



Council name	<b>COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL</b>
Name and date of Committee	<b>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 30 JANUARY 2024</b>
Subject	<b>REVIEW OF LEISURE AND CULTURAL SERVICES PROVISION</b>
Wards affected	All
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Summary/Purpose	<p>This report considers the Council's role in contributing to healthy communities through its leisure and cultural services.</p> <p>It provides updates on the delivery of the Active Cotswold leisure strategy, mobilisation of the new leisure and cultural contracts, and the Council's work with other health and wellbeing partners.</p> <p>The recently adopted playing pitch strategy is referenced and future plans and initiatives are described.</p>
Annexes	Annex A: Summary of Strategic Outcomes Planning Model - Active Cotswold Leisure Strategy Annex B: Active Cotswold Programme Organisation Annex C: Active Cotswold Key Achievements - Jan 2024
Recommendation(s)	That the Committee resolves to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Consider and note the report's content;</li><li>2. Make recommendations to the Cabinet that could further improve the district's leisure and cultural services offer.</li></ol>



Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Deliver the highest standard of service</li><li>● Support health and wellbeing</li><li>● Respond to the climate crisis</li></ul>
Key Decision	No
Exempt	No
Consultees/ Consultation	<p>The Active Cotswold Leisure Strategy was informed by and developed after extensive consultation with key stakeholders such as Active Gloucestershire, Gloucestershire County Council, Gloucestershire Police and Crime Commissioner, Bromford Housing, Cotswold National Landscape and the then Clinical Commissioning Group.</p> <p>In addition, an online community survey elicited 1,066 responses from our residents and virtual focus groups were held with Tetbury residents, Fairford residents, young people, older people and families.</p> <p>The Leisure and Culture Management Contract award report went to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet and Council and was supported by a cross party Leisure and Cultural Provision Working Group during its development.</p>



## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The key role district councils have to play in driving better health outcomes as part of a wider system with other health partners is described, along with the purpose and approach of the Council's community wellbeing team, with a particular focus on asset based community development. Alongside other council services, it is noted that targeted leisure and cultural services are likely to have the most significant impact on community health and wellbeing. The report goes on to consider how the Council is delivering and enabling such targeted services, starting with its adopted leisure and wellbeing strategy - the Active Cotswold Programme.
- 1.2 The Active Cotswold Programme was informed by and developed after extensive consultation with key stakeholders, a residents survey and virtual focus groups, which included young people, older people and families. Sport England's Strategic Outcomes Planning Model was used to produce the strategy and three key themes were identified - Healthier District, Connected Community and Active Environment. The intended outcomes for each of these themes, along with the planned approaches to achieve them, are summarised in Annex A. Part of this report considers progress to date and the key achievements for each theme (Annex C).
- 1.3 At the same time as the strategy was adopted in March 2021, Cabinet granted authority to undertake a leisure management options appraisal to determine the most suitable delivery model, contract scope and contract terms for the Council's leisure and cultural facilities from August 2023. This options appraisal concluded the optimum management option for both the leisure and culture contracts was to appoint an external contractor to operate the services on behalf of the Council. A full and competitive procurement process led to both the leisure and cultural management contracts being awarded to Freedom Leisure, which commenced on 1st August 2023 for a contract term of 10 years with the option to extend for up to 5 years. The contract mobilisation period is considered in this report, along with the learning from transitioning from one provider to another, how the programme attracts and utilises external investment and partnerships and the next steps to consolidate the Council's leisure offer and customer experience.
- 1.4 This report also outlines how the council works in partnership with health partners to build relationships, trust and to support a whole systems approach and how the Active Cotswold programme benefits from funding that the council has secured from health partners to lead on the prevention agenda locally.
- 1.5 The report finishes by outlining proposals for an enhanced contract monitoring capability and considers the next steps to further improve the district's leisure and cultural provision, with a particular focus on a new cultural strategy and a joint community outreach programme to complement the leisure facilities offer.

## 2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In March 2021, the Council's Strategic Outcomes Planning Model (SOPM) - Active Cotswold Leisure Strategy was adopted and authority granted to undertake a leisure and culture management options appraisal, to determine the most suitable delivery model, contract scope



and contract terms for the Council's leisure and culture facilities - [Cabinet report from meeting of Cabinet held on Monday, 1 March 2021](#)

- 2.2 The SOPM identified three key themes - Healthier District, Connected Community and Active Environment - which were established through the review of local and national strategies, and extensive community consultation with stakeholders and residents. Each theme area has a linked action plan which is sectioned into service and facility interventions. See Annex A for a summary of the SOPM.
- 2.3 As mentioned above, authority was also given to undertake a leisure and culture management options appraisal. To support this process a cross party Leisure and Cultural Provision Working Group was established. The purpose of the working group was to help determine the best delivery model for the provision of sustainable leisure and cultural activities, provided in Council owned and operated facilities. The working group was involved in identifying the key drivers for the new contracts via a paired comparison exercise and also supported the review of the options appraisal findings and potential bidders soft market testing.
- 2.4 The appraisal concluded that the optimum management option for both the leisure and culture contracts was to appoint an external contractor to operate the services on behalf of the Council.
- 2.5 In May 2022, the Cabinet granted authority for officers to commence procurement exercises for the appointment of a Leisure Management Contractor, and a Cultural Services Management Contractor for the operation of the Council's leisure and cultural facilities - [Cabinet Report from meeting of Cabinet held on Monday, 9 May 2022](#).
- 2.6 As part of the procurement exercise, a commitment was given to provide the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with key updates on the procurement process and timeline, which happened at key milestones throughout the process.
- 2.7 The procurements followed a competitive procedure with negotiation process, which commenced in September 2022, with the publication of the notice within the Official Journal of European Union (OJEU) and utilised the standard Sport England Leisure Operating Contract and guidance.
- 2.8 In March 2023, Council agreed to award both the Leisure and Cultural Management Contracts to Freedom Leisure, which commenced on 1st August 2023 for a contract term of 10 years with the option to extend for up to 5 years - [Minutes of a meeting of Council held on Monday, 15 March 2023](#).

### **3. THE IMPACT OF DISTRICT COUNCILS ON COMMUNITY HEALTH & WELLBEING**



3.1 The latest Kings Fund report, [Driving better health outcomes through integrated care systems - The role of district councils](#), clearly sets out that “District council services – across housing, planning, economic development, welfare, leisure and environmental health – influence some of the most significant determinants of health. Around 80 per cent of the variation observed in population health outcomes is attributable to wider factors such as these, rather than to the quality of health care services. This makes district councils indispensable strategic partners in integrated care systems (ICSs), whose involvement is essential if systems are to deliver population health improvements.” Figure 1 on the next page illustrates how district council services can support the health and care system.



Figure 1: How District Council services can support the health and care system (Source: The Kings Fund 2023 - “Driving better health outcomes through integrated care systems - The role of district councils”)



- 3.2 Acknowledging the other services that bring about improved health, it is targeted leisure and cultural services that are likely to have the most significant impact on community health and wellbeing (alongside other wellbeing specific initiatives the council's communities services area is delivering) and this report is confined to leisure and cultural services.
- 3.3 In order to develop more focus for these targeted leisure and cultural services, and to foster inspiration and creative leadership, the communities team has developed a shared purpose.
- 3.4 It was important to identify WHY we are doing what we are doing, apart from earning money. Equally important is to know HOW we aim to achieve the WHY, and WHAT the relevant actions and interventions are:

***Why are we here?*** We want to help improve people's quality of life.

***How do we do that?*** We empower communities, increase community resilience and improve health and wellbeing.

***What are we doing to achieve that?*** We engage, listen and build community capacity. We proactively bring ideas, people, organisations and resources together to enable a rich diversity of sustainable projects, innovative responses to local social challenges and new life-enhancing opportunities for the benefit of everyone.

It is worthy of note that Freedom Leisure's purpose is 'Improving lives through leisure' (and culture) and therefore closely aligned.

- 3.5 The HOW and WHAT are underpinned by specific principles of working. In particular since the COVID19 pandemic, the Council increasingly applies a strength-based and place-based approach as well as increased facilitation of partnership work.
- 3.6 Asset-based community development (ABCD)<sup>1</sup> has been developing in Gloucestershire over the last 10 years, and is at the heart of our Communities directorate's ambitions. The Social Care Institute for Excellence describes the potential and benefits of ABCD as helping to:
- enhance health, wellbeing and resilience
  - reduce long-term pressures on higher-cost health, care and support services
  - enable people to participate in and benefit from community resources and activities.
  - reframe the narrative from needs to assets
  - build a dynamic picture of personal and community assets
  - to connect people to each other and to wider community assets
  - grow and mobilise community assets
  - monitor impact and learn from evidence

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<sup>1</sup> Asset Based Community Development builds on the assets that are found in the community and mobilises individuals, associations, and institutions to come together to realise and develop their strengths. This makes it different to a Deficit Based approach that focuses on identifying and servicing needs. From the start an Asset Based approach spends time identifying the assets of individuals, associations and institutions that form the community. The identified assets from an individual are matched with people or groups who have an interest in or need for those strengths. The key is beginning to use what is already in the community. Then to work together to build on the identified assets of all involved. (Source: [Nurture Development](#))



3.7 The Active Cotswold programme, which has emerged as a result of the SOPM, is applying the principles and approaches mentioned above and therefore aims to achieve outcomes by delivering services holistically and beyond the more traditional facility-based leisure offer.

#### 4. KEY ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE ACTIVE COTSWOLD PROGRAMME TO DATE

- 4.1 The Active Cotswold Programme was established in 2021 and is the Council's adopted leisure and wellbeing strategy, which is delivered as a long term programme (10 years). The programme's vision statement is "*to improve the health and lives of Cotswolds residents by connecting communities and fostering an active environment*".
- 4.2 As mentioned in 2.2 SOPM has identified the three core workstreams, objectives and approach that sport and physical activity can have a positive impact on. These are summarised in the tables on the next two pages.
- 4.3 Annex B shows how the programme is organised and delivered. The delivery of the programme is sponsored by the Assistant Director for Communities and overseen by a Programme Manager. Regular Board meetings, as well as workstream lead meetings, ensure the smooth delivery and progress of the programme. In addition, there are many interconnecting activities and projects that are carried out jointly and are contributing to this complex programme.
- 4.4 Currently, there is no identified workstream lead for the 'Active Environment' workstream following the leadership team's decision not to recruit to the vacant (non establishment) Sustainable Transport Officer post. This results in progress against most objectives for this workstream being on hold for the time being.

<b>Healthier District</b>
<b>Objectives</b>
I. Promote mental and physical health equally by increasing participation in sport and physical activity for all



2. Support the 'We can Move' campaign to get more people enjoying an active life
3. Aim to help 30,000 people become active across Gloucestershire
4. Promote healthy lifestyles and self-care across all ages
5. Reduce health inequalities

#### Approach

- Achieving permanent behaviour changes through increasing opportunities for residents to build physical activity into their everyday lives
- Facilitating the enhancement of referrals into physical activity and fitness based programmes
- Increasing emphasis and resources into targeted outreach services for those with long-term health conditions

### Connected Community

#### Objectives

1. Encourage well connected, resilient and active communities to help social isolation and prevent anti-social behaviour
2. Improved and equal access to quality services
3. Create more healthy, sustainable, mixed communities
4. Improve digital inclusion
5. Enable people to build and nurture strong social networks and vibrant communities
6. Ensure that physical activity has a place based approach and is right for each local community
7. Reduce the life expectancy discrepancy for the most deprived Cotswold wards

#### Approach

- Using an asset based community development approach to increase participation in physical activity
- Maximise opportunities with local groups, developing new local activity programmes encouraging people to adopt and maintain a healthy lifestyle, particularly in rural isolated communities
- Identify resources and support to develop local solutions, which address barriers to physical activity
- Work in partnership with the Council's leisure contractor to raise customer satisfaction, accessibility and a positive customer experience
- Utilise the power of physical activity to improve community cohesion and tackle local issues
- Use 'Crowdfund Cotswold' to leverage investment from residents and businesses to deliver sustainable local projects aiming to reduce inactivity

### Active Environment

#### Objectives

1. Enable residents to live healthy lives through active places and active travel
2. Encourage active travel through cycling and walking, to increase physical activity and reduce carbon footprints
3. Improve housing and the built environment to enable our residents to live healthy lives
4. Support health and wellbeing projects that are focused on outdoor activities and recreation



### Approach

- Work in partnership with local groups and stakeholders to provide, improve and promote sustainable transport options, including cycling and walking
- Facilitating partnership work to promote the benefits of active travel, encouraging people to engage in active travel - e.g. to leisure centres, to work and to town centres
- Protecting access to open spaces

#### 4.5 Key achievements to date against the three programme workstreams are set out in Annex C and include:

- Development and adoption of a district wide Playing Pitch Strategy and action plan - see section 8 for further details.
- Fitness equipment replacement and refurbishment at Cirencester and Bourton Leisure Centres.
- Capital programme of works to support the implementation of the new Leisure Management Contract, which include improvements to Cirencester and Bourton Leisure Centres.
- Leisure Contract Procurement completed - the new contract with Freedom Leisure commenced in August 2023 and the contract service specification aligns to the outcomes of Active Cotswold.
- Encouraging Active Travel in and around the Cotswold Water Park by producing a video showing a snapshot of what it is like to cycle one of the 6 circular cycle routes in the Water Park.
- Walking and cycling improvements have been made around Cotswold Water Park ensuring it is sustainable and more accessible for everyone. New cycle parking has been installed at 6 locations in the Water Park. There is also a new section of cycle path linking NCN45 (Railway Path) with Cerney Wick bridge to make cycling and walking more accessible. New wayfinding boards have also been installed in 5 of the key destinations to guide visitors to new and interesting places.
- Partnered with Cirencester College to run a Dementia Chair exercise class.
- Trained 8 Walk leaders from different organisations to lead Wellbeing Walks.
- Active Cotswold LIVE event reached over 100 people
- developed and distributed 'Fit Kits' enabling residents to start exercise where they live or as part of a group at no cost.
- Collaboration with Mr Motivator to promote his free Motivation Club amongst residents
- Crowdfund Cotswold supported 14 projects so far that are contributing to helping residents to become more active, with a collective value of £366,810, towards which the council contributed £81,554.



## 5. CONTRACT MOBILISATION & TRANSITION

### *Leisure Management Contract*

- 5.1 The transition from one leisure operator to another at the end of a contract term is a complex process, with a range of items and matters that need to be put into place. The overarching aim is to ensure that the customer experience remains seamless whilst 'behind the scenes' all of the staff transfer (under the TUPE regulations) and all systems, processes, data, information, and communication software and hardware etc. are migrated.
- 5.2 There have been some administrative and logistical issues that have occurred during this transition period. These included initial difficulties with the switching of the telephone and IT platforms from one operator to another, a mismatch between the outgoing contractor membership architecture and the new membership schemes, and the need for new equipment to be delivered to sites including a full catering package to be installed to allow the opening of the cafe at Cirencester Leisure Centre - a service enhancement. In future contracts, where possible, it would be worthwhile arranging for earlier transition meetings between operators, with the council acting in a mediation role, so that more information can be shared in advance of the actual handover.
- 5.3 At Cirencester and Bourton leisure centres there were also swimming pool plant equipment failures in the initial weeks of the contract mobilisation that led to unexpected pool closures. The condition of some of the pool plant equipment was found to be poor on handover, and these items tend to have a lead in time for repair and replacement. Cirencester pool also experienced a case where a member of staff inadvertently missed a final check after completing pool filter works which led to a large volume of swimming pool water being discharged.
- 5.4 Typically, with swimming pool issues these took a number of hours or days to resolve as the balancing and management of pool water takes time. Regrettably, these issues did directly affect the customers. To prevent recurrence of these matters Freedom Leisure is now actively looking at solutions for the affected plant items and will work with Council officers to make recommendations for replacements where possible. Regimes have also been changed to prevent accidental loss of pool water overnight by undertaking plant conditioning works in the mornings instead of the evenings.
- 5.5 Where customers have been affected by any issue Freedom Leisure has tried to make sure communication is clear and proactive to help to minimise disruption. The Council's communications team has supported such endeavours.
- 5.6 A few customer groups were identified who felt that the transition to Freedom Leisure was not delivered as they would have expected, as they would have liked more personalised or specific information about the contract change. In the majority of these cases the customers were promptly identified and have since been updated, and where possible, encouraged to continue with their visits. The use of all customer feedback channels has been important in this respect and the latest inclusion of regular 'Meet the Manager' sessions has proven popular and will continue.



- 5.7 Part of the challenge in transitioning between leisure contractors is that, whilst they have broadly similar ambitions, each organisation has their own nuances and styles. Therefore we have seen occasions where a change in culture has been necessary. Freedom Leisure has a more localised approach to the operation of Council facilities and empower local managers and staff to adapt the delivery structures to best fit their local requirements, whilst staying within the corporate protection of key matters such as health and Safety and operational best practice. Overall this leads to an element of responsibility being placed on the local teams to react to local issues, instead of a 'not company policy' approach which can lead to frustration for users. Freedom Leisure has ensured that their senior support team were closely on hand to help the transferred staff team through this change in delivery approach.
- 5.8 Some of the administrative, booking, and membership structures have also undergone changes which led to a need to update and advise customers with new information that had only recently been delivered to the staff teams. To aid this Freedom Leisure delivered comprehensive induction training to all staff and were also on hand to offer guidance for clubs, hirers, and regular users who may have felt this change more keenly.
- 5.9 The following is an example of the 'real time' processes being delivered during the mobilisation. Prior to the contract award it had been identified that the showers in the swimming pool changing room were reaching their end of life. As part of the tender process Contractors were asked to show improvements to this area as part of their proposal for the Capital fund which the Council had secured. The replacement of these showers would now, therefore, be included in the Capital works due to take place in April/May 2024. After the Contract award officers had also worked on putting together a bid for the Swimming Pool Support Fund (SPSF) and this bid included for an upgrade of the shower units to also make them more energy efficient and water saving. However, the condition of the showers has proven to be so unreliable that this item of work had to be brought forward - which led to the SPSF bid option being compromised as the works need completing before an award has been made. The Council will still engage Freedom Leisure to complete the works using the Capital fund, but the timeframe needed to be shorter to minimise complaints. Freedom Leisure and the Council were able to react dynamically to this challenge and have agreed that the works will take place in January 2024. It has also been agreed that the best option is still to install the energy saving showers due to their enhanced environmental benefits.

#### ***Culture Management Contract***

- 5.10 Overall there has been a seamless transition from the previous operator to the service now being delivered by Freedom Leisure.
- 5.11 The Museum team were recognised for the delivery of their learning programmes by being awarded the Sandford Award for Heritage Education.
- 5.12 The Museum team took custody of some key archeological finds (two Roman Swords found by detectorists) which will be returned to the Museum for display after they have been examined and surveyed by archeologists.



### *Summary*

- 5.13 Whilst the original intended mobilisation phase was to last 3 months (August – November 2023) this has taken slightly longer in being delivered. We are nearing the end of this mobilisation phase now with a target for full mobilisation by January 2024. Although mobilisation is not fully complete the final stages are largely back office requirements and reporting/planning pieces of work. Customer facing elements or ‘business as usual’ items are now all complete – with the exception of leisure facility upgrades, which will form part of the capital works programme currently on target to be delivered in 2024.
- 5.14 A demonstration of Freedom Leisure’s commitment to making improvements where possible in the facilities prior to the capital works can be seen as they have invested approximately £24,000 on building maintenance since 1st August 2023. An element of this was necessary to rectify legacy issues from prior to the start of the new contract.
- 5.15 Plans are now also in place to continue to monitor and review the services on an ongoing basis. Freedom Leisure has also introduced ‘Meet the Manager’ sessions for sites. Feedback from these sessions will be used to inform each Centres planning/improvement actions. The following measures will be implemented in 2024 to assist with this:
- Quest (a nationally recognised Quality Assurance Scheme for the Leisure sector) will be introduced in 2024. This will include ‘Mystery Visits’ and face to face interviews and site management reviews from industry qualified assessors
  - An Net Promoter Score survey (which measures leisure customer experience and loyalty) will be undertaken early in 2024 to ascertain the current performance and to form a benchmark through the rest of the contract
  - Freedom Leisure conducts internal audits from experts within their own estate to continually monitor service performance in fields such as Health & Safety, Technical Operations, Energy Management, etc.
- 5.16 Regular meetings are now being scheduled (Monthly, Quarterly, Annually) between the various stakeholder representatives and the Freedom Leisure teams at the Leisure Centres and the Museum to ensure continued dialogue and monitoring takes place for each of the service areas.
- 5.17 The following are a snapshot of some of the positive steps made since contract award:
- Leisure Management Contract
    - Learn to Swim programme has seen a net gain of 158 new attendees raising the maximum number on scheme to 1,897 children
    - Gym memberships have seen a net gain of 346 raising the current membership level to 3,436 members.
    - Cirencester cafe has re-opened and attained a 5 star hygiene rating



- Culture Management Contract
  - 17% Year on year increase in Museum footfall since August 2023.
  - 59% Year on year increase in school visits since September 2023.
  - Sandford Award for Excellence in Heritage Education attained.

5.18 In financial terms, the start of the mobilisation period has been slightly behind the target set in Freedom Leisure's bid. This has been influenced by a number of factors including:

- Starting numbers were lower than anticipated because of the exit approach from the previous contractor. There is always a risk when an incumbent contractor knows they will not be the future contract provider, that they reduce their proactive efforts to boost memberships and maintain or improve service levels.
- Memberships are close to expectations but there is a slightly lower yield, which causes a small shortfall in the income.

5.19 Freedom Leisure has subsequently reviewed the fees and charges, and membership architecture to bring them in line with the requirements and the restrictions in the contract. A suite of 'Core prices' are listed in the specification which the Council agree with Freedom Leisure, these are linked to the annual CPI change. The specification also contains a requirement for the provision of concessionary prices and benefits which accord with specific user groups. Other prices can be changed at the discretion of Freedom Leisure in the understanding that they will better know the affordability levels for activities, and that it will be in their best interest to keep all activities affordable. If a group of users are identified as being unable to afford the services there is also a step in procedure that the Council can take to negotiate a better outcome with the operator. As an example, countywide discussions are taking place to improve access to leisure by care leavers.

5.20 New pricing has been implemented from January 2024 and a new membership arrangement removed a previous 'privilege' hierarchy that was in place. The new scheme intends that all members will receive the same benefits without an option to pay an enhanced member privilege fee.

5.21 **Key learning points for the Council from the mobilisation phase are:**

- Allow access for the incoming contractor to survey sites as soon as possible after contract award
- Act in a mediation role between operators to ensure that information and technical detail is shared in a useful and constructive process
- Determine the preferred route for legal support and make appointments early in the process
- Set aside sufficient officer time from the associated disciplines within the council (Estates, Finance, Legal, etc.) to allow continued interaction and input during the pre-mobilisation, and mobilisation phases



5.22 **Key learning points for Freedom Leisure from the mobilisation phase are:**

- **Clear Communication Channels:** Ensure effective communication channels are established from the outset, fostering transparent and regular updates between all involved parties. This can help in addressing concerns promptly and avoiding misunderstandings.
- **Performance Metrics and Monitoring:** Define clear performance metrics and establish a robust monitoring system. This will enable both parties to track progress, identify any deviations from the agreed-upon standards, and take corrective actions as needed.
- **Risk management:** Develop a comprehensive risk management plan, anticipating potential challenges and outlining mitigation strategies. This proactive approach can help in minimising disruptions during the contract mobilisation process.
- **Stakeholder & customer engagement:** Engage relevant stakeholders early in the process to gather input and address concerns. This could involve not only internal departments but also community representatives or other external entities affected by the contract mobilisation.
- **Training and transition support:** Provide adequate training and transition support for staff affected by the contract mobilisation. This includes ensuring that employees are well-equipped to adapt to changes and new processes.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Foster a culture of continuous improvement by regularly reviewing and evaluating the contract mobilisation process. Encourage feedback from all parties involved to identify areas for enhancement and implement necessary adjustments.

5.23 The next stages of the contract development work are highlighted below and these are either currently in progress or will be scheduled over the coming months:

- **Service Delivery** - Officers will work with Freedom Leisure to ensure that all opportunities to maximise the delivery of the services are achieved, that new options are explored, and that the outcomes detailed within the contract are delivered.
- **Partnership forming** - Through the various meetings and group working arrangements being planned and delivered we will ensure that Freedom Leisure are well connected to all relevant stakeholder groups within the District (i.e. Portfolio Holder, Active Cotswold project group, Health & Well-being team, Properties/Estates team etc.)
- **Monitoring** - An initial component for monitoring progress and achievement will be the creation of the portfolio of data/reports/feedback/information that Freedom Leisure is required to provide under the contract. This information will be shared with relevant



departments in the Council and will allow them to track, monitor, challenge, and review the operators outcomes on an ongoing basis.

## 6. EXTERNAL INVESTMENT & PARTNERSHIP WORKING

- 6.1 The Communities Service area and Active Cotswold Programme Team apply a [Whole Systems Approach](#) and therefore recognises the value of partnership working with other statutory organisations, as well as the rich and valued local voluntary, community and social enterprises (VCSE) sector. This includes seeking opportunities to pool resources, in particular in times of significant financial pressures, as well as creating time and space to build and nurture strong relationships and infrastructure for partnerships.
- 6.2 It also recognises the importance of the various assets (physical, people and skills) the district has to offer, in particular our local communities and residents. We are therefore focussing on how we can co-produce services, enable, empower and support residents to help themselves. This has in particular been a focus since the COVID19 pandemic where our communities have shown how resilient they are and what they can achieve without any or limited public sector input.
- 6.3 To enable an improved strength-based way of working, the Community Wellbeing team has undergone a significant restructure in 2021 to create more capacity and capability for community based and asset based working, to support county-wide system priorities around prevention and community enablement. In addition to that, we have secured external funding, in particular through the Strengthening Local Communities programme to further enable us to co-produce, develop and deliver community-based interventions, focussing on wellbeing, equity and access to services.
- 6.4 In 2021/22, the Community Wellbeing Team secured £149,000 Strengthening Local Communities Funding from the then Clinical Commissioning Group. The funding, which aims to support asset-based community development and tackle health inequalities was ring-fenced to support the Active Cotswold Programme. How the funding has been utilised to date is set out in the above point 4.2.
- 6.5 The following years, 2022/23 and 2023/24 the team has secured a further £149,000 per year to support the council's work in achieving improved food equality across the district as well as supporting young people and tackling isolation & loneliness. The continued support from health partners is grounded in strong relations which we have built over recent years, trust and the assurance that the council is delivering on the priorities of the Gloucestershire health system and in particular on its role in prevention and community enablement. Further funding for 2024/25 has not yet been announced.
- 6.6 The council's partnership work within the health system also includes an influential role in the Cotswold [Integrated Locality Partnership](#), which is increasingly adopting a strength-based way of working by making use of what is already available and working well in the district, as well as much improved partnership working across the whole system to change local health care provision and preventative initiatives to the better now and in the longer term.



6.7 As set out above, the Community Wellbeing Team at CDC is playing a key role in facilitating partnership work and enabling communities to build capacity and increase resilience. To achieve that, we are working in partnership with a wide range of local and county-wide organisations. Reflecting on our work, it is fair to say that there is hardly anything that we do on our own.

Partners include:

- Town and Parish Councils
  - Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner (OPCC)
  - Police
  - Community Payback Team
  - Gloucestershire County Council - various different departments
  - Integrated Care Board
  - County-wide and local VCSE (Feeding Gloucestershire, Long Table, Gloucestershire Rural Community Council, Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Support Service, The Churn, Cotswold Friends, Chipping Campden Support Hub, Foodbank, Citizens Advice, Working for Wellbeing Lechlade & Fairford etc.)
  - Youth organisations
  - Other District Councils
  - Housing Associations
  - Schools and other educational institutions such as the Royal Agricultural University and Cirencester College
  - Individuals and businesses
- 6.8 These principles align with Pillar 2 of the Gloucestershire Integrated Care Strategy - 'Transforming what we do'.
- 6.9 This report clearly sets out that the new contract with Freedom Leisure and the Active Cotswold programme are taking a much more holistic and sustainable approach to leisure and wellbeing, by moving away from solely focussing on the leisure facilities and contract management activities. The joint work of the leisure and community wellbeing team, alongside other internal services as well as many external partners, highlights the improved focus on partnership work, a whole systems approach and applying the principles of place based/hyper local engagement, as well as a focus on enabling and motivating local communities. The benefits that this shift has already delivered are demonstrated in the key achievements to date (Annex C) as well as the complex and holistic Active Cotswold programme itself.
- 6.10 This change has been reinforced and strengthened through the recent internal restructure in September 2023, when the leisure service areas was brought into the Communities directorate led by Assistant Director Andy Barge and the creation of the new role of Business Manager - Leisure and Wellbeing.
- 6.11 In 2024, the CDC Community Wellbeing team will work in close partnership with Freedom Leisure to deliver joint community outreach activities in particular in areas with limited access



to leisure facilities and with a focus on getting those that are currently inactive more active in an inclusive and accessible way.

## **7. AN ENHANCED CONTRACT MONITORING CAPABILITY**

- 7.1 To improve effective on the ground contract monitoring capabilities, it is suggested to appoint a part-time contract monitoring officer in spring 2024 (1 day per week on each Council area). It is further proposed that selected Public/Council staff who are existing members of the leisure facilities perform 'mystery shopper' type activity in return for a subsidised monthly membership fee. In addition, the Community Wellbeing Team will be undertaking site visits too. All site visits will be supported by a digital, easy to use feedback system. We are confident that these changes would improve all aspects of the contract and customer experience by creating a timely and effective feedback loop resulting in less complaints being raised. This will be funded from the existing budget.
- 7.2 Contract management for the cultural contract has been light touch in recent years and needs more attention going forward to maximise potential. Therefore, the contract management responsibility will be taken on by the Tourism Team as this provides a much better fit with the remit of the team, their expertise, skills and relations. The handover is planned for Q4 of 2023/24, with a start date for the new arrangements of 1st April 2024.

## **8. PLAYING PITCH STRATEGY**

- 8.1 One of the actions that emerged from the Active Cotswold Connected Communities theme was the refresh of a districtwide Playing Pitch Strategy, which was last completed in 2017.
- 8.2 In November 2023, the Playing Pitch Strategy was adopted and authority granted to officers to work in partnership with other organisations to establish the feasibility and funding sources for the projects identified within the strategy and to prepare business cases, where opportunities arise, and bring them forward for consideration - [Cabinet Report from Cabinet meeting held on Monday, 2 November 2023](#).

## **9. 'CREATIVE COTSWOLD' - AN EMERGING CULTURAL STRATEGY FOR THE COTSWOLD DISTRICT**

- 9.1 The council is coordinating and facilitating the co-production of a district-wide cultural strategy, which is planned to go live in spring/summer 2024 - Figure 3 on the next page shows a summary of the draft strategy.
- 9.2 The strategy aims:
- To celebrate the amazing and nationally and internationally renowned cultural and creative offerings in the Cotswold District.
  - To provide leadership and facilitation to join up the varied and geographically disparate initiatives, organisations, people and events.



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- To better promote the culture available to Cotswold residents, tourists and to people across the UK and the World to stimulate the local economy.
  - To promote easy access to cultural events for all and to reach out to people who would not normally find them relevant, appealing or affordable.
  - To promote mental wellbeing via access to culture and the arts in the Cotswolds.
  - To find and launch a permanent art gallery in the Cotswold district to showcase Cotswold artists and art depicting the area.
- 9.3 The cultural strategy will further complement the council's work on health and wellbeing, tourism and the economy to improve resident's quality of life.



Figure 3: Summary of draft Culture Strategy.



## 10. CONCLUSIONS

- 10.1 This report highlights the Council's proactive shift from mainly managing a leisure facilities contract to a much more holistic approach to leisure and wellbeing through the procurement and mobilisation of an outcomes focussed new contract, which is supported by a complex and holistic programme of work (Active Cotswold).
- 10.2 Both, the Council and Freedom Leisure are united in their purpose of improving people's quality of life through leisure, culture and wellbeing and will strengthen their partnership to not just develop the leisure centres into wellbeing hubs, but to also reach out to those communities that have limited access to leisure facilities and other barriers to becoming more active and /or connecting with others.
- 10.3 The Council recognises its role in supporting health partners to help people live healthier lives through its range of services – across housing, planning, economic development, welfare, leisure and environmental health. These influence some of the most significant determinants of health. The Council takes this role very seriously and works provocatively with partners and local communities by taking a place-based and strengths-based approach for increased sustainability in times of significant financial pressures.
- 10.4 The report showcases the dedication and great work of Council staff, Freedom Leisure as well as our partners and local communities to improve health and wellbeing and connectedness across the district. Some key learning points have been taken from the contract mobilisation phase, which will help improve future service delivery. It is clear that our leisure facilities and the services we deliver in partnership will see significant improvements over the coming months and years, from which residents will benefit within and outside the leisure facilities. These benefits will be delivered through:
- an improved facilities and leisure offer at the centres
  - improved relationships and contract monitoring strategies & capabilities
  - an increased accessible and inclusive outreach programme and
  - a more joined up, visible and accessible culture offer
  - a continued success in securing external funding, based on our position as a valued and trusted system partner, who delivers long-term, sustainable outcomes for our communities.

## 11. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Any activities under the Active Cotswold programme that require additional financial resources will be funded from external sources as set out in section 6.



- 11.2 The combined impact of the Leisure and Cultural Contract awards, when averaged over the contract term, is a net positive position which overall results in payments being made to the Council from the delivery of the services through Freedom Leisure.

## 12. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

## 13. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 13.1 The Active Cotswold Programme is reliant on the workstream areas/ themes being adequately resourced. If resources aren't available the benefits of the programme won't be realised. At present there is no identified workstream lead for 'Active Environment', which has impacted the progress and delivery of this theme.
- 13.2 A large proportion of the projects within the Active Cotswold programme are dependent on external funding to guarantee their sustainability. In order to ensure projects continue beyond their proposed lifespan, officers ensure a good level of community engagement is present through the development and delivery of schemes, with the hope that the community will take them on once established.
- 13.3 As with any programme a risk register exists for the Active Cotswold programme, to identify and mitigate any risks that may arise during the course of the programme.
- 13.4 There is a risk that Freedom Leisure fails to achieve the level of surplus/deficit predicted in their tender returns or fails to meet their contractual obligations. In mitigation to this, the contracts were signed under seal which will commit Freedom Leisure to the financial terms and conditions of their tender regardless of the marketplace fluctuations. The residual risk in these circumstances will therefore be mitigated by the ability to hold Freedom Leisure to deliver the full life of the 10 year contract.
- 13.5 During contract mobilisation a risk register was developed to cover all areas of the transition to Freedom Leisure. Examples are included in Table I overleaf.

*Table I: Contract Mobilisation Risk Register examples.*

Risk	Control
Lack of communication between Operator and Council	Early contact made between mobilisation/demobilisation teams. Responsible people identified and initial meetings planned
Delays in Capital developments	Separate project plan and risk matrix to be completed by FL. Project Board to be



	established with CDC involvement
Contract documentation is not ready to be signed in time (1st August)	Issues meetings to be held early/ T&H to support on legal engrossments. Contract signing event to be scheduled

## 14. EQUALITIES IMPACT

14.1 Under equality legislation, the Council has a legal duty to pay 'due regard' to the need to eliminate discrimination and promote equality in relation to:

- Race
- Disability
- Gender, including gender reassignment
- Age
- Sexual Orientation
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Religion or belief

14.2 The Council also has a duty to foster good relations, and to consider the impact of its decisions on human rights. The law requires that this duty to pay 'due regard' is demonstrated in the decision making process. Therefore your report should contain a statement as to whether the recommendation has a particular impact on any of the above groups

14.3 As this report does not relate to new policies, procedures or services; or changes to existing policies, procedures or services an equalities impact assessment (EIA) is not required.

## 15. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

15.1 During the leisure contract mobilisation period officers were able to complete a bid for the Government's Swimming Pool Support Fund (SPSF) with the support of Freedom Leisure's facilities management and the climate teams. The bid is for approximately £280,000 capital and we will be notified by Sport England, who are administering the scheme, if we are successful at the end of January 2024. The funding provides a support package for public leisure facilities with swimming pools and reflects the cost pressures these facilities face and the need to improve their energy efficiency. The timeframe for this grant scheme was a significant challenge and good partnership working was demonstrated to meet the deadline.

15.2 In March 2021, prior to the contract procurement project, the Council gave approval for projects to take place at Cirencester Leisure Centre and Bourton Leisure Centre with the aim of reducing the carbon production associated with the energy use at the Centres. This followed a successful grant application from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS). Initial plans had to be scaled back at Cirencester Leisure Centre to fit within the available



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project fund, but it was identified that further solar panels could be fitted to the building which would help to offset the financial impact of the carbon reduction works. As part of the SPSF bid further solar panels have been applied for, and if this bid is unsuccessful the Council and Freedom Leisure will continue to investigate funding sources in an effort to install the additional solar panels.

- 15.3 The cabinet report for the original PSDS project can be found here [PSDS Cabinet Report, 1st March 2021](#)

## **16. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 16.1 Any relevant background papers have been referenced in the report.

(END)