

To: Cabinet
Date: 18 March 2026
Report of: Director of Communities and Citizens Services
Title of Report: Leisure Contract Annual Service Plan (2026-27) and Year 2 (2025-26) Update

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	To update Cabinet on the highlights of the second year of the new leisure contract and approve the Annual Service Plan 2026-27, which is an annual requirement of the operator, aiming to align outcomes to the Council's priorities and to address health inequalities.
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Chewe Munkonge, Cabinet Member for a Healthy, Fairer Oxford
Corporate Priority:	Thriving Communities
Policy Framework:	Thriving Communities Strategy

Recommendation(s):
That Cabinet resolves to:
1. Approve the Leisure Annual Service Plan 2026-27 and delegate authority to the Director of Communities and Citizens Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for a Healthy, Fairer Oxford, to make any necessary amendments.

Information Exempt From Publication
N/A – no exempt documents

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
Appendix 1	Oxford Annual Service Plan 2026-27	No
Appendix 2	Active Communities Plan	No

Appendix 3	Oxford Leisure Upgrades (Photos)	No
Appendix 4	Risk Register	No
Appendix 5	Equalities Impact Assessment	No

Introduction and background

1. The 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.
2. The Council appointed its new leisure contractor Serco Leisure Operating Limited on 27 March 2024, and provision officially started on 30 March 2024. More Leisure Community Trust acts as Serco's delivery partner, responsible for day-to-day operational management and community engagement, while Serco retains contractual accountability.
3. This report provides an update on the second year of the contract and an overview of the Annual Service Plan for Year 3 (2026-27).
4. The Annual Service Plan will be reviewed in monthly client meetings and the quarterly meetings of the Strategic Partnership Board which includes officers from the Council and More Leisure's senior management teams, and key partners such as Active Oxfordshire, Public Health, Integrated Care Board (ICB), alongside user representation.

Second year performance

5. A summary of the second year's performance of the leisure contract is highlighted below. Please note that, due to reporting deadlines, the data covers only nine months (April to December 2025).
6. Targets set last year (largely 3% increases) have all been exceeded. Headline figures include:
 - a. 377,974 recorded visits (compared to 280,311 visits in the previous year)
 - b. 13,169 pay as you go members (compared to 12,803 visits in the previous year)
 - c. 5,257 total members, of which 801 are concessionary members (compared to 4,611 and 678 members in the previous year)
 - d. 2,332 swimming lesson members (compared to 2,268 in the previous year)
 - e. 333 membership referrals for people experiencing homelessness and supported by the Council's commissioned homeless pathway services (compared to 162 in the previous year)
 - f. An average Net Promoter Score customer experience rating of -11 (compared to -44, where the service ended under the previous operator); disruption from leisure investment works such as the Leys Youth Hub may have contributed to the low score and we expect this to improve in the year ahead (also note the leisure sector's average Net Promoter Score stands at 22 – source: [Moving Communities, 2025](#))

7. As of January 2026, £36,000 of in-kind funding has been allocated, supporting a number of activities such as:
 - a. Barton Utd FC half term club swim sessions (75 children)
 - b. 250 free soft play sessions (vouchers distributed to local partners)
 - c. Youth Ambition activities including ice skating and swimming (funding for 250 children and young people)
 - d. South Oxford Family Triathlon at Hinksey Pool (an inclusive, untimed and non-competitive event for families to enjoy together)
 - e. Enabling pulmonary rehab courses at Leys
 - f. Activity sessions and classes for members of My Life My Choice (self-advocacy organisation for people with learning disabilities)
8. The Council's leisure centres have continued their period of significant transformation and are continuing to improve. Key investments and achievements over the last year include:
 - a. Partnership working and community development by More Leisure's Active Communities Manager, who has been working with communities to improve accessibility of the leisure centres and develop new programmes to reach a wider audience (see more in Appendix 1)
 - b. Opening of the new Leys Youth Hub, which is providing positive activities for young people including a climbing wall, music room, cooking, group activity areas and quiet space; 184 individual young people have engaged to date
 - c. Continuation of the Council's [under 17s free swimming programme](#), which currently offers 37 hours of free swim sessions across its pools, at no cost to the Council (16,135 free swims were enjoyed in April to Dec 2025, compared to 9,737 in the same period in 2024)
 - d. Continuation of the Council's excellent [concessionary scheme](#), which offers low cost pay as you go and monthly membership to residents on low incomes
 - e. Full refurbishment of changing facilities at Ferry Leisure Centre (with Barton and Leys to follow in Spring 2026)
 - f. New active zone at Leys Pools and Leisure Centre (soft play and tag arena)
 - g. A commitment to healthier food in our facilities, with a vending trial commencing from February 2026 (working in partnership with Public Health)
 - h. Fairtrade, organic, Rainforest Alliance-certified and Soil Association-accredited tea and coffee are now served at all sites; 30p discount for bringing a reusable cup
9. A summary slide deck that highlights some of these key achievements and photos is available in Appendix 3.
10. We maintain strong oversight of health and safety through monthly client reporting, contract meetings, and regular compliance checks; any urgent concerns are immediately raised by the operator. In April to December 2025, 3.15 accidents were recorded per 10k visits (compared to 3.82 in the same period in 2024).

11. One incident to note was a pool rescue at Barton Leisure Centre in November 2025, after which the individual was taken to hospital and sadly passed away a few days later. While the fatality did not arise from an incident within the leisure centre or as a result of any shortcomings, we have undertaken further assurance checks with the operator, alongside our regular compliance monitoring, to confirm that all required safety processes and controls remain robust.
12. The Council's relationship with More Leisure continues to be a positive one, with good communication and regular formal meetings to track progress. The operator is flexible and keen to work in partnership with the Council.
13. Formal complaints received and handled by the Council directly relating to our leisure operator have reduced from 30 in 2024/25 to 14 in the period April to December 2025. The complaints handled primarily relate to issues at Ferry Leisure Centre that are now resolved or actively being addressed (service disruptions and inconsistent service delivery).
14. For the year ahead the Council will look to build on this relationship, work to complete the remaining investment works and continue to work together to improve how repairs and maintenance are managed.

Annual Service Plan

15. The Annual Service Plan ("ASP") (Appendix 1) outlines the priorities and actions to enhance leisure services in Oxford, including key capital investments. It focuses on improving health and wellbeing across target groups including children, young people, women, people with disabilities, and older adults.
16. The ASP aligns with key Council strategies such as the Thriving Communities Strategy and wider ones such as Oxfordshire County Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Sport England's Uniting the Movement and the NHS Fit for the Future: 10 Year Health Plan for England.
17. The ASP cross-references More Leisure's Active Communities Plan (Appendix 2) and includes initiatives for physical activity, mental health support and community engagement, aiming to create inclusive and accessible leisure opportunities for all Oxford residents.
18. Focus areas are derived from national physical activity priorities, which are then translated into Oxford-specific actions to tackle local health inequalities. This ensures that our local priority groups and interventions dovetail naturally with the overarching national framework.
19. Some of the key themes from the Active Communities Plan are outlined below:
20. Embedding national programmes across the contract
21. The plan sets out a series of national initiatives that Oxford's leisure contract is expected to deliver consistently across all sites. These programmes collectively strengthen quality, safety, inclusion and wellbeing. This suite of national programmes showcases a clear organisational commitment to standardised, evidence-based and socially inclusive leisure provision, with a particular emphasis on safety, early years support, and addressing gender imbalances in activity participation. Highlights include:
 - a. Leisure to Active Wellbeing – moving away from a traditional leisure approach to more preventative and integrated services strongly aligned to

reducing health inequalities. We will continue work with Sport England and the leisure operator to maximise opportunities in this area.

- b. Early years programme – the “Baby Welcome” policy is already embedded, signalling an established commitment to improving experiences and support for families with infants.
- c. Water Wellbeing – accreditation has been secured, and teams have been trained in motivational interviewing and behaviour-change techniques to better support local residents with health needs.
- d. UK Active Safer Spaces – training to reinforce the safety and inclusiveness of leisure environments.
- e. Warm Welcome Hubs – provision promoted throughout winter, contributing to wider social-support networks for vulnerable residents.
- f. Lift the Curfew – supporting the safety and independence of women and girls in accessing physical activity spaces.

22. Tackling local health inequalities through targeted priority groups

23. A broad spectrum of local priority groups have been identified, directly reflecting the JSNA, NHS and City Council strategic priorities. The breadth of priorities demonstrates a strong focus on reducing health inequalities, particularly in communities experiencing deprivation.

24. The plan highlights the intention to direct services where need is greatest, using insight from Community Health Insight Profiles to guide this work. This positions leisure as a mechanism for addressing systemic inequalities in health, wellbeing and access. Local priority themes include, but are not limited to:

- a. Residents with long-term health conditions
- b. People with mental health needs
- c. Women and girls, addressing gender-specific barriers (including female-only swimming sessions)
- d. Disabled people, including SEN and neurodivergent residents
- e. Refugees and asylum seekers
- f. Children and young people
- g. Multicultural communities

25. Strengthening and expanding health and community partnerships

26. Across the identified focus areas, the Active Communities Plan outlines a wide network of partnerships that the leisure contract will work with, and complement, to deliver improved health and social outcomes.

27. The plan envisages a connected ecosystem of health and community partners, embedding leisure within wider clinical pathways, neighbourhood wellbeing systems, and youth support networks. This reflects an ambition to ensure leisure services act not only as activity providers, but as integral contributors to health improvement, social care prevention and youth development. Partners include:

- a. The NHS, ICB and GP surgeries (including social prescribers and pathways such as Move Together and You Move)

- b. Local charities and local organisations
- c. Local and national disability and sports organisations
- d. Leys Youth Hub

28. Supporting community safety and positive pathways for young people

29. Within the priority area for Children and Young People, the plan highlights a preventative community-safety dimension. The clear linkage between physical activity, positive engagement and reduced antisocial behaviour gives a strong narrative about the dual social and health benefits of an active leisure partnership.

30. The focus for this includes increasing opportunities for children and young people living in areas of deprivation and contributing to the decrease of anti-social behaviour and crime by creating constructive, accessible activity pathways.

31. Targeted key focus areas for the year ahead

32. Three core focus areas for development during 2026 are identified:

- a. Long-term health conditions
- b. Disabilities
- c. Children and young people

33. Across each focus area, three common threads emerge:

- a. Targeting deprived areas identified in the community insight profile.
- b. Building strong partnership frameworks tailored to each priority group.
- c. Expanding opportunities, whether through new sessions, supported pathways or improved accessibility.

34. The clarity and consistency across these areas show a strategic, insight-led approach, ensuring that next year's priorities are coherent, intelligence-driven and rooted in community-level evidence.

Financial implications

35. The Council receives monthly finance reports as part of the Client monitoring report pack, which is reviewed and any questions communicated to Serco for response. BDO are also conducting a review of the contract. All management fee payments in accordance with the contract, up to and including December 2025, have been received.

Legal issues

36. The Annual Service Report is a contractual reporting mechanism through which Serco formally accounts to the Council for its performance under the contract and sets out proposed priorities and actions for the forthcoming year. The report is required to be submitted annually and must contain the information required as set out in the contract.

37. The Council must review the Annual Service Report to ensure that it is satisfied with the information provided, that the report accords with the contractual requirements.

38. Subject to the Council being satisfied with the contents of the Annual Service Report, there are no additional legal issues or implications arising. Should any aspect of the Annual Service Report require clarification or give rise to potential

legal, contractual, or governance concerns, further legal advice should be sought as appropriate.

Level of risk

39. The level of risk is low. A Risk Register is shown in Appendix 4.

Equalities impact

40. The Equalities Impact Assessment is shown in Appendix 5. The Annual Service Plan incorporates equalities at its core and there are no implications arising from this.

Carbon and environmental considerations

41. Not required, as for key decisions only.

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Background Papers:
None

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