

# Cabinet

10 September 2024

## Queen Elizabeth Leisure Centre

### For Decision

**Cabinet Member and Portfolio:**

Cllr J Andrews, Place Services

**Local Councillor(s):**

Cllr W Chakawhata, Cllr A Todd, Cllr J Atwal, Cllr D Morgan, Cllr S Bartlett

**Executive Director:**

Jan Britton, Executive Lead for Place

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**Report Status:** Public (the exemption paragraph is N/A)

**Brief Summary:**

At the council meeting on 18 July 2024, members agreed to bring a report to Cabinet to consider the circumstances that led to the decision to withdraw from the dual use management agreement at Queen Elizabeth Leisure Centre on 31 March 2024.

**Recommendation:**

Cabinet is asked to:

1. Note the contents of the report.
2. Note that the Council has already contributed £276,160 towards condition works prior to 31 March 2024 and a further £604,407 has been provided to the Trust as part of the exit arrangements, to be spent by March 2025
3. Note that as the Council has no legal interest in the leisure centre, the future use of the facility is a matter for the Trust to determine.
4. Agree to progress and accelerate the Leisure Strategy to ensure there is a strategic and informed approach to leisure provision which will deliver the Council priorities of building stronger and healthier communities

## **Reason for Recommendation:**

The council is in the process of developing a new leisure strategy that will enable it to consider and adopt a more strategic and informed approach to the way it operates its leisure facilities and service.

The strategy's focus is for leisure facilities to be fit for purpose, accessible, affordable, and sustainable, with equity of provision and areas of health inequalities given priority.

The council does not own Queen Elizabeth Leisure Centre and its leisure spend across the East Dorset area is considerably higher than other areas of the Dorset council area. A key aim of the leisure strategy will be to address this issue.

There is a good level of alternative provision within the effective catchment area with eight public leisure facilities within a 10-mile radius/20-minute drive of QELC, with three being owned by the council. All these alternative facilities operate a GP referral scheme and provide a good range of accessible facilities and programmes to meet the needs of the community.

Dorset Council has contributed £880,567 towards site and facility improvements at QELC to enable the continuation of school and community club usage. The site is currently being used by the school pupils and a number of sports groups, and the school are open to considering options for further community use.

### **1. Background**

1.1 The land and leisure centre at Queen Elizabeth School are under the ownership of the Queen Elizabeth School Foundation Trustees (QUEST) and managed under the umbrella of Initio Learning Trust. The council which previously managed Queen Elizabeth Leisure Centre (QELC) on the school site was subsidising the leisure facilities by approximately £550,000 pa. This equated to over 33% of the overall leisure centres budget for the whole of Dorset. As this was higher than any of the leisure centres owned by the council, further work was undertaken to ascertain if this provided the best value for money given that the council:

- (i) Did not own the QELC facilities.
- (ii) Can evidence there to be a good level of alternative provision within the effective catchment area with eight public leisure facilities within a 10-mile radius/20-minute drive of QELC, with three being owned by the council.

(iii) Would be required to contribute £2.83m of an estimated £4.7m capital cost of works required in the next 25 years. This estimate was based on works and figures produced in 2019 and therefore, it is anticipated that this cost would now be considerably higher.

1.2 At its meeting on 1 March 2022, Cabinet resolved to:

- (i) give formal notice to the owners Queen Elizabeth School Foundation Trustees of its intention to withdraw from the dual use management agreement on 31 March 2024;
- (ii) to continue to engage with the school during the transitional period;
- (iii) to work alongside the school in identifying ways to maximise the availability of leisure facilities for school and community use; and
- (iv) to provide an additional one-off contribution of £150,000 in capital funding towards the replacement of the All-Weather Pitch.

1.3 At the council meeting on 18 July 2024, a petition exceeding 7000 signatories was presented and a number of questions were asked by members of the public regarding the closure of QELC. Cabinet has requested that officers bring a report to Cabinet to further consider the details around the decision to withdraw from QELC.

## **2 Leisure Strategy**

2.1 At its meeting on 1 March 2022, Cabinet also considered a paper to review Leisure Services provision in the form of a leisure strategy. Dorset Council currently owns or funds 8 leisure facilities and has a mixture of operating models with facilities either operated in-house, by third party contractors or on a lease arrangement. Many of these leisure centres are on school sites and have longstanding dual use contractual arrangements. The council inherited these arrangements following local government reorganisation and there has not to date been a holistic review across the county.

2.2 The development of a leisure strategy will enable the council to consider and adopt a more strategic and informed approach to the way it operates its leisure facilities and service. The council needs to ensure that its leisure facilities, provision and budget will be sustainable in the future and broaden their impact on improving community health. The strategy will also consider provision in the widest sense and not just focus on what is provided by the council.

2.3 The strategy aims to focus on and explore the opportunities that a review can present both in terms of leisure facilities being fit for purpose, accessible, affordable, and sustainable, with equity of provision and areas of health inequalities given priority as well as the opportunities to support regeneration objectives. The figures below demonstrate the per capita spend across Dorset for 2024/25. The Dorset East area which covers Wimborne, would have been much higher had the council continued to manage QELC.

	Dorset East	Dorset North	Dorset South	Dorset West	Mid Dorset	South East Dorset
Leisure budget						
Cost per person	£14.58	£3.15	£0.64	£6.10	£2.82	£10.32

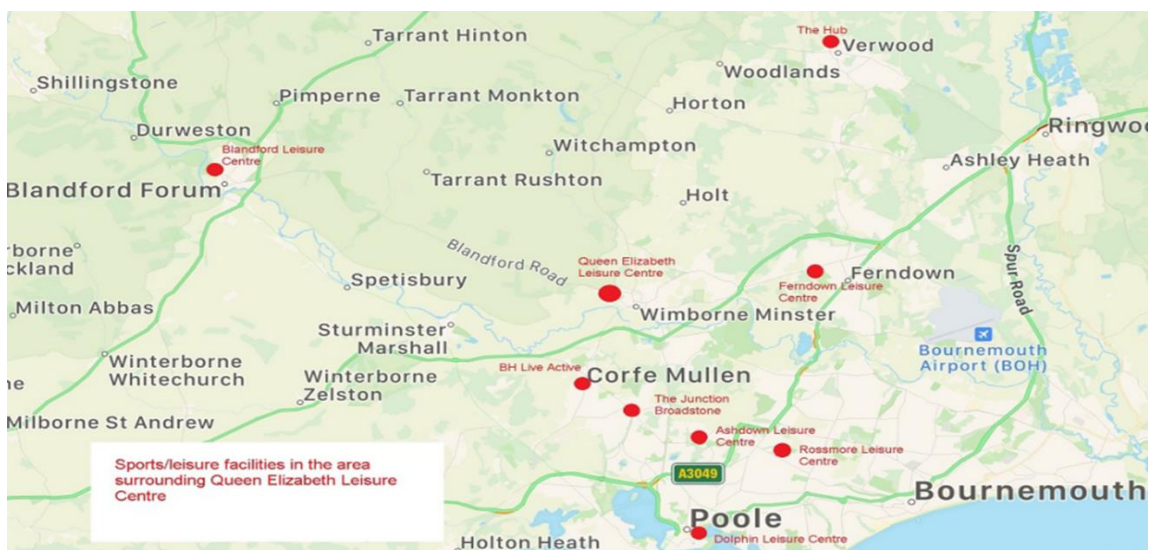
### 3 Exit Arrangements

3.1 The council has now concluded the transactional elements of the withdrawal from the QELC which completed on 31 March 2024. During the 2-year transitional period, officers met with QE School representatives monthly to support them in identifying ways to maximise the availability of leisure facilities for school and community use and to agree a formal exit arrangement. The council also undertook a consultation for the 9 full time and 31 part time staff members, many of whom were instructors working between 1-4 hours per week. This resulted in the redeployment of 3 full time staff members with 37 staff being made redundant. The exit agreement sets out a number of responsibilities to include site handover, inventory, capital works and financial arrangements.

3.2 Under the dual use agreement, the council was required to leave the facilities in a good condition. Dorset Council has contributed £880,567 towards site and facility improvements to enable the continuation of school and community club usage. Funds have already been used towards the replacement of the all-weather pitch, the painting of the tennis/netball courts and the installation of new LED lighting to the all-weather pitch and outside courts. The remaining £604,407 has been given to the school to complete the outstanding works listed in Appendix 1. The school is required to complete post termination works by 31 March 2025.

3.3 These funds will enable improvements to the swimming pool air handling system, pool plant, pool hall roof and wet side changing areas. Funding is also available for sports hall floor resurfacing works and electrical and mechanical upgrades.

- 3.4 At the council meeting on 18 July 2024, comments were made around the previous management approach to pricing and marketing. Pricing was always benchmarked against other local providers but also considered alongside the quality and accessibility of the provision, existing usage levels and any external financial factors impacting residents.
- 3.5 The marketing undertaken at QELC was similar to that at other centres and covered a range of news updates and promotions via social media, adverts and leaflets. QELC has always been impacted by community use restrictions, its location, the lack of public transport and most significantly the high level of alternative provision locally, many of which are easier to access and don't have the same dual use constraints. This is due to the school have exclusive access to much of the facilities during the school day. These were factors which contributed to the decision to exit the arrangement.
- 3.6 Concerns were also raised on the impact on residents with disabilities and health conditions, and whether the Equality Impact Assessment took this into consideration. The map below evidences a good level of alternative provision within the effective catchment area with eight public leisure facilities within a 10-mile radius/20-minute drive of QELC, with three being owned by the council. Canford School in Merley can also be added to this map as alternative provision. Sport England define an effective catchment as the distance travelled by around 75 - 80% of users. All these alternative facilities operate a GP referral scheme and provide a good range of accessible facilities and programmes to meet the needs of the community. Funding has also been provided by the council to deliver Aqua therapy at Blandford Leisure Centre, given that this is no longer available at QELC to meet a recognised need.



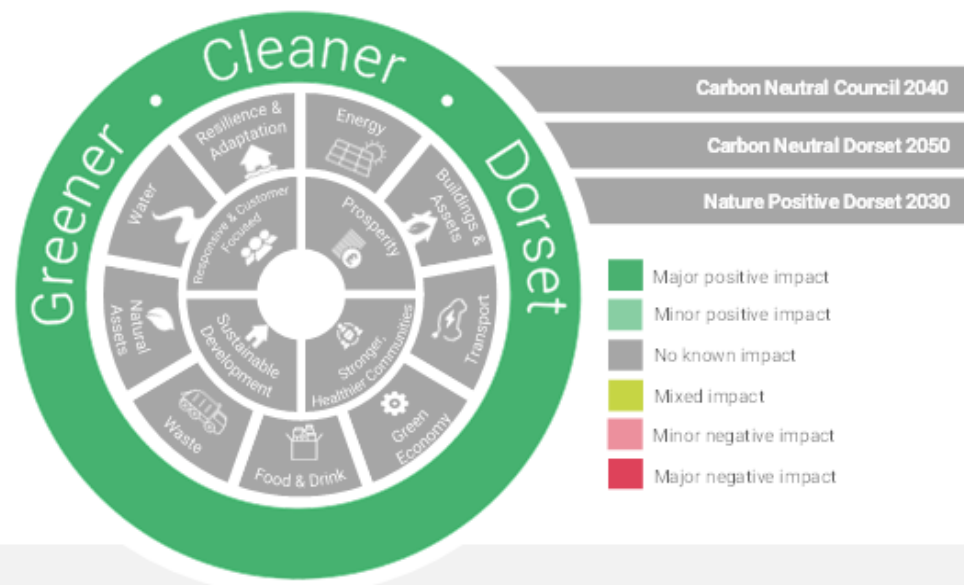
## 4 Update

- 4.1 Since the council meeting in July, officers have met with the Chief Executive Officer and Director of Resources of Initio Learning Trust and the Chair of QEST and undertaken a site visit with the Leader, Cabinet Member and Ward councillors.
- 4.2 The school stated that the outdoor pitches, netball/tennis courts, athletic facilities and smaller school hall/dance studio were available for club/group hire and school use, and they were providing access to male and female changing rooms within the centre.
- 4.3 Whilst the swimming pool is in an operational condition, it is currently closed for school and club usage. The pool air handling and roof works are being looked at by the school and being worked towards. The school highlighted that they already operate another local school pool that has community club/group use and is hired out to a local swim school. They have said that making the pool available for a swim school may be something that they consider for QELC.
- 4.4 The school has stated that there is not currently a great deal of demand for the main sports hall, although the QE pupils continue to make use of this facility as well as the school fitness suite. Options for sports hall community use, to include the climbing wall are being kept open.
- 4.5 Whilst the school has stated that they are not planning to operate the site for general access, there could be scope for individuals to form a group and contact the school about hire opportunities.
- 4.6 The council has recently commissioned consultants Max Associates to support it in developing a new leisure strategy. To date a high level of analysis and assessment work has been carried out to help inform decision making. Officers are currently working with consultants to refine a scope to further progress the emerging strategy. A clear aim and objective of which will be to articulate the ambition for leisure across the county in the medium to long term, informing future investment decisions which accord with the council objective of stronger and healthier communities.

## 5 Financial Implications

The council has contributed £880,567 towards site and facility improvements at QELC. Funds of £276,160 have already been used towards the replacement of the all-weather pitch, the painting of the tennis/netball courts and the installation of new LED lighting to the all-weather pitch and outside courts. The remaining £604,407 has been given to the school to enable them to undertake the outstanding works listed in Appendix 1; with a completion date of 31 March 2025. The council no longer has any revenue or capital commitments at QELC.

## 6 Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications



Quantitative Impact on CEE targets (if known)		
	Unit	Number of units (+/-)
2030 - Natural asset extent & condition	Ha	Unknown
2040 - Operational Emissions	CO <sub>2</sub> (tonnes)	Unknown
2050 - County Emissions	CO <sub>2</sub> (tonnes)	Unknown

The accessible impact and recommendation tables are set out in Appendix 2.

Condition survey works have taken account of the ability of the building to incorporate low carbon technologies such as LED lighting, efficient pool ventilation, solar PV, biomass heating or air/ground source heat pumps etc. The council has recently received funding from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme and has upgraded lighting to LED and installed solar panels at both the school and the leisure centre.

## **7 Well-being and Health Implications**

The council's aims are to support communities to be active, to increase people's healthy life expectancy and reduce health inequalities between areas. Leisure Services play a significant role in providing opportunities for all ages to lead a more physically active lifestyle. The council currently provides a good range of leisure facilities across the East Dorset catchment area, and this is further enhanced by an additional 5 public leisure facilities within a 10-mile radius/20 min drive time of QELC.

## **8 Other Implications**

None

## **9 Risk Assessment**

9.1.1 **HAVING CONSIDERED:** the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

## **10 Equalities Impact Assessment**

An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken for this report, the details of which are set out in Appendix 3.

## **11 Appendices**

Appendix 1 - Schedule 4

Appendix 2 – Accessible Impact Assessment and Recommendation Tables

Appendix 3 – Equality Impact Assessment

## **12 Background Papers**

None

## **13 Report Sign Off**

13.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)