

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ECONOMY, RESIDENTS, COMMUNITIES AND GOVERNANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT BY TEAMS ON MONDAY, 14 DECEMBER 2020

PRESENT: County Councillor M J Dorrance (Chair)
County Councillors G Jones, K W Curry, D O Evans, J Pugh, D Selby, L Skilton,
K Laurie-Parry, K Lewis and S L Williams

Cabinet Portfolio Holders In Attendance: County Councillors R Powell (Portfolio Holder for Young People and Culture), G Breeze (Portfolio Holder for Corporate Governance, Engagement and Regulatory Services), I McIntosh (Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Planning and Housing) and M R Harris (Leader)

Officers: Nigel Brinn (Corporate Director - Economy and Environment), Nina Davies (Head of Housing and Community Development), Clive Pinney (Head of Legal and Democratic Services), Wyn Richards (Scrutiny Manager and Head of Democratic Services) and Jenny Ashton (Service Strategy & Development Manager)

1. APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed the new members of the Committee who had been appointed at the Council's Annual Meeting and paid tribute to those who had left the Committee and wished them well in their new roles.

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors J Charlton and P Davies (Portfolio Holder for Education and Property) (on other Council business)

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED that County Councillor D Selby be elected Vice-Chair for the ensuing year.

3. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no disclosures of interest by Members relating to items to be considered at the meeting

4. DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPS

The Committee did not receive any disclosures of prohibited party whips which a Member has been given in relation to the meeting in accordance with Section 78(3) of the Local Government Measure 2011.

5. FREEDOM LEISURE ANNUAL REPORT

The Chair welcomed Gwyn Owen (Area Manager) and Jeremy Rowe (Regional Director), from Freedom Leisure to the meeting together with the Portfolio Holder and officers.

Documents Considered:

- Freedom Leisure Annual Report

Issues Discussed:

- The report is for Year 5 of the Contract and the period ending in Quarter 4 (January to March 2020). Income grew by 2.1%, and there was a growth in active participation. There was a drop in the Health intervention participation (GP referrals) and the Fresh programme (family fitness)
- There has been a growth in swim school lessons and an improvement in compliance rates. All sites were closed on March 20th in response to the pandemic.
- In terms of the financial position the contract had been performing well until Quarter 4 when the pandemic occurred which resulted in a deficit of £59.2k at year end.
- There are a number of challenges forthcoming including, the withdrawal of the furlough scheme, operating within Covid restrictions, customer and member confidence and a 50% reduction in the Free Swim Grant. A number of measures have been agreed between the Council and Freedom Leisure in response to these challenges.
- Welsh Government's decision to revise the criteria for the Free Swimming Initiative has had an impact on attendance figures. The loss of 4 instructors during the year impacted on the take up for the National Exercise Referral Scheme at 4 sites. However, recruitment has been successful to fill these vacant posts.
- Funding for the Fresh Programme (Family fitness) ended in quarter 4 and the programme had operated well. A decision was awaited on the renewed programme, but confirmation has been received from Powys Public health that funding has been made available for the current financial year.
- Energy saving measures have been undertaken across the sites which has resulted in an overall fall in energy consumption (electricity -6.3% and gas -5%)

- **Questions:**

<p>Review of opening hours and fees – gyms are important for people's health and well-being. How is Freedom engaging with the public to show that sites are open to the public. Has engagement increased since the restrictions have been lifted.</p>	<p>Freedom started reactivating sites at the beginning of August, initially with 5 sites and by November all sites were open. Freedom has engaged and written to all its members on lockdown, during lockdown and as sites reactivated to inform of plans and what measures are in place to provide assurance to the public that it was safe for them to return. Video clips have been posted through media channels as well. There will also be a campaign between January and March 2021 to promote these messages.</p>
<p>The £52k for marketing in the budget – where is this directed.</p>	<p>This goes across all sites and links to Freedom's marketing nationally. It also includes the provision of printed materials, banners and posters.</p>
<p>Is there a figure / target which Freedom should be achieving in</p>	<p>The target is the specification and tender which was submitted to the</p>

<p>terms of the percentage of the population that is attending gyms etc. How does this compare to other counties.</p>	<p>Council. The success of the contract is measured against this specification. Over the 5 years of the contract participation has grown.</p>
<p>With the pandemic, and for well-being purposes, there is a need to get people to use leisure centres. Has there been any indication from Welsh Government about assistance for marketing or any other assistance to promote the value of leisure centres.</p>	<p>Welsh Government are making a number of funding sources directly available to Freedom or to the Council for which bids can be made. There are often strict criteria for bids, but Freedom has been successful in obtaining funding to target the 60+ market, with the programme launching in January 2021. The funding will be used to trial some initiatives, the outcomes of which can assist in identifying future programmes for which bids will be made for the next financial year.</p>
<p>In relation to considering a linked site between Education and Leisure at Machynlleth could this be considered elsewhere such as Brecon.</p>	<p>The Portfolio Holder explained that long term and short term options were being explored by the Leisure Service in relation to joint facilities with the Education Service.</p>
<p>National Exercise Referral Scheme – how difficult is it to recruit to these specialist posts. If it is difficult does there need to be a collaboration with other partners such as colleges and the NHS to develop individuals with the skills required.</p>	<p>Freedom appointed staff with some of the required skills and then offered training as well which can take time to complete. This resulted in a delay in getting the schemes operating again. Working with partners is essential as well.</p>
<p>Welsh Government Free Swimming Scheme – there is a significant increase in those under 16 taking up swimming, but a significant reduction in the numbers for over 60. Is there evidence that this age group is still accessing exercise opportunities.</p>	<p>During the pandemic there has been a decline. Some over 60s are still accessing services but not as many as previously. The new criteria for Free Swimming targeted the under 16s. This has also shown the concerns of the over 60s as a result of the pandemic but the grant from Welsh Government will assist Freedom in focussing on this age group from next year.</p>
<p>Is it Freedom collectively which bids for additional funding or are individual centres encouraged to seek additional funding for equipment or to enhance centres.</p>	<p>It depends often on where the grant is coming from. Often it is for the local authority to submit the bid application, but Freedom will collate information to assist the client officer in making the bid. There are occasions when Freedom Leisure can bid directly for funding but Freedom does liaise with other partners.</p>

Outcomes:

- **Noted.**

6. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted that future meetings were scheduled as follows:

18-01-21	10.00 – 12.00	Performance Q3 + Risk (Provisional – Confidential Report – Housing)
28-01-21	14.00 – 16.00	Budget
01-03-21	10.00 – 12.00	Digital Strategy 2021-25
12-04-21	10.00 – 12.00	
03-06-21	10.00 – 12.00	Performance Q4 + Risk
12-07-21	10.00 – 12.00	Performance Q1 + Risk (To be confirmed)
06-09-21	10.00 – 12.00	
18-10-21	14.00 – 16.00	Performance Q2 + Risk
29-11-21	10.00 – 12.00	

Potential items for consideration:

- Regulatory Services
- Recycling rates – what advantage is being taken of the increases in recycling rates and how can we maintain recycling rates.
- Economic Impact Study / Town Centre Focus Group
- County Farms
- Review of removal of Pest Control Service (added by Co-ordinating Committee)
- Growing Mid Wales

The Scrutiny Manager confirmed that the Council was currently dealing with business critical matters only once again which was why matters on the work programme were not able to progress.

7. EXEMPT ITEM

RESOLVED that the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that there would be disclosure to them of exempt information under category 3 of The Local Authorities (Access to Information) (Variation) (Wales) Order 2007).

The Monitoring Officer has determined that category 3 of the Access to Information Procedure Rules applies to the following item. His view on the public interest test (having taken account of the provisions of Rule 14.8 of the Council's Access to Information Rules) was that to make this information public would disclose information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

These factors in his view outweigh the public interest in disclosing this information.

8. RESOLUTION OF CONTRACTUAL ISSUES WITH HEART OF WALES PROPERTY SERVICES (HOWPS)
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Documents Considered:

- Report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and the Head of Housing and Community Development.

Issues Discussed:

- The resolution of contractual issues with the Heart of Wales Property Services.

Outcomes:

Action	Action By / Completion Date
That the Head of Legal and Democratic Services discuss the issues raised by the Committee in detail with the ERCG – HOWPS Working Group	WR / CP

County Councillor M J Dorrance (Chair)