

COUNCIL – 28 SEPTEMBER 2023

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF PUBLIC

Executive Summary

The following questions have been received from Members of Public. The individuals who raised the questions have been invited to attend the meeting. The relevant Portfolio Holder will be asked to provide a formal response.

Question 1 – Karen Woodhead

“Why does the pool in park have to close?”

Supporting Statement

“I am a disabled woman. I go swimming every Monday and Friday. I get there by bus as I don't drive and not on a lot of money. My surgeon has recommended me to go to help lose weight and ease my joint. If this closes I will struggle to get to the nearest pool. Please reconsider the pool for disabled people as it not our faults and feels like we are suffering for your mistakes in the past.”

Reply from Councillor Ellen Nicholson

“The Council recognises the significant health and wellbeing benefits of swimming, particularly for our residents with disabilities.

At the moment the Pool in the Park receives significant subsidy from the Council to run the facility, in part due to the age of the facility. However due to the Council's financial situation, we do need to look at all of our discretionary services provided to see if they can be self-funding.

The Council will be launching its residents consultation on Monday on the proposed phased closure along with other options for consideration. We will also be seeking to understand the impact of our proposals on residents through the impact assessment.”

Question 2 – Gillian Bernadt

“If alternative sources of funding can be found to fill the funding gap (and create a saving of £700,000 per year over the 4 years proposed, as a major element of the proposed Leisure service savings) would the Council be willing to maintain support to the Pool through existing contract management arrangements?”

Supporting Statement

“The proposed withdrawal of funding to Pool in the Park (PITP) will have a massive impact on the community, in terms of health, well-being and sports education & water safety. Consultation over the summer showed PITP to be in the top three services residents wanted to be retained, showing its value and the popularity of the Pools as a community asset. The Council clearly needs to make a saving, and the scale of the saving to be made, as outlined in the MTFS makes PITP, as a major

part of the Leisure service savings, an obvious choice to cut (not withstanding the above community value).

However It is unclear whether alternative funding sources have been explored to fund PITP. It is proposed that further work is undertaken to explore funding alternatives that could maintain facilities while achieving short term savings, in the order of £2-3million to 2027/28. The question addresses whether, if the community, working with members and local businesses could raise the funds needed, the Council would be willing to maintain contract and management arrangements for PITP, for the period of 3 years, to enable the pools to stay open during that period? After that the MTFFS refers to a self-funding principle of delivery, which would need to be delivered at a reasonable cost to residents.”

Reply from Councillor Ellen Nicholson

“Our initial residents engagement work over the summer showed PITP to be one of the top three services residents wanted to be retained, showing its value and the popularity of the Pools as a community asset. Creating a self-sustaining budget for the site will certainly be difficult, but if attainable then we are open to alternative options, but this is certainly something we would love to see come forward.”

Question 3 – Carolyn Edis

“At the PITP swimming lessons are available for toddlers up to senior citizens. Water aerobic classes are beneficial for those who suffer from arthritis, joint problems etc.

How confident are councillors that customers can be absorbed by Eastwood Leisure Centre bearing in mind that they already have a programme of lessons which may well subscribed?”

Supporting Statement

“I can attest fully to the benefits of swimming and water exercise. I taught at Woking pool at it was a privilege to see children and adults develop their swimming skills.

The aqua aerobic classes and swimming sessions have been of benefit to me as I now suffer from joint problems.

The Pool In The Park should not close...it will be a huge loss to Woking and its surrounding areas.”

Reply from Councillor Ellen Nicholson

“Eastwood Leisure Centre has proved to be very popular since it opened in October 2021. Whilst the Eastwood Leisure Centre will have some capacity to take on a proportion of Pool in the Park users, it would not have sufficient capacity to accommodate all displaced users and groups.”

Question 4 – Colin Evans

“One of the Council's main purposes is to provide public services and particularly to support the most vulnerable in our society. As a voter and council tax payer, I would like to understand how you can justify closing down the Pool in the Park and other key services that support the wellbeing and health of our community - effectively turning Woking in to a 3rd world town, when there must be alternative routes in the short to medium term around re-structuring the debt of selling off assets? The proposed approach is very draconian - effectively punishing our community in the short to medium term (and possibly for a lot longer) because of poor financial decisions made within past Council Meetings which many of today's councillors participated in!”

Supporting Statement

“My disabled son has attended Dolphins Club (at the Pool in the Park) for about 20 years and learnt to swim there and it provides a vital social dimension to his life. Without the Pool in the Park there will be no club! Equally importantly, many thousands of our children have learnt to swim there, so what is the Council's plan for 'today's' children learning to swim in the absence of a pool?”

Reply from Councillor Ellen Nicholson

“Dolphins will still have a home at Eastwood Leisure Centre. Whilst the availability and range of facilities will be reduced, we really do want to try and protect the most vulnerable. Unfortunately, the proposed phased closure of the Pool in the Park is under consideration due to the severe financial position of the Council and the level of subsidy the facility requires. The Council's position means that we are unable to subsidise non statutory services, and we currently are subsidising Pool in the Park.”

Question 5 – Trudi Reid

“Can the council help facilitate a meeting between Freedom Leisure, the council, and a residents to develop a part community funded model for Pool in the Park so it can stay open away from Council Tax funding. There is enough support locally to organise community funding for this pool combined with a ticket price increase to save the pool from closure but residents need to understand how much hard cash is needed annually including maintenance costs.”

Supporting Statement

“I am a local mum with 3 children including one disabled child who has to swim daily and an active member of a local schools PTA. There is huge public support to keep Pool in the Park open and feel residents deserve a chance to save the pool. I would like to combine with PTAs in all of the Woking schools to help deliver the community funded needed for Pool in the Park.”

Reply from Councillor Ellen Nicholson

“As part of the resident engagement there will be a range of opportunities to give feedback and discuss how best to take this forward. This is a really pleasing approach and we really hope that we can find a self-funding solution.”

Responses to Questions from Members of Public

Contact Person: Frank Jeffrey, Head of Democratic Services
Email: frank.jeffrey@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3012

Date Published: 28 September 2023