



Places Leisure Strategy 2023/24



Strategic priority

This strategic plan lays out the priority areas of focus and effort for Places Leisure over the next 5 years. Underpinned by an empowering and high-performing culture, we will put healthy communities at the heart of our delivery to drive future growth, and thereby support Places for People's commitment to communities and its desire to be the UK's leading social enterprise.



Because Community Matters
The Places Leisure strategy to deliver the Places for People outcomes

We want to be – and be known as – the UK's leading health and wellbeing enabler
We are changing lives by creating active places and healthy people for communities to thrive

We will create and support thriving communities by..

1 Making healthy communities
Delivering the highest quality service to support active, healthy communities

2 Developing healthy communities
Forging collaboration with communities, health and wellbeing partners, and other Places for People businesses, to deliver a comprehensive service

3 Strengthening healthy communities
Delivering an accessible hub for the entire community to meet and flourish

Aspirations

Customers

>30m engaged

Engagement

>85%

Effort

Effort = 5 NPS >40

Unutilised Space

<20%

Profit

Income growth >4%
Operating margin >5%

Social Value

>£200m

Net Zero

By 2035

How to win..

Customers

Our customers are our clients, members and users, but we also serve the entire community

People

Everyone is equally important, trusted and cared for. Everyone serves our purpose

Culture

Empowering and high-performing such that staff and customers are attracted and retained

Effortless

Access to, and management of, our services is enabled through effortless processes

Integration

The needs of a healthy community and operational efficiencies are maximised through the collective power and expertise of Places for People

Innovation

We are the first to understand the evolving needs of our communities, the first to adapt to these demands, and the first to drive growth in the emerging revenue streams

Sustainability

We lead the sector and community in embracing sustainable practices, delivering a healthier environment for current and future generations

Our capabilities

A deep understanding of our customers

Data and insight to drive flawless decisions

Technology supported automation to enable customer-focused people

Unflinching professionalism in pursuit of operational excellence and safety

An inclusive employer, invested in developing all our people

Mutually supportive client relationships enabling collaborative partnerships

Operating environment

The strategic plan comes as the UK emerges from a global pandemic and teeters on a recession, driven by complex economic and social conditions. We should recognise the achievements of the last two years to keep the business afloat, colleagues employed and customers engaged. The re-opening plan has been executed impeccably, maintaining the increased levels of cleanliness now demanded and supporting people back into their fitness regimes. However, we have only recovered to 80% of our pre-COVID membership levels, driven in part by the continued rise of low-cost gyms, impacting our already narrow profit margin of <1.5%.

This is now exacerbated by war in Europe which is driving volatility in the energy market. The net outcome is spiralling energy costs that we cannot offset through the various mechanisms available, and continued uncertainty ahead. Rising energy costs are contributing to inflation that defies being passed to customers, and in turn drives increased wage expectations. Agility and resilience will be key to weather the economic storm, and this obligates us to be based on strong economic foundations.

Onerous contracts unequal to the world in which they now exist add complexity to the operating environment, and often prevent us from supporting the very communities we are charged with serving. Concurrently, the demands of our clients are ever increasing as they recognise the opportunity for broader social value from their leisure services. We must navigate this difficult terrain and work with our clients to find compromises, trading on the strong foundations of the essential services we can provide, and the broader opportunities afforded by being an integral part of Places for People.

The same pressures impacting the business are impacting our current and future customers. Their needs will change as a result, and we must be equal to the task of understanding these needs intimately. This will require us to be active and visible in our communities. Brand awareness will help customers understand what we can deliver, and engagement will help us understand what our potential customers want. The breadth of services provided by Places for People also delivers a unique insight into our communities, and the lives of some of our customers who are in the greatest need. We must exploit the full extent of this information to ensure we can impact these people in the most positive ways.

As we pivot to meet these new demands and needs, we are likely to facilitate and deliver unfamiliar services. The success, or otherwise, of these initiatives will continue to rest on the financial stability of the business. Experimentation will be key to establish viability, where impact and value for money is uncertain. This will ensure we innovate in a sustainable way and maintain our long-term health. This means we should be ambitious, but not reckless.

Within this context the Places Leisure strategy has been developed.

Our winning aspiration

Places Leisure has historically operated as a stand-alone business, separated from its parent company, Places for People. Irrespective of this, Places Leisure has always had a philosophy of creating active places and healthy people. However, this has often had a narrow emphasis on delivering in-house services and activities, focussed on existing members and casual users.

Places for People has determined that it exists 'Because Community Matters.' In turn, Places Leisure exists 'because healthy communities matter,' and we have set a winning aspiration to be known as the UK's leading health and wellbeing enabler. However, health and wellbeing must be interpreted in its broadest sense. This is about looking beyond the walls of a leisure centre and into the communities we serve. By understanding the needs of that community, in partnership with our clients, we can create behavioural changes which improve the physical and mental wellbeing of individuals, and the social wellbeing of the collective. These same partnerships can also ensure we contribute to creating a healthier environment in which our communities can thrive.

This demands a comprehensive approach to the health and wellbeing of our communities. What is good for our communities is also good for the business. Greater engagement will lead to increased brand awareness, increased footfall, and increased membership. More importantly, it will generate lifestyle changes which will help reduce the burden on NHS and social care services, and ensure the leisure sector is considered an essential service for all communities. We want to position ourselves at the forefront of the sector in leading this evolution, by **creating active places and healthy people for communities to thrive.**



Where we will win

The key to where we will achieve this winning aspiration is in the communities we serve. We must recognise the core service we provide, centred around swimming and fitness. These services must be of the highest quality to ensure they deliver the opportunities for participants to **learn-like-live**. Therefore, we must consider the full customer journey and enable participation across the ability spectrum.

But we also need to do more to engage the broader community and provide access to comprehensive services. This will require us to collaborate with all health and wellbeing partners, to deliver outreach activities and fused services within our leisure centres. Working with governing bodies and charities, we can combine our resources to take our services to those hard-to-reach people; the people with the greatest need; and the people who will benefit most by improving their health and wellbeing. Within our leisure centres we can also facilitate the delivery of other providers, whether these are medical, educational or other health related services

Health and wellbeing is also more than just fitness, medical needs and education; it is about broader social engagement and cohesion, and we want to ensure our facilities can be used by the entire community, irrespective of their interests. Therefore, we will also encourage all clubs, charities and societies to exploit the spaces within our facilities, ensuring they are accessible and welcoming spaces, where the community wants to meet and flourish. In doing so, our centres will become the beating heart of the community.

Collectively, we will help communities learn about health and wellbeing, like the benefits it provides, and support the behavioural change to live a life which improves their outcomes.





How we will win 2023-2028

These services will be delivered by focussing on four strategic pillars.

Customers

Customers come in the form of local authority clients, members, casual users and the broader community. Each has a unique set of needs and requirements.

We will invest in the relationships with our clients through the establishment of a Healthy Communities team. It will collaborate with clients to identify opportunities to drive the health and wellbeing strategy in the community, securing funding streams and exercising due diligence to ensure each proposition meets a commercial framework. Initiatives with national relevance will be packaged and communicated across the business to support replication and best practice.

Promoting and delivering a more comprehensive social value package will also strengthen our proposition in future tenders. This will translate into growth of the business over the lifetime of this strategy, through new acquisitions and contract extensions. This is vital to improving our profit margin and the long-term health of the organisation.

Outreach activities will drive brand awareness and lead to increased footfall within our centres. Interaction in the community will generate greater insight into the needs and requirements of the people. This in turn will support increased revenue through the hiring of spaces, casual users and conversions into full memberships. Insights from external engagements will be fed back to Places for People and our clients to inform future initiatives across the group. The collation of this data and its link to social value will support our strategic narrative, shifting how leisure is perceived by the public and supporting future tender processes.

We will strive to make every engagement effortless, considering how the complete customer journey is simple and intuitive. Where our people interact with customers, the service delivered will be of the highest standard, achieved through high quality learning, development and mentoring. This will ensure customers remain satisfied and existing memberships are retained.

Culture

We are a people-delivered service provider; the customer experience is directly attributable to the people with whom they interact and thereby the culture of the organisation. Equally, the people who interact directly with our customers and live alongside them in their communities are the people who know our customers best. We trust them.

We will create a culture which empowers the frontline to work independently to deliver the strategy. This does not mean they are abandoned; they can rely on high levels of support and collaboration from across Places for People. Everyone is vital and of equal importance; new ideas are welcomed from any part of the business. Those with genuine merit will be decided and acted upon quickly, and a lack of ambition will not present a barrier to progress. Transparency and information exchange will be key to openness and effectiveness. A fun, innovative, supportive, compassionate and invigorating workplace will engender these behaviours. This culture can only be created by those in the privileged position of leading others, delivering on their obligation really to lead.

New skills are required to support this shift in emphasis. Learning and development will be a key element to upskilling the workforce. This starts with effective communication of the strategy and embedding the organisational culture. This will not be sufficient in itself, and we will need to evolve the learning, development and mentoring programme to provide the skills required for a community-led approach. This will include leadership

development to embed the right behaviours at all levels of the organisation. Training delivery will rely on generating short-term capacity at the frontline, but this small investment will pay dividends in staff retention and succession planning.

With a highly skilled workforce, we will reinforce our efforts to improve retention and engagement by systematically addressing the issues raised in the Big Colleague Survey. Concurrently, we will exploit a renewed focus on driving brand awareness to attract new talent to join the business. A similar investment of time and effort will be required to ensure we are a fully inclusive employer. Barriers must be carefully considered and addressed. Only by doing this can we benefit from true diversity of thought, and genuinely represent the communities we serve. We will ensure this high-performing team is cared for and supported by building on the success of the wellbeing hub and ensuring we know our people, such that issues can be addressed collaboratively.

This collective investment in our people will lead to an engaged workforce, which identifies with our core purpose and reflects the culture we need to deliver success. Above all, our people will always have the moral courage to do what is right, however hard, to be accountable and never to walk on by or turn a blind eye.



Governance

Simple and effective governance is an enabler of successful delivery. We need to be able to harness the collective capabilities of Places for People, without adding undue complexity and bureaucracy. Continued commercial viability will provide the bedrock for a thriving and growing business, restlessly able to exploit opportunities.

The executive line of authority and accountability will be reinforced from the frontline to the CEO. Simple and universal metrics will drive the behaviours sought across the business. Clear priorities set by the Senior Leadership Team will provide focus and inform resource allocation. A frontline forum, supported by a series of workshops, will provide a voice quickly to identify impediments and possible resolutions. An empowered executive action team will ensure priorities are delivered quickly and effectively. Just as we want the customer journey to be effortless, we also want our business processes and systems to be effortless. This must be supported by maintaining an assurance and audit programme which causes the least disruption, whilst ensuring we keep our customers and people safe, and remain legally compliant.

The complete portfolio of businesses in Places for People offers a unique opportunity to enhance the Places Leisure offer. Mutually beneficial relationships will be identified and developed to integrate functions and drive collaboration on outputs. This will start with, but is not limited to, the enabling functions, where functional alignment will allow the combined capabilities to be focussed on identified priorities. Careful consideration will be given to developing the service level agreements to enable effective matrix management and to maintain accountability. The establishment of a Healthy Communities Management Group will also galvanise all Places for People businesses in supporting healthy community initiatives. As these linkages and understanding develop, combined business development opportunities will present an aspirational goal.

A robust commercial framework will inform decision-making to ensure new initiatives can be sustained in the long-term and drive revenue growth. This will not prevent change or the exploitation of opportunities, but will force each one to be viewed in terms of its value proposition.

Innovation

Innovation at the speed of relevance and sustainable practices are the lifeblood of maintaining a healthy business.

The enhanced customer insight and direct feedback from the frontline will identify opportunities for the development concepts and solutions, leading to new revenue streams and growth. We will exploit the flat governance structures identified to enact high tempo change through rapid experimentation and scaling. An improving profit margin will allow us to reinvest more financial resource into supporting these initiatives.

As in many organisations, our technology has been underinvested in. It is vital to our bottom line and the morale of our people and customers. An associated technology strategy has been developed to deliver an improved service. This is currently focussed on the customer journey, but will also consider

the 'back-office' functions in due course. This will take time, with the transition to the new leisure management system not due to complete until Q2 2025. However, by streamlining our business processes and information requirements, we will seek to minimise the short-term impact.

Energy efficiency is also a key focus, to drive down costs in an uncertain market. We will continue to identify ways to reduce overall energy use, at the same time as finding greener sources of energy. This will require collaboration with clients and green technology industries, but together we can drive towards a common goal of net zero by 2035. This will help create healthier environments for current and future generations to enjoy.



Creating active places and healthy people for communities to thrive

Learn

Educating communities on health and wellbeing

Like

Enabling communities to experience the benefits of improved health and wellbeing

Live

Support communities to live a life which improves health and wellbeing

Customers

Understand who we serve and their unique needs

Culture

Create the correct culture to drive the outcomes

Governance

Develop the systems to support frontline delivery whilst maintaining business assurance

Innovation

Encourage an entrepreneurial approach which drives change to meet evolving needs

Places Leisure



placesleisure.org