

## **REPORT TO STRATEGIC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Date of Meeting: 03<sup>rd</sup> April 2025

### **PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S REPORT TO SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Cllr Duncan Wood – Leisure Services and Physical Activity**

#### **Annual Summary and Highlights**

- 4.3 million recorded visits since onboarding Leisure in 2020
- 2 million visits in 2024
- 5,810 memberships sold since 1<sup>st</sup> April 24
- Club live – 12,846 members to date
- Group exercise – since April 2024, 88,295 participants
- Swim school – 2,003 swimmers participating in swim lessons each month
- GP Referral Scheme – this year we will have delivered over 900 sessions and 768 classes to some of our most vulnerable Exeter residents

#### **1. Issues relating to achieving the Council's published priorities**

##### **'Healthy & Active City'**

**Wonford – The Vision for the Wonford Community Wellbeing Hub as agreed with the community is:**

**To create a single hub facility to act as a focal point in the community - to promote access to, and participation in, community, health & wellbeing activities and services, to better connect with the nearby green space and better meet the needs of the local community.**

Planning permission was granted with a formal decision notice and pre-commencement conditions on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> February

A capital funding bid to Sport England was submitted, also in February, with the outcome expected in April.

The next phase of work includes:

- a review of the Business Case which supported the funding bid,
- detailed design of the new facility

- preparation of tender documents
- Delivering a funding strategy.
- Considering and progressing the management model for the building

## **2. Potential changes to services/provisions being considered**

**Northbrook** – At the budget-setting meeting on 28 February, the Council had to identify £3.5 million savings to set a balanced budget for the next financial year.

Part of the measures to achieve this included a reduction to the budget of the Leisure Service of £586,000. To achieve these savings, the Leisure service has had to review the centres it runs.

The Northbrook Swimming pool, despite extensive initiatives to increase usage, continues to be used by a low number of people.

Although a small community pool, its running costs are high because of the design and age of the building and pool itself. This means the income from the centre is substantially less than it costs to run it.

The decision to close Northbrook Swimming Pool will only be considered after hearing from the community it serves and after assessing the impact of the potential closure on its users.

A consultation started on 11 March and will last for six weeks.

It will involve setting up focus groups, an online and paper survey and direct contact with members and users.

When the consultation has been completed, a full analysis of the impacts will take place before any decision is made.

**Exeter Arena** – Exeter Arena is a key athletics and sporting facility in the Southwest, playing a vital role in the local and regional sporting landscape, sitting with the City Council's Leisure Portfolio. To ensure the sustainable future of the facility the Council is exploring alternative models of management that enhance service delivery, community engagement and financial viability.

By exploring alternative management models, the aim of ECC is to ensure the facility remains a high-quality, accessible, and financially viable resource for athletes, community groups, and residents.

### **Repairs to Leisure stock**

Due to ongoing issues with the procured contractors the decarb project at Riverside Leisure Centre was postponed. A second application to the government's decarbonisation fund has been submitted in the hope of these works taking place in 2026.

## **3. Update or commentary on any major ongoing programmes of work**

## **Newtown – Active Travel scheme**

The community consultation is complete, all residents in Newtown were sent information and 4 engagement events were held. 60 local residents have completed the survey. The results are currently being analysed with a view to sharing with SMB and members before a proposal going to DCC HATOC in July 2025. The scheme is on track for delivery in September.

The proposals include:

- Providing new walking and cycling infrastructure through the triangle car park
- Closing Russell Street and providing new walking and cycling infrastructure and new public realm
- Improvements to the highway and public realm along Clifton Road
- Improvements to the access to Belmont Park

## **Wellbeing Exeter**

Wellbeing Exeter and Cranbrook is a collaborative partnership working together to promote and improve the wellbeing of individuals and communities in Exeter and Cranbrook. The program focuses on connecting people to their communities, supporting individuals to improve their health, and fostering community connections. Key outcomes include increased physical activity, improved mental health, and greater community engagement. The initiative also aims to address health inequalities by targeting priority areas and providing tailored support to those in need

- Exeter City Council committed funding to deliver the new Wellbeing Exeter core model in 2024/25, with additional funding secured from Sport England in 2024/25 to continue as a core partner. Following a successful tender process, CoLab were appointed as the Wellbeing Exeter contract holder and their overview of the programme began on 1st July 2024.
- Over quarters two and three, around 200 referrals were made into the service and almost 300 individuals were involved in activities facilitated by Community Physical Activity Organisers
- A two-year contract extension was agreed for 2025/26 and 2026/27
- Work continues, to design and deliver a targeted enhanced model, funded by Sport England, including focusing on Getting People Back into Work, Equality Diversity and Inclusion, Access to Walking and Cycling and Leisure Partnership
- The contract with CoLab to deliver Wellbeing Cranbrook ends, as planned, on 31/03/2025, with commissioning transferring to East Devon. The Wellbeing Exeter partnership is supporting this transition

**Financial Performance** - Exeter Leisure continues to perform ahead of target. Quarter 4 results show the service is significantly ahead on predictions.  
We are expecting £646.6k in additional income due to the national VAT rebate in Leisure which has been a big piece of work for our teams pulling the data together for this claim.

**Physical Activity as a route to health** - We continue to work closely with the NHS who not only refer into our scheme, they also use our facilities to deliver some of their rehabilitation classes. These include cardiac rehab, heart failure, falls prevention, lower limb, back fit, knee fit and neurofit.

Exeter Leisure have grown the GP Referral scheme significantly over the last 12 months and now offer 75 exercise Referral gym-based sessions/classes ran each week at our leisure centres.

ECC continues to work closely with our partners Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital, Devon Partnership NHS Trust, Stroke Association and FORCE cancer charity delivering referral classes for patients. Alongside this we provide sessions for non-curative patients.

#### **4. Issues that may impact services delivery/financial performance/future budget requirements**

**Staffing** - there is still a shortage of swimming instructors and lifeguards nationally and we are not immune. Exeter Leisure is now working in partnership with Swim England to deliver local training courses within our centres in the hope of increasing interest in the Swim Instructor roles. We will also be linking in with local higher educational settings to engage with school leavers and sports study students.

**Aging Stock**- aside from St Sidwell's Point, the majority of the Leisure Stock is aging and in need of repairs.