

# **Report title: Bowling Green’s / Public Health Funding Withdrawal**

Report to: Cabinet

Date of meeting: 17th December 2024

Cabinet Portfolio Holder: Councillor Tricia Ayrton

Report of: Martin Taylor

Public or private: Private

Key Decision: Yes, is likely to lead to significant expenditure or savings within a service area, or one that is likely to have a significant impact on the life of a community within the Borough.

Published on the Forward Plan: Y

## **Report summary**

* 1. The Council is required to set a balanced budget each financial year, due to pressures in Adults Social Care, Children’s and Housing Services efficiencies have been required from across the Council. This report addresses the mitigations for consultation after the removal of Public Health substitute part-funding, originally allocated in 2015/16, to Environmental Management for the continued provision of Bowling Green & facilities situated outside of parks across the borough.
  2. The report evaluates options for consideration to mitigate the removal of the £60k per annum Public Health contribution to allow the Service / Council to continue to maintain Bowling Green provision numbers.
  3. The detail of the original Savings Proposal which followed a financial review of associated costs carried out in 2014/15, recommended that from the 24 bowling facilities across the borough at the time, 14 of these which were the ones located outside of a park boundary, and which were still managed and maintained by the council, would have the maintenance removed and responsibility handed to the individual bowls club to carry out and fund at their own expense through member/user subscription. This Savings Proposal was not supported at the time.

## **Recommendations**

2.1 Due to the removal of £30k funding in 2025/26 and £60k from 2026/27, Members are asked to approve the proposal as a basis to consult with the bowling clubs, to agree a system that will enable the Council to achieve the required saving and for this saving cost to be shared equally by all the clubs.

## **Reason for recommendation**

* 1. Funding will be reduced as part of the Budget Setting process to set a Balanced Budget for the Council for 2025/26. There is a need to consult on the options to reduce funding and maintain the service to Bowling Greens and facilities.
  2. The opportunity to repurpose resources and reduce the council's liabilities associated with deteriorating assets in support of the asset disposal and rationalisation aspirations.
  3. Potential capital receipts from the sale of the land and buildings associated with any subsequently closed greens.

## **Alternatives considered**

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* 1. To re-submit the original Savings Proposal to cease the maintenance to the 14 Bowling Green’s outside parks, and responsibility to be transferred to the individual bowls club to carry out and fund at their own expense through member/user subscription.

## **Key information**

* 1. The Public Health Investment Strategy has provided £60,000 annually as substitute funding to the service. As part of the Budget Setting process to set a Balanced Budget for the Council for 2025/26 the substitute funding is proposed to be removed starting in 2025/26 of £30,000 and the full amount from 2026/27 onwards.
  2. There are currently estimated 1,024 active bowls club members benefiting from the greens.
  3. The ongoing maintenance of facilities costs the council significantly, with no immediate alternative funding sources available.
  4. Through consultation with Bowling Clubs an ongoing service could be maintained via a number of alternative methods, including clubs paying utility bills, taking on Grounds Maintenance obligations, paying a standard rent fee for use of the facilities, upkeep of the pavilions etc.

An additional option to reduce the costs to the Council is a full Community Asset Transfer option. If pursued, would take further detailed work with Estates colleagues and in-depth support in the first year to secure this community transfer to the Bowling Clubs / Associations. Bowling Clubs may bring their own ideas to the table.

## **Finance**

6.1 The withdrawal of Public Health funding will create a £60,000 funding gap against current operations. The proposal in this report will realise savings required to bridge this gap. Staffing efficiencies may also be realised by reallocating personnel to vacant positions within the EM Service.

6.2 **Table 1**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Efficiencies 2025/26**  **£m** | **Efficiencies**  **2026/27 £m** | **Efficiencies 2027/28 £m** |
| Employees |  |  |  |
| Other Costs | 0.030 | 0.060 | 0.060 |
| Income lost |  |  |  |
| **Net Efficiencies** | **0.030** | **0.060** | **0.060** |
| Additional income generated |  |  |  |
| **Total Efficiencies** | **0.030** | **0.060** | **0.060** |
| Implementation costs |  |  |  |
| **Total savings less implementation costs** | **0.030** | **0.060** | **0.060** |

## **Legal**

7.1 If required, the council must ensure compliance with any legal obligations related to the closure of public facilities, including consultations with affected clubs and adherence to property disposal regulations.

## **Human resource**

8.1 Staffing adjustments may be required if clubs take on grounds maintenance duties. Two full-time equivalent (FTE) staff can be repurposed to other vacant posts. Any transfer of maintenance to bowls clubs will necessitate discussions regarding staff roles and responsibilities.

## **Sustainability impact**

* 1. It is not anticipated there will be any negative sustainability impact as a result of proposed changes. If the report is accepted and Bowls Clubs opt to take on responsibility for paying utility costs, then there is greater incentive to only heat building as is absolutely needed and carbon footprint may reduce.

## **Other considerations (corporate priorities, risks)**

* 1. Community feedback and potential backlash from bowls clubs must be considered in the decision-making process.
  2. The impact on local sports and recreation should be assessed to maintain community well-being and public health benefits.
  3. The council should explore opportunities for community engagement to encourage wider participation.

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