



Neuadd y Sir / County Hall, Llandrindod, Powys, LD1 5LG

## **QUESTIONS AT ANY TIME TO CABINET PORTFOLIO HOLDERS**

Response by the Cabinet Member:

Thank you for your questions, which we have repeated for ease of reference:

- 1. If they consider it appropriate that a struggling organisation such as Freedom Leisure should be offering free facilities to Powys County Council staff at centres which were under threat of closure only months ago?**

Freedom Leisure and all other leisure operators throughout the UK, including local authorities that deliver leisure 'in house', have been significantly impacted by the catastrophic increase in energy prices and costs.

This is currently having a detrimental effect on valuable public resources and facilities, and is not specific to Freedom Leisure.

The industry and sector have been lobbying Welsh and central government to request urgent support as leisure, and swimming pools more specifically were not included in recent government support packages.

This offer, as with the other range of incentives that Freedom Leisure promote throughout Powys (and the UK), are part of their marketing campaigns and 'Healthy Communities Plan' to encourage residents, businesses, the health sector and communities to become more active.

- 2. If they consider it appropriate that Powys County Council staff should benefit from a seven-day free pass to use facilities which residents from all across the county are struggling to afford?**

As a council, we encourage our residents and our staff to lead active and healthy lifestyles. This would improve their quality of life including having a positive influence on their mental health. One way that they can achieve this is by visiting their local leisure centre.

Our leisure partner, Freedom Leisure, run a number of promotions throughout the year to encourage people to use their local centre and therefore increase revenue and provide health benefits.

The majority of these promotions are aimed at new and existing customers but Freedom Leisure also work with local businesses and public bodies to offer workplace physical activity opportunities, active workforce weeks, exclusive offers and staff health and wellbeing support. We encourage this type of marketing schemes as part of normal joint working.

These promotions have included:

- February Fitness Campaign

The February fitness campaign started with a promotion of 2 months free on an annual membership and then changed to 3 months free from the middle of the month.

For a monthly membership this started with 50% off the first month and this changed midway through the month to a “rest of the month free” promotion.

Marketing methods used: Social Media, Website, Email, SMS, Print, Banners, Social Media Adverts.

The anticipation is that the employees that have claimed the free pass as part of the Active Workforce Week promotion go on to become regular customers at their nearest Freedom Leisure centre.

By encouraging our workforce to lead an active and healthy lifestyle, not only will it benefit our staff as individuals, but it will benefit the council as an organisation as it could reduce sickness levels and increase productivity.

As of 10am 8th March, Freedom Leisure have reported that their landing web page for the Powys staff promotion has been visited:

Cymraeg: 90

English: 489

Total: 579

This page has currently resulted in 161 enquiries from North/Mid Powys, 110 from South Powys, so a total of 271 enquiries generated. In addition, there will also be walk-ins/phone calls etc which will increase this number further. The numbers of actual users and conversions to memberships will be reported in early April.

- b. Freedom Leisure will be providing Early Help Services (PCC) with annual or six-monthly swimming or gym passes that they can give to families to increase their family bonds and for their physical and mental health.
- c. Freedom Leisure have offered various promotions to local businesses, the health board staff and targeted initiatives for families, older people and those receiving benefits.

**3. Was the offer from Freedom Leisure discussed and approved at Cabinet Level or scrutinised by the council in any way?**

The Portfolio Holder for a more Prosperous Powys, the Executive Director for Economy and the Environment, the Head of Service for Communities & the Head of Service for Workforce Development. were all aware of the promotion as part of regular performance reviews. The scheme will be reviewed in detail when it closes.

Freedom Leisure provide initiatives such as this throughout the UK to encourage participation amongst a range of potential users i.e. organisations, clubs, disability groups. Initiatives for other groups would not normally be formally ‘scrutinised’ by the Council, the activities of Freedom Leisure are subject to constant review as with any activity of the Council or partner organisation.

As Powys County Council are one of the largest employers in Powys, with many employees also being residents, this initiative would be seen as a positive offer for a large number of people should they wish to take it up.

4. **If the answer to question 3 is “No” can confirmation be provided of who did approve and accept the offer?**
5. **Will they recognise that the acceptance of free use of the facilities for Powys County Council staff was ill-conceived and will not be permitted in the future.**

The offer and encouragement for Powys employees to have the opportunity to become more active and try out a number of activities, then becoming members, has already been offered to residents, other organisations and local businesses.

Freedom Leisure also offer ‘anyone’ to sign up for a guest pass so that they are able to access any Freedom Leisure Centre for one day so they can try activities before committing to anything on a more regular basis.

It is our view this type of offer is of benefit to our residents and staff and as such will be encouraged where appropriate. Our aim is to increase centre usage, and we are therefore content to consider and indeed support any scheme or offer that would achieve this.