

Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee

21 February 2024



Reading
Borough Council
Working better with you

Title	GLL Annual Report November 2022 – December 2023
Purpose of the report	To note the report for information
Report status	Public report
Report author	Ben Stanesby, Active Leisure Manager Donna Pentelow, Assistant Director of Culture
Lead Councillor	Councillor Adele Barnett-Ward
Corporate priority	Thriving Communities
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. That Committee notes the contents of the presentation by GLL in respect of the operation of the leisure contract as detailed at paragraphs 3.1 to 3.13 of this report.2. That Committee notes the.<ol style="list-style-type: none">2.1. opening of the new facilities and swimming pool at Palmer Park Leisure Centre & Stadium in December 2022,2.2. opening of Rivermead Leisure Centre in July 2023 and the planned pools opening in summer 2024, both of which have been built to BREEAM excellent sustainability standards,2.3. successful refurbishments at South Reading and Meadway Leisure Centres.3. That Committee endorses the priorities for 2024/25 as set out in paragraph 3.20.4. That Committee notes the receipt of the Sport England Strategic Facilities Fund grant of £1.5m - a funding contribution towards the construction costs of the new leisure facilities at Rivermead and Palmer Park.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the performance and delivery of Leisure Services and development of new facilities by Greenwich Leisure Ltd (GLL) and to inform committee of the Council's success in securing a £1.5m grant from Sport England Strategic Facilities Fund towards the cost of Rivermead and Palmer Park leisure centres.
- 1.2. The leisure contract started on 1 July 2021 and GLL commenced the operational management of the Council's leisure centres at Rivermead Leisure Centre, Palmer Park Sports Stadium, South Reading Leisure Centre and Meadway Sports Centre. This is the second annual report that has been presented to Committee reporting on the contract's performance over the past year.
- 1.3. The Council's £40m investment programme in leisure centres has included significant works to all its leisure centres. Refurbishment works have been undertaken at Meadway Sports Centre to the swimming pool changing areas and works are underway at South

Reading Leisure Centre swimming pool and associated changing areas. The work to the swimming pool includes structural repairs to the pool tank.

- 1.4. The new Rivermead Leisure Centre opened in July 2023 with the pools set to open in summer 2024. This follows the opening of Palmer Park Leisure Centre & Stadium including a new 6 lane 25m community swimming pool in December 2022.
- 1.5. The increasing use of facilities continues to grow as new facilities open, and improvements are made. GLL also continue to broaden the range of services being provided including health initiatives and targeted activities. This shift in focus to the range of services offered is reflected in the priorities for 2024/25 as listed below
 - Continue to develop and grow the Healthwise Programme to increase participation by underrepresented groups and those with specific health conditions.
 - Continue to develop partnerships locally with schools and other community organisations to increase participation in physical activity beyond the boundary of the leisure centres.
 - Continue to improve the quality of service to customers using Trustpilot as the key customer feedback mechanism.
 - Improve data collection and analysis to measure the impact of the services provided and to engage and increase participation by underrepresented groups, reflecting the demographics of Reading.
 - Implement independent quality assessment of services (Quest) at Palmer Park and Rivermead.
- 1.6. This report introduces a presentation by Greenwich Leisure Limited, which will inform the Committee in more detail of the services that are being delivered, people accessing them and progress of the works described above.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. In August 2023 the Department for Media Culture and Sport published their Get Active strategy aimed at building a healthier nation by tackling high levels of inactivity and making sure that the sport and physical activity sector thrives for future generations. The Strategy sets out how the government will work together with the sector to achieve these aims by ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to get active. Provision of high-quality accessible facilities and services effectively targeted are a key driver in increasing participation in physical activity.
- 2.2. As part of the tender process for the GLL contract, the service specification defined target indicators and performance measures to deliver against the following nine Council objectives.
 - Improving health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities
 - Providing local economic benefit
 - Ensuring local people have the skills to prosper
 - Supporting safe and inclusive neighbourhoods
 - Promoting community cohesion
 - Educating, protecting and providing opportunities for young people
 - Supporting and caring for vulnerable adults and older people
 - Providing high quality services
 - Sustainability/ environmental improvements.

The contract continues to deliver against these outcomes in a variety of ways.

- 2.3. The Policy Committee on 21 September 2022 delegated to the Executive Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services in consultation with the Director of Finance, the Assistant Director for Legal and Democratic Services and the Lead

Councillor for Leisure and Culture to enter into Sport England funding agreements for £1.5m in two separate agreements one for Rivermead (£1m) and one at Palmer Park (£500k). £1.45m of the Sports England's Strategic Facilities Fund was received on the 25 November 2022, split one third for Palmer Park and two thirds for Rivermead. The remainder will be paid at the end of the defects period in summer 2025.

3. GLL's Performance 2023

- 3.1. Greenwich Leisure Ltd have operated the Council's Leisure Centres since 1st July 2021. Included within the contract is the operation of existing facilities and the design, build and operation of a new leisure centre and facilities at Rivermead and Palmer Park Sports Stadium respectively. Significant refurbishment has been undertaken at both Meadway and South Reading Centres over the last two years and is ongoing to South Reading's pool and associated changing facilities.
- 3.2. The investments at Meadway and South Reading have lifted tired facilities to a good standard. Work to the swimming facilities at South Reading are currently underway and are the last of the indoor public facilities to be addressed.
- 3.3. The new pool, gym and studio at Palmer Park opened in December 2022 and since opening has welcomed over 218,000 visitors. The numbers of predominantly children and young people participating in swimming lessons across the leisure centres has increased from 8,200 peaking at 10,700 in June 2023, just before the temporary pool at Rivermead closed as services were reconfigured facilitating the demolition of the centre and South Reading's pool closure for repairs.
- 3.4. The Council's £40m investment into leisure centres is reflected in the increased resident satisfaction in sport and leisure services, which has increased by 21% since the contract was started in 2021 and by 11% since 2022.
- 3.5. The gym, sports hall, café, soft play and studios at the new Rivermead Leisure Centre opened in July 2023 and the new pools are due for completion in summer 2024. The delay to the swimming facilities was due to GLL's contractor, Pellikaan Construction, requiring an abstraction licence from the Environment Agency (EA) enabling the ground water level to be lowered sufficiently to allow construction of the new diving pool. The licence to proceed was issued by the EA on 22 May 2023. The new pools are on target to open in summer 2024.
- 3.6. The investment into the leisure centres reflects the Council recognition that the provision of suitable and accessible sports facilities underpins facilitating participation in sports and physical activity and supports the delivery of the social and economic benefits that can be attributed to an active community.
- 3.7. Visits are now approaching a million per year to the Borough's four leisure centres reflecting the investment and improvements made helping meet needs and aligns with the Council's wider policies and priorities, including public health objectives and tackling health inequalities.
- 3.8. Nationally, recovery of attendance at leisure centres to pre Covid levels has been patchy geographically. The presentation by GLL, however, will outline the trends that are being experienced and how well Reading is performing in comparison, which is generally positive. However, direct full year on year comparisons are still difficult to make with extended closures for refurbishments at all centres over the last 12 to 24 months.
- 3.9. In addition, to growing attendance another key element of the contract is the introduction of effectively targeted activities to improve participation in physical activity and health for key groups of Reading's communities. As part of this process the Council has been working collaboratively to better define health programme targets to increase the numbers of people attending, and the quality of targeted activities being provided. These targeted

activities include, adult weight management, cardio rehabilitation, physical activity referral services. In 2024/25, GLL are working towards introducing falls prevention, child weight management, cancer pre/rehabilitation and diabetes programmes.

- 3.10. Work has been ongoing in 2023 between Public Health and GLL to refine the contract specification developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with supporting KPIs to measure and evidence the impact of the leisure contract on improving health and wellbeing across the life course through promoting healthy habits, with particular focus on physical activity.
- 3.11. Many of the indicators in the MoU set targets that increase over the 25 year contract period from a baseline set in the first full contract year. With facilities still being built out and opened, the baseline is still to be set to ensure an appropriate starting point is used.

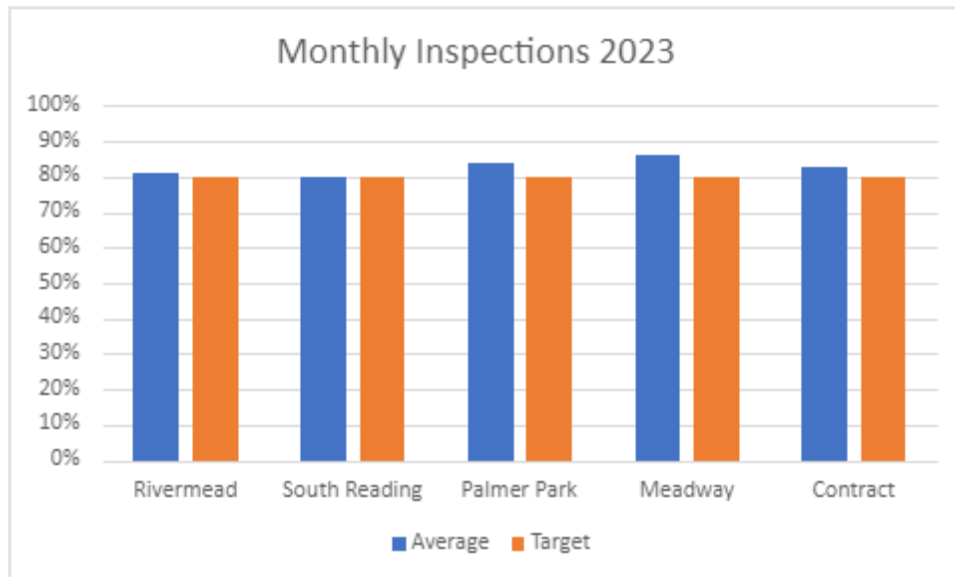
The MoU also sets new, or amends, targets and as this was formally agreed in May 2023 some KPI's are currently only reporting part year information. The targets are also set assuming all facilities are operating normally but for much of the year all facilities except Palmer Park have been partly closed for refurbishment or being built out. The KPI information below does here the less provide an indication on progress being made.

The MoU identifies programmes that will be introduced in the coming year, including Falls Prevention and Cancer Rehab. In future years, a more comprehensive performance scorecard will be reported, illustrating the impact of the service and performance of the GLL.

KPIs from MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) with Public Health	Full Year Target	Actual Year to Date Data
Number of courses and Participants completing Weight Management Programme	12 courses, 144 participants with 70% completing	10 courses each run over 3 months - statistics on people completing will not be available to April 2024 Rivermead 4 courses Palmer 4 Courses Meadway 2 Courses
Number of Participants attending Introduction into physical activity - Give It a Go Programme	180 people	137 – Participants are using multiple centres
Number of free swims provided including SEN (Special Educational needs)/Carers	Target to be set	6,705 swims provided currently there is not a breakdown by category Rivermead 1766 Plamer Park 1424 Meadway 2097 South Reading 1418 (pool closed for 3 months)
% of front-line staff trained in Make Every Contact Count	75% front line staff trained	All front-line staff trained
Number of referrals per year to the Physical Activity Referral Scheme (PARS)	500	484 Jan – Nov. Participants will likely be using more than one centre to access a range of activities. The programme last 3 months so there is a lag in data from starter to completion.

Mini Health Checks	X12 per year, per site	Following the first 7 health check events in centres effectiveness/value was reviewed due to low uptake. From September, health checks were moved to being provided by fitness instructors on request. In addition, health checks are now being provided at outreach and community events.
Health Promotions	X6 per year	12 ran (all promotions ran at all centres) attendees to 2024 programme to be used as target/benchmark in the future.

- 3.12. As more people are attending targeted services, the focus is now moving to collecting and analysing data to ensure that the services are being tailored to benefit those in most need, maximise the use of resources and reach, and identify and mitigate barriers to participation as this service is extended.
- 3.13. The provision of, and growth of attendance at these sessions has been slower than had been anticipated within the contract. This has been partly due to the first two years of GLL operations being focused on business recovery from Covid and build of new facilities. In the last 12months, GLL have employed a Healthy Communities Manager in Reading, specifically tasked with developing the activities targeting those with health conditions and from underrepresented groups. The impact of this post will be part of the GLL presentation along with the change in the breadth, and numbers of people, attending the healthy community programme.
- 3.14. The Council undertake a programme of regular contract monitoring and inspections of all four sites looking at but not limited to:
- cleanliness,
 - service delivery,
 - customer service
 - staffing.
- 3.15. The team conduct ad-hoc inspections accompanied by a manager from GLL. This highlights any issues and areas for improvement. These issues are then formally reported to GLL who must rectify them within a specified timeframe. There has been a constructive approach by GLL to inspections of Centres on average have met or exceeded the target quality throughout 2023.



3.16. The Council regularly meet with both GLL and Pellikaan to monitor the progress of the build programmes against timetable and budget, with the swimming pools at Rivermead on target to open this summer. Detailed progress against the build programme will be presented by GLL.

3.17. In 2023, the operation of the paddling pool at Christchurch Meadows was added into the GLL contract. Refurbishment of the filtration and dosing equipment was undertaken in April and May prior to opening. GLL were contracted to operate the paddling pool for the summer season from the start of the school Spring Half Term to the end of the school summer holidays.

To deliver a cost-effective service, GLL contracted temporary staff and specialist contractors, (to commission and decommission the pool at the start and end of the season) at the outset, with the Council making budget provision accordingly. Investment into the plant and technical contractors for the season provided significantly greater reliability with no days where the pool was closed due to technical failure, but this does reduce flexibility in extending the season at short notice.

3.18. The Council, GLL and Reading Football Club Community Trust (RFCCT) are working together to make better use of underused areas of South Reading Leisure Centre to accommodate a range of social inclusion initiatives run by the Trust. These aim to provide services to young people where mainstream education services are not meeting their educational and social needs. Football is used a vehicle to engage students raising self - confidence, providing greater life skills and facilitating improved educational attainment. The programme delivered from South Reading Leisure Centre will include:

- **Alternative Provision (RAP):** The RAP programme is set up to work with more challenging boys & girls who struggle in mainstream school.
- **Education 16 - 19 year provision:** delivered in partnership with academic providers.
- **Reading College:** Level 1, 2 and 3 in Sport courses being delivered in partnership with the college
- **SCL Education:** Level 1 – 2 courses being delivered in partnership with SCL Education (a 16yr + college specialist college using sport as an educational tool) for both mainstream and SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) students
- **Kicks Targeted –** The Trust's Kicks (football sessions) targeted programme offers a package of mentoring & 1-2-1 support which incorporates sessions to reduce offending behaviour, improve life skills and constructive activities for participating young people to reengage them into their local communities.

- **Premier League Kicks:** 22 weekly Kicks sessions engaging with over 300 young people, all these sessions take place in targeted areas within local authorities. Premier League Kicks uses the power of football to connect with young
- 3.19. South Reading Leisure centre is being used as it is close to Reading Football Club Community Trust main base at the Select Car Leasing Stadium club and will contribute towards the Council's Tackling Inequalities Strategy being located within the Council's Place Based Pilot area.
- 3.20. Overall, GLL are making significant strides in delivering good services, with service breadth and quality approaching what would have been expected had there not been the Covid19 pandemic, which caused significant impact to the leisure sector nationally as well as locally. The partnership is moving towards business as usual and direct comparison to the contract as originally envisaged. Therefore, the following priorities have been identified for the partnership to focus on in 2024/25:
- Continue to develop and grow the Healthwise Programme to increase participation by underrepresented groups and those with specific health conditions.
 - Continue to develop partnerships locally with schools and other community organisations to increase participation in physical activity beyond the boundary of the leisure centres.
 - Continue to improve the quality of service to customers using Trustpilot as the key customer feedback mechanism.
 - Improve data collection and analysis to measure the impact of the services provided and to engage and increase participation by underrepresented groups, reflecting the demographics of Reading.
 - Implement independent quality assessment of services (Quest) at Palmer Park and Rivermead.
- 3.21. Craig Woodward, Partnership Manager and Steph Smith, Area Community Sports Manager from GLL will present to the Committee progress made in the key streams of the leisure contract including:
- Improvements made at South Reading and Meadway Sports Centres
 - New Build Programme Update (Palmer Park and Rivermead)
 - Usage Levels
 - Programmes
 - Customer Feedback
 - Targeted Health Activities and Community Engagement

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

4.1. Healthy Environment

- 4.1.1. The Council is working with the leisure provider, GLL, to increase physical activity and transform the leisure offer in Reading to improve the health outcomes for residents. In addition to overarching targets specific health improvement programmes are being introduced.
- 4.1.2. The significant uplift in the quality of facilities is delivering attractive and affordable and accessible services to improve the physical and mental health of residents of the Borough. The presentation by GLL will identify the increased footfall through our centres and the mechanisms in place to provide accessible services.

- 4.1.3. The new leisure facilities at Rivermead and Palmer Park contribute to tackling climate change by being BREAAAM excellent.

4.2. Thriving Communities

- 4.2.1. The Council is working with its leisure partner, GLL, in the delivery of key national and local strategic policies. The investment undertaken across all local leisure centres and action is making a positive difference to people's lives on a local level and will contribute to public health outcomes.
- 4.2.2. Whilst the town's culture and leisure opportunities are accessed by the vast majority of residents there are significant cohorts who face barriers to access. This can lead to increased levels of obesity and poorer health and well-being for both adults and children in respect of physical activity; and poorer quality of life, mental health, social isolation and well-being. A series of activities are being run to lessen these barriers and widen participation and promote them in areas where participation is identified by GLL as being low.

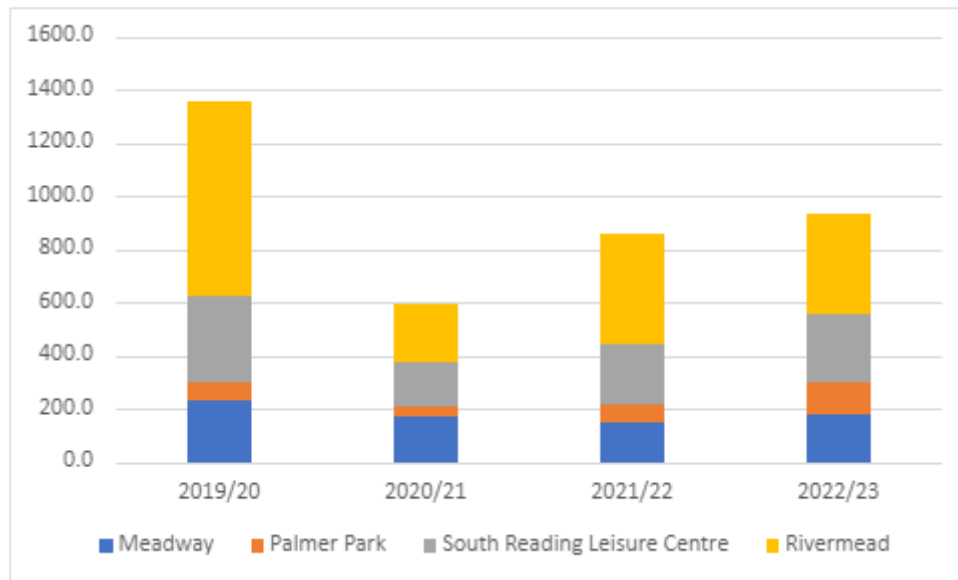
4.3. Inclusive economy

- 4.3.1. The contracts relating to the building of new facilities includes employment of local people and offering local apprentice training. Leisure facilities are predominantly staffed by local people and are providing apprenticeships and training opportunities. Provision of high quality and affordable cultural and leisure facilities are important in ensuring Reading continues to be identified as a great place to live and work.

5. Environmental and Climate Implications

- 5.1. The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers). The old leisure facilities were ageing and do not have the benefit of being built to modern standards including current energy efficiency standards. The new facilities at Rivermead and Palmer Park are being built to BREEAM Excellent standards, using renewables where possible to achieve building control compliance and to help reduce carbon emissions and improve environmental efficiency. A bid was submitted to the Swimming Pool Support Fund for works to improve the energy efficiency of swimming pools. The outcome of the application will be known in March 2024.
- 5.2. Greenwich Leisure Ltd has managed the four leisure centres in Reading since July 2021, with the newly extended Palmer Park facility opening in December 2022. The emissions from these leisure facilities are reported in the Council's 'wider influence' emissions dataset and represent a significant source of emissions within Reading. As such, to ensure continued improvements within its scope of influence, RBC has invested heavily in energy efficiency, decarbonisation and renewable energy generation within the leisure facilities, all of which will support the reduction of the carbon emissions from the operations.
- 5.3. A further opening up and increased use of the leisure facilities post-Covid, combined with the opening of the larger and greatly improved facilities at Palmer Park Sports Stadium, can be seen in 2022/23, with a 26% year-on-year increase on carbon emissions compared to 2021/22. However, when comparing against the last pre-Covid year, 2019/20, which is a more meaningful comparison, the carbon emissions from the leisure facilities as a whole are now 31% lower (see figure 1). In other words, we have greatly enhanced and expanded the leisure centre offer in Reading but reduced emissions from it at the same time.

Figure 1: Comparison of Leisure Centre emissions 2019/20 to 2022/23



6. Community Engagement

- 6.1. GLL within their presentation will outline how they are engaging with key partners, users and clubs especially as services are disrupted during the improvements being undertaken.
- 6.2. The new facilities at Rivermead and Palmer Park were subject to statutory public consultation as part of the planning approval process leading to planning consent on 31 March 2021.
- 6.3. The presentation from GLL will outline the steps they are undertaking to engage with the local community and local people.

7. Equality Implications

- 7.1. In addition to the Human Rights Act 1998 the Council is required to comply with the Equalities Act 2010. Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010 requires the Council to have due regard to the need to:
 - eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 7.2. An EIA was not relevant to the decision to accept the Sport England Strategic Facilities Fund. However, part of the conditions of the Sport England grant is to ensure equality of access to services.

8. Other Relevant Considerations

- 8.1. None for this report

9. Legal Implications

- 9.1. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

10. Financial Implications

- 10.1. Since the start of the contract in 2021, the management fee for running the leisure centres has been a payment from the Council to GLL, in 2023/24 this is around £0.600m. However, from 2024/25 the management fee will start to become a payment

to the Council from GLL, eventually rising to over £0.900m. These payments are subject to fluctuations due to inflation and the impacts of utility price rises which the Council is responsible for. The MTFS (Medium Term Financial Strategy) has a total £1.196m reduction in budget/savings over the 3 years 2024/2025 to 2026/2027 reflecting the management fee becoming due to the Council.

- 10.2. The £1.5m Sport England Grant has been included within the capital budgets set for the building of facilities at Rivermead and Palmer Park.
- 10.3. There are no direct financial implications from this report, further financial modelling continues to be undertaken as part of the usual budget monitoring and the budget setting process for 2024/2025 to reflect latest assumptions on Inflation and utilities costs.

11. Timetable for Implementation

- 11.1. A large part of the build and refurbishment programme has been complete with the following items to completed,
 - South Reading Pool Tank structural repairs - Spring 2024
 - Rivermead swimming pools and Diving facility – Summer 2024

12. Background Papers

- 12.1. None.