

FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

PRESS RELEASE

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Council considers action to support Fenland's leisure centres amid energy crisis

Fenland District Council is looking into ways it can help maintain leisure services in the district amid spiralling energy costs.

Freedom Leisure has the contract to run Fenland's four leisure centres.

But the not-for-profit trust, which is still recovering from the effects of the pandemic, is now facing over £600,000 of extra energy costs next year, despite a recent support package from central Government to cap energy prices for businesses.

Freedom Leisure is now asking the Council to consider a range of practical and financial support, and potential changes to opening hours and concession prices, to help fund the hike in energy costs – and allow it to continue offering services that support the health and wellbeing of local communities.

The Council's Cabinet will discuss and agree options at its next meeting on Monday 14 November.

The four leisure centres operated by Freedom Leisure in Fenland are the George Campbell Leisure Centre in March, the Hudson Leisure in Wisbech, the Manor Leisure Centre in Whittlesey and Chatteris Leisure Centre.

Fenland District Council Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Cllr Chris Boden, said:

“The challenges facing Freedom Leisure in Fenland are replicated across the UK leisure industry, and we've already seen stories in other areas of prices increasing significantly, or services being cut and facilities closing – especially swimming pools which cost so much to heat.

“Leisure facilities are vital to the health and wellbeing of our residents so we're determined to do what we can to safeguard the services that Freedom Leisure provides. We will look at what action can be taken to relieve the impact of rocketing energy prices and what longer-term measures can be put in place to ensure their sustainability in future.”

Freedom Leisure had made a solid recovery after the pandemic, with a significant increase in user numbers; particularly with more children learning to swim. It has also implemented a range of energy efficiency measures to further reduce costs, but the energy crisis has added exceptional and unavoidable costs to the business.

A range of support options will now be considered by the Council's Cabinet.

An option to bring the operation of the leisure centres back 'in-house' under the Council has been considered but discounted at the present time as the Council would be in the same position as Freedom with paying increased energy costs and would also incur significant costs in transitioning the service back.

Cllr Sam Clark, the Council's Cabinet member for Leisure, said: "Despite Freedom working incredibly hard to recover from the pandemic, the rise in energy costs that the country is currently experiencing is creating a unique challenge. We recognise how important the services are to local people and want to do our best to preserve them."

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Notes to Editors

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