

Report to: Policy and Performance Advisory Committee

Date: 15 January 2021

Title: Wave Leisure Partnership Support update

Report of: Phil Evans, Director of Tourism and Enterprise

Cabinet members: Cllr Ruth O Keeffe, Cabinet member for Tourism and Devolution

Ward(s): All

Purpose of report: To provide an update on the impact of Covid-9 on Wave Leisure Trust and the Trust's plans during the Tier 5 lockdown.

Officer recommendation(s): (1) The Committee is asked to note the report.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Following the phased re-opening of Wave Leisure Trust (WLT) sites that began on 25 July 2020 after the first lockdown period a number of leisure facilities were able to open across the District. Some however had to remain closed because they were either too small or unviable financially with reduced patron numbers caused by the on-going restrictions. Strict health and safety measures including social distancing had had to be implemented and maintained throughout but customer numbers had started to build in the larger centres.

As the second build-up of the virus expanded outward from Kent and areas of East Sussex started to see increases in new CV-19 cases it was likely that further restrictions would be re-imposed in the late autumn. Initially Lewes District was put in Tier 2 and there was a limited lockdown from 5th November but this was increased to Tier 4 and on 23rd December Wave Leisure was again forced to close down facilities and to re-furlough staff across the District. Tier 5 restrictions followed.

1.2 Between 20 March 2020 and 25 July 2020, 95% of WLT staff had been furloughed and WLT had to approach the Council to ask if it might provide financial support to assist with its re-mobilisation for Lewes District. For various reasons including restrictions on eligibility criteria for access to funding, the size

of the organisation and its status as a Trust, Wave Leisure Trust had been unable to source external funding from Government or Government agencies.

- 1.3 At the Cabinet meeting on 23rd September, It was requested that Wave Leisure Trust (WLT) be offered a loan of up to £500K to support it through the immediate period and to offset its losses in income throughout 2020. The exact terms were to be determined between the identified officers and portfolio holders listed in the Report.

PPAC also requested that an update would be provided on the future activities of WLT as it started to implement its remobilisation programme.

The move into Tier 5 restrictions has unfortunately delayed progress in this regard and a further update report, once the future lockdown conditions are eased and as soon as real progress in implementing post-Covid operations can continue is proposed.

2 National Leisure Recovery Fund and operational changes

- 2.1 Prior to the closure leisure centres on 23rd December, a new recovery fund was announced that could help see leisure trusts and other providers cover a substantial part of their costs and lost income during the closure period.

The deadline for bids was originally set as 8th January but this was subsequently extended to 15th January. WLT submitted their bid on 14th January. Technically this had to be applied for by the local authority but WLT provided all the data and were very efficient in compiling all the necessary information so that it could be submitted successfully. At this time we await the decision of Sport England on how much can be recovered.

In the meantime Wave have been adapting their operational model to make it more efficient and to cater for changes in the way that users will want to make use of their facilities in a post-Covid environment.

There will be a focus on providing gym, swim and group exercise classes and these will all be 'bookable' activities i.e. customers would not be able to turn up and access them without booking. Various physical changes to facilities like gyms have also been made with more spacing and better customer flows.

3 Financial re-structuring and future plans

- 3.1 Last year WLT has produced a 3-year financial model which showed it moving from a £1.5m loss in 2020/21 to a £130k surplus by 2022/23 financial year end. Whilst this plan might have to be re-adapted to consider the new restrictions imposed in 2020/21 the basic principles outlined by the Restart; Rebuild; Recover model will remain the same. Wave has also produced a ten-year strategic plan to support the long-term development of the trust.
- 3.2 It is envisaged that the current lockdown situation will encourage a pent-up demand for leisure services once everything can safely open again. Many

potential markets, previously under-represented, might take up sport and exercise in a more controlled environment and with professional guidance. Wave is currently engaged in creating a studio that can be used to help people exercise at home in a digital access format and with personal guidance on exercise. Overall there is more emphasis on supporting hard to reach groups, including GP referrals, some of which are now related to CV-19 recovery.

With the roll out of the vaccination programme more people will feel confident about improving their health in a social environment, knowing that high standards of cleanliness and hygiene are adhered to.

Throughout the closure period, Wave has continued to provide exercise and training programmes through social media platforms such as Facebook and various exercise options are available using such methods.

At this time it is not known how long the Tier 5 restrictions will be in place or how the re-opening of leisure facilities will be implemented. Once we have further information there will be a possibility to provide a more detailed report and with further performance monitoring regarding the provision of leisure provided by WLT across the District.

4 Financial appraisal

The report is for noting only and there are no direct financial implications.

5 Legal implications

The report is for noting only and there are no direct legal implications.

6 Risk management implications

The report is for noting only and there are no direct risk management implications

7 Equality analysis

The report is for noting only and there are no direct implications on equality analysis.

8 Environmental sustainability implications

The report is for noting only and there are no direct implications for environmental sustainability.

9 Appendices

None

10 Background papers

None