

FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

PRESS RELEASE

17 March, 2023

Council steps in to keep leisure centres open

Fenland District Council has stepped in to keep leisure centres and swimming pools in the district open.

The Council's Cabinet agreed to support Freedom Leisure (the charitable trust that runs the district's four main leisure centres) to prevent the ongoing global energy crisis putting them at risk of closure.

The Council plans to pursue Government funding that was announced in this week's Budget to help support leisure centres with energy costs.

After the meeting, Fenland District Council Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Cllr Chris Boden, said: "Recently published evidence shows that for every £1 spent on community sport and physical activity in England a return of almost £4 is generated through things like reduced health problems.

"It's vital for us to have leisure centre and swimming pool provision in Fenland – places for our entire community to stay healthy and, in the case of pools, learn lifesaving skills.

"The huge global increase in energy costs has brought huge unprecedented and impossible to predict challenges.

"We'll continue to work closely with Freedom Leisure to find long term savings and solutions."

Next month (April), existing Government support offered to leisure centres in the energy crisis falls away exposing them to potentially higher costs.

However, the Government announced in its Budget that £63m is to be made available to support leisure centres with energy costs.

In addition, the wholesale energy market is currently seeing reduced energy costs, so expected longer terms costs appear to be reducing, albeit not back to levels seen this time in 2022.

On Thursday (16 March), Cabinet agreed an interim measure to offer a loan of up to a maximum of £250,000 to Freedom Leisure to support it through the six months to September. Further work will be done to try to find a longer-term solution and to uncover the detail and bid for the newly announced Government funding.

Freedom Leisure has a contact with the council to run Chatteris Leisure Centre, March's George Campbell Leisure Centre, Wisbech's Hudson Leisure Centre and Whittlesey's Manor Leisure Centre.

The energy crisis forced reduced opening hours to be implemented in November. The reduced hours in Fenland will continue.

In other parts of the country swimming pools have closed due to the crisis.

Other measures to reduce costs in Fenland, including the planned installation of solar panels and energy saving lighting, are also being implemented.

In addition, the council has secured a £5,000 grant from Sport England to employ a specialist consultant to assess energy use at the leisure centres and identify any other cost-saving measures.

The outsourcing of the management and operations of the leisure centres to Freedom Leisure continues to be the most cost-effective option to keep them open, Cabinet heard.

Over the 15-year-four-month contract agreed in December 2018, the total predicted savings were around £5.6 million.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

For media enquiries, please contact the Fenland District Council press office on 01354 622226 or email: communications@fenland.gov.uk