

**CABINET
9 APRIL 2024**

**DOLPHIN CENTRE UPDATE: PHASE 3 MECHANICAL AND ELECTRICAL REPLACEMENT
PROGRAMME AND RELEASE OF ADDITIONAL CAPITAL FUNDS FROM
SWIMMING POOL SUPPORT FUND**

**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Matthew Roche
Health and Housing Portfolio**

**Responsible Director – Dave Winstanley
Group Director of Services**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To update members on the delivery of the Phase 3 Mechanical and Electrical (M&E) installation and request release of funding following a successful bid to the Swimming Pool Support Fund (SPSF), for photovoltaic panels and new combined heating and power unit.

Summary

2. The Dolphin Centre is now over 40 years old and like any asset requires investment in maintenance.
3. Members have received a number of reports over the last 18 months with regard to the ongoing maintenance works to the Dolphin Centre, covering the Phase 3 M&E installation and essential pool repairs.
4. In July 2022, members approved the release of funding for Phase 3 M&E work and funding for localised pool repair work. Following initial investigation, it was identified further work was required to the main pool, walkway, shower area and toddler pool, with additional funds being realised in a further two cabinet reports in August 2023 and September 2023.
5. The main pool opened in January 2024, and the shower area and toddler pool are expected to be completed in Spring.
6. During this period the detailed design for Phase 3 M&E has been developed and the Government announced the SPSF in June 2023, which was in two phases. The Council were successful in a bid to the Capital phase of the fund in February 2024. This will provide a new combined heating power unit and photovoltaic panels, which will improve the carbon footprint of the building and reduce operational costs.

7. The works identified in the bid have been incorporated into the Phase 3 M&E works to be able to issue a single tender to try and secure economies of scale and a more effective delivery programme.
8. Phase 3 works include space heating and ventilation across a number of areas in the building, the building management system (control system), air handling systems, emergency lighting and replacing existing lights with LED fittings to improve energy efficiency.

Recommendations

9. It is recommended that Cabinet release the £526K capital funding from the successful bid to the Swimming Pool Support Fund.

Reason

10. To enable the installation of photovoltaic panels and a new combined heating and power unit at the Dolphin Centre as part of the Phase 3 Mechanical and Electrical works.

Dave Winstanley
Group Director of Services

Background Papers

- Cabinet report 5 July 2022
- Cabinet report 11 August 2023
- Cabinet report 5 September 2023

Ian Thompson : Extension 6628

S17 Crime and Disorder	The content of this report will not impact on crime and disorder.
Health and Well Being	The Dolphin Centre is the Council’s key facility in providing opportunities for residents to participate in an active and healthy lifestyle.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There will be a positive impact on carbon reduction as a result of installing modern and efficient mechanical and electrical plant and equipment.
Diversity	No individual is adversely affected as a result of this report.
Wards Affected	Park East
Groups Affected	No group will be adversely affected as a result of this report.
Budget and Policy Framework	There is no impact on the Council’s budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	No

Urgent Decision	No
Council Plan	The Dolphin Centre contributes to a number of the priorities in the Council Plan.
Efficiency	Elements of the capital works will reduce operating costs of the Dolphin Centre.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers.

MAIN REPORT

Background

11. The Dolphin Centre is the Council's only indoor leisure facility providing a range a health and wellbeing activities, as well as a key leisure and social venue in the town centre. Its town centre location contributes significantly to town centre footfall and vice versa. As the role of town centres continues to change, with greater emphasis on leisure and social activities, the contribution the Dolphin Centre makes to the town centre will continue to increase.
12. The key facilities within the Dolphin centre include:
 - (a) 25 metre swimming pool with diving boards, slides, training pool and toddler pool;
 - (b) water education programme and delivery of Key Stage 2 swimming to primary schools in Darlington;
 - (c) modern gym facilities with 2000 members, casual users and college curriculum usage (the team are GP referral qualified and local GPs refer into our team to support health improvement and rehabilitation);
 - (d) fitness studio, including exercise class programme;
 - (e) sports hall facilities, equivalent to two 5-a-side courts;
 - (f) recently refurbished and extended soft play facilities;
 - (g) recently installed 5 lane bowling alley;
 - (h) the Victorian Central Hall (Grade II listed);
 - (i) a number of social and meeting spaces;
 - (j) catering and hospitality, including a bistro, cafe and pavement cafe generating up to £1m income per year;

- (k) indoor events programme, including sporting events, concerts, weddings and more;
 - (l) a number of partners based in the Dolphin Centre, including Connect Health, who deliver the muscular skeletal contract on behalf of the NHS, Darlington Amateur Swimming Club, Darlington College, and 40 regular clubs.
13. During financial year 2022/23 there were over 850,000 visits to the Dolphin Centre.
14. The Dolphin Centre is over 40 years old and like any asset requires investment to maintain the centre.

Mechanical and Electrical Update

15. In 2012/13 a detailed study of the M&E installations was undertaken which resulted in a phased approach being implemented in relation to replacement and upgrading of equipment.
16. In 2015/16 Phase 1 was carried out, covering the pool, gym, wet changing village, and a number of other smaller areas. At the same time, replacement windows in the pool hall, replacement suspended ceiling in the pool hall and refurbishment of the wet changing village took place. The cost of this work was £2.7m.
17. Phase 2 of the M&E replacement programme took place in 2021 as part of the installation of the bowling alley, covering the bowling alley, soft play, dry changing rooms, first floor meeting spaces and the former registrar's area. The value of the M&E work was £0.6m.
18. In July 2022 members approved the release of funding for Phase 3 M&E work. Following approval, detailed investigation and design work has been carried out, which is now ready to go out to tender.
19. The much-needed investment will be used to replace essential elements of the mechanical plant, heating & ventilation services across the whole centre that are beyond their effective life, bringing significant improvements to the Bistro, Central Hall, Sports Hall and circulation areas in particular. This will ensure the centre can continue to provide comfortable environments across a range of services and also reduce operational running costs.
20. New energy efficient lighting will also be installed throughout the centre, bringing the lighting to a modern, efficient standard. Whilst the majority of the works will be confined to back of house plant rooms, short term disruption to operating functions will be unavoidable. It is expected that the first floor Bistro will need to be temporarily closed for a period of up to 11 weeks (which will be reduced where possible), whilst new supply and extract ventilation systems are installed; 16 Horsemarket Cafe will remain open throughout the refurbishment. The works are scheduled to start on site in quarter 3 2024, concluding in 2026.

Swimming Pool Support Fund (SPSF)

21. The government's SPSF provided a total of £60 million to local authorities in England as a support package for public leisure facilities with swimming pools and is split into two phases.

Phase I - Revenue

22. £20m was made available to support facilities with swimming pools with increased cost pressures, leaving them most vulnerable to closure or significant service reduction.
23. The Council had to be the lead applicant for any publicly accessible pool within its boundaries and a submission was made to the Phase I fund for Hummersknott Academy Trust. Unfortunately, this application was unsuccessful.

Phase II - Capital

24. £40m was made available from the government for capital investment to improve the energy efficiency of public facilities with pools in the medium to long term.
25. For the Phase II round, an application was submitted for just over £1m for a range of capital interventions and other associated work. The Council was successful and received £526k for photovoltaic panels and a new combined heating and power unit. These two interventions will help reduce energy consumption.
26. The delivery of this funding will be added to the M&E contract, therefore creating a bigger package of work providing economies of scale.

Delivery

27. The delivery programme for the package of works will be developed through the procurement process to minimise the impact on the operation of the Dolphin Centre.
28. The majority of the remaining M&E work is associated with the plant rooms that cover the Bistro, Central Hall, Sports Hall, and general circulation areas. Therefore, most of the work is not associated with pool plant and there would not have been any benefit in trying to do the work while the pool was closed, even if its design work could have been accelerated.

Financial Implications

29. In July 2022, Cabinet had already released £2.2m for Phase 3 of the M&E project, which has now been designed and is ready to go to procurement. The cost of the additional M&E work, photovoltaic panels and new combined heating and power unit, which will be included in the Phase 3 programme, will be funded from the SPSF award.
30. As this is an external award, Cabinet have the delegation in place to approve release of this funding, as there is no impact on the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

Procurement Advice

31. The Procurement will be through the Procurement Hub Major Works Framework, via a Direct Award appointment to Willmott Dixon. The Framework is compliant with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.