

**Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel – 17  
September 2025.**

**Freedom Leisure/NFDC Partnership Annual Performance  
Report**

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|-------------------|--|
| Purpose           | For Review   |
| Classification    | Public   |
| Executive Summary | <p>New Forest District Council commenced its partnership with Freedom Leisure on 1 July 2021. Freedom Leisure is the Council's preferred leisure operator to oversee the management of the five leisure centres within the district until 2032<sup>(00)</sup>. The following report provides an overview for contract year 4 (2024-2025) of New Forest Partnership with Freedom Leisure operating the following facilities: Applemore Health and Leisure centre, Lymington Health and Leisure centre, New Milton Health and Leisure centre, Ringwood Health and Leisure centre and Totton Health and Leisure centre.</p> <p>The Partnership continues to deliver impactful services across leisure centres and remains focused on enhancing community wellbeing, improving facilities, and driving sustainable growth.</p> <p>The Annual Report will cover the following key performance indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Strategic Objectives and Purpose</li><li>- Fitness Memberships</li><li>- Learn to Swim Memberships</li><li>- Customer Experience</li><li>- Utilities consumption - Successes and Impact</li><li>- Participation levels</li><li>- Capital Projects overview</li><li>- Healthy Communities Outcome</li><li>- Social Impact</li><li>- Financial Performance</li><li>- 2025/26 Key Objectives</li></ul> |

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|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>Recommendation(s)</b>      | <b>That the Panel note New Forest Partnership Annual Performance Report.</b>   |
| Reasons for recommendation(s) | New Forest Partnership Annual Report is required as set out in Freedom Leisure/NFDC Outsourcing Agreement. The council's review and oversight of the partnership's performance is key in ensuring the council achieves its corporate objectives. |
| Ward(s)                       | All  |
| Portfolio Holder(s)           | Councillor Dan Poole – Community, Safety and Wellbeing   |
| Strategic Director(s)         | Alan Bethune – Strategic Director Corporate Resources & Transformation   |
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## **Introduction and background**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide members with New Forest Partnership Annual Performance overview to cover the period 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025.

New Forest District Council commenced its partnership with Freedom Leisure on 1 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 eleven 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."

2. The New Forest Partnership, operated in collaboration with Freedom Leisure, has continued to deliver a comprehensive and community-focused health and well-being service across five key sites: Applemore, Lymington, New Milton, Ringwood, and Totton Health and Leisure centres. This report outlines, operational achievements, capital investments, community impact and the financial performance of the partnership over the twelve-month period. The overarching aim remains to enhance public health and well-being, promote inclusive

participation, and ensure the long-term sustainability of leisure services in the district.

### **Operational Performance and Membership Trends**

3. The partnership has seen encouraging growth in key performance indicators, particularly in membership engagement:

- Fitness Memberships experienced a substantial increase, rising from 6,228 in July 2023 to a peak of 8,527 in January 2025. This upward trajectory reflects successful marketing, improved facilities, and enhanced customer experience.
- Learn to Swim (LTS) Memberships remained relatively stable, with minor month-to-month variations, indicating consistent demand for swimming lessons across all sites.
- Customer Service Responsiveness:

40% of customer queries were resolved within 2 working days, and

59% within 7 working days.

The majority of queries pertained to fitness class scheduling and swimming lessons availability.

The deployment of digital tools such as Course Pro and the Freedom Leisure App is expected to further streamline customer interactions and reduce query volumes.

### **Utilities – Successes and Impact Summary**

4. The Utilities section of the presentation highlights strategic efforts undertaken by the New Forest Partnership to improve energy efficiency, reduce environmental impact, and enhance the sustainability of leisure operations across the district.

5. Seasonal Trends - Electricity Consumption - Peaks are observed during winter months (likely December to February), which aligns with increased indoor activity, lighting, and heating system usage. A noticeable dip occurs in summer months, suggesting reduced demand due to longer daylight hours and potentially lower operational intensity. Gas Consumption - follows a similar seasonal pattern, with higher usage in colder months due to heating requirements. Consumption drops significantly in warmer months, indicating effective seasonal control and more efficient plant management.

6. **Year-on-Year Comparison and Impact.** A reduction in overall consumption, suggesting the impact of energy-saving measures such as enhanced team environmental training, efficient monitoring of building management systems and plant management, implementation of environmental interventions such as solar panels and shower restrictors.

## **Participation**

7. The participation data contained in the presentation offers a comprehensive, month-by-month breakdown of user engagement across five key leisure centres operated under the New Forest Partnership. This dataset serves as a critical performance indicator, reflecting not only the operational throughput of each site but also the effectiveness of programming, seasonal responsiveness, and community engagement strategies that led to increase in participation year on year by 76,118 visits which is a great result.

8. The participation data directly supports the partnership's strategic objective to increase overall participation year on year. The seasonal peaks and troughs identified in the data provide clear guidance for when and where to focus promotional efforts and programme innovation.

## **Capital Investment and Service Enhancements**

9. A series of capital projects were successfully delivered, aimed at modernising facilities and improving the overall user experience:
  - At Lymington, the gym underwent a comprehensive refurbishment, including the installation of state-of-the-art equipment such as the Half Rack, Plate Loaded Glute Drive, Arc Trainer, and SpeedFlex Blade. The facility also benefited from upgraded flooring, refreshed décor, and an expanded free weights area.
  - The Group Cycling Studio was revitalised with the introduction of IC6 bikes featuring the Coach By Colour system, offering members a personalised and data-driven workout experience.
  - Applemore Health Suite was fully modernised, with enhancements to the steam room and sauna, significantly improving comfort, aesthetics, and relaxation opportunities for members.
  - Sustainability initiatives were prioritised at Applemore, where solar panels and shower restrictors were installed with funding from the Swimming Pool Support Fund (SPSF) - government initiative in England aimed at providing financial assistance to public swimming pools and leisure facilities to ensure

their sustainability and improve energy efficiency. These measures are expected to reduce carbon emissions and lower operational costs.

### **Healthy Communities Programme and Social Impact**

10. The Healthy Communities programme continues to be a cornerstone of the partnership's social value delivery, offering a wide range of inclusive and condition-specific activities:

**Exercise on Referral:** Delivered 86.5 hours per week across five sites, supporting individuals with medical conditions through tailored physical activity.

**Specialised Classes:** Including falls prevention, COPD rehabilitation, cardiac rehab, and joint pain cycling.

**Inclusive Programmes:** Such as SEN swimming lessons, Menofit (menopause support), Mum & Baby circuits, and Forever Active sessions for older adults.

**Strategic Partnerships:** Collaborations with University Hospital Southampton (UHS) for cancer prehabilitation and Lymington Hospital for stroke recovery support.

**Social Impact Testimonials:** Participants reported significant improvements in physical health, mental wellbeing, and social connection, with heartfelt stories of recovery and empowerment shared by both service users and healthcare professionals.

### **Charitable Engagement and Community Outreach**

11. The partnership has continued to foster strong community ties through charitable initiatives:

- The Wear It Pink Campaign in October raised £3,031 for Breast Cancer UK, with centres hosting themed classes and a nationwide cycling challenge.
- The Christmas Present Drive, now in its second year, saw over 500 gifts donated to Southampton Children's Hospital, reflecting the generosity and compassion of the local community.

## Financial Performance

12. Over the course of the financial year, the partnership generated a total income of £8,468,765, which exceeded the original bid projection of £8,015,466, reflecting strong commercial performance and effective service delivery. However, total expenditure reached £8,618,264, resulting in a net deficit of £149,498.

Applemore Leisure Health and Leisure emerged as a standout performer, delivering a surplus of £145,312, indicative of robust operational management and high levels of community engagement.

Ringwood Leisure Centre also achieved a positive financial outcome, with a modest surplus of £6,556.

In contrast, Lymington, New Milton, and Totton experienced financial shortfalls, with deficits of £147,072, £97,218, and £58,998 respectively, attributable to a combination of operational pressures and fluctuating participation levels.

In summary, since the inception of the New Forest Partnership contract in 2021, the financial trajectory has demonstrated a marked and commendable progress in significantly reducing the deficit. The partnership has transitioned from its foundational phase into a period of sustained financial maturity and operational stability.

A well-structured and forward-looking commercial strategy has been central to the contract's success. The partnership has consistently aligned its service offerings with community demand, while leveraging data-driven insights to optimise pricing, programming, and resource allocation. This has resulted in revenue generation that not only meets but often exceeds bid expectations.

Targeted capital investments totalling £242,400 in year 4 (4,105,422 to date)—such as facility refurbishments, equipment upgrades, and energy efficiency projects—have enhanced the quality of service delivery while simultaneously improving cost-effectiveness. These investments have been carefully prioritised to maximise return and community impact, contributing to both financial and social value.

Operational expenditure has been tightly managed through rigorous financial oversight, procurement discipline, and continuous performance monitoring. This has enabled the partnership to absorb inflationary pressures and unexpected costs while maintaining service standards and contractual obligations.

The financial performance of the contract reflects a well-executed balance between growth, sustainability, and fiscal responsibility. The

partnership's ability to adapt, invest wisely, and manage costs effectively has positioned it as a resilient and high-performing model within the leisure sector.

## **2025/26 Key Objectives**

13. Looking ahead, the partnership has established a clear set of strategic goals designed to drive growth, enhance service quality, and support environmental sustainability:

- Performance and Growth Targets:
- Achieve a 5% increase in overall participation.
- Reduce energy consumption by 3% (measured in kWh).
- Reach a Group Fitness membership target of 8,700.
- Expand the Learn to Swim programme to 5,250+ members, representing a 5% increase.
- Community and Partnership Development:
- Collaborate with the Council's Active Lifestyles referral programme.
- Increase Healthy Communities funding by 6%.
- Grow outreach programmes by 8%, extending the reach of health and wellbeing services.
- Strategic Projects and Leadership:
- Advance planning for the Major Decarbonisation Project, in partnership with external consultants.
- Strengthen leadership capacity through the appointment of a new Area Manager and General Manager, ensuring continuity and driving operational excellence.

## **Corporate plan priorities**

14. The Council's Corporate Plan Priorities includes empowering our residents to live healthy, connected and fulfilling lives. Having a successful leisure partner supports the council to achieve this.

## **Options appraisal**

15. No options appraisals are required.

## **Consultation undertaken**

16. As part of the partnership, there is regular and ongoing dialogue and collaboration between both parties. All matters contained within this report and the appendix have been developed as part of this partnership approach. Freedom Leisure additionally seeks feedback from members and the public via Customer Forums, NPS surveys and ongoing collection of online and on-site feedback.

## **Financial and resource implications**

17. There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report.

## **Legal implications**

18. There are no direct legal implications as a result of this report.

## **Risk assessment**

19. A risk assessment is not required.

## **Environmental / Climate and nature implications**

20. New Forest Partnership joint environmental efforts led to overall decrease in carbon emissions and utilities consumption, suggesting the impact of energy-saving measures such as enhanced team environmental training, efficient monitoring of building management systems and plant management, implementation of environmental interventions such as solar panels and shower restrictors. We continue to undertake further measures through Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme to decarbonise Applemore Health and Leisure centre through 2025-28.

## **Equalities implications**

21. Social Housing Regulation Act (2023) Progress Report Number 4 (Neighbourhood and Community Standard)

## **Crime and disorder implications**

22. There are no direct crime and disorder implications as a result of this report.

## **Data protection / Information governance / ICT implications**

23. There are no direct data protection, information governance or ICT implications as a result of this report.

**Appendices:** None

## **Background Papers:**

Key Performance Indicators for New Forest Partnership