

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
THURSDAY 23RD JANUARY 2014

LEISURE CONTRACT REVIEW

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF LEISURE AND TOURISM

(Contact: Diana Shelton, Tel: (01993) 861551)

(This report is for information.)

1. PURPOSE

To update on progress against recommendations agreed by the Committee in January 2013 relating to the leisure management contract.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee notes progress to date.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. As Members will know, the Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to review the operation of the leisure management contract in 2012-2013.
- 3.2. A Review Group of four members was established and Councillors Beaney, Cooper, Mrs Crossland and Kelland were appointed to serve on the group. The relevant Cabinet member was also invited to attend meetings.
- 3.3. The Review Group held four meetings and received input from officers, representatives of the contractors and members also undertook site visits to familiarise themselves with the facilities.
- 3.4. The current contract has been in place since November 2006 and is for a 10 year period. As Members will be aware the contractor was originally Wycombe Leisure Ltd, who subsequently changed their name to Nexus Community. In January 2011, they became a division of one of the country's largest leisure trusts, Greenwich Leisure Ltd (GLL).
- 3.5. The contract covers the leisure centres at Carterton, Chipping Norton, Eynsham and Witney together with the outdoor swimming pool at Woodstock. GLL also manage playing fields and artificial turf pitches in Carterton and Witney.
- 3.6. The Review Group agreed that the scope of the review would cover:
 - performance to date against the outcomes set out in the management contract
 - financial performance against projections set out in the management contract
 - implications of the merger with GLL
 - possible opportunities for investment as part of a contract extension with GLL.

- 3.7. Based on meetings and visits, the review group identified the following in line with the agreed scope of the review:

Performance to date against the outcomes set out in the management contract.

- The outcomes set out in the contract focus on increasing participation within the facilities and providing a high quality experience for users.
- The review found that the number of users of the facilities had increased in line with targets set by the Council on an annual basis, and there were now over one million visits to the facilities by a cross-section of the West Oxfordshire community each year.
- On the whole, the quality of service has been high. However, there have been incidents where the standards of cleanliness dropped.

There has also been feedback from users of the fitness suites that levels of staffing have decreased.

Financial performance against projections set out in the management contract

- Financial performance has been close to that set out in the contract even though the economic situation nationally has deteriorated since the contract was established, including an increase in the costs of utilities.
- The review group considered the marketing of activities at the facilities. Although it is accepted that the quality of materials is good, it is felt that communication with the local community could be improved.

Implications of the merger with GLL

- It was agreed that the merger of Nexus with GLL had been well handled and enabled the Council to work with a larger company that had wide ranging experience of facility management across the South East.
- The merger had enabled investment by GLL in West Oxfordshire facilities including recent investments in the Windrush, Chipping Norton and Carterton leisure centres.
- The merger had also brought improved marketing materials through the introduction of the 'Better' brand.
- The merger had also brought funding in the form of grant aid for talented athletes with the potential to compete at a high level through the GLL Foundation, which makes an annual contribution to our own West Oxfordshire Achievement Awards Scheme.

Possible opportunities for investment as part of a contract extension with GLL

- GLL have expressed an interest in a contract extension in return for capital investment in West Oxfordshire Facilities.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. In light of the scope and findings of the review, the following recommendations were agreed in January 2013:

- A thorough review of presentation and cleanliness is undertaken by GLL and an action plan for improving and maintaining standards in these areas is agreed at the West Oxfordshire Advisory Board (WOAB) and implemented by GLL.
- A quarterly marketing plan is put forward by GLL at WOAB setting out the marketing and communication issues ahead and how they will be engaging with local groups and organisations using a range of media to raise the profile of the facilities in the local community.
- Staffing levels in the Fitness Suites are monitored to make sure that sufficient staff cover is provided to ensure an appropriate standard of customer care is maintained.
- Possibilities for a contract extension are further investigated and any options put forward to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and then Cabinet in the near future.
- Operational issues identified as part of the review are considered by GLL and actions implemented where possible to address them:
 - greater flexibility in the swimming pool programme in Carterton
 - wider variety of children's holiday provision, particularly outside of Witney
 - improvements to the appearance of all the facilities.
- A report is brought to this Committee in 12 months time setting out the improvements that have been made in line with the recommendations set out above.

5. PROGRESS TO DATE

5.1. **A thorough review of presentation and cleanliness** was carried out early in 2013 and the action plan was devised and delivered. Standards have improved significantly in 2013, and this has been agreed at WOAB. This can also be evidenced in a programme of audits carried out throughout 2013.

5.2. **A quarterly marketing plan** is put forward by GLL at each WOAB meeting and also at the Inclusion Group meetings held quarterly. In 2013 GLL teamed up with "Pick West Oxfordshire" (a local brochure) to run quarterly campaigns. There has also been an improvement in the number of press releases and adverts in the local papers particularly in the Witney Gazette and the Oxford mail. In 2014 GLL will be launching a new leisure guide brochure with an initial 10,000 copies being printed. This guide will heavily focus on pool programmes and junior activities.

5.3. **Staffing levels in the Fitness Suites have improved** and GLL continue to make sure that sufficient staff cover is provided to ensure an appropriate standard of customer care is maintained. The commitment is still in place to have a qualified fitness instructor on duty at all times. In the early part of the year there were some recruitment barriers, which GLL have overcome by introducing a new and more competitive pay structure, as well as the introduction of recruitment events at the centres. There are currently two vacancies in West Oxfordshire, one at Carterton and one Chipping Norton.

- 5.4. **The possibility for a contract extension** was investigated, but legal advice is that this would put the Council at risk of a successful legal challenge.
- 5.5. **Operational issues identified as part of the review** were considered by GLL and the following actions were implemented to address them:

There have been reviews of the centres' pool programmes throughout the year and although there have not been radical changes due to existing bookings and lessons, changes have been made to replace unused or low-use sessions with those with wider appeal. This approach will continue on an on-going basis.

Throughout 2013 a number of holiday activities sessions were trialled at Bartholomew Sports Centre and Chipping Norton Leisure Centre, but low usage has continued. In response to this, GLL are running an organised play-scheme at the Windrush Leisure Centre and drop in sessions at the other centre to grow demand over time. Carterton Leisure Centre has also worked well with the RUSH group in Carterton to offer a more extensive and joined up programme across the summer holidays of 2013. This was very successful and this partnership work will continue.

All centres have had presentation refreshes in 2013 that have significantly improved their appearance. There is also an on-going redecoration plan in place, with specific attention to Carterton and Chipping Norton changing areas.

- 5.6 Further improvements to operations were implemented in 2013 including:

'Course – Pro' a new innovative swimming lesson tracking system that allows teachers to update instantly on a child's progress in a lesson has been introduced. It gives parents access to a home portal where they can see the progress of their child. The portal also allows parents to move their children to and from lessons based upon their ability.

Fast track kiosks have been introduced at the Windrush Leisure Centre, allowing card-holders to by-pass reception. The Windrush is the busiest centre and has had issues with customers queuing at reception. After three months of installation the results are positive, with over 3000 customer entries being processed by the kiosks so far, relieving the pressure on reception. This figure is likely to increase as awareness continues to grow.

GLL have recently installed new phone management systems at all centres allowing customers to by-pass reception and get through the relevant extension or department they wish, again relieving pressure on reception.

6. ALTERNATIVES/OPTIONS

This report is for information.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

No financial implications arising directly from this report.

8. RISKS

None.

9. REASONS

To encourage tourism, leisure and cultural opportunities for all and promote healthy living and be recognised as a leading council that provides efficient, value for money services.

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Background Papers:

None