

SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

**Economic and Environmental Wellbeing Scrutiny and Policy Development
Committee**

Meeting held 27 February 2013

PRESENT: Councillors Helen Mirfin-Boukouris (Chair), Roger Davison, Bob Johnson, Steve Jones, Joe Otten, Sioned-Mair Richards, Tony Downing (Substitute Member), Clive Skelton (Substitute Member), Geoff Smith (Substitute Member) and Jillian Creasy

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 Apologies for absence were received and substitutes attended the meeting as follows:-

Apology

Substitute

Councillor Ian Auckland
Councillor Terry Fox
Councillor Neale Gibson
Councillor Steve Wilson

No substitute nominated
Councillor Geoff Smith
Councillor Tony Downing
Councillor Clive Skelton

2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

2.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

4.1 The Chair requested that any public questions be raised or petitions submitted during the consideration of item 5.

5. PETITIONS REFERRED FROM CABINET ON 13 FEBRUARY 2013

5.1 The Chair reported on the reasons for holding this special meeting, indicating that two petitions had recently been received by the Council, objecting to the proposed removal of the permanent staff at Highfield and Pitsmoor Adventure Playgrounds and Verdon Recreation Centre. The petition regarding Highfield Adventure Playground had been received by the Council at its meeting held on 6th February 2013, at which time it contained 2,446 signatures but, following the addition of further signatures, which had taken the figure over 2,500 threshold, the lead petitioner had requested that, in accordance with the Council's Petitions Scheme, a senior Council

employee give evidence on the issues at the relevant Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee. The petition regarding Pitsmoor Adventure Playground and Verdon Recreation Centre, which contained 1431 signatures, had been submitted to the Cabinet at its meeting held on 13th February 2013, and had been referred for consideration to this meeting.

- 5.2 The Committee received a presentation from Paul Billington, Director of Culture and Environment, on Activity Sheffield's current service provision, a budget overview, including details of the required savings following the Government cuts, the operational costs in terms of the facilities, the work of the Activity Sheffield Mobile Teams, the proposed changes and a summary of the overall position.
- 5.3 Councillor Isobel Bowler, in attendance as the Cabinet Member for Culture, Sport and Leisure, stated that she had welcomed the dialogue with the Friends of Adventures (Highfield), Pitsmoor Adventure Playground Users Group and the Friends of Verdon Recreation Centre, indicating that the discussions held had been very positive. She reported that the decision to bring forward the proposed changes in terms of the operation of the facilities had been forced upon the Council following the Government cuts and that, as a result of this, both Members and officers had agreed that in order to sustain the service, the Council had to look at utilising the Mobile Teams. This would not only mean that there would still be some provision at the facilities, but more importantly, that the Mobile Teams would still have the capacity to serve all areas of the City, where needed.
- 5.4 Kate West, Co-Chair, Friends of Adventures (Highfield), made representations on behalf of all three facilities. She referred to how all three facilities provided good value for money and supplied figures in terms of the subsidy costs of the two sites, based on their own calculations. Reference was also made to the added value that adventure play brought, mainly relating to the positive development of healthy children and families and the prevention of anti-social behaviour. Ms West reported on the benefits of retaining static facilities, with permanent staff, over mobile workers, and argued that the facilities would no longer remain accessible if the permanent staff were removed. Reference was also made to the benefits of the facilities remaining in the Highfield and Pitsmoor and Verdon areas of the City, specifically highlighting the high child poverty figures and deprivation linked to these areas. Ms West concluded by reporting on the long-term future of the facilities, indicating that more time was required for further consultation and dialogue in order to look at the various proposals that could provide core staffing for the fixed venues and the development of the sites for City-wide use.
- 5.5 Members of the public and the Committee raised questions and the following responses were provided:-

- The Council was not underestimating the value of the facilities, but had been forced into making a number of very difficult choices following the recent Government cuts. Officers had tried to be as accurate as possible when calculating the subsidy figures. For each session provided at the facilities, Activity Sheffield could deliver three mobile sessions. It was accepted that visit levels were not the perfect method of assessing the impact of the withdrawal of the permanent staff from the facilities, but it was deemed to be a reasonable method of assessing such impact. The Council were obliged to look at play provision from a City-wide perspective.
- At the present time, a large proportion of Activity Sheffield's budget was being spent on staffing the three facilities, whereas the Mobile Teams would be able to run sessions across all areas of need in the City, including the two communities where the three facilities were located. Activity Sheffield's management structure had been scaled down over recent years and the organisation provided a largely operations-based service, having a good balance between management and frontline services. The Mobile Workers were able, and expected to, deliver up to 10,000 visits a year.
- The Council did not believe that dedicating more staff to the three facilities would increase their appeal on a City-wide basis as all the three facilities had generally attracted children and young people from the local communities in which they were based. It was accepted that there were staff travel costs involved in using the Mobile Teams, but even after such costs had been taken into account, this option would be more cost-effective. Whilst the Mobile Team were based at Carbrook, apart from the administrative staff, the majority of staff were Mobile Workers who spent very little time at Carbrook.
- The staffing for all opening hours for Adventure Playgrounds was a standard of three. Total staffing numbers included additional staff to provide core and cover support for the playgrounds. There was currently a vacant Grade 6 post.
- All direct staff costs were included in the present £250,000 operating costs in terms of the three facilities.
- There would be no further reductions this year in the Mobile Teams and this would provide Activity Sheffield with the capacity to work across the City.
- The fact that there were likely to be more budget cuts in the future had also been taken into consideration as there was a

need to be more flexible in terms of being able to offer a City-wide service.

- Highfield and Pitsmoor Adventure Playgrounds were open from 3.00 pm to 8.00 pm (Tuesday to Saturday) and closed on Sundays and Mondays. Verdon Recreation Centre opened from 11.00 am to 7.00 pm (Monday to Thursday), 12 noon to 5.00 pm (Friday), 12 noon to 6.00 pm (Saturday) and was closed on Sunday. If a group required access outside these hours, the facilities would be made available. Maintenance costs for all three facilities totalled approximately £8,000 per year.
- In terms of the feasibility of the proposed future consultation with, and provision of assistance for, the local communities, the Council planned to provide a total of £50,000 in grant aid to support community management across the three facilities. There would be more time for further consultation to enable the local communities and the Council to move towards a community-managed operation. There was a need to be realistic in terms of what the Council was trying to do, in the light of the budget cuts. It was considered that these proposals provided the greatest level of sustainability in terms of the provision of play facilities, particularly in the light of potential further budget cuts. Activity Sheffield had already arranged two multi-agency meetings to discuss the proposals and with regard to the Highfield Adventure Playground, there had been an expression of interest from the Sharrow Community Forum to take part in further dialogue, an offer from Voluntary Action Sheffield to help market the facilities, an offer from Football Unites, Racism Divides (FURD) to provide a worker for three hours a week, and an offer from Sheffield Hallam University to provide volunteer workers.
- If the proposed changes were agreed, Activity Sheffield would be able to guarantee up to 10,000 visits per Mobile Worker, at an estimated cost of £1.80 per visit.
- Activity Sheffield's core budget for marketing in 2013/14 would be around £8,000. Publicity regarding the provision of the Mobile service had been made available in all community venues, as well as being advertised via social media. The attendance at events which had been the subject of targeted campaigns were measured in order to assess take-up.
- Approximately 70% of Activity Sheffield's work was with children and young people (8 to 16 year olds) and 30% with older people (50 to 65 year olds).
- Even with an increase in resources, it was not considered that

advertising the facilities for hire on a City-wide basis would have much of an impact in terms of take-up. The three facilities have always tended to attract children and young people from their respective local communities.

- There would be no regular weekly programmes or sessions in the facilities after 1st April 2013, although staff would be provided if the facilities were hired for private sessions. However, proposals were being developed for a transitional programme in April/May 2013 and for holiday programmes beyond that.
- If the facilities were kept open, in terms of the budget cuts, this would have an adverse impact in terms of the provision of play facilities in other areas of the City.
- The Friends Groups and Users Group had already given consideration to requesting that schools and churches in the local communities contribute financially in terms of the operation of the facilities, but this idea had not really progressed. The schools within the local communities had been invited to the multi-agency meetings, but were unable to attend. Activity Sheffield would continue to pursue all options and consult with all interested parties.

5.6 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted and the additional information circulated, the representations made by the Friends of Adventures (Highfield) and Verdon Street Recreation Centre and Pitsmoor Adventure Playground Users Group, and the responses provided to the questions raised; and
- (b) requests that (i) the Council continues to make considerable efforts to work with the two local communities and other providers to try to find a long-term solution to keep the facilities open, with a specific request that local Ward Councillors play a community leadership role in helping to facilitate a solution, (ii) Mobile Activity Sheffield staff provide some sessions of mobile activity at the three facilities for a limited period, to allow a local solution to be developed and (iii) a copy of this decision be forwarded Councillor Isobel Bowler, Cabinet Member for Culture, Sport and Leisure.

(The votes on the above resolution were ordered to be recorded and were as follows:-

For the Resolution (9) - Councillors Helen Mirfin-Boukouris, Jillian Creasy, Roger Davison, Tony Downing, Bob Johnson, Steve Jones,

Sioned-Mair Richards, Clive Skelton
and Geoff Smith

Abstentions (1) - Councillor Joe Otten

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

6.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Thursday, 21st March 2013, at 2.00 pm, in the Town Hall.