

## Overview and Scrutiny Committee Working Group – September 2025

### Review of scrutiny item requests

Scrutiny request pro-forma	Request details
No. 26	
1. Member request	Councillor E L Stephens
2. Area of scrutiny requested and reasons for it	<p>The new Leisure Contract procured in 2024 for the management of the Council's leisure centres. As with all major projects, a post implementation review is required, in particular requested by Members because:</p> <p>a) Neither Officers, nor the procurement contractor, nor Members foresaw that the outcome of the tender process could be to lose the sports hall at Blackwater Leisure Centre. Members would like to explore how to minimise the chances of this happening in any future procurement exercise;</p> <p>b) When this was made public, a number of leisure centre customers contacted Members, the press, and even a lawyer, in an effort to prevent it. Members would like to explore how to manage public communications for future high-impact projects.</p>
3. Indicate which part of the Committee's remit the request falls within	Review or scrutiny of decisions made or actions taken, also relating to corporate risk and affecting the inhabitants or the area.
4. If other, give further details	
5. Has the matter been raised directly with Officers or another Committee?	Yes
6. If yes to 5, give further details including dates and any response	Raised at the Leisure Partnership Board meeting on 31 July 2025. Officers advised that this could be a potential scrutiny review item.
7. Expected outcome of this requested scrutiny item	A post implementation review with recommendations arising to be actioned by the relevant teams.

### Officer review and comments

1. These matters clearly fall within the remit of the Committee for potential review and scrutiny.
2. The subject matter of this request is related to the request by Councillor A M Lay which was considered by the Working Group at its July 2025 meeting, the outcome being due to be reported to the Committee at its September meeting. Whereas the request by Councillor

Lay was focused on the actual messaging and communications as to the implications of the new contract in terms of its impact on the sports hall, this request seeks a wider examination of the significant impact of a key feature of the new contract, and that this was either not known or understood fully at the outset.

3. The procurement process was set up in a way that encouraged bidders to invest and safeguard the long-term commercial viability of the assets and increase participation to a wider demographic for years to come. It is felt that this has been achieved by creating new attractions and expanding the fitness provision at the Blackwater Leisure Centre in place of the under-utilised sports hall (4% of throughput). The procurement process puts its trust in the bidders – they are the experts - hence why the Council outsources this service. It is true that a bid of this quality and significant investment into our assets over a period of 20 years, which also returned the Council with c£500k per annum fixed management fee, had not been foreseen.
4. Information on timeline including Member notifications:
  - May 2024 - initial evaluations concluded
  - June 2024 - Members of the Leisure Contract Working Group informed of the outcome and preferred bidder
  - July 2024 - All Member briefings informing them of the outcome and likely impact
  - July 2024 – Council decision delayed and process reviewed to provide an opportunity to tie in investment and borrowing terms in line with a 20 year contract, bidders were asked to provide a revised bid based on 20 years
  - September 2024 – second evaluation concluded
  - October / November 2024 - Member meetings and engagement were scheduled, supported by the new Chief Executive. A schedule of those Members who did not opt to engage or who were otherwise unavailable during these times is available. At both these briefings and those held in July the proposed change to the use of the Blackwater Leisure Centre sports hall was clearly identified.
5. The Working Group's report on its initial assessment of the scrutiny request by Councillor Lay regarding the Leisure Contract was withdrawn from submission to the last meeting of the Committee and although raising different issues can be linked with this scrutiny request for eventual report back to the Committee. It is therefore now for the Working Group to make an initial assessment of this particular scrutiny request.