

Question submitted to Full Council 18 July 2023

“The Council will be aware of the concerns Sport Haslemere has expressed on behalf of the clubs who use The Edge and the lack of certainty about their future use of the Building. To this end we have organised a petition entitled “Protect The Edge” which has over 2,500 signatures and we would like to present this at the meeting. We would also like to ask a question - can the Council give the clubs a categorical assurance that The Edge will re-open for Community Use by no later than 1st October 2023 so that they can plan their future activities?”

NB. At the Council meeting, Mr Grimes read out a slightly different question, reflecting the way in which discussions had moved on since he submitted his original question:

“Regarding The Edge Leisure Centre in Haslemere, this is a facility that was built by public subscription for the benefit of the people of Haslemere, thanks to the sterling work of the late Nick Chilton and the late Eric Thompson who have over many years done so much for the development of sport in Haslemere. Until 1st of July the building was used by a large majority of clubs and for some of these there are simply no alternative permanent locations for them locally. In addition Rachel Morris MBA a double Olympic gold medal winner in disabled sport has also had to suspend her activities which she runs for disadvantaged and disabled children as she is wholly dependent on The Edge to be able to deliver her program.

We are now told by Surrey County Council that for the school and the Weydon Multi-Academy Trust to take over the facilities at The Edge will take a minimum of 12 months. We further understand that Surrey County Council are prepared to let Waverly Borough Council reinstate their lease for two years and this frankly is the only way that community use of The Edge can continue in the next 12 months. We realize that this will be at a cost but would save the council in the short term a lot of money in dilapidation costs. A group of users of the facilities has been set up and those people already have a track record of raising large sums of money for schemes for sport of up to £1m and we are confident we'll raise the necessary funds in the next two years to enable continued use of The Edge for community purposes. Health and well-being is an essential part of modern life and what the clubs need is an assurance that The Edge will re-open. They need certainty to enable them to plan for the future. If the clubs fold due to that lack of certainty that will do untold harm to many athletes, some disabled, some with huge potential for the future, and some just denied access to be able to continue with their chosen sport.

Hence our petition entitled ‘protect The Edge’ which has huge local support with over 2,700 signatures which I have formally presented. The only opportunity now to keep The Edge open for community use is for Waverly Borough Council to take back the lease for two years whilst

funding is sorted out. I was also aware of the letter that Jeremy Hunt had sent to the Leader this afternoon asking the council also to take back the lease. This is an opportunity for the Leader of the Council to make good on the promises he gave Sport Haslemere at its meeting on the 17th of April. He told us that The Edge would not close for community use and that Waverley Borough Council would be prepared to provide financial assistance for a two-year transitional period so I hope that the council will now agree to take back the lease as offered providing the categorical assurance that the club's need for them to be able to move forward.

Thank you very much.”

Cllr Kika Mirylees responded to Mr Grimes original submitted question: “We are very sorry that Waverley Borough Council are unable to provide a categorical assurance The Edge will be reopened by 1 October. We are not the owners of the facility, as you know, Surrey County Council are. Where we do have ownership at the site, in the case of the playing pitches including the new 3G pitch, we have ensured that these are still open for community use. Without going into the details of all the things that we have encountered during this handover period we would assure you that we are very committed to supporting sports activities throughout the borough and negotiations and discussions with the multi-academy trust will continue and be aimed at re-opening The Edge facility as soon as possible. We are very much supportive of this, and I think that whatever we can do we will bring it to some happy conclusion.”

Responding to Mr Grimes’ question, the Leader advised that the petition had met the threshold to be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He was unable to give the assurances that Mr Grimes was looking for as there were some contentious issues regarding the amount of money that would be required in dilapidations and these had not been agreed between Waverley and Surrey. The Leader offered to meet with Mr Grimes, and also Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council, and Jeremy Hunt MP, and officers to discuss this and the local government funding issues that had led the council to this point.

Waverley continued to support Sport and Leisure in Haslemere, primarily through the extant Haslemere Leisure Centre, so whilst he could not give a categorical answer to Mr Grimes’ additional question, he was more than happy to extend an invitation for that meeting to take place and would certainly come along and speak to the subject at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.