

ANGUS COUNCIL

18 MARCH 2021

EXTERNAL REVIEW OF DECISION TO DEMOLISH THE FORMER LOCHSIDE LEISURE CENTRE

REPORT BY MARGO WILLIAMSON CHIEF EXECUTIVE

ABSTRACT

This Report presents to Members the independent external review report relating to decisions taken by the Council from 2013 to present in determining the decision to demolish Lochside Leisure Centre.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Council: -

- (i) Note the contents of the independent external review report attached at Appendix 1; and
- (ii) Note the actions already taken and to be taken in light of the report findings.

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE COUNCIL PLAN

This report contributes to the following strategic priorities in the Angus Council Plan: We want Angus Council to be efficient and effective.

3. BACKGROUND

[Report No 273/20](#) by the Chief Executive was considered at the meeting of Council on 5 November 2020. It detailed a proposed remit, timescale, cost, funding and procurement options for an independent external review of all evidence and decisions taken from 2013 to present in determining the decision to demolish Lochside Leisure Centre. At the meeting, the Chief Executive advised members that in relation to Procurement Option 1, Audit Scotland had indicated that they did not have the capacity to undertake the work until well into 2021 and that members would need to take that into account when selecting which option they wished to go for. The Council resolved to approve the remit of the review which was the examination of the decision-making and evidence from 2013 to 2020 in determining the decision to demolish the former Lochside Leisure Centre. Procurement Option 3, namely further competition from a framework, was also approved with an estimated cost of £15,000.

On 13 November 2020 the Council issued a Mini-Competition Invitation to the 8 providers on Lot 1 (Internal Audit - Large - Universities, NHS and Scotland Excel) of the APUC "Audit Services - Internal External and Tax" framework (APUC Framework Number PFB1028 AP). Following an evaluation process, Azets was appointed on 8 December 2020.

It was incumbent on Azets to carry out its review in a way it deemed appropriate and Azets was free to do whatever investigation was considered necessary, with a particular focus on the internal decision-making. Report 273/20 clearly advises 'access to Council Officers, other witnesses including Petitioners, and further evidence will be arranged as required'. Azets conducted the review independently and exercised their expertise and professional skills in this area.

4. PROPOSALS

The independent review undertaken by Azets has concluded that: -

- Based on its review of evidence, the decision by the Council on 7 February 2019 to approve the demolition of Lochside Leisure Centre was not unreasonable.
- Three weaknesses were identified, as detailed in the report, none of which are significant in nature.

- The main lesson to be learned is the importance of producing options appraisals to support decision-making. It was recommended that Management develop formal guidance for the documentation of options appraisals and that documentation of options in Council and Committee papers be proportionate to the nature of the decision being made.

In response, an Action Plan has been agreed setting out Azets' Recommendations and the Council's response, detailing what will be done and setting out responsible officers and timescales for completion.

Work had already been undertaken in response to the Internal Audit report of November 2018, whereby CLT approved an Exit Strategy for Council Buildings in March 2019. This addressed all the recommendations made, which were to: -

- develop exit strategies as part of the decision-making process to vacate a building;
- record fully discussions and decision-making about potentially surplus assets, including the reasons for accepting or rejecting various options;
- that reports to committees should include a summary of the options considered, their pros and cons and the reasons for rejecting options and the selection of the recommended option;
- clarify the position regarding use of the Disposal Procedure Checklist; and
- provide further guidance on recording of enquiries about potential community asset transfers.

The options appraisal requirement is now part of the council's project management business case template and work is ongoing to link to additional guidance and support material to enhance the current approach. The current review of the Council's Financial Regulations (due to report in May 2021) will further implement these actions.

5. FINANCIAL AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

An estimated budget of £15,000 was approved by Council on 5 November 2020. The cost of the review was £13,500.

6. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

An Equality Impact Assessment is not required.

NOTE: No background papers, as detailed by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report.

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Appendix 1 – Azets report “External review of decision making re demolition of Lochside Leisure Centre”