

WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

Presented by the Chief Executive

SUMMARY

This report provides an update on Covid-19 in relation to activities of the Authority and an update on the 2020/21 Work Programme.

RECOMMENDATION

Members Note: (1) the report.

COVID-19 UPDATE

- 1 Members have been kept apprised of the Authority's response to COVID over the past 6 months.
- 2 The COVID oversight group has continued to meet weekly to ensure all changes and updates from Government are implemented as required and that there is an Authority-wide, well communicated, coordinated strategic approach to how COVID related matters are dealt with.
- 3 A venue re-opening structure was implemented in June to ensure that a robust well planned and coordinated approach was undertaken regarding the re-opening plans of all Authority venues and services. This is formed of three specific working groups with a steering oversight group chaired by the Chief Executive which has to sign off all activity, re-opening and any un-Furloughing of venue staff. This approach has been underpinned by three guiding principles:
 - activities must make a surplus;
 - COVID safe to the highest standard; and
 - not to negatively affect the Authority's reputation.
- 4 **Providing support for the Covid-19 Emergency**

The Authority has since 22 April 2020 leased an area of the car park at Lee Valley Leisure Complex as a drive through Covid-19 Testing Centre, see Appendix A to this report.

- 5 The Covid-19 Testing Centre has operated well, the Authority has had no issues with how operations have been conducted by Serco (the operators on behalf of the Government) and negotiations have started to allow an extension until 31 March 2021. The Authority also received a thank you letter from the Secretary of State (see Appendix B to this report.)

6 **Venues**

All of the sports venues reopened between Aug and Sept and have been operating a reduced programme, both in terms of operational hours and activities available. The programmes and activities on offer are being reviewed weekly to ensure that nothing is being undertaken that causes the Authority a financial concern. As time has gone by more activities have been added to the venue programmes, but the reduced opening hours will remain in place for the rest this financial year.

- 7 Recent government changes to COVID-19 regulations have not affected the venues activities, which in the main have continued. The Authority has put in extra measures around face coverings and how activities are booked but due to the venues operating to such a high COVID-19 standard disruption has been kept to a minimum. All venue Risk Assessments relating to any activity have been updated to ensure all areas are covered and the Authority venues continue to operate a COVID-19 safe environment to the highest standard.

8 **Managing and supporting Staff**

Working from home or being furloughed has meant a major adjustment for staff. Senior officers have been keen to ensure that staff have all of the support they need, from IT equipment to regular contact with colleagues. Emails, video briefings, video conferencing and e-bulletins are all being used.

- 9 Over the summer we surveyed staff to see how both furloughed and non-furloughed staff were coping, and how we can better support them. Overall the survey results were very positive. The feedback suggests that staff feel they have been well looked after by the Authority, with the majority of staff feeling that they are in a good place mental health wise and on the whole, communications have been regular and well received. Staff who are currently at work feel safe and are happy with the measures that have been put in place, such as screens, masks, sanitiser stations and manager support. Most staff who are furloughed are looking forward to returning, however as can be expected some are worried and anxious about this and the Authority will provide support here where necessary.
- 10 There was a lot of feedback around working from home and equipment, so in order to find out people's individual requirements in this area, the working from risk assessment (RA) has been reviewed and sent round for completion, so that any issues can be highlighted and resolved and the appropriate support given.
- 11 Technologies will be explored to see if they can be used to overcome some of the technical issues identified in the survey.

Some staff suggested more personal contact from line managers was needed, so this will be followed up with managers.

The feedback on all staff remote briefings was very positive, so these will continue on a regular basis to keep staff up to date and give them the opportunity to ask

any questions they may have.

- 12 We regularly remind staff about all our support mechanisms, such as the Employee Assistance Programme, which are available for them to use if they are finding these times difficult.
- 13 With the furlough scheme ending on 31 October, we are looking forward to welcoming back all staff to the Authority with a virtual all staff briefing on 2 November. Managers will be making sure they are integrated back into the Authority with clear objectives and any support they need.
- 14 **Emergency Budget 2020/21**

The Authority's budget has been significantly affected by the impact of COVID. The main income generators, the venues, were closed for the beginning of the peak season (April-October). 70% of the venues annual income is earned during this period. In addition, the Authority's rental income has been impacted as tenants seek a rent holiday or deferral.
- 15 An Emergency Budget was approved at Executive Committee in May, and forecast a reduction to the Authority's cash reserves of £7million for the current financial year.
- 16 With venues now being able to be opened with limited capacity, due to COVID regulations, we have been able to take some income. Along with keeping a close rein on expenditure, we expect the final outturn for the year to be between £2million - £3million better than expectations. However, this will still see a reduction in cash reserves of £5mill from £10mill to around £5million.
- 17 The Authority has benefited from the 100% business rates relief that all leisure venues are to receive in 2020/21.
- 18 The Authority has also benefited from the Government's Job Retention Scheme, which has allowed organisations to claim up to 80% of salaries for employees that have been furloughed. In total we anticipate that the Authority will claim over £1million once the scheme ends in October. We also expect to be able to claim an additional £150k for the Job Retention Bonus, to cover furloughed employees retained until the end of January 2021.
- 19 The Government recently announced a new Job Support Scheme for six months from November, whereby it will contribute up to a third of salaries for employees brought back part time from furlough. The Authority is currently assessing the criteria for acceptance into the scheme and whether it qualifies to claim. In addition, on 9 October the Government announced that this scheme would be expanded to support businesses forced to close as a result of Covid restrictions. The support will comprise of 67% of each employees' salary being paid by the Government, up to a maximum of £2,100 a month.
- 20 The Authority does have reserves to enable it to get through 2020/21 and has been able to manage its short-term cash flow. We have now started work on the budget for 2021/22 and 2022/23 and how cash reserves can be rebuilt to be able to sustain the organisation in the longer term.

21 2021/22 Budget Planning

The Chief Executive and officers have started the process of budget planning for 2021/22 and revising the Medium Term Financial Plan. The budget for 2021/22 needs to address the impact on the Authority's reserves in 2020/21 and the strong likelihood of reduced income across the Park's activities. The focus for 2021/22 budget is recovery and resilience.

Budget Assumptions

- Cash reserves reduced from £10mill to £5mill
- Little capacity for capital investment
- Reduced demand and income as a result of:
 - lower operating capacities;
 - customer caution re: indoor venues;
 - economic climate,

Key Budget Objectives

- Develop budget capacity in response to a projected fall in income
- Achieve a cash reserves position which enables the Authority to deal with further financial shocks
- Increase income where possible eg non LSC venues
- Minimise expenditure across all activities

The main focus for recovering the Authority's budget position is reducing the Authority's cost base. A number of areas are being looked at:

- staffing efficiencies;
- Head Office costs;
- asset management programme; and
- new operating arrangements for Hayes Hill Farm and the Water Works.

On the income side opportunities will be more limited in the short term, but an officer group has been set up to look at possible areas for income growth. The levy of course is a mechanism the Authority can consider to increase income to assist its budget position.

Budget options for 2021/22 will be developed over September/October and Member discussions will start in late autumn.

AUTHORITY WORK PROGRAMME

- 22 The Authority's work programme has naturally been affected by the Covid emergency. The sports venues are operating on a limited basis and a range of other activities and services have been paused, either as a direct result of Covid or in response to the need to rein in expenditure, conservation work, Park activation (events, youth and schools, community programmes) and asset management. On the other hand there has been enormous pressure on the Park's open spaces over the past 6 months, with the Ranger teams having to respond to high levels of use and associated adverse impact e.g. litter and anti-social behavior.

Despite the extraordinary challenges presented since March, officers have managed to progress some key investment projects.

23 a) Ice Centre

The new Lee Valley Ice Centre scheme obtained planning permission at the London Borough of Waltham Forest's Planning Committee on 6 October. As this is a major strategic facility the application now needs to go before the Mayor for planning consent. This process will take up to 6 weeks.

The procurement process for a building contractor has started with 5 major companies progressing from the pre-qualification stage to the Invitation to Tender stage of the OJEU process. It is hoped that such a high profile project and the depressed economic climate will see competitive bids and a good price. This process will be completed by early spring 2021.

Officers have been exploring the funding model for delivering the new Ice Centre. Discussions have taken place with the London Borough of Enfield (LBE) (as part of the financial support Service Level Agreement) and the London Borough of Waltham Forest with regard to borrowing options. In addition, with planning approval hopefully almost there, officers will start to explore funding support from the Government, GLA and the London Borough of Waltham Forest, along with funding agencies such as Sport England and the London Marathon Trust.

The proposed funding package along with the conclusion of the building contractor procurement exercise will go to Members for approval in Spring 2021. If approval is given the build programme will start Summer 2021 with estimated completion Summer 2023.



24 b) Wildlife Discovery Centre

The new Wildlife Discovery Centre has been completed, replacing the Bittern Watchpoint in the River Lee Country Park. Construction was completed for the £897k development on 7 September. Despite challenges presented by the Covid-19 situation the project was completed 9 weeks after the original proposed completion date. The habitat works and Kingfisher bank were completed on 29 September and the overall project is now at practical completion stage. The centre is currently being prepared for safe opening under Covid Safety Guidelines and we are expecting to be open to the public late October or early November. We have a total of 37 volunteers interested in working at the Wildlife Discovery Centre made up of existing volunteers and new volunteers to the building, all have been trained in Covid safe operation and the opening procedure arranged. A booking system will be put in place to allow groups to visit the centre with clean down by volunteers in between. Opening is expected to be

from the weekend of 31 October/1 November. Due to the availability offered by the volunteers the centre will currently be open from 10am to 4pm at weekends and on Mondays and Bank Holidays. Officers are also looking at the possibility of redeployed staff opening the centre for more days of the week. The intention is of course that this wonderful new facility does become open to the public 7 days a week. A Member's visit is arranged for 15 October.



25 c) **The Wave**

The Wave project at Picketts Lock has been on pause for the last 6 months. The Wave opened the UK's first next generation Inland surfing venue in Bristol November 2019. Following a very successful winter and early spring season, the fledgling venue had to close in March, not reopening until August. Despite suffering what was a major financial blow The Wave Bristol has bounced back with a busy August-October period. The Wave is now keen to re-engage the Authority on the Picketts Lock scheme and a meeting will take place towards the end of the calendar year.

As part of the Exclusivity Agreement the Authority has with The Wave, the golf course and campsite on the Picketts Lock site were due to close 31 March 2021, with The Wave taking occupation of the site. However due to the delay it has been agreed that both facilities will continue to operate for 2021/22.

26 d) **Land and Property**

A planning appeal has been lodged with the Planning Inspectorate against the decision by Epping Forest District Council to refuse planning permission on the site of the former Mile and Langley nursery. The appeal has been validated and the Authority awaits a start date for the process which should be received in the next couple of months.

Officers have now been advised that the LBE do not wish to proceed with the agreed land swap which would have exchanged land at Harbets Hump (Authority owned) for land that LBE own as part of the Rammey Marsh West area. LBE require the land at Harbets Hump for flood alleviation in connection with the Meridian Water development and have now issued a Compulsory Purchase Notice to the Authority to seek to acquire Harbets Hump. The Authority has lodged an objection to the CPO. Senior officers have been invited to engage with LBE in a joint meeting so that LBE can explain the decision taken to withdraw from the land exchange and put forward proposals on how the Council and the Authority can potentially work together on Rammey Marsh.

27 **Discussions with Broxbourne Borough Council (Broxbourne) on the**

development of a masterplan for the 200 acre Spitalbrook site have been on hold. Earlier this year Broxbourne shared some high level scenarios for the site. These will be discussed with Members at the next Land & Property Working Group and it is hoped that discussions on Spitalbrook will re-start over the next few months.

28 e) The Leisure Services Contract

Following cessation of the Lee Valley Leisure Trust Ltd's legal claim against the procurement process for the Leisure Services Contract (LSC), officers have been in weekly discussions with GLL to progress the process to enable GLL to commence the LSC on 1 April 2021.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

29 There are no environmental implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

30 There are no financial implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

31 There are no human resource implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

32 There are no legal implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

33 There are no risk management implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

34 There are no equality implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

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APPENDICES ATTACHED

Appendix A Plan of Covid-19 Testing Centre at Lee Valley Leisure Complex
Appendix B Letter from Matt Hancock

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE REPORTS

Authority	A/4281/20	Covid-19 Response and Work Programme Update	22 April 2020
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Authority A/4274/19 Work Programme: Progress Update 17 October 2019

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

the Trust	Lee Valley Leisure Trust Ltd (trading as Vibrant Partnerships)
LBE	London Borough of Enfield
LBWF	London Borough of Waltham Forest
Broxbourne	Broxbourne Borough Council
LSC	Leisure Services Contract

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**Department
of Health &
Social Care**

*From the Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care*

*39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU*

Dan Buck
By email to: dbuck@leevalleypark.org.uk

October 2020

Dear Dan,

I am writing to personally thank LVAC for your support in making Lee Valley Athletics Park available for the UK's coronavirus testing programme.

The threat to public health posed by coronavirus has been the gravest the country has faced in peacetime. Testing is a key weapon in our armoury in combatting and ultimately defeating this terrible disease.

Our goal has been to provide a test to anyone who needs one. With your support, we have been able to create the largest network of diagnostic testing facilities in British history. Thanks to the huge national effort, we now have a network of 76 drive-through sites, 125 walk-through sites, 258 mobile units, home testing and satellite kits and five mega laboratories across the UK.

From the very first site we have made huge strides. The regional test sites have played in a vital part in the completion of over 20m tests. This is a feat which would not have been remotely possible without the commitment, determination and selflessness shown by the brilliant collaboration of public and private sectors, in which your business played a crucial part.

On behalf of the government, I want to express our sincere gratitude for your time, flexibility and support in this unprecedented national effort. We have made great strides so far, but we know the fight is far from over. Thank you in advance for any continued support you are able to provide.

Yours ever,

MATT HANCOCK