



ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24
April 2023 – March 2024





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2023 / 2024

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1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

The following report provides detail for the financial year 2023-2024 which was the twelfth full year of Freedom Leisure operating leisure facilities: Woking Leisure Centre (WBC), Woking Pool in the Park, Woking Sportsbox, Eastwood Leisure Centre and pavilions on behalf of Woking Borough Council. Commencing in 2011, the 10-year contract was extended to 2025.

1.2 Executive summary:



objectives and purpose

Our leisure trust status means it is not all about the finances – our focus is on:

- Increasing participation
- Improving services
- Delivering quality services and experiences for our customers
- Supporting “Active Communities”
- Reducing negative environmental impact
- Delivering for clients and customers
- Developing and rewarding our people

- **Increased Attendance:** Across all facilities, attendance has grown significantly compared to the previous year. Woking Leisure Centre attendance increased by 19%, Pool in the Park by 42%, Woking Sportsbox by 43%, and Eastwood Leisure Centre by 38%.
- **Strong Financial Performance:** The partnership generated nearly £7 million in income, with a large portion due to the continued growth of the learn to swim program and memberships at Eastwood Leisure Centre. The council received a management fee of over £1.2 million, which is an increase of 687K from the prior year.
- **Success of Learn to Swim Program:** All facilities saw growth in the learn to swim program, with Eastwood Leisure Centre experiencing the most significant increase. The program benefited from additional colleague qualifications and new water inflatables.
- **Improved Customer Satisfaction:** Positive feedback was received regarding customer service, cleanliness, and session experiences, particularly for children's activities and group exercise classes.
- **Environmental Sustainability Efforts:** Freedom Leisure became the first carbon literate operator in the UK and is committed to continuous improvement in environmental management.
- **Community Engagement:** The partnership offered a variety of free and accessible activities, resulting in a 40.45% increase in participation compared to the previous year. This included initiatives like Walking Football and “No Strings” Badminton.
- **Strong Partnership with NHS:** The partnership continued to grow, with a focus on establishing Woking Leisure Centre facilities as a hub for health referrals. An additional colleague is currently undergoing Exercise Referral qualifications.



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Overall, the 2023/2024 period was positive for Woking Leisure Centre, with significant growth in attendance, financial performance, and community engagement. The partnership continues to address challenges and strives to provide excellent customer service and a positive experience for Woking residents.

2. Summary and review of performance for 2023/2024

2.1 Woking Leisure Centre

Woking Leisure Centre (WLC) attendance increased by 19% during April 23 – Mar 24 period against the same period the previous year. In terms of actual visits this equates to 348K visits, 55K more than the previous year. Notable increases include additional 1.5K participants within group exercise, 7.8K more visits from contract bookings including team sports and events. Healthy Communities related activities achieved increased attendances in comparison to the previous year including Friday night project and many of our subsidised community sessions such as walking football and 'No Strings Badminton.

The relationship with the NHS has continued to go from strength to strength and 2024/ 2025 will see a further increase in social prescribing at the Venue. The NHS have provided full funding, to upskill a colleague who is currently undertaking their Exercise Referral qualifications. Working with Chris Sexton and Jay Jones, our Healthy Communities Managers.

2.2 Pool in the park

Despite the early uncertainty if the facility would remain open, In the period between April 23 and March 24 the pools attendance grew from 303K visits to 433K a staggering 129K more visits or 42% increase on the same period last year.

2.3 Woking Sportsbox

The site has seen some positive areas of growth since opening, including growing from 583 members in Apr 23 to 641 members in March 24, a net gain of 10%.

SB has also seen an increase in number of contract bookings including Hoe Valley school and Woking Athletic Club. Increasing the number of visits to 130K visits an increase of 63K for the same period the previous year.

Collaborating with British Triathlon we also secured funding to run our first 'Dualathon' (Run-Bike-Run) in January 24, welcoming 30 new participants to our first event.

2.4 Eastwood Leisure Centre

The Learn To Swim programme (LTS) has increased significantly from 478 members in April 23 to 1070 in March 24. This is increase of over 123% with significant room for further growth. The continued strong performance saw the Eastwood (EW) swim team win Regional LTS programme of the year and won the Group LTS programme of the year, in the March 24 group awards ceremony.

2.5 Woking Pavilions

In April 2023 cricket season started off with a few challenges, due to the sink holes in Woking Park cricket pitch. Collaboratively working with the Borough's green spaces team, we were able to positively communicate with the teams to minimise impact on their bookings

Due to one of the wettest September's on record the football season experienced one issue, including the pitch contractor not being able to complete line marking. We ensured we worked with the teams affected by relocating any games which were impacted

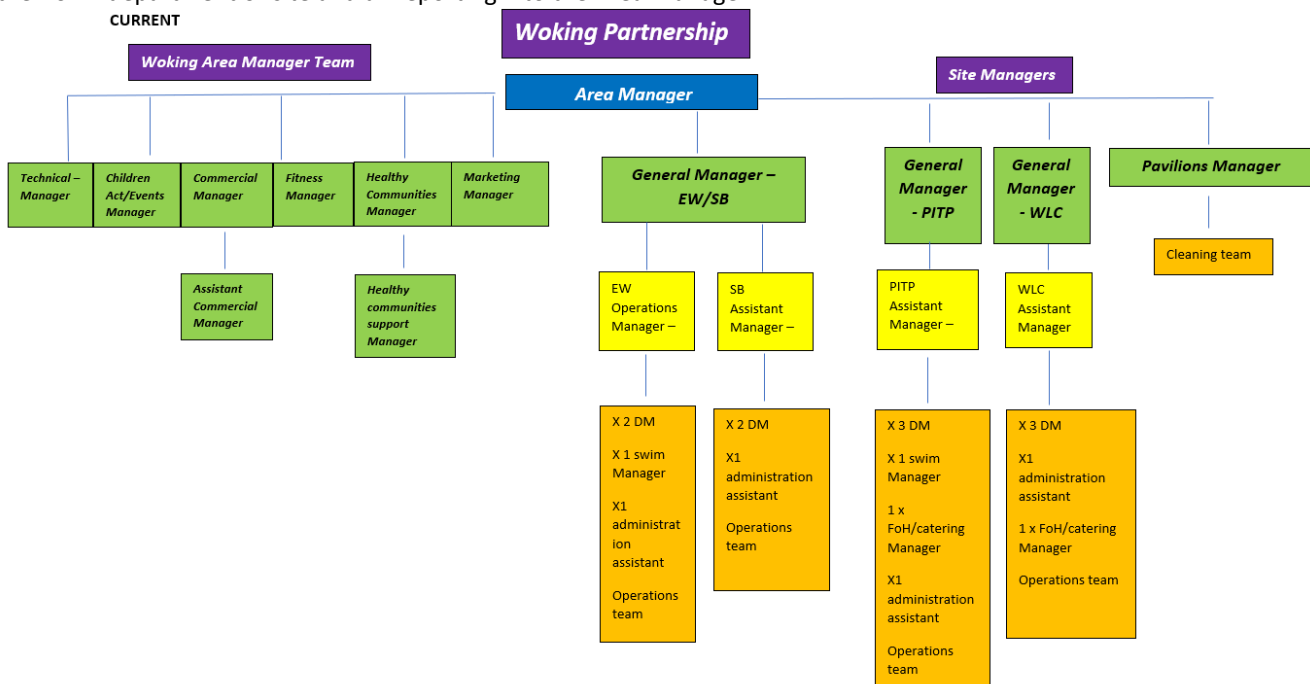
3 People, passionate, bespoke and local:

2023/24 has seen a continued improvement in recruitment and retention. Since April 23 we have retained and continued to develop the General and Area Management team, with a very strong retention record.

Working closely with Lifetime our apprenticeship learning provider we have offered new and existing colleague's additional qualifications, allowing them to progress via multiple pathways. This year we offered a Level 3 Duty Manager apprenticeship to all existing Duty Managers, in which 4 are now enrolled on an 18-month course.

3.1 Human resources

Our current Partnership structure is depicted in the org-chart below. Each colleague (in green) is responsible for either their own department or site and all reporting into the Area Manager.



3.2 Staff training & benefits

- Access to IHASCO (interactive health and safety company) online training courses and the freedom internal training programme are being utilised



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- Employees have continued to use discounts from My staff shop, the freedom benefit platform
- Colleague of the month recognition scheme running across all sites. Winners receiving a £25 gift voucher.
- Apprenticeships on offer to all existing colleagues who meet the criteria to enrol – this is paid above apprenticeship national minimum guidance.

4 Process, operational excellence/ environmentally responsible

4.1 Programming and service development:

Freedom Leisure continued to ensure its existing programme was in place and protected bookings supported. In addition, Freedom Leisure added/changed the following:

Woking Leisure Centre:

- Secured NHS funding to upskill existing colleague attain level 4 Exercise Referral qualification, to support new role out of prescribed health referral offering.
- Secured new Judo event, bringing visitors both regionally and nationally in association with British Judo.
- Launch of Digitickets to improve customers' ability to book online services such as Inflatazone and Lagoon sessions
- Maintained 5-star EHO rating
- Girls football festival organised and delivered with over 70 participants over the session.
- Events have continued hosting x 2 car shows, postcard fair, American Theatre Organ Society (ATOS) Wurlitzer concert, car boot, Woking Means business and many others.
- Les Mills launch event held for all members and non-members showcasing our classes

Pool in the Park

- Supported Drowning Prevention week, working with local schools and delivering sessions within our own holiday day camps
- Learn to Swim colleague restructure – to aid consistency and growth of scheme.
- Saved Woking Lifesaving club due to dissolution after 60 years of running – integrated the club under Freedom Leisure service/offering to maintain and grow on great work the club achieved.
- Added further activities for children in public sessions at lagoon – adding music to weekend sessions
- Maintained 5-star EHO rating

Sportsbox

- New partnership with British Triathlon, roll out of Duathlon (run, bike, run) sessions on the athletics track.
- Hosted 3 district sporting events
- Gained Track Mark accreditation – allowing clubs to host larger meetings. Only a small proportion of tracks nationally have this accreditation

Eastwood

- Increased number of spaces within LTS programme to meet demand and improve access to accredited swimming lessons to local area.
- Purchase of new water inflatable adding new fun sessions and party offering to the programme



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- 'Warm spaces' initiative rolled out at EW to welcome those in need of support during the colder months. Hot drinks, warm blankets and warm space offered.

Pavilions

- Brookwood Farm and Byfleet pavilions re-opened after significant repairs were carried out. Local rugby club secured funding to support repairs works at Byfleet.
- Introduction of Sheerwater recreational ground has seen significant increase in bookings, particularly during football pre-season
- Successful fireworks night at Vyne and Woking Park
- Borough led Community Asset Transfer of Pavilions initiated.

4.2 Summary of significant improvements to facilities or services:

There have been many improvements made to the facilities by Freedom Leisure and Woking Borough Council, and these included:

Woking Leisure Centre

- High level cleaning of Sports Hall and Squash courts
- Adapted lighting rigging in Wurlitzer to improve quality and meet standards for ATOS events and concerts
- New postal lockers added to reception – to increase number of visitors at facility
- 4 x new rowers added to gym floor
- Digitickets added to improve customers' ability to book online
- Colleague training with partner Costa to improve quality of service and colleague knowledge and understanding

Pool in the Park

- Digitickets added to improve customers' ability to book online
- More matting brought for flooring, to ensure H&S of colleagues and customers
- Regular installation of hair dryers, necessary due to vandalism
- Deep clean procured by external waste company to clean chemical bunds
- Continued locker replacement of bands due to high footfall and usage
- More NPLQ and recruitment in place to increase lifeguard provision.
- Colleague training with partner Costa to improve quality of service and colleague knowledge and understanding

Sportsbox

- New sand pit covers ordered to protect sand pit bed
- New postal lockers added to reception – to increase number of visitors at facility
- New retail display stands added
- Colleague training with partner Costa to improve quality of service and colleague knowledge and understanding
- Deep clean on Sport Hall flooring and repair of basketball hoops
- New parasol ordered for outside seating.



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Eastwood

- Additional Gym equipment added
- Jetwash ordered to support cleaning of changing room floors
- Colleague training with partner Costa to improve quality of service and colleague knowledge and understanding
- Upholstery works completed in fitness suite
- New Special Educational Needs (SEND) parent and toddler sessions added to programmes
- New party offering available due to purchase of water inflatable.
- 4G goal nets/ wheels ordered to ensure H&S compliance and booking continuity.
- Free NHS booking – parent and baby drop-in clinic.
- New pool testing equipment purchased.

Pavilions

- Waterers Park heat exchange replacement
- Waterer's Park goal replacements
- Kingshead Lane sewage pipe replacement
- Brookwood farm reopened for use.
- St Peters reopened for use.
- Security measures taken at Alpha Road due to vandalism.

4.4 Repairs and maintenance

Woking Leisure Centre

- Works carried out on dry side changing room ceiling tiles.
- Tightened 3G pitch netting to improve on H&S concerns.
- Door furniture and iron monger replaced
- 3G security gate maintenance /improved security measures due to vandalism and break ins
- Added £5K new security/fire door to rear access of WLC due to multiple breaks in attempts.
- Repair on 3G pitch – turf coming up.

Pool in the Park

- Door furniture and iron monger replaced
- Rapid repair works implemented to support casual lagoon and Dolphin sessions.
- £11K worth of fire door repairs
- £7K new pool alarm system installed – no longer made parts for original system.
- Main Pool and Lagoon changing / shower floor refurb completed.
- Polyaluminium Chloride (PAC) pump replacements for both plant rooms.

Sportsbox

- £10K of external track light maintenance and service (WBC responsibility)
- Track gully deep cleaned to stop build-up of natural debris.
- Tracker repaired
- Basketball hoops repaired
- Scrubber dryer machine repaired

- External Boot scrapper replaced with new.
- Repair on 3G pitch – turf coming up.

Eastwood

- Loose paving slabs on stairs to 3G pitch have been fixed, 2 x loose slabs were causing a trip hazard. Issue now resolved – latent defect and issue previous year. Now resolved.
- Repair on 3G pitch – 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 replaced due to end of life
- Woking Park – new fire call point installed
- Alpha road new smoke detectors installed

4.5 Accidents:

Below is a summary of 2023- 24 accident/incident performance, appendix 4. Headlines are;

	Total visitors	Total accidents	Percentage of accidents	No of accidents previous year	Percentage of accidents previous year
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%

The percentage of total accidents were very low across sites this year in line with the total number of visits.

4.6 Environmental Health Office:

Woking Leisure Centre and Pool in the Park maintained their 5-star accreditation in March 2024 whilst Sportsbox and Eastwood were awarded a 5-start rating on opening.



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4.7 Fees and charges:

As part of our annual price review all prices were benchmarked against other leisure operations and inflation. Fees and charges increases took place in April 24. The main increase affecting the learn to swim customers with significant increases and the removal of concession pricing.

Going forward Freedom Leisure will continue to review fees and charges to ensure the service remains excellent value for money while remaining competitive within the market it operates and sensitive to the Council's wishes.

4.8 Environmental:

Freedom Leisure is committed to working with its local authority partners, customers and, crucially, its staff teams to achieve these ambitious targets. A robust sustainability culture is already embedded into the organisation, with the senior leadership team at the not-for-profit trust prioritising environmental management and sustainability as a core business objective in its medium-term plan.

With continuous improvement at the forefront of our minds, we always look for ways to develop, improve and invest in the facilities across the Woking contract. 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 2 colleagues complete and pass the carbon literacy course, with more colleagues lined up to go through the process in 2025.

5 Customer, profession trusted partner

5.1 Day to day customer feedback:

Freedom Leisure is committed to providing excellent customer service. There are several ways in which it obtains detail on satisfaction. These provide a snapshot in time of current success and areas of improvement. These actions are captured using the Efocus programme and dealt with as they arise. The methods that we will collect feedback are as follows: -

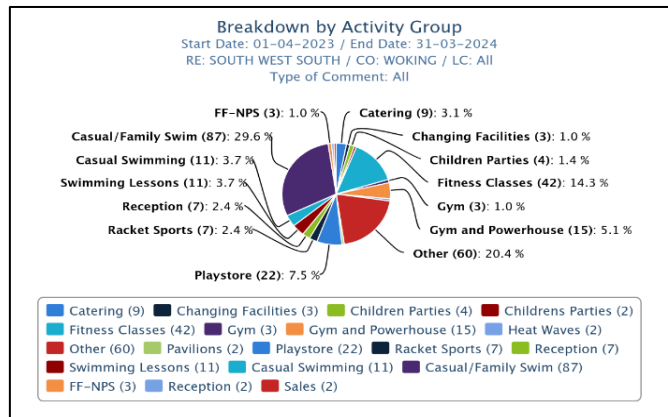
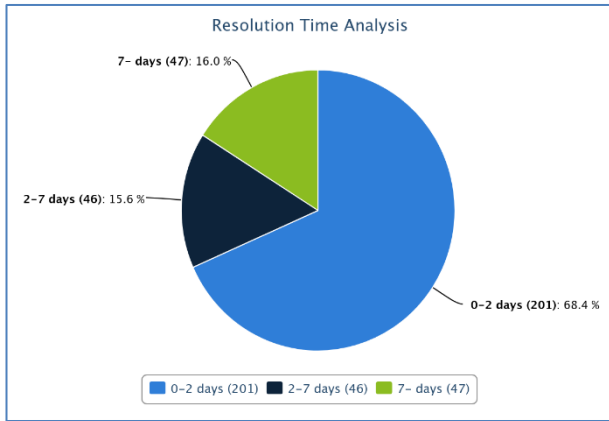
- Online feedback through our website
- Online comments received through social media
- Verbal feedback at site, which is then logged by our colleagues
- Written feedback at site, which is then logged by our colleagues

We received lots of positive comments across the partnership this year. Most notably comments relating to positive customer service (positive colleague comments), positive experience during sessions including children's activities', learn to swim and group exercise classes and improved cleanliness across several sites

Please find summary of our Efocus feedback received and the timeframe in which we have responded, throughout the year below

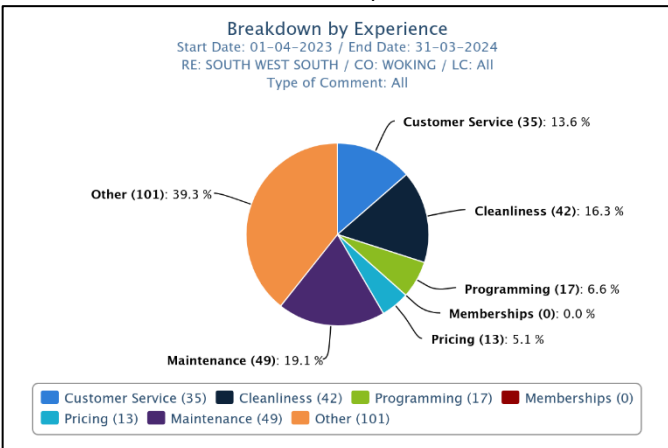
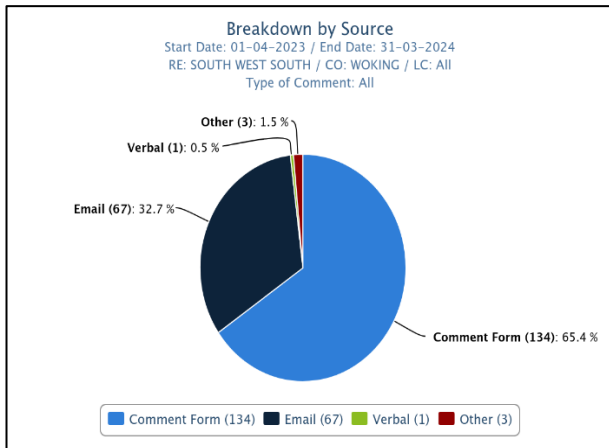
Response time:

Breakdown by activity:

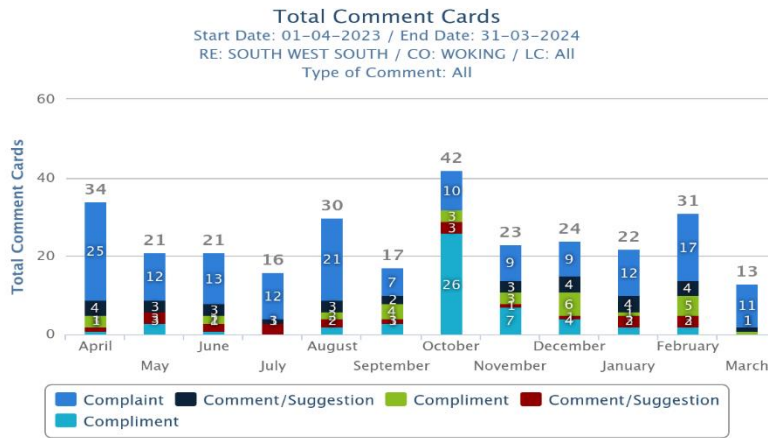


Breakdown of source:

Breakdown of experience:



Comments/ complaints/ compliments: Partnership total



6 Product, innovation and creativity

6.1 Sports development:

‘improving lives through leisure’ through everything that we do as a leisure trust, by providing a transformational impact on the health and wellbeing of the Woking community’



Our approach is to provide partners and customers with a bespoke service that will inspire and excite communities to increase participation. Understanding local communities is at the heart of what we do and, working in partnership with Woking Borough Council, we would ensure the community is fully understood and engaged to deliver a passionate, bespoke and local service. Through our proven record of success and our commitment to understand the specific needs of Woking residents, we have already begun to generate a deep understanding of the local communities.

The partnership between Woking Borough Council and Freedom Leisure provides recognition of achievement for talented people. 2023/24 has been a productive year. We currently offer free provision to 24 different Talented Athletes who are competing both nationally and internationally, including the national champion for sprint and marathon kayaking and a GB Ice hockey athlete.

Our focus has been to continue provide accessible and varied activities and increase the number of junior sessions to our timetable. We also aim to operate a safe and enjoyable environment for participants within the existing healthy community session.

Attendance has been very positive across all activities; with improved targeted marketing, more posts through social media and listening to our user's feedback, we have seen an increase in attendance across the board by 4959 participants (40.45%)

A summary of the attendance in 2023-24 is provided below

50+ Club	3405
Junior Basketball	219

Walking Basketball	457
Walking Netball	639
Walking Football Sportbox	615
Pickleball Sportbox	382
Badminton Club	1233
Lunchtime Swimfit	359
No Strings Badminton	1205
Walking Football	702
Women's Rec Football	711
Pickleball Eastwood	723
Back to Netball	484
Squash Beginner	124
SEN Swim Eastwood	234
Squash Club Night	721
Lunchtime Swimfit	277
Swim Buddies	422
Swimfit	161
Friday Night Project	1961
Fun and Bounce	109
Adult Trampolining & Trampoline Courses	1713
Xplorer	94
Freedom Runners	268
Total sessions	17,218 (40.45% increase from 2022/3)

Upcoming Opportunities

- Woking Area Sport for Primary Schools (WASPS) Offering - **Delivered**
- Woking offering of Surrey Youth Games - **Delivered**
- Looked After Children Family Day - **Delivered**
- Duathlon (British Triathlon) - **Delivered**
- Pickleball Leaders Course – **Completed**
- Extend 50+ Club Offering to Eastwood - **Delivered**



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6.2 Wellness and Health referral:

Our program has continued to grow, and we maintain a healthy relationship with the NHS. With a second colleague currently undertaking their Exercise Referral qualification, the partnership is on course to make our sites a hub for wellness and health referral in 2024-2025.

Freedom Referral Programmes:

- 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

We continue to develop the partnership with the NHS. New “Community Hubs” will see the Leisure sites firmly involved in supporting our partners and clients in their exercise/sport journey.

6.3 Marketing and Information technology:

In 2023-24 marketing used the following channels to promote activities: websites, social media: Facebook, Instagram, X, Google and Tiktok, Brief Your Market email newsletters, app news and push notifications, text messaging plus internal video screens, banners, posters and leaflets.

To support our marketing and promotions a professional drone videographer was engaged to create fly-through videos of each centre, which have been uploaded to a YouTube page and used on our web pages and social media. A Go-Pro action camera has also been purchased to allow us to create content for YouTube and social media, particularly with the pools in mind as the camera can also be used under water.

YouTube

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC3ZcO1IYx4W_f-ysa-ccuMw

We currently have 21 videos uploaded and 73 subscribers, however YouTube also allows us to embed our videos on our web pages and in social media as well as providing links for attaching to emails and push notifications.

Our most popular video is the Pool in the Park fly-through which has received 15.0K views and been played for a total of 216 hours! <https://youtu.be/Ab4HQ7y923M>

Woking Freedom Flyer

Woking Freedom Flyer is our monthly colleague newsletter and part of a companywide initiative to promote internal comms. Produced in-house the Flyer includes updates for centre activities and departments, colleague news including new starters and outside of work activities, new promotions, events and customer feedback.



App

The app continues to be a useful addition to the marketing toolbox. Each centre has its own version of the app with links to the applicable website, Facebook page, online memberships, online booking pages, timetables and a latest news page which can also be used to send short push notifications directly to registered customers mobile phones.

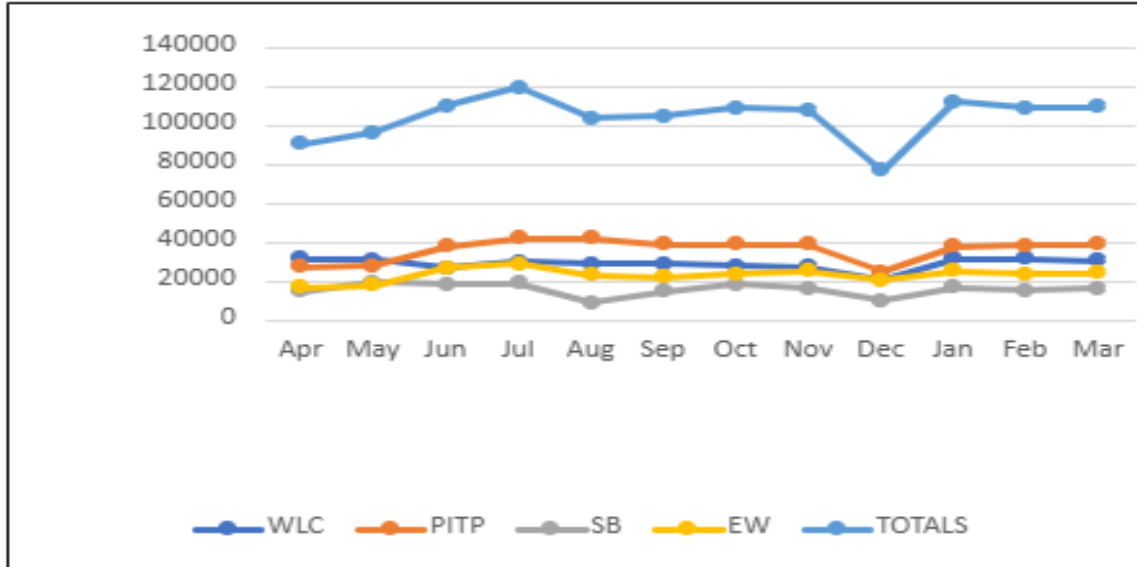
DigiTickets Update

In 2024, DigiTickets proved to be a valuable asset for online booking at Woking Leisure Centre and Pool in the Park and as such the platform was extended to include children's parties, as well as offering the existing variety of activities like lagoon swims, under-fives splash sessions, Inflatazone inflatable sessions, and the Playstore soft play centre. There was an average of 200 transactions per day through DigiTickets in 2024, reflecting our commitment to meeting customer needs and improving overall service delivery.

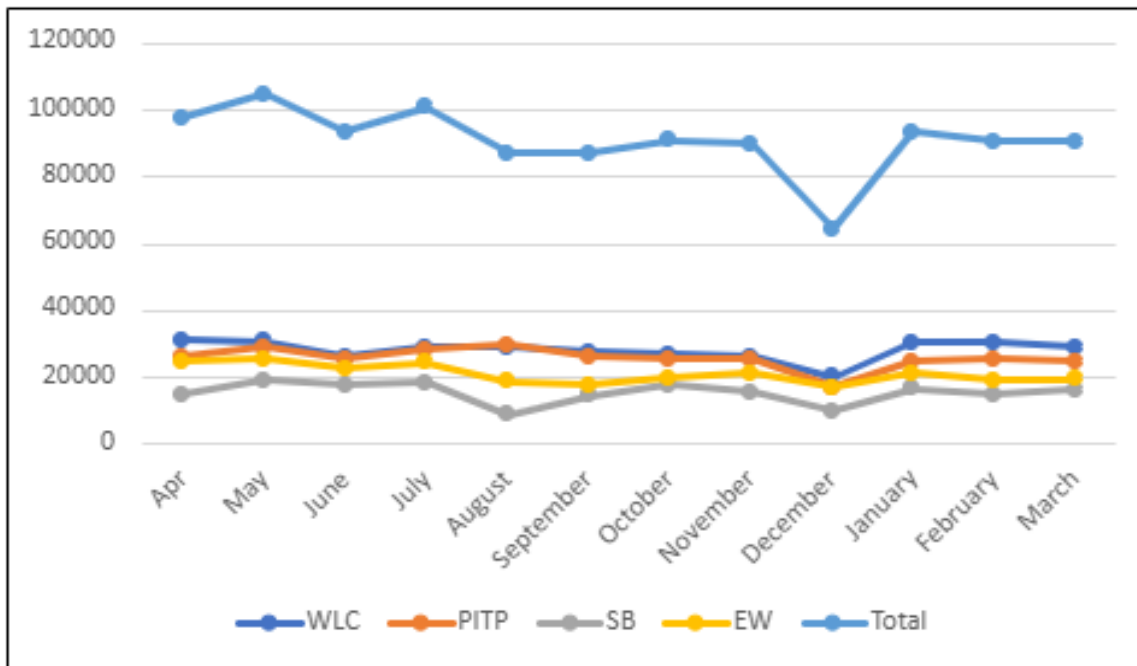
6.5 Participation:

The graph below provides a summary of overall participation rates for activities. Detail can be found in appendix 4. Across contract, footfall has been significantly higher than previous year due to increased net gain of members, growth of learn to swim product and general session attendance.

Partnership footfall 2023/ 24:



Partnership participation 2023/ 24:



6.6 Financial

For accounts to March 2024 please refer to appendix 5.

Freedom Leisure				
Woking Contract Summary				
	Actual		Bid	Last Year
April 2023 to March 2024	12m		12m	12m
Income	6,928,548		4,736,185	6,169,087
Expenditure	6,928,548		4,736,185	6,169,087
Total Surplus / (Deficit)	0		0	0
April Management Fee to WBC	92,562			
May Management Fee to WBC	132,554			
June Management Fee to WBC	85,539			
July Management Fee to WBC	126,053			
August Management Fee to WBC	80,995			
September Management Fee to WBC	99,525			
October Management Fee to WBC	102,768			
November Management Fee to WBC	90,720			
December Management Fee to WBC	29,630			
January Management Fee to WBC	128,963			
February Management Fee to WBC	125,957			
March Management Fee to WBC	144,926			
	1,240,192			

2023-2024 had a very strong financial performance generating just under £7 million pounds of income. The council were subsequently paid a management fee of just over £1.2 million – which was £687K more than the previous financial year

APPENDICES

- 1 Active Communities plan
- 2 Annual feedback Summary
- 3 Accident Report Summary
- 4 Participation summary
- 5 Client P&L report