

CCPR Facilities Inquiry

8 April 2010

About the LGA

The LGA is a voluntary membership body and our 422 (TBC) member authorities cover every part of England and Wales. Together they represent over 50 million people and spend around £113 billion a year on local services.

They include county councils, metropolitan district councils, English unitary authorities, London boroughs and shire district councils, along with fire authorities, police authorities, national park authorities and passenger transport authorities. The 22 Welsh unitary authorities are in corporate membership through the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) which retains full autonomy in dealing with Welsh affairs.

Response

1. For the individual, participation in sport contributes towards better health, mental wellbeing and self-confidence. Sport can be a route out of poverty, social exclusion and disaffection, especially for young people. For communities, sport makes an important contribution towards cohesion, safety and economic prosperity.
2. Most of the activity and resources deployed to encourage people to lead more active lives takes place at the local level, and it is councils and their partners who provide the vast majority of the facilities and spaces in which to play it.

Key Messages

- Council are the largest public funder of sports and physical activity infrastructure in the country;
- A sustainable funding strategy for sports facilities has the following key elements:
 - Strong local and national political leadership, advocating for sport when budgets and priorities are set;
 - A clear evidence base that shows how sport delivers better outcomes for people;
 - Flexible funding arrangements, not ring-fencing and micro-management by well intentioned bodies and individuals;
 - A “whole team” partnership approach, building both strong strategic and strong delivery networks;
 - Embedding sport in local strategic planning, as described in the LGA / Sport England document, *Our Sporting Commitment*.
- At local and sub-regional level, we must avoid competition between sports for increasingly scarce resources;
- Sports agencies and governing bodies need to make links with the physical and cultural activity sectors to make a common offer to improve people’s wellbeing and mental and physical health.

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Our legacy promise

3. Acknowledging the potential value of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games to deliver a lasting legacy of sports participation, and to improve the physical infrastructure in which people play sport, the LGA has worked with local authorities, the professional sports officer networks and others to develop a new package of support for councils to help them achieve a legacy of mass participation for their communities.
4. Our approach will give local government a bigger role in the national legacy arrangements and will complement the legacy plans that already exist for people participating in more formal sport developed by government, UK Sport, Sport England and the National Governing Bodies. There are three components to our legacy commitment:
 - Recognising and better utilising the leadership role of councillors and senior officers;
 - Focusing the managerial expertise of council officers running council and community sports facilities; and
 - Helping councils track progress on sports legacy, and more, through an interactive self-assessment benchmarking tool.
5. The Local Leadership, Local Legacy Programme will harness the vision and passion of councillors and senior officers from the Beacons and other councils that have realised the potential of the 2012 Games to achieve a legacy of mass participation in sport. The programme will launch in summer 2010 to coincide with the 'two years to go' celebrations, but we are inviting expressions of interest now from councillors and senior officers who would like to benefit from peer mentoring or peer challenge or who feel they would like to share their expertise with other councils.
6. Through the Beacons and LGA Group peer mentoring programme for councillors and senior officers, we will seek to develop a cadre of local political leaders, led by the Beacon councils, who will go out into places, leading this agenda, enthusing their peers and describing a vision around which councils, sports facilities and the wider public sector all come together at a local level to use the power of the Games to deliver a sustainable local sports legacy.

Built environment

7. Council investment cannot be prescribed nationally. Decisions about where and when facilities are built need to be made by elected councillors, who are accountable to their communities for spending council tax payers' money.
8. There is a need for co-ordination between partners at a sub-regional level to ensure an efficient distribution of built sport facilities. The LGA does not however support further prescriptive national guidance or directions about where and how capital investment should be made in sport. Instead we need flexible sub-regional discussion between

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councils, NGBs, CSPAPs and Sport England to establish where particular facilities are needed and how funding packages can be developed to meet those needs.

9. Increasingly, councils must look to deliver sports facilities in partnership in order to make the most efficient investment. Such arrangements require a flexible approach focused on what solutions will best improve outcomes for local people. We must not get hung up discussing particular club structures, relationships between sports or what has been tried “in the past”.
10. Councils and leisure providers should increasingly look for innovative ways to “sweat the asset” that they have invested in. The infrastructure we currently have must deliver more hours of sport, and councils should work with local clubs, communities, planning and transport departments, amongst others, to find ways of minimising the number of hours that facilities are unused. Good communication between local sports delivery partners and an understanding of the value of sport in delivering local priorities is key to this.

The natural environment

11. The natural environment represents many fantastic opportunities for increasing physical activity. Studies have shown that proximity and access to green space contributes on an individual level to improved wellbeing and reduced stress; it also reduces social ills such as domestic violence.
12. Local knowledge of the best places to, for example go rock climbing are key to unlocking the potential of natural resources. Councils need to work with their local clubs to ensure these resources are maximised and to make sure they fully understand the value of their local natural resources.
13. Councils can work with local partners and national agencies to open up the natural environment. This can apply equally in urban areas, for example, seeing canal towpaths as exercise spaces.

Pricing

14. The LGA does not support a national strategy for sports facilities pricing. This would be a needless incursion into local autonomy. Prices need to reflect local demand and councils must balance the community benefits of low-cost access with the need to generate income to fund wider service provision.
15. Over 80% of councils are delivering the Government’s free swimming programme, but councils will want to ensure it represents good value for money before committing any further local funds to the programme post-2011. Free services are by their nature untargeted; those people who are willing to pay to play sport need not. Lessons will need to be learned from this programme before further decisions are made about the impact of the free provision of services. Understanding how the perception of value differs between people and places is key here.

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Funding

16. The public finances face a period of serious retrenchment in coming years. Funding for sport and sports facilities will not be immune to these pressures. We need more than simply a conversation about doing more with less; councils have been doing that for years.
17. The sports sector must reach out to health and education practitioners in particular with a clear offer of how it can deliver their objectives. It must also upskill its workforce to ensure that sport can benefit from strategic commissioning by these bigger spending service areas.
18. The current difficult financial situation may have an impact on councils' offer of discretionary rate relief to sports clubs. Such relief is a blunt instrument, and the LGA supports relocalisation of business rates, which would allow councils to be much more flexible in the over all rates levied on sports clubs. As a sector we are very sympathetic to the financial impact of withdrawing rate relief from community sports clubs, but these decisions are properly to be made, and accounted for, locally.
19. The LGA continues to support the Community Amateur Sports Club tax relief scheme, and has worked with the CASC development forum to increase council and club awareness of it. We would be interested to hear about further campaigns in support of community sports clubs that CCPR are engaged in.

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