

<b>Mayor &amp; Cabinet</b>		
<b>Report Title</b>	Development of a Soft Play facility at Glass Mill Leisure Centre	
<b>Key Decision</b>	No	<b>Item No</b>
<b>Ward</b>	Lewisham Central (although serving the whole borough)	
<b>Contributors</b>	Executive Director for Community Services, Head of Law	
<b>Class</b>	Part 1	<b>Date:</b> 14 February 2018

## 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report provides information about a proposed soft play development at Glass Mill leisure centre.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Mayor
- Note the background to the proposed development of a soft play facility at Glass Mill leisure centre; and
  - Approve the development of a soft play facility at Glass Mill leisure centre

## 3. Policy context

- 3.1 Lewisham's Sustainable Community Strategy 2008 – 2020 '*Shaping our Future*' reflects the many individual strategies and plans endorsed by different agencies and partnerships in Lewisham. All are working with our citizens to build a successful and sustainable future. The key principles of this strategy are reflected through the two leisure contracts and specifically through the priority:

*Healthy, active and enjoyable:* where people can actively participate in maintaining and improving their health and well-being.

- 3.2 This is reflected in Lewisham's Corporate Priorities:

*Active healthy citizens:* Leisure, sporting, learning and creative activities for everyone.

## 4. Leisure background

- 4.1 Lewisham has a history of providing class leading leisure facilities, well maintained parks and recreation spaces and supporting sports development through schools and the community.
- 4.2 The Council has invested in a large capital delivery programme coupled with the provision of new leisure contracts. In the past 10 years the Council has rebuilt or refreshed 4 of its 5 main Leisure Centres and entered into two new

Leisure Contracts (1Life at Downham Health and Leisure Centre and Fusion Lifestyle across the rest of the portfolio).

- 4.3 Glass Mill Leisure Centre is the borough's flagship leisure centre costing circa £20m and opened to the public in 2013. The centre not only boasts an award winning façade and design but contains completely inclusive facilities including competition grade swimming pool, teaching pool, gym, health suite, studios, café and meeting space. The site is also the home of Saxon Crown Swimming Club, the only swimming club in the borough.
- 4.4 The Fusion Lifestyle contract covers all the leisure sites across the borough except Downham Health and Leisure Centre which is run by 1Life under a PFI contract agreement.
- 4.5 Participation figures continue to climb with the number of visits to leisure centres in Lewisham increasing from 1.23 million in 2012/13 to 1.99 million in 2016/17.
- 4.6 Local authority leisure provision is increasingly being squeezed in a changing market, with increasing competition from the commercial sector (particularly 'budget' gyms; with Fusion already seeing a negative impact from these). This requires the council and the two operators to continue to invest in the offer available and maintain or increase their market share. This includes providing a niche offer that the commercial sector doesn't; for example family participation.
- 4.7 As part of the Lewisham Future Programme officers were tasked with saving £1m from the Leisure Services revenue budget for 2017/18. Officers worked with the two operators to identify savings, including looking at investment opportunities in the current facilities to ensure that the leisure offer continues to be an attractive and profitable one. The options, including a new soft play facility at Glass Mill, did not form part of the formal delivery of the £1m savings but have been further developed since and will realise longer term financial benefits for both parties.

## **5. Glass Mill soft play proposal**

- 5.1 As outlined above, the local authority leisure industry is increasingly being squeezed and officers are seeking ways to keep its current facilities up to date and competitive. Glass Mill has a large under-used foyer space which could accommodate a soft play facility. This would enhance the family offer and increase the number of people accessing the facility. It is expected that those accessing the soft play will also make use of the café and other facilities within the centre. For some this may encourage swimming or gym and aerobics class use for the first time. Soft play is also considered a stepping stone to leisure and gym activity in children and is a good way of encouraging activity and movement.
- 5.2 The proposal is for the soft play to be situated at the far end of the foyer from the reception; behind a sound proofed glass and solid wall. There will be a hatch from the existing café within the soft play area and plenty of seating for parents. Parties and pay as you go will operate. The facility will be accessed via bar coded ticket available at reception and will be staffed at peak hours. The soft play will be primarily aimed at the 0-8 year age group and will have a variety of sections, heights and activities within it.

- 5.3 This will mean that the centre is no longer accessed directly through the main entrance with the side entrance to the green to the side of the facility becoming the primary entrance. There is no doubt that this will impact on the integrity of the original design but the benefits of the softplay for the local community, as well as improving the ability to manage the space which often attracts anti-social behaviour, are considered sufficient to offset the aesthetic impact. It will also be necessary to re-site the heritage board and image on the wall to the right of the main entrance with the exact location to be determined as part of the design process for the softplay frame.
- 5.4 Fusion have analysed the market, including their own soft play facilities at Wavelengths and Bellingham, and believe there is room in the market for this facility. Glass Mill is very centrally located, well served by public transport and has an expanding population within its vicinity. Fusion have also set a proposed pricing structure which is competitive and takes into account local competition.
- 5.5 Consultation was undertaken during 2016 to gauge interest in the proposal. This showed that 46% strongly agreed and a further 29% agreed with having a soft play. There were 241 responses to the consultation, which was undertaken via a variety of methods – on site surveys in person, survey monkey and dot.mailer to all members. Soft play is often cited in surveys and feedback to open questions about improvements to the centre.
- 5.6 This is a RIBA stage 2 estimate. Should the Mayor agree to this proposal then Fusion will tender the works plus the soft play frame itself.
- 5.7 As this is a spend to save project the council will receive a return on any capital investment. Fusion will operate an open book process to agree operating costs and the council's annual share in profit. Officers are confident that Fusion have estimated reasonable prices for operating the new facility, expected income and overheads with a return on investment within 4 years; however this estimated return on investment may vary (up or down) once the facility is up and running.
- 5.8 Should the Mayor agree to this facility being built then the next steps will be for Fusion to tender both the building works and the soft play frame. Officers will then review returns with Fusion, agree a contractor and total capital cost and works will proceed. Fusion will be fully responsible for the build, communications and launch of the new facility. It is expected that from start of tender process to completion of the facility will take approximately 4 months.

## **6. Financial Implications**

- 6.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from this report. Funding for the works outlined in this report is through the capital programme. .

## **7. Legal Implications**

- 7.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from the contents of the report requiring the attention of Mayor and Cabinet. Officers have confirmed that a consultation exercise has been undertaken.

## **8. Crime & disorder Implications**

8.1 There are no direct crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

## **9. Equalities Implications**

9.1 It is expected that the new soft play facility will enhance the leisure offer to children and families in the borough. The foyer is currently under-used and whilst the new soft play facility will remove a large part of it there will still be substantial space left in the foyer area around reception and the café for people to sit and pop-up events and information stands to be held.

## **10. Environmental Implications**

10.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

## **11. Conclusion**

11.1 A new soft play facility at Glass Mill will help to broaden the appeal of this leisure centre in a difficult and increasingly competitive market. It will extend the range of activities on offer for Lewisham children and families, and will provide a return on investment for the council.

If there are any queries on this report please contact James Lee, Head of Culture and Community Development on 020 8314 6548.