

REPORT TO: Employment, Learning and Skills, and
Community Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 18 September 2023

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director Environment and
Regeneration

PORTFOLIO: Employment, Learning and Skills, and
Community

SUBJECT: Halton Leisure Centre, Village Change
Facilities

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 A petition has been received in relation to the village changing room plan for the new Halton Leisure Centre. The online petition is titled [single sex spaces](#) and started on 2nd May 2023. It was submitted to the Council on 10th August 2023.

1.2 The report provides members with information on Halton Leisure Centre plans and the design process relating to the village changing rooms.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- i. The report is noted;**
- ii. The Board recommends Option 1 as the preferred option and contractors continue to proceed with the current design layout and programme of works.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Approval to proceed with Halton Leisure Centre was originally granted by Executive Board on 15th October 2020, Minute No EXB34. Final approval to proceed, following submission of updated costs, Executive Board on 22nd October 2022, Minute No EXB37.

3.2 Ellis Williams are the architects appointed to design and develop the new Leisure Centre. They have followed the advice contained in the British Standard Code of Practice BS8300 (Design of an accessible & inclusive built environment). This is the recognised strategy for meeting the requirements of the Equality Act.

3.3 Community involvement took place throughout the course of the

scheme development. Executive Board on 19th September 2019 Minute No EXB35 placed the scheme and the draft design proposals in the public domain. This led to press coverage, including Runcorn and Widnes World on 17th September 2019. Inside Halton, a free magazine produced by the Council and circulated to all households, also had an article on the new leisure centre Winter 2019/2020 edition.

- 3.4 The main consultation events, relating to the building facility mix, took place in January 2020, this was prior to the pandemic.

During January 2020, comments and suggestions were sought on the facility proposals, this was to inform the next stage of the project.

The consultation period included:

- Information on display at Kingsway Leisure Centre for centre users and the public.
- A consultation event with the design team, was held on Tuesday 21st January between 3pm – 7pm at Kingsway Leisure Centre.
- Online consultation advertised, led by the Councils research team, they prepared and published a questionnaire, collated comments.
- Paper questionnaire was available on site and by request.
- Direct mailing to all Elected Members, specialist groups, such as, One Halton Population Board, Halton Sports Partnership, Merseyside Sports Partnership, Active Halton.
- Views and comments also encouraged via email to kingswayleisurecentre@halton.gov.uk

- 3.5 The questionnaire received 88 responses. Comments were provided by many stakeholders in both their professional / voluntary capacity, and in their personal capacity as Halton residents. An overview of the comments received during the consultation can be viewed in the Planning Statement.

- 3.6 Comments were again sought and received, from the public, when the planning application was submitted in May 2020, the planning application was advertised to the public and 20/00206/HBCFUL case number shared. Thus, full documentation was available for review. There was an extended period for comments to be received. <https://webapp.halton.gov.uk/planningapps/index.asp>

- 3.7 Concern has been raised that the village changing rooms put women and children at risk, and erode privacy for both men and women.

- 3.8 Instead of separate changing facilities for men and women the new facility has two areas described as “village changing” rooms.

- 3.9 In a village changing area costumes must be worn and customers are required to keep covered when in communal areas. Privacy is provided via individual cubicles for changing. There will be private cubicles and private shower areas. There is no communal nudity in these areas.
- 3.10 Village style changing rooms can be found in new and refurbished swimming facilities. There are village changing facilities in St Helens, Sefton, Knowsley, and Liverpool.
- 3.11 Benefits include the areas can be supervised by both men and women, thus checked more regularly, are easier to keep clean and hygienic and there will be more customers around to spot any issues, inappropriate behaviour.
- 3.12 Two areas also mean there will be no shared changing between schools and the public (an area of concern, which has led to Widnes schools swimming outside of Halton). The facilities cater for people with a range of abilities and needs.
- 3.13 Should the centre or a customer become aware or receive an allegation around possible taking or use of indecent images, then the matter would be referred immediately to the police.
- 3.14 Anyone (including other children) sexually assaulting others, or taking indecent images of children, including over/under adjoining cubicles, for example, renders themselves liable to arrest, prosecution and registration as a Sex Offender.
- 3.15 A pool operator is required by law to undertake a risk assessment of all activities and managerial practices in their centres and produce operational systems that ensure safety. As a result of the risk assessment the pool operator is required to produce Pool Safety Operating Procedures (PSOP), which includes the Normal Operating Procedures of the facility and the Emergency Action Plans. Within the PSOP the methodology of how the changing rooms is operated, supervised, and cleaned etc. should be included.
- 3.16 Pool operators are ultimately responsible for the safe management of their swimming pools and changing rooms and they must ensure that systems are in place to safeguard users and in particular children and vulnerable adults; however, there are many ways that this can be achieved, and customers must be aware of their responsibilities within that process.
- 3.17 Facility signage about mobile phones or devices being taken into changing rooms will be on display.
- 3.18 It is anticipated that customers will be shown round the new facility and there will be clear signage throughout the building. We

appreciate that new activity programmes and different service delivery models, may be challenging for customers. Key to delivery, at the new site, will be the communication between staff and customers. If any customers have concerns about arrangements, staff will be happy to explain how they work.

3.19 **Next steps**

3.19.1 **Option 1:** Do nothing, the current layout is retained.

No additional work or cost incurred.

3.19.2 **Option 2:** Review the current plans and provide a new floor layout, converting two changing rooms into three changing rooms. There would be a cost associated with a re design and this would take several weeks to complete.

Following the above exercise, the contractor would have to assess the implications of the new design on the existing works. This too would incur additional cost and the timeframe for completing this work is unknown. Construction of the new leisure centre would carry on during this period. It should be noted that the drains have been installed and the ground floor slab pour commences in the coming weeks.

To make a design change, of this nature and at this time, would have a significant impact not only on the layout, but also on the design of the drainage, mechanical and electrical installations. It would also affect other areas of work being completed by the contractor. The impact of these changes would likely be a significant delay to the project, which overall could have a huge bearing on the total project cost.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The Council's policy as outlined in the Indoor and Built Facilities Strategy is to 'create a high quality accessible and sustainable facility capable of supporting sport, health and well-being which offer inclusive services for all; enabling the inactive to become active and more residents to fulfil their potential by participating in sport and physical activity, thus improving their long-term health and well-being'.

The Leisure Centre Service is a non-statutory service, which supports statutory deliver, such as, school swimming and public health objectives, it also supports the Council's priorities.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 To change the design and layout of the changing rooms would have a significant negative effect on completion date and the overall cost of the project.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

The service follows Child Safeguarding Policies and Procedures, in line with current legislation, regulations and guidance. It also refers to documents such as Wavepower 2020 – 2023. This is primarily aimed at Swim England affiliated clubs but is also utilised by swim schools and other related organisations, events, or activities where appropriate.

6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

The service seeks to provide information and training to all staff, so that customers remain informed and can use the leisure centre in a safe and appropriate manner.

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

Regular swimming reduces the risk of serious illnesses, like heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and stroke. Swimming can also help with weight loss, improve general flexibility, increase strength, and improve mobility. As well as improving physical health, swimming can also boost mood and reduce stress levels to improve mental wellbeing.

Exercising in water means reduced strain on joints when compared to other exercises like running or football. Swimming is a beneficial activity for people of any age or ability.

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

The safety and welfare of customers and staff is of paramount importance and any reports of unacceptable behaviour are taken extremely seriously.

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

Halton Leisure Centre, Moor Lane, Widnes, is a flagship project, which will regenerate the site area.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 The Leisure Centre admission criteria and operational policies are based on Council policy and procedures and national guidance issued by, but not limited to, the following governing bodies, The Institute of Sport & Recreation Management (ISRM), Swim England, The Royal Lifesaving Society (RLSS) and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA).

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 The service supports groups and individuals to be and stay active. The service regularly reviews its activity programme and operating procedures. Flexible spaces can accommodate diverse customer needs and requests. Changing Places facility is being installed in the new Leisure Centre.

9.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 There are no direct climate change implications as part of this report.

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

10.1 None under the meaning of the Act.