

Report to the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

26 January 2023

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| Subject: | Launch Plan of Sandwell Aquatics Centre |
| Director: | Director of Borough Economy – Alice Davey |
| Contact Officer: | Ben Percival – Assistant Director – Contracts, Projects, Strategy & Policy |

1 Recommendations






- 1.1 That the Board note the outline plan to prepare for the opening of Sandwell Aquatics Centre.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The Sandwell Aquatics Centre (SAC) is an aquatics facility of a scale and quality the region has never before seen. The SAC presents a huge opportunity to engage residents, to make them more active and improve health and wellbeing. The SAC also has the potential to build on the success of the Commonwealth Games, to further raise Sandwell's profile by attracting further large events.
- 2.2 Careful planning and preparation are essential to ensure the opportunities presented by SAC are optimised. The business plan will be critical to ensure that marketing, programming and pricing policies support broad community access alongside a vibrant events programme and a financially sustainable business model.
- 2.3 Alongside the business plan it is critical that a robust operational launch plan is implemented. This will need to ensure a smooth handover from contractors, careful preparation for community operation and an effective transition from the centres at Langley and Smethwick.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?



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|  | Best start in life for children and young people The SAC will encourage access from all Sandwell children and help foster the habit of lifelong activity and participation. |
|  | People live well and age well Encouraging active lifestyles is critical to improving the health and wellbeing of Sandwell residents. |
|  | Strong resilient communities The scale of the facilities at SAC combined with an effective launch and supporting programming and pricing policies should substantially increase participation from all the community. |
|  | A strong and inclusive economy Effective launch of SAC is fundamental to ensuring a sustainable leisure service for residents. Physical activity is integral to supporting a healthy workforce. |
|  | A connected and accessible Sandwell There is potential to link to range of activities within and beyond SAC – potentially including open spaces and active travel. |

4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 Following the successful delivery of the 2022 Commonwealth Games, the “Legacy Phase” of the construction project commenced. This phase sees the removal of the temporary seating and the creation of sports halls, fitness facilities and studio space to optimise community use. In summer 2023 the legacy phase of the works are scheduled to be complete and the SAC will be handed over to the Council for operation.
- 4.2 Substantial work has already been undertaken to plan for the operation of SAC. Outline plans, policies and programmes have been developed and partners engaged with a programme of events already taking shape. However, the next six months will see activity increase substantially as plans are refined and final preparations made.
- 4.3 Mark Braithwaite, the Chief Operating Officer of Sandwell’s Local Authority Trading Company (LATC) started employment on 11 January. Mark will be supporting and evolving the business planning and leading on the operational preparations, including the legacy programme.



Business Planning

- 4.4 As part of the business planning process a number of workstreams are underway:
- 4.5 **Marketing and Promotion** – a plan has been drafted, outlining a series of launch events, pre-sales of both gym memberships and swimming lessons and following the same key campaign messages as the LATC: barriers to participation, exercise as the best medicine and mental health support.
- 4.6 **Programming** – draft programmes of use have been developed, following engagement with key partners. One of the key benefits of the scale of SAC is that community access can be maintained alongside school swimming, club swimming, and higher education use. A vibrant events programme is already being assembled, which will see regional events hosted from SAC in the second half of 2023.
- 4.7 **Financial Modelling** – work is underway to refine and confirm the business plan for SAC, to ensure the operating model optimises the benefits from SAC whilst ensuring the best value for money for the Council.

Operational Planning

- 4.5 **Operating Systems** – much work has already been undertaken to draft operating procedures to ensure a safe and high-quality environment for SAC users. In addition, existing leisure staff have been providing ongoing operational support throughout the legacy phase.
- 4.6 **Commissioning and Handover** – the Council has maintained a close working partnership with Wates (principal contractor) throughout the SAC construction. This will continue into the commissioning and handover stages. This will help ensure that the leisure team are trained and have a good understating of SAC operation prior to handover.
- 4.7 **Staffing** – recruitment has commenced for the staffing at SAC. An offer of employment has been made to the Head Diving Coach and the advertisement for the General Manager and Aquatics Development Manager roles will be placed imminently. The rest of the recruitment will take place over the coming months. The process will ensure that there are



no redundancies as a result of staff being displaced from the closing centres at Langley and Smethwick.

- 4.8 **Transition and Mobilisation** – operational plans will be developed to ensure that the mobilisation of SAC post-handover is as short as possible. The plan will also ensure that the transition from Langley and Smethwick is as smooth as possible with minimum disruption to service provision.

5 Implications

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| Resources: | Work to date is funded from additional resources. Further resource requirements may be identified as part of the next phase of work. |
| Legal and Governance: | None |
| Risk: | Risk registers will be included in the workstreams outlined in the report. |
| Equality: | Equality impacts will be considered and assessed as part of the workstreams |
| Health and Wellbeing: | The launch of SAC will include a focus on opportunities to improve residents' physical activity. |
| Social Value: | A report will be commissioned to assess social value. |
| Climate Change: | As part of the business planning, an energy efficiency audit and assessment for SAC has been commissioned. |

6 Appendices

None

7. Background Papers

None

