

Community Leisure UK – Supplementary written evidence (NPS0112)

We are pleased to be submitting a response to the Inquiry, following the opportunity to give oral evidence to the committee on the 16th December 2020. In line with the remit of our organisation, our response addresses only those questions where we can offer an informed view.

1. To briefly introduce ourselves, Community Leisure UK is a trade association representing members who are all registered charities or societies delivering public leisure, sport and/or culture services for communities across the UK. These charities provide physical activity, cultural engagement and social opportunities and are significant partners within their local communities. We have a total of 110 members, operating over 3 700 facilities across England, Scotland and Wales, with a total of over 100 000 staff and over 17 000 volunteers.

How can local delivery, including funding structures, of sport and recreation be improved to ensure that people of all ages and abilities are able to lead an active lifestyle? For example, how successfully do local authorities and other bodies such as Active Partnerships, Leisure Trusts, local sports clubs and charities work together, and how might coordination be improved?

2. Local authorities are key partners in the provision of physical activity, sport and leisure for their local communities. Approximately one third of public leisure provision in England is delivered through charitable trusts, in collaboration with their local authority partner. Therefore, local authorities need to be sufficiently resourced to effectively deliver and support public leisure and physical activity, whether this is delivered by the local authority or through a charitable trust partner.

2.1 Management fees to leisure trusts have been decreasing consistently for a number of years, with some local authorities now not paying any management fee to their leisure trust partner, or looking for a payment from the provider to deliver the services. Public physical activity, sport and leisure provision must be seen as an essential service, which is an investment rather than a cost. This is more relevant in light of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. If local authorities are not properly resourced, sport, leisure and physical activity budgets will continue to be cut, resulting in disproportionate impacts for communities.

2.2 It is equally important to recognise the value of facilities, services and programmes provided by third sector organisations and charities with no link to the local authority. These organisations provide important services for many communities across the UK, and are heavily reliant on volunteers. However, as part of the public leisure landscape they must be recognised and

valued by both local and national Government and have equal access to funding streams and grants.

2.3 There is a need for ownership of public leisure and sport at Government level. The sector's skills and expertise is ideally positioned to support local partners and community health and wellbeing. However, it has traditionally been regarded as a 'nice to have', which is easy to cut as it is not a statutory service. The Government needs to engage with the sector and to recognise, embed, and invest in the value that it can offer, particularly around preventative health care.

2.4 Leisure trusts are uniquely positioned to support their communities to lead active lifestyles. They are run by independent boards made up of individuals from the local community and are well connected with health and social care partners, their local authority partners and other third sector and charitable organisations. It is imperative, therefore, for the government to champion the inclusion of leisure trusts, where they are the delivery partner, in any strategic sport and leisure planning on both a local and regional level.

2.5 There is an urgent need for capital investment into venues and facilities to ensure there is a sustainable and future-proof asset base to serve the needs of communities in the long-term. This is also an opportunity to reduce the carbon footprint of the leisure sector.

2.6 The Local Government Physical Activity Partnership brings together partners from across the public sport and leisure landscape and is an example of a vehicle that could be used by Government to effectively engage with local government and delivery partners.

2.7 At a local level, local authorities should be the 'glue' that brings together all stakeholders within their area to encourage collaboration and ensure adequate and fair provision of physical activity, sport and leisure opportunities for everyone within their communities.

2.8 Funding of all local delivery should be based on principles of sustainability, equality and inclusivity. Social value must be front and centre for any funding agreements, with a move away from short-term project funding to long-term funding arrangements that will provide stability for the delivery of projects and programmes and long-term results around health, wellbeing and prevention to be delivered.

2.9 Finally, local authorities, when commissioning services, must require contractors to offer affordable and inclusive programmes, and require them to work within their communities to join up and strengthen the offer for residents, and not just make profit from limited programmes for those who can afford it. The trust sector, with aligned strategic priorities, is ideally placed to deliver this.

How can children and young people be encouraged to participate in sport and recreation both at school and outside school, and lead an active lifestyle? If possible, share examples of success stories and good practice, and challenges faced.

3. Children and young people must be encouraged to participate in physical activity and sport through school PE, complemented with a high quality and appealing offer of activities and opportunities outside school.

3.1 There should be clear pathways from school PE into community based sport physical activity, with schools encouraged to signpost children into relevant community activities. Swim England offers clear pathways from learn to swim programmes into other aquatic activities and strives to retain young people to be active within water sports.

3.2 Community sport and physical activity venues must be accessible for schools to use, to complement their offer, and to enable children and young people to become familiar with local facilities and what other activities take place within these venues.

3.3 Sports development programmes are important to engage and retain children and young people in sport and physical activity, however, due to funding pressures, these programmes are at risk of being cut, resulting in a loss of expertise and pathways for young people to be active.

3.4 There must be a focus on inclusive family activities, from prenatal, to postnatal and early years activities. Providing opportunities for families to be active and take part in physical activity together is important to ensure that children are encouraged by their family to be active and to enjoy the benefits of activity together. One area that has proved particularly popular during the current Covid-19 pandemic is the provision of family swim bubble sessions, where families can book an area of a pool for their household bubble to enjoy together.

3.5 It is important to recognise the drop off during life transition points, for example children starting school or transitioning to secondary school, and to provide targeted offers to help address the decline in physical activity.

How can adults of all ages and backgrounds, particularly those from under-represented groups, including women and girls, ethnic minorities, disabled people, older people, and those from less affluent backgrounds, be encouraged to lead more active lifestyles? If possible, share examples of success stories and good practice, and challenges faced.

4. Public leisure facilities are ideally positioned within communities to offer an inclusive, accessible and affordable leisure opportunity and activities for people of all ages and backgrounds.

4.1 As charitable organisations, Community Leisure UK members offer a range of concessions, discounts and free access targeted at individuals who may be otherwise unable or unwilling to participate in physical activity. As non profit distributing organisations, all profit generated is reinvested, enabling cross-subsidy of both services (i.e. income from profit-generating activities is used to subsidise outreach and development work) and people (i.e. those able to pay subsidise access for people with less disposable income).

4.2 However, there is a concern that, due to the pandemic and consequential economic recession, there will be a greater number of people without any disposable income to participate in physical activity and sport. There is a significant challenge for leisure operators to identify these individuals, many of whom will not fall within the traditional concessionary categories. This could result in higher numbers of people not participating in, or dropping out of, sport and physical activity. This risks the increase of inequalities for people to lead an active lifestyle.

4.3 Related to the challenge of poverty, households or individuals may find themselves unable to invest in the equipment needed to participate in their preferred physical activity. Investment will be needed to make additional equipment available free of charge as offering free or subsidised access assumes that individuals have appropriate clothing/footwear/equipment to participate.

4.4 One way to address the challenge of facility access is to invest in physical activity opportunities outdoors, such as outdoor gyms and public sports courts. However, this will need to be complemented by a sustainable pathway into an indoor activity to enable active lifestyles in all seasons.

4.5 As community anchor organisations, leisure trusts operate assets that bring people together to socialise and lead an active life, regardless of their ability or background. Thus, in addition to providing affordable services, they deliver specific programmes that provide the opportunity for different community, age and ability groups to be active. These include Dementia-friendly programmes, falls prevention, strength and balance classes, toning suites, walking football/netball/rugby including wheelchair accessible activities, and private access for faith groups. These activities are both delivered inside the leisure facilities as well as in other community venues such as town halls.

4.6 One example of how trusts share a common goal of being accessible is from Wave Leisure in Sussex. They operate the impressive [Get Set Club](#), which encourages children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), and their families, to take part in activities. This is a service delivery beyond the 'traditional' leisure service that a charitable trust is able to provide thanks to their strong position and connection with the community and non-profit distributing business model.

4.7 Links with charities and organisations that work with specific community groups are an important way to connect individuals into physical activity opportunities and to discuss suitable provision for different population groups.

4.8 Physical activity referral schemes are another effective way to enable health care providers to signpost individuals into safe and supportive exercise activities. However, this is dependent on the existence of a physical activity referral scheme operating where an individual lives, with variance in provision across England.

Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation, the Government's 2015 sports strategy, outlines five outcome priorities: physical health, mental health, individual development, social and community development and economic development. Are these the right priorities and how successful has the government been in measuring and delivering these outcomes to date?

5. The priorities within the strategy are relevant and there has been success since the launch of the strategy in 2015, particularly in the beginning to frame sport and physical activity within a wellbeing context and far more than sport for sport's sake.

5.1 The question has been in the delivery of the strategy, which requires far greater cross-department and policy collaboration to enable effective and meaningful implementation. DCMS has a key role, but will not be able to deliver on these outcome priorities alone, which will require cross-departmental ownership.

5.2 Furthermore, as we emerge from Covid-19, the legacy will remain for a long time and will have long-lasting impacts on the sector. There is an urgent need to rethink the public leisure landscape, particularly recognising its fragility and seek to protect and sustain it.

5.3 Now is the time to be ambitious in the vision for the role of physical activity and sport. As we seek to rebuild in the aftermath of the pandemic, we have the opportunity to recognise and optimise the role of leisure and sport in supporting the rehabilitation of individuals, and to relieve the burden on the NHS.

Is government capturing an accurate picture of how people participate in sport and recreation activities in its data collection? How could this be improved?

6. We do not think the government has an accurate picture on the participation rates in sport and recreation activities, as there is no standard framework for data collection. This has been highlighted in the messaging and advocacy work during the pandemic where there has been a struggle to collate consistent and robust data of the impact of the pandemic on the sector. This is an area of ongoing work where standardisation of reporting and guidelines are not readily available yet.

6.1 Operators like leisure trusts and Councils managing leisure services are key partners in providing this information. Our work with members on articulating their social value highlighted a key barrier being the collection of participation information. Not all CRM or booking systems are set up to collect extensive background information on participants nor the frequency with which an individual or household engages in a particular activity. It is clear that not all organisations have the capacity or skills to be able to effectively collect, monitor and process detailed participation information on a regular basis.

6.2 The National Leisure Recovery Fund administered by Sport England illustrated some of the challenges in data collection as some organisations did not have the required participation data at hand, or on their systems. However, this is an opportunity to build on the data gathered through the fund and develop consistent data collection and monitoring. This will require training, advice and investment to make this data collection possible locally so that the information can be collated nationally.

6.2 We work closely with 4Global and Datahub to understand how to integrate data collection in CRM systems. A report by Powering Partnerships¹ on social value found that our members have limited capacity to assemble and process data into useful information for local authorities. There has also been limited demand from local authorities on measuring social value. Different local authorities and leisure trusts use different reporting structures, making it more difficult to create a template reporting framework. However, there are four metrics that can be obtained with saliency from an integration with DataHub:

- Average Social Value per Person (£)
- Total concessions (%)
- Concessions by ward (% and map)
- Deprivation targeting (% and map)

How can racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and ableism in sport be tackled?

7. There is a lot of work within the physical activity, sport and leisure sector to understand and offer fully inclusive opportunities for participation. At Community Leisure UK we are currently developing an inclusivity policy, both for ourselves as an organisation and to support conversations with our members.

7.1 It is important to ensure safeguarding standards and training are inclusive in their language and approach, and that these are widely shared. For example, our Safeguarding group has engaged with Sport England on their work around transgender inclusion.

7.2 At a governance level, organisations should seek to have representatives reflecting their local communities. Our members all have boards made up of individuals from their local communities and this is important in ensuring that they

¹ Articulating Social Value for Leisure Trusts in England. Powering Partnerships. March 2020

are community focused, but should also be encouraged to look at diversity and representation.

What successful policy interventions have other countries used to encourage people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to participate in sport and recreation, and lead more active lifestyles?

8. Within our UK remit, we are aware of some policy interventions within the devolved nations that have been successful in encouraging people to participate in physical activity and sport and to lead more active lifestyles.

8.1 In Wales, the National Exercise Referral Scheme offers a uniform approach to referrals across the country. Managed by the Welsh Local Government Association, this national scheme is delivered by local authorities in partnership with Public Health Wales. The national approach offers equality of access to provision and ensures that everyone has the same opportunity to engage in a referral programme, no matter where they live. Where Welsh local authorities work in partnership with a leisure trust, it is the charitable trust that delivers the local exercise referral scheme following the national framework.

8.2 Led by SAMH, Scotland's Mental Health Charter for Physical Activity and Sport encourages participation in physical activity and sport as a way to maintain and improve mental health and wellbeing. The Charter supports anyone involved in physical activity and sport at grassroots to elite level to talk about mental health and wellbeing, and to know where to go to get help.

Should there be a national plan for sport and recreation? Why/why not?

9. As part of a consultation with our members on the future of public leisure, there was an appetite to produce a bold and brave new vision, national strategy and delivery framework for leisure and culture leading to the creation of a national wellness service aimed at significantly reducing rising demands on NHS and social services.

9.1 A national strategy could result in the physical activity, sport and leisure sector delivering:

- ❑ integrated health and wellbeing services focused on improving physical and mental health, including the entitlement for everyone with a long-term health condition to receive a "wellness prescription" to help manage their condition(s);
- ❑ integrated disability, social care and youth services focused on improving physical and mental health, educational attainment, routes to employment and crime reduction; and
- ❑ a leisure volunteering scheme to build social capital to support community outreach work to engage population groups who do not benefit from being physically active and being part of a community.

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