

**Minutes of the Joint Meeting of the Cabinet / Education Skills and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committees**

8 May 2024

Hybrid Council Chamber, Port Talbot Civic Centre and Microsoft Teams

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<b>Chairperson:</b>	<b>Councillor P Rogers</b>
<b>Vice Chairperson:</b>	<b>Councillor R Phillips</b>
<b>Councillors:</b>	T.Bowen, W.Carpenter, C.Clement-Williams, C.Galsworthy, N.Goldup-John, J.Henton, J.Jones, R.G.Jones, C.Jordan, C.Lewis, R.Mizen, S.Paddison, S.Pursey, P.A.Rees, S.Renkes, S.H.Reynolds, A.J.Richards, D.Thomas and R.W.Wood
<b>Co-opted Voting Members:</b>	M.Caddick
<b>Officers In Attendance</b>	C.Barnard, N.Daniel, T.Davies, C.Griffiths, A.Jarrett, H.Jones, N.Pearce, C.Saunders, A.Thomas, D.Evans, A.Thomas and P.Chivers
<b>Cabinet Invitees:</b>	Councillors W.F.Griffiths, J.Hale, J.Hurley, N.Jenkins, S.Jones, S.A.Knoyle and A.Llewelyn

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1. **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRPERSON AND VICE-CHAIRPERSON**

It was proposed and seconded and agreed that Cllr Phil Rogers be the Chair for the meeting.

It was proposed and seconded and agreed that Cllr Rebeca Phillips be the Vice-Chair for the meeting.

2. **CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllr. R. Phillips – Cabinet Agenda Item 6 - Personal, Member of Celtic Leisure

Cllr. N Goldup-John – Cabinet Agenda Item 6 – Personal, Member of Celtic Leisure

4. **PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY - PONTARDAWE SWIMMING POOL**

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised members they are able to make reference to previous decisions taken providing any questioning was relevant to the report under consideration.

The Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning gave members a brief overview of the report contained within the Cabinet Agenda pack.

Members commented on the overwhelming strength of feeling in the community regarding the future of the swimming pool. Members asked, given the substantial community usage outlined in the report, how will the closure impact the accessibility of services for residents and what measures have been explored to address safety concerns, whilst ensuring uninterrupted access to swimming facilities for the community.

The Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning acknowledged that there would be a detrimental impact to user groups associated with the pool; programmes would be re-located to other local leisure facilities in mitigation. The need for a replacement facility is undisputed but currently there is no identified funding available. A propping scheme is currently in place which has enabled continued public use; this scheme is under constant independent monitoring and inspection but there has been a significant deterioration in the fabric of the pool tank.

Members expressed concern over potentially longer travel times for residents to access alternative facilities and questioned whether any

strategies will be considered to mitigate any potential negative impacts on community health and wellbeing, particularly for vulnerable individuals.

The Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning advised members that data is held which shows some current users have alternative facilities closer to their homes and it is anticipated these will be utilised. Other potential impacts will be picked up in any replacement facility if appropriate. The feasibility study will identify the optimum location for a replacement pool and available funding options.

Members enquired whether any further detail of possible grant funding or alternative funding sources were available, following the preliminary discussions that had been held with Welsh Government.

The Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning confirmed that currently all options are being explored but there were a limited number of potential funding bodies; currently no funding has been identified.

The Head of Leisure Tourism, Heritage and Culture confirmed that preliminary discussions had been held with Welsh Government and these centred on possible locations.

Members requested that existing service users in neighbouring authorities be included in any future consultation.

The Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning confirmed that the feasibility study would look at the facility mix and all user groups would be involved in any future consultation.

Members acknowledged the considerable impact a pool closure will have on the wider community and staff who may be re-deployed. Members enquired whether there will be any assistance for schools in relation to increased transport costs. Members asked, should the recommendations be accepted, the timescale for the feasibility study and whether there will be a full consultation regarding the location and design of any potential future pool.

The Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning confirmed that the interim Chief Executive of Celtic Leisure has given assurances there would be no compulsory redundancies. All schools have been made aware of the proposals and Celtic Leisure will be

liaising with schools regarding possible relocation sites. There is reasonable confidence that the majority of schools can be accommodated; there will be no contribution by the authority in relation to any additional transport costs. If the recommendations are approved, arrangements will be made to tender and appoint a contractor to carry out the feasibility study with the aim of a report being produced by the year end.

Members asked if problems at Pontardawe Swimming Pool were detected prior to 2022.

The Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning confirmed that reports relating to the condition of Pontardawe Swimming Pool were held prior to 2022.

Members commented that there was a need for the primary towns in the borough to have their own swimming pools and the report did not provide any guarantee that there will be a replacement pool built at Pontardawe.

The Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning acknowledged that a pool is needed in Pontardawe, the purpose of the feasibility study is to establish an optimum location, facility mix and possible funding solutions. Currently, a replacement pool cannot be guaranteed due to the lack of available funding.

Members asked for clarification regarding displaced classes transferring to Neath Swimming Pool and a potential reduction in public swimming availability.

The Head of Leisure, Tourism, Heritage and Culture confirmed that there was capacity at Neath Swimming Pool presently; any reduction in availability related to pool space rather than available times. It was noted that Celtic Leisure are currently carrying vacancies with some hard to fill posts. The re-deployment of staff may allow Neath Swimming Pool to vary opening times, however this will depend on take up which is currently unknown.

Members questioned whether use of the pool at Llangatwg Community School had been considered.

The Head of Leisure, Tourism, Heritage and Culture confirmed that the pool at Llangatwg had been considered but it was fairly small, not available during school hours and had many private bookings outside

of school times. The use of pools at Ysgol Maes y Coed and David Lloyd has also been explored.

Members raised concern that schools budgets may affect children being given the opportunity to learn to swim if parents are asked for financial contributions. Members noted that it was important that all children are given the opportunity to learn to swim and that school take-up needs to be tracked.

The Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning confirmed that it will be possible to track schools take-up of swimming lessons. As schools have control over their curriculums there will be some flexibility in place to enable slots to be utilised.

Members asked whether the feasibility study scope would consider complimentary uses of any future building to reduce pool operating costs.

The Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning commented that any new facility would have increased energy efficiency; the feasibility study will explore all options to reduce operating deficit and impact on any possible funding solution.

Members referred to page 7 of the report and asked if there was an awareness of the need to consider the future provision of pool facilities prior to the ARUP report; if so what actions were taken to achieve this, given the known limited life for this type of construction.

The Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning, confirmed that there was an awareness of the building condition prior to the ARUP report, the solution was the school reorganisation proposal which was not progressed.

Members questioned the delay in moving forward with a further proposal.

The Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning confirmed that during the year since the decision on school reorganisation was taken, discussions have taken place with Welsh Government and officers have explored potential funding solutions of which none have been identified. There is limited organisational capacity to take capital schemes forward.

Members commented that the time taken to undertake a feasibility study could cause delays if funding were to become available and asked whether the swimming pool at Pontardawe was not seen as a priority. Members questioned why the swimming pool was not considered as a capital scheme under SPF funding.

The Director of Environment and Regeneration confirmed that SPF funding would not provide adequate funding for a replacement facility. Attempts have been made to ensure funding opportunities are spread across the county borough.

Members commented that the cost of the feasibility study could have been covered by a funding application. Members enquired whether any approach had been made to Carmarthenshire CBC regarding use of their pool in Ammanford and whether there would be any additional support in relation to increased school transport costs. Will any money raised from the current site be ring-fenced? Members commented that residents in Pontardawe have raised concerns that the location of the current pool would be unsuitable for a replacement facility due to parking and traffic issues, and asked for this to be taken into consideration for any future development.

The Head of Leisure Tourism, Heritage and Culture confirmed that initial contact has been made with Carmarthenshire and this contact can be re-visited. The Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning confirmed the school swimming programme was funded by the authority but there was no proposal to fund travel costs. The feasibility study is required to identify a suitable location as the parking issues are longstanding. The capital value of the site will be factored into any funding package that might be brought forward for a future replacement pool.

Members questioned whether the Terms of Reference relating to the feasibility study would be available.

The Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning confirmed that the feasibility study specification would be available. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services noted that under the revised scrutiny model that the committee could look at this matter within the remit of the scrutiny committee going forward.

Members referred to page 11 of the Integrated Impact Assessment and raised concern relating to the negative impacts on all of the protected characteristics, but acknowledged the health and safety

reasons for the pool closure. Members questioned the terminology used in the report around staff redeployment and enquired whether the decision to delay Celtic Leisure coming in house will impact directly on the workforce. Members referred to page 9 of the report and expressed concerns concerning capacity of Neath Swimming Pool to cope with demand and requirements. Members asked, considering the numerous warnings in previous reports of a lack of funding, the likelihood of securing funding to replace a swimming pool in the valleys that will cover the residents of the Upper Swansea valley, Aman and Llynfell valleys. Members suggested that recommendation 4 should be amended to encompass the wider area.

The Director of Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning advised members that although confidence is held that suitable offers of alternative employment will be made, these offers may not be acceptable to individuals due to their personal circumstances. There is no legal requirement to provide school swimming lessons but all young people are encouraged to take up swimming, however, it is appreciated that transport costs can be prohibitive. There are currently no identified funding solutions but the situation could change. The delay in bringing Celtic Leisure in-house will have no direct impact on the workforce.

Members commented on the importance of utilising green energy and the possibility of using any new facility to generate power. Members questioned whether contact has been made with Powys County Council and commented that the feasibility study should have been carried out in 2022.

The Head of Leisure, Tourism, Heritage and Culture agreed the importance of utilising green energy for current and future facilities. Contact has been made with Powys and it is possible they will pick up some usage commercially.

The Cabinet Member for Nature, Tourism and Well-being thanked officers for the work undertaken and reiterated the closure of the existing pool is a matter of public safety and any decision is not a withdrawal of support for swimming facilities in the Swansea valley. There is a need to move forward with the feasibility study to place the authority in a favourable position should funding become available. Members were encouraged to lobby Welsh Government in relation to funding.

Following scrutiny, an amendment was put forward in relation to

recommendation 4. The amended recommendation as set out below was supported to Cabinet Board.

"Grant delegated authority to the Head of Leisure, Tourism, Heritage and Culture in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Nature, Tourism & Wellbeing to commission a feasibility study to investigate options for a future site and potential funding for a replacement facility and to make a commitment when resources allow, that a pool which serves the whole of the upper Swansea, Amman and Llinfell Valleys will be built."

5. **URGENT ITEMS**

There were none.

**Councillor P Rogers**

**Chairperson**