

LEISURE PARTNERSHIP BOARD 10 Sept 2004

Response to Leisure Partnership Review report of the Corporate Issues and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Panel report, 29 July.

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to respond to the recommendations made by the Corporate Issues and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Panel when it met on 29th July 2004. The responses agreed by the Partnership will be reported to the next meeting of the Panel which takes place 23 Sept.

2. Responses

2.1. The Leisure Partnership Board welcomes the Panel's report and was particularly pleased to read that the panel "found that The Partnership has succeeded in delivering a range of improvements to the Council's Leisure Provision that the Council could not have provided alone. Therefore, it is achieving its primary aim to secure long term best value for the Council."

We have considered the recommendations included within the report (shown below in italics) and respond as follows:

2.2. The partners should revisit their core values to evaluate whether these are being applied in their fullest sense in this partnership so that a spirit of partnership within the whole community can be engendered.

The Partnership accepts this recommendation and over the next few months key personnel from the Council and Aquaterra will revisit Partnership values. The objectives will be to:-

- 1 Build positively on the best of what has been achieved/ learned to date.
- 2 Implement processes designed to achieve continuous improvement.
- 3 Review team structure, objectives and priorities
- 4 Develop relationships and a partnering culture of innovation, best practice and sustainability, to promote dynamic and innovative ways of operating and delivering a quality service.

Work will take place during October / November 2004 with the aim of reporting back to the Leisure Partnership Board meeting in December.

2.3. The Partnership should take active steps to address weaknesses in its approach to stakeholder communication.

A number of improvements have been made which we believe address the

panel's concern. These include:-

Customer panel – A formally constituted forum of customer representatives (2 from each facility) has been set up and this meets regularly with managers from Aquaterra and the Council to discuss the service provided, consider changes and ensure continuous communication with customers of all facilities. The Panel meets quarterly with senior management and on a regular basis with facility managers.

Comments and complaints system – the Partnership frequently reviews comments and complaints received daily from customers and analyses trends to ensure that, wherever possible, remedial action is taken. All comments and complaints are acted upon and the Partnership's first annual report summarises the position to the end of March 2004.

Annual customer satisfaction survey – the first annual customer satisfaction survey was carried out by Aquaterra earlier this year. This identified current levels of satisfaction and areas in which improvements might be sought. The resultant, independently written, analysis and report has been discussed by the relevant staff and an action plan has been agreed and implemented.

Communication of programme changes – a minimum of 14 days notice is now given of any programme changes agreed by the Partnership (usually through notices on site). These largely relate to "minor" changes which would not adversely affect specialist or "protected" groups.

Consultation with specialist groups – relationships with specialist groups have developed in order to improve stakeholder communication and address the concerns of some user groups. For example, the concerns of remedial swimmers are being discussed through the RSCG (Remedial Swimming Consultative Group) which is looking at how the needs and preferences of this group might best be met in the future. The Council's Executive Member is personally involved in this group.

Swimming Clubs – these are now consulted through the B&NES Swimming Development Group (on which the partnership is now represented) as well as individual meetings to deal with any issues specific to the clubs.

General stakeholder communication – 160,000 households have received general communication leaflets about Aquaterra's leisure facilities.

We accept that consultation in the Partnership's first year could have been improved and that these measures will prevent a repeat of previous mistakes.

2.4. That the provision for assisted access e.g. discounts for casual users who are either elderly or on low incomes should be reconsidered.

Aquaterra have introduced a greater range of concessionary rates than were

available prior to the Partnership's inception and the purchase of a Leisure Card (for £5 or £10 for elderly and low income groups) can achieve a discount of up to 59% on the regular price and Users can use all four leisure sites with the one card. Over 40% of members of the new Leisure Card scheme are from concessionary groups.

The cost of swimming for OAPs, for example, has fallen from £1.70 (before the contract came into effect) to £1.20 for people who have any type of concession card. These cost £10 or £5.00 annually depending on personal circumstances. Therefore anyone who swims more than 20 times per year is getting their swimming cheaper now than before. There is also an option to have a direct debit "Aqua card" available for £14 per month that allows unlimited access. Many people who qualify for concessions have taken this option and swim as many as 6 times per week, which in effect means their swimming is costing 50 – 60p each visit.

A small number of customers expressed some concerns about the changes when they were first introduced but the benefits of the revised charging regime were explained and no complaints have since been received. Aquaterra employ specialist staff to advise customers on the best payment plan to suit them and further concessions for various groups are available. The current scale of charges is designed to encourage regular rather than occasional use of the facilities. The Partnership will continue to review charges to ensure that these help to achieve its objectives.

Should the Council wish to reconsider this part of the agreed pricing policy there would need to be an adjustment to the contract price. For example, the Council could choose to give away free leisure cards to everyone over 60 rather than charge the £10 for the card. There are currently approx. 1000 60+ members but many more may apply if it were free. An estimated cost to the Council of providing free membership to the over 60's could be approximately £20,000 per year and we are considering making a proposal to the Council of this nature.

2.5. That any proposed changes to facility usage by clubs should only be implemented following consultation, negotiation and mutual agreement to ensure that Clubs continue to enjoy the same levels of service as before the partnership came into existence.

There are over 80 sports clubs that use the facilities managed by the Partnership. These range from groups of friends who play badminton once a week to large, formally constituted clubs such as Bath Dolphin.

If changes are proposed which affect any of these clubs, the Leisure Partnership will always look to consult and negotiate with them and hopefully come to a mutual agreement. However, it may not always be possible to reach mutual agreement as this could restrict the Leisure Partnership's ability to be able to offer flexible programming to a range of other users whose needs must be taken

into account and a balanced judgement found.

Therefore, the Leisure Partnership will ensure that any proposed changes to the arrangements for formally constituted clubs, who have a strong junior base and who can clearly demonstrate that they provide a significant contribution towards sports development, will be subject to special consideration. This includes the main swimming clubs at each of the swimming pools.

2.6. That, to increase general accessibility to swimming facilities, the partnership investigates:

(i) the potential of increasing general pool temperature which may improve the accessibility of pool water to a wider cross section of the community at all times without jeopardising health or pool plant.

The O&S report proposes an increase of 2 degrees in the Bath pool temperature throughout the week, and quotes a current temperature range of 27-29 degrees. Discussions have been held with Bath Dolphin Swimming Club to ascertain their view on any proposal to increase water temperatures. Their view is that 30 degrees would be at the top limit at which their competitive club members should be training and it is unlikely that they would be supportive of a change above this figure. There is also evidence to suggest that morning and lunchtime lane swimmers avoid Thursdays at present due to the warmer temperatures on that day.

There were a series of complaints about the pool temperature at Bath Sports and Leisure Centre earlier this year. This was largely due to boiler failure which has now been rectified. The pool already has very high usage by older people, parents and toddlers and disabled people and complaints are negligible. Temperatures are now displayed at reception and if the temperature in the main pools falls below 27 degrees customers are entitled to swim for free or compensatory vouchers are issued so that the customer can swim at another time (this is extremely rare and since this system has been introduced there has been no need to issue vouchers).

We will therefore ensure that temperatures will be maintained to a minimum of 28.5 degrees with 30 degrees applying on Thursday for remedial swimmers. We believe this will achieve improved customer satisfaction amongst most users.

(ii) identifying alternative swimming provision for disabled swimmers to be made available at no extra cost to these swimmers.

The Remedial Swimming Consultative Group (RSCG) meets on a regular basis and consists of representatives from Aquaterra, the Council, Remedial Swimmers and Access Bath and North East Somerset. The group has made progress in looking at alternative venues that may be suitable for remedial swimmers who are unable to swim at less than 30 degrees in the main Bath pool. This has included the University 25m pool, the Leisure Centre leisure pool and various

hydrotherapy type pools in the area. A feasibility study is currently being carried out on the possibility of building a suitable pool at Bath Sports and Leisure Centre. This feasibility study is due to be presented shortly to the RSCG when it next meets in September.

2.7. That the Partnership:-

reviews its arrangements for service delivery to ensure that it continuously improves standards of provision and is fully responsive to the needs of the community

consults the local community on its current and future plans and provides opportunities for debate and agreement before decisions are taken.

measures the potential and actual impacts of decisions.

The Leisure Partnership is introducing independently and externally assessed management systems via the Charter Mark and ISO 9001:2000 quality management systems. This will ensure that a cycle of continuous review and improvement is implemented. These systems will specifically focus on customer perception / satisfaction and requirements. In addition the other measures we have introduced above will, we believe, ensure the community consultation on improvements and changes improve and that customer service and usage will continue to increase.