



New Forest

DISTRICT COUNCIL

July 2022 – June 2023

ANNUAL REPORT 2022 / 2023

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1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

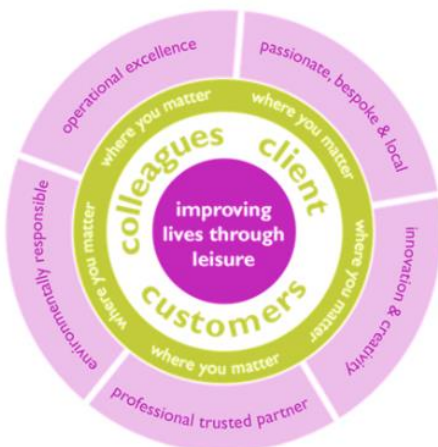
The following report provides detail for the financial year 2022-2023 which was the second full year of Freedom Leisure operating leisure facilities: Applemore Health and Leisure, Lymington Health and Leisure, New Milton Health and Leisure, Ringwood Health and Leisure and Totton Health and Leisure on behalf of the New Forest District Council.

1.2 Strategic alignment

The utility/ cost of living crisis has greatly impacted the sport, fitness and leisure industries due to the additional utility costs coupled with CPI/ cost of living challenges for the local communities.

It is safe to say that almost immediately after COVID-19 for many it has led to less physical activity, with longer screen time, irregular sleep patterns, and potentially more stress, all resulting in poorer wellbeing. The cost of living and utility crisis has created uncertainty and challenge.

However, there is now a great opportunity to reset our thinking around our core products and approach, to engage more people on all levels and all abilities. Our mission has never been more significant, and we will continue in order to educate, support and inspire people to live a more active and healthier lifestyle.



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

As such, our strategic objectives cover five key areas, which as a local team we have broken down into four elements to ensure we approach this in the correct fashion for the New Forest community.



2. Summary and review of performance for 2022/2023

2.1 Applemore Health and Leisure Centre

Applemore Health and Leisure Centre's attendance increased significantly after the 'Covid period' and several activity areas saw over and above attendance figures compared to pre-Covid. With the introduction of the £100,000+ installation of the brand new soft play unit in the sports hall, childrens attendance significantly increased and the Venue has evolved into a family friendly destination.

Childrens parties were launched in 2023 and this has proved very popular, particularly in the soft play area.

The Healthy Communities activities have continued to grow in popularity and we launched a venue specific 'Forever Active' programme that targets physical activity in older adults.

The completion of the FOH refurbishment has modernised the entrance into the venue and improved the customer experience with technical advances in access control. The FOH improvements included a café area where customers can enjoy a variety of food and drinks including a range of Costa products. The Venue achieved a 5* hygiene rating and the café is becoming more popular each month.

With significant investment planned in the gym areas in 2023/ 24 we expect significant membership base growth in 2023/ 24.

2.2 Lymington Health and Leisure Centre

Lymington Health and Leisure Centre's attendance increased significantly after the 'Covid period' and several activity areas saw over and above attendance figures compared to pre-Covid. A continued positive working relationship with Priestlands School has seen ongoing usage of the swimming pool and after long negotiations a shared usage of the sports hall (mainly evening and weekend usage) should be agreed in 2023/ 24.

The Venues Duty Management team was increased from 2 to 3 full time staff members to cope with the demand of the venue and ensure service qualities were not adversely affected.

The Venues membership base has grown circa 200 members in the past 12 months and boasts the second largest membership base across the 5 Venues.

2.3 New Milton Health and Leisure Centre

New Milton Health and Leisure Centre's attendance increased significantly after the 'Covid period' and several activity areas saw over and above attendance figures compared to pre-Covid. Arnewood school continue to utilise the sports hall and swimming pool to deliver their school curriculum and we are actively communicating to maximise opportunities between the two parties.

The Venues Duty Management team was increased from 2 to 3 full time staff members to cope with the demand of the venue and ensure service qualities were not adversely affected.

The Venue boasts the largest Healthy Community programme across all 5 venues (more info can be found on page 15 and 16).

The Venues membership base has grown circa 150 members in the past 12 months and with significant investment into the gym areas in 2023/ 24 continued membership base growth is expected.

2.4 Ringwood Health and Leisure Centre

Ringwood Health and Leisure Centre's attendance increased significantly after the 'Covid period' and several activity areas saw over and above attendance figures compared to pre-Covid. With the introduction of the £100,000+ installation of an extended soft play area and café area, childrens attendance significantly increased and the Venue has evolved into a family friendly destination. The Venue achieved a 5* hygiene rating and the café is becoming more popular each month.

Childrens parties were launched in 2023 and this has proved very popular, particularly in the soft play area.

A change in our digital marketing strategy has resulted in membership growth from 753 in July 2022 to 904 in June 2023. Representing approx. 20% increase YoY. Further growth is expected in 2023/ 24 and by October 2023 we forecast 1,000+ members which has never been achieved at Ringwood Leisure Centre.

2.5 Totton Health and Leisure Centre

Totton Health and Leisure Centre's attendance increased significantly after the 'Covid period' and several activity areas saw over and above attendance figures compared to pre-Covid.

The Venues Duty Management team was increased from 2 to 3 full time staff members to cope with the demand of the venue and ensure service qualities were not adversely affected.

The completion of the FOH refurbishment has modernised the entrance into the venue and improved the customer experience with technical advances in access control. The FOH improvements included the offering of Costa drinks and catering options so customers can enjoy a variety of food and drinks. The Venue achieved a 5* hygiene rating and the catering options are becoming more popular each month.

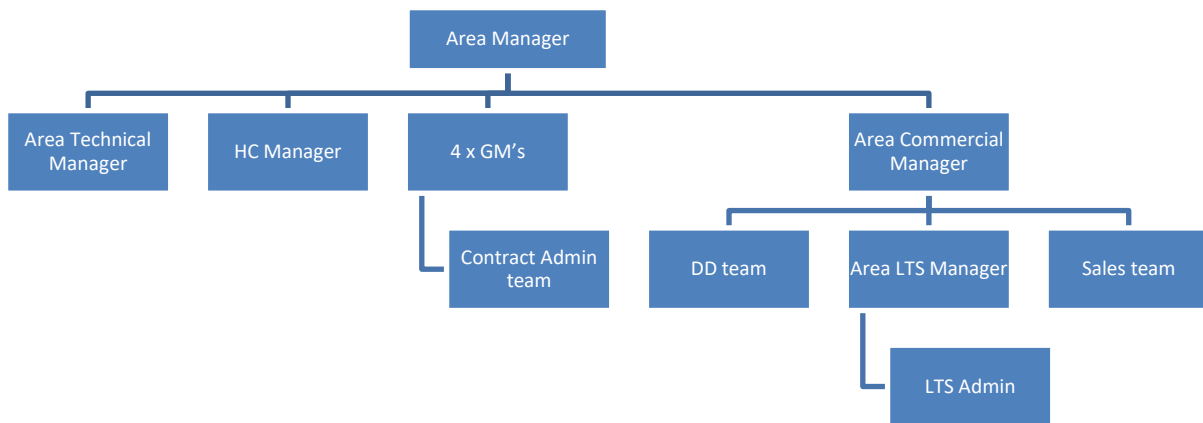
With significant investment planned in the gym areas in 2023/ 24 we expect significant membership base growth in 2023/ 24.

3 People, passionate, bespoke and local:

2022/23 has continued to be an extremely challenging year for the sport and leisure sector as a whole, but Freedom Leisure has worked closely with their local authority partners to provide the best service possible during this unprecedented time.

3.1 Human resources

The ongoing reviews resulted in a change in the Area Management, admin, sales and customer service teams that was focused on improving the operational and commercial aspects of the business with improved customer experience a key outcome (see below). This change was rolled out in full in April 2023 and the early observations and feedback have been very encouraging.



- The implementation of a full time Area Commercial Manager and a dedicated sales team was a key requirement for the partnership. These roles have supported the local teams to maximise commercial opportunities and ultimately increase footfall and participation into the venues.
- Staff turnover has been high this year and a steady recruitment process has been needed to ensure effect on service was kept to a minimum. Key areas have been Lifeguards and Swim teachers where there has been a national shortage

3.2 Staff pay and rewards – including pay review and training:

- Reviewed in March 2023, staff pay rewards were ‘paused’ due to the uncertain and challenging economic climate. This will be reviewed in September 2023.
- ihasco online courses and the freedom internal training programme are being utilised with staff given the ability to complete the training at their place of work or at home (online learning).
- Employees have continued to use discounts from My staff shop, the freedom benefit platform

4 Process, operational excellence/ environmentally responsible

4.1 Programming and service development:

Freedom Leisure have added/ changed the following:

Applemore Health and Leisure Centre

- Our first ‘FUN’ weekend was delivered/ Focusing on families and our new family fun and friendly facilities. The soft play and inflatazone were the key attractions
- Soft play SEN (Special Education Needs) sessions were launched in the soft play area
- ‘Forever Active’ programme launched. Offering pickleball, badminton and a number of class based activity sessions for those who are 50+ years of age
- Les Mills launch event held for all members and non-members showcasing our classes
- Additional lane swimming added to the programme
- Party offering re-launched (post covid) and proving very successful
- Re-opening of the Health Suite (steam room only)

Lymington Health and Leisure Centre

- Additional lane swimming added to the programme
- Les Mills launch event held for all members and non-members showcasing our classes
- Party offering re-launched (post covid)
- Re-opening of the Health Suite

New Milton Health and Leisure Centre

- Additional lane swimming added to the programme
- Les Mills launch event held for all members and non-members showcasing our classes
- ‘Little leapfrogs’ drop in sessions added to the programme
- Party offering re-launched (post covid)
- Re-opening of the Health Suite



Ringwood Health and Leisure Centre

- Additional lane swimming added to the programme
- SEN soft play sessions
- Les Mills launch event held for all members and non-members showcasing our classes
- Party offering re-launched (post covid)
- Re-opening of the Health Suite

Totton Health and Leisure Centre

- Additional lane swimming added to the programme
- 'Little leapfrogs' drop in sessions added to the programme
- Les Mills launch event held for all members and non-members showcasing our classes
- Party offering re-launched (post covid)
- Re-opening of the Health Suite

4.2 Summary of significant improvements to facilities or services:

There have been many improvements made to the facilities by Freedom Leisure and New Forest District Council, and these included:

Applemore Health and Leisure Centre

- Upgraded dry side changing rooms
- Refurbished reception and café area
- Upgraded turnstyle system installed
- Free weights room extension (works started in 2022/23 year but will be finalised in 2023/24)
- Pool inflatable
- Various areas decorated throughout the building
- Energy works – ASHP installation (works started in 2022/23 year but will be finalised in 2023/24)

Lymington Health and Leisure Centre

- Full hairdryer replacement
- Health suite upgrades to ensure smooth running of this product

New Milton Health and Leisure Centre

- Wet side AHU (air handling unit) replacement. Significant investment (works started in 2022/ 23 and completed in 2023/ 24)
- Full hairdryer replacement
- Fall arrest upgrade

Ringwood Health and Leisure Centre

- Soft play upgrade
- Café refurbishment

- Storage improvements
- New wetside showers
- Energy works – ASHP installation (works started in 2022/23 year but will be finalised in 2023/24)
- Structural steel works upgrades (works started in 2022/23 year but will be finalised in 2023/24)

Totton Health and Leisure Centre

- Studio upgrade/ extension
- Dry side changing room and toilet upgrade/ extension. Including new shower facilities
- Reception upgrades including turnstlye updates
- Full hairdryer replacement
- Roof repairs to address leaks

4.3 Incidents:

Below is a summary of 2022- 23 accident/incident performance. Headlines are;

	Total visitors	Total accidents	Percentage of accidents
Applemore health & Leisure Centre	130944	17	0.01596%
Lymington Health & Leisure Centre	125372	29	0.02313%
New Milton Health & Leisure Centre	150729	30	0.0199%
Ringwood Health & Leisure Centre	164601	68	0.04131%
Totton Health & Leisure Centre	153760	23	0.01495%

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

4.6 Environmental Health Office:

The catering facilities across the partnership (Applemore, Totton and Ringwood) all achieved 5-star accreditation.

An accident at Applemore Leisure Centre in the soft play area resulted in a voluntary short term closure of the unit to safeguard all users and staff whilst investigations could take place to understand why the unit had failed. The investigation concluded that no failings could be found on the part of Freedom Leisure and following remedial works the unit was re-opened.

4.4 Fees and charges:

As part of our annual price review all prices were benchmarked against other leisure operations and inflation.

Secondary spend items were also reviewed in line with supplier and contractor inflation rates, any impact to the customer has been minimised.

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.

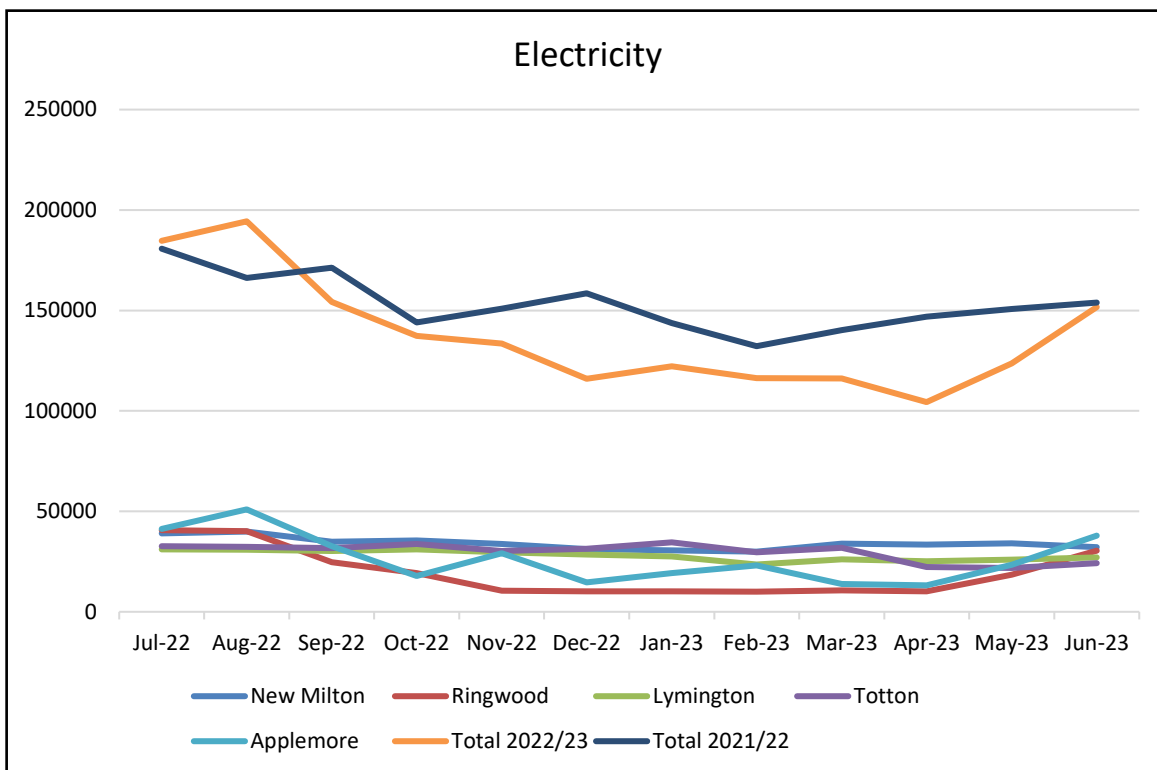
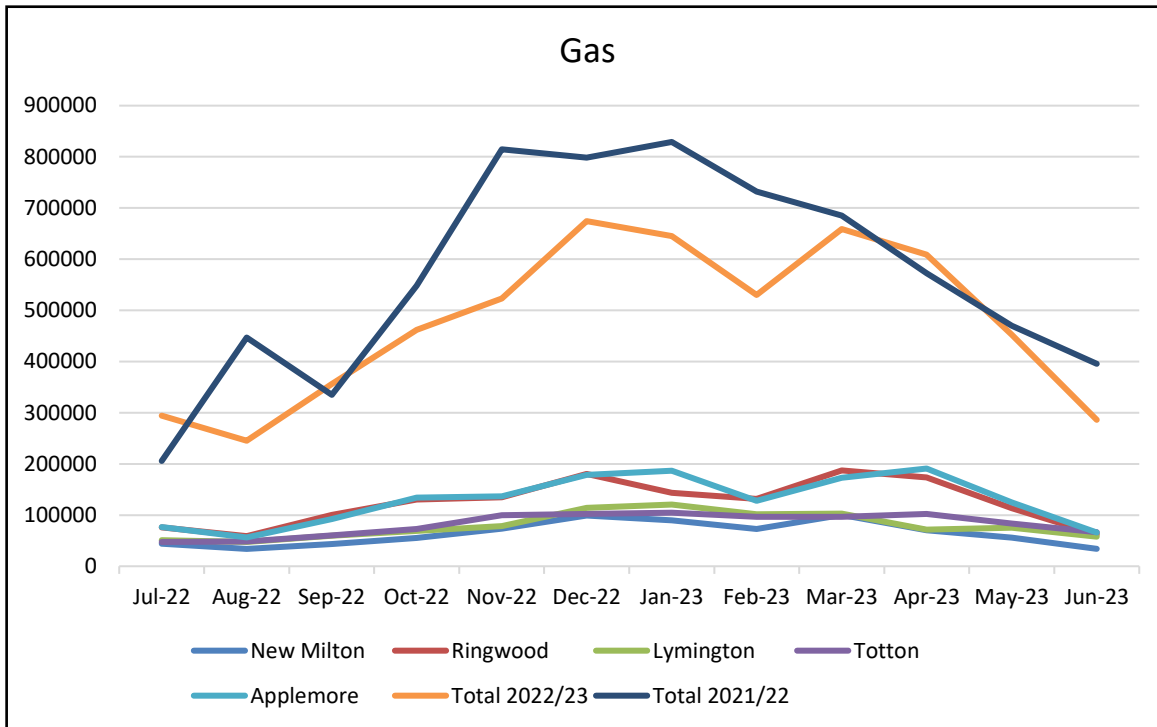
4.5 Environmental:

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 New Forest contract. With our focus being very much on environmental impact, we are also looking at ways to reduce our carbon footprint and continue our journey to net zero emissions.



Utility information:



Key points

- Gas usage down YoY by 1,096,769 units
- Electricity usage down YoY by 184,725 units
- Continued effort to reduce consumption via staff training and capital projects (ASHP's)

Financial impact (July 2022-June 2023)

Total All Sites (gas and electric only)	Applemore	Lymington	New Milton	Ringwood	Totton	Total
Utilities ACTUAL	£272,902	£234,258	£255,190	£239,916	£273,238	£1,275,504
Utilities BID (3% inflation adjusted)	£98,406	£98,355	£106,770	£84,831	£101,280	£489,642
Difference	£174,496	£135,903	£148,420	£155,085	£171,958	£785,862

With the ongoing support from the New Forest District Council, Freedom Leisure have been able to reduce the possible impact of the utility crisis, but even with this support the additional utility costs are in excess of £785,000 vs the forecast made on acquisition of the partnership.

5 Customer, profession trusted partner

5.1 Customer satisfaction:

Freedom Leisure is committed to providing excellent customer service. Detail on satisfaction is obtained by the comment cards, email feedback, comments on social media, verbal and surveys. These provide a snapshot in time. Actions are captured using the Efocus system and dealt with as they arise.

5.2 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



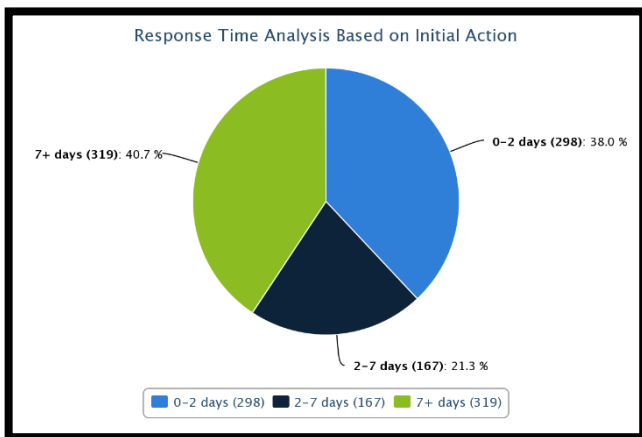
Positive feedback was received this year after significant investment in a number of Venues coupled with improved timetables and customer engagement to shape them.

Due to the national lifeguard and swim teacher shortage, we have had feedback on effected services. In response to this we have shared staff resources across sites, adjusted rotas to provide an even spread of staff and run several NPLQ and swim teachers courses across the venues.

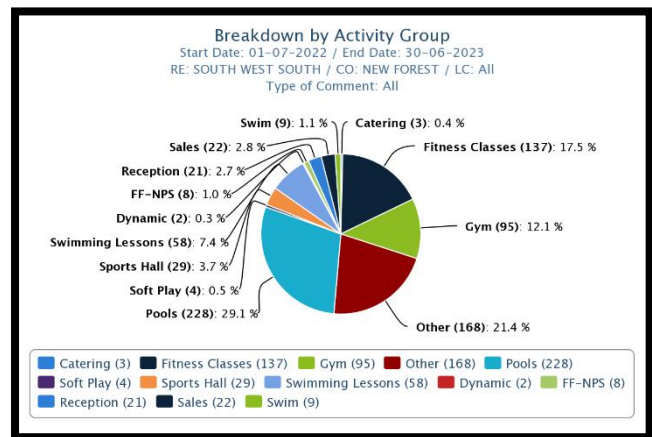
Please find summary of our Efocus feedback recieved and the timeframe in which we have responded, throughout the year below.

Partnership detail

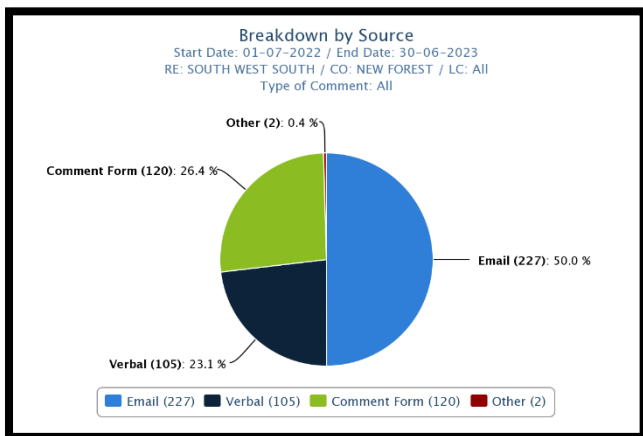
Response time



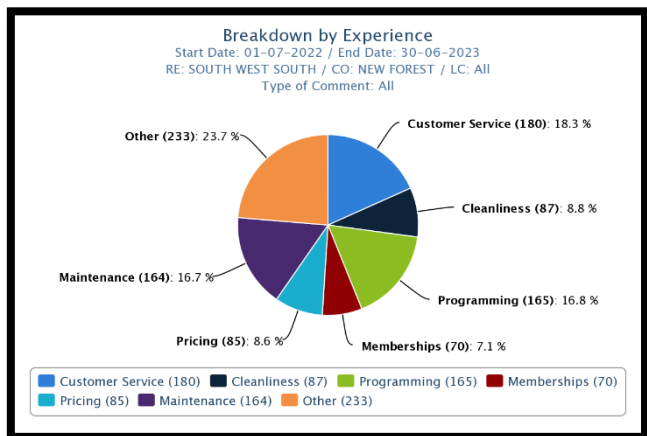
Breakdown by activity



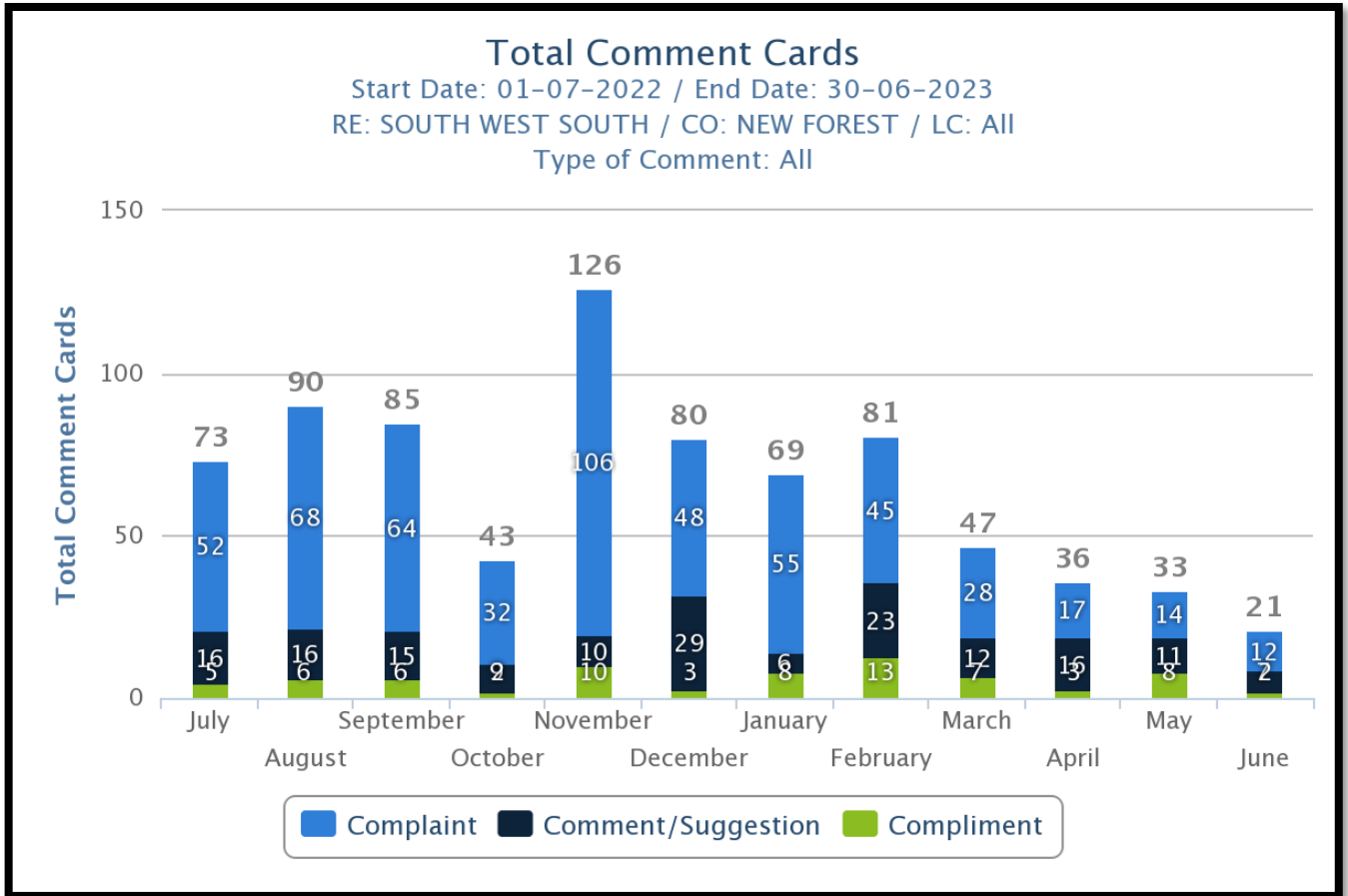
Breakdown of source:



Breakdown of experience:



Comments/ complaints/ compliments



6 Product, innovation and creativity

6.1 Healthy Communities/ sports development:

A Forever Active programme has been introduced at Applemore which offers a variety of activities including Pickleball, table tennis, short tennis, aerobics and chair yoga. Forever Active is a programme aimed at older adults and provides a relaxed casual session to encourage older adults to stay active, whilst also including a social element to tackle loneliness in the older generation. Forever Active programmes will be introduced at Totton and New Milton in September 2023.

Walking sports continue to be a popular choice for older adults with walking netball and football clubs based across our sites.



We continue to run successful gymnastics programmes at New Milton & Lymington with classes ranging from beginners to club gymnastics. Across the two sites we currently have 109 gymnasts enrolled in to sessions out of a possible 128 spaces showing a 85% class occupancy rate. In addition to this we have Gym Tots classes running at Applemore which currently have 37 children enrolled.

Our 3 month refugee membership has been highly valued by customers across the year. This membership options has allowed those who have had to flee their country to continue to stay active, which is of great benefit to their mental and physical health but has also allowed them the opportunity to integrate in to the community. This 3 month membership is completely free of charge to the customer and has resulted in some fantastic feedback from those who have been able to take advantage of the facilities on offer.

6.2 Holiday Activity & Food:

At Applemore and Ringwood Leisure Centres we have been providing free Holiday Camps spaces for children on Free School meals or from low-income families.

This has been possible working with New Forest District Council and the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) funding provided by the government.

This allows children to experience things they may not be able to day to day, be active and healthy with a balanced meal provided free of charge. The children that get involved in the program will have the opportunity to have many experiences like Swimming, Sports, Arts and Crafts, Inflatables and more that they may not be able to do normally.

Not only this but as part of the program we are educating children in healthy lifestyles and are able to point parents in the right direction to help with this. We hope to continue this great work with New Forest District Council and the HAF funding for years to come.



6.3 Wellness and GP referral:

Our program has continued to progress in the last year, especially with our NHS partnerships. We have built a strong partnership with University Hospital Southampton and their PREHAB scheme helping 13 patients in the local area to become fitter, stronger or lose weight in preparation for surgery. We attend Pulmonary Rehabilitation Phase 3 classes in Blackfield, Sway and Wellow at the end of their 12 week courses to offer continuity and remove barriers for patients continuing with Phase 4 classes in the community. In addition to this we have strong links with cardiac rehabilitation services in New Milton, Lymington and Applemore which ensures a smooth progression from nurse led phase 3 classes in to our community based phase 4 cardiac rehabilitation classes.

As of July 2023 we have 391 members on our GP referral scheme across the 5 sites, this number has increased consistently month on month since January 2023 at 279 members. Provision at Totton has recently been increased to reflect the increasing demand.

We have averaged 65 exercise referrals per month since January 2023

Our exercise referral programme includes the following:

- 3x 1:1 touch points with instructors during initial 12 week period
- Additional 12 week 'graduate' membership option for those who complete the initial 12 weeks
- Access to pool usage – including aqua aerobics
- Circuits
- Phase 4 pulmonary rehabilitation class
- Phase 4 cardiac rehabilitation class
- Falls prevention classes
- Chair Yoga
- Level 4 Cancer qualified instructors

Health referral class	Participation 2022/2023
Health Circuit	4106
Pulmonary Rehabilitation	1842
Cardiac Rehabilitation	1417
Steady & Strong (Falls prevention)	3941
Chair Yoga	1321

Our key projects and goals for 23/24 include

- Smoking cessation clinics
- Host NHS services such as physios and health checks
- Host social prescribers at site

6.4 Marketing and Information technology:

In 2022-23 we utilised the following channels to promote activities: websites, social media: Facebook, Instagram, Google, Brief Your Market email newsletters, text messaging plus internal video screens, banners, posters and leaflets. In line with the rest of Freedom Leisure, the Venues websites were completely rebuilt in 2022 with a new format, standardised layout and a clearer design more suited to use on mobiles and tablets as well as PCs.

Work was also carried out during 2022 to onboard the Freedom Leisure booking app. MyFit App provides access to the centres' online bookings, website and social media plus enhanced features such as news items and push notifications.

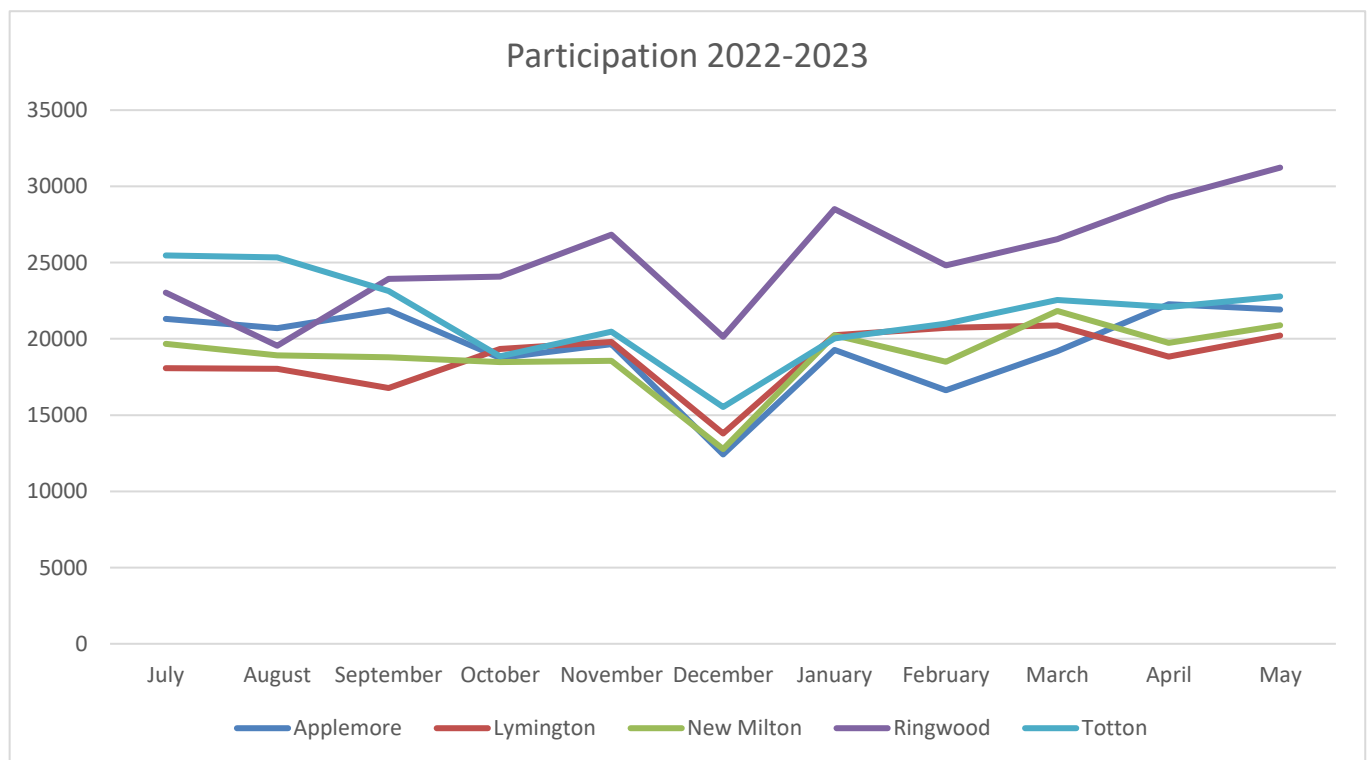
The ICT headline for 2023 is the introduction of DigiTickets, a third-party web based online booking solution which allows basket shopping rather than single activities. Digi Tickets will provide a simple-to-use modern interface for members and non-members to book soft play, Inflatazone sessions and birthday parties at Applemore and Ringwood Leisure Centre. It is hoped that other activities will be added included family swimming and there is also the opportunity to add bolt-on activities such as food and resale items.

6.5 Participation:

The graph below provides a summary of overall participation rates for activities.

Across the partnership, participation has been significantly higher than previous year due to the effect of Covid and restrictions that were in place.

Partnership participation 2022/ 23:



6.6 Financial

Year 2 of the contract was particularly difficult for Freedom Leisure financially, with a slower than expected post Covid recovery. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 also caused a significant and unforeseen spike in the cost of utilities, adding significant expenditure pressures to income recovery pressures. The sector is still finding it extremely challenging to cover the huge energy cost increases, whilst still operating in the context of a post pandemic recovery and a cost of living crisis. Unfortunately Freedom Leisure, like many others in the industry, are experiencing these same challenges which contributed to the overall deficit of £1,482,553.

Freedom Leisure New Forest Contract Summary						
July 2022 to June 2023	Actual 12m	Bid 12m	Bid 12m			
Income	6,620,220	7,605,064	7,605,064			
Expenditure	8,102,772	7,605,064	7,605,064			
Total Surplus / (Deficit)	(1,482,553)	0	0			
Total All Sites	Applemore	Lymington	New Milton	Ringwood	Totton	Total
Total Income	1,635,609	1,209,943	1,207,073	1,346,574	1,221,020	6,620,219
Total Expenditure	2,018,551	1,422,459	1,383,537	1,731,928	1,546,297	8,102,772
Surplus/Deficit	- 382,942	- 212,516	- 176,464	- 385,354	- 325,277	- 1,482,553
Income Bid (YTD)	1,821,455	1,407,273	1,324,256	1,505,914	1,546,166	7,605,064
Expenditure Bid (YTD)	1,821,455	1,407,273	1,324,256	1,505,914	1,546,166	7,605,064
Surplus / (Deficit) Bid (YTD)	0	0	0	0	0	0

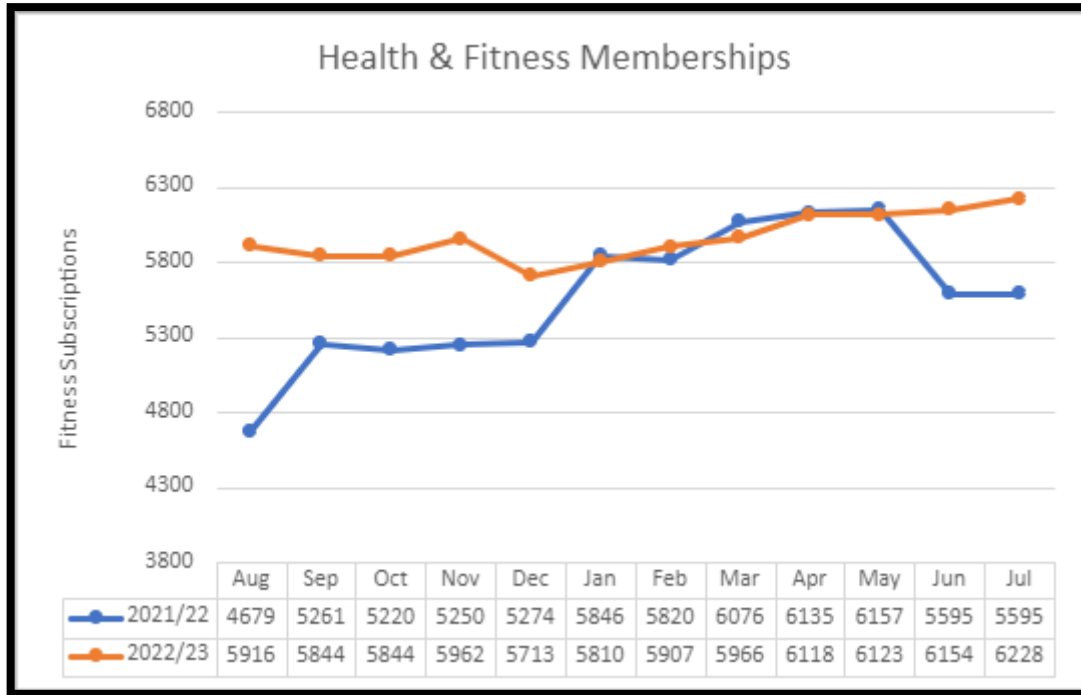
Area Manager Conclusion

2022 – 2023 proved a significantly challenging year for all leisure business including those run by Freedom Leisure in New Forest. The cost of living crisis couldn't have come at a worse time when you consider the huge impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the industry, and the country/ world as a whole.

Regardless of this there are a number of major positives to take away from the year. Those include the 'modernisation' of the Area Management, operations and commercial positions to include an Area Commercial Manager and a sales team to better promote the facilities and offerings. This has resulted in both service and commercial improvements across all 5 venues.

I am positive that the partnership is now in a stronger position due to the difficult decisions made at the start of the calendar year. This will allow for the partnership to be better placed to offer the very best service and standards going into 2023 – 2024 and capitalise on social proscrying, junior activity and fitness membership opportunities as a priority.

An example of this confidence can be demonstrated below:



Health and fitness memberships are now at an all time high and growing monthly in months where we would traditionally see either a small loss of members or maintaining the membership base we have. This is particularly promising as we enter September 2023 which is traditionally a bigger growth month.

To support further growth, in 2023 – 2024 the aim will be to deliver the gym refurbishments at Applemore, Totton and New Milton Leisure Centres (circa £500,000 investment) and drive the membership base of the partnership to over 7,500 members.