

Response from Leisure Partnership Board to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 At its meeting on 24 October 2019, the Leisure Partnership Board received the report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee following the Committee's review into the experience offered to residents by Freedom Leisure and the value for money provided to the Council.
- 1.2 The Board has put together a response to the Committee's report.

2.0 Role of the Leisure Partnership Board

- 2.1 The role of the Leisure Partnership Board is to oversee the Leisure Partnership Agreement and to hold all parties to account for the obligations contained therein, reporting any key issues of performance (service and financial) or proposed change in strategic direction to the Council for consideration / approval as appropriate.
- 2.2 The Board meets a minimum of two times per annum.
- 2.3 The Board's work programme includes standing items, such as core/non-core fees & charges and the business plan, and the timing of items dovetails with the Council's business planning process.

3.0 Fees and Charges 2020-21

- 3.1 Fees and charges are referred to as either Core or Non-Core. Core prices are those which the Council reserve the right to determine itself due to their community importance, such as swimming and memberships. Non-Core prices are prices set by Freedom Leisure as they are commercial activities based on local benchmarking.
- 3.2 The Board notes the request from the Committee that when it considers the fees and charges for the next year it links this with how these will influence the uptake in the defined priority groups as identified in the 2020/21 draft business plan namely;
 - Disabled
 - Women and girls
 - Young People
 - Socially disadvantaged
 - Older people
 - BME/ Asian women being a particular emphasis for the next year
 - Those physically inactive
- 3.3 The Active Communities Team at Freedom Leisure is conscious of the need to influence the uptake in the defined priority groups and work closely with Council Officers to deliver projects for the priority groups above.
- 3.4 At its meeting on 24 October, the Board received a very informative update from Abby Woodhouse, Freedom Leisure's Active Communities Manager, on the work and achievements of Active Communities in the Borough.

3.5 Examples of work with priority groups in the Borough include:

- Woking Friday Night Project for young people held at the Leisure Centre – has seen a 27% decrease in Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) levels (further information on the Project under section 4.0).
- Female youth boxing attended by Asian girls.
- Xplorer – family orienteering attended by 233 participants in Summer 2019.
- Learning disability swimming.
- Walking football at Sportsbox.
- Sheerwater ladies badminton.
- Women's table tennis.

3.6 For those living with disabilities, the Active Communities Team offer a 'Moving barriers with Badminton' course to learn the sport with like-minded individuals which runs each term. Active Communities also have a good partnership with Linkable where they can enjoy multi sports at the Leisure Centre on Friday evenings. This includes badminton, football and virtual studio classes. There is also the Swim Buddies session at Pool in the Park which is suitable for older people and those living with disabilities. Swim Buddies is a social session in the leisure lagoon.

3.7 For women and girls, the Active Communities Team offer two weekly back to netball sessions, Walking Netball, women's recreational football and various ladies only swimming sessions.

3.8 For children and young people, as well as the Friday Night Project, the Team run after school sessions such as junior table tennis, junior squash, dodgeball and kids yoga at Alpha Road pavilion which attracts mainly families from the Asian community. Projects like the Friday Night Project, swim buddies, social badminton and our walking sports offering are all designed to create a social aspect and bring people together.

3.9 For older people, there is a very popular internal 50+ club who use the Leisure Centre and Pool 4 days a week for various sporting activities and a successful walking sports programme consisting of walking football, walking basketball and walking netball. The Active Communities Team also run dementia friendly swimming for those affected by dementia and the swim buddies session.

3.10 With regards to BME/Asian women, the Friday Night Project attracts individuals from this priority group from priority areas as does the kids yoga at Alpha Road pavilion. The Team has just started Boccia and Badminton with the Asian ladies on a Monday morning, also at the Alpha Road pavilion.

3.11 The Active Communities has achieved an impressive footfall of 16,263 across all programmes and has secured funding of £17,252.39 in the last 12 months.

3.12 As the Board meeting on 24 October 2019 was not quorate, the Board was unable to formally agree the proposed fees and charges and agreed that a meeting will be arranged before February Full Council in order to do so. However, the Board did express its broad content with the proposals.

3.13 An overall increase of just over 2% is proposed. The Board was advised that the increases at the Sportsbox were in order to move it in line with the Leisure Centre.

3.14 The Committee's concerns regarding affordability was raised and Freedom Leisure explained that it tried to keep prices as competitive as possible. For example, the proposed Concession rate for an off peak casual swim is only £1.95.

4.0 Invitation for a Leisure Partnership Board representative to join the Health and Well-Being Task Group

4.1 The Board discussed the invitation for a representative to attend the Health and Well-Being Task Group, noting that the meetings were held in the daytime.

4.2 A function of the Leisure Partnership Board is to promote Freedom Leisure's Active Communities projects and the impact they have on the health and well-being of the Borough residents. As mentioned above, the Board received an Active Communities update from Abby Woodhouse, Freedom Leisure's Active Communities Manager at its meeting.

4.3 The Board was of the view that the Freedom Leisure Lead Officer for Health and Well-Being, Abby Woodhouse, could attend the Task Group on an as and when required basis.

4.4 Freedom Leisure already work closely with the Council on health. Two examples of partnership working between Freedom Leisure and the Council are set out below.

Inclusive Sports Day

4.5 Freedom Leisure and Woking Borough Council are delivering an inclusive sports day for pupils at Freemantles School for children and young people with learning difficulties.

4.6 The event is being hosted at Woking Leisure Centre on the national day of people living with disabilities. The day entails adapted sports sessions for children to try and experience sports they may not have previously been exposed to.

4.7 Around 60 children are expected for sports and activities such as boccia, cricket, walking football, gymnastics, rugby and table tennis.

Woking Friday Night Project

4.8 The Woking Friday Night Project is one of Freedom's Active Communities Team most popular and well attended projects and is well supported by Woking Borough Council, Active Surrey and Surrey Police. It is aimed at young people aged 11-18 from within the local community and is an inclusive, fun and social multi sports activity evening.

4.9 Sport is used as a tool to engage with young people in a safe environment where they can meet new people each week and make new friends, learn new skills, gain social skills and improve general confidence. The sports and activities Freedom currently offer include trampolining, 3G football, youth boxing, badminton, dodgeball, table tennis and aerial and circus skills. The sessions run 7-9pm on Fridays during term time and are led by coordinators, activators and qualified coaches.

- 4.10 One of the main reasons for the project is to give young people an alternative to hanging around on a Friday night potentially getting into trouble and causing anti-social behaviour. Parents can drop their children off and pick them up knowing they're exercising and socialising in a safe environment.
- 4.11 From Police statistics and insight, before the project started, it became apparent that Friday nights had the highest reported levels of anti-social behaviour. Since January 2016 when the project started, to date, there has been a decrease in the number of reported incidents. It is fair to say that the Woking Friday Night Project has had a positive effect on ASB in the Borough.
- 4.12 The project is aimed at young people across Woking but has a particular focus on targeting those from areas of identified need. It is a low cost project and offers reduced rates for those receiving benefits, full time carers and those with disabilities/learning disabilities. Currently, 34% of those young people on our registers come from areas of identified need in Woking (Maybury and Sheerwater, Knaphill, Horsell West and Mount Hermon East).
- 4.13 Another of the projects objectives is to get more young people active and into sport, to not only keep them physically and mentally active but also help improve their personal development, social development and to develop healthy and active lifestyles. The Team regularly change the sports and activities on offer through participant consultation surveys with the young people to determine what they want.

5.0 Further Comments

- 5.1 The Board would like to clarify that the original Pool in the Park site visit date was not cancelled by Freedom Leisure. Freedom Leisure notified the Council that the date originally chosen by the Council fell on a ladies only session and the Council made the decision to cancel.
- 5.2 At the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 21 October 2019 a user of the Leisure Centre, Mrs Bond, advised the Committee that she had not received a customer survey to complete by email. On further investigation Freedom Leisure identified that the reason why Mrs Bond had not received a survey was because she had ticked out of receiving emails. Freedom Leisure advised the Board that it was looking into whether surveys could be categorised so that users could choose to receive them.
- 5.3 The Board received the results of the survey undertaken by the Committee as part of its review and welcomed the positive comments. In particular, the following results were highlighted:
- 94% of users agreed that an excellent level of customer service was provided; and
 - 91% of users were already happy with the gym facilities.