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# Soft Market Test

For

Procurement and management of six leisure facilities

West Northamptonshire Council

(Ref: WNC00000351)

# Section 1: Introduction

## General Requirements

* 1. The purpose of this document is to briefly explain to suppliers the business and technical requirements and the expected scope for the procurement and operation of its leisure centres with a potential redevelopment / new leisure centre in order suppliers can explain the relevance of products, services and their experience to the requirements.
	2. **Please note:** this market testing exercise is **not** an invitation to tender or a request for formal expressions of interest. This document does not form any part of an invitation to tender. West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) is issuing this request for **information only**. Any supplier invited to present to WNC is doing so to support market research only and to help make any potential procurement process more focused and efficient. No supplier selection or supplier preference is implied.

## Confidentiality and Freedom of Information (FOI)

* 1. **Please note:** all information included in this Soft Market Test is confidential and only for the recipients’ knowledge. No information included in this document or in discussions connected to it may be disclosed to any other party without prior written authorisation.
	2. All responses will be treated confidentially. However, please be aware that we are subject to the disclosure requirements of the FOI Act and that potentially any information we hold is liable to disclosure under that Act. For this reason, we strongly advise that any information you consider to be confidential is labelled as such. In the event a request is subsequently made for disclosure under FOI the request will be dealt with in accordance with the legislation.

## Background

3.1 West Northamptonshire Council has six leisure facilities which will be tendered in a contract to commence **1 April 2026**. The leisure facilities included are listed below:

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| **Daventry Leisure Centre****Lodge Road****Daventry****NN11 4FP****Built in 1996** | **Moulton Leisure Centre****Gate 4 Pitsford Road Moulton****Northampton** **NN3 7QL****Built in 2012 and part refurbished 2020** | **Daventry Sports Park****Browns Road** **off Leamington Way****Daventry****NN11 4NS****Built in 1990’s and** **3G pitch refurbished 2018** |
| 95 station gym6 court sports halls2 studios25 metre pool / leisure water Teaching poolPool spectator area Treatment rooms | 80 station gym25m swimming pool with moveable floor 2 Hydrotherapy poolsStudioSpin studioSauna, spa and steam roomTreatment rooms  | Full size flood lit 3G pitch Changing rooms part refurbished 20184 full size grass pitches  |

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| **Danes Camp Leisure Centre** **Clannell Road****Northampton** **NN4 0RX****Built in 1987** | **Mounts Baths** **Upper Mounts****Northampton** **NN1 3DN****Built in 1936** **Part refurbished 2016** **Art deco pool** **Grade II listed building** | **Lings Forum Leisure Centre****Billing Brook Road Northampton****NN3 8JR****Built in 1970’s** |
| 68 station gym 4 court sports hallStudioSpin studioFree form leisure pool Steam room / sauna Pool spectator area  | 60 station gym 30 metre poolTeaching pool Steam Room, Sauna Turkish Bath Studio Pool spectator area  | 65 station gym 6 court sports hall 25m poolSpin studio200-seater 1 screen cinema Studio  |

WNC is currently considering adding an Athletics Track / changing rooms to the portfolio of facilities, no decision has been made. Please feel free to comment on this aspect in response to Question 10.

## Soft Market Test Timetable

* 1. Please read this document and if you feel your organisation is able to contribute to this process, please complete the questionnaire and return, via email to procurement@westnorthants.gov.uk by 29 November 2023.
	2. Following receipt of the questionnaires; none, some or all respondents may be contacted to clarify responses, and maybe, invited to attend a 1:1 meeting to discuss matters. These meetings should be viewed as informal discussions; and in no way constituting any form of agreement between the Council and the operator.
	3. A decision will then be made by WNC on the best procurement approach

The Soft Market Test timetable is set out below:

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| **Stage** | **Date** |
| Deadline for receipt of responses to Soft Market Test questions. | 29 November 2023 |
| The Council *may* wish to clarify any answers via email.  | During December 2023 |
| The Council *may* wish to undertake subsequent 1:1 meetings with operators. | During January 2024 |
| Decision on the way forward will follow once Members have been consulted on the Soft Market Test / any Weston Favell Hub update  | February - March 2024  |

* 1. Potential responders will not be prejudiced in any future procurement processes by either responding or not responding, in part or in whole, to this soft market test exercise.

# Section 2: Identification of Requirement

## Current Situation

West Northamptonshire Council ‘the Council’ wishes to engage with the leisure operator market to better define the procurement process and to develop a commercially viable, community aware, high-quality management of the leisure services serving the needs of the local population.

The Council’s six leisure facilities are different styles and ages, however, one centre, Lings Forum Leisure Centre is 50 years old and does need to be replaced / refurbished.

In 2022, the Council applied for £20m of Levelling Up fund to replace Lings Forum Leisure Centre and a wider number of buildings (Adult Services, Children’s Services, GP Surgery) to develop the Weston Favell Hub, an ambitious combined leisure / health social services facility, the total project cost is approximately £50m. The funding application was unsuccessful.

WNC will continue to apply for further external funding as opportunities are presented.

The Council has a Corporate Plan, Anti-Poverty Strategy and will develop its services to align with the Integrated Care Northamptonshire’s ‘Live Your Best Life’ outcomes.

The Council is developing a Playing Pitch Strategy / Sports Facility Strategy with external consultants, and it is expected to be published by December 2023.

In conjunction with a wide variety of partners, the Council is also developing its Sports, Leisure & Culture Strategy over 2023/2024.

## Our Requirements

The Council is looking for a solution that will:

* Provide best value for residents
* Potentially include the development / partnership working for the Weston Favell Hub (replacing Lings Forum Leisure Centre)
* Appoint a partner (s) to work with the Council to transform the leisure facilities through innovation to deliver a high quality service meeting the needs of our community
* Enhance social value delivery
* Increase usage across a wide range of demographic groups, particularly groups that are under utilising the leisure facilities
* Meet the Council’s climate change aspirations of net zero by 2030
* Explore extended services (Health, Sports, Social Prescribing)
* Possibly include new building works / development across all the existing centres

# Section 3: Supporting information

## Section A: Organisation and Contact Details

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| Name of your organisation |
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| Registered office (if applicable) |
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| Trading address (if different from office) |
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| What, if any, local connections do you have with the authority? |
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| Name of person(s) to whom any queries relating to this questionnaire should be addressed |
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| Telephone number(s) |
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| Contact email(s)  |
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## Section B: Questions

This is purely a soft market test / pre-market engagement to enable the development of the services with leisure operators. Please note there is no guarantee of being awarded a contract by replying, or not replying, to some or all of these questions.

Please write enough to answer the question; ideally no more than 1000 words per question. Please avoid wordy answers. Concise and clear answers are appreciated. Bullet point answers are allowed.

The answers are not scored in any way. Not all questions have to be answered.

Follow up discussions / queries, if necessary, will be solely determined by WNC.

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| Question 1 |
| The Council is considering potential tendering options for the future of its leisure centres.Would your organisation be interested in managing the portfolio of leisure facilities from 1 April 2026?Please identify any issues, concerns or risks that might prevent your organisation from participating in a future tender exercise to provide these services? |
| Response  |
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| Question 2 |
| The Weston Favell Hub (in Northampton) includes replacement for the almost 50-year-old Lings Forum Leisure Centre. The Hub is estimated to be a £50m facility and includes a new leisure centre, health facilities, library, adult / children's services options. The timescales would mean, if funding was available, it could be incorporated into a new leisure contract. However, the project is still subject to gaining external funding.The estimated cost for a new standalone leisure centre is £30m. The Council is considering whether the Weston Favell Hub project is procured with the other leisure centres or separately. If the Council does **not** succeed in gaining any external funding, do you have any thoughts on the project / options on how the project could be funded then managed? The Council could consider the following options – please can you outline what you see as being the potential benefits and risks of each:- DBOM - major refurbishment of Lings Forum Leisure Centre- The five centres are tendered, however, Lings Forum Leisure Centre only is managed by a management fee until the new Weston Favell Hub is built / decided upon- or please suggest any alternative options Please note any preferred contract length of contract for the possible options. |
| Response |
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| Question 3 |
| The number of leisure centres / their location means the Council could consider different Lots or packages, for example:Lot 1 Daventry Leisure Centre, Daventry Sports Park, Moulton Leisure Centre Lot 2 Mounts Baths, Danes Camp Leisure Centre, Lings Forum Leisure CentreLot 3 Include Lot 1 and Lot 2 Or should only one Lot of all the leisure centres be considered without any smaller Lots?Have you any thoughts / suggestion / preferences on lots and its impact on best value for money / service delivery? Have you any thoughts how the Weston Favell Hub project impacts upon Lot size / combination? |
| Response |
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| Question 4 |
| What do you consider should be the most appropriate length of the contract and why? If there is a main contract period plus contract extensions, what period of extension and multiples of extension eg 10 years +5 + 5 years or 15 + 5 years etc is preferred? Are there other factors you wish to mention which impacts upon the contract period? |
| Response |
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| Question 5 |
| The Council is considering a fully repairing, maintaining and replacement arrangement.What is your preferred position in terms of the maintenance, replacement of leisure centre plant and machinery?  |
| Response |
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| Question 6 |
| What is your preferred position in terms of utilities (electricity, gas)?What is your view on the operator taking on the full liability of the cost of utilities / the risk share on utilities? Have you got any alternatives / mechanisms you would like to see put in place in relation to utilities? |
| Response |
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| Question 7 |
| Are there other factors the Council should consider in terms of the financial arrangements for a new contract that would make the tendering opportunity more or less attractive from your organisation’s perspective? |
| Response |
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| Question 8 |
| The Council may wish to include an outreach sports / health / active communities programme designed to address inactivity, health inequalities and promote sports development in the wider community.What are your views on incorporating these aspects into the leisure contract, and have you any views / examples on the most optimal way to achieve this?Do you have any views on offering free swimming for people over 70 years, free swimming for under 16 years, reduced gym rates to support those people on a drug rehabilitation programme, or reduced rates for care leavers? |
| Response |
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| Question 9 |
| In order to provide interested parties with the information needed to submit comprehensive tenders, please could you outline the key pieces of information you would expect to be provided at the commencement of the procurement process?Is there anything the Council should reasonably avoid requesting from the operator regarding the Contract documents? |
| Response |
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| Question 10 |
| If you would like to make any additional comments, please use the space below.  |
| Response |
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The Council may wish to clarify answers via email, or it may wish to undertake 1:1 meetings with leisure operators.

If you have any questions, please email procurement@westnorthants.gov.uk

Thank you for taking the time to complete the form.