

**Freedom Leisure takes over running of Ashford Borough's main leisure facilities:**

I am pleased to update you that a new operator, Freedom Leisure, has taken over the day to day running of the borough's main leisure facilities.

Freedom Leisure is a not-for-profit leisure trust which manages leisure and cultural facilities on behalf of partners across the UK, including two centres in Kent, in Maidstone and Sandwich.

They took over the reins from Ashford Leisure Trust (ALT) on 1 September and will be working in partnership with the council to oversee significant investment in leisure facilities and a transformation in the way they are provided, boosting participation and improving the health and wellbeing of residents.

Around £7.5 million investment is planned including refurbishment of the gym and a new soft play and clip and climb centre at the Stour Centre and a new fitness suite at the Julie Rose Stadium, while both reception areas and the catering offer will be improved with the introduction of Costa Coffee. Attention will be paid to improving hygiene and distancing in light of the Coronavirus outbreak

As part of the new arrangements ALT will step back from the future management of the operation of the Stour Centre, Julie Rose Stadium and other leisure sites owned by the council, allowing the council to enter into a contract directly with Freedom Leisure.

ALT will now focus its time on fulfilling its charitable objectives of improving the health and wellbeing of the residents of Ashford, with a particular focus on those who are in disadvantaged groups or with health challenges.

Current members will be able to use the facilities at Julie Rose Stadium, including a temporary 50 station gym while the Stour Centre is closed for refurbishment.

The new lease is for 15 years with an option to extend this by a further five years.

I hope you will agree that encouraging residents to stay healthy is especially important in the current situation, and this new contract will offer the best opportunity for them to do this.

Gerry Clarkson CBE, BA (Hons)

**Leader - Ashford Borough Council**

**Distribution:** All Members of the Parish or Town Council, and representatives of the Community Forums (Please do not circulate beyond the above recipients).