

**ACTIVE BELFAST LIMITED BOARD**

**Monday, 11th April, 2022**

**MEETING OF ACTIVE BELFAST LIMITED BOARD**

**(Held remotely via Microsoft Teams)**

**Attendees**

- Directors:** Mr. J. McGuigan (Chairperson)  
Councillor Corr  
Councillor McCann  
Councillor Newton and  
Mr. K. Ellison.
- Officers:** Mr. N. Munnis, Partnership Manager; and  
Mr. H. Downey, Democratic Services Officer.
- GLL:** Mr. J. Michael, Business Manager; and  
Mr. A. Walker, Partnership Manager.

**Apologies**

Apologies were reported on behalf of Councillor McLaughlin, Mrs. K. McCullough and Mr. C. Morrison.

**Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were reported.

**Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 7th March were approved. It was reported that those minutes had been noted by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 28th March.

**Matters Arising**

The Board noted that, following consultation with the Council's Head of Human Resources, the Partnership Manager would shortly be forwarding to Mr. Ellison a response to the issues which he had raised around BCC/GLL HR policy alignment.

It noted also that a process to appoint an external contractor to remove extensive graffiti from the façade of Loughside Recreation Centre had now been initiated.

**Director Attendance Statement**

The Board noted that there were no issues to report in terms of non-attendance of Directors at meetings.

## **Future Board Meeting Agenda Items**

The Partnership Manager informed the Board that it had been the intention to present at this meeting reports for 2022/23 on strategic planning and Directors' declarations of interest. However, in light of the decision which had been taken by the Council around future governance arrangements, details of which would be provided later in the meeting, these would not now be presented.

Noted.

(Mr. Michael and Mr. Walker were admitted to the meeting at this point.)

### **Six-Monthly Update on GLL Community Engagement**

The Board considered the following report which had been prepared by GLL:

#### **1.0 Purpose of Report**

**1.1 To present the Board with a six-monthly community engagement update report for the period October 2021 – March 2022**

#### **2.0 Recommendation**

**2.1 The Board is requested to note the report.**

#### **3.0 Main Report**

**3.1 GLL is a leading social enterprise. One of the core priorities of GLL is to ensure full access for all members of the community and to encourage more people to be more active, more often.**

**3.2 GLL's Regional Business Manager has a key focus to drive participation and usage, ensuring more people from every background are regularly and meaningfully engaged and taking part in sport and physical activity. To continue on progress made, GLL has a team of three that focus on participation and another staff member with a focus on group exercise.**

**3.3 The easing of Covid-19 restrictions has resulted in a wide range of groups and activities returning to centres. Programme opportunities have increased and GLL are now delivering in a more normal operating environment.**

**3.4 GLL is committed to support community access offering varied opportunities delivered in centres that are accessible, affordable and not inhibiting.**

**3.5 GLL re-invests through the GLL Foundations (Sport and Communities) that provide and sustain support for community cohesion and talented individuals.**

**3.6** 53% of Belfast GLL members benefit from concessionary charges thereby helping to remove affordability as a barrier to participation.

**3.7** **Sports Programmes**

**3.7.1** Between October and March 2022, GLL has supported a number of National Governing Bodies (NGBs) in the delivery of their holiday programmes, grassroots events and performance programmes.

**3.7.2** In the past six months, centres have supported a number of regional and national sporting events. Brook has support Country Antrim Boxing tournaments in November and February. Ballysillan have hosted the all-Ireland Powerchair Championships along with the Antrim 6's boxing competition. Lisnasharragh continues to host the all-Ireland Water Polo championships with regular competition on Saturday evenings. Lisnasharragh has also supports the Irish under 17 Water Polo Cup, Ju-Jitsu National Grading, relay change over point for the Belfast Marathon and extended opening hours for Short Course Swimming Galas.

**3.7.3** In partnership with Irish FA, GLL provides female only football sessions at four centres across the city through the Shooting Stars Programme. These are delivered at Brook, Girdwood, Lisnasharragh and Shankill to girls aged 4 to 11 years.

**3.7.4** Holiday camps have been secured with the Irish FA, NI Netball and Badminton over the Easter period.

**3.7.5** GLL has introduced Pickleball in two centres over the past three months. Over 60s sessions have been provided in Olympia and Lisnasharragh on Tuesday and Thursday mornings respectively. A family session is also on offer at Lisnasharragh on Wednesday evenings. Currently over 45 people are participating each week in Pickleball, which can be played by all ages and abilities. GLL plans to expand the programme in the coming months.

**3.7.6** GLL supports over 200 sports clubs and performance squads weekly across leisure facilities in Belfast. Leisure centres in Belfast are utilised for club and performance training and service a variety of sports. The centres currently cater for football, Gaelic games, swimming, water polo, sub aqua, kayaking, martial arts, boxing, basketball, netball, badminton, cricket, tennis, climbing, gymnastics and disability sports such as boccia and power chair football.

- 3.7.7** GLL centres are also supporting local sports clubs by offering strength and conditioning sessions to supplement team training sessions.
- 3.7.8** Brook Leisure Centre has a swimming pool specifically designed to cater for those with sensory needs and those with wide range of disabilities. The centre works in partnership with Swimming Buddies, an organisation that specialises in Autism friendly swimming lessons. A number of sessions are being offered throughout the week delivered by this specialist partner. In addition to this, the centre offers pool sensory sessions to the general public within the weekly timetable.
- 3.7.9** Swim School continues to grow in Belfast, with over 4,200 children enrolled on the programme. Lisnasharragh has recently surpasses 1,000 pupils and plans are in place for further expansion across the city in 2022 with a collective target of 5,000 to be achieved by the end of the year.
- 3.7.10** Centres also provide crash course swimming programmes to further assist pupils in their water confidence and swimming development. These have been delivered during the Christmas period and with Easter programmes planned for Olympia and Lisnasharragh.
- 3.7.11** Brook and Olympia continue to support the Football Management Company in the delivery of their football and education programme. Avoniel have also hosted sessions from Playing for the Future as well as the Asmir Begovic academy. The centre is also in discussions with Glasgow Rangers about providing facilities for their academy programme on Sunday afternoons.
- 3.8** **Family Programming**
- 3.8.1** GLL has created a balanced programme of activities across all centres allowing families to participate. 367 classes are offered each week which also include a blend of basic and junior group exercise classes that can be enjoyed by those wanting to work at a lower intensity.
- 3.8.2** Centres have increased the number of junior gym sessions offered throughout the week and during holiday periods. In addition, adult and child gym sessions have been included across the city which permit children from the age of 9 to workout under their parent's supervision.
- 3.8.3** A new kids fitness programme in partnership with the Brand X Method has been piloted in March and will officially launch in April. This programme will engage children aged between 4 and 17 to focus on their fitness and athletic performance.

- 3.8.4** Youth and family products such as water slides, Surf Belfast and the Aqua Play at Andersonstown, Air Venture at Brook and Aqua Splash at Lisnasharragh were extremely popular with young people and families over the Christmas and half term period. GLL have also utilised these products to engage a number youth and community groups to access the centres as part of their own holiday intervention programmes.
- 3.8.5** Pool parties continue to be delivered at Brook Leisure Centre on Friday evenings and a new family friendly aqua aerobic session is currently being piloted and performing well.
- 3.8.6** Pool programming has been reviewed to include more Swim for All sessions across the city including family fun and float-based sessions. Teaching pools and confidence water have opened for peak sessions to provide a greater service to families, particularly at the weekends.
- 3.8.7** Mother and toddler and baby sensory pool sessions have also been added to the product, offering in the likes of Andersonstown, Brook and Grove. These programmes will be expanded to include Olympia and Lisnasharragh later in the year to offer more families an early opportunity for their child to develop water confidence.
- 3.8.8** Birthday parties have returned and we are beginning to see a return towards pre-pandemic booking levels. GLL offers a wide range of provision for birthday parties including bouncy castles, climbing wall, sports (indoor and outdoor) along with the new products mentioned in this report. GLL offer a menu of prices to ensure that barriers to access are limited and that all communities can be accommodated.
- 3.8.9** The soft play facility at Grove has reopened and now provides drop-in sessions throughout the week as well as a birthday party option for children of pre school and primary age.

### **3.9 School and Youth Programmes**

- 3.9.1** School swimming continues to increase each month. Currently, 76 Primary and Post Primary schools attend weekly sessions with 183 lessons delivered across 9 pools.
- 3.9.2** NGBs deliver weekly programmes in Avoniel, Brook, Falls, Olympia, Lisnasharragh and Shankill to encourage local children to access sport. These are currently delivered by Netball NI, Irish FA, Ulster Badminton and Ulster Boxing.
- 3.9.3** Centres host a variety of after schools' programmes delivered by supporting partners. Examples include football and boxing sessions at Avoniel, school's basketball at

Brook, multi sports coaching and sensory swimming sessions at Brook for special schools. Grove hosts a Swim Ulster after school water polo programme every Thursday and the programme will run until the end of May.

- 3.9.4 Since opening in November 2021, Avoniel has engaged with a variety of partners to ensure both the pitches and community spaces are utilised at non-peak times. The centre has linked with Sport Changes Lives in the provision of an intervention programme focusing on at risk teenagers, a digital arts academy through GIGA and a variety of Education Authority evening youth programmes.
- 3.9.5 Sure Start mother and toddler pool sessions are delivered at Falls and aqua aerobics at Olympia. Female only group exercise classes are also delivered at Andersonstown, Avoniel and Olympia.
- 3.9.6 Falls Leisure Centre is currently supporting Comfort NI which provide a diversionary football programme for young people from ethnic minority groups.
- 3.10 **Community Outreach**
- 3.10.1 Andersonstown, Better Gym Belfast, Lisnasharragh and Olympia all supported the Belfast fitness challenge in which over 400 people were provided with a one-month free membership and advice and assistance to achieve their fitness goals.
- 3.10.2 Girdwood Community Hub currently facilitates a Community Food Bank which is in operation Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 10:00 to 13:00.
- 3.10.3 A number of facilities supported Christmas food collections for a variety of local charities.
- 3.10.4 GLL continues to partner with 'Menshed' by offering Girdwood Community Hub, Brook and Whiterock where the focus is on improving mental health for men.
- 3.10.5 GLL facilitates the Colin Autism Support Group for parents of children with autism and other learning disabilities.
- 3.10.6 GLL has funded a number NPLQ courses over the past six months to provide opportunities for local people to gain a pool lifeguard qualification and open up employment opportunities.
- 3.10.7 Falls Leisure Centre supports the work of the Maureen Sheehan Centre in the delivery of water polo and danderball mornings for senior participants. The centre also works with the NOW group in the delivery of a group exercise programme for NOW group service users.

- 3.10.8 Brook Leisure Centre has delivered a number of community initiatives over the past six months. These include a 6-week men's health and fitness programme for Sure Start dads, creativity month in March, a Chest, Heart and Stroke charity football tournament and the West Belfast Sports and Wellbeing Forum fundraising day.**
- 3.10.9 Avoniel supports East Belfast Community Development Association in providing meeting space to deliver programmes and will be rolling out partnership programmes later in 2022. The centre also supports a local church group with their weekly meetings with over 100 attendees.**
- 3.10.10 Whiterock Leisure Centre is delivering weekly disability sports sessions to the Upper Springfield Development Trust and Focus Group. The centre also supports Newhill Community Centre in the delivery of health and fitness advice to various groups and users from the local community.**
- 3.10.11 Ballysillan Leisure Centre is currently working with Peace Players to offer a weekly cross community sports programme. The centre has also been utilised as a vaccination centre for local schools.**
- 3.10.12 Grove Wellbeing Centre has supported Mountcollyer Youth Club whilst their centre is closed for repairs. This involved facilitating evening sessions over a six-month period. The centre has also been utilised in November and January to deliver Covid vaccination clinics.**
- 3.11 Older Participant Programmes**
- 3.11.1 Over 16% of all current Belfast members are aged 60+**
- 3.11.2 Free access for over 60's before 11 am Monday to Friday.**
- 3.11.3 GLL has a daily programme of activities targeted at and suitable for older people and continue to open up further opportunities as Covid restrictions ease.**
- 3.11.4 GLL delivers chronic disease (Cancer and Cardiac) rehabilitation programmes, whilst also supporting and hosting Diabetes and Strength & Balance programmes. Many of the referrals for these interventions are older people.**
- 3.11.5 A 'Falls Prevention' programme is delivered across the city by the Belfast Trust and supported by the GLL Healthwise team.**
- 3.11.6 GLL continues to deliver a 'basic' physical activity programming designed to target referrals coming off the**

rehabilitation programmes and is also suitable for members looking for a lower level/low impact workout. In addition to this, walking groups have become part of the mainstream group exercise offering so can be accessed by the wider membership and not just those on PARS.

- 3.11.7 Senior activity mornings are being delivered across the city with activities ranging from danderball, table tennis, badminton, pickleball, boccia, yoga, aqua aerobics, legs, bums and tums and indoor bowls.”

After discussion, the Board noted the contents of the report.

(Mr. Michael and Mr. Walker left the meeting at this point.)

### **Six-Monthly Update on Facility Management and Centre Inspections**

The Partnership Manager submitted for the Board’s consideration the following report:

**“1.0 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To update the Board on the condition of the leisure facilities and the ongoing contract governance inspection programme.

**2.0 Recommendation**

- 2.1 The Board is requested to note the report.

**3.0 Main Report**

- 3.1 Since early 2016, leisure centres have been subject to a programme of routine inspections. Each centre is inspected twice in every quarter. Inspections visits are always carried out by the Partnership Manager. Visits are unannounced and the Partnership Manager is accompanied by a member of the centre management team, normally the General Manager or the Duty Manager on shift.
- 3.2 The visits are designed to focus on building maintenance, cleaning and Health and Safety.

Observations are scored against a check sheet of 355 items with a clear definition of the expected standard for each. Each measure is scored out of 5 with a score of 4 demonstrating full compliance with the criteria set. Score definitions are as follows:

SCORING LEVELS		Red Rating Category 4	20% - 59.99% (average score of 2.99 or below per measure)
All measures scored from 1 - 5		Amber Rating Category 3	60% - 74.99% (average score between 3.00 - 3.74 per measure)
1 = Substantially below target standard. Significant and urgent improvement required.		Green Rating Category 2	75% - 84.99% (average score between 3.75 - 4.24 per measure)
2 = Below target standard. Improvements required.		Gold Rating Category 1	85%+ (average score of 4.25 or above per measure)
3 = Slightly below target standard. Minor improvements required.			
4 = Meeting target standard. Some improvements required to achieve 5* facility			
5 = Exceeding target standards. 5* facility			

**3.3 The GLL Regional Management Team (RLT) and each centre's General Manager receives a detailed report of all scores, with an explanation for any scores of 3 or below, along with a summary report including an overall centre score. The RLT also receives a centre comparison table which includes an overall service score.**

**3.4 In the last six months of the current financial year (October 2021 – March 2022), four inspections were carried out at each centre. The following overall service scores were recorded demonstrating the very high standards maintained across the estate:**

**1st half year (April – September 2021)**

Q1 V1	79.03%
Q1 V2	80.77%
Q2 V1	80.79%
Q2 V2	80.76%

**2nd half year (October 2021 – March 2022)**

Q3 V1	81.02%
Q3 V2	81.41%
Q4 V1	81.50%
Q4 V2	81.49%

**3.5 Movement from 79.03% in Q1 V1 to 81.49% in Q4 V2 should be accepted as evidence of a significant improvement in facility management related operating procedures. When formal inspections commenced in 2016/17, initial average service scores recorded were as low as 72.75% using the same**

inspection protocols and scoring mechanism as used today. Rapid improvements were made resulting in scores of circa 78% being achieved by early 2017/18.

- 3.6** The positive direction of travel is, undoubtedly, due in part to the opening of four new centres. This naturally lifts the overall service average. This should not detract from the general improvements observed at each individual centre.
- 3.7** In the four inspection visits completed in Q3 and Q4, all centres scored 'green' (75.00-84.99%) in their overall centre assessment. The lowest scoring centres are now all consistently achieving scores in excess of 78.5%. Eight out of fifteen centres scored over 80% in Q4 V2. This should be regarded as an excellent result as full compliance with all listed criteria would result in a score of 80%. The top five scoring centres consistently score above 83%.
- 3.8** The following outcomes are particularly encouraging:
- a) The high standards being delivered by the management and teams at the new LTP centres;
  - b) The significant improvements evidenced over the last six months (and indeed the full year) at Grove, Falls and Ballysillan where standards had previously been challenging;
  - c) The general uplift in care/cleaning of wet areas (changing, showers and toilets);
  - d) Facility maintenance reaction times; and
  - e) Improvements at the older centres and their contribution to the overall service average scores.
- 3.9** Areas requiring ongoing attention and focus:
- a) Synthetic pitch surface maintenance and litter picking (BCC/GLL);
  - b) Lighting - Bulb replacement (GLL);
  - c) General grounds maintenance (planted areas) (BCC).
- 3.10** While there is still work to be done in certain areas at specific centres, general facility management is robust and working relationships between the responsible departments and GLL remain strong.
- 3.11** Monitoring is designed to ensure that contract standards are maintained and specifically that customer service, in relation to the centre environments, is in line with expectations for a premier leisure service.

- 3.12 Scores primarily reflect the quality of GLL management systems and normal operating procedures alongside the day-to-day performance of the management and staff at each centre.
- 3.13 Maintaining the centres to the required standards is a joint responsibility shared by BCC and GLL. Many elements of the centre maintenance programme and all of the maintenance of our car parks, paths and planted areas, including the synthetic pitches, sits with BCC facility maintenance and BCC Parks sections respectively. Scoring reflects observations in these areas even though responsibility for delivery does not sit with GLL.
- 3.14 Overall, GLL's management systems, BCC routine maintenance regimes and the contract governance/monitoring programme combine to provide a robust partnership that consistently provides early identification of issues and timely resolutions.
- 3.15 All centres are measured against the same standards. However, it should be noted that the estate includes centres of very different ages with expected variations in the fabric of the buildings. Naturally the most recently opened LTP centres are in the very best condition and are expected to score higher. Buildings fall into the following age categories:

a) New (opening since 2016)

Girdwood CH  
Olympia LC  
Better Gym Belfast City Council (GLL)  
Better Gym Connswater (GLL)  
Lisnasharragh LC Brook LC  
Andersonstown LC  
Avoniel LC

*Note – BGB and BGC are owned and managed directly by GLL within/alongside the contract*

b) Mid range (opened 2000 – 2010)

Grove LC  
Falls LC

c) Older (opened pre-1990)

Ballysillan LC  
Belvoir RC  
Loughside RC (currently closed)  
Shankill LC  
Ozone/Indoor Tennis Centre  
Whiterock LC

*Note - Ozone was extended in the mid 90's to include indoor tennis and climbing*

- 3.16 The inspection programme serves to identify common themes evidenced at multiple sites. Themes such as light bulb replacement (indoor and out), contractor sign in protocols, grounds maintenance and wet area cleaning have been identified and resolved as a direct result of the monitoring programme.
- 3.17 Inspection reports feature prominently in ongoing fortnightly BCC/GLL operational meetings. These meetings are scheduled every second Friday and provide a valuable opportunity to explore any issues highlighted through the inspections and to discuss actions/options for continuous improvement.”

In response to an issue which had been raised by a Director, the Partnership Manager confirmed that he would, later in the month, be attending a meeting involving GLL representatives and Council facility maintenance managers to review the existing split responsibilities matrix and examine ways in which the current process for raising works orders could be streamlined.

The Board noted the contents of the report.

#### **Policy and Procedure Alignment – Equality and Diversity/Health and Safety**

The Partnership Manager submitted for the Board's consideration the following report:

**“1.0 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To provide the Board with an annual confirmation statement in relation to both Equality and Diversity and Health and Safety policy and procedure alignments.

**2.0 Recommendation**

- 2.1 The Board is requested to record receipt of this report and note the statements of policy alignment as presented at 3.7 and 3.11 below.

**Main Report**

- 3.1 At its meeting on 16th January 2017, the Board approved a programme to evaluate key policy alignments to demonstrate that GLL policies and operating procedures reflect those of Belfast City Council. This requirement is set out in the partnership specification and tri-partite contract documentation.

- 3.2 Within the current annual board report schedule, the relevant report on both Equality and Diversity and Health and Safety is due in Quarter 1 (April 2022).

#### Equality and Diversity

- 3.3 On 8th April 2019, the Board approved the third annual report in relation to Equality and Diversity alignment.
- 3.4 Policy alignment in relation to Equality and Diversity was not reported in 2020 or 2021 due to Covid related lockdowns and operating restrictions.
- 3.5 At the time of the original assessment, the relevant policy and procedure alignment was very positive. Following discussions between GLL and BCC it was agreed that existing policies, operational practices and activity programming were substantially aligned and an alignment assurance statement was agreed.
- 3.6 By its nature, equality and diversity is subject to ongoing changes in legislation and best practice guidance. BCC policy and leisure centre operating procedures are continually under review. Consequently, agreement is in place to ensure that when policy decisions emerge, GLL operating procedures are updated to reflect the relevant policy changes.
- 3.7 A review of the previous analysis alongside current policies and procedures concludes that GLL and BCC equality and diversity positions remain substantially aligned. Consequently, we are satisfied that the current arrangements and outputs support the following statement:

*'At 11th April 2022, BCC and GLL policies and operational procedures in relation to Equality and Diversity are closely aligned with no significant variances or areas of concern to address.'*

#### Health and Safety

- 3.8 Health and Safety is categorised as a 'corporate risk' for BCC. The consequences of non-compliance with legislation and industry best practice are grave in relation to potential financial loss, reputational damage and legal action.
- 3.9 Assessment of the relevant policy and procedure alignments, comparing BCC and GLL, has been very positive. Information gathered through a number of approaches clearly indicates that existing policies, written 'normal operating procedures (NOPs)' and observed operational practices are substantially aligned and an alignment assurance statement was agreed.
- 3.10 Assessment of GLL's Health and Safety procedures has included the following four elements:

- a) **BCC Monitoring Visits** – BCC conducts two centre inspection visits per quarter in every centre. The visits focus on cleaning, maintenance and health and safety. In relation to health and safety, visual inspections/observations include room security, equipment and material storage, lifeguarding, overall staffing levels and risk assessment files. Observations are scored and reports sent to each centre manager and the GLL Regional Management Team. Throughout 2021/22, a total of 115 centre inspections raised no serious H&S concerns and resulted in no formal rectification notices being issued to GLL.
- b) **Findings within the 2017 Independent Review of Leisure** – Board members will be familiar with the independent review of leisure commissioned by BCC in 2017. The final report was presented to BCC in February 2018 and discussed further at a workshop on 16th May 2018. The report concluded that: ‘no evidence was found to suggest that they are operating the service outside of health and safety legislation and relevant guidance.’
- c) **BCC Desktop Review of GLL Written Policies and Procedures** – BCC corporate H&S section conducted a desktop exercise to compare GLL H&S policies and written procedures with those currently in place within BCC. The findings indicated that GLL H&S paperwork and related files are up to date and in line with H&S legislation. This exercise did not assess the practical application of GLL policies and concluded that a more thorough independent audit of operational practices and culture would be the best way to complete the overall review. As a result, BCC commissioned an independent audit.
- d) **Independent Health and Safety Audit** – In March 2019 BCC appointed Quadra Consulting Ltd to conduct H&S compliance audits in every centre. Following Covid pandemic related delays the review was finally completed in March 2022. All visits were unannounced. The audit sought to establish an overall level of assurance for each centre with ratings being low, moderate, high or excellent. The final report will be presented to BCC in the coming weeks. Initial review of the executive summary has been very encouraging with (of the sixteen centres audited) 4 achieved a ‘moderate’ assurance rating, 9 were rated as ‘high’ and 3 as ‘excellent’. None were rated as ‘low’.

This was a substantial commitment and reflects the serious nature of H&S management in the leisure management environment.

- 3.11 The review/monitoring actions as detailed above in 3.10 (a - c) alongside the independent audit described in 3.10 (d) demonstrates that GLL and BCC Health and Safety positions are substantially aligned. Consequently, we are satisfied that the current position supports the following statement:

*'At 11th April 2022, BCC and GLL policies and operational procedures in relation to Health and Safety are closely aligned with no significant variances or areas of concern to address.'*

After discussion, the Board recorded receipt of the report and noted the statements of policy alignment for (i) Equality and Diversity and (ii) Health and Safety.

### **Update on Review of Leisure Operating Model Governance Arrangements**

The Partnership Manager submitted for the Board's consideration the following report:

#### **1.0 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To update the Board on the final report arising from the review of the leisure service governance arrangements and the resulting Council decision.

#### **2.0 Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Board is requested to note the information provided and in particular the options and recommendations presented at 3.3 and 3.7 respectively.
- 2.2 The Board is requested to formally consider the approach from BCC to approve a voluntary and solvent winding up of the company as set out below at 3.11.
- 2.3 The Board is requested to agree, in principle, that a special board meeting be convened before June, as set out at 3.13 below to consider next steps.

#### **3.0 Main Report**

- 3.1 Members are reminded that in November 2020, the SP and R Committee agreed to review the tri-partite leisure model and the ABL Board, including its membership and governance arrangements. Terms of reference were approved in June 2021 and First Point Management and Consultancy Limited was appointed to conduct the review.

The review entailed an extensive desktop review together with a programme of stakeholder consultations and was concluded with submission of the draft report on 2nd February 2022. The final report was scheduled to be presented to the SP&R Committee on 28th March.

This report sets out the main elements of the review findings, proposals and recommendations.

- 3.2 The report has concluded that the tri-partite arrangement in general and ABL in particular made a positive contribution in the early years to the Leisure contract 'settling in' and the establishment of stable contract compliance assurance protocols. The report states that over time as the contract matured ABL's position and influence has diminished, stating:

*'To some extent ABL has become embroiled in operational detail from the outset which has effectively set in motion a circular process of contract monitoring with little space for anything else, and limited opportunity to genuinely add value to the partnership.'*

*'The majority of consultees felt that the Council through SP&R and ultimately Full Council realistically held the power and control. It should be noted that GLL have a direct relationship with the Council that often-bypasses ABL.'*

*'There is no sense of empowerment within ABL; a significant number of consultees described ABL as 'toothless'.'*

Critical questions for consideration are posed and answered within the report including:

*'The key question is:*

*Now that the contract is into its 7th year and has matured considerably, is the current arrangement still fit for purpose?*

*The simple answer to this question is no. This review is timely as the leisure management contract is now well established, the transitional issues have progressed considerably, the service is moving into a post pandemic recovery period and the independent directors are approaching the end of their term of office.*

*Contract compliance, performance management and holding the operator to account could be undertaken directly by the Council. However, full consideration should be given into increasing the resources available to undertake this function given the leisure estate has expanded from 10 to 16 facilities through the LTP with the potential for further expansion.*

*This then questions the future of ABL in its current composition, if its core activity over the past seven years is undertaken directly by the Council in the future, then the continuance of ABL does not fulfil any meaningful purpose.'*

3.3 The following three options were presented:

**Option 1** – Do nothing;

**Option 2** - Bring Contract Compliance and Performance Monitoring of GLL back into the Council and retain ABL in a different form to focus on its broader objectives;

**Option 3** - Bring Contract Compliance and Performance Monitoring of GLL back into the Council and commence the winding up of ABL.

3.4 Option 1 was not recommended. Options 2 and 3 were recommended for further consideration.

3.5 Option 3 was proposed as the preferred way forward, based on the following assessment of the report findings:

a) There is little evidence to suggest that Council would be minded to devolve the required level of responsibility and autonomy to ABL to allow it to fulfill a substantially different function and focus on its broader objectives as proposed in Option 2.

b) Contract compliance and performance monitoring is already substantially managed through the City and Neighbourhood Services Department (CNS). Broader contract management functions could be easily transferred to Council and legal/contractual amendments put in place via provisions within the existing contract documentation.

c) There are currently only three of nine independent director positions filled on the ABL board. The reduction has been through natural wastage but has been exacerbated with recruitment being postponed during the pandemic and more recently pending the outcome of this review. All three sitting independent volunteer directors (including the chair) will reach the end of their tenure on the board by December 2022.

3.6 Conclusions set out in the report are clear and unambiguous. Specifically stating:

*'ABL has undoubtedly provided a useful vehicle to navigate through the formative years of the contract with GLL'*

*'However, despite the intention for ABL to have a much wider influence on community and health outcomes as expressed in its 'objects' it has, almost by default done little more than fulfil a contract compliance and performance monitoring role for the Council.'*

*'With limited exceptions ABL adds little value to leisure per se and has limited powers; it is in effect a 'toothless client.'*

*'There is no genuine justification for the continuance of ABL in its current form, as the contract management function can be managed directly by the Council through the Partnership Manager.'*

- 3.7** The report included the following recommendations:
- a) Consider the Options as set out in this report;
  - b) Take further legal advice on any potential implications and necessary steps to be taken to implement the preferred option;
  - c) Consult the parties to the current Leisure Management Arrangements on the options as set out in the report;
  - d) Approach Active Belfast Limited to approve a voluntary and solvent winding up of the company;
  - e) Transfer the contract monitoring function of GLL directly to the Council;
  - f) Establishing an additional contract monitoring post to support this function in consideration of the expansion of the leisure estate and to support succession planning;
  - g) Formally acknowledge the commitment and contribution of all current and former Directors of Active Belfast Limited.
- 3.8** The final review report was presented to the SP&R Committee on 25th March 2022. After consideration, the Committee approved Option 3 as the preferred way forward. Namely, to bring Contract Compliance and Performance Monitoring of GLL back into the Council and commence the winding up of ABL.
- 3.9** At the time of writing, the SP&R Committee decision is pending ratification by full Council on 4th April. The Council's decision will be confirmed verbally at the meeting.
- 3.10** Having sought legal advice, there will be a number of actions required as a result of Council's decision including:
- a) Establishment of a time frame for winding up ABL, moving contract compliance and performance monitoring to Council control and the revision of contract documentation;
  - b) Review of contractual arrangements to move from a tri-partite to a bi-partite model; and

**c) The formal winding up of ABL, along with all associated Companies House administration.**

- 3.11 In relation to recommendation (d) in 3.7 above, the Council is now formally approaching Active Belfast Limited to approve a voluntary and solvent winding up of the company**
- 3.12 Subject to Board approval of a voluntary winding up of the company, Council officers will move to establish the process and time frame required to finalise arrangements.**
- 3.13 The next ABL Board meeting is scheduled to take place on 6th June. Given the Council's decision, Board approval is requested to convene a special meeting, before June, specifically to consider details of the winding up process and implications for the conclusion of company business. It is proposed that a meeting date be agreed as soon possible after all essential information/detail is available."**

The Partnership Manager provided a brief overview of the report and confirmed that the Council, on 4th April, had ratified the decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 28th March to adopt Option 3, as recommended within the consultant's report. As a result, contract compliance and performance monitoring of GLL would return to the Council and the process leading to the winding up of Active Belfast Limited would commence.

During a lengthy discussion, the Chairperson, in raising a number of issues around the Council's decision, highlighted the need for those Directors who had yet to view the consultant's report to be provided with a copy in full, in advance of the special meeting being recommended to consider the next steps.

Mr. Ellison pointed out that the Active Belfast Limited Board provided Trades Unions with a valuable opportunity to engage, on behalf of their members, with GLL on leisure-related issues. In the absence of any meaningful alternative being proposed, he confirmed that he was opposed to the Council's decision.

After further discussion, the Board agreed, with four Directors voting for and one against, to adopt the recommendations contained within the report and noted that the special meeting would be convened before the end of May.

The Board noted also that the Partnership Manager would investigate the potential for Directors to be provided with a copy of the consultant's report in full at the earliest opportunity and would discuss with Mr. Colin Campbell, Divisional Solicitor and with Advance Accounting, their respective roles at the special meeting.

**Other Business**

No additional items of business were raised.

Chairperson