

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

LEISURE and ARTS ADVISORY BOARD

14 January 2008

**Report of the Chief Leisure Officer and the
Cabinet Member for Leisure, Youth and Arts**

Part 1- Public

**Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken
by the Cabinet Member)**

1 MYSTERY SHOPPER REPORTS

Summary

This report provides Members with the results of the 2007 Mystery Shopper visits to the Council's main leisure facilities. The report identifies a number of key areas for improvement, which will either be addressed immediately, or incorporated in the relevant service improvement plans for each facility.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Members may be aware that over the last few years mystery shopper visits have been undertaken at the Council's main leisure facilities.

1.1.2 The visits have in the past been carried out by Quality Leisure Management Ltd (QLM), which undertook two visits at each facility throughout the course of the year. Whilst QLM remain the assessor for Poulton Wood Golf Centre, the indoor leisure facilities used a different provider in 2007, Right Directions Ltd (RDL), as the company's report format is more closely allied to the Quest Award criteria. RDL has also undertaken a programme of customer care training for LSBU staff linked to the report findings at each site.

1.1.3 The mystery shopper rates the facility against a range of criteria including cleanliness, housekeeping, maintenance, customer care and supervision.

1.1.4 The accepted "pass mark" applied by both companies is 60%, and this has become recognised across the leisure industry as an acceptable standard. The 60% pass mark is included in Leisure Service Performance Plans as a performance target for each facility, and the results are reported annually in the Council's Corporate Performance Plan.

1.2 Results

1.2.1 Members will note that the pass mark of 60% was achieved for all visits, and the overall average for all the facilities provided by this Council was 74%.

1.2.2 The scores for each facility in 2007 are listed below:

Facility	Visit 1 – Score (%)	Visit 2 – Score (%)	2007 Average Score (%)
Larkfield Leisure Centre	76	77	76.5
Angel Centre	71	71	71
Tonbridge Pool	75	79	77
Poult Wood Golf Centre	74	66	70

1.2.3 By using RDL the Council can compare performance against overall Quest Award ratings. The current Quest database of all registered sites shows:

- the 'pass mark' is 60%
- the industry mean is 70%
- the upper quartile score is 73%

1.2.4 Members will note from the above that the 2007 average scores for this Council's indoor leisure facilities are all above the industry mean score, with Tonbridge Pool and the Larkfield Leisure Centre in the upper quartile.

1.2.5 QLM at Poult Wood also compare performance but in slightly different way and, based on their own surveys, the performance of the Centre is measured as follows:

- industry low score 46%
- industry average score 66%
- industry high score 81%

1.2.6 Members will note from the above that PWGC's average score is above the industry average score.

1.3 Improvements

1.3.1 Detailed reports are received for each facility after each visit. The reports have been analysed, and a number of improvement actions have been identified for each facility. Where practicable improvements will be implemented without delay, with others being considered within relevant facility service improvement plans.

1.3.2 A summary of the key areas for improvement are detailed below:

- Larkfield Leisure Centre
 - Poor lifeguarding was identified on one visit
 - Upselling opportunities
 - Environmental management

Slide maintenance
 Display of staff photographs and qualifications

- Angel Centre

General redecoration
 Staff appearance
 Cross promotions
 Telephone answering
 Retention approach in fitness room
 Display of staff photographs and qualifications

- Tonbridge Swimming Pool

Lifeguarding standards
 Environmental management
 Opportunity for verbal feedback
 Telephone information regarding Child Admissions Policy
 Pool party packages

- Poult Wood Golf Centre

Minor cleanliness issues but generally good
 Building looks rather tired in places
 More recycling needs to be encouraged
 Opportunities to improve leaflets to give a stronger identity
 Ladies changing area hot

1.3.3 The results will be displayed on the customer information boards in each facility reception area; will be discussed at the facility customer panels and will also be published in Spotlight.

1.3.4 It is felt that the move to RDL has been positive, and consideration will be given to changing companies at PWGC in 2008.

1.4 Legal Implications

1.4.1 None.

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.5.1 The cost of the Mystery Shopper visits (£300 per visit) is met from the Leisure Services market research revenue budget. The reports are felt to offer good value for money in monitoring the performance of the Council's leisure facilities, and identifying improvements for the future.

1.6 Risk Assessment

- 1.6.1 It is essential that the Council regularly monitors performance of its leisure facilities, and implements customer improvements to maintain and increase levels of attendance. The Council's leisure facilities are operated in an increasingly competitive market, and need to focus on service delivery arrangements.

1.7 Conclusion/Recommendations

- 1.7.1 It is encouraging that for all the visits undertaken, the scores for each of the leisure facilities achieved above the accepted "pass mark", and that on average this Council is performing very well compared to others.
- 1.7.2 The mystery shopper programme is considered to be a very useful means of measuring performance and identifying areas of improvement. This year's results will be considered carefully within the relevant service improvement plans for each facility.
- 1.7.3 It is therefore **RECOMMENDED** that the 2007 Mystery Shopper results be noted, the identified areas of improvement be addressed, and the results be considered within the relevant service improvement plans for each facility.

The Chief Leisure Officer confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

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