

PLACES AND STRATEGY EXECUTIVE PORTFOLIO UPDATE

Summary: To provide a progress report on the Places & Strategy Portfolio

Portfolio: Places & Strategy

Wards Affected: All

Recommendation

The Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee is advised to note the report

1 Background

- 1.1 The Places & Strategy Portfolio covers a wide range of public facing services delivered by two service areas within the Business Service:

Recreation and Business

- Places Leisure, Camberley - the new Leisure Centre Project
- Greenspace (parks and countryside)
- Play area replacement and improvement projects
- Contract Management (Grounds Maintenance, Verges and Leisure Centre)
- Events, Hires and Pitch bookings

Commercial and Community Development

- Events (commercial and community)
- Physical Activity and wellbeing
- Partnership working
- Support and development of community and sports organisations

2 Recreation and Business

- 2.1 The Recreation and Business Team is made up of 11.2 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) officers led by the Recreation and Business Manager. This team supports the delivery of the council's key objectives that relate to Place and People. All Officers in this team were seconded to work primarily to support the response efforts of the authority responding to Covid19 during the initial lockdown. Support varied across the team from Tactical Co-ordination, Welfare Callers, Runners and internal support roles for those making calls to ensure that details were correct. Whilst a number of projects were paused to support welfare work, core business was maintained throughout.
- 2.3 The Recreation and Business team work closely with other departments in the delivery of large-scale projects such as the Mindenhurst (Deepcut) development and the Southampton to London Pipeline.

3 Greenspace Team

- 3.1 An important part of Recreation and Business is the Greenspace team (4 FTE) whose responsibilities include the care of over 300 hectares of parks, countryside, conservation sites, Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs) and all other open spaces and verges. This includes over 30 playing pitches and 32 play areas.
- 3.2 The Greenspace team manage the borough's trees with works ranging from tree inspections, maintenance works, customer requests and storm damage.
- 3.3 The Greenspace team also carries out a number of statutory inspections within our pavilions, out-building, community centres and playgrounds to ensure the safe operation of facilities and equipment.
- 3.4 Greenspace deliver volunteer work parties, and educational activities, talks, walks and children's activities. Many of these events support the national curriculum for schools, conservation aims and group badges (for Brownies, scouts etc.). However, during this last year many of these could not take place. The team is now starting to plan (as the Country re-opens and restrictions ease) to re-introduce these services as we are able to do so
- 3.5 The team is responsible for noxious weed control including annual ragwort and Himalayan balsam pulling and Japanese knotweed controls. Japanese knotweed is treated twice a year which is a legal requirement. They remove the Ragwort from countryside grass to allow for the annual grass cutting to be used as animal feed.
- 3.6 Increasing demand for additional conservation within the borough has seen trials of long grass regimes, the introduction of wildflower planting in urban areas and meadows in countryside areas with a view to extending these in to each ward in the borough. With bio-diversity being high on the team's agenda they are always keen to explore and introduce further schemes that will deliver benefit to our community.
- 3.7 The increasing popularity of the borough's parks, especially during lockdown, has presented challenges as the team are witnessing increasing pressure on available parking especially in our premier parks locations, coupled with this the deterioration in the infrastructure especially the road surfacing. It is likely that this will need a significant review in the coming year as demand is unlikely to reduce and wear and tear increases. Along with increased demand we have experienced a surge in vandalism and antisocial behaviour (ASB) seeing destruction of bins, benches, fencing, play equipment etc. and increased levels of graffiti in places. It is hoped that as restrictions ease the vandalism and ASB will reduce along with the cost to replace and treat the problems.
- 3.8 Recreation and Business is responsible for the 12 public toilet facilities across the borough which transferred in 2018 from Community (as a result of the new Joint Waste/Street Cleansing Contract). Five are within borough parks and the others are situated in the villages and council car parks.
- 3.9 In recent years the council has experienced a decline in the usage of grass pitches (see table below) which is in line with the national picture of declining use of grass pitched for sport (football, rugby and cricket). Simultaneously we have seen an increase in demand for 3G pitch booking provision. The 3G pitch at Frimley Lodge is now running (when restrictions allow) almost at capacity with additional demand for the peak slots over-subscribed. There is also a continued demand to provide

facilities for sport currently not catered for within in the borough such as netball. The Commercial and Community Development Team is currently exploring options to address this issue.

Pitch bookings

	Grass Pitch	3G Pitch
2014/15	835	
2015/16	809	
2016/17	731	
2017/18	555	494*
2018/19	812	1711
2019/20	597	1707
2020/21	250	507

*figures for the 3G only commenced from Jan 18, this represent figures for 3 months

Table 1: Grass pitch bookings compared to 3G pitch bookings

- 3.10 Due to Covid restrictions, there has been a significant reduction in income for both sports bookings and event hire. During 2019/20 the council generated just over £200k income compared to the same period 2020/21 where the council achieved circa £79k. However, this loss of income is eligible for the local government scheme that will refund 70% of lost income due to Covid.

4 Contract Management

- 4.1 Contract Management is delivered by 1 FTE responsible for key contracts including Grounds Maintenance, SCC Verge Maintenance and the new Leisure Centre contract. These contracts are closely managed to ensure the delivery meets the expectations. This role also supports the delivery of contracts on behalf of Windlesham Parish Council and Surrey County Council. Recently this function oversaw the smooth transition from the former contractor Sodexo to the new Grounds Maintenance provider Glendale.
- 4.2 The Recreation and Business team oversee the project delivery of the new Places Leisure, Camberley **Leisure Centre** due to open on schedule and on budget in July 2021.

5 Play Area Replacement and Improvement Projects

- 5.1 This is delivered by 1 FTE, supported by the wider Business Service support team. There are a number of projects that this role delivers including proposed security enhancements on council sites, commercial projects, public consultations and playground projects (funded by planning contributions).

Playgrounds and projects completed 20/21

- Old Dean Recreation Ground, Camberley
- Watchetts Recreation Ground, Camberley
- Loman Road, Mytchett
- Bike Hire, Frimley Lodge Park

Playgrounds and projects commenced and in progress

- Chobham Road Recreation Ground, Frimley
- Old Dean Security Enhancements
- Heatherside Recreation Ground Security Enhancements
- Wheelchair Swing, Frimley Lodge park
- London Road Recreation Ground, Camberley

5.2 Future projects, will see the delivery of more commercial events in the parks such as fun fairs, pop-up events (e.g. crazy golf, theatre in the park). All of which subject to lifting of Covid restrictions over the coming months.

6 Business Team

6.1 This team is made up of three officers (2 FTE) who, working with the council's Contact Centre, administer and oversee all sport pitch bookings. They complete and record all statutory checks health and safety arrangements and records for the Recreation and Business Team. This team, working closely with managers and the finance team, is responsible for the financial controls, analysis and budget management for the Recreation and Business Team (and Theatre).

7 Commercial and Community Development

7.1 The Commercial and Community Development (CCD) team is led by the CCD Manager and is made up of 4 FTE (including one apprentice) and supports the delivery of the council's key objectives that relate to People, particularly in relation to health and wellbeing, sport and leisure activities, and community engagement. The team is also responsible for delivering income generating events and activities and events that support the local community.

7.2 Due to the size of the team, much of the successful delivery is only possible through collaborative working with other council services and external partners which include community groups, the Surrey Heath Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and the County's "Active Partnership", Active Surrey amongst others.

8 Redeployment of Staff to support Covid welfare work

8.1 All four members of the team were involved in the Council's welfare response to the Covid pandemic, with roles varying across coordination roles, administration, welfare cell management as well as making phone calls to vulnerable and shielded residents directly.

8.2 Although much of the 'Business as Usual' work of the team has returned, events continue to be heavily impacted and this is expected to continue into the summer.

8.3 Members of team are currently redeployed in varying degrees to support other Council services including Corporate Property, Parking Services and coordination of the Council's Covid Champions.

9 Physical Activity, Health and Wellbeing

9.1 Sport England's 'Active Lives' survey measures the activity levels of people across England down to local authority level, with a reduction in *inactivity* (people doing less than 30 minutes of physical activity a week) levels identified as a Key Performance Indicator within the Council's annual plan.

9.2 The most recent data, published in October 2020, covers the May 2019-May 2020 period and shows a continued reduction in the levels of inactivity in Surrey Heath (18.7% vs 21% twelve months ago). While this is positive news, it is not considered fully reflective of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is anticipated that the next set of results released in April 2021 (covering Nov 2019-Nov 2020) will show a sharp increase in the percentage of residents classed as inactive across the country.

9.3 Surrey Heath's activity levels in comparison to our Surrey neighbours is shown in the table below:

Local Authority	Respondents	Active (150+ minutes a week) Rate (%)	Fairly Active (30-149 minutes a week) Rate (%)	Inactive (<30 minutes a week) Rate (%)
Elmbridge	554	67.4%	11.6%	21.1%
Epsom and Ewell	506	67.1%	14.5%	18.4%
Guildford	453	71.4%	12.3%	16.3%
Mole Valley	549	67.2%	9.1%	23.7%
Reigate and Banstead	550	65.7%	14.9%	19.4%
Runnymede	575	66.8%	10.4%	22.8%
Spelthorne	510	59.8%	15.6%	24.5%
Surrey Heath	561	69.8%	11.4%	18.7%
Tandridge	633	67.3%	8.7%	24.0%
Waverley	581	75.1%	9.7%	15.2%
Woking	537	64.0%	11.8%	24.2%

Table 2: Active Lives Survey results May 2019-May 2020

9.4 Since 2015/16 Surrey Heath has seen a statistically significant increase in people who are fairly active (+4.9%) and a significant decrease in people who are inactive (-11.6%). Further information on the Active Lives survey is available from the Commercial and Community Development Manager.

9.5 To support our most vulnerable residents (who were often isolated) to remain active during the pandemic, the Council distributed flyers (produced by Active Surrey) that educated residents on exercises they could undertake at home to help keep their muscle strength up and reduce the risk of falls, and in turn reduce the risk of hospital admissions. While feedback from residents was limited, those who did were very positive about receiving the flyer and commented on their intention to keep doing the exercises.

9.6 The Council's Walking for Health programme has operated on an intermittent basis in line with national restrictions over the past year. From August, group walking became exempt from the 'rule of 6' (subject to certain conditions and robust risk assessments being followed) which led to a total of 21 walks being delivered between Aug – Dec 2020 with a total of 425 attendances, at an average of just over 20 people per walk. Each walk is led by volunteers and held on a rotational basis at a range of locations across the borough to allow as many residents as possible to enjoy them.

- 9.7 The Council's walks programme had expanded to include introduction of 'Diabetes Walks' and 'Walks with Friends' (Dementia), working alongside partners including the CCG and the Alzheimer's café. Walks for these groups were put on hold in the spring due to the pandemic, but officers look forward to welcoming these groups back when it is safe and appropriate to do so.
- 9.8 As part of its programme the Council also supports 'walking sports', including Walking Football and Netball, which are adapted versions of the game aimed at being more inclusive. Walking Football took place throughout the year on an intermittent basis in line with national restrictions. Sessions are held at Frimley Lodge Park and average around 18 participants each week, with many attendees reporting how they have benefitted socially from the programme as well as physically. The Council previously launched a session at Chobham Recreation Ground but despite efforts from officers and the parish Council, numbers were not sustainable and sessions curtailed in December 2019. Walking Netball is based at Lightwater Leisure Centre with 8-14 ladies attending weekly until sessions stopped in March 2020 due to the pandemic, though officers will be facilitating a restart when restrictions allow and is practical.
- 9.9 Currently a cancer rehabilitation exercise programme entitled "Move More Feel Better" is underway, another partnership project with officers working alongside the CCG and a MacMillan Cancer Navigator. The first 6 week programme is now underway, being delivered virtually to a small cohort. The cost of the project has been covered through a successful application to Sport England's "Tackling Inequalities Fund" for £2,000.
- 9.10 The pandemic forced the cancellation of the 2020 Specsavers Surrey Youth Games programme, traditionally one of the largest community engagement projects of the year. The Council paid a reduced entry fee of £2,000 in light of fixed costs which had already been incurred by the organisers Active Surrey, but while there was a small expense for printed marketing, most expected expenditure related to items such as T-shirts and equipment for participants and contributions to clubs was saved.
- 9.11 In 2021, rather than a training programme which culminates in a mass Olympic-style event at Surrey Sports Park (as is traditional), officers are developing plans with Active Surrey to deliver an adapted version of the Youth Games. This will be a more targeted offer which looks to engage inactive young people who may otherwise have limited physical activity opportunities.
- 9.12 The Council operates 4 park tennis venues across the borough, each hosted within one of our recreation grounds, under the banner of "Tennis in the Park". Despite the courts being shut for 6 months (March-May, November, Jan-March), court bookings in 2020/21 have increased by a total of 144% in comparison to 2019/20. This is largely attributed to Tennis being one of the few forms of activity the public were allowed to take part in following the first lockdown but has been helped by the flexibility and accessibility of the Council's online booking system and overall tennis offer.
- 9.13 139 residents subscribed to Tennis in the Park annual membership programme, which offers year-round access for the entire family for just £39 per year, generating £5,421 in income. This was supplemented by casual 'pay and play' income of £1,506.50.
- 9.14 There were only 5 beneficiaries in 2020/21 of the Borough's Free Access for County Sportspeople Scheme (FACS), which offers talented local athletes free access to

certain leisure facilities. The number of FACS users, which in recent years has been closer to 15 a year, was heavily impacted by forced intermittent closures of Lightwater Leisure Centre and the rebuild of Camberley Leisure Centre.

- 9.15 The more general work of the team includes supporting the borough's community centres, sport and leisure organisations with an array of enquiries including leases, facility development, grants, equipment and other resources, and training amongst others. Officers also provide regular updates and support to the Surrey Heath Sports Council who in turn assist the sporting community.
- 9.16 Forthcoming events and initiatives for the year ahead include:
- A new Physical Activity Strategy, which will outline how the Council plans to help reduce inactivity in the borough and support people to return to physical activity in a post-covid world.
 - Contribute to cross-service "Whole systems Approach to Obesity" project, which will support local approaches to maintaining a healthy weight
 - Utilise opportunities created by new Camberley Leisure Centre
 - Supporting Active Surrey with the delivery of the "Holiday Activities and Food" programme (funded by central government) which aims to provide healthy food and enriching activities to disadvantaged children during the school holidays
 - Manage local changes as part of rebrand from "Walking for Health" to Ramblers Wellbeing Walks programme
 - Introduction of "Sweatcoin" app, which helps get local people active by combining exercise with technology.
 - Review of green walk routes across the borough with a view to making them as accessible as possible
 - Exploring possibility of a mental health garden and homing of local dementia group at Flourish garden (Frimley Lodge Park) with the intention of achieving funding through an application to the NHS Innovation fund.
 - Exploring ideas for the delivery of new facilities in the borough for sports currently under provided for – particularly net ball.

10 Events

- 10.1 As a result of the restrictions related to the pandemic, the programme of events delivered by the Commercial and Community Development Team was heavily impacted in 2020/21. This included enforced cancellations of the Camberley Carnival (a cross-service effort delivered with Media and Communications), all Christmas events, Big Tennis Weekends, a Council volunteer celebration event and the Camberley Beer Festival (with Camberley Theatre).
- 10.2 Similarly, events that Council staff do not run directly but play a key part in facilitating such as the Surrey Heath Show were also cancelled alongside more informal 'pop up' events such as those at the 'Ping Pong Parlour' in The Square shopping centre.
- 10.3 However, one event which was adapted and took place safely was a socially distanced and adapted Duathlon at Frimley Lodge Park in September 2020. This event was held as a time trial rather than a race, with participants registering and being set off at staggered times so there was minimal interaction. Despite issues with parking at Frimley Lodge (as the car park was at capacity), the event was very well received and generated £1,476 for the Council while also raising money for local charity 'Harry's Hat' who supported the event with route marshals.

- 10.4 Some events such as the Surrey Heath Sports Awards moved to a digital format. Following an online nomination process, rather than presenting awards at the traditional ceremony at Camberley Theatre, winners were presented with their trophies at their places of exercise with videos recorded for social media. Changes in national restrictions at the end of 2020 meant that officers were unable to present trophies to 3 of the winners, with presentations to be rescheduled when permitted again.
- 10.5 While many events including the Camberley Carnival and Surrey Heath Show have been cancelled again for 2021, officers are exploring plans to adapt further events where possible.

Annexes	None
Background Papers	None
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