



LEISURE IN ARDS AND NORTH DOWN

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

THEMES

- Overview and facilities at Ards & North Down
- Performance and future plans around physical activity
- The Covid-19 year, challenges and changes ahead



CONTEXT

- Local government in Northern Ireland does not have responsibility for schools, housing or Libraries
- Leisure therefore becomes a key aspect of what it can deliver
- Average House Price in Ards and North Down is £201,000
- Average rates bill for a house of this value is £1,403 PA of which £13.68 pays for leisure provision, this figure does not take into account loan repayments, utilities or maintenance costs
- The perception of Ards and North Down is one of affluence where people are well educated, live in large houses and enjoy an excellent quality of life. In comparison to the rest of Northern Ireland, we have the lowest levels of obesity, higher than average levels of economic activity and some of the most majestic scenery, high quality outdoor spaces and accessible leisure facilities for people to participate in physical recreation.
- How Should leisure be delivered in this context should it be self sufficient and delivered by council, should it be subsidised, or should it be provided by the private sector?



CONTEXT

- For those of you who have made up your mind that leisure should be privatised and not subsidised by the public purse because of the perception of the borough as an affluent area you may want to consider that the borough has a number of estates that are ranked in the worst 10% of areas in Northern Ireland under the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measures that ranks deprivation according to
 - Income
 - Employment
 - Health and Disability
 - Access to Services
 - Living Environment
 - Crime and Disorder

CONTEXT

- Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council overturn a previous council decision to outsource their new £35 million leisure facility and agree to manage it in-house at least for the 1st year of operation
- Magherafelt leisure centre ended their outsourced agreement early and returned the management of the facility to the in-house team
- Belfast City Council leisure centres are operated by GLL and depending on who you talk to they are either a disaster or they are doing exceptionally well. What is not in doubt is that Belfast is continuing to invest heavily in its leisure infrastructure with major refurbishments at 4 of its main centres all either completed or due to be completed very shortly since GLL took over.
- A number of other councils have also recently refurbished or built large tier 1 centres, suggesting a real confidence in leisure in Northern Ireland



OVERVIEW AND FACILITIES AT ARDS & NORTH DOWN

- I manage 2 X Tier 1 Leisure Centres, 2 X Tier 2 leisure Centres, 1 X Tier 3 Leisure Centre, 2 X Multi Sports Pitch facilities, 38 X Grass Football Pitches with pavilions, 6 X 3G Pitches, 3 X Sand Dressed Hockey Pitches, 42 X Tennis Courts (including 3 Indoor), 42 Bowling Rinks across 5 sites, 3 Cricket Pitches, 4 Rugby Pitches, 1 Athletics facility, 80 parks and playgrounds and 450 Hectares of open space that includes beaches, country walks and forest trails
- The council area is 228 square miles with 118 miles of coastline and has a population of 178,000
- 2 Councils joined together in 2015
- The last 10 years have seen almost £100 million invested in leisure facilities
- Plans were in place for further investment of £20 – 25 million
- Approximately £15 million revenue spent on leisure in the last 10 years



MANAGEMENT

- I manage a 'mixed' economy
- Former North Down Borough Council Facilities managed for Council by Serco who set up the Northern Community Leisure Trust (NCLT)
- Former Ards Borough Council facilities managed by the existing in-house management team
- In 2015 protracted discussion over who should deliver leisure services eventually settled on the status quo until 2023 when NCLT/Serco contract is due to end. Option exists for a further 5 year extension if agreeable to both parties.
- Consultants appointed to agree a way forward on this
- Early thoughts from the consultants are that there might not be too many other options available due to economic downturn brought about by Covid
- I may see this differently

FINANCE

- In the last almost fully operational financial year I had an operating budget of £1,152,100 Expenditure £4,255,900 Inc £3,103,800
- This includes the subsidies paid and received to and from NCLT/Serco but does not include their detailed income and expenditure statements, these are managed by Serco
- These figures do not include utility and maintenance costs, these are managed by separate departments of the Council
- The headline figures behind the above budget are;
 - Ards Blair Mayne due to make a net gain of £339,000 based on income of £2,305,600
 - Comber Leisure Centre net deficit of £110,200 based on income of £421,300
 - Portaferry Sports Centre net deficit of £84,400 based on income of £85,700
 - Subsidy paid to NCLT/Serco £437,500

HUMAN RESOURCE

- I manage a team of over 100 permanent employees and some 50 or 60 casual and seasonal staff on the in-house team
- Technically also responsible for the Serco employees which amount to 71 permanent staff and around 80 casual and seasonal staff



COVID IMPACT

- Annus Horribilus
- ABMWLC Income from £2,305,600 to and end of year forecast of less than £400,000 which may even be optimistic if current lockdown continues
- Bangor Aurora Income from over £4,000,000 to less than £800,000
- Memberships across all sites either frozen or cancelled
- Footfall massively down, over 1 million visitors inside the first 16 months of operation
- Significant expenditure across all areas on Covid safety measures
- Permanent staff on furlough, casual staff released
- Mental and physical health issues of staff and customers



COVID IMPACT FINANCE

- Total budget for leisure has now moved to £4,255,900
- ABMWLC net benefit of £339,000 to net deficit of £1,481,300
- CLC net deficit up from £110,200 to £386,100
- PSC net deficit up from £84,400 to £124,400
- Subsidy paid to NCLT/Serco up from £437,500 to £1,584,500

COVID IMPACT HR

- Almost all staff on furlough (90%)
- Some staff came back on flexible furlough as we operated on reduced opening hours
- Increased referrals to OH for stress related issues





REACTIONS

- Online classes
- Online fitness programmes for sports people
- Online courses for Sports Development programmes
- Online inductions for equipment
- Online programmes for clients
- Redeployment
- Community aid schemes

CHALLENGES

- Partnerships

PHA

Trusts

Health charities, McMillan, Cancer Research etc (PreHab for Cancer)

Schools

Universities and Colleges



CHALLENGES

- Changing Attitudes to fitness

- Home gyms
- Online classes
- Walking

- Cycling

- PS5 and XBOX all feature fun fitness programmes

- Confidence

- IPSOS polls show people happier to go to pub than return to gym
- Older demographics less confident about coming back (60% over 60 years of age)

- Finance

- Will we have to put our prices up
- Will people be able to afford leisure activities
- Mass unemployment when furlough stops?

Leaders
challenge
people.

But people
stretch
themselves.



OPPORTUNITIES

Stroke

- Social Proscribing
- Identification of those at risk from obesity, diabetes etc and introduce early interventions
- The cost of 1 heart surgery costs approximately £23,000, never mind the social cost and economic loss to the family of the patient
- Invest £4000 in 5 early identified at risk patients and you can potentially save over £100,000 and direct the savings to other areas of the NHS or invest in even more and better facilities to help improve the health and fitness of our communities

FREE NHS

Health Checks

for 75 year olds

Heart disease

IT CAN'T BE ALL ABOUT HEALTH CAN IT?

- Oxford dictionary defines leisure as “ Time when one is not working or occupied; free time” and “ use of free time for enjoyment.”
- Leisure activities include all the things you do that give you pleasure and are not work-related: it's any type of recreational activity.
- Leisure purpose is to be an escape from work and personal worries, it's a time you take for **yourself**, to disconnect. It's a shot of positivity, to take your mind away from problems and quotidian issues.
- Happiness, Enjoyment, Socialising, Self Esteem, Challenging, Educational, Safe Environment, Stress Reduction



OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE ASSUMING WE HAVE A FUTURE

- Closure of all or some facilities

- Limited Opening of some or all facilities

- Sharing of facilities

- Re-shaped in-house provision – “In House Transformed”

- Outsourcing options that could result in;

- An extended contract with **NCLT/SERCO**
- A contract with an existing charitable non-profit distributing organisation (NPDO)
- A contract with a Community Interest Company (CIC) or other Social Enterprise established for the purpose
- “Quasi – outsourcing” options that could involve a contract with a Council Owned Company (Local Authority Trading Company)

- Combinations of the above/consideration of one or more trusts for one or more facilities (Mixed Market)

