

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 19 January 2023

REPORTING OFFICER: Operational Director, Community and Environment
Operational Director Economy, Enterprise & Property

PORTFOLIO: Environment and Urban Renewal and Employment, Learning and Skills, Leisure, Community and Culture

SUBJECT: Runcorn Swimming Pool

WARDS: Mersey & Weston

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 On 2 March 2022, the Council agreed to a budget for 2022/23 that included the closure of Runcorn Swimming Pool. The decision came with a proviso that closure would not be implemented until September 2022 to allow time to ascertain if there was a third party who might be interested in taking on the pool and operating it going forward.
- 1.2 The report outlines the approach the Council took to seeking a third party.
- 1.3 The report seeks approval to declare the asset surplus to requirements and to place the building on the Council's disposal list.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1) the report be noted;**
- 2) the Board approves the placing of the asset on the Council's Asset Disposal register; and**
- 3) approval is given to the Operational Director, Economy, Enterprise and Property, in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Environment and Urban Renewal and Employment, Learning and Skills, Leisure, Community and Culture to place the property on the open market for sale.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 The closure of Runcorn Pool was presented in the Councils Revenue Budget 2022/23 EXB 68 refers. Full Council on 2nd March 2022 endorsed the decision taken by Executive Board.

- 3.2 In order to facilitate the decision taken by Members, the opportunity as described in that decision was published on 22nd March 2022 on the Chest. Interested parties were encouraged to register on the Chest. The opportunity was advertised widely, Council's website, news update, social media, business newsletters including a trade advert in Leisure Opportunities, which has pages dedicated to property related tenders, expressions of interest, news, developments, and acquisitions in the leisure property market.
- 3.3 The Council made available on the Chest, information it had on the swimming pool including, floor plans, condition surveys, user figures and expenditure, to give interested parties a better understanding of what would be involved. This ensured that there was a central point for such information and that all interested parties were treated fairly. Interested parties were invited to submit an expression of interest by 1st July 2022.
- 3.4 Ward Councillors supported the process and responded to local enquiries, directing anyone with questions submit them via the Chest.
- 3.5 Several organisations viewed the opportunity; an open day took place at site on 8th April. Officers responded to questions submitted on the Chest in a timely manner.
- 3.6 The Council received no expressions of interest.
- 3.7 When the Council agreed to close Runcorn Swimming Pool on 2nd March, the service had six members of staff attached to the Pool structure. This quickly reduced to one member of staff; all the other staff secured alternative positions.

With a national shortage of Lifeguards, it became almost impossible to staff Runcorn Swimming Pool and keep the pools open at Brookvale and Kingsway.

- 3.8 Runcorn Swimming Pool closed to the public on 16th June.
- 3.9 The Leisure Centre team removed any equipment it could use at other sites. The pool was drained, and suppliers collected plant room equipment on loan.
- 3.10 As some interest to use the building was expressed by community groups, the Council ran a further procurement round. This time seeking expressions of interest for alternative uses for the building, (not use as a swimming pool). The opportunity was advertised from 20th September to 14th October.
- 3.11 During the advertised period, the Council received no questions and requests for further information. The Council received no expressions of interest.

3.12 Property Services now hold the keys for this premise. All services will cease. Costs will be kept to a minimum (building alarm and essential servicing only). The Council insurer have insisted that the building be boarded up.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no further policy implications arising from this report

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Council has reviewed the site and the current budgetary position means it cannot afford the significant investment needed to maintain the building.

5.2 There are ongoing costs for the building, which include some utility costs and annual service charges. Expenditure will be in line with other vacant buildings and kept to a minimum. The building condition is likely to deteriorate.

5.3 There is a wider regeneration plan for Runcorn with significant investment already made in the area and further investment coming, which will see, improved assets in the area. However, the Town Deal regeneration project has not identified a use for the building.

5.4 For these reasons, it is proposed that the building is declared surplus to requirements, and the Council seeks to place the property on the open market for sale. The sale would be subject to planning, and any proposed end use would need to be sensitive to the wider regeneration plans for the town.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

None

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

None

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Closure of the pool has reduced the water space available for residents

6.4 A Safer Halton

None

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

Consider and review the suitability, condition and cost of the property and reasons for retaining the non-operational property or determine if surplus to requirements.

Once a building is, unoccupied and boarded up deterioration can quickly happen, having a detrimental effect on the surrounding neighbourhood.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

The building is empty; services remain connected, the water system is drained. The building is alarmed.

The building is likely to fall into disrepair

If the Council is unable to find a viable use or occupier, the cost of renovating the building will continue to increase.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

The asset has been used as a community facility.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

None within the meaning of the Act.