

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 13 MARCH 2012
title: PROPOSED CLOSURE OF LONGRIDGE GYM
submitted by: JOHN HEAP, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
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1 PURPOSE

1.1 To inform members of developments in respect of the planned closure of Longridge Gym.

1.2 Relevance to Council ambitions and priorities:

- This report contributes to Making People's Lives Safer and Healthier

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 The decision to close the Gym facility at Longridge Civic Hall is part of a service review, and identification of a savings package that was agreed at Policy & Finance Committee on 22 November 2011.

2.2 The closure of the Gym represents a net saving to the Council of £31,870. It will affect around 250 gym users currently attending the facility.

2.3 The two members of staff employed at this facility have been placed on the Council's redeployment register, and are currently subject to redundancy and personalised severance packages. The Council is not seeking to circumvent what might be considered to be an unfavourable situation, and is conforming to very specific obligations in concluding the Gym operation.

3 FURTHER INFORMATION / ISSUES

3.1 The Gym facility is located in the building extension to the Main Hall, and comprises of a fitness training area, with 10 items of cardio-vascular equipment and 7 strength training stations. The equipment varies in age (some strength training machines were purchased over fifteen years ago, and the most recent was added when the Gym relocated from Longridge High School in 2008). There are also separate changing and showering facilities, with lockers, and a disabled changing / shower area.

3.2 As from 31 March 2012, when the Council ends any involvement in operating the Gym, the future use of these facilities reverts to the conditions that apply to the Main Civic Hall building:-

Longridge Social Enterprise Company (LSEC) was granted a long term lease (60yrs) in 2005, to operate Longridge Civic Hall. When the new extension was built to accommodate the Gym and Children's Centre in 2008, a licence to occupy the building for operating the Gym was drawn up, and now, on terminating this occupancy arrangement, use of the facilities and grounds is subject to the existing lease and conditions contained in this document.

- 3.3 It is proposed to contact all those on the current membership database, to inform them that the Gym will no longer be available, and to end any direct debit contracts with members.
- 3.4 It is understood that LSEC may want to extend their role of community provision by making the Gym area available for fitness activity, and this is dependent upon the extent to which it is possible for them to broaden their volunteer base, and making conversions to enable access and usage of this area without the need for any staffing presence.
- 3.5 The Gym equipment is owned outright by Ribble Valley Borough Council and, whilst it is likely to have a market value, the fact that it is dated and fitness equipment technology is constantly changing, means that there is not anticipated to be much in the way of interest for resale. Most of the equipment dates back to when the fitness room was first modernised over 15 years ago at what was then the Sports Centre, though three stations of strength training equipment was added on relocation to the Civic Hall in 2008. Whilst the cardio-vascular machines are in reasonable condition they are expected to require an increasing amount of expenditure with regards to maintenance.
- 3.6 One of the reasons for maintaining the provision of a fitness facility at the time of the relocation of the Gym from Longridge Sports Centre/ High School, was to enable the continuation of health improvement opportunities for clients on the Council coordinated Exercise on Prescription scheme. The Healthy Lifestyles team receive funding to support the delivery of exercise programmes in the Longridge area and whilst clients might benefit from a range of activities including walking and swimming, the Gym facility does provide appropriate individualised fitness conditioning at all times of the day and has proved particularly popular with this user group.
- 3.7 Given that there is still a demand for fitness provision in the Longridge community it would appear that there is local enthusiasm for making it available; (LSEC if they are intent on progressing a delivery mechanism), then the equipment might be loaned or gifted in terms of an agreement which covered responsibility for ongoing maintenance and for any claims that might arise out of it not being operated to a satisfactory standard of user safety. Dependant upon whether a situation of community use is established then committee members might consider either the sale or donation of the equipment at a later stage.
- 3.8 It is essential that no avoidable expenditure is incurred at the gym after its closure and, apart from the staffing implications and the future of the gym equipment outlined above, the following action has been taken:
- Notice given on hand dryer and water dispenser contracts;
 - Notice given to LSEC to terminate arrangements for the payment of electricity, business rates and sewerage charges;
 - Notice given to gas company to terminate gas supply contract;
 - Notice given to the cleaning company to terminate the agreement for the cleaning of the building;
 - Cancellation of the internet and telephone lines;
 - Termination of the television licence;
 - Termination of the performing rights licence;
 - Termination of the debit and credit card terminal contract.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- **Resources** – The closure of the Gym will result in a revenue saving of approximately £31,870. There would be severance payments attached to any potential redundancy of employees at this facility, should it not be possible to redeploy them.
- **Technical, Environmental and Legal** – The operational arrangement according to the licence to occupy will no longer apply once the Council concludes the Gym service and the usage rights for this area will return to the conditions set out in the head lease agreement for the Civic Hall and grounds.
- **Political** – The closure of this facility now means that the Council does not have any direct involvement in delivery of activity through leisure facilities in Longridge. The current members of the Gym will no doubt be disappointed as some users consider this facility to be important in helping maintain a healthy lifestyle.
- **Reputation** – Members may wish to consider the support of any attempt to deliver a community focused exercise opportunity by making the fitness equipment available to LSEC subject to user safety precautions being in place.

5 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

- 5.1 Notes the contents of this report and especially the issues raised in section 3.2;
- 5.2 Decides as to whether the Council-owned fitness equipment should be made available to LSEC in the current location, by way of a loan agreement on a temporary basis, for the purposes of meeting community need.

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For further information, please contact Colin Winterbottom 01200 414588