

Loughton Leisure Centre Customer Forum - Monday 5th March 2017

Report by Councillor R Brookes and Councillor G Chambers

Unlike most of the Loughton Leisure Centre Customer Forums, this meeting had no agenda and had been given over to three of the managers from *Places for People*, to talk through their plans for LLC and the other centres in the Epping Forest District. The forum was well attended and including several members of Epping Forest Swimming Club's Committee, Peter Charman (EFDC) and many regular centre users keen to find out what the new company had planned.

Places for People had began as a housing association and had branched out into managing leisure centres on behalf of local Councils, where they currently managed over a hundred leisure centres.

Places for People were in the process of appointing a new manager for Loughton and *Everyone Active* had been generous in the access given to the new company prior to the takeover of the contract on 1 April 2017. The new IT systems would be introduced and from the middle of March the data handover would begin with the online booking system temporarily being unavailable. The Centre would have a new phone number from 17 March 2017 (01992 564574). All members would receive new cards and the booking system for classes would change with the removal of the waiting list. Places for People would introduce free swimming for children under eight years of age and parents would need to register their children for this scheme. A new type of membership for swimming only would be introduced and a direct debit of £24.99 a month would give a full paying adult unlimited swimming. There would be new pool cover and Poolview would be installed in all the Epping Forest pools. The Poolview was an above and below water camera system, which would help the lifeguards survey the water and should improve the safety of swimmers. The intention of the new contractor was not to make any major changes to the programme of classes or pool-timetables for the first three months until they had observed how things were running. Places for People had a different policy towards personal trainers to Everyone Active and the new company's policy was to employ them directly and not on a self-employed basis on their premises.

One of the first projects would be building the new Leisure centre in Waltham Abbey and the members of Epping Forest Swimming Club had asked to look at the plans for the new pool. They had submitted comments during the public consultation in 2016 and expressed disappointment that there would only be a small viewing area to the teaching pool and no viewing area for the main pool, thus making it not suitable for galas. It was hoped that a large extension to Loughton Leisure Centre (subject to the usual planning process) would start in the autumn and a refurbishment of Epping and Ongar Sports Centres later on. The extensions would be two storeys and create a one hundred and fifty station gym. The existing gym would be turned into two studios and there would be a purpose built cycling studio. As far as possible they would try to keep the centre open during the building work and this year the LLC would open on both Easter Bank holidays (Friday 14 April and Monday 17 April 2017) and six hour openings of the both pools and the gym.

The lead petitioner of the parking petition raised the question of parking subsidies for Centre members and expressed her disappointment with the Council. The new management made no commitment to a subsidy and the swimming club asked for something in writing to protect their pool time with the new company.

Members of the forum raised a number of other matters including cleanliness issues, broken showers and the new company's complaints procedures. The forum expressed their thanks

to Kirsty, who had been acting centre manager with Kim since the beginning of January 2017.

The date of the next meeting of the forum was set for Monday 10 July at 7.00 p.m.