



The future of Local Authority Sport and Leisure services

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The future of Local Authority Sport and Leisure services

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About the report

- [The report: Securing the Future of Public Sport and Leisure Services](#) was launched in parliament on 14th September 2021.
- The report is a collaboration between the [Association for Public Service Excellence \(APSE\)](#), the [Local Government Association \(LGA\)](#) and the [Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association \(CLOA\)](#).
- **The report speaks on behalf of the public sport and leisure sector.** The findings and recommendations are based on an extensive consultation with over 260 local government representatives, leisure providers, arms length bodies, national governing bodies and the [Local Government Physical Activity Partnership \(LGPAP\)](#).
- The recommendations reflect what the sector told us needs to change, in order to make public sport and leisure services sustainable, and to realise its potential to deliver on a wide range of national and local policy objectives.

Since publication and working alongside LGPAP the LGA have supported the production of resources and guides e.g.

- **Briefings for CEOs/Local elected members/Directors (on the report)**
- **Finance options for Councils**

Case for public sport and leisure

85% young people **learn to swim in public pools.**

14m people participated in swimming pa Pre-COVID.

Councils in England are the biggest spenders on sport, leisure, parks & green spaces, spending **£1.1bn pa**

Physical activity's value to the economy -

£9.5bn. Of this:

£5.2 bn - health care savings

£1.7bn - **social care** savings

£20bn in social value incl. **10,000 fewer crime** incidents, improved levels of social trust, **belonging**, community engagement

86% - people who **prefer exercising in leisure centres.**

66% cancer pre/post rehabilitation services delivered in public leisure facilities

Exercise on referral schemes, **social prescribing** & rehab. services delivered in public leisure facilities

What makes PSL provision unique?



Affordable

Subsidised membership

- facilities for grassroots sports clubs

-accessible



Cradle to grave

opportunities for **all** to be active at any stage in life

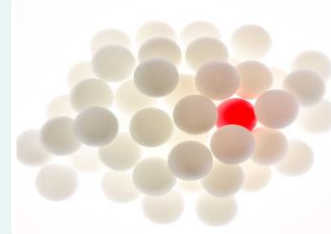
- Breadth & depth of provision



Public pools

deliver the **statutory requirement** for swimming/ water safety

- diving/ swimming couldn't exist



Reach

Deprived, under-represented, inactive groups & communities

- **health inequalities**

-Community hubs



Public Policy

Levelling up

- Health, social care

- Climate

- Social prescribing

and much more..

The private sector cannot match the breadth & depth of facilities provided by the public sport and leisure sector because it is not viable for them to do so.

Challenges

Funding

- Historically, some products have been commercialised to meet funding challenges.

- Reinvestment in the service has usually not been routinely implemented.

- The service has often subsidised budget pressures elsewhere but is now in need of subsidising.

Facilities

- Nearly two-thirds of the leisure estate is ageing and past its replacement date.

- Current provision does not fit local need.

- The public leisure estate contributes between 10 - 40% of a councils' direct carbon emissions.

COVID-19

- Historic funding, systemic & operational issues have intensified.

- The sector is fragmented and is not influencing effectively.

- Health inequalities and physical activity levels have worsened

Without immediate support, public sport & leisure facilities are at immediate risk of failure & long term damage

Summary of key findings

1. Public sport & leisure services (PSLS) are unique for their reach & support of communities.

2. Systemic funding issues & COVID-19 have left PSLS at immediate risk of operational failure/damage.

3. Increasing financial returns risks losing focus on those most in need of the service.

4. Leadership & skills development across PSLS, health & workforce is needed to drive collaboration & integration.

5. Councils have the central leadership role in creating active places & connecting diverse Government objectives.

6. Community sport & physical activity development is essential to expand the reach of PSLS & address health inequalities.

7. Children learn essential water safety & swimming skills in publicly provided swimming pools. This cannot be fulfilled by private operators..

8. Ageing leisure assets make a significant contribution to councils' carbon emissions.

9. The sector's voice is fragmented, weakening its influence at local & national levels.

10. Leaders of PSLS want to expand on existing work & collaborate more with partners, particularly with health.

11. PSLS are integral to COVID-19, recovery supporting communities, reducing the burden on NHS & social care.

Opportunities (1)

- Radical Rethink**
- Strategically align & champion PSLS contribution to a diverse range of policy objectives.
 - What is the vision going forward?
 - Who is the service for & why?
 - How does it support recovery?
 - How should PSLS be funded/delivered in the future?
 - What do communities need from facilities/PSLS in the future?

- Leadership**
- Understand local systems & the role the sector plays within them.
 - Invest in leadership & skills development across leisure, health & the workforce to co-design services & drive integration & collaboration.
 - Develop a shared vision
 - Agree the evidence base with partners & the workforce so outcomes are clear & priorities aligned.

- Expansion**
- Enhance the sector's preventative offer for mental/physical health & its community development offer.
 - Build on/develop collaborations with NHS, public health & wider partners.
 - Opportunities: shaping places, levelling up, active travel, inequalities.
 - How? Facilities, regeneration, planning, co-location.

Opportunities (2)

Integration

- Influence partners so PSLs are seen as a key strategic & delivery partner across a range of policy objectives.
- Integrate PSLs with new Integrated Care Systems and public health teams to align and support priorities.
- Use social prescribing opportunities, GP referral programmes & community development to tackle inequalities & reduce the burden on health & social care.

Decarbonisation

- Investment in decarbonising leisure assets can help to meet net-zero targets
- Reduce running costs in the longer term.

Social value

- Build in additional social value to communities in new contracts.
- Opportunities incl. purchasing from local businesses, apprenticeships, outreach work & activities targeted at less active groups.
- Expand community development prog. to increase reach & address inequalities

2 Asks

To fulfil the sector's ambition & address the challenges identified in the findings, the report asks for **two key contributions from Government**:

1. The new Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) should take responsibility for embedding the strategic role of public leisure facilities within health systems and pathways, coordinating with Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and local government within England. All nations should consider how best to coordinate public sport and leisure provision across differing departments of Government.
2. A £1 billion capital investment into the leisure estate based on established design plans would help to create hundreds of construction jobs, improve efficiency, reduce climate emissions and boost usage. Longer term, it would create new job opportunities and apprenticeships in areas of the sport and leisure industry typically taken by young people.

Recommendations

The report makes the following **seven** recommendations to local and national partners, (paraphrasing...)

1. DCMS should establish a programme for public sport and leisure services....
2. DCMS and DLUHC should work in partnership with local government to build a robust case for the sustainable investment in public sport and leisure services...
3. DFE to work with Government Departments to map school swimming attainment...
4. Councils to be clear of the social outcomes desired when procuring services...
5. The sector should come together to focus on the professional development skills required to support programmes aimed at addressing health inequalities post COVID.....
6. The sector should support leadership development both elected members and officers/senior operational leads....
7. LGPAP should continue its role and further develop its influence.....

Identifying additional financing options for public sport and leisure services

This guide seeks to highlight additional financing options to help sustain the sector and showcases learning from a number of councils who are already doing this.

[Identifying additional financing options for public sport and leisure services | Local Government Association](#)

Some observations/setting the scene (by no means exhaustive)

- Degree of change makes any type of future planning incredibly difficult. Trying to hit a moving target!
- Cost of living/energy crisis (COL) is making an already challenging post COVID world even harder (if that was possible).
- Some Councils taking advantage of decarbonisation funding. But whilst this reducing consumption the cost of energy is wiping out projected savings (accepting it would have been worse without investment)
- Is relying on income growth to meet rising costs sustainable?
- Front line staff recruitment is a massive challenge, (as it is in many other sectors where there is low pay and unsocial hours).
- Encouraging to hear/see that school swimming lessons are seeking to catch up post COVID. However, there are concerns of impacts of COL on school budgets overall, especially transport
- Encouraging to hear that DCMS are working to establish the extent that the sector is at risk and requires support, but outcome could be some weeks away yet
- Councils will be exploring options on budget savings. There are indications of reduced services including closures. Councils will want to save core services.

- Each council will be in different financial positions but the outlook for all is incredibly challenging, especially upper tier where social care pressures continue to rise
- In the immediate short-term influencing local stakeholders becomes critical (senior members and officers). Have we got the right skills and the right messages to have a positive impact? In my experience most elected members would be reluctant to close/reduce services, but have we now reached a point where the ability to exercise those choices is fast disappearing?
- LGPAP continues to bring together key stakeholders around a common purpose, but there is so much turbulence and strain in the system and on people
- At the outset of commissioning the Future of public sport and leisure report we talked about resetting the unique public sport and leisure offer, focussing for example on its role in supporting healthier lives, learn to swim and helping the most vulnerable post COVID. But will this COL crisis force an even more radical rethink?
 - Is this still realistic when there is a crisis?
 - Over the next 5 years will councils/operators have to focus on those that can pay just to survive?
 - Do schools/Government value the role Councils play in providing facilities to learn to swim when there is no obligation to do so?
 - Can we expect a significantly smaller asset base? What are the implications?
 - What services should be at the core of the offer? Who are they for?