

Submission to Shropshire Council in response to the consultation on Leisure Facilities Strategy 2019-2039

1. Introduction

The reduction in funding received by councils coupled with the fact that leisure services are not classified as essential mean that funding for sport and physical activity has been squeezed.

However, the value of sport and physical activity to the country is well documented ...

“For every £1 spent on community sport and physical activity in England, £3.91 of economic and societal impact is generated” (Sport England, August 2020)

...and UK Government strategy is to increase the activity levels of the population. The Sport England stated aim is to increase the number of people who are regularly active in England by 500,000 nationally between 2016 and 2020.

Despite this national imperative, SC’s strategy contains no growth in facility usage and therefore displays little ambition to improve the health and wellbeing of Shropshire’s residents through physical activity.

This failure to adopt national guidance is built upon one of the worst performances of any local authority in the country. The Sport England Active Lives Survey data of 2018/19 shows that over the period 2015/16 to 2018/19 the percentage of the adult population classed as active (ie performs >150 minutes of moderate activity a week) increased nationally by 1.1% but over the same period in Shropshire the percentage dropped by 3.7%. Evidence of monitoring of the performance of SC leisure services is difficult to find and despite asking the SC Committee Officer, no minutes could be found to show that leisure services performance has been considered in recent years by elected members. It is possible that the lack of robust monitoring may explain why SC activity performance is amongst the worst in the country in both pre- and post-COVID reporting data.

Shropshire’s poor activity performance relative to other authorities means that local residents are getting worse value for money which is placing additional burden on Shropshire’s other services since the link between physical activity and health benefits has been well-documented.

In addition, in 2010, the Marmot review of ‘Fair Society, Healthy Lives’ stated that:

“Reducing health inequalities is a matter of fairness and social justice. In England, the many people who are currently dying prematurely each year as a result of health inequalities would otherwise have enjoyed, in total, between 1.3 and 2.5 million extra years of life...Delivering these policy objectives will require action by central and local government, the NHS, the third and private sectors and community groups. National policies will not work without effective local delivery systems focused on health equity in all policies. Effective local delivery requires effective participatory decision-making at local level. This can only happen by empowering individuals and local communities.”

Against this background, it is yet more disappointing that the leisure strategy upon which SC is seeking comments lacks any ambition. In particular, despite national policy establishing growth targets, SC strategy does not identify any growth other than population increase.

The purpose of this document is to critique the SC leisure facilities strategy consultation summary and to make a series of recommendations which it is suggested need to be followed if SC is to create a more effective strategy and to deliver genuine leisure based services to residents to help improve the health and well-being of the county.

It will do this by:

- Analysing the current national strategy/policy as set out by national organisations including the DCMS, Sport England and CIMSPA
- Summarising Shropshire Council’s proposed strategy
- Comparing and critiquing the draft Shropshire Council strategy to national policy and current industry thinking
- Making recommendations where appropriate

2. National Strategy and Funding

2.1. National Strategy since 2012

Good practice demands that local strategy should reflect the aims of national strategy.

Accordingly, Sport England’s stated aims between 2016 and 2020 are to:

- Increase the numbers of people in England who are regularly active by 500,000 nationally
- Increase the numbers of women who are regularly active by 250,000 nationally
- Increase the numbers of people from lower socio-economic groups who are more active by 100,000 (within targeted locations).

In addition, Sport England are undergoing a strategic consultation on future strategy in which they identify the ‘Big Issues’ in which they should play a role. If these are a priority for Sport England, then it is probable that they should be a priority for SC too.

- **Inequalities:** the current design and delivery of many sport and physical activity experiences meets the need of some more than others. Tackling inequalities and

combating discrimination to certain population groups is absolutely key to provide a level playing field.

- **Climate emergency:** tangible threats as well as an opportunity to be part of the solution
- **Connect with health and wellbeing:** unlocked potential, especially around prescribing into sport and activity
- **Digital and data:** sport and leisure may have fallen behind other sectors on the digital experience and needs to catch up
- **Workforce:** sustain, grow and develop the professional workforce and volunteers
- **Active environments:** spaces and places for people to be more active
- **Diminishing local resources and capacity:** fears around ongoing reductions in local government spending on activity, sport and leisure. A sense that places are losing their capacity and capability to make long term decisions
- **School experiences:** often the first and most equal opportunity that children and young people have access to, and which shape their relationship with movement for the rest of their lives, is often felt to be a low priority for many schools

Building on the consultation, in October 2020 Tara Dillon CEO CIMSPA discussed the role of the sport and physical activity industry in health and wellbeing:

“Is our impact on health really a strategy or just rhetoric? ...While we say we intend to have a society-changing impact, I often see margins through members driving our purpose... Right now, local authority CEOs are looking at which services they can raid to save the services they must protect. For them, [Sport and Physical Activity] is a cost they could do without. Would the above facts move us to the ‘must-have list?’”

2.2. The Economic Value of Activity

There are compelling financial reasons to invest in Sport and Physical Activity (Sport England, August 2020):

- For every £1 spent on community sport and physical activity in England, £3.91 of positive impacts is generated. Looking at England as a whole this equates to:
 - £9.5bn savings in physical and mental health including reduced heart disease/strokes, diabetes, cancer, dementia, depression, hip fractures, back pain, use of psychotherapy services and GP visits
 - £42bn positive impact of mental wellbeing through improved life satisfaction by participating and volunteering
 - £282m individual development impact through improved educational achievement and increased earnings
 - £20bn impact on social and community development through reduced crime, increased volunteering, enhanced social capital
 - £13.8bn of economic value through the support of 285,000 jobs within the sector and a gross value add of £7.0Bn to the commercial sector, £3.7Bn to the public Sector and £3.1Bn to the voluntary sector

Based on a simple straight line extrapolation, Shropshire’s share of the above positive impact equates to £430m.

Even in the current COVID world, the importance attached to sport and physical activity remains. On 22 October, the Secretary of State for the department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Oliver Dowden, announced that Local Authorities will be able to bid for money from a new £100m fund to help them through the challenge of the pandemic.

3. SC Strategy Summary for Consultation

The stated approach of this revised Leisure Facilities strategy is to focus on creating and retaining a sense of belonging, or 'place', rather than focusing on specific services and buildings. This is consistent with national thinking and, in theory, moves away from a bricks and mortar approach to one which generates a feeling of community. However, each place must be relevant; large enough to generate economies of scale whilst enabling a unique identity and retaining a feeling of belonging and loyalty.

3.1. Creating a 'Sense of Place'

In rural communities the concept of place is of great importance to individuals, and services must be planned accordingly. The amalgamated Place Plan areas used in the playing pitch strategy have been transposed to the draft indoor leisure facilities strategy, but each has different requirements and it may not be appropriate to universally transfer them across. For example, placing Ludlow, Church Stretton, Craven Arms and Bishops Castle in the same Plan Area simply fails to recognise the different needs and demographics of these communities, and seem to be of geographical convenience rather than a sense of 'place'.

While the strategy recognises the challenges presented by an ageing population and of younger people, it is unfortunate that these key facts are not considered to any depth elsewhere in the strategy and appear to simply be rhetoric. Additionally, by amalgamating disparate 'places' and failing to recognise demographics in the analysis of need, the strategy discriminates against both the young and the old by totally failing to recognise their individual needs and the broader savings which catering for these needs could bring.

3.2. Analysis of Need

3.2.1. Key Influences on Future Leisure Provision

Section 1.21 of the strategy raises some key points regarding deprivation, rurality, mobility and car ownership and the importance early health interventions. Sadly, none of these factors are adequately considered, if at all, within the needs analysis.

In addition, Section 1.21 states that 'the current level of participation in physical activity in Shropshire is 63.8% (Active People 2020).' The Active People survey ran from 2005 to 2016 and has now been superseded by the Active Lives Survey available on the Sport England website. The base data behind the Active Lives report shows the levels of activity for the Shropshire population as quoted in the strategy as 2020 data does in fact date from 2015/16.

The pre-COVID data set from 2018-19, shows Shropshire's percentage of the adult population classed as 'active' (ie >150 minutes of activity per week) falling by 3.7% from baseline and by

4.0% year on year. This clearly infers that one of the key aims of the existing leisure policy is failing, but there is no mention of this in any reporting.

	DATA FOR YEAR MAY 2018 - MAY 2019					
	Change from Baseline 2015-2016			Change in the last 12 months		
	Active	Fairly Active	Inactive	Active	Fairly Active	Inactive
All England adults (aged 16+)	1.1%	-0.3%	-0.8%	0.9%	-0.4%	-0.4%
Shropshire	-3.7%	4.2%	-0.5%	-4.0%	1.1%	3.0%

The misquoting of this element of data within the strategy document must cast doubt about the integrity of the remaining data.

The only readily available item of performance data on the SC website’s performance portal refers to the number of leisure centre visitors recorded on a quarterly basis which shows that visitor numbers have remained broadly flat over the past 4 years, with a slight decline in recent months. The website suggests that the decline is due to incomplete data, but surely this assumption cannot be made? The missing data might have made the figures worse.

3.2.2. Key Factors Influencing Future Facilities Need

Section 1.23 states that the future need for facilities and investment is clearly linked to a number of factors, none of which mention either place or demographics. The only two factors on this list actively considered by the current strategy are the first two: housing and population growth, together with the age and condition of the facility itself.

Another item mentioned in section 1.23 as influencing future facilities and investment is the existing facility mix, which in the case of the Strettons includes the Mayfair Centre and the Silvester Horne Institute. However, the strategy does not clarify how additional commercial or voluntary facilities will be taken into account or indeed how they are included in any demand-based calculations.

This section, reassuringly, does include the changes brought in the aftermath of COVID-19, which is not mentioned elsewhere.

3.2.3. The Evidence Base – The Needs Assessment Report 2017-2037

The analysis contained in Section 3 of the Need Assessment 2017-2037 seems remarkably similar to that used to inform the previous Indoor Leisure Facilities Strategy for Shropshire 2018-2020. Section 2 shows the national and local policies informing the analysis to have been written largely in the period 2011-2017. Appendices 4 and 5 compare demand between 2016 and 2037 based purely on population growth with no ambition to increase overall demand, despite the national objective from Sport England that the active percentage of the population should increase. If not through indoor leisure facilities, then what other strategy does SC have for increasing the percentage of active population? Outdoor activity may not be a suitable year-round option for either the very young or very old.

3.2.4. Existing Facilities Analysis from Consultation Summary

It is disappointing that the facilities needs analysis, based on the Sport England Facilities Planning Model (FPM) and the Sports Facility Calculator (SFC) together with ‘other factors’,

still has overt reliance on mechanistic numerical calculations. There is no reference to sense of place and no mention of demographics.

Section 1.16 of the draft strategy states that it 'will ensure that existing facilities are the most appropriate in terms of quantity, quality and location and consider how best to meet the additional needs generated by the planned housing and economic growth.'

The existing and future facilities calculations for Sports Halls, Swimming Pools and Fitness Suites/Studios in Section 1.25 thus seem based on:

- The baseline current population and current usage
- The envisaged future population growth
- The scaled-up usage based on that population growth
- Geography
- The age and condition of the existing facility

They appear to take little account of:

- The requirements of different demographics
- Sense of place
- Need versus usage ie what is the potential need in an area and how can that usage growth be encouraged for the benefit of the individual and the wider community in terms of health and other economic benefits. When assessing need, consideration should be given to accessibility in terms of opportunity, access and programming and not purely the presence of a facility. What of further national (and local) initiatives such as 'This Girl Can' to encourage more female daytime usage, especially amongst those demographics that are less likely to use swimming facilities such as the lonely, those with mental health concerns, the obese or simply the under-confident.

More minor facilities requirements were listed thus:

- Squash: 'No requirement for additional squash courts has been identified in the *Borough*'(?)
- Indoor Tennis: 'No additional need for more indoor courts has been identified in the *Borough*'(?)
- Indoor Bowls: 'No additional need identified at this stage, but the current provision is below that recommended by EIBA per 1000 population. Bowling clubs not yet identified the need for additional provision – should be regularly reviewed given the ageing population'

Where is the encouragement and aspiration to increase the usage of obvious facilities that promote social contact, wellbeing and activity such as bowls?

The use of the word 'borough' is confusing and suggests that it may have been cut and pasted from another document.

3.3. Vision, core principles and strategic priorities

Quoting directly from the draft strategy, the vision “Shropshire will be a county where healthier, active lifestyles are encouraged, supported and facilitated for everyone” is underpinned by three core delivery principles of:

- (i) “Sustainable, accessible and inclusive indoor leisure facility mix
- (ii) Recognising the importance of leisure facilities as community spaces offering activities, services and support to local communities
- (iii) a commitment to work with partner organisations and individuals to co-deliver leisure facilities.”

Both the vision and principles are supported by the five strategic priorities:

- a. “To work with partners to support the people of Shropshire to live longer, healthier and quality lives through sport and physical activity with a focus on young and older people
- b. To support the resilience of local communities and the development of Place by strengthening local communities through sport and physical activity.
- c. To support economic growth by developing opportunities for people to reach their full potential by providing employment, volunteering and tourism opportunities
- d. To take a cross county Place based approach to the delivery of high-quality leisure facilities through targeted investment, partnership opportunities, community empowerment and commercial acumen in order to reduce levels of subsidy.
- e. To aim to reduce our carbon footprint in line with the commitment of Shropshire Council to the declaration of Climate emergency to become carbon neutral by 2030”

As a vision and priorities, they are relevant, appropriate and in line with the latest national strategy consultation and “Big Issues” from Sport England.

However, since there is no evidence readily available of past performance against these, or similar, aims and there is no recognition of any of these principles and priorities within the basic thinking and needs analysis of the strategy, (other than the introduction and context) there is no reason to expect that any of these will be achieved through this strategy. Each priority has a number of aspirational objectives written in the ‘we will’ language of consultant-speak. Each one begs the questions of who and when and how will this be commissioned, managed and evidenced to councillors and to the public as value for money?

3.4. The Action Plan

An action plan should be just that; a lower level of plan which details how the implementation of the strategic priorities will be achieved.

The plan starts in section 1.31 by stating that the delivery model is a ‘community-focused hub-type service’ which could either be co-located with other community services, standalone or co-located/linked, driven by ‘locality’ and not by place. These options certainly cover every eventuality! The facilities will be managed through a ‘wide range of models... currently under review and will be determined by the end of 2020’. The operational sustainability of a facility will be a major consideration understandably, but there is no mention or consideration of the additional ‘benefits’ derived from a fitter healthier

population or of other aspects of place. There is an ‘aim’ to hold, or continue to hold, user forums for many facilities, where issues can be raised. However, these fora are with the management of each facility who will each be responsible for responding to their forum on a monthly basis. When and how will these valuable user forum inputs be aggregated, analysed and fed into feedback regarding the performance of this and future strategies? How will other community services such as GPs, volunteer and community funded services feed into and also receive feedback from such fora?

In the draft leisure facilities strategy, each strategic priority has one or two key ‘actions’ associated with it, which in fact are not actions at all, rather they appear to be good intentions. Taking the first strategic priority as an example, the feedback below on the action column applies equally to the other priorities.

Strategic priority	Actions	Partners	Timescale
Strategic Priority 1: To work with partners to support the people of Shropshire to live longer, healthier and quality lives through sport and physical activity with a focus on young and older people	To ensure physical activity is at the heart of placemaking across Shropshire	Shropshire Council, Place-making leads, Parish and Town Councils, Energize, facility operators	Ongoing

Reviewing the above action associated with Strategic Priority 1, it appears somewhat lacking in detail:

Specific: the strategic priority is necessarily high level, but there are no real actions here, just an aspirational statement ‘to ensure...’ with no indication how this will be done

Measurable: this action is unmeasurable, which perhaps explains the current lack of measures put in place

Agreed: No measures yet agreed ie to increase the active population % of a place by x%, in particular focusing on specific demographics such as the young or the old.

Realistic: at present this strategic priority is unrealistic and unachievable, due to the lack of clarity around how they will be delivered, measured, monitored and reported

Timebound: the timeframe ‘ongoing’ gives no comfort that there is a desire to achieve anything

3.5. Communication, Commissioning and Reporting

Hampering any critique of the strategy is a lack of accessible regular reporting. There is little available to the public on the SC website and, when requested, SC were unable to locate any leisure services metrics in the minutes of Place committee meetings, which suggests there is no regular report to elected councillors.

The draft leisure facilities strategy gives no indication of what success looks like, nor how it will be managed, measured and controlled. Having no indication of performance against the previous strategy, it is impossible to comment on the effectiveness of existing collaborations to inform changes and practices in the future.

The SC ‘Authority’s Monitoring Report March 2018’, does not cover any element of the Leisure strategy and fails to link leisure services to health and wellbeing or a sense of place.

3.6. The Link to Health and Wellbeing

There is a recognition that 'removing spending in the area of sport and physical activity services...could severely impact on communities and will result in increased spend in the areas of health and social care.' The limited number of references to 'health' within the strategy document each extol the positive impact that sport and physical activity can have on the health of an individual and of the community. Health is mentioned in the vision, and Strategic Priority 1 in the context of 'we will...' We need to understand what will be done, how these will align with the local strategy and place plans and especially who will be responsible for the success?

3.7. The Energize Partnership and others?

The Energize Partnership has the mission 'to improve lives and empower communities through the power of physical activity and sport.' The governance of the Partnership is strong with a focused sense of purpose and drive, with much of its funding coming directly from Sport England. Its four priorities are:

- Independence in later life
- Actively Ageing Well
- Building Active Families
- Stabilising Young Lives

This appears to be a successful and proactive Partnership, and it would be interesting to understand the contribution it makes towards the SC Leisure strategy. How is SC leveraging the skills and experience of partnerships such as this one in order to further the strategic objectives? Energize is but one of several Partners including Place Making Leads, Parish and Town Councils and facility operators mentioned within the leisure facilities strategy. Who in SC is responsible for ensuring such Partnerships are efficient, effective, offer value for money and deliver the services they are contracted to?

Energize actively promotes the programmes and collaborators it is using to achieve its objectives. Could SC not do the same?

4. SC Strategy Recommendations

4.1. What business is the SC Leisure Services in?

SC will need to determine in its own mind where it stands between the provision of sports services and facilities, recreation and leisure facilities and health and wellbeing provision, and articulate this position within the strategy.

4.2. What does success look like and how will it be made visible?

SC should define and adopt a common understanding across its own officers, partners and the general public of what success looks like, and communicate how this will be managed, tracked and communicated to Councillors, officers and the general public.

4.3. Reporting and KPIs

SC should develop, and include within the strategy, meaningful KPIs to inform Councillors, officers and the Public. A performance management framework, in line with national objectives, should be constructed to cover all aspects of the strategy. The framework will provide the opportunity for a feedback loop to be in place to inform future management decisions and strategic direction.

The Government's 'Sporting Future: A new strategy for an Active Nation' December 2015 defines 23 KPIs. Some of which are directly applicable to the SC leisure facilities strategy and others which can be adapted for local analysis and performance tracking. A list of these performance indicators is at Appendix 1.

4.4. What is missing from the Strategy?

There are a number of outcomes and issues, many previously mentioned, which are not covered in the strategy. It would be good to understand whether these have been considered and discounted, or whether they have not yet been thoroughly assessed as options.

- (i) **Delivery channels:** A greater variety of delivery channels are required to enable greater off-site accessibility to services. Following from Sport England's observation that the industry lags behind in digital transformation, the use of digital means of delivery might be appropriate. The Energize Partnership already uses digital methods to contact clients, but local Leisure Provision is unwilling at present to use digital channels such as live on-line scheduling or recorded video offerings to reach more members or to enable those who have accessibility issues due to COVID-19 or otherwise. These offerings could be pay-by-view or subscription based, with rates varying, depending on socio-economic ability. Marketed correctly, these could be a remunerative adjunct to physical attendance at a leisure facility and not replace the need for such centres. Many commercial gym operators and other local authority led leisure providers have established or are considering digital and online augmentation to their client offering. Has Shropshire?
- (ii) **Getting the basics right:**
 - a. On site accessibility. On-site classes are currently quite rightly shortened and capacity reduced due to the safety regulations of COVID-19. Scheduling should be reviewed in order to provide more of the classes that are currently oversubscribed with regular waiting lists.
 - b. We believe that the online booking function for exercise classes and the swimming pool is still not available for the Church Stretton Leisure Centre, despite handover having taken place on 1st April 2020. Even given lockdown, the inability to instigate a simple booking system after seven months is concerning, and leading to member frustration
 - c. Other imaginative usage of facilities. For example, in off-peak times running more classes for a variety of demographics along the lines of exercise referral follow-on classes such as gentle circuit training and keeping active

- d. Taking part in national initiatives such as ‘This Girl Can’ to encourage further usage of the facilities across a variety of demographics and creating a special focus on target demographics in line with national strategy
- (iii) **Marketing to increase usage and alleviate discrimination:** With a variety of delivery channels and charging schemes, physical activity ceases to be the preserve of those who can easily access or afford to keep fit. Positive and more robust marketing is absolutely key to attract a greater usage of existing facilities. National schemes and promotions, plus the intervention of local Partners like the Energize Partnership are key in generating involvement for all age groups and demographics. This requirement should be in the strategy, managed and monitored. Where is the marketing around towns and villages, the ‘stands’ on high streets, the welcome for prospective clients and taster days. In fact, where are any of the techniques used by the commercial sector to attract clients?
- (iv) **Lack of ambition:** the ambition to increase usage of existing facilities is conspicuously lacking throughout the strategy. So obviously so, that one wonders if this is a conscious omission? This is out of alignment with national strategy and how can SC expect to execute their vision of a ‘healthier, active lifestyle for everyone’ where there is no planned growth in the usage of existing facilities?
- (v) **Little consideration of demographic in facilities needs requirements:** the detailed needs analysis covers such topics as deprivation, health profiles, demographics and market segmentation. The data used in many instances is old, dating back as far as 2007 in some cases. Modelling of future population growth has purely been done on total population and does not take into account any increase in specific demographics. There is the recognition that Shropshire will have an increasingly aged population with commensurate health and care needs, many of which can be ameliorated through the availability and accessibility of suitably staffed and planned leisure facilities and referral services. However, once this recognition is out of the way, all subsequent strategic modelling seems to discount variations in demographic.
- (vi) **Professional workforce and staffing levels:** the professional workforce in the sport and physical activity industry is notably undervalued and staff turnover, particularly of young, disaffected staff members, is high. There is no mention of a workforce strategy or career plan to ensure that SC Leisure facilities are properly staffed and maintained by appropriately qualified personnel. There is no obvious evidence available of staffing requirements and skills review across the county. Better qualified and well-motivated staff could be invaluable, especially in the more rural centres such as the Strettons, so that greater support and level of service can be provided to facilities users and less able demographics are not excluded or discriminated against.
- (vii) **Links with health and wellbeing:** as mentioned above, there is extensive evidence to show that increased physical activity, both of an individual and of the community a whole, has a positive effect on daily health and reduces the risk of

an individual developing chronic conditions associated commonly with ageing or unhealthy lifestyles. It is concerning therefore, that little effort seems to have been put into Exercise on Referral (EoR) or other similar schemes from a SC delivery perspective. It may be the intention to outsource these to delivery partners – in which case why is there no information? In many areas the EoR scheme needs a revamp with more appropriate qualified specialist practitioners properly remunerated to run beneficial and meaningful schemes. In Church Stretton Leisure Centre, the scheme is notable by its absence, presumably for the reasons of COVID risk. What other provision has been made, such as online classes or contact as provided by the Energize Partnership? EoR need not necessarily be fitness suite based; it can take the form of circuit training, individual classes and more social sessions in a variety of venues. Which committee reviews the benefits analysis and success of any/all of the EoR schemes running and disseminates good practice to other localities? Have the individuals who were on EoR prior to COVID effectively been abandoned through the unwillingness to use other delivery channels?

- (viii) **Co-operative working:** Strategic Priority 4 describes the delivery of high-quality leisure facilities through targeted investment, partnership opportunities, community empowerment and commercial acumen in order to reduce levels of subsidy. The objectives to achieve this all link to the SC corporate plan but does the continual use of the ‘we will...’ terminology mean that ‘we have not...so far’ been doing any of the due diligence and commissioning of partnerships that a performance managed business should undertake? A community such as the Strettons has an ageing (but not yet aged), affluent and educated demographic with a strong community bond, many of whom bring with them a wealth of successful career experience from other sectors. The community is additionally well-experienced in providing volunteer led services such as the Mayfair Centre and Silvester Horne Institute and the myriad of charities and volunteer concerns that have continued, and proliferated, throughout lockdown and beyond. This community has repeatedly called for the continuation and investment in the Church Stretton swimming pool through the voice of the Stretton Pool Action group. Surely, a community such as this which is rich in resources, skills and time must be a candidate for the ‘community empowerment’ as stated in SP4? Why, in the past, has SC been reluctant to enter into such an agreement? There should be significantly more scope for discussion now that empowerment and partnerships are an active part of the LC leisure strategy.

4.5. Leisure’s role in the post COVID recovery

Finally, in these latter stages, and the aftermath, of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is widely recognised that the leisure industry has a major part to play in the nation’s post-COVID recovery:

On 6 July 2020, 118 member states of the United Nations issued a joint statement on the impact of COVID-19 on sport, physical activity and well-being, as well as its effects on social development. Signatories praised the valuable contribution of sport and

physical activity in promoting many important areas, such as: education, sustainable development, peace, cooperation, solidarity, fairness, social inclusion and health.

“There is no situation, there is no age and no condition where exercise is not a good thing.” Professor Chris Whitty, Government Chief Medical Adviser

Aside from recognising that changes brought about by COVID-19 and its aftermath will impact the requirement for future facilities need and investment, the strategy makes no other mention of COVID, or indeed how it will influence facility and investment decisions. The media has highlighted specific COVID-recovery referral schemes in Wales to aid the recovery of those with both acute and “long’ COVID symptoms. Would such a scheme be beneficial to Shropshire, and if not, why not?

5. Conclusions

Now is an increasingly a tough environment for local authority leisure services as a discretionary, but undoubtedly vital spend. The limited funding available has been stretched by the COVID pandemic and there is pressure to reduce and consolidate council run facilities.

Ironically, leisure services will be one of the key components of a post-COVID recovery both in terms of individual physical and mental health and wellbeing, but also of community wellbeing, strengthening the bonds within a community to add resilience and a sense of place for every member.

The time is therefore now to be bold, to be innovative and to work with willing, skilled and capable partnerships in order to not only retain existing services, but to re-energise provision so that no element of society is discriminated against. In order to do this, SC should rely less on ‘consultant speak’ and more on practical and basic performance management techniques.

The critical point of the current strategy must be to ensure that it provides excellent value for money, effective commissioning, a range of modern, effective and appropriate delivery channels and a reliable and accurate performance management system if SC is going to deliver on its vision and core principles. Convert the ‘we will...’into ‘we are, and this is how we are doing...’ in realistic and communicated timescales.

From the major sports hubs in the larger towns, to smaller offerings such as the Church Stretton Leisure Centre, there is the potential to make an ongoing and tangible difference to many more people’s lives over the period of this strategy if we succeed.

5.1. Key Recommendations

- a. Define ‘success’
- b. Understand the business you are in
- c. Get the basics right
- d. Be bold and innovative and work with commercial and volunteer partnerships, with local facility owners such as schools and in-house facilities to create best value for money

- e. Have ambition and drive usage through more targeted marketing campaigns
- f. Create accessibility and reduce discrimination against demographic and geographical groups by utilising a variety of delivery channels
- g. Communicate, commission, manage and report
- h. Improve the skills of the leisure services professionals to better align with a potential move towards a health and wellbeing role

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Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation

Key Performance Indicators

KPI 1 – Increase in percentage of the population taking part in sport and physical activity at least twice in the last month

KPI 2 – Decrease in percentage of people physically inactive (KPI 1 and 2 from Active Lives survey) KPI 1 – Increase in percentage of the population taking part in sport and physical activity at least twice in the last month KPI 2 – Decrease in percentage of people physically inactive (KPI 1 and 2 from Active Lives survey)

KPI 3 – Increase in the percentage of adults utilising outdoor space for exercise/ health reasons (MENE survey)

KPI 4 – Increase in the percentage of children achieving physical literacy standards

KPI 5 – Increase in the percentage of children achieving swimming proficiency and Bikeability Levels 1-3

KPI 6 – Increase in the percentage of young people (11-18) with a positive attitude towards sport and being active (KPI 4, 5 and 6 from Taking Part)

KPI 7 – Increase in the number of people volunteering in sport at least twice in the last year (from Active Lives survey)

KPI 8 – The demographics of volunteers in sport to become more representative of society as a whole (from Active Lives survey and ONS population data)

KPI 9 – Number of people who have attended a live sporting event more than once in the past year (from Active Lives survey)

KPI 10 – Number of Olympic and Paralympic medals won at Summer and Winter Games

KPI 11 – Position in Olympic and Paralympic Summer and Winter medal tables

KPI 12 – UK/Home Nation performance in pinnacle World, European or Commonwealth competitions (provided by UK Sport)

KPI 13 – Average attendance levels at national-level domestic sport

KPI 14 – Attendance at events supported through government and UK Sport major events programmes

KPI 15 – Economic impact of events supported through government and UK Sport major events programmes (both from UK Sport figures)

KPI 16 – Employment in the sport sector (from Sport Satellite Account)

KPI 17 – Position of the UK in the Nation Brands Index, both a) overall and b) in answer to the specific question about the UK excelling at sport (from the Anholt- GfK Roper Nation Brands Index)

KPI 18 – Percentage of publicly owned facilities with under-utilised capacity (through revised National Benchmarking Service)

KPI 19 – Increase in the amount of non-public investment into sport bodies which are in receipt of public investment

KPI 20 – Increase in the number of publicly funded bodies that meet the new UK Sports Governance Code (collated annually by UK Sport and the Home Nations Sports Councils)

KPI 21 – Number of sports that meet the Sport and Recreation Alliance's Voluntary Code to reinvest 30% of their net UK television broadcasting revenues in grassroots sport (collated by the SRA)

KPI 22 – Headline results of the new Sport Workforce People Survey (Sport England benchmarking)

KPI 23 – Relevant indicator to be developed as part of Duty of Care review