

Support for Councils on Leisure Services

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

This paper outlines ongoing work to support councils with the challenges facing their leisure services, including:

- The National Leisure Recovery Fund
- Rapid insourcing document
- The Future of Public Leisure research

Recommendation/s

That the Board note the report and provide local insight on further support required.

Action/s

Officers will work with partners to provide further support for the leisure sector.

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National Leisure Recovery Fund

1. The fund was intended to be soft launched on 7 December 2020 and officially launched for applications on 14 December, with expressions of interest closing on 16 December and final applications closing on 21 December.
2. The launch of the fund was delayed until 14 December. In light of this, the LGA lobbied Sport England and Ministers to extend the application process, reflecting the Christmas period. An extension to the expressions of interest was given until 21 December, and final applications until 8 January.
3. 100% of eligible councils had submitted their expressions of interest by 21 December.
4. Following the announcement of Tier 4 and the ramifications for councils, the LGA made the case for a still longer application period and on 23 December 2020, Sport England confirmed that Ministers had extended the application date to 15 January 2021. The LGA communicated this through its bulletins, twitter, and WhatsApp group for sports leads.
5. On 15 January, Sport England confirmed that the funding could also now be used to cover costs associated with the new national lockdown. This followed requests from councils and the LGA.
6. By the time the fund closed, 100% of eligible councils had submitted a completed applications form.
7. Applications are being assessed on a first come basis, to ensure that those councils that are most in need and who met the first set of deadlines were not disadvantaged. It is expected that these councils should receive their first tranches of money in the week commencing 1st February.
8. The LGA has continued to engage with Sport England on the development of the evaluation and monitoring tools for the Fund. The LGA's Senior Adviser and Head of Research have met three times with the Sport England team developing this tool.
9. Initial concerns were that a resource heavy approach was being taken to monitor a comparatively small amount of money. Sport England outlined the free online tool they are making available, which will have significantly wider benefits in terms of understanding and articulating the social value of leisure facilities at both a local and national level.
10. The LGA has therefore worked with Sport England to more effectively articulate these wider benefits and present it as a positive development in understanding the sector. The

platform will also incorporate elements of the LGA's LG Inform, enabling councils to compare their performance with comparable authorities.

11. LGA feedback has also led to some more ambitious elements of data collection, although important to achieve in the long term, being separated out and planned over a longer period of time.
12. We continue to share local intelligence about risks to leisure centres with Sport England, as part of our collective work to secure further emergency investment in the sector.
13. Some councils have fed back that the latest change to what the money can be spent on is causing them some problems and taking time to recalculate, and this information has been passed on to Sport England.

Rapid insourcing document

14. In light of the intense pressures on leisure trusts, and reflecting that several trusts have collapsed or had to be taken back in house, we are developing a quick reference tool to support councils faced with imminent collapse of their provider and having to insource their provision, at least temporarily.
15. The guide is about supporting councils who find themselves in a state of emergency. It is designed to help the council re-mobilise their leisure services and complete the transfer of the service from their leisure provider to the council. The guide is not intended to instruct or encourage councils whose provider is stable to bring leisure services back in house. It is therefore important that the guide is written in this spirit and complements our existing advice note on ["Options for councils in supporting leisure providers through COVID-19"](#).
16. The LGA has developed a short outline of the issues and actions that we believe need to be included, in consultation with council and trust officers. The supplier will be expected to develop this further, using their own knowledge and expertise to identify and fill any gaps, including consultation and testing with council and trust officers as part of their proposal.
17. The work is intended to be finished by end of April 2021.

The Future of Public Leisure research

18. The future landscape for leisure provision is exceedingly challenging from a financial perspective. This has led to significant discussion and scrutiny at senior levels of councils, including Chief Executives and leaders. As a result, councils have reflected on the reason for providing leisure services, and determined the benefits that accrue to their communities from doing so.

19. While this reaffirmation of local governments commitment to leisure delivery is positive, some additional thought leadership is required to help councils understand how delivery in the future may look different from delivery pre-pandemic, both as a result of changing customer expectations and behaviours, and from a more financially challenging environment.

20. This research commission was launched at our [Reimagining the future of public leisure conference](#) on 21 January 2021 and aims to provide some of this thought leadership.

Working with CLOA and APSE, we have provided a grant to provide a rounded assessment of the current challenges facing local authorities because of the COVID-19 pandemic and assess how this may fundamentally affect the future shape of Sport and Leisure services.

21. The research piece and subsequent report will provide essential intelligence that can help inform and positively influence the future direction of sport and leisure services as part of the wider physical activity system and its' contribution to placemaking.

22. Survey responses have currently been received from over 200 councils and providers, and will inform a series of scheduled roundtables, covering portfolio holders and leaders, chief executives, Directors of Public Health, and frontline providers.

23. The final research publication is due for completion in June, and a launch event is being developed.

Implications for Wales

24. The National Leisure Recovery Fund is an England-only fund. The principles of the insourcing document and the future of public leisure research will also be relevant to Welsh authorities.

Implications for inclusion, diversity and equality

25. The evaluation of the National Leisure Recovery Fund will include some more granular data on use by different parts of the community. However, this requires fundamental changes and improvements in the way that councils and providers collect this data, and is part of the work that has been postponed until there is more capacity within local government.

26. We know that some forecast leisure centre closures are located in lower income or BAME communities. The insourcing publication will provide a small increase in probability that the council will be able to retain these facilities if the provider withdraws from the contract.

27. The Future of Public leisure consultation work includes specific questions about inequality, diversity and improving accessibility of services.

Financial Implications

28. The National Leisure Recovery Fund work has no cost implication for the LGA.

29. The rapid insourcing document has been allocated £8000 from the CTS policy budget.

30. The Future of Public Leisure research has been allocated £4000 from the CTS policy budget through APSE as the lead partner.

Next steps

31. The contract for the rapid insourcing document will be awarded on 30 March.

32. The Future of Public Leisure consultation closes at the end of March, with roundtables running through until end of April.