

THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA**MEETING OF THE COUNCIL - 12 OCTOBER 2011****REPORT OF THE PUBLIC REALM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
INTERIM REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON LEISURE
FACILITIES**

This interim report summarises the findings of the Working Group on Leisure Facilities in relation to the future of Kensington Leisure Centre. The report seeks the Scrutiny Committee's endorsement of our proposed recommendations to Cabinet members.

The Working Group will report our other findings to a subsequent meeting of the Committee.

The report is referred to the Council for information.

FOR

INFORMATION

1. BACKGROUND, MEMBERSHIP, AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 1.1 The Public Realm Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish a Working Group at its meeting on 13 September 2010. The Working Group comprised Councillor Joanna Gardner (Chairman), Councillor Barbara Campbell, and Councillor Pat Mason.
- 1.2 Our terms of reference were to advise on the spread and suitability of leisure facilities across the borough, and in particular to focus on the range of facilities and manner of operation of the Kensington Leisure Centre in view of its potential redevelopment alongside the Kensington Academy.
- 1.3 We have examined the following principal topics:
 - the adequacy or otherwise of leisure facilities in the central area of the Borough;
 - the amount of outdoor space for leisure activities in the Borough;
 - whether residents' needs were being adequately catered for;
 - what the Council was doing well and what could be done better; and
 - the future of the Kensington Leisure Centre, its potential redevelopment, and what should be included in any new Centre.

2. MEETINGS

2.1 We have met on eleven occasions:

- 20 October 2010
- 25 November 2010 - visit to Northolt Leisure Centre
- 9 December 2010
- 11 March 2011
- 11 and 13 April 2011 - interviews with user and non user groups of Kensington Leisure Centre
- 13 and 29 June - focus group sessions with young people
- 20 July – tour of Kensington Leisure Centre facilities
- 2 August - discussion with residents' group representatives
- 1 September – by phone to approve this report (Cllr Gardner and Cllr Mason only)

3. A FOCUS ON KENSINGTON LEISURE CENTRE

3.1 The Council's commitment to building a new Academy and Leisure Centre on the existing Leisure Centre site became stronger during the course of our scrutiny. External funding rules mean the Academy must be completed ready for the first cohort of Year 7 pupils in September 2014. The economics of construction dictate that the new Leisure Centre should be built concurrently with the new Academy. These facts made it imperative for us to focus our attention on the existing and new Leisure Centre; otherwise our recommendations would come too late to influence the design of the new facilities.

3.2 The existing Leisure Centre comprises the following public facilities:

- 25 metre, 6 lane pool – when the 'boom' is lowered the pool can be made 33 metres long (900mm to 1.23m in depth and when boom down to a depth of 3 metres)
- 15 metre teaching pool (800mm to 900mm in depth)
- 55 station gym and 12 spinning bikes
- 6 court multi use hall with ancillary accommodation
- Small multi use hall
- 1 large workout studio
- 2 squash courts
- Café area
- A children's soft play area
- 3 junior five a side outdoor pitches
- A dedicated swimming unisex changing area, including 2 group changing rooms within it
- 'Dry' activities male / female changing areas
- Crèche Room
- 1 beauty room

- A health check consultation room

3.3 The Kensington Leisure Centre is open at the following times:

- Monday to Friday: 6:30am to 10.00pm
 - Saturday: 8.00am to 8.00pm
 - Sunday: 8.00am to 10.00pm

3.4 The programmes on offer are detailed on the website of GLL, the Council's sports and leisure centre partner. The two hyperlinks below provide details:

<http://www.gll.org>

<http://www.gll.org/lg/kensington.pdf>

3.5 The swimming programme comprises many different strands distributed across each day and across both the main and the teaching pools: 'lane swim'; lane swim (adults only); 'general swim'; 'Swimming Nature' (lessons); clubs; 'aqua'; aqua aerobics; 'pool party' (private hire); Aquababies; sports development; and group exercise. Several swimming clubs use the Centre including: Chelsea and Westminster Swimming Club; MCWG Swimming Club; Emperors Swimming Club; and Cosmos Subaqua Club.

3.6 The fitness programme is also very varied including: body conditioning; pilates; spin; cardio workout; yoga; 'strictly dance'; aerobics; zumba; keep fit; 'legs, bums, and tums'; 'step and tone'; 'body pump' and so on.

3.7 The gym offers 'abs' (muscular, strength, and endurance workout); junior gym; GP referral; personal training; and MOT health assessments.

3.8 The indoor sports hall can be booked for badminton, volleyball, indoor football, basketball, or indoor bowls.

3.9 Several clubs use the Centre, including: SM Basketball Association; Long Yang Badminton Club; Goslings Sports Club; Suchards Badminton Club; Olympic Wrestling Club; Teddy Tennis; Kensington Ju-Jitsu; Kensington Tae-Kwon-Do Club; Tyga Karate; and Zhuan Shu Kuan.

3.10 We cast our net wide and invited many individuals and organisations to talk to us about their experience and views on the existing Centre, and about their aspirations – and anxieties – about any new Centre. We saw everyone who responded to our invitation. We

spoke to the Council's Sports Development Team, Quadron Services (holders of the Council's Grounds Maintenance Contract, who also control the use of sports facilities in the Borough's parks), and Nuffield Health (who held the leisure centre management contract until 31 March 2011). We visited Northolt Leisure Centre in Ealing to find out how leisure facilities are organised in that area.

- 3.11 We spoke to representatives of six user groups, including clubs offering competitive activities and those representing people with disabilities. We listened to the views expressed by eight teenage members of the Lancaster Youth Centre and eight younger teenage pupils from Holland Park School. We invited representatives of residents groups who had already attended consultation events to share their views with us, which they did on 2 August 2011. We also took account of views on the new Leisure Centre expressed by representatives of residents' groups who had attended a 20 June 2011 consultation event on the Kensington Academy/Leisure Centre development. The Head of the local Primary Care Trust came to talk to us and provided evidence on how the new Leisure Centre could assist in encouraging more local people to adopt an active lifestyle.
- 3.12 Our visit to the new Northolt Leisure Centre was very useful. Usage and income were higher than expected – but so were the day to day running costs. We heard about the benefit of having a small library in the Northolt reception area, as it brings new people into the Centre. However we also heard the library was costly to run. When we asked if the Centre's managers would change anything if they were to go back to the drawing board – they replied they would create separate male and female changing rooms for the swimming pool (not a mixed 'village' changing area), and a bigger car park.
- 3.13 They assessed their top three successes at Northolt as: attracting 3500 members; getting over 1000 young people on the swim school programme; and a thriving Staying Active Programme for people aged over 50. The most frequent compliments users pay the new Centre are about: staff attitude; the flexibility and range of facilities on offer; and the support given to people with disabilities. The top three complaints are: the car park is too small; the village changing room makes some people uncomfortable; and the lack of a sauna and steam room.
- 3.14 Appendix 1 lists the user groups and residents groups represented in meetings with the Working Group.

4. FINDINGS IN RELATION TO KENSINGTON LEISURE CENTRE – BOTH "AS IS" AND AS IT MIGHT BE

4.1 Witnesses made the following points to us about the existing facilities

- the entrance to the centre needs to be made more welcoming; at the moment the barriers are more prominent than the Reception, which is to the side as you enter
- the layout needs to be made more convenient to users
- some dry side areas are under-used
- changing rooms provide insufficient privacy; their mixed use is universally unpopular
- swimming pools at certain times (e.g. Thursday evenings) are too crowded
- there are insufficient aids such as overhead tracking hoists for users with disabilities and their carers
- access only by ladder or hoist into the large pool can deter a number of swimmers – eg the frail, old, overweight or disabled – who wish to maintain their independence but are thwarted at the pool side edge
- equipment is not consistently in a fit state of repair and electronic doors sometimes do not operate
- lifts should be large enough for those on electric scooters and there should be parking outside designed to enable people with limited mobility to be set down close to the entrance
- dry side hire of spaces is limited and more flexibility in the design and use of these spaces (e.g. for dance studios) is needed
- improved signage is needed both inside the Centre and to it from nearby streets
- people like the café area, but the food is expensive, and it closes too early
- standards of cleaning and hygiene are not good enough
- temperature and ventilation are not comfortable at present – some areas are too cold (e.g. the unisex wet side changing area); some are too hot (e.g. the gym)
- the current Centre does not always manage the transition from one activity to another, e.g. gymnastics to wrestling
- information about the facilities on offer is poor and there is nothing to encourage a wet side user to try a dry side activity (e.g. a taster session or cross selling)

4.2 We heard many positive suggestions for increasing the number of regular users in a new Kensington Leisure Centre. These included:

- the new Leisure Centre should provide for some competitive sport but also give sufficient scope for leisure and fun activities
- a stronger focus on leisure could attract those with physically inactive lifestyles

- greater privacy for female users and particularly Muslim women would be popular (e.g. alterations to changing room layout, provision of women only sessions with no overlooking of the swimming pools)
- single sex sessions of dry side activities could attract more participation in sports such as volleyball and basketball
- introducing equipment such as computer games could attract younger people
- segregating the use of the Centre by age during certain periods of the week could make the facility more attractive to certain age groups
- free sessions for frequent users might incentivise greater use of facilities
- membership schemes need to compare favourably with other leisure centres
- the Council could improve the quality and reach of information about the new Centre in schools and sports clubs
- co-locating other services at the new Centre could attract new users and assist families in developing habits of active participation in activities

4.3 We heard evidence about the form of the new facilities to be provided in the rebuilt Centre. Witnesses told us:

- they supported the construction of a 25 metre 8 lane pool (we heard one witness argue for an Olympic size 50 metre pool)
- there was strong support for the construction of a leisure pool to complement the 25m swimming pool
- smaller pools need to be large enough for group use
- windows should be screened when the pool is used by women's groups and there should be no overlooking from within or from outside during these sessions
- there should be a sufficient number of overhead tracking hoists for swimmers with disabilities
- the pool temperature and surrounding air needs to be kept warm enough for elderly swimmers
- the sub aqua divers preferred 4 metres depth
- saunas and steam rooms would be popular
- there was a case for designing in recreational areas to attract new users, who might then be encouraged to adopt more strenuous activities
- there could be distinct areas within the gym – one part for really strenuous activity; another part for more recreational use
- the poor use of the existing gymnastics hall was noted by users. Witnesses welcomed the idea of a gymnastics hall that could be used more flexibly

- they supported the construction of a multi-use 8-court sports hall
- the changing rooms should be located away from the reception area
- all doors throughout the new Centre need to be easily opened by wheelchair users
- all areas should be level so that they are more accessible for wheelchair users
- there should be enough space within changing rooms to allow wheelchair users to manoeuvre freely
- pools need to provide non-hoist options for the disabled or elderly to access the water so that users can be self sufficient if they wish
- the lockers need to be more secure
- the indoor play area should remain and be integrated with the café
- the quality and size of the external landscaping and open space was a high priority
- adequate parking near the new Centre is needed

4.4 We also heard arguments in defence of the squash courts and the outdoor sports pitches. In relation to the latter we note that the Cabinet has already agreed to fund alternative compensatory provision in the form of new multi-use games areas at the Westway.

4.5 We had a long and useful meeting with local residents on 2 August, and we will send the Cabinet Member a full record of what was said that evening. Several of the points raised by residents have been included in this report. In particular, we have made recommendations in light of residents' views about the relationship between the Academy and the new Leisure Centre.

5. OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FACILITIES IN A NEW KENSINGTON LEISURE CENTRE

5.1 We saw at Northolt how a newly built leisure centre, incorporating a library service and neighbourhood police base, can become a lively focal point for a local community. We would not support the relocation of North Kensington Library from Ladbroke Grove to the new Centre as Ladbroke Grove is a more central location, more accessible and a large library; however, a small satellite library facility at the new Centre, similar to the Pembridge Road library with self service tills, could be a useful addition to introducing people to the Centre and vice versa to the Borough's libraries and borrowing books. It is important that any such services at the Centre have an active frontage and when closed do not detract from the ambiance of the Centre if it is still open.

5.2 Having heard the evidence of many witnesses, we recommend to the Cabinet the following design considerations. The architects of the new Kensington Leisure Centre should:

- design it to provide for informal leisure, social, and recreational activity as well as competitive sport. (Our findings supported the view that if the Centre hosted low-key activities such as lunch clubs and other recreational events, more local residents could find it less daunting to move on to physically active pursuits in the Leisure Centre.)
- consider the co-location of other services at the Centre to draw families into the building, who – through increasing familiarity with the building – might then be encouraged to adopt more active lifestyles. Care is needed that this does not radically impact the space available for sport and leisure.
- include a leisure pool in the design with easy access (i.e. not restricted to ladders) , providing fun for families near but separately from the main swimming pool; also provide a training pool as now – i.e. three pools in all.
- design it so it can readily meet the needs of people who, for whatever reason, are put off from leisure or sporting activity because of an inhibition about being watched by, or close to, strangers of the opposite sex – whether in swimming pools, dry side facilities, or in changing rooms.
- meet the needs of people with restricted mobility and other disabilities - throughout the whole Centre not just in parts of it
- incorporate space and facilities designed to attract young people into the Centre, such as a computer games area (provided these have a physical/sporting element to them e.g. Wii Fit) – and consider whether access to computer time could be on a 'reward' basis linked to completing physical activities
- include a steam room/sauna
- maximise the flexible use of dry side spaces for different activities so they can readily adapt to new trends in leisure, so they can expand or contract as required, and so they need not be dominated by any single user or type of user
- create a welcoming reception area, that is not dominated by entry barriers

- design out the wasted corridor and other spaces evident in the current Centre
- integrate the play area and café so parents can relax while keeping an eye on their children
- design the heating, cooling, and ventilation systems with great care, so there is minimal risk that users have to resort to informal solutions (such as leaving doors open)
- consider the design of changing areas with great care to ensure that they provide easy, same-level access, especially to wet side facilities, and provide for the segregation of men and women while also providing specific facilities for family groups to change in together
- design the pools with disabled access to allow user independence, rather than simple reliance on hoists for access
- consider the design and positioning of the lockers with equally great care, to ensure that users are fully confident that their belongings will be safe at all times
- provide adequate parking, especially for people with mobility problems
- include very clear signage within the building so that new users feel immediately confident about where they are and where they need to go
- seek to introduce new/existing users to a wide variety of sports/leisure activities outside their usual remit both by information and taster sessions, and signage of “what is on” at KLC
- ensure adequate provision for indoor and outdoor children’s play

5.3 We recommend that the Cabinet Member responsible for the management of the new Centre should:

- give the most careful consideration to ensuring reasonable continuity of service provision during the period between demolition and re-opening of the new Centre
- ensure that community access to the new leisure centre is not squeezed out by allocating too much exclusive use to pupils from the new Academy; residents told us that the swimming

pool should not become a form of 'school baths' used exclusively for the school

- aim to create training and employment opportunities for the local community in the new Leisure Centre and in building it
- consider offering greater incentives in the pricing of entrance fees and flexible types of membership to encourage regular and frequent use of the new Leisure Centre. (The young people we questioned had a number of novel ideas and expected special offers to be targeted at them.)
- when setting fees and charges, always have regard to the affordability of the Centre, particularly for young people, families, and people receiving disability living allowance
- consider arranging activities at specific times of the week for specific age groups for their exclusive use of part or all the facilities. (There was evidence that young people disliked sharing facilities with older age groups and the boisterous exuberance of youth was not always welcomed by much older users. We heard evidence about the special measures needed to sustain the interest of teenage girls.)
- ensure that GLL and officers actively engage with local communities to draw them towards the Centre; ensure they detect and overcome all the different barriers that deter local people from participation (information, communication including language barriers (e.g. by having a membership or induction day for Somali women with a member of the community who can interpret for them), pricing, image, initial welcome, accessibility and so on), putting the improvement of the community's health as the principal priority
- wherever possible take the services offered by the new Centre out into the community, in particular in the nearby social housing estates (examples of venues suggested to us included the North Kensington Resource Centre and the Estate Management Board Community Rooms)
- ensure that officers publicise the new Centre more effectively within schools. (We noted little evidence that pupils in Holland Park School had the information available on the current facilities and clubs.)
- ensure that the streets around and leading to the new Centre have clear, attractive signs indicating how new users can find the Centre

- continue the policy of ensuring that the new Centre complements other sports or activity related facilities in the vicinity and does not duplicate or compete with excellent facilities nearby e.g. the Westway Sports Centre's climbing wall and indoor tennis facilities
- consider how local transport links to the Centre might be improved
- ensure spotless cleanliness throughout the new Centre; ensure all kit and equipment not being used is put away promptly; ensure all kit and equipment is clean and in repair

5.4 We ask the Scrutiny Committee to endorse these recommendations so that we can pass them on to the Cabinet Members most closely concerned with the construction and funding of the new Kensington Leisure Centre. If the recommendations are endorsed, we ask officers to pass the recommendations in paragraph 5.2 to the Design Group that is drafting the brief for the architect.

FOR DECISION

COUNCILLOR JOANNA GARDNER (CHAIRMAN)
COUNCILLOR BARBARA CAMPBELL
COUNCILLOR PAT MASON

Background papers: Notes taken at Working Group Meetings

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