

Annex B

Community Sport – Nick Bitel’s article in First Magazine

23 January 2014

I’m passionate about sport and the benefits it brings to individuals and communities – the fun, excitement, sense of pride, belonging, and the 'feel good factor' as well as the wider benefits to improving health, bringing communities together and contributing to economic growth.

At Sport England, we are focused on getting more people taking part in sport – it's our core business. But achieving this is only possible through a strong collaborative approach across all sectors – public, private and voluntary.

As local councils, you are key partners in delivering community sport. Spending £1 billion a year, you are its single biggest investor and this shows you recognise the part sport plays in contributing to local priorities. Birmingham's 'Be Active' programme is a good example of this, with each £1 invested generating £21 in benefits.

Tough choices

But these are unprecedented times. We know that you continue to face tough choices about the future of services, moving to a commissioning and enabling role while continuing to meet the needs of your local communities in a changing and complex market place. Having a strong local strategic plan for sport that identifies agreed priorities has never been more important.

Key to developing strategic plans is understanding what drives participation, and we have built up a bank of insights in this area. We're currently working with Bury Council to apply this learning through a pioneering campaign to get more women active, built around insights into barriers and motivations for local women.

We have other tools, expertise and investment to help you get more people active, demonstrate the value of sport, plan for community needs and future demands and make

services more efficient and effective. Our Affordable Facilities guidance helps to deliver cost-effective design and construction ensuring efficiently operated facilities which will meet the needs of local communities. There are a number of examples where councils are replacing old facilities with new, achieving revenue savings and seeing dramatic increases in attendances.

For example, the new £11.8 million Xcel leisure complex in Elmbridge has increased attendance from 275,000 in the old facility to more than one million a year, and is generating annual revenue savings to the council of over £460,000.

Working together with Oldham Council, using our new procurement guidance, we have helped it secure £13 million of savings over 15 years on its leisure contract, which will be re-invested into leisure facilities.

Partnership

In partnership with the LGA, we are also investing in councils' leadership by running leadership academies. These help cabinet members and portfolio holders with responsibility for sport explore the challenges and opportunities they face learning how to take forward transformational change in community sport, as well as understanding the support that Sport England can provide.

We know that if we are to get the nation active – and reap the financial, health and social rewards that this brings – councils are in a pivotal position to help make this happen. I encourage councils across England to take advantage of the advice and funding we can offer to help transform local services while delivering significant efficiencies.

By working together, I believe that – even in challenging circumstances – we can find innovative ways to build a sporting habit for life in communities across the country.

Affordable facilities - Sport England website.

Procurement toolkit - Sport England website.

Nick Bitel is Chair of Sport England and will be addressing the LGA's annual culture, tourism and sport conference on 3-4 March 2014.