

## **COVID-19 RECOVERY SCRUTINY PANEL**

**Meeting held in the Committee Room, Council Offices, Urban Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield,**

**on Thursday, 17th March, 2022 at 7.00 pm**

**Present:** Councillor Will Bostock in the Chair;

Councillors Jim Blagden, Dale Grounds,  
Kevin Rostance and Daniel Williamson.

**Apologies for Absence:** Councillors Caroline Wilkinson.

**Officers Present:** Lynn Cain, Ruth Dennis, Mike Joy and  
Shane Wright.

### **CP.9 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and/or Non-Registrable Interests**

No declarations of interest were made.

### **CP.10 Minutes**

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 4 November 2021, be  
received and approved as a correct record.

### **CP.11 COVID-19 Recovery - Everyone Active**

The Chairman welcomed everyone present to the meeting and introduced Lorenzo Clark, the Ashfield Contract Manager for Everyone Active, who was in attendance at the meeting to deliver a presentation to Members regarding their Covid-19 recovery process in relation to the Council's leisure facilities.

To commence the presentation, Members were given a brief overview of the actions taken at the start of the pandemic when the Government ordered leisure sites nationally, to be closed on 20 March 2020. Following Government guidance and Ashfield District Council guidelines, the centres went into soft hibernation with slowed ventilation and pool temperatures being dropped to agreed levels.

During the first lockdown Everyone Active held large discussions with the organisation nationally to stay abreast of the ever-changing COVID landscape and it was acknowledged that the support from Ashfield Council officers throughout every stage of the pandemic had been absolutely excellent (the same period having also included the tendering and award process for renewal of the leisure contract).

Many of the Everyone Active staff went through the furlough process and ICT provision and communication channels were cut off apart from with employees and clubs/main users to circulate messages and updates as required. A decision was also taken to donate the majority of the food and beverage stock being held at the leisure centres to foodbanks to ensure it wasn't wasted and could be put to good use elsewhere.

Once the Government announced that leisure facilities could start to open their doors again, Everyone Active worked with partners to develop an agreed approach post lockdown. Discussions were held with the Council to ascertain which elements of service provision could be delivered under the new regime with many fitness activities moving online. Opening times were also restricted in the beginning to enable the facilities to manage all the additional Covid-19 distancing measures. It was noted that the ice rink at Lammas Leisure Centre remained shut for the majority of the pandemic due to additional restrictions arising from current gaming legislation.

During the lockdown, Focus Groups consisting of Everyone Active Managers considered the impact of Covid-19 on service specific operations and developed new procedures and guidance to help staff with managing centres once they reopened. Site risk assessments were carried out and Site Reopening Plans outlined the following:

- One-way systems
- Booking systems
- Timelines for opening
- Local marketing and communication plans
- Cleaning requirements
- Use of fogging machines
- Continued closure of change/shower facilities
- Social distancing measures.

Having to operate on reduced capacity, users were required to book online to use the facilities, particularly the gym equipment and group exercise activities. Swimming pools reopened but lanes were widened with a maximum of 10 users per lane. No swimming competitions were allowed to take place during this time.

PR plans were put into place for all centre reopenings and these included social media testimonials from customers and clubs and ongoing positive messages regarding implementation of social distancing measures and creating safe environments. A message from the Board of Directors thanking customers and colleagues for their support was circulated including a contract-wide piece about the overall success of reopening the facilities.

Case studies on customers that began their activity journey during lockdown were also included through the 'on demand' online workout package. Customer feedback throughout the pandemic had been very positive and it had been wonderful to see.

Having successfully retendered for the leisure contract for the next 10 years, Members were then informed of a range of Everyone Active capital developments at the Council's leisure facilities to a tune of £22.5 million which included:

- New Fitness Suites at both Lammas and Hucknall
- Sensory Pool at Lammas
- New Food and Beverage offerings at Hucknall and x 2 Lammas
- Soft Play and Tag Active Arena Lammas
- Ice Rink new efficient cooling and ice generating plant
- New Olympia – Ice Tractor
- Bowls re-developed to allow Fitness Expansion at Lammas
- New Studios at Hucknall including Earth (Holistic) Studio.

Everyone Active had six key themes for supporting and encouraging healthy, active local communities with a key focus on mental health and agility wellbeing, which included:

Health Children and Young People  
Healthy Lives  
Healthy Communities  
Healthy Workplaces  
Healthy Ageing  
Active Environments.

Members welcomed the increasing social value impact for the current year in relation to the services provided through Ashfield's leisure facilities and the reduction for many health indicators including strokes, cancers, type 2 diabetes, dementia, depression and back pain. This had culminated in reduced GP visits and referrals to NHS specialist services locally.

To conclude the presentation, Members considered a management contract overview in relation to recovery positions for all of the Council's leisure centres regarding attendance and memberships. Recovery rates were impressive and were to be welcomed with fitness memberships increasing significantly from pre-pandemic levels.

Moving forward, the Council's leisure centres would be facing certain risks and opportunities, and these were highlighted to the Panel. Recent increases in the global cost of gas and oil would potentially have a negative impact on leisure centre running costs alongside the more standard, ongoing risks of competition with other local leisure providers and clubs going out of business as a result of the pandemic.

On the flip side, the pandemic had brought with it some opportunities which included the success of the online booking system, increased usage of the Everyone Active App, fitness on demand and streamlining of services as appropriate.

Question/Comment:	Response from Lorenzo Clark:
<p>Has there been any help given to customers throughout the pandemic, to enable them to avoid cancelling their memberships? (Councillor Daniel Williamson)</p>	<p>Each customer was supported based on their individual circumstances but Everyone Active allowed customers to freeze their memberships if they were struggling financially or drop down to the lower tier of membership if this was acceptable. Everyone Active worked hard to keep the dialogue going with its customers and some even continued to pay their subscriptions for donation to local charities</p>
<p>It was evident that many users were pre-booking swimming places through the online booking system and then failing to turn up which in turn prevented other customers from using the pools. Has anything been done to stop this misuse of the system? (Councillor Kevin Rostance)</p>	<p>Yes, Everyone Active has now introduced a Dishonour Rule which facilitates an email being sent advising of a £5 penalty fee and the withdrawal of certain privileges for any repeat offenders</p>
<p>Thank you for the excellent presentation it is very much appreciated. Do Ashfield District Council staff get any beneficial rates for using the leisure facilities? (Councillor Jim Blagden)</p>	<p>Thank you and yes, Ashfield employees, are offered a range of beneficial rates for using many of the leisure services provided</p>
<p>Would Everyone Active be interested as part of its community engagement initiatives, to work with a youth council that I am in contact with? (Councillor Dale Grounds)</p>	<p>Everyone Active is always keen to develop community partnerships and work with a range of groups across the District. I would be more than happy to speak about this further.</p>
<p>What key lessons have been learnt from the pandemic and are Everyone Active prepared should there be another pandemic and/or lockdown? (Councillor Daniel Williamson)</p>	<p>Yes, Everyone Active are well prepared and equipped to deal with any future pandemics and credit to Ashfield District Council for their level of investment and commitment towards providing leisure facilities to their residents</p>

	<p>The most important lesson learnt is that organisations must never take their customers and colleagues for granted and must ensure that they are continually cared for and supported. Staying in touch was paramount</p> <p>The ongoing issue now is for retention of staff going forward</p>
Are any of the social distancing measures introduced as part of national guidelines, going to be useful going forward? (Councillor Daniel Williamson)	Yes, the spacing of equipment in the fitness suites has proved to be very popular and will continue, thus allowing customers to still distance by default
Could you please expand on your green space programme (Councillor Will Bostock)	<p>The green space programme is to enable Everyone Active to be out and about more, working with community teams within the District</p> <p>Anti-Social Behaviour initiatives will be part of the programme to endeavour to tackle ongoing issues on parks and around leisure centre sites</p> <p>Also we will be working with West Notts College to get out into communities (based loosely around the Nottingham Forest model) to engage young people with fitness activities including apprenticeship schemes etc</p>
The presentation was excellent thank you and it is great for Panel Members to hear. Are the impressive recovery rates being seen in other regions as well? (Shane Wright, Scrutiny Research Officer)	Ashfield District Council is currently showing the best recovery rates in the Midlands. Some other contracts are recovering well but Ashfield District Council is a leading light!
Is there one particular thing that has made the difference with the impressive recovery rates? (Shane Wright, Scrutiny Research Officer)	I think Ashfield residents showed a real desire to get back to fitness and were very accommodating of the social distancing restrictions. They did not let the restrictions get in the way and worked alongside them to get back to the centres and their fitness goals

	Also, community spirit is great within Ashfield!
Online streaming of fitness activities has become an important part of service delivery, will this be built into any future business models? (Mike Joy, Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services)	<p>Everyone Active did actually provide virtual fitness classes pre-pandemic but they just expanded and became immensely popular during the pandemic lockdowns</p> <p>Customers can now subscribe to the on-demand App which is also very popular as it supplements their visits to the centres. Online fitness provision will be very much part of Everyone Active's service delivery programme for the future</p>

On conclusion of the presentation and ensuing discussion, the Scrutiny Research Officer and the Chairman thanked Lorenzo for his informative update and attendance at the meeting.

#### RESOLVED

that the presentation regarding Everyone Active's Covid-19 recovery process in relation to the Council's leisure facilities, be received, noted and welcomed.

The meeting closed at 7.54 pm

Chairman.