

## HEALTH AND LEISURE CONTRACT UPDATE



### INTRODUCTION

New Forest District Council commenced the partnership with Freedom Leisure on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2021. Freedom Leisure is the council's preferred leisure operator to oversee the management of the five leisure centres within the district for the next 11 years. Freedom Leisure is a not-for-profit leisure trust which manages leisure and cultural facilities on behalf of partners across the UK, to realise their vision of "improving lives through leisure."

### MOBILISATION

To ensure a smooth handover of services to Freedom Leisure, weekly mobilisation meetings have taken place during the mobilisation phase. The meetings have addressed any operational, financial, human resource and legal queries with attendance from New Forest District Council team members and Freedom Leisure team members.

Following on from the mobilisation meetings, a Contract Partnership Board has been formed. The board met on 10<sup>th</sup> August with future meetings scheduled once per month to review the partnership and evaluate the performance of the leisure venues.

### STAFFING

- 392 staff were transferred under TUPE with 15 staff recruited since the launch on 1<sup>st</sup> July. There are currently 6 vacancies being advertised.
- All staff have received new uniform and all venues have fully installed new Freedom signage internally and externally.
- In the first two weeks of the contract, staff on site were supported by experienced Freedom Managers, 7 days a week from open to close which totalled around 1300 hours in total.
- To the vast extent, the implementation of Freedom's payroll processes has been smooth. Where there have been any errors or queries, Freedom have worked at pace to rectify and communicate with the staff members concerned.

### SIGNS OF RECOVERY

The leisure venues are showing positive signs of recovery as Coronavirus restrictions are lifted.

#### Specifically:

- The centres have been noticeably busier week by week.
- Since the launch of the partnership on 1<sup>st</sup> July, there has been a 24% growth in membership subscriptions with 5,075 live fitness subscriptions across the venues; a net growth of 975 subscriptions.
- Swimming Lessons are fast recovering to pre-pandemic levels with 877 enquiries being processed for the Autumn term. An estimated 4,500 swimmers will be learning to swim by the end of September 2021.
- The Active Lifestyles programme is now offering 36 classes a week, only 1 less than the pre-pandemic programme, with a 57% uptake to sessions.

- In the first 3 months of this year, the venues have had 134 referrals, and this will continue to grow as restrictions are lifted.
- The re-introduction of Senior Swim Sessions, Therapy Swim Sessions and multi-activity mornings are proving popular.
- Sports Clubs and Swim Clubs have returned to the venues.
- The recently refurbished Astro-Turf pitch at Lymington welcomes the return of the New Forest Hockey club and is attracting new booking enquiries for the venue.
- Shared use of the Sports Hall at Lymington has been agreed with Priestlands School. Freedom will be developing a new programme in September to offer a balance of club use, children's activities, and casual use.

## FUTURE PRIORITIES

Work is due to commence in December 2021 to upgrade reception areas, expand group fitness studio floor space and install soft play equipment. Some, or all, of these works will be at Applemore, Totton and Ringwood Leisure Centre's. A Capital Partnership Board has been formed and will oversee these exciting capital investment projects. The project board is made up of key partners at New Forest District Council, Freedom Leisure and The Clarkson Alliance, who will be project managing on behalf of Freedom Leisure

The Leisure Contract Working group will start to meet in October, members will be asked to volunteer after the Panel meeting. The working group will meet to evaluate the partnership between New Forest District Council and Freedom Leisure reviewing the operator performance against their strategic performance indicators.

Freedom Leisure are planning to move the learn to swim programme in the New Forest from a termly enrolment programme, over 44 weeks of the year, to a 50 week per year programme; offering continuous learning throughout the year. Freedom Leisure will be communicating with Customers and Staff on this change and there will be further progress updates in the next panel report.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Members, please note the updates within this report. Future updates will be provided at each panel meeting. The next update will be provided in January 2022.