

## FREEDOM LEISURE PERFORMANCE REVIEW

### Executive Summary

This report sets out the performance review of Freedom Leisure, including assessments on quality and performance management, KPIs and the priorities for year 2020/2021. Complaints, feedback and achievements are reviewed in the report as Freedom Leisure provide a wide range of services to the public.

The reporting period starts just after the first national lockdown, meaning that any comparisons to previous years are very difficult.

This report will assist in identifying the support that Freedom Leisure has received during the pandemic during this period and what they have done to minimise the impact of the pandemic.

### Recommendations

The Committee is requested to:

**RESOLVE That** the content of this report be noted.

The Committee has the authority to determine the recommendation set out above.
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**Background Papers:** None

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## Freedom Leisure Performance Review

## 1.0 Introduction

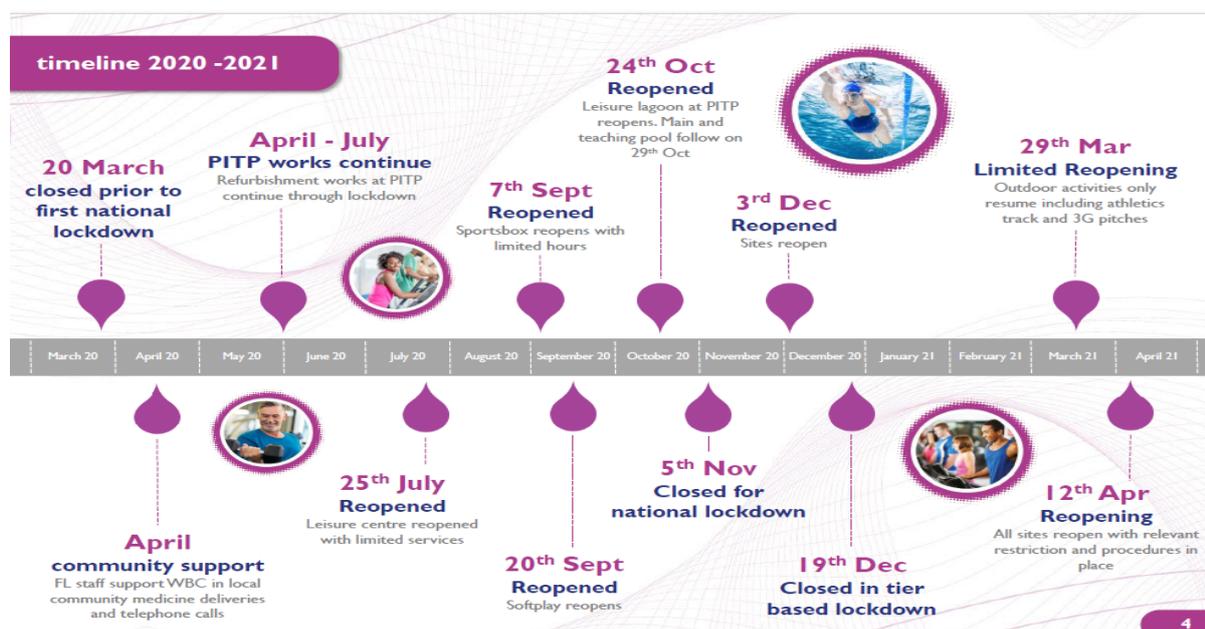
- 1.1 The Leisure Partnership Agreement commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2011. The Woking and Guildford partnerships were procured as part of a joint process that required a turnover threshold/scale of organisation that would have been challenging for Freedom Leisure to have met at the time on their own. Freedom Leisure therefore asked GLL to be the “principal” contractor, with Freedom Leisure delivering the contract, as a sub-contractor to them. The bid was written by Freedom Leisure who are fully responsible for its delivery. GLL receive an annual fee from Freedom Leisure for underwriting the original bid and holding the risk of Freedom Leisure failing to perform.
- 1.2 Since the original agreement, the contract has had several major changes which include 3 new pavilions and the Sportsbox at Hoe Valley.
- 1.3 The inclusion of Sportsbox also triggered the contract extension clause in the main contract which is for a further 4 years. Contract end is now 30<sup>th</sup> November 2025
- 1.4 Separate to the contract, following an open tender process Freedom Leisure has also been successful in securing the contract to run the kiosk in Woking Park from Summer 2018.
- 1.5 In September 2018, Woking Park Tennis Courts were removed from the Leisure Contract and returned to the management of Woking Borough Council. This was to allow a funding bid to improve the courts from the Lawn Tennis Association and for us to be included in the LTA led Club Spark community tennis programme.
- 1.6 In February 2021 the Eastwood Leisure Centre was also added to the remaining contract.

## 2.0 Priorities for 2020-2021

- 2.1 Freedom Leisure in consultation with Officers and their customers set a list of key priorities for 2020-2021. These were presented to the Leisure Partnership Board at the end of 2019 and agreed by this Board. However due to the circumstance around COVID 19 these priorities could not be achieved and the whole landscape of the contract changed significantly.

## 3.0 Performance during the 2020-2021

### 3.1 What happened Time line



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- 3.2 Woking Borough Council took a cautious and pragmatic approach to the early stages of the pandemic. WBC instructed Freedom Leisure to close all its leisure centres before the national lockdown came into force. At this time WBC agreed to cover all financial losses of the contract on an open book basis but expected Freedom to do everything possible to mitigate these losses. WBC also requested 40 staff to work for the Council. These staff were then utilised in community support.
- 3.3 The timeline shows that the rest of the year was then a rollercoaster with partial openings and then closures take place through this whole period. It was not until 12th April 2021 that full opening could occur. (Even then there were some restrictions on capacity in place.)
- 3.4 Freedom utilised the Furlough scheme. For the initial 3 month period WBC had agreed to top up the staff payment to 100% of salary. This decision was made prior to the knowledge of the furlough scheme being announced and full salary had already been agreed.
- 3.5 After the initial 3 months, to reduce the financial burden to the Council the payments were reduced to 80% as per the furlough scheme apart from those staff there were still required to ensure the building remained safe and secure. The Freedom Team Members that were supporting the community support were no longer needed to assist in a full time capacity so these were stood down also but with many voluntarily staying on to assist in a part time capacity.
- 3.6 Whenever Government guidelines allowed, Freedom Leisure reopened the service in consultation with WBC in the most financially viable fashion to minimise the financial exposure of the Council.
- 3.7 The Leisure Contract was only open for 20.5%, just under 75 days, (Woking Leisure Centre, Sportsbox, Pool in the Park and the Sports Pavilions) of the year due to the national lockdown restrictions and all of this was under some form of restriction allowing partial opening and/or reduced capacity.

### **4.0 Improvements and significant changes to the service provision**

- 4.1 The closure of the facilities left an opportunity to progress with some planned works in a more productive manner. A changing room refurbishment has started in a phased manner that was going to take over a year to complete. The lockdown meant this could be progressed more quickly without the concern of trying to keep facilities open to the public at the same time.
- 4.2 The following is a list with short description of the works completed:
  - Pool in the Park Changing room refurbishment: This included, new ceiling, lighting and flooring. A complete redesign of the changing room layout and the development of 3 fabulous disabled changing facilities, one of which is to the full changing places specification.
  - Heating system for Pool in the Park: New boilers, to include some air handling and pool pipework replacement.
  - Café refurbishment: Redesign of counter, new lighting, air handling and roof repairs (It was leaking).
  - New flooring to the main entrance area and refurbished counter.
  - Sauna installed on poolside. This was following customer feedback and specifically feedback from Dolphin's disability group. A sauna facility can really help many people with disabilities and has been very well received.
  - Redecoration of all other areas of Pool in the Park.

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- 4.3 Note that a lot of work has now taken place at Pool in the Park especially over the past 3 years Freedom Leisure has also replaced the water slides, significantly upgraded the children's play equipment and installed a small café to the reception area as well. Even with all of this work we need to recognise the building is old and many areas are still to be addressed. The pool plant is aging and will be more expensive to maintain and more susceptible to issues in the future. In particular the leisure lagoon plant which is bespoke design does need specialist works done to it when things do break meaning that downtime is often longer.
- NHS physiotherapy integration to Woking Leisure Centre: 5 new state of the art physiotherapy rooms were built at Woking Leisure Centre. Alongside these a NHS office was also built to house the Physiotherapy team from St Peters Hospital. This allowed the return to treatment to be quicker for patients during the pandemic period and significantly enhanced the facilities available to the team. It is hoped and a case study is being built that patients will utilise the leisure service to enhance their recovery and longer term stay customers of the leisure centre having built a report with the leisure centre team.
  - Introduction of the "inflatazone" at Woking Leisure Centre. This inflatable play zone that takes up 5 badminton courts has a twofold impact. Commercially the investment has less than a 1 year pay back with many casual and party bookings being made. It also entices those less active or "sporty" to come and have some active fun. The pandemic did delay the launch of this product but it has now launched and is being very successful.
  - 3G pitch netting at Woking Leisure Centre: Replaced or tightened as required.
  - Redecoration throughout Woking Leisure Centre.
  - Private Physiotherapy room built at Sportsbox. This was following a request from a physio for space which was easily converted and a good service to offer the customers of this facility.
- 4.4 One of the biggest and most challenging additions to the service was the Eastwood Leisure Centre. This new facility has been built on the site of Bishop David Brown School as the first phase of the regeneration of Sheerwater.
- 4.5 It has been designed for general community use on a school site so a huge amount of work has been done to make the site safe by design, working with both the school and the Department for Education. Other very important considerations were to make the leisure Centre accessible both for people with physical and mental disabilities but also to meet the needs of users from faiths and cultures that are prominent in the local community.
- 4.6 Youth provision is an integral part of the contract with Freedom at this venue. They are tasked with further expanding the Friday Night Project offering at Woking Leisure Centre to Eastwood Leisure Centre along with supporting a range of other junior projects. This will aid Woking Borough Council with its Health and Wellbeing Objectives around childhood obesity.
- 4.7 The Eastwood Centre was planned to open in September 2021. There was a need for WBC to take control of the new building in February to allow for the next phase of the development to take place. This meant that Freedom Leisure was asked to take on the management of the building in a care taking role much earlier than anticipated.
- 4.8 The next phase was to demolish the school canteen and old PE facilities and as both of these are part of the Leisure Centre Building we had to take over this building to facilitate this.
- 4.9 Bishop David Brown were not in a position to be able to offer swimming lessons to its students due to staffing commitments. However working with our Freedom team we managed to offer the whole school the opportunity to participate in swimming lessons by asking our furloughed learn to swim team if any of them would like to voluntarily deliver some lessons to the school. Many of the team were happy to get out for this worthwhile cause.

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- 4.10 To build a positive relationship with Bishop David Brown School was very important from the outset. The engagement in the project has been very good and they are extremely happy with the new facilities available to them for PE and the new dining room. The relationship with Freedom has started off very well with plenty of collaborative working taking place to really aid the schools provision but also the overall community offer.
- 4.11 Eastwood is also the home of Sheerwater Football Club with them being displaced from their previous venue as part of the regeneration project. Moving the football club to this location has caused problems with noise complaints from local residents and what can be done to mitigate this is being investigated.

### 5.0 Financial position

What normal looked like prior to the pandemic:

- 5.1 For context the Leisure Partnership Agreement is normally a payment from Freedom Leisure to Woking Borough Council. This payment has changed throughout the term of the contract linked to additions to the contract. The payment expected for this financial year was £689,809
- 5.2 There is an allowance in the contract for major events that may affect the financial position of the contract. Woking Borough Council and Freedom Leisure worked together to minimise the impact of the national lockdown on the finances by:
- Furloughing as many staff as safe to do so. Only keeping on staff to meet the statutory requirements in keeping the venues safe and ready to re-open once allowed. For example pool venues must either be completely decommissioned or have a daily check of the pool and pool plant. This is due to the chemicals involved in these areas.
  - Deferring any financial commitments where possible. Lease or loan payments wherever possible to do so
  - Minimising the burden on utilities by changing boiler settings, reducing air handling loads where safe and appropriate to do so.
- 5.3 Woking Borough Council has worked with Freedom Leisure on an “open book” process throughout the pandemic. Woking has paid Freedom for any losses that have occurred throughout the closure and partially re-opened times and continues to do so during the staggered re-opening of the services.
- 5.4 During this contract year Woking Borough Council has paid Freedom Leisure £1.4M. It is worth noting that the first three months of closure where Freedom were providing a number of staff to help with community support the cost was £500K alone.
- 5.5 Once this support was reduced to volunteer time the support costs dropped significantly with the rest of the year costing a further £900K. Of this the partial and very short term reopening in November 2020 cost us a further £140K due to needing to install all the privacy screens, hand sanitising stations and then running in many cases at less than 30% of original capacity making the service very expensive to run. The service was then closed back down in December.
- 5.6 Further to this cost of £1.4M the management fee (£689,809) has not been paid of which we are able to claim 70% back from the government as lost income due to the Pandemic.
- 5.7 The Department of Culture, Media and Sport released a fund to aid the reopening of leisure facilities. Whilst this money was for the operation of the leisure service the local authorities had to apply for this funding. Woking was able to demonstrate the amazing work that is done in the community by our leisure service and secured the maximum grant fund of £171K.

6.0 Key Performance Indicators

6.1 Freedom Leisure reports a range of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to the Leisure Partnership Board twice a year. Even with the closure some of these KPI's were still able to be reported on as follows:

Customer Satisfaction:

- 6.2 The following is an extract from the Freedom Annual Report presentation to the Leisure Partnership board. Much of the year customer communication was limited to COVID communication but during the periods when the centres were open or partially open customer comments, complaints and suggestions were recorded in the normal way.
- 6.3 There was positive comment about the way in which the facilities reopened in a secure manner, but then complaint that people could not get booked for the activities they wanted to do. In many cases such as group exercise classes the number of attendees was reduced significantly. Some classes that would have attracted 40 people were restricted to just 8.
- 6.4 Being able to get through on the phone was also cited as a problem. This was a problem pre-pandemic also but with the need to book in advance for all activities becoming mandatory this got far worse during this time Freedom are working on an advancing booking "app" to work alongside their management software to aid this problem in the future.

### Customer Satisfaction

**Woking Leisure Centre:**

"Great job with social distancing and cleaning carried out professionally"

"Can highly recommend I've been around my fair share of gyms at both ends of the spectrum for budget (The Gym) and top end (David Lloyd). This gym has the best of both, friendly staff that care about their job. Rarely too busy (when pre-Covid hours operated)"

**Pool in the Park:**

"It was great and everything worked well. All staff from reception, lifeguards and cleaner all very helpful and friendly. It is great to be back"

"Great to be back...very safe and clean...staff very good following all Covid guidelines"

Month	Compliment	Complain	Comment/Suggestion
April	0	0	1
May	0	0	2
June	0	0	2
July	0	0	2
August	0	1	3
September	3	4	10
October	3	5	8
November	0	1	2
December	3	5	10
March	0	0	1

"...since re opening I have only been able to book 1 class, all others have been full. Whilst I appreciate that you need to social distance and protect all, I am nevertheless paying membership for classes which I cannot book."

"I can't get through to anyone on the phone. Have tried lots of times"

Month	Compliment	Complain	Comment/Suggestion
April	0	0	1
July	0	0	2
September	0	1	1
October	2	3	6
November	3	2	3
December	0	1	2
February	0	0	1
March	0	0	1

"looking forward to swimfit returning ASAP"

"The phone doesn't get answered. Every single option on the menu goes to an answerphone"

Audits:

6.5 Freedom would normally undergo a range of audits each year. These include a range of pool safety, health and safety and quality assessments. All internal audits continued but the external audits did not take place during this time. However WBC officers did conduct both adhoc spot checks and a more formal inspection of COVID secure protocols and risk assessments.

### 7.0 Moving forward

- 7.1 The return of leisure since May has been good but is not back to pre-pandemic levels. As of September 2021 the overall number was just below 80% of 2019 attendance figures but to an extent this is slightly misleading as we have the “inflatazone” driving a higher than normal children’s attendance and the first month of Eastwood being open. However it is a good sign that confidence is returning and we are slightly ahead as a borough of the national average.
- 7.2 We have had to really focus on the reopening of what is most commercially viable and the most beneficial to the community we serve which has led to some programme changes. Getting the Friday Night Project back up and running has been critical for our youth provision along with working really hard with our health care colleagues to get the Cardiac Rehab and GP referral programmes running again.
- 7.3 The launch of Eastwood has been a stunning success so far. Membership is already at 610 members (8/11/2021) and there are over 2100 young people using the facility as club visitors a week. Maximising the impact of this facility for the Sheerwater and surrounding facilities is essential for the success of the leisure centre but also has a big impact on the regeneration overall.

### 8.0 Corporate Strategy

- 8.1 The work that Freedom Leisure does mainly falls within the Corporate Strategy priority of “Improving the Health and Wellbeing of all Residents. Offering a wide ranging, affordable whilst high quality and accessible to all leisure provision ensures we are giving every opportunity for our residents to become or remain fit and healthy.
- 8.2 Freedom Leisure also plays a part the Corporate Strategy priority of “Engaging our Communities”. Many of the sports clubs and other organisations that use the leisure facilities are local community groups or sports teams. These are often made up of volunteers who are engaging in touching or coaching others to better themselves.
- 8.3 The Corporate Strategy priority of “Promoting a Strong Economy” is also critically important. The Leisure Contract historically was an income generator for Woking Borough Council and will return to be one in the future. It is also a base for a number of other businesses all paying back into the community. (e.g. private physios, beauty therapists etc.)

### 9.0 Implications

#### Finance and Risk

- 9.1 Financially the service is still being supported and it is expected that the service will be back to breakeven by Spring 2022 with some reduced management fee payments being made by Freedom from then onwards. This is making the assumption that no further restrictions are put in place.
- 9.2 Further investment may be required into the aging pool filtration and circulation system at pool in the park. Significant front of house refurbishment as already detailed above has been made however the system is still original and has had some major failures in the past 6 months. These are being assessed currently to understand the scope of the works required.

#### Equalities and Human Resources

- 9.3 There are no equalities or human resource implications arising from this report.

#### Legal

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9.4 This report has been reviewed by Legal Services who haven't raised any issues.

### **10.0 Engagement and Consultation**

10.1 As part of the Leisure Partnership Agreement there are a range of surveys and customer feedback mechanisms in place. However in the past year much of these could not take place but all are now back up and running again.

REPORT ENDS