

**To:** Scrutiny  
**Date:** 04 November 2024  
**Report of:** Executive Director of Communities and People  
**Title of Report:** Leisure Update

Summary and recommendations	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To update Scrutiny on the mobilisation of the leisure contract and client function arrangements in line with the recommendations from Scrutiny Committee that were approved at Cabinet on 24 January 2024.
<b>Key decision:</b>	No
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Chewe Munkonge, Cabinet Member for a Healthy Oxford
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	Thriving Communities
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Thriving Communities Strategy

Recommendation(s): That Scrutiny resolves to:	
1.	<b>Note</b> the update on the leisure investment programme and leisure contract clienting arrangements in line with the recommendations from Scrutiny Committee that were approved at Cabinet on 24 January 2024.
2.	<b>Comment</b> on the report and <b>agree</b> any recommendations.

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Confidential

## Introduction and background

1. The Scrutiny Committee met on 16 January 2024 to consider a report concerning the Leisure Services Contract Award. The report's recommendation that Cabinet awards a 10-year contract (with 5-year extension option) for managing and developing the Council's three leisure centres, Hinksey Outdoor Pool and the Oxford Ice Rink to Serco Leisure Ltd, was accepted by Cabinet on 24 January 2024.

2. Cabinet agreed on 24 January 2024 to receive annual reports on the performance of leisure services and the contractor and agree the business plan priorities for the following year.
3. This report provides an update to Scrutiny following the leisure contract mobilisation.
4. Key successes to date include:
  - Brand new gyms at Barton, Ferry and Leys Leisure Centres
  - Redecoration of centres including new café furniture
  - Hinksey opened on time for the first time for several years
  - Opening hours have been extended at all of the leisure centres
  - Additional female-only swim sessions
  - New ice pad at the Ice Rink.
  - Low emissivity ceiling at the Ice Rink
  - More schools now swimming at our pools
  - A diverse programme of events and activities including; Oxford Pride, Swim for León, National Lifeguard Day, Big Splash Weekend, Eid Prayer and UK Warhammer event.
  - Reduction in complaints
  - To help reduce health inequalities, we are moving from a traditional leisure model to active wellbeing, we are actively working with Sport England, More Leisure's fundraising team and the health system to look at ways to bring funding in, add value and enhance the offer.

**An update on the arrangements established for the effective commissioning, delivery and management of the leisure services.**

5. A client team has been set up which has cross-Council support. The team is led by the Active Communities Manager, supported by the Leisure and Active Wellbeing Manager as the client and contract officers.
6. It also includes a full-time commissioned post in Property Services who has the technical expertise to oversee the maintenance and dilapidations programme within the leisure centres, as well as supporting the client audit of facilities and providing expert technical advice of this nature. Other officers from across the Council such as finance and legal will similarly support through the governance structures below.
7. Governance structures have been set up and are shown below.
  - Regular weekly meetings were held during the first 6 months of mobilisation to ensure that this was successful; these have now moved to monthly client and monthly maintenance meetings.
  - A monthly formal in person client meeting, which rotates around the leisure centres, focusing on ensuring excellent community experience, contract items, health and safety, active communities programme and performance.

- A monthly formal property/maintenance meeting, also in person and rotating around sites focusing on property, maintenance, and dilapidations.
8. These meetings are supplemented by a programme of formal and informal audit inspections by Council staff, alongside mystery visits.
  9. External health and safety audits by Right Directions (industry lead in this area) for external assurance will be completed every 2 years.
  10. Additionally, Quest accreditation is a requirement of the contract, and all sites are to be rated 'Excellent' by the end of Year 2 of the contract.
  11. The work in this area is also discussed on a regular basis including formal monthly meetings with the Cabinet member and regular reports into the officer Communities Change Board that is chaired by the Director of Communities and People and is also attended by the Heads of Service.
  12. Community engagement is also key within this. To enable effective engagement, we have also worked with More Leisure to set up arrangements that work best at each individual site. There are now quarterly meet the manager sessions at Barton, Ferry, and Leys leisure centres, which provide users with an opportunity to formally raise issues and suggestions for improvements. Hinksey Pool has a successful user group and Oxford Ice Rink meets regularly with the key clubs/user groups at the centre. These sessions provide further feedback and are a useful way of monitoring success. We will continue to monitor and review the success of these.
  13. In addition to this, take up of the Council staff leisure membership offer has increased and staff members also provide feedback on their experiences, which widens the clienting reach.
  14. A planned annual report and business plan will be reported at Cabinet before the end of the financial year 2024/25.

**The arrangements established to ensure a smooth transition to the new provider – framed in the context of lessons learned.**

15. Mobilisation of a leisure contract is a significant exercise and involved a cross-Council team of staff working on the project. An actions tracker was used, containing over 350 items to ensure the safe and effective transition from Fusion Lifestyle with More Leisure.
16. We held 3 meetings per week: one with Fusion Lifestyle, one with More Leisure, and one with both operators. The feedback from both operators and suppliers was that the mobilisation was successful and most importantly, the feedback from our clubs and users was positive. As with any operation of this size, there are always some lessons learnt.
17. The key findings from lessons learnt on the mobilisation are summarised below:
  - The membership data whilst conducted in a safe compliant way, did not all transfer across from Fusion to More Leisure successfully. When we experience a future change in operator, we will ensure that any new operator's database is formatted correctly and aligned to the current operator.

- Telephony issues were experienced as phone lines had to change due to communications issues with the former operator. This resulted in temporary phone numbers being used and temporary downtime. For the future, we will ensure communications are programmed earlier on in the sequencing to ensure a smoother transition.
- The new operator inherited a low staffing base, compared to their own contract submission and had to actively recruit to many vacant posts. The new operator worked hard to recruit even before the contract start date at their own risk, for instance, running lifeguard training sessions at their own cost and starting the promotion of vacancies and recruitment. It has taken longer than planned to build up to a full complement of staff. Going forward for any future contract we will need to ensure we extend the timescales of the procurement and contract exercises to enable more effective and timely recruitment.
- More Leisure performed well and at their own financial risk, in ensuring that Hinksey opened on time at the beginning of April even though their contract did not start until the end of March. In any future procurement exercise we would need to build in additional time to enable this to happen in a less time intensive way.

### **Progress of the implementation of the leisure investment programme**

18. We have been working through the £3.04 million investment programme as detailed within the cabinet report of 10<sup>th</sup> July 2024, ensuring that it complements works such as the dilapidations programme and Leys Youth Hub construction works. The leisure investment program forms part of the contract and we also have a separate legal agreement in place with More Leisure to explicitly support this including covering payments back to the Council.

19. Significant items that have been delivered to date include:

- New gyms, aerobics equipment and body composition machines at Barton, Ferry, and Leys (including E-GYM kit at two sites)
- New state of the art inflatable at Barton
- New spin bikes
- New branding and redecoration

20. Items coming up include:

- Studio conversion at Barton
- New inflatables at the other swimming pool sites
- Sports hall conversion at Leys – new Tag Active and soft play arena
- AI drowning prevention system
- Changing room improvements (More Leisure currently reviewing and will recommend to Council which sites given condition etc)
- New spin studio at Ferry (conversion of one unused squash court)

## Other implications

21. Health and safety of the leisure facilities is paramount, and More Leisure are very committed to this with a safety-first approach. They have set up an effective compliance monitoring system and the Council will be monitoring Health and Safety through the systems mentioned in the report.

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**Background Papers:** None

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