

LEISURE MANAGEMENT CONTRACT TASK GROUP

18 October 2016

Present: Councillor D Barks (Chair)
Councillors J Dhindsa, K Hastrick and T Williams

Also present: Karl Miles, Contract Manager, SLM (for minute numbers 1-4)
Gary Foley, General Manager, Watford Central, SLM (for
minute numbers 1-4)
Kelly Spencer, General Manager, Watford Woodside, SLM
(for minute numbers 1-4)

Officers: Corporate, Leisure and Community Client Section Head
Committee and Scrutiny Officer

1 Committee membership and election of Chair

Councillor Barks was elected Chair.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Crout.

2 Disclosures of interest (if any)

It was noted that any councillors who were ordinary members of Everyone Active or casual users of the sites did not have a pecuniary interest and therefore would not be prevented from taking part in the task group.

Councillors Barks and Williams both indicated that they used the leisure centres' facilities.

3 Scrutiny proposal - Leisure Centre Management Contract Retender

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer stated that the scrutiny proposal set out the remit of the task group. It had been agreed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting in September. The task group's membership had also been agreed at that meeting.

Leisure Centre survey results September 2016

The Corporate Leisure and Community Client Section Head provided a brief overview of the leisure centre management contract which was due to expire in June 2018. The survey provided an understanding of current customers' and users' thoughts about the service. There had been a total of 516 responses which was an increase of 103 when compared to the last survey in 2013.

Representatives from SLM were present to respond to the task group's questions about the current service and how they had spoken to various groups and users about completing the survey.

The task group noted the low response from school and college users. The SLM representatives explained that the link to the survey had been sent to all schools that used the facilities at the two leisure centres. It was noted that it was possible one person from each organisation may have completed the survey. This would mean that approximately 50% had responded, which was considered reasonable. The key tenant clubs, e.g. swim clubs and Harriers, completed a questionnaire on behalf of their management committees.

The task group considered the benefits of the leisure centres in comparison with budget gyms which had less facilities and classes than the centres at Central and Woodside.

The Contract Manager for SLM explained to the task group the different types of membership arrangements for customers –

- Casual users
- Monthly direct debits, no contract requirements
- Discounted annual membership

The Contract Manager informed the task group that they were introducing 'single customer viewpoint'. This would enable the company to track people's usage patterns across all of the facilities covered in the contract, rather than separate monitoring systems across the contract. It was also noted that it would help to identify when people stopped attending.

In answer to the response related to opening hours, the Contract Manager advised that SLM had set itself a target to retain its membership following the introduction locally of budget gyms. The opening hours had been reviewed at each of the sites and longer opening hours had been implemented; opening earlier in the morning and later in the evening. He stated that none of SLM's sites across the country were open 24 hours.

The Corporate Leisure and Community Client Section Head added that the company had to carry out competitive analysis to understand the competition in the Borough and cross border. It was also necessary to consider the economic viability of any new proposals.

The General Manager for SLM explained that when the facilities opened there was usually a minimum of seven staff on site at Central. At budget gyms there may be no one on site.

The Corporate Leisure and Community Client Section Head referred to the negative response to the question about the mixture of activities at the sites. He suggested that some of the responses to question 11 had referred to flumes or slides. There was little capacity to change the mix of facilities at Central but may be some scope at Woodside. However, most of the responses had been about being unable to get into classes or sessions as they were so popular.

The Chair noted that in response to question 12 more people had said they attended more often than those who responded that they attended less than a year ago.

The Corporate Leisure and Community Client Section Head explained how the responses to questions 13, 15, 17 and 21 were assessed. The larger the word the more often the word had been mentioned in responses. These generally related to operational matters and the contract monitoring team would look at the responses in greater depth to see if there were any issues that could be addressed.

Councillor Hastrick noted that 'Holidays' was in large print. The task group was reminded that people were asked about things that affected them. It was possible individuals were affected by the holiday programmes, but this would be reviewed when the detailed responses were examined.

The General Manager for Woodside explained that during holiday times the swimming pool was very busy and the centre had to restrict the amount of time people could swim. As a result timed sessions were set up and customers paid per session.

The General Manager for Central responded to members' comments about parking. He said the company tried to educate its customers about green travel and reducing car usage. They also informed people of the location of the town centre car parks.

Members noted the reasonable number of positive responses regarding cleanliness and condition of the facilities and equipment. Councillor Williams referred to personal experiences he had at Woodside. Although there were occasions in the evening when it might be messy, however it was usually clean when he went back to the changing area later. However he felt more promotion needed to be done about not wearing outdoor shoes in the changing rooms or poolside.

Councillor Hastrick said that previously she used to receive a lot of complaints about the cleanliness of Woodside, but the number of complaints had reduced.

The General Manager for Central agreed that complaints had reduced. A janitor was located in the changing areas on a permanent basis.

The negative response to food and beverages was noted. Central no longer had an on-site café. However vending machines were available. The facility was close the town centre with a wide variety of food options available. At Woodside customers used the café and met others to socialise after an exercise session.

The Chair felt, based on the responses, capacity may be an issue, particularly in relation to cleanliness and parking.

The General Manager for Central said that the company was looking at carrying out satellite classes, possibly located at the community centres.

The Corporate Leisure and Community Client Section Head said that the community centres were an important part of the council's work. There would need to be a balance about how SLM's work and the council's work might interact.

Councillor Williams questioned whether a family membership was encouraged as he had been advised it was not available.

The Contract Manager confirmed that a family membership was possible and there were varying discounted rates.

The task group reviewed the responses to the final questions which related to ethnicity, age, male or female and where the customer was resident.

At this point it was recognised that further discussion would need to take place in private due to the possible commercial sensitivity of the comments prior to the tender being published.

The representatives from SLM were thanked for their contribution to the task group.

5 Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED –

that, under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business as it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during consideration of the item there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in Section 100(1) Schedule 12A of the Act for the reasons stated in the agenda.

6 Conclusions and recommendations

The task group further discussed the responses to the survey and commented on those areas it wanted the Executive to take into account in the development of the future service specification for the new leisure contract.

RESOLVED –

that the task group's comments be forwarded to the Portfolio Holders' meeting on 14 November 2016.

Chair

The Meeting started at 6.35 pm
and finished at 8.30 pm