

Vending Machine Removal in Trafford Leisure Centres

What is it?

Trafford Council secured substantial capital investment to refurbish leisure centres across the borough, aiming to future-proof the sites and maintain high-quality physical activity opportunities for residents. As part of the redesign, a strategic decision was made to remove vending machines and reinstate cafes within each centre.

Concurrently, the Health and Wellbeing Board partners prioritised developing a healthy vending policy to be implemented across all partner organisations.

With significant inequalities in excess weight across Trafford, leisure centres play a crucial role in supporting residents not only through physical activity but also by creating environments that encourage healthier behaviours, including better food and drink choices. Trafford Council and Trafford Leisure have committed to leading by example in promoting healthier food options on their premises.

What was the timeline?

The first leisure centre to be refurbished was Move Urmston, which reopened in March 2020. A tender process was conducted to select a local café operator aligned with Trafford Leisure's values.

A similar tender process took place in 2024 for Move Altrincham, supported by Trafford Council's Public Health team. Local operators were invited to express interest and submit bids for the café when the centre opens. Lessons learned from the Move Urmston process were applied to improve this approach, ensuring it was meaningful and sustainable, promoting a positive food culture across our leisure sites.

Trafford Leisure received support to deepen their understanding of food and health, helping to establish clear non-negotiables for the café operator.

The next step is to initiate a tender process for a café operator at Partington Leisure Centre, which is currently closed for refurbishment.

How did it happen?

The removal of vending machines coincided seamlessly with the refurbishment schedule of each leisure centre, making the change a natural part of the overall upgrade. This alignment helped ensure minimal backlash or negative feedback.

Replacing vending machines with café operators reflects Trafford Council and Trafford Leisure's commitment to delivering high-quality leisure facilities that offer a more holistic experience—supporting residents' health and wellbeing beyond just sport and physical activity.

The selection of café providers involved a thorough process, including informal discussions, expressions of interest, mystery visits, and interviews. The recommended provider was then approved by Trafford Leisure's Board of Trustees.

The café operations model allows Trafford Leisure to partner with operators in a way that is both financially sustainable and supportive of health and wellbeing outcomes. When Move Urmston opened without vending machines, there was no negative feedback.

For the Move Altrincham tender, the non-negotiables included:

- Offering food and drink that supports a healthy, balanced diet
- Avoiding ultra-processed foods
- Aligning with EatWell guidelines
- Portion controlling high fat, salt and/or sugar (HFSS) foods
- Avoiding branded fridges promoting sugary drinks
- Not using price-driven offers to promote HFSS foods
- Catering to diverse dietary preferences, including vegetarian, vegan, and plant-based options
- Considering seasonality and food provenance to reduce carbon footprint
- Prioritising local suppliers
- Minimising food waste through careful purchasing and consumption review
- Ensuring separate collection and composting of food waste
- Promoting reusable options by:
 - Eliminating single-use plastics
 - Avoiding takeaway packaging for on-site consumption
 - Using recyclable packaging and recycled paper
 - Offering discounts for customers who bring their own coffee cups
 - Providing water bottle refill stations

Ongoing review and support for café providers are essential to ensure continued adherence to these standards.

Who was involved?

This process was agreed between Trafford Leisure and Trafford Council's Leisure Project Board. The Council's Public Health team supported development of non-negotiables around health and sustainability and the tender process overall.

How did you involve the community?

While there hasn't been any direct community mobilisation, feedback from residents using the centres has been positive, and the facilities are thriving.

What were the challenges and how were they overcome?

To date, this change has faced no challenges. Financial considerations were carefully evaluated by both Trafford Council and Trafford Leisure to develop a food and drink supply model that ensures Trafford Leisure's financial sustainability while also achieving health and wellbeing goals.

What have you learnt?

As noted earlier, the removal of vending machines from leisure centres has not presented any challenges to date. We will continue to monitor feedback as more centres are refurbished and reopen without vending options.

Currently, Move Urmston holds a 4.1 out of 5 rating on Google Reviews.

Further information

Move Altringham – [Tender opportunity](#)