Consultation

22. Consultation will be undertaken with the Leisure Strategy Working Group and any relevant stakeholders in the development options and plans for the Brentwood Centre.

References to Corporate Plan

23. The Brentwood Centre sits under the Developing Communities strand and in particular - to continue to invest in and develop new community facilities to meet the future needs of a growing population

Implications

Financial Implications

Name/Title: Jacqueline Van Mellaerts, Corporate Director (Finance and Resources) and S151 Officer

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24. Since taking back the Brentwood Centre, the Council has had to endure essential compliance costs on the property, to bring it back to an acceptable standard, as well as staff the centre and manage general operational running costs. The Council does also not receive exemptions on Business Rates for the property.
25. A grant of £117k was received from the national leisure recovery fund which has been used to offset the running of the centre, as well as income losses due to COVID-19 lockdown and restrictions.
26. Following the Brentwood Leisure Trust going into liquidation, the Trust was a debtor to the Council and subsequently the balance of £0.343m which was held on the Council's balance sheet has been written off in 2020-21 year end accounts.
27. As part of setting 2021-22 it was assumed that the Brentwood centre finances should break even, and at the time of setting the budget various variables were unknown. Officers have been working closely with the centre managers as well as our consultancy support to ensure that current financial forecasts are realistic and accurate as possible. The current position is forecasting a deficit of approximately £500k for the year 2021-22. The Council is expecting to reduce this pressure by looking to appoint a 3rd party operator.

Legal Implications

Name & Title: Amanda Julian, Corporate Director (Law & Governance) and Monitoring Officer

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28. The Council will follow the public procurement process to ensure compliance and transparency when looking to appoint this will mitigate the Council's risk of challenge.

Economic Implications

Name/Title: Phil Drane, Corporate Director (Planning and Economy)

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29. Improving the health and wellbeing those living, working and visiting the borough can benefit the local economy in a multitude of ways.

Equality and Diversity Implications

Name/Title: Kim Anderson, Partnerships, Leisure & Funding Manager

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30. The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:

(a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful

(b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

(c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

31. The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, gender, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).

32. The proposals in this report will not have a disproportionately adverse impact on any people with a particular characteristic.

Health & Wellbeing Implications

Name/Title: Jo Cory, Corporate Health & Wellbeing Officer

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33. Any development of the Brentwood Centre will encourage increased participation in activities and promote active and healthy lifestyles.

Other Implications (where significant) – i.e. Health and Safety, Asset Management, Equality and Diversity, Risk Management, Section 17 – Crime & Disorder, Sustainability, ICT.

None.