

Report to: Communities Committee, 8th November 2023

Report of: Corporate Director - Operations, Homes and Communities

Subject: FREEDOM LEISURE – CONTRACT YEAR 7 ANNUAL REPORT (APRIL 2022 TO MARCH 2023)

1. Recommendation

1.1 That the Committee notes the contents of the Freedom Leisure Annual Report 2022/23, presented by members of their Senior Management Team at Committee.

2. Information

- 2.1 The attached annual report 2022/23 (**Appendix 1**) encompasses an overview of the performance of Freedom Leisure during the specified period.
- 2.2 Following on from the impact of the pandemic, contract year 7 produced further challenges related to the energy and cost of living crisis, resulting in a loss of £210,844 which includes further financial support from the City Council for increased utility costs of £255,000.
- 2.3 In response to the energy crisis Freedom Leisure introduce a 26 point non-negotiable action plan which enabled them to reduce energy consumption by 18% year on year, with an additional 326 tonnes of Co2 saved compared to the pre-pandemic period.
- 2.4 Pre-pandemic the Freedom Leisure group was operating with 81,145 members nationally. When the facilities reopened in May 2021 they did so with 47,574 members. They now have 96,000 live members across the group having in that time acquired new contracts in the New Forest, Ashford and the Cotswolds, whilst handing back Lichfield to the local authority. As a group Freedom Leisure have recovered to an average of 93% nationally and to 95% on the Worcester contract.
- 2.5 At the end of the reporting period Freedom Leisure had a live membership database of 5,171 members on the Worcester contract representing a net gain of 482 over the course of the year, with an overall membership recovery of 95% compared to pre-pandemic levels (Perdiswell Leisure Centre 89%, St Johns Sports Centre 105% and Nunnery Wood Sports Complex 101%).
- 2.6 Active participation increased by 7% ending the year on 607,549 against a target of 560,488, overachieving target by 47,061 visits.
- 2.7 Swim School participation was affected by the summer 12 week closure for the replacement of the pool tiles. However, working in partnership with the Council and local alternative venues Freedom Leisure were able to offer swimming lessons to over 1,500 children during the closure period at Perdiswell Leisure Centre with 650 children taking up the invitation to continue their swimming lessons.

Swim School membership reached 2,574 by the end of the period which was a net gain of 30 new members despite the 12 week summer closure.

- 2.8 Group exercise participation was up 10% year on year and a total of 112 weekly fitness classes are on offer across the contract including Aqua Aerobics, Ladies Who Lift, SH'BAM, Body Combat, Omnia HIIT and Yoga. This consists of 67 weekly classes at Perdiswell Leisure Centre, 30 classes at St Johns Sports and 15 classes at Nunnery Wood Sports Complex.
- 2.9 The Healthy Communities Programme hosted sessions focused on Health, Young People, Special Needs and Disability (SEND), Women and Girls, Low Socio-Economic Families, and Disability Sport. This was in addition to delivering free multisport activities during school holiday periods.
- 2.10 Freedom Leisure continue to support the growth of tennis in the City which includes 15 hours of weekly free use. In addition, in partnership with the Council the 'Are you Wimbledon Ready' campaign was very successful in the two weeks prior to the start of the tournament, which saw free courts provided during peak periods and resulted in 650 people taking part over the period.
- 2.11 Freedom Leisure provided investment into the Fitness facilities at St Johns Sports Centre with the introduction of the Elevate Suite, and the Squash Courts at Nunnery Wood Sports Complex were refurbished and continue to be some of the most popular and well used courts in the area.
- 2.12 Issues encountered during the period included a national shortage of Swim Teachers and Sports Coaches to support programme delivery.
- 2.13 The Council's Contracts and Performance Manager liaises on a regular basis with the Area Manager and General Managers at Freedom Leisure responsible for the delivery of the Worcester contract, in order to resolve any day to day operational issues.
- 2.14 The Contracts and Performance Manager also attends quarterly meetings with representatives from Freedom Leisure to analyse and discuss the content of their quarterly performance reports.
- 2.15 Freedom Leisure's performance is also monitored via a Performance Framework which reviews areas of the business such as income, active participation, sales, membership attrition, statutory compliance, community engagement and financial investment.
- 2.16 Building inspections and spot checks also form part of the contract monitoring process undertaken by Council Officers.

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Appendix 1: Freedom Leisure Annual Report – 2022/23