

# FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

## PRESS RELEASE

November 9, 2023

### **New changing rooms unveiled as lifeline leisure centre funding confirmed**

There's been double good news for Fenland leisure centres with confirmation of lifeline Government funding to offset excess energy costs - and the completion of a changing room refurbishment.

Fenland District Council was successful in securing £191,000 from the Government's Swimming Pool Support Fund, administered by Sport England, to offset the crippling energy costs faced by its Freedom Leisure-managed leisure centres in Chatteris, March, Wisbech and Whittlesey.

It is hoped the Sports England funding will offset the need for an agreed loan from Fenland District Council to Freedom Leisure to help it keep all four of its Fenland sites open and operating amid global increased energy costs that have led to some swimming pools elsewhere in the country closing.

In addition to the Sports England funding, overhauled changing rooms at the March George Campbell Leisure Centre gym will be open to users by Monday (Nov 13).

Fenland District Council funded work to replace the ceiling, lighting, air handling unit, internal wall cladding, flooring, toilets and sinks as part of ongoing condition survey works.

Cllr Alex Miscandlon, Fenland's portfolio holder for leisure, said: "We value our leisure centres highly knowing the importance of them for the health and wellbeing of our communities.

"We will continue to strive to ensure good quality facilities are available to our communities in the most cost-effective way we can.

"The funding from Sport England to support in this is hugely welcome. And we're proud also to unveil our recent investment into the gym changing room at March leisure centre, which should encourage even more people to use our facilities."

Fenland District Council continues to own Chatteris Leisure Centre, March's George Campbell Leisure Centre, Wisbech's Hudson Leisure Centre and Whittlesey's Manor Leisure Centre. But in December 2018 handed management to Freedom Leisure, a charitable trust and not for profit organisation, on a 15 year and four-month agreement. This arrangement is estimated to save the council around £5.6 million over the contract period.

Dan Palframan, Freedom Leisure Area Manager, said: "We are pleased that Fenland District Council has been successful in securing government funding via the Swimming Pool Support Fund and we look forward to working with the council to support the swimming facilities in Fenland going forward.

"As a result of the energy crisis we as an organisation have seen our energy bills more than double and although this additional funding will help it remains a challenge to maintain swimming pools across the UK and we would encourage as many residents as possible to continue to use and support their local community swimming pools."

Sport England [research](#) has shown every £1 spent on sport and physical activity in England generates a £4 return across health and wellbeing, stronger communities and the economy.

Sport England's Director of Place Lisa Dodd-Mayne said: "We know just how vital swimming pools and leisure centres are to our nation's activity levels, which is why Sport England is proud to have played a central role in the delivery of this fund.

"Many pools have faced a real and significant threat to their survival this year, as local authorities and operators battle the challenge of increased energy and maintenance costs, weakened reserves and difficulties with retaining staff.

"Today's announcement is an important moment in time but is by no means the end of the work facing us or the support available as we continue to work with our partners to ensure the long-term viability of these vital community resources."

Sports Minister Stuart Andrew said: "Leisure centres and pools are vital for millions of people to stay fit and healthy, and we know that many public swimming pools are experiencing greater pressure due to increased operating costs.

"We have heard their concerns and have stepped in to help them make ends meet with £20 million immediate relief, and a further £40 million to help improve sustainability of public swimming pools over the long term.

"This is part of our support for grassroots sports facilities with more than £400 million in order to achieve our ambitious target of getting 3.5 million more people active by 2030."

Swimming is a valuable life skill for people of all ages, important for safety as well as both physical and mental health and wellbeing. Swim England's latest '[Value of Swimming](#)' report showed how water-based activity, such as swimming, helped generate social value of £2.4 billion in 2022.

The Swimming Pool Support Fund was announced in the Government Budget report in March to support facilities with swimming pools. This first £20 million of funding is going to the swimming pools and leisure centres most at risk of closure or significant service reduction and will be used to help with the recent rise in energy costs, such as paying towards immediate maintenance costs, heating and pool chemicals.

Operating costs including, but not limited to, heating, alongside general inflationary pressure has increased considerably over recent months, with local authorities facing greater challenges to make ends meet as a result.

## **ENDS**

Picture:

Cllr Miscandlon at Whittlesey swimming pool, which, along with all Fenland District Council-owned pools, has qualified for Government excess energy cost funding support.

Cllr Miscandlon in March's George Campbell Leisure Centre gym where facilities have been further improved with refurbished changing rooms.

## **Notes to Editors**

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

