

East Lothian sport centre users drop by over 10%

The number of people using East Lothian sports centres fell by more than 10% last year as operators recorded an operating loss of £131,000.

Enjoyleisure which operates the council's sports centres and swimming pools said the continued cost of living crisis and RAAC issues had an impact on visitor numbers.

A report due to go to the council's audit and governance committee next week says the arms length company has struggled to increase fitness memberships and balance the books with increasing costs and wages.

And it said it was working to address a gap in pay which saw workers receiving around 15% less than council employees on the same grade structure.

It added there have been "unprecedented difficulties in the recruitment of staff due in a large part to rates of pay being offered by enjoy".

The number of visitors to sports centres last year was 685,000 compared to 765,000 the previous year.

The report said the closure of some buildings for repair including North Berwick where Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) was identified shutting part of it down, had impacted its numbers as well as the cost of living.

It said: "Total visitor numbers fell in 23/24 compared to the previous year, which we have attributed predominantly to the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and customers necessarily tightening their personal finances as a result.

"We also continue to feel the impact of the closure of the Loch Centre pool in early 2023 and restricted access at the North Berwick Sports Centre due to ongoing RAAC issues which arose as an issue in the summer of 2023."

The report added that there had been a deficit of £131,000 in operations split including £79,000 trading losses in its cafe business.

However it said total income across the group was £6.97million – higher than the £6.75million in the previous year, adding "this has put us in a good position compared to pre-COVID income levels, which were circa £6.4m".

The report said despite the challenges enjoy was looking to the future and seeking new ways to improve the business while continuing to support its users.

It said: "We are also proud to continue to offer an Access to Leisure Scheme, whereby East Lothian residents on low incomes, with disabilities, or in NHS health programs can access enjoy leisure facilities for £2.00 off peak, and receive 50% off children's coached activities such as swimming lessons.

"We hope this will go some way to ease the burdens of the cost of living crisis for customers and ensure that those who wish to participate in sporting activities can continue to do so."

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter