

ACTIVE AND COHESIVE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 3rd October, 2013

- Present:** Councillor Reginald Bailey – in the Chair
- Councillors:** Councillor Reginald Bailey, Councillor Mrs Dylis Cornes, Councillor Mrs Gillian Heesom, Councillor Miss Sophie Olszewski, Councillor Glyn Plant, Councillor Miss June Walklate and Councillor Mrs Joan Winfield
- Portfolio Holder(s):** Cllr Mrs Elsie Bates – Leisure and Culture
- Officers:** Dave Adams – Executive Director, Operational Services
Robert Foster – Head of Leisure and Cultural Services
Martin Stevens – Scrutiny Officer
Louise Stevenson – Scrutiny Officer
Roger Tait – Head of Operations

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Cllr Cairns and Cllr Mrs Rout.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received.

3. **KEELE GOLF COURSE**

The Executive Director, Operational Services introduced the report for Keele Golf Course and gave an overview of the process to procure a new tenant to manage, develop and maintain the facility. It had been an important priority that the company who took on the lease developed the course and rebuilt the strong reputation it had previously enjoyed.

The Head of Cultural and Leisure Services explained the golf management aspects of the process and the evaluation process. The invitation to bid stage had included the Heads of Terms, in order to inform the prospective bidders of the Councils principle requirements for the lease. There were time pressures to let the lease, and early agreement of the Heads of Terms from the two invited bidders was an important element to ensuring an expedient start to the new management arrangements.

Following a condition assessment by officers, a Schedule of Works detailed the work that was required to the buildings and illustrated that they had fallen into disrepair in a number of areas. The Schedule of Works would also bring the course back up to a good standard and also ensured that the bidders were clear as to the works and standards the Council expected. It was necessary to ensure that the facilities were brought back up to a minimum standard in a reasonable timescale to prevent any further deterioration.

With regard to operational management, in particular the grounds maintenance and golf management aspects, the focus was to ensure the course could become a place where golf was developing and growing. Golf Association members had reduced in recent years, having decreased at its lowest point to around forty members, although it was noted it had now increased to fifty members. Officers emphasised the importance of the Golf Association and including them in the journey to improve the course. It was also important to keep the Association informed of developments and the Head of Operations had met with them to this end. Another priority was that the course should be maintained as a pay and play course and younger players encouraged to take up the sport. The Operational Management Schedule asked the interested parties to address these issues and include in their bids how they would develop, teach, and encourage more people to take up of golf, and to also link in with education in schools.

In developing golf at the course it was important to ensure the course itself was at a high standard, as more people would play if it was in good condition. Both of the submissions received had addressed these important issues. The Head of Operations explained the elements of the process which focused on the improvement of the course. The course had required attention and a report from the Sports Turf Research Institute (STRI) had been commissioned to provide a condition assessment for the course. This was a detailed report by an expert in the field of sports surfaces. Whilst there was no quick fix to bring the course up to standard, a programme of work and investment would be undertaken over three years to bring the course up to a minimum standard. The STRI report had been provided to the bidders and they were informed that they would be required to illustrate how they would deliver the recommendations in the report. It was noted that there was the potential for the winning bid to go over and above what was recommended in the report to improve the course.

The previous tenant had held the lease at the golf course for approximately ten to twelve years, and Members questioned the state of the properties and the greens. They considered that the course must have deteriorated quite soon after the previous tenants took over the lease. They felt the work required was considerable and questioned whether what was being offered was a viable proposition. There had been concerns about the condition of the course and the buildings for some time and discussions had taken place with the previous operator with a view to improving them. These discussions reached a point where it became evident that the former operator was not going to deliver what the Council was asking them to complete and the management of the course was changed when the opportunity arose. Detailed surveys were then undertaken and the extent of the deterioration at the course was understood. Moving forward, however, the picture was positive. Both bids were sound; the companies had good reputations and knew the golf industry well. Furthermore, the fact that they had submitted sound bids illustrated that in their view the course was viable.

Members questioned whether the lease contained provisions to check that the work the winning bidder undertook was completed to the required standard. It was important that other areas did not deteriorate whilst the identified areas for improvement were addressed. The STRI report and the Schedule of Improvements would form part of the monitoring process. It was acknowledged that the monitoring process with the previous operator had not been robust enough, but this would be addressed with the new lease.

Members further questioned what the timescales were for the essential works detailed on the Schedule of Works. There was a clear timeframe the works to be

completed between three and five years and also within ten years, but no time frame for the essential works. The Executive Director, Operational Services would take this point back to officers from the Property Section and communicate the answer to the Committee.

The Executive Director, Operational Services reassured the Committee that whoever the preferred bidder was, their plans would meet the Council's requirements, as they had already agreed to the Heads of Terms, Schedule of Works etc. as a bare minimum. Although they could carry out the work earlier than they had agreed to or perform more work if they wished. Added value had been one of the evaluation criteria when the bids had been scored.

The vice-Chair expressed a concern about the renewal of the gas boiler within three to five years, and whether it should be moved to essential work. The Executive Director, Operational Services undertook to discuss the boiler with the Facilities Manager, with the intention of seeking reassurance that the boiler was not hazardous. It was noted that one of the two bidders had indicated that they would refurbish the club at an early stage and Cabinet would be aware of this when they were deliberating over their decision.

Cabinet would make their decision on 16 October 2013. Once the winning bid had been decided upon, the Executive Director, Operational Services agreed that their business plan could be shared with the Committee in order for them to see what the Council would be monitoring against.

RESOLVED: (a) That the Committee are satisfied with the golf development and course grounds maintenance aspects of the tender process that has been undertaken.

(b) That clarification be sought of the timeframe for 'essential works' as contained in the Condition Schedule.

(c) That the Executive Director, Operational Services ascertain from the Facilities Manager the condition of the boiler and seek an assurance that it is not hazardous.

4. **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business within the meaning of Section 100 B (4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

COUNCILLOR REGINALD BAILEY
Chair