

FREEDOM LEISURE PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Meeting: **Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee**
Date Of Meeting: **21 January 2025**
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Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Ellen Nicholson | Cllrellen.nicholson@woking.gov.uk**
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Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 This report sets out the annual performance review of Freedom Leisure, including assessments on quality and performance management, KPIs and the priorities for the year 2023/2024. Complaints, feedback, and achievements are reviewed in the report as Freedom Leisure provide a wide range of services to the public.

1.2 In general, Freedom Leisure have achieved the Key Performance Indicators set out in the Leisure Partnership Agreement and continue to work in partnership with the Council.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is requested to:

RESOLVE THAT

- i. **The report be noted.**

3.0 Proposal and Outcome

3.1 The Committee is invited to note the annual performance review 2023/24 for Freedom Leisure.

3.2 The desired outcome is that through scrutiny and oversight, residents and the Committee will have an improved understanding of the services provided by Freedom Leisure and in turn influence future performance improvements.

4.0 Background

- 4.1 The Leisure Partnership Agreement commenced on 1 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 Greenwich Leisure Limited (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.
- 4.2 Since the original agreement, the contract has had several major changes which include the addition of three new pavilions, the Sportsbox at Hoe Valley and Eastwood Leisure Centre.
- 4.3 The inclusion of Sportsbox also triggered the contract extension clause in the main contract which is for a further 4 years. The Contract end is now 30 November 2025.
- 4.4 Separate to the main Leisure contract, Freedom have also been successful in securing the contract to run the kiosk in Woking Park.
- 4.5 In September 2018, Woking Park Tennis Courts were removed from the Leisure Contract and returned to the management of Woking Borough Council.

5.0 Performance during 2023-24

- 5.1 Total visits steadily grew again in 2023-24, up to 1.24 million visits across the contract. This was an increase of over 295,000 visits on the previous year across the contract when compared to 2022-23, showing a continued recovery following the Covid pandemic.
- 5.2 Despite the early uncertainty if the facility would remain open, Pool in the Park (PITP) has performed remarkably well, attracting over 433,000 visits, accounting for an increase of 130,000 from 2022-23.
- 5.3 Woking Leisure Centre (WLC) also performed well. Visits reached 348,000, an increase of over 50,000 visits from 2022-23. Notable increases include an additional 1,500 participants within the group exercise programme, and 7,800 more visits from contract bookings (including team sports and events) when compared with 2022-23. Social Prescribing and the Active Communities programme have continued to grow in 2023-24.
- 5.4 Sportsbox attendance figures grew more steadily with over 188,000 visits in 2023-24 compared to 155,000 in 2022-23. Membership numbers have grown from 583 to 641 in this period. Contract bookings (including those made by key partners, Hoe Valley School and Woking Athletics Club) have seen significant increases this year, growing by 63,000 visits compared to the same period in 2022-23.
- 5.5 Lastly, Eastwood Leisure Centre’s (ELC) attendance figures continue to grow year on year since opening in 2021, with the latest annual figure at 277,000, up 77,000 on the previous year. The Learn to Swim programme continues to flourish at Eastwood

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Leisure Centre, with the number of members increasing from 478 in April 2023 to 1070 in March 2024.

5.6 Unsurprisingly given the overall performance outlined above all core areas performed well in 2023-24:

Gym Visits: Maintained performance with a marginal increase of 0.5%.

Swim Visits: Continued a steady increase of 7%, due to increases at ELC.

Group Exercise: Really strong group exercise performance, up 24%.

Learn to Swim: Increased by 15%, again continued increases at ELC.

Contract Hire: Very strong, with a 70% increase on 2022-23.

Sports Development: Total attendance of 17,218, an increase of over 40%.

5.7 Customer Satisfaction: Each year Freedom provide monitoring on customer satisfaction. A Net Promoter Score System is utilised throughout the year to analyse how members feel about the services provided and this is backed up further with user surveys to wider groups of facility users such as the football clubs or other sporting hirers.

5.8 There are several ways in which Freedom obtains detail on customer satisfaction, including:

- Online feedback through its website
- Online comments received through social media
- Verbal feedback at site, which is then logged by Freedom colleagues
- Written feedback at site, which is then logged by Freedom colleagues

5.9 68.4% of comments received were resolved in 2 days. 15.6% were resolved in 2-7 days and the remaining 16% were resolved in 7 days.

5.10 In total, 294 comments were received in 2023-24 versus 288 in 2022-23. Of these comments, 158 were complaints (53.7%). This represents an increase from 38.8% complaints received in 2022-23. The remainder of comments received were compliments (27.5%) and suggestions (18.7%).

5.11 Of the complaints received, the main themes were around changing room cleanliness, car parking issues and maintenance items. There were also a proportion of comments related to the potential closure of Pool in the Park.

5.12 The compliments and positive comments received related to positive customer service experiences and positive experiences in specific programmes specifically within the learn to swim programmes and group exercise classes.

6.0 Improvements and significant changes to the service provision

6.1 The following repairs and improvements have been undertaken at the facilities during 2023-24:

Woking Leisure Centre:

- Works carried out on dry side changing room ceiling tiles.
- Tightened 3G pitch netting to improve health and safety concerns.
- Door furniture and ironmongery replaced.
- 3G security gate maintenance, improved security measures due to vandalism and break-ins.
- Added new security/fire door to rear access of WLC due to multiple breaks in attempts.
- Repair on 3G pitch due to turf coming up.

Pool in the Park:

- Door furniture and ironmongery replaced.
- Rapid repair works implemented to support casual lagoon and Dolphin sessions.
- Extensive fire door repairs.
- New pool alarm system installed (no longer made parts for original system).
- Main Pool and Lagoon changing / shower floor refurb completed.
- Polyaluminium Chloride dosing (PAC) pump replacements for both plant rooms.

Sportsbox:

- External track light maintenance and service.
- Track gulley deep cleaned to stop build-up of natural debris.
- Basketball hoops repaired.
- Scrubber dryer machine repaired.
- External Boot scrapper replaced.
- Repair on 3G pitch due to turf coming up.

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Eastwood Leisure Centre:

- Loose paving slabs on stairs to 3G pitch have been fixed.
- Repair on 3G pitch due to turf coming up.
- Pool hoist repairs.
- CCTV repairs.
- Hair dryer repair/replacement due to high usage.
- Sauna door repair and adjustments throughout the year.
- New ceiling tiles installed throughout facility.
- Changing room shutters repaired.
- Main pool filtration pump repaired.

Pavilions:

- St Peters leak damaged ceiling tiles replaced.
- Alpha Road and Byfleet leaks repaired.
- Brookwood country park external shutters repaired.
- Sewage pump at Kings Head Lane replaced due to end of life.
- Woking Park new fire call point installed.
- Alpha Road new smoke detectors installed.

Health & Wellbeing programmes

- 6.2 Freedom have continued to grow their Active Communities and Health & Wellbeing programmes in 2023-24.
- 6.3 Programmes target different audiences with walking versions of basketball, netball and football aimed at older and less mobile people to get them back into activity.
- 6.4 Freedom have also worked closely with Woking primary schools, delivering successful Surrey Youth Games events.
- 6.5 The Friday Night Project, a low-cost, multi-activity evening offer for those aged 11-18, offers a range of activities, including football, dodgeball, handball, tennis, cricket, rounders, and a SEN chill-out zone.
- 6.6 Ladies only swimming sessions continue to be popular at Eastwood Leisure Centre, with ladies only sessions now also well established for football too.

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6.7 SEN swimming sessions are also well established now with strong attendance and Freedom have formed partnerships with key groups like Linkable and Surrey Wheels for All to broaden their offer.

Wellness and health referral:

6.8 The exercise or health referral programme has continued to grow, with Freedom working closely with local NHS services.

6.9 Referral Programmes offered include:

- Wellbeing Circuits Class
- Wellness Class
- Aqua Wellness
- Aqua Circuits
- Pulmonary Exercise Group
- Circuits
- Otago Strength & Balance Class
- Sing for Your Life
- Wellness Swim
- Gym 1:1
- Diabetes Program
- Smoking Cessation

7.0 Key Performance Indicators

7.1 Freedom Leisure reports on a range of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) monthly and complies with several audits each year.

7.2 These audits include pool safety, health and safety and quality assessments.

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7.3 Below is a summary of 2023- 24 accident/incident performance:

Centre	Total Visitors	Total Accidents 23-24	Percentage of accidents of total visits 23-24	No of accidents 22-23	Percentage of accidents of total visits 22-23
Woking Leisure Centre	348,168	197	0.05%	273	0.07%
Pool in the Park	433,908	77	0.017%	138	0.030%
Woking Sportsbox	188,001	28	0.014%	19	0.010%
Eastwood Leisure Centre	277,746	51	0.018%	31	0.012%

7.4 Overall, there were a relatively low number of accidents and incidents across the contract in 2023-24, with the two Woking Park sites trending downwards compared to the previous year and Eastwood Leisure Centre and Sportsbox trending slightly upwards as a percentage of total visits. These accident and incident levels are low. Woking Leisure Centre does have the highest proportion of accidents across the contract due to the nature of the activities at the site.

7.5 Environmental Health audits (conducted by Woking Borough Council) on food safety were carried out on all sites. Woking Leisure Centre and Pool in the Park maintained a 5-star accreditation in March 2024, whilst Sportsbox and Eastwood were awarded a 5-start rating on opening.

8.0 Plans for 2024-25 and beyond

8.1 The previous Leisure Partnership Board has now disbanded, so core updates will be brought back to the Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee.

8.2 The senior management of Freedom and Woking Borough Council's Leisure and Community teams will continue to meet quarterly as we move into the final year of the current contract.

8.3 Working with Freedom in 2024-25, the team will be looking to review the fees and charges and types of activities offered to move the service further towards a cost neutral position and in-line with regional pricing through extensive benchmarking.

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8.4 Freedom have already developed an extensive health and wellbeing focus through their Active Communities team. Officers will look to work with Freedom to develop this further, ensuring that key target groups including disabilities, those on health referral programmes and certain socio-economic groups are targeted to gain maximum benefit from the facilities and programmes offered.

9.0 Implications

Legal

9.1 None.

Resources (including finance)

9.2 Freedom Leisure pays the Council a management fee. This fee is surpluses made within the contract and for 2023-24 Freedom paid WBC a management fee of £1.24 million. This constituted a significant increase from the £687,000 received in 2022-23. The increased financial performance is linked to the strong attendance figures gained for 2023-24.

9.3 However, due to the utility costs for the contract, particularly the ThamesWey arrangements for Woking Park (including an annual loan contribution of £795,000 for both Woking Park leisure venues), the contract is still operating at a deficit.

9.4 Overall, the picture is a positive one, with Pool in the Park performing well despite the challenges faced there. Despite increased pricing, numbers at all sites are beginning to return to pre-pandemic levels.

Risk and Mitigation

9.5 None.

Consultation, Equality Impact Assessments

9.6 None.

Environment and Climate Change

9.7 In 2023-2024 Freedom Leisure set out to become the first Operator within the UK to be carbon literate. Something which was achieved in late 2024 becoming a Bronze Carbon Literate Organisation. The Woking partnership saw two colleagues complete and pass the carbon literacy course, with more colleagues lined up to go through the process in 2025.

10.0 Supporting Documents

Appendices

10.1 Appendix 1 - Freedom Leisure Annual Report 2023-24

Report Ends