

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

Overview and Scrutiny Panel 3

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REPORT OF THE OPERATIONS MANAGER FOR COMMERCIAL & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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OPERATION OF LEISURE FACILITIES AT DEREHAM AND THETFORD

Summary: This report provides an update on the operation of Dereham and Thetford Leisure Centres from April 2007. It provides an overview of usage and demand together with a summary of issues concerning residual design.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update and overview of the performance of Dereham and Thetford Leisure Centres following the opening of the new facilities. Dereham Leisure Centre was opened to the public on the 20th April with the formal opening taking place on 10th May 2007. Thetford Leisure Centre refurbishment and extension was completed in November 2006.
- 1.2 The Full Service Contract commenced with the opening of Dereham Leisure Centre. A key feature of this contract and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) agreement was that significant financial risk was passed over to Parkwood Leisure. However while financial risk and day to day management responsibility has been devolved the public will continue to view the facilities as being a Breckland Council responsibility.

2. UPDATE

- 2.1 The usage of the Leisure Centres has increased significantly since the opening of the new facilities as illustrated below.

	Breckland Leisure Centre		Dereham Leisure Centre	
	Total admissions		Total admissions	
	2006	2007	2006	2007
May	19,113	42,348	13,812	20,879
June	15,778	21,662	9,194	19,348
July	21,826	26,134	14,052	18,691

- 2.2 The construction element of the PFI at Thetford was completed 3 months early and Dereham was completed on time and on budget. The quality of the buildings provided through the PFI is very high and this has been acknowledged by customers, the local media and key stakeholders. In terms of design there have been some issues which needed to be addressed. However given the scale of construction it is perhaps unsurprising that a few problems have emerged and we are assured by Gleeds (the independent certifier) that the number of teething problems to date is consistent with other similar projects. These are summarised as follows:

2.2.1 Multi Use Games Area (All Weather Area)

At present balls are being inadvertently kicked into neighbouring domestic properties. The cost of erecting fencing will be in the order of £10 to 14K including costs associated with planning consent. It was at the Council's request that the MUGA was located in its current position in order to make way for the Health Centre on the originally proposed location. However under the terms of the PFI agreement the Council maintains that this is a risk which was transferred to Parkwood Leisure. At present Parkwood are considering the options available to them and are will bring forward proposals in due course.

2.2.2 Teaching Pool

Following the opening of Dereham Leisure Centre there have been some instances of children sustaining minor cuts and abrasions to their feet. Accident report forms have shown that this is commonly on the instep of their big toe. Although none of the injuries were serious the number and frequency was a cause for concern. As a consequence the teaching pool was drained and a detailed inspection undertaken by the builders, the tile sub contractors and the Council. No fault was found with the construction of the pool and the architects confirmed that the specified 'none slip tile' was in accordance with current design criteria. Since no fault could be found the pool was thoroughly cleaned with a rotary deck scrubber and subsequently refilled.

Investigations into the cause of the problem continued in co-operation with the operators, builders and architects. Subsequent research within the industry revealed that new pools are now required to provide a non slip surface in order to ensure that children can regain their feet. This is important for safety reasons and helps children to build confidence. Several pool operators reported the same problem. Wellingborough Council closed its teaching pool in May following a few weeks of operation in similar circumstances to that experienced in Dereham and similar actions in terms of investigation. has undertaken similar actions in terms of investigation and rectification. It was subsequently found that although the pool tiles were supplied in accordance with the current design criteria the tiles were too abrasive for the location and action was taken to sand them down. The tiles remain compliant with the required specification. In order to carry out the works the pool was closed on 10th August for an anticipated period of 2 weeks. The issue will be reported to professional bodies such as the Institute of Sport and Recreation Management in order to ensure that future problems are avoided.

2.2.3 Timing system

The competition timing system at Dereham Leisure Centre has been a cause of some concern. Although the system operates in accordance with the specification the swimming club and County ASA have expressed some concern about the location of socket plugs. There are no electrical risks as the system merely transmits data however there is a concern that there may be a trip hazard particularly during galas when excitement is heightened. The suppliers of the equipment are at options relating to redesigning the plugs and a form of cover for the system. Temporary arrangements have been put in place to mitigate any trip hazard risks.

2.2.4 Customer Feedback

Anecdotal Customer Feedback to staff at the new leisure facilities is generally very positive. However in order to gain a complete picture of customer satisfaction a comprehensive survey is to be carried out by Parkwood Leisure. This will provide comparative data with a similar survey undertaken in 2006 and also identify areas where service provision can be further improved. In addition to this Parkwood are gathering data via a verbal log held at reception to record passing comments by members of the public and telephone conversations.

2.2.5 Demand Issues

The fine facilities at Dereham and Thetford have inevitably driven up demand for improvements to the sports centres in Swaffham, Attleborough and Watton. In order to respond to these officers are undertaking preliminary investigations to see if any opportunities exist to address these demands.

There has been some demand for a sauna to be provided at Dereham Leisure Centre. While this is a low priority Parkwood Leisure have agreed to consider a proposal after the first year of operation subject to continuing demand and practical difficulties being addressed.

3. KEY DECISION

2.1 This is not a key decision.

3. COUNCIL PRIORITIES

3.1 The matter raised in this report falls within the following Council priorities:

- Promoting healthier lifestyles

4. FINANCIAL DETAILS

4.1 Although the closure of the teaching pool at Dereham Leisure centre has attracted some poor publicity the nature of the PFI agreement means that the Council has not suffered any financial loss.

5. RECOMMENDATION(S)

5.1 The panel is requested to note the action taken.

- Equal Opportunities – There are no implications
- Section 17, Crime & Disorder Act 1998 – This project could have a positive effect on the Section 17, Crime & Disorders Act 1998.
- Human Rights Act 1998 – There are no implications