

Surrey Heath Borough Council
Finance and Performance
9 March 2022

Places and Strategy Portfolio Update

Portfolio: Places and Strategy
Strategic Directors: Nick Steevens - Strategic Director Environment & Community
Louise Livingston – Head of HR, Performance & Communications
Report Author: Sue McCubbin – Recreation and Leisure Services Manager
Ben Sword - Engagement, Wellbeing & Events Manager
Key Decision: No
Wards Affected: All

Summary and purpose

To review the Places and Strategy Portfolio services area progress over the past 12 months which covers the following areas:

Recreation and Leisure Services

- 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)
- Hires and Pitch bookings

Engagement, Wellbeing and Events (formerly Commercial and Community Development)

- Physical Activity
- Tennis in the Park
- Health & Wellbeing
- Health Walks
- Partnership Working
- Events
- Community Leases

Recommendation

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

1. Background and Supporting Information

Recreation and Leisure Services

Places Leisure, Camberley

- 1.1 Places Leisure Camberley is the new £22 million flagship centre featuring a fitness suite, 25 metre 6 lane pool, learner pool with adjustable floor, splash zone, 8 court sports hall, group exercise studio, health suite, a vibrant Clip 'n Climb climbing area, purpose-built play area and a café. The Centre was successfully mobilised and opened as planned, on budget and on time on July 1st 2021. Places Leisure have a contract to operate the facility for 25 years. The construction to completion process took a little under 2 years and faced the challenge of being completed during the pandemic.
- 1.2 The centre opened with Covid restrictions in place meaning that all activities needed to be booked to control access and numbers. Restrictions then lifted on the 19th July 2021 allowing further activities could then be launched including Birthday parties, roller skating sessions and No Strings badminton.
- 1.3 In September, further activities were launched including the pool inflatable, Gymnastics, and Active play and bounce.
- 1.4 Group Exercise classes have proven to be very popular the Centre opened with 70 instructor lead classes and 40 virtual classes. Due to increasing demand in September this was increased to 90 instructor lead and 52 virtual classes. This has since been reviewed again and in January a further 5 instructor led classes have been added making a total of 95.
- 1.5 The pool and sports hall programmes are under regular review so as to meet Customer demand. In particular the swimming pools remain under pressure for 'family' and 'Just Swim' availability. There remains a significant latent demand for swimming lessons which is seeing increasing numbers on the waiting list for lesson availability. The Centre currently has 19 schools signed up and a further two in the pipeline.
- 1.6 Membership take-up from the outset has far-exceeded forecasted projections seeing membership numbers increase month on month since opening. January saw an increase of 369 memberships taking the total memberships to 4367 in total for January. Places Leisure confirmed that this level of membership is their highest achieving Centre in their portfolio.
- 1.7 January is seeing a new initiative being launched, Hot Yoga! This is yoga classes in a specially commissioned studio that sees temperatures of up to 38 degrees being achieved. Trial classes are being hosted currently with the official launch late January.

Greenspaces (Parks and Countryside)

- 1.8 The Greenspace team cares for 300 hectares of Council owned greenspace including parks, countryside, conservation sites, woodland, Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANG) and all other open spaces that are within the Council's ownership.

- 1.9 The Greenspace team care for the borough's trees with works ranging from tree inspections, maintenance works, customer requests and more recently a large amount of storm damage. During the storms the Greenspace team with support from the Grounds Maintenance Contractor and a specialist tree surgery company worked tirelessly over the weekend and the following week to respond to fallen trees (36), storm related Customer queries (20) into the Contact Centre and to help clear debris.
- 1.10 The team ensure that all statutory inspections are undertaken within our pavilions, out-buildings, and changing facilities to ensure the safe operation of facilities and equipment. These include all health and safety checks along with fire and water safety (legionella testing).
- 1.11 The team work closely with a team of regular conservation volunteers, they support local school groups in their educational activities with 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.). During school holiday periods they ran 'learn to fish' sessions at Hammonds Pond in Lightwater Country Park. Now that restrictions have lifted the education centre within the Country Park can be more active in delivering activity sessions, they delivered a Christmas event in partnership with the Thames Basin Heath Partnership that saw nearly 100 people come along and join in Christmas crafting activities.
- 1.12 All of the team are qualified in noxious weed management, the team are responsible for treating and controlling the weeds on the Councils' land. This includes annual ragwort and Himalayan balsam pulling and Japanese knotweed controls. Japanese knotweed is treated twice a year which is the legal requirement. They remove the Ragwort from countryside grass to allow for the annual grass cutting to be able to be used as animal feed. SHBC look after 11 Japanese knotweed sites (6 are SHBC, 5 are on behalf of County).
- 1.13 To improve biodiversity in the borough, the Greenspace team in conjunction with the Contract Manager (for the Grounds maintenance contract) have been trialling wild flower areas and more recently long grass regimes across the borough. Demand for additional conservation within the borough has seen the introduction of wildflower planting in urban areas and meadows in countryside areas with the ambition of working with ward councillors to extend conservation efforts in each ward in the borough. Over the four years 14 Wildflower areas have been created with varying success, this coming year we will be re-seeding 4 as they did not take as well as hoped last year. We will also be adding a further four sites in the coming year. With bio-diversity and Climate Change being high on the team's agenda they are always keen to explore and introduce further schemes that will deliver benefit to our community.
- 1.14 The increasing popularity of the borough's parks, especially during lockdown, presented challenges as the team are witnessing increasing pressure on greenspace infrastructure, specifically in relation to parking within the premier locations. The parking problems became so challenging at Frimley Lodge park that parking restrictions were brought in to regulate where people could/could not park to make sure that emergency vehicles could attend all areas of the site. Along with increased enjoyment and use of green spaces we have experienced an increase in refuse, vandalism and antisocial behaviour (ASB) On a positive note, the vandals that have been caught and whom have subsequently been asked to undertake community service have been made to attend a course to make habitat boxes that have then been donated to the greenspace team who then put them in suitable locations. During last summer we used £50k of the Contain Outbreak Management FUND

(COMF) to employ localised security patrols to help curb anti-social behaviour, break up gatherings and to deter vandalism and illegal activity.

Play Area Replacement and Improvement Projects

- 1.15 In light of the incidents of unauthorised encampments across the borough, and acknowledging the impact this can have on local communities, the team undertook a review of existing security measures currently in place across its Green spaces. The review highlighted 19 priority areas where investment into enhancing security at that site may be considered. A consultation with local residents for each of these areas to seek their feedback on whether they felt the security measure were required and desired. Of the 19 identified sites works have been completed at 7 of the sites seeing an expenditure of a little over £25k. As a result of feedback work on 7 of the sites was not required. The final 3 sites saw residents vote in favour of bollards to be installed at Freemantle Road and Clews Lane and grassed earth bunds at Cheylesmore Park. These works are currently being priced.
- 1.16 The team have delivered playground replacement schemes at Chobham Road Recreation Ground in Frimley and at London Road Recreation Ground, Camberley. There has also been a wheelchair swing and accessible path being installed at Frimley Lodge Park. The cost of these projects totalled £217k.
- 1.17 The team are currently trialling dog exercise/socialisation area. One is at Lightwater country park and is aimed at dog socialisation within a small fenced area at the Education Hut. The other is former grass tennis courts that are fenced in Watchetts Recreation Ground. Both trials are running for 3 months to determine whether a permanent change of use should be proposed and consideration for further socialisation/exercise areas created more widely across the borough.
- 1.18 Recently opened is the Adventure Golf at Lightwater Country Park, initial feedback after the first week of opening during half term is that it is a very welcome addition to the park. Over the February half term a little under 800 people played adventure golf.
- 1.19 Bench of Hope was a wonderful project linked to the television series Afterlife starring Ricky Gervais that has seen one of 25 benches across the country be installed in Lightwater Country Park. The benches were installed by Afterlife in conjunction with suicide prevention charity CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably). Those who visit the bench will be able to access mental health resources from CALM via a unique QR code, or by visiting the [CALM website\(link is external\)](#).

Contract Management

- 1.20 The Senior Contract Manager oversees the day-to-day contract management, performance and delivery for
 - Places Leisure, the leisure Centre Operator.
 - Glendale, Grounds Maintenance Contractor
- 1.21 SHBC provides Grounds Maintenance and Greenspace services to Windlesham Parish Council and Verge Maintenance for Surrey County Council. The Senior Contract Manager is the client officer for these two contracts ensuring smooth delivery of service, contractor liaison and performance management for these.
- 1.22 Performance is key to managing these contracts and there are performance measure for both. The leisure operator has performance measures that are industry wide

benchmarked by Sport England along with localised contractual performance around membership levels and service delivery. The Grounds maintenance contract (Glendale's) performance is linked to Key Performance Indicators that must be achieved and are linked to a financial payment to the contractor. Non-performance costs the contractor financially up to £30k of the contract value annually.

- 1.23 This year we have contracted to fully survey the boroughs trees which have now been completed and mapped on GIS. All urgent works have been completed along with planned works for the following years to ensure that our trees are maintained.

Events, Hires and Pitch Bookings

- 1.24 In recent years the council has experienced a decline in the usage of grass pitches which continues to be the case and is in line with the national picture. The demand for the 3G has remained constant and the 3G at Frimley Lodge Park is over-subscribed at peak times. The demand for tennis has increased seeing the membership and use of our courts.

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
2021/22	575	1734
*new facility, 3 months figures only		

- 1.25 Post the pandemic we are slowly seeing events and groups return to the parks. This year we have 10 booked seeing the circus, funfair and running events return to the park. This year will also see the return of the Surrey Heath Show and a number of Queens Jubilee events that will encourage the return of other events in future years. The income generated this year (£10k) was double that of last year (£5k) but is still not achieving the £15k expectation.

Engagement, Wellbeing and Events

- 1.26 The Engagement, Wellbeing and Events team (formerly the Commercial and Community Development team) is made up of 4 FTE and sits within the Communications and Engagement team a part of the HR, Performance and Communications service. The team supports the delivery of the council's key objectives that relate to People, particularly in relation to health and wellbeing, sport and leisure activities, community engagement and a range of events.
- 1.27 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 many others.

- 1.28 Day-to-day work of the team includes supporting the borough's community centres, sport and leisure organisations with an array of enquiries including support with leases, facility development, grants, equipment and training amongst others. Officers also provide regular updates and support to the Surrey Heath Sports Council who in turn assist the sporting community.

Physical Activity

- 1.29 The pandemic has continued to have an impact on the activity levels of our residents, as demonstrated by Sport England's 'Active Lives' survey. The adult survey (16+) is one of the largest in Europe, providing an in-depth picture of how many people take part in sport and physical activity by demographic group, location and activity type. The sample size for each local authority (including Surrey Heath) is around 500 people.
- 1.30 Depending on the number of minutes of weekly physical activity, people are classed as being either active (at least 150 minutes a week), fairly active (30-149 mins a week) or inactive (less than 30 minutes a week).
- 1.31 The most recent Active Lives results for the Borough covering the period May 2020 – May 2021 classes 67.1% of residents as active (down from 69.8% in 19-20), 10.6% as fairly active (down from 11.5%) and 22.3% as inactive (up from 18.7%). This reduction is mirrored across the country in varying degrees, but Surrey Heath remains more active than the national average (active: 60.9%, inactive: 27.5%) and ranks mid table in comparison to our Surrey neighbours. While some progress has been lost in the last year, Surrey Heath is still more active than it was when records began in 2015-16.
- 1.32 To encourage more residents to enjoy the various health benefits that physical activity brings, officers developed a new physical activity strategy entitled "Moving Forward" that highlights priority areas for the next five years where the Council will concentrate its efforts.
- 1.33 Moving Forward aspires to create an environment where all Surrey Heath residents, regardless of age, background or circumstances, have the opportunity to participate in physical activity in a way that works for them. This was developed based on a range of information sources and a three-phase engagement process including focus groups, an online survey and one-to-one discussions with local residents, clubs, community organisations and key partners.
- 1.34 Moving Forward will also help deliver the Council's higher level objectives from its Five-Year Strategy, with a particular focus on Environment and Health and Quality of life, most notably in areas such as "enhance and improve access to green spaces", "net zero carbon emissions & resilient to the impacts of climate change", "strong community identity", "improving health and wellbeing" and "access to leisure and recreation".
- 1.35 As part of its programme the Council supports 'walking sports' such as Walking Football and Netball, with a slower game designed to be more inclusive. Walking Football took place throughout the year at Frimley Lodge Park with an average of around 20 participants each week, and many attendees report they have benefitted socially from the programme as well as physically. Officers are currently working with the Surrey Football Association to explore the creation of a women's session (although women are very much welcome at the existing sessions).

- 1.36 Walking Netball was based at Lightwater Leisure Centre but failed to restart due to lack of coach availability following the pandemic. Officers are currently seeking a new coach to allow sessions to restart in the near future.
- 1.37 There was no Surrey Youth Games in 2021 due to the pandemic, but the Games are due to return in 2022 with a more focused approach. As in the past, young people will be able to enjoy 6 weeks of free training that culminates in a celebration event at Surrey Sports Park, but the initiative is now being targeted at total beginners and those who are otherwise unlikely to be active.
- 1.38 The activities on offer will include Go-Tri (triathlon for beginners), Girls Football, Tennis, Swimming, Judo, 3v3 Basketball and Dance. Officers are partnering with local referral partners such as the Family Services team, Home School Link workers, SEN schools and Afghan resettlement officers to offer places to young people who can benefit most from the sessions.
- 1.39 As part of the Council's Olympic celebrations officers administered an Olympic micro-grant fund which supported local clubs and community groups with grants of £50 to support them in providing activities that promoted participation and captured the legacy of the games. A number of floor and window stickers detailing Olympic and Paralympic facts and records were also displayed at facilities across the borough from shopping centres to community centres to capture people's attention and inspire them.
- 1.40 There were 16 beneficiaries of the Borough's Free Access for County Sportspeople Scheme (FACS) in 2021, which offers talented local athletes' free access to certain leisure facilities. This is up significantly from 5 beneficiaries in 2020, in large part due to the opening of Places Leisure Camberley.

Tennis In the Park

- 1.41 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". 117 residents subscribed to the Council's Tennis in the Park annual membership programme - which offers year-round access for the entire family for just £39 per year - generating £4,323 in income. This is slightly down on 2020 (139 memberships), but this is considered to be because Tennis was one of the few forms of activity the public were allowed to take part in following the first lockdown, so numbers were likely to have been slightly inflated. Casual 'pay and play' income in 2021 was £2,208, up from £1,506.50 in 2020.
- 1.42 After some delays, progress has been made in the pursuit of external funding to support the redevelopment of the public courts at Watchetts Recreation Ground. The Council initially approved a £135,000 capital budget for the development before further investigation revealed a greater scope of works would be required than initially budgeted for. Officers have submitted an initial funding bid to the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) to make up the shortfall between the Council's budget and the full cost, with confirmation arriving in late 2021 that the Council's application has been accepted. Further details on grant funding are expected from the LTA shortly, after which a formal report will be brought back to members to provide a more comprehensive update.

Health and Wellbeing

- 1.43 The team are also leading Surrey Heath's Whole Systems Approach to Obesity, which aims to support residents to maintain a healthy weight by following a six stage Public Health framework. Although the Council is the lead partner, this is a highly collaborative project with partners including Voluntary Support North Surrey, Surrey Public Health, Frimley Clinical Commissioning Group, Active Surrey and the University of Surrey.
- 1.44 Following public consultation and the hosting of an 'Obesity Summit' in November 2021 at Camberley Theatre, an action planning workshop was held online with a variety of stakeholders in the last fortnight to begin the process of turning good intent into tangible action. This important work will continue to be pushed forwards in 2022 with support from a fixed-term project officer (funded through COMF) and bids for external funding to support delivery of local actions.
- 1.45 Cancer rehabilitation exercise programme "Move More Feel Better" is now on its 6th cohort and has had 18 participants take part in total. Some have graduated onto the Council's Walking for Health scheme. This is another partnership project where officers work alongside Frimley CCG and a MacMillan Cancer Navigator, with the cost of the project being covered through a successful application to Sport England's "Tackling Inequalities Fund" for £2,000.

Health Walk Schemes

- 1.46 The Council's Walking for Health programme did not operate between 1st Jan – 14th April 2021 due to restrictions. A total of 52 walks were delivered from April onwards with a total of 889 attendances, at an average of just over 17 people per walk. Each walk is led by much-valued 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.
- 1.47 Due to a change in funding for the overarching national programme, "Walking for Health" is becoming "Ramblers Wellbeing Walks", with officers managing the local transition. The nature and ethos of the walks have had little change but in addition to understanding a new database and back of house system and rebranded artwork, officers have provided training for 18 volunteer walk leaders.
- 1.48 The Walking for Diabetes programme has been expanded, taking place weekly, with improved links with local GP surgeries and Specialist Diabetes Nurses. There are currently 14 active walkers referred by Diabetes Nurses. The aim is to offer attendees free exercise in a supportive group where they can learn how to manage their condition, with guest speakers once a month. Virgin Care and its team of nurses won a national award for 'Hypo Awareness Week' off the back of supporting Surrey Heath's scheme.
- 1.49 The Council also facilitates 'Dementia Walks' and have partnered with the Young People with Dementia charity. Officers have helped them find a home at Flourish Community Garden and support 8 of their clients to walk weekly for 6 week blocks. The group offer the walking alongside choir, arts and crafts, adapted cycling and more.

Partnership Working

- 1.50 In addition to the work above there have been a number of examples where the Council has worked collaboratively with partners in order to provide the greatest benefit to the local community.
- 1.51 In an effort to improve the accessibility and quality of information for residents with mobility and other issues, the Council has partnered with local charity 'Parity for Disability' to audit some of our parks and open spaces. At present two sites have been audited (Lightwater Country Park and Frimley Lodge Park) with a further two (London Road Recreation Ground and Chobham Meadows) booked in and other sites to follow. Based on the charity's feedback relevant information has been published on the SHBC website. In due course, officers intend to bring forward a comprehensive report to members on the findings of this project.
- 1.51 SHBC officers partnered with local community leaders, Surrey County Council and Active Surrey to donate 55 bikes to Kings International and South Camberley Schools over the summer holidays in 2021. The bikes were given to young people on Free School Meals to encourage them to use active transport and to be more active. Some of the students that received a bike attended a satellite event in Farnham as part of COP26, where they spoke about their experiences and how active transport helps with climate change.
- 1.52 Expansion of the bike project is planned but dependent on finding a location where bike donations can be accepted from the public and stored before being re-donated to people who find cost a barrier to cycling.
- 1.53 Links have also been developed with a provider called the "Community Kitbag", who accepts donations of second-hand sports kit and distributes them on a roadshow basis across Surrey to those in need. The kitbag has visited the Old Dean twice via the Old Dean Community Group. Officers are investigating the potential for further visits elsewhere in the borough and a community donation point, but this is made more challenging by the fact there is only one individual behind the Community Kitbag scheme who covers the whole county.
- 1.54 Officers have also facilitated meetings and links between Gordons and Portesbury schools to develop opportunities for young people with disabilities, and supported Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum to train a walk leader to deliver guided walks for local Nepalese and Muslim women.

Events

- 1.55 Against a backdrop of uncertainty and changing restrictions, 2021 was again very limited in the delivery of events. This was reflected in staffing levels, with the Events Officer postholder seconded to another service for the full duration of the year.
- 1.56 One high profile event that did take place was the Freedom of the Borough in September 2021. The Freedom was a military parade around Camberley town centre to celebrate and thank the Joint Hospital Group (South East), who have many staff based at Frimley Park Hospital, for their incredible service throughout the COVID pandemic. The event was positively received by all stakeholders, with praise from members of the general public and the Joint Hospital Group themselves who fed back *"it couldn't have gone any better – all the hard work paid off"*.

- 1.57 The Surrey Heath Sports Awards was also delivered, once again in a digital roadshow 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 posted on social media for family and friends to enjoy.
- 1.58 There were also some smaller events such as a “Family Search and Discover” trail at Lightwater Country Park during May half term, with 8 families completing children’s activities as they followed a trail around the park.
- 1.59 A far more comprehensive events plan is being finalised for 2022 including events to mark the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee, the return of Surrey Heath Triathlon, Camberley Beer Festival, Big Tennis weekends, a rebranded Surrey Heath Sports Awards ceremony that recognises the wider sphere of wellbeing and a series of more informal ‘pop up’ events such as at the ‘Ping Pong Parlour’ in The Square and an “On Your Bike” event to encourage residents to use active transport.

Leisure Leases

- 1.60 Officers work with the corporate property, legal and finance teams to manage the Council’s Leisure Leases. These include 33 tenants spanning the borough’s Community Centres, sports clubs, uniformed groups (scouts/guides etc.) and not-for-profit organisations based in the Council’s parks. Officers from across these teams attend monthly asset meetings to review developments which can include discussions around lease renewals, requests for alterations (such as new paths or amendments to fencing), rent reviews, clarification of lease terms and more. As leisure leases were historically agreed for long terms of up to 99 years and agreed at different times in the Council’s history, many of the leisure leases are very different which can make the nature of requests complex and time consuming to address. Officers are working to standardise leases wherever possible.

2. Reasons for Recommendation

- 2.1 To comment on the work contained within the Places and Strategy Portfolio.

3. Proposal and Alternative Options

- 3.1 Not applicable

4. Contribution to the Council’s Five Year Strategy

- 4.1 Set out in the body of the report.

5. Resource Implications

- 5.1 Set out in the body of the report.

6. Section 151 Officer Comments:

- 6.1 Set out in the body of the report.

7. Legal and Governance Issues

- 7.1 Set out in the body of the report.

8. Monitoring Officer Comments:

8.1 Set out in the body of the report.

9. Other Considerations and Impacts

Annexes

None

Background Papers

None