

Environment and Climate Change

Report of: Cllr Nurullah Turan, Executive Member for Health and Social Care

Meeting of: Executive

Date: 18th May 2023

Ward: Finsbury Park

Subject: Sobell Leisure Centre Facilities Changes

1. Synopsis

1. To set out the serious impact of the Thames Water Mains flood in August 2022 on the Sobell Leisure Centre
2. To explain the issues relating to the reinstatement of an ice rink at the Sobell and the potential alternative facilities.
3. To set out the proposed consultation and engagement process for the next phase and the constraints that the insurance claim place upon this.

2. Recommendations

1. That the Council is minded not to reinstate an ice rink at the Sobell Leisure Centre for the reasons set out in the report.
2. To consult and engage with users and the wider community on the proposal not to reinstate the ice rink and to replace the lost facilities with a new offer to appeal to a wider user base to increase physical activity particularly by young people.
3. To delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Resources in consultation with the Executive Member for Health and Social Care to make a decision as to the future uses of Sobell, following the consultation.

3. Background

- 3.1 In August 2022 Sobell Leisure Centre suffered a major flood as a direct result of a Thames Water Mains bursting on Tollington Road which has affected the entire ground floor of the Leisure Centre. This flood has caused major damage to the facilities and services on offer at the centre and both LBI and GLL have been engaging contractors and specialists in immediate remediation and in consultation with the insurers are developing a plan of reinstatement.
- 3.2 All floors will require replacement throughout, and this has added complexity as the original Granwood was overlaid in 2011 by an Olympic standard Gransprung floor for Volleyball training facilities for London 2012. Also, in 2018 GLL introduced an Extreme Trampoline Park in half of the sports hall that put trampolines and structures on top of this floor as well as 2 mezzanine floors and a central sports hall full height steel framed dividing wall.
- 3.2 All the facilities/equipment and fixtures and fittings at Sobell including the Trampoline Park and the Ice Rink, Squash courts, Soft play area, Dojo have been condemned and written off and have been stripped out, including the full height central partition wall. This has been far more extensive than initially envisaged and has been a process that has taken time to establish the full extent of damage at each stage of the investigation and have that formally written off by the insurers.
- 3.3 Whilst it was originally envisaged that GLL would simply re-instate the damaged and lost facilities the extent of the damage has meant that there is an opportunity to reconsider and re-think the facilities and offer at Sobell. The Trampoline Park facility is now 5 years old and there were plans to re-refresh the offer to keep it current and this also needs to be considered in the context of an extremely challenging operating environment for GLL with the impacts of inflation, the rise in utility costs, the cost-of-living crisis and the impact of government austerity on Council budgets.
- 3.4 Throughout the last financial year, the Leisure contract has been impacted significantly by the disproportionate rise in utility costs, wider expenditure increases in staffing, materials, maintenance and chemicals as well as the growing impact that the rise in inflation is having on the community's disposable income. Islington is not alone in this struggle, the sector has made its plight known nationally and at ministerial level. The impact of this particularly in the management of pools is posing a major viability/affordability issue for local authority providers and in turn creates a serious threat to the future of the Leisure Sector as this impact is even greater than the financial impact of Covid.
- 3.5 **Ice Rink**
- The Ice Rink at the Sobell has been condemned and the full cost of the replacement rink and infrastructure is in excess of £1.8 million exc. vat, and this does not include fees.
- 3.6 The Ice rink operated at a deficit of £0.25 million per annum and this was in advance of the increases in utilities costs. The Ice rink market is being influenced in the wider context as there is a new double Olympic sized venue reopening at the Lee Valley Ice Centre this

summer. The Alexandra Palace Ice rink has also taken significant Sobell bookings and customers that may not return.

- 3.7 This forced closure and catastrophic damage has inevitably led to a loss of custom with people instead using the Alexandra Palace rink. The Lee Valley Centre will further absorb custom when it opens in the summer. Business analysis suggests that a re-instated ice rink which is much smaller than the other two competitive providers will not be able sustain improved usage and attendance levels. Sobell did have some benefit from the closure of Lee Valley during its makeover. However, the £0.250 million deficit per annum included this so it is very likely that the financial position would be worse if reinstated.
- 3.8 The ice rink is a high energy consumer and even with new facilities would continue to be so due to the nature of the activity. Energy costs have increased for the Leisure estate by 156% from £703,000 to £1.8 million. The £250,000 deficit only includes a third of a year with the higher utility costs, so a full operating year with the higher costs will mean a higher level of deficit. GLL manage the Lee Valley Ice Rink on behalf of the Lee Valley Regional Park and with its expansion will be able to negotiate some of the Sobell Ice rink usage being dispersed into its new programme so that the customers get an improved service offer. This was already being discussed as part of the mitigation for the current loss of the ice rink provision.
- 3.9 The Ice rink was a high consumer of energy by the very nature of it. With the very high costs of electricity this makes high energy consuming facilities difficult to be financially viable. There are also the environmental impacts of high energy consumption. The Ice arena was running on 593,216kWh load per year and therefore a carbon footprint of 125.23 tonnes being emitted per annum. This equates to about 70% of the total electricity consumption for the Sobell. The Council is committed to being a net zero borough by 2030. The Sobell already has a large solar array on the roof which helps to offset the carbon impact of the centre. Opportunities to increase the renewable element of the required electricity load are limited. To not re-instate the ice rink and provide a much lower power demand facility provides an opportunity to reduce the carbon footprint of the centre significantly. Under the contract with GLL the energy price rise cost is shared on a 50:50 basis with the Council so there is a direct financial cost to the Council.
- 3.10 When it was operative, the Ice rink attracted:
- 8 Clubs – 1 club is going back to Lee Valley (Lee Valley Ice Hockey)
 - Lesson & Course numbers – 302 Per week and Average monthly casual usage is 800 user visits per month which is less than 30 per day
 - GLL Employ Coaches - 5

The ice rink does have a long history and a core base of regular users, clubs and coaches that use the facility. An on-line petition has already been started to save the ice rink which has achieved 2,286 signatories at the time of this report.

3.8 **Sports Hall and Trampoline Park New Options**

The Sports Hall and Trampoline Park are having to be completely replaced and reinstated along with the steelwork to the mezzanine floor and central wall to the sports

hall. This means there is a potential opportunity of reorientating the layout of the sports hall and the trampoline park which would not require the reintroduction of the mezzanine floors by flipping the sports hall and the trampoline park over to the opposite side. This would create an opportunity of connecting the ice rink space and the trampoline park by creating a seamless transition on this side of the centre by connecting these two spaces to incorporate a different offer.

- 3.9 The Trampoline Park has welcomed 3 times the number of sports hall users since its introduction. It has predominantly attracted families and young people. To build on this success, GLL have proposed that the new Trampoline Park offer is adapted to combine a new attractive offer of a Trampoline Park, Inflatable zone, "Ninja Warrior" area and junior soft play so that there is a junior to teenage (including older teens) offer in this area that leads on from the toddler baby soft play zone. When looking at users by age, there was a notable decrease in the number of users aged 10-20, 54-58, and 65-86, compared to all other ages. The first group is particularly noticeable as the Sobell Centre should be able to provide engaging activities for younger people within this age bracket. The potential offer would look to target this specific under-represented age group.
- 3.10 Appended to this report is a layout proposal that is a combination of two companies that could make the Sobell Leisure Centre one of the UK's leading family sport and leisure facilities (Appendix 1). Any proposals would be subject to consultation and engagement.
- 3.11 Under these proposals the sports hall would then be reintroduced on the western side and would encompass a newly laid sprung floor and would make a clear delineation of sports activities on the western side of the centre and leisure trampoline /adventure soft play experience space activities on the eastern side. It would put Sobell back on the map and would re-energise the offer and make it a visitor attraction centre whilst maintaining its sporting and community offer. Creating more opportunities for families and under 5s in the expanded soft play zone then generates new families and more under 5s into the centres wider programme, so ancillary activities like holiday programmes gymnastics and junior programmes will all also increase. The proposals would also provide an improved offer for older children and teenagers with a number of the features aimed towards older children, including teenagers. The 10 to 20 age group has been identified as a group that are under-represented in usage of the Sobell and this offer is aimed to appeal specifically to that age group.

Alternative Options

- 3.12 The main alternative option would be to simply re-instate the facilities as before. There would be some options to do a smaller re-refresh of the Trampoline Park to incorporate the soft play offer into it and re-purpose the old soft play and make some alterations to the community sports offer which could be done following a period of stakeholder consultation. However, for the reasons set out in this report it is officers' view that the reinstatement of the ice rink is very unlikely to be a viable option because of the financial deficit that it operates at, the levels of usage in comparison to other offers and the carbon impact of the facility.
- 3.13 The usage levels in the existing trampoline park were up to 120 per hour whereas the new proposed area has the potential for 150-300 visits per hour and projections are based on overall usage increasing up to 250,000 user visits. The new proposals would therefore bring in 110,000 new user visits a year (an extra 2000 per week). The

alternative proposals would demonstrate a significant community benefit with affordable concessionary pricing access and fee-paying customers contributing to a significantly improved business plan.

- 3.14 There is potential that when the Council and GLL engage and consult with users it may be proposed that there would be an option to re-instate the sports hall back to its original 16 court size. This is not an option that is viable for the Council to consider for two principal reasons. To re-instate the full sports hall would result in a significant reduction in visitor numbers as the previous Trampoline Park attracted far more users than the previous sports hall space. It would also be a huge financial cost to the Council as the Trampoline Park generated significantly more revenue than the half of the sports hall and so any proposals would need to generate at least the equivalent amount of income to be sustainable and restoring the full 16 court sports hall would not do that. Therefore, that is not being proposed as a viable option in the consultation.
- 3.15 Prior to the flood at Sobell Leisure Centre, the Council, GLL and Whittington Health have been in dialogue about moving the Neurological Rehabilitation Unit into the centre from their current premises to free up space to enable a wider Council development to proceed. The Council would still like to see that proceed given the clear links to early intervention and prevention in using physical activity to support people with long term health conditions in their recovery, this would be absorbed into the old soft play area.
- 3.16 With the introduction of more young people to the centre it would also like to provide more on- site youth engagement programmes through consultation and GLL would like to expand the capacity of this offer.

3.16 **Benefits and Social Value of Proposals**

In the recently adopted Islington Active Together Strategy the Council's vision is to empower our communities to be more physically active. The Strategy sets out three guiding principles:

- Focussing our resources on the residents who are least active and empowering them to become more active.
- Challenging inequalities in access to, and participation in, physical activity. The service will focus on children and young people and the groups who are traditionally less likely to be physically active, including people living with a disability or long-term health conditions, Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, women and girls, older adults and people living in areas of higher deprivation.
- Recognising the powerful impact that physical activity can have in preventing and managing a range of long-term health conditions, including supporting good mental health.

- 3.17 The proposals that are set out in this paper for the Sobell Leisure Centre are guided very much by these principles. The introduction of the trampoline park demonstrated the vital role that more informal leisure offers are to increasing usage levels and drawing in new audiences. A formal sports offer does not appeal to all and making physical activity fun is critical in breaking down barriers, particularly for children and young people in being more

physically active. The proposals could see a rise in usage levels of 250,000 people a year with a majority being the key target group of young people. It also has a broader appeal to a much wider demographic group enabling a much broader range of people to access physical activity.

- Islington's School's health and wellbeing team conducted online surveys and focus groups with 706 local girls, they found that the girls want fun activities, things they don't try in school. Most of all they enjoy being active with friends. The new products provide an ideal opportunity for targeted activity for secondary school girls and local youth clubs.
 - GLL could provide targeted sessions to support people with disabilities to utilise the products. This would involve partnership work with local schools, Disability Sports Coach, Centre 404, Elfrida Society and more. The estimated number of Islington residents with a disability in 2021 is 36,656 or 15% of the population.
 - As of 2019 Finsbury Park was the most deprived ward in Islington. In addition to low-cost pricing GLL could work with local partners to ensure there are opportunities available for low-income families during term time and the school holidays. This would include schools, children's centres, Access to Sports, food banks and the local youth hubs.
 - Sobell Leisure Centre would provide opportunities for local schools, nurseries and children's centres to use the products. This will help improve health, wellbeing and educational outcomes for pupils, with a particular emphasis on the least active children and girls.
 - Sport England's Active Lives Survey of Young People for the academic year 2021/22 states 42.7% of 5–16-year-olds in Islington were active, which is less than the London average of 45.3%, and 36.4% were inactive, which is above than the London average of 32.7%.
 - The proposed new facilities could support young people in Islington to be more active. There are 69,259 people aged 0-15 within 9 minutes travel of Sobell Leisure Centre.
 - There were an estimated 12,220 children aged 0 to 4 years living in Islington in 2020/21 (Bright Start 2022). A higher percentage of these children live in the North and Central localities (39% and 37% respectively) compared to the South (24%).
 - It is clear that children and families would benefit significantly in terms of improvement and focus on reducing childhood obesity, improving mental health, providing access to all in order to mitigate established trends in health outcomes within specific populations and demographics.
- 3.18 This project talks directly to the Council's ambition to give its young people the best start in life, as outlined within the most recent health and wellbeing strategy for children. GLL will ensure it prioritises and focuses on these priorities and widen the focus on target groups to include e.g., looked after children, those with long term conditions and those with extreme healthcare needs This proposal creates larger routes into employment and increased abilities to offer career pathways, training, and development such as apprenticeship schemes and improved employment rates within Islington. Comparing the required working hours between the offers, there will be a potential additional 300 hours a week to be employed into. Providing, typically 20 new placements both full and part time within the facility.

3.19 Insurance Constraints.

The timing of the decision making on this is particularly important due to the critical path of the works to Sobell Leisure Centre. The extent of damage is now significantly more than initially envisaged. It has taken longer to scope and define. The investigatory works have revealed significant structural and foundation disrepair. This has resulted in the rink being taken back to a bare bone shell.

- 3.20 A detailed defined cost for re-instatement and a full scope of works. Is now available. There have been significant inroads made on the enabling phase of works across all of the ground floor damaged areas and the team now need to plan for the redesign as soon as possible without aborting works and leaving the site dormant. The cost to reinstate the ice rink has now been detailed at £1.8m excluding VAT and excluding fees and placing an order of this scale and specialism is always subject to risk due to parts and supply chains being so specialist.
- 3.21 Any decision making about the revised proposals needs to be carried out within the context of the insurance claim. The Council and GLL will be claiming from our insurers who will then seek to recover those costs from Thames Water's insurers. The insurers have agreed in principle that they will pay for alternative facilities to be installed rather than to re-instate what was there if that is now no longer considered viable or appropriate. However, the costs of that must be no more than it would be to reinstate and not take any longer. The Project team have now established what the full reinstatement costs would be and the timelines for doing that along with the timelines for an alternative offer.
- 3.22 To reinstate the ice rink would take 44 weeks. To implement the revised proposals would be 28 weeks. This is a 16-week difference. So, this allows just over 3 months to consult and decide in order to stay within the insurance limitations. The window for a decision to be made has been agreed with the insurers as the 6th of April which was the point at which the Council would have been ready to place an order if the decision was to re-instate having had all the quotation and enabling works information from its principal contractor. This takes us to the 26th of July as the point by which a decision on any alternative proposals needs to be made. The construction period is then 28 weeks.
- 3.22 A consultation and engagement plan has been developed for a 6-week period to try and balance the need to have a meaningful engagement period but to still manage that within the insurance window. If the Council can stay within that then the costs of the intervention are covered by insurance and there is no cost to the Council.

6th April – Insurance window of 16 weeks commenced.

10th May – Executive report published on decision to not re-instate the ice rink

18th May – Executive Committee decision

25th May – call in period ends

26th May – Launch of consultation and engagement

7th July – End of consultation

25th July – Key Decision on outcome of the consultation

26th July – end of insurance window and issuing of instructions to design team

28th February 24 – Final completion of all the works.

3.23 Consultation & Engagement

A consultation and communications plan alongside an engagement plan has been put together to ensure that key stakeholder organisations and target groups are engaged. There will be a particular focus on families, children and young people. There will be an on-line survey open to all that will be hosted on the Let's Talk Islington Engagement site. This will be the main tool we use to gather data and will have a mix of quantitative and free text questions. A URL / QR code linking to the survey will be added to the main information flyers which will be distributed throughout leisure centres and other community locations. Limited hard copies will be available in leisure centres and libraries for people who are not able to access the digital site and want to share their thoughts. We will also distribute flyers with the QR codes to local schools (e.g., Pakeman) and faith centres (e.g., Finsbury Park Mosque).

- 3.24 There will be targeted engagement sessions onsite with key current user groups. This will be a mix of specific hosted sessions and drop in's to scheduled activities to speak to current users and publicise the survey. There will of course be specific engagement sessions with the ice rink users about how to best mitigate any impacts.
- 3.25 Thirdly there would be targeted outreach sessions with current non-users and key target groups, particularly to include young people (particularly teenagers) and older people and those with disabilities.
- 3.26 We will do targeted survey outreach in community settings to reach these groups, making use of May half term activities on estates to reach young people and going to spaces such as GP surgeries. We will also focus on the immediate catchment of people who could benefit from the space, such as the Harvist and Andover Estates, for example by going to the Friday food project drop in at the Andover community centre.
- 3.27 The consultation and engagement exercise will focus on the proposed new offer at the Sobell to obtain feedback on the proposals and to shape and influence the final offer. It will also seek views about the proposed non-retention of the ice rink. GLL have worked with a number of companies to produce a proposal to evolve the previous Trampoline Park offer with a new offer that provides a single space experience with the old ice rink and the sports hall space to create a family experience from 0 to 19 involving an expanded soft play offer, slides, 'ninja warrior', inflatables and trampolines. The proposal is not a final design and there will be a final design that will incorporate the feedback. The consultation will also focus on the future opportunities for programming and new activities including opportunities to expand the boxing offer and the potential to provide new capacity and opportunities for new sports. One of those options will be to explore the potential to increase outdoor pitch provision around the grounds of the centre. Questions will focus around views on the proposed designs, what additional services or activities people want to see, how the centre can be made more accessible for different groups.

3.28 Discussions are continuing with GLL as the operator of the Lee Valley Ice Centre around the potential to absorb the clubs and lessons and courses into their new programme and the question of discounts will be raised. GLL are confident that lessons and courses can be easily absorbed. There will need to be discussions with the clubs around their programming needs and how they can potentially be accommodated into the new programme at the centre. The Council is keen to secure some level of discount for Sobell ice rink members at the new facility and are in active discussions about that. It should be noted that the centre is owned by Lee Valley Regional Park Authority not GLL and so any concessions would have to be agreed with them.

3.29 Elections

The Sobell Centre is the venue used for Election Counts which take place on the sports courts. The next scheduled elections in Islington are the Greater London Authority (GLA) elections which will be taking place on Thursday 2 May 2024. It is not known when the date of the next Parliamentary General election will be however it will be called by January 2025, therefore there is a possibility that it could be held on the same day as the GLA elections. While the Sobell Centre is the preferred venue, particularly for Parliamentary elections due to the location of the venue and the balcony space for media and broadcasters there is an alternative count venue which is the Islington Tennis Centre on Market Road. If the Sobell Leisure Centre wasn't available and the Council did use the Islington Tennis Centre it would be unlikely that it would be able to accommodate any broadcasters due to the outside space for broadcasting kit and vehicles and venue access points.

4. Implications

4.1 Financial Implications

The Sobell Centre Ice Rink suffered a major flood as a direct result of a Thames Water Mains bursting on Tollington Road in August 2022. The capital costs of re-instating the ice rink would be covered by the insurers (capped at £1.8M), however the operating costs would remain with GLL and the Council.

Prior to the flood, the ice rink was operating at a deficit of £250,000 per annum. Further factors affecting the viability of the ice rink are;

- Increasing energy costs that make such a facility uneconomical, particularly as the energy price rise risk is shared 50:50 with the Council.
- The changing market, in particular the opening of a brand-new facility in Lea Valley ice centre which is within relatively close proximity.

It is therefore very likely that if the Council was to re-instate the ice rink, then;

- The operating deficit would be higher than it was.

- The cost-of-living crisis would make it a more challenging trading environment for GLL to be able to support and sustain the current business position.
- If the ice rink continued to be economically unsustainable, the Council may not have the financial resources to maintain the offer.

GLL pay an annual rent to the Council. During lockdown, the Council deferred rental payments to support GLL through that period. That deferred rent is £2.76 million and GLL only pays this back to the Council when the contract can move to a surplus position. If the Sobell Centre continues to operate with such a significant operating loss, then GLL will be unable to return to that position. It is anticipated that the alternative proposals are likely to improve the business plan by reducing expenditure and significantly increasing usage and therefore income. Any surpluses that would be achieved would be a payment to Council until the deferred rent was repaid.

The costs of any new proposals would be covered by the insurers, as long as any proposals cost no more and take no longer than if the Council was to simply re-instate the rink. This therefore provides the Council with a unique opportunity to review the viability of the current provision and to cover the costs of providing something different.

The constraints of the insurance though, do mean that the decision has to be made within a particular window as set out in the body of the report. If the Council was to move outside of that time period, then there would be a financial risk to the Council as the insurers would no longer indemnify the Council for the loss of rent, or GLL for the loss of income. There would also be inflationary cost increases that the insurers would not cover. The exact financial risk to the Council is not possible at this stage to calculate, as it would involve a complex discussion with the insurers and GLL around the level of liability.

4.2 Legal Implications / Consultation

The council has a statutory power but not a duty to provide leisure centres. That power, which is set out in section 19 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Powers) Act 1976, enables the council to 'provide, inside or outside its area, such recreational facilities as it thinks fit and, without prejudice to the generality of the powers conferred by the preceding provisions of this subsection, those powers include in particular powers to provide—

(a) indoor facilities consisting of sports centres, swimming pools, skating rinks, tennis, squash and badminton courts, bowling centres, dance studios and riding schools;'

There is no statutory duty under the 1976 Act to consult residents / users when proposing changes to introducing or changing the existing recreational facilities. Further, there is no statutory guidance that requires consultation to be undertaken.

Leisure contract

Under the leisure contract, GLL are responsible for implementing the capital works programme in respect of the leisure centres. GLL may change the programme but only

with the council's consent in accordance with the Approval Procedure (clause 95 and Schedule 26 Part 3).

The Council and GLL are required to comply with the Liaison Procedure (see clause 47 and Schedule 9). This provides for the establishment of the Project Liaison Group whose functions include providing 'a forum for joint strategic discussion and consideration of all aspects with regard to this Agreement including ensuring dissemination of information and consideration of the views of all the stakeholders connected with the Works and Services'. Whilst 'stakeholders' are not defined, the Authority's Requirements in Schedule 1 refer, in the context of the Annual Service Plan, to 'Current stakeholders are to include at least; Leisure Officers, ProActive Islington, Children and Young Peoples officers, Public Health, Access 2 Sports, Arsenal FC Community Development Team, key clubs based at the Facility and School Sports Partnership Sport Islington key schools'.

The Authority's Requirements require GLL to be /act as the Authority's leisure partner and deliver the Services both at the Facilities and outside in the community that have effective stakeholder and partner collaboration across the Borough's sport and physical activity sector to achieve wider outcomes.

GLL method statement 2.1 Increasing Participation and Sports Development refers, amongst other matters to 'Customer forums/focus groups - help GLL gain a deeper understanding of the local community, allowing us to tailor products and services to their needs.' which suggests consultation with those groups to get their views on proposed new services.

The GLL method statement on the upkeep of the leisure centres state:

'Requirements for lifecycle renewal and replacement will be identified through a number of sources of information including

- The existing backlog of maintenance work
- Best practice and manufactures recommendations
- Monitoring and measurement activities
- Consultation and communication with key stakeholders including the Council'

Reference is also made to 'Customer consultation on major refurbishments and new builds'.

GLL is required to comply with their service delivery proposals (clause 12) and the above extracts form those proposals illustrate their commitment to consulting customers / stakeholders regarding the facilities / services provided or to be provided at the centres.

4.3 Environmental Implications and contribution to achieving a net zero carbon Islington by 2030

The ice rink is a high energy demand facility. The energy load of the ice rink is 593,216kWh load per year and therefore a carbon footprint of 125.23 tonnes being emitted per annum. This equates to about 70% of the total electricity consumption for the Sobell. By changing the offer it would support the Council's ability to reduce the carbon footprint and enable more of the centre's energy needs to be met through renewable sources.

4.4 Equalities Impact Assessment

The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed, see Appendix 2. There would be both positive and negative impacts from the proposed changes. The main negative impacts from the proposed closure of the ice rink are the impact on the large portion of female users (72%) and in particular, young females, with 52% being 30 or under. The main positives are that the proposed changes to the Sobell Leisure Centre generate significantly increased usage of the leisure facilities and provide a broad and inclusive offer for young people, and inactive young people in particular. The Sobell Leisure centre changes include the expansion of two existing services namely the Trampoline Park and the soft play and the omission of the Ice Rink. The activities being proposed will appeal to a wider range of people than the ice rink, and the scale and reach of an expanded soft play will attract more families and the revised facilities would increase the offer for young people aged five to nineteen. The proposed changes would in summary include an array of reduced cost and free access times throughout the year with concessionary reduced pricing accessibility in holiday times, weekends and after school times as well as allow for schools and group access. There is also a recognition that Sobell would need to provide some more youth access times and develop some targeted youth sport at the centre and create a Youth sports evening.

If it's confirmed that the ice rink does not re-open then mitigation will be required through the absorption of the lessons and courses at the Lee Valley Ice Centre, operated by GLL along with programmed time for the clubs to be able to relocate. The Council is also negotiating the potential of discounts for the clubs and ice members at the Sobell.

5 Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 5.1 The financial costs of operating the ice rink at a significant deficit are not considered to be sustainable particularly in the context of high utility prices and high levels of inflation along with the changing ice offer with the opening of the Lee Valley Ice Centre.
- 5.2 The ice rink has a significant carbon footprint of 125 tonnes of carbon per year. Not re-instating the ice rink would save a significant level of carbon and enable renewable options to cover more of the utility load for the centre enabling the centre to move closer towards a net zero carbon position.
- 5.3 Usage levels of the ice rink are relatively low in comparison with the potential increases in usage levels of alternative facilities that are appealing to a broader range of users and have increased capacity. This would support the Council's strategic objective to get more inactive residents active, in particular, but not exclusively, children and teenagers.
- 5.4 It is not considered economically viable for the Council to continue to operate an ice rink and the consultation and engagement exercise will be clear that this is not considered a likely option but to seek people's views regarding that and to shape and influencing the alternative proposals and the activities and programmes that could take place in a newly restored Sobell Leisure Centre.
- 5.5 The recommendation is that the Council is strongly minded to not re-instate the ice rink and to consult on that and on the Council's preferred alternative provisions. This alternative offer increases levels of usage and physical activity, is more sustainable and provides a better financial position in the challenging economic circumstances. The outcome of the consultation and the recommendations for the final proposals are recommended to be a key decision for the Corporate Director of Resources following consultation with the Executive Member for Health and Social Care.

Appendices:

- Appendix 1 – GLL Proposal for Soft Play and Tramp/Air Park Sobell
- Appendix 2 – Equality Impact Assessment Sobell Proposals

Final report clearance:

Signed by:

Councillor Nurullah Turan, Executive Member for Health and Social Care

Date: 02/05/23

Report Author: Andrew Bedford

Tel: 020 7527 3287

Email: Andrew.Bedford@islington.gov.uk

Legal Implications Author: Marie Rosenthal

E-mail: Marie.Rosenthal@islington.gov.uk

Financial Implications Author: Donna Davis

E-mail: Donna.Davis@islington.gov.uk