

## Annual Presentation by Freedom Leisure

Tuesday 3 October 2023 at 13:00

### Guildford Spectrum

#### Present;

From GBC:

Kelvin Mills (KM)

Charlotte Brindley (CB)

Cllr Catherine Houston (CH)

Cllr Jason Fenwick (JF)

Cllr Howard Smith (HS)

Cllr Joanne Shaw (JS)

Cllr Stephen Hives (SH)

From Freedom Leisure;

Ivan Horsfall Turner (IHT)

Emma Beavis (EB)

Brian Lamplough (BL)

Matt Wickham (MW)

Ivan Horsfall-Turner (IHT)

Ref:	ITEM	Action
<b>1.0</b>	<b>Apologies for absence &amp; introductions</b>	
1.1	Apologies were received from Cllr Vanessa King and Ian Doyle.	-
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Annual Presentation by Brian Lamplough</b>	
2.1	<p>The presentation by BL provides an overview of the performance of the leisure facilities (Spectrum, Lido and Ash Manor Sports Centre) during the period of 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.</p> <p>BL began by summarising the contract, which commenced in November 2011. Freedom Leisure (FL) operate the facilities on behalf of Greenwich Leisure Ltd. (GLL). This 10-year contract has been extended twice, and expires in October 2025.</p> <p>BL then outlined GBC's strategic priorities.</p> <p>BL provided an overview of FL's portfolio, whereby FL currently operate 110 leisure centres across England and Wales. BL outlined FL's ethos and commented that he was excited to share details of the investment made by FL (a not-for-profit leisure trust) over the last year and the planned investment going forward.</p>	-
2.2	<p>Finances</p> <p>BL provided an overview of the financial performance for the year (2022/23).</p> <p>Income at Spectrum and Ash Manor Sports Centre exceeded expenditure in the year. The overall position, after the deduction of the management fee and repayments, was a net surplus of £51,952.00.</p> <p>It was clarified that the 'repayments' element of the management fee and repayments line, related to projects such as the lido slides which were initially funded by the Council, and is being paid back by Freedom Leisure over an agreed term (circa. £50k).</p> <p>It was confirmed that the Council pay for the utilities for the leisure facilities, and Freedom Leisure are re-charged according to the</p>	-

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	<p>fixed rates set out in the contract. This is captured under the expenditure line.</p> <p>BL confirmed that Spectrum performed very well this year and saw strong attendances. BL believes this to be partly due to people opting for 'staycations' and day trips following uncertainty around travel and holidays post the pandemic.</p>	
2.3	<p>Capital investment.</p> <p>BL was pleased to report that just over £1.08m was invested into the leisure facilities, £900k of which was invested at Spectrum. This included a replacement electric ice zamboni, significant refurbishment of the gym and installation of an outdoor fitness area (powerhouse). The Spectrum pools also received significant investment (£90k) during the period, with works to the leisure pool features, wet pour and new starting blocks and a new pool timing system for galas. BL confirmed that FL have seen a return to the investment made into the gym through membership growth and retention. BL confirmed that FL have around 2700 members currently. The investment in this area, which included a complete re-configuration, new equipment and re-decoration, ensured the provision suited the changes in demand and current exercise needs and habits which have changed following the pandemic, whilst also ensuring the gym was more accessible. Other investment at Spectrum included marketing and re-branding, ice pit replacement works and catering equipment.</p> <p>BL confirmed that the investment at the Lido included significant re-decoration works and refurbishment to the gym changing areas. Various maintenance works also took place to the flume tower, fire alarm, paddling pools and pool plant.</p> <p>The investment at Ash was made across all facilities; the gym, all weather pitch and redecoration works.</p>	-
2.4	<p>Attendances - aquatics</p> <p>BL then provided an overview of the aquatics' attendances. The leisure pool continues to see significant attendances, with over 340,000 attending during the period. Toddler splash and family bubble swims also proved to remain popular, with visitor numbers up on previous years.</p> <p>Spectrum's Learn to Swim (LTS) programme, which saw remarkable growth following the pandemic (from 2,300 to 3,000) has been built upon further, with 3104 now on the scheme in 2022/23. The meeting discussed the backlog of pupils and therefore the pent-up demand during the pandemic. BL explained that the LTS programme is one of, if not the largest swim schools in England which is 3 times the national average. BL explained that FL is working on retaining the swim school numbers as the pools are at capacity and therefore the programme cannot be grown further. EB provided information on how the swimming lessons are organised and pools are divided. EB confirmed that FL employ around 65 swim teachers.</p>	-

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	<p>1:1 swimming lessons have also continued to be a success, with over 6700 attendances during the period.</p> <p>Lane swimming is also very popular, with over 325k lane swim visits at Spectrum and Lido.</p> <p>EB was asked how many schools use the facilities for their lessons. EB confirmed around 15 schools attend Monday to Friday for lessons, however FL is aware of the challenges surrounding transport costs for schools.</p> <p>The Lido saw 125,647 visits during the period for public swimming. BL explained that attendance is very much dictated by the weather and how that falls around peak times.</p> <p>BL explained that with this success comes its challenges. When the Spectrum was built, its success was not envisaged and the facilities, the changing provision in particular, are under constant strain as they are undersized. The cleaning of these areas is very difficult at peak/ busy times due to the volume of customers coming through (up to 2500 a day for the leisure pool). Whilst arrangements are put in place to try to maintain cleanliness standards, sometimes it's not always possible to clean between customers and so customers are often faced with facilities which have not been left clean or in an acceptable state e.g. dirty nappies on the floor etc. This understandably generates complaints and is an area of common complaint. BL explained that FL have planned to renew the changing area in November/ December of this year, which will see new flooring throughout, and refurbishment of the toilet and shower areas, however cleaning during peak times will remain a challenge. The opportunity is also being taken to improve some of the features within the leisure pool and undertake works to the wet pour.</p>	
2.5	<p>Attendances continued - programming</p> <p>BL/EB explained how the booking system enables FL to track all visits across the facility.</p> <p>Visits to the ice (363,781), bowl (253,794), group exercise (61,447) and the gym (173,057) were all up on last year. The ice lesson provision at Spectrum also continues to be a success and remains in high demand, with 37,573 attending group ice lessons last year. BL confirmed that the ice lesson provision is also at capacity (same as the learn to swim programme).</p> <p>BL explained the reasoning behind the number of penguins hired in the period (2,457) being almost treble on last year was due to the</p>	-

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	investment into skating aids and therefore more were available for customers to hire.	
2.6	<p>BL summarised the catering arrangements at Spectrum, whereby the majority of the outlets are operated by Freedom Leisure, with the exception of Burrito Loco. The café is a 'proud to serve' which enables FL to sell costa coffee products whilst also not restricting FL from serving other products which suit customer demand and the nature of the venue. FL also have various satellite stations across the building so that they can provide catering for various events, ice hockey games and so on.</p> <p>A question was asked around the party provision at the Spectrum and the catering arrangements for these. EB explained that up to 25 parties are delivered each Saturday and Sunday. These vary from climbing parties (rock box), to swimming, ice skating, bowling, soft play and trampolining. Customers are able to choose specific party food which can be organised as part of the party booking.</p>	-
2.7	<p>The next slide presented a snap-shot of leisure pool users for August 2022 in terms of where customers were visiting from. The map demonstrates the wide draw of Spectrum, with users coming from all over the UK. The Spectrum is considered a destination venue and a tourist attraction, unlike other smaller leisure facilities. The meeting discussed the catchment of the ice rink, particularly as there are very few ice rinks in the UK. BL confirmed that he could prepare a map to show where ice customers travel from.</p> <p>Various comments were made over the bus service and park and ride provision which SCC have paused which means it does not currently operate at the Spectrum. This means that currently the Spectrum is difficult to access via public transport. KM explained that SCC have been looking at the usage/ demand, and whilst Artington and Merrow were performing well and Onslow has recently opened, the P&amp;R for Spectrum is not currently deemed viable by SCC. KM understands that Surrey are looking closely at this due to the subsidy costs associated with the park and ride provision.</p> <p>A comment was made about the opportunities to improve the cycle routes to and from the Spectrum and across the borough, as well as looking at transport as a whole and the potential economic impact Spectrum has on the borough which may be improved upon further if access to and from the town and around the borough is improved.</p>	<p><b>BL</b></p> <p><b>KM</b></p>
2.8	BL then went on to summarise the customer feedback received during the period, of which there were 518 complaints, 60 comments/ suggestions and 151 compliments. This accounts for 0.004 of the total visits (1,629,951). BL confirmed that the feedback is shared with GBC each month as part of the monitoring reporting documentation. KM explained that it is best for any enquiries or complaints relating to the operation to be directed to Freedom Leisure in the first instance so that FL can respond accordingly and	-

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	<p>GBC will also pick this up too if/ as necessary and will be aware of it as part of the monitoring paperwork.</p> <p>The feedback does vary, however common areas of complaint related to the cleanliness of the pool changing areas as discussed earlier. This is particularly common during extremely busy periods e.g. Easter holidays, October half term.</p> <p>CB confirmed that another trend of complaints related to customers' perception that the pools felt crowded at times. This feedback was predominantly received following a period where pools were operating at reduced capacity as a result of the covid-restrictions and so when these restrictions were eased and capacities returned to normal, customers found it difficult to adapt to increased numbers.</p> <p>Other areas of complaint related to the booking process and booking system. Many of these issues and challenges have now been resolved following the recent upgrade of FL's booking system.</p> <p>EB explained that the data can be looked at closely to delve into areas of complaint. EB provided an example of if customer complaints are received over cold pool water temperatures, FL can look at the time and date of the customers visit and then look at historical pool temperature data to see if there were any issues at that time.</p> <p>KM explained that the spa area in the gym (sauna, steam and jacuzzi) was being looked at in terms of its running costs (utilities) and carbon impact, particularly given the low usage of this area. This area is currently closed because repair works are required which may not be progressed should the decision be to permanently close this facility (following analysis of the cost and usage). EB commented that whilst some complaints have been received over the closure, one comment related to customers no longer having access to a cold shower after a sauna (NB the saunas are located outside of the spa area, in the changing rooms). FL are currently looking to resolve this by ensuring at least one cold shower in each changing area.</p> <p>BL then summarised the compliments received. The gym refurbishment received a great level of positive feedback. The meeting discussed the level of competition in the area and BL was pleased to report that Spectrum has managed to retain those members who moved across from the Sports Direct gym following its sudden closure. BL added that despite the new gym now opening, members have decided to stay at the Spectrum and BL believes the gym refurbishment played an integral part in that and member retention and growth overall.</p> <p>Compliments are varied but general trends of compliments were how well staff deal with first aids, particularly in the ice. BL added that often compliments are received over the swim lesson provision, with particular emphasis to certain swim teachers who continue to be valued by customers.</p>	
2.9	BL then summarised the accident statistics for the period.	-

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	<p>There were 946 accidents during 2022/23, which accounts for 0.04% of attendees. BL provided detail over the incident at Ash Manor Sports Centre which required reporting to the HSE under RIDDOR regulations.</p> <p>The top 5 'hotspots' for accidents were shown, with the ice rink seeing the highest number of accidents as you would expect, with 510 in the year.</p> <p>Of the 946 accidents, 34% were able to return to their activity.</p>	
2.10	<p>BL then provided an overview of some of the key roles and staffing at the facilities. FL also continue to be supported by the apprenticeship scheme that is in place with Lifetime Training. FL also link in with a number of schools in the local area, such as George Abbott School and offer NPLQ courses to those pupils. BL was asked whether there were any specific challenges relating to recruitment in certain areas. Lifeguarding is a challenge during certain times of the year, particularly during term time and exam periods because staff are not able or willing to work at this time. There has also been a nationwide shortage of swim teachers, partly because many swim teachers found other jobs and careers during the pandemic when they were unable to work. This has been a particular challenge for the leisure industry as a whole.</p>	-
2.11	<p>Marketing</p> <p>BL outlined the importance of using a variety of marketing tools to target a wide audience. Facebook and Instagram continues to reach a number of people and FL have recently started using TikTok. BL showed an example of one TikTok video showing how the Zamboni resurfaces the ice. This was viewed by 1.6m people and 'liked' by nearly 190,000.</p> <p>The FL mobile booking app has recently been launched and currently has 2264 users. EB explained that this is predominantly used by members who would use the facilities regularly and are able to book group exercise through the application.</p>	-
2.12	<p>BL provided an overview to one of Spectrum's largest events, the pantomime on ice. This is performed by pupils across the ice coaching programme. Cinderella on Ice was extremely popular and very well received with over 10,400 tickets sold (97.8% capacity). BL explained that each year the mayor is invited and the mayor's charity. FL also work with local schools and care groups and arrange for them to attend at more appropriate and suitable times, such as the Friday matinee performance. BL is pleased that FL is able to make this accessible to everyone, and commented that the average ticket price of £13.88 makes it very affordable and exceptional value for money, particularly given the high standard of the event. BL is excited to see how successful this year's pantomime on ice (Alice in Wonderland) will be.</p>	-
2.13	<p>BL concluded the meeting by showing examples of some of the improvements that have been made to improve the visual aspect of the facilities, which has made it more vibrant, clean and welcoming. FL is looking to re-brand and enhance more areas in the coming months, focusing on the ice boxes and new Zamboni.</p> <p>BL then summarised the upcoming investment planned for the facilities for 2023/24, some of which are already complete, such as the boiler replacement (£250k), lido café fit out (£40k) and online</p>	-

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	<p>booking system (£78k). EB explained that Spectrum was one of the first leisure centres to have an online booking system and that the pandemic forced other leisure centres to offer this service too as pre-booking became a requirement. Freedom have had to keep up with the times and this new booking system provides customers with an easier, more seamless booking experience.</p> <p>Upcoming investments which are already underway, include the installation of a new sound and disco lighting system in the ice (£83k) and upgrade of the facility's intruder alarm (£67k). The Lido will also be receiving significant investment (£350k) to investigate and resolve the leaks and to complete the works required to the pool tank. FL will also be undertaking wet pour repair works to the paddling pool and looking to refresh the disused paddling pool.</p> <p>Other investments planned for 2023/24 are the refurbishment of the level 3 toilets, leisure pool changing room refurbishment and works to the wet pour and water features (as mentioned earlier). The pinsetters (to lanes 1-16) will also be replaced next year (£360k) and the opportunity will be taken to refresh this area at the same time.</p> <p>KM clarified that GBC is generally responsible for the structural elements e.g. main structure, roof, glazing etc. and FL is responsible for everything else e.g. plant, equipment etc.</p>	
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Questions</b>	
3.1	<p>BL welcomed any further questions.</p> <p>BL was asked about the clock in the leisure pool area. EB confirmed that FL is currently looking at replacing this.</p> <p>EB added that FL is also looking at installing a lighting system which links to the tannoy system which is used to call out the leisure bands. This will provide a visual aid to the existing voice system which is used to indicate which colour band session is over.</p>	<b>EB</b>
3.2	<p>KM thanked everyone for attending and hoped Cllrs felt briefed in advance of the upcoming Overview and Scrutiny meeting in January. KM confirmed that Cllr Houston and he will likely provide an introduction and overview, and discussion can then follow.</p> <p>KM referred to recent discussions that have taken place with Guildford City Football Club (GCFC), in relation to the pitch maintenance arrangements. KM explained the complications surrounding this dual use facility and the conflicting sports (athletics and football) and the inability to provide security of tenure with only a couple of years remaining in the contract. KM is due to look at Merrist wood as a possible alternate site for the football club, however outlined the challenges surrounding funding and the infrastructure that is required by the league.</p> <p>KM added that GBC will soon be looking at the procurement of the leisure facilities as the contract approaches expiry in October 2025.</p>	-
3.3	<p>There were no further comments or questions and the meeting closed.</p>	-