

A Shared Vision for the future of Public Leisure Services

Purpose of report

For discussion.

Summary

The Board identified the development of a vision for the future public leisure services as a key objective at its September 2020 meeting.

This paper outlines the work that is being undertaken in partnership with the Association for Public Sector Excellent (APSE) and the Culture and Leisure Officers Association (CLOA) to develop a shared vision for what the future of public leisure services could look like.

Recommendation/s

Board members to discuss and comment on the scope of the piece of work and identify any key lines of enquiry or omissions (section 11)

Action/s

Officers to follow up as directed by Board Members.

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Background

1. Sport, leisure, parks and green spaces is a key priority for the CTS Board, COVID-19 has highlighted the important contribution these services make to the health, mental wellbeing and resilience of local communities and their contribution to local economies and places people want to live, work and play. This paper will look specifically at sport and leisure services.
2. In the past our lobbying and improvement work has focused on:
 - 2.1. Ageing facilities and our call for a £500m investment from Government: nearly two thirds of leisure centres are outdated and need urgent new investment
 - 2.2. The financial impact COVID-19 is having on leisure providers following their closure in line with Government rules during the three national lockdowns
 - 2.3. The funding cuts to local government budgets which has a knock-on effect on council's sport and leisure budgets
 - 2.4. Supporting councils to understand different commissioning models. Many councils have moved to providing these services through a leisure trust, with a focus on efficiency and budget savings.
3. The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the challenges facing sport and leisure services. Facilities are still ageing but now they are closed and not generating income, a lack of income is leading to a potential financial collapse of leisure trust providers or leading some councils to bring services back under local authority control either through necessity due to provider failure or as part of a forward looking strategic plan.
4. This is leading to concerns within the sector that huge income loss and budget pressures now faced by local authorities and leisure providers has generated significant distress and frustration and at times a worrying disconnect between those delivering the services and the strategic positioning, value and understanding of those services.
5. Furthermore, there remain stubborn challenges when it comes to addressing physical inactivity with the impact of the pandemic striking our most deprived communities worst, amplifying existing levels of inactivity and inequality in those areas. It raises questions about the future positioning and effectiveness of sport and leisure services in terms of its' contribution to addressing these massive challenges.
6. In response to these challenges, the CTS Board committed to a piece of work to develop a vision for the future of leisure provision, reflecting changed patterns of consumer behaviour and demand, and connections to the climate change, active travel, and obesity agendas.

Update on a future vision for sport and leisure services

7. Following discussions with our stakeholders from Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) and Culture, Leisure Officers Association (CLOA) we have identified that APSE had commissioned a similar piece of work to begin to develop a vision for the future of sport and leisure services. The remit for this piece of work incorporated the main aspects we wished to pursue. We therefore proposed a collaboration with APSE and CLOA on this piece of work to make the best use of our collective resources and to start building and embedding a shared vision across the sport and leisure sector and across our respective members. This will ensure that both elected members and officers are moving forward together.
8. We have jointly commissioned Mark Allman, in his capacity as a consultant to undertake research and develop a think piece. Mark was previously the Head of Sport and Leisure services at Leeds City Council and has a thorough understanding of the sector.

Parameters:

9. The piece of work will build upon a “traditional” view of Sport and Leisure services, identifying what is required of them, their relevance to the future of council objectives around health and wellbeing, and financial implications. This will include the following areas:
 - 9.1. Provision of Leisure Centres, Pools and Sports facilities, indoor and outdoor.
 - 9.2. Sports development and community sport
 - 9.3. Sports events
10. The work will also reference the following:
 - 10.1. High level assessment of National and local strategies that would impact on service design and delivery e.g., new Sport England Strategy, Public Health Outcomes framework, Local Health and Wellbeing plans, Climate emergency, Economic policy, Transport Policy, Planning policy
 - 10.2. The role of physical activity in place making and meeting wider outcomes.
 - 10.3. The strategic development of physical activity and how it is led nationally and locally.

Key lines of enquiry:

11. The work will start by gauging how well local authorities are currently able to articulate the role of services and will then move on to look at how things are affected by COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically –
 - 11.1. The case for sport and leisure services pre-Covid-19: Was/is there a clear understanding of what sport and leisure services are there to deliver?
 - 11.2. The case for sport and leisure services post Covid-19: What are the impacts of Covid-19 on Council’s budgets and consequently what are the likely medium (next 3 years) and long- term impacts on the future provision of those Sport and Leisure services?

- 11.3. Physical activity and systems/collaborative thinking: Is there evidence of physical activity being positioned as a local priority to help support community wellbeing and the recovery from COVID-19?
- 11.4. How do we understand what impact COVID has had on public leisure services for deprived communities? How do we go on to create a more inclusive offer that enables all groups the opportunity to be active?

Methodology:

12. The research brief includes:
 - 12.1. Using existing events to survey sport and leisure portfolio holders and officers to identify the current state of play for the sector.
 - 12.2. Conducting a series of discussions, based on the survey results, with sector leaders and stakeholders to explore how sport and leisure services have changed in recent years; together with the trends that have developed, and the current challenges faced by local authorities, the future direction of travel and potential contributions traditional sport and leisure can play locally.
 - 12.3. Desktop research of published sport and physical activity strategies.
13. Following the completion of the above, a 10-15-page report will be produced that brings together the findings of discussions and provides a critical appraisal of the existing situation. This will seek to provide a practical approach/framework that local authorities can deploy in understanding wider “physical activity systems working” and in turn reflect on the positioning and vision of their own Sport and Leisure services moving forward.

Implications for Wales

14. Welsh authorities will be included in the survey and discussions. Given the differing governance structures in devolved administrations, it may be necessary to develop separate recommendations for Welsh leisure, but this is not yet clear.

Financial implications

15. The anticipated total cost of this work is £14 000. APSE is providing £10 000 and the LGA £4 000.

Next Steps

16. The first public discussion of this work will take place at our [Reimagining Public Leisure conference on 21 January](#).
17. APSE have established [an information page on the project](#) to enable councils and providers to stay up to date with the project.
18. We will provide Board members with updates on progress of this work at future board meetings.