

**Select Committee on Regeneration, Culture and Adult Education**

**Wednesday 3 November 2010**

**Report of the Director of Urban Environment**

**Indoor Sports Facility Provision – National Facilities Inquiry**

**Purpose of Report**

1. To consider the results and recommendations from the National Facilities Inquiry and to consider their implications and application within Dudley Borough.

**Background**

2. There are more than 1,600 local authority owned or managed sport and recreation facilities in England. Of these only 33% are under 20 years old, with an average age for this stock of facilities of 25 years.

In Dudley the majority of swimming pools are well over 20 years old. More than 50% of sports halls in the Borough are less than twenty years old reflecting a boom in construction of this type of facility from the late 1990s.

3. **Facilities Inquiry**

BBC broadcaster, John Inverdale, and a panel including a local authority chief executive, a chief executive from the private sector of the leisure industry, an Olympic and World Championship medallist, and senior representatives from national governing bodies of sport, recently undertook an independent investigation into the quality, accessibility and sustainability of community sport and recreation facilities.

4. It is recognised that community sports facilities come in all shapes and sizes. From state-of-the-art lottery-funded facilities, to canal towpaths and local bowls clubs. Some are natural, some man-made; some benefit from public investment whilst others survive on minimal membership subscriptions. For the purposes of this particular report there will be a focus on indoor sports facilities in Dudley.

5. The Facilities Inquiry was prompted by concerns raised by a range of stakeholders and collated by the Central Council for Physical Recreation (CCPR). These included issues such as whether:
- The cost of accessing community facilities was prohibitively high
  - Asset owning sports clubs were able to maintain their facilities to an adequate level
  - Sports halls were being given over to other broader leisure activities

Whilst almost nine in ten people (88%) do not think that there are enough facilities for sport and recreation in the UK, five months of investigation have shown that the UK currently has enough community sports facilities, but they are not in good enough condition, and in some cases not even available for use. The solution, the Panel recommends, lies in maximising usage of those that already exist.

6. There are seven recommendations from the Inquiry contained in a report published in May 2010:
- I. **Local authorities must not be afraid to rationalise facilities where they are no longer fit for purpose or located in the wrong place.**
  - II. **Schools must be obliged to open their premises for out of hours sporting usage.**
  - III. **Greater research is required to understand the current location, condition and usage of facilities.**
  - IV. **All new facilities, whether on school or community sites, must include social space for players, spectators and others.**
  - V. **Voluntary and community groups must be more fully involved in facility provision.**
  - VI. **Freely available outdoor space must appear more accessible**
  - VII. **Access to, and maintenance of waterways must be improved.**
7. The Panel propose to tackle each recommendation separately as the diversity of the recommendations, and the number of stakeholders involved in delivering these, means that no one Department of Government can deliver on the recommendations alone. The Panel is hoping to gather as much support as possible from as large a number of individuals and organisations in order to be able to successfully campaign on each recommendation.

8. This report intends to follow the lead of the Panel and to consider recommendations I - V from a Dudley perspective, given the focus on indoor sports provision in this report.

9. **Local authorities must not be afraid to rationalise facilities where they are no longer fit for purpose or located in the wrong place**

Evidence from the inquiry posited that closing two poor facilities in order to create one good one can lead to increased sporting participation.

Closure of facilities is a particularly contentious issue as has been the experience in the Borough. Communities and clubs are closely attached to their facilities and no matter what the rationale for closure, whether it be financial, building condition or strategic, there will always be public opposition and resistance to change. The point made in respect of two poor facilities being closed to create one good one was a factor that played into the recent closure of Coseley Swimming Baths given the development taking place at Bilston, which whilst being out of the Borough will have a catchment area extending over much of the North Dudley area.

The location of major facilities is largely down to decisions taken some years ago, often by previous authorities and less to do with strategic considerations and more in providing a civic legacy. Equally a number of facilities, mainly school sports halls and synthetic pitches, have been developed since the advent of the national lottery and have required more justification in terms of strategic provision, supply and demand.

Given the current pattern of facility provision in Dudley Borough it is considered that there will be limited further opportunities to rationalise provision in line with this recommendation.

10. **Schools must be obliged to open their premises for out of hours sporting usage**

Evidence shows that the availability of school sports facilities varies according to the attitude of the individual school. Yet opening up all school facilities could enable many more people to participate.

The network of sports facility provision on school sites is extensive in Dudley Borough (see Appendix A) and there are several good examples in Dudley Borough where schools open their sports facilities for extensive use by the community.

Equally there are other instances in the Borough where sports facilities located on school campuses, are less accessible to the wider public reflecting the findings in the Inquiry report. This issue has also

previously been discussed by the Select Committee with reference to Playing Field provision in the Borough.

The Inquiry Panel recommended Governing bodies should be encouraged to review their arrangements for access by the wider community, with particular consideration being given to access to sports facilities by sports clubs and organisations. It may be possible to develop partnership arrangements where community users could provide opportunities for the school population to engage in physical activity and sport.

**11. Greater research is required to understand the current location, condition and usage of facilities**

Strategic planning for future facility developments must provide a framework for provision, based on the use of models such as Sport England's Facilities Planning Model, Active Places Power and the Facilities Calculator. This planning must recognise levels of existing provision both within the Borough and in neighbouring authorities.

Any framework must provide sufficient flexibility so as not to prevent projects from developing, but must also establish a pattern of provision which meets the needs of local people and ensures that there is no duplication of provision and sustainable.

A significant amount of data has been captured regarding facility provision in the Borough through strategic planning work undertaken in partnership with sport England, and would guide future investment in sporting provision in the Borough.

**12. All new facilities, whether on school or community sites, must include social space for players, spectators and others.**

This contributes both to the quality of experience and, crucially, may generate income to sustain the venue.

Social space for players, spectators and other users provide a setting that supports the activities of the users of the sporting facilities. This type of provision provides an opportunity for users to socialise and for facility managers to generate secondary income. Traditionally sports clubs that manage their own facilities have recognised the benefit of social provision and the positive impact that this has for their organisations. The revenue generated from the sale of refreshments in cricket and rugby clubs in particular offset some of the costs associated with operating the organisation.

**13. Voluntary and community groups must be more fully involved in facility provision**

This would reduce costs and generate greater community ownership of the facility. Examples are as follows:

- a. A school providing access and giving responsibility to a badminton club one evening, and a basketball club the next; the security of venue would incentivise responsible stewardship;
- b. A sports centre and local clubs creating formal user agreements, thus providing secure income for the centre and guaranteeing facility time for sport as opposed to other non-sporting uses
- c. A local authority transferring a pavilion or changing rooms to local sports clubs, thus reducing costs for the local authority and providing an asset for the club from which to create a firm base and identity.

The role of the voluntary and community sector in sport is recognised and valued in Dudley and in terms of levels of sports volunteering the Borough has recorded levels of activity well above the national average. Dudley Council for Voluntary Service (DCVS) is among a handful of voluntary service councils nationally which positively engage with, and provide support, to the sporting community. This has been recognised at a national level with support being provided by the National Association for Voluntary and Community Associations (NAVCA) for an extension of the activities.

Voluntary and community groups are involved in facility provision with many Council owned sports grounds being leased to voluntary sports organisations. Examples of this include Stourbridge Cricket Club and Stourbridge Football Club at the War Memorial Athletic Ground in Amblecote and Dudley Rifle Club in Lower Gornal.

The Government's Big Society agenda which encourages people to take an active role in their communities could provide the impetus for other sports facilities to engage customers and communities in facility provision and management, and this is clearly a recommendation that further work can be based around.

The possibility of funds from dormant bank accounts being used to support neighbourhood groups and social enterprises could enable sports groups and organisations to access finances to further develop their facilities.

## **Finance**

14. There are no immediate financial issues arising from this report.

## Law

15. Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 empowers the Council to take action to implement measures it considers likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of the Borough.
16. Section 111 of the Local Government Act, 1972, enables the Council to do anything which is calculated to facilitate or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of its statutory functions.
17. Section 19 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1976, empowers the Council to provide recreational facilities in its area.
18. There is a duty under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to account for the implications of the impact on community safety of actions and decisions relating to service areas.

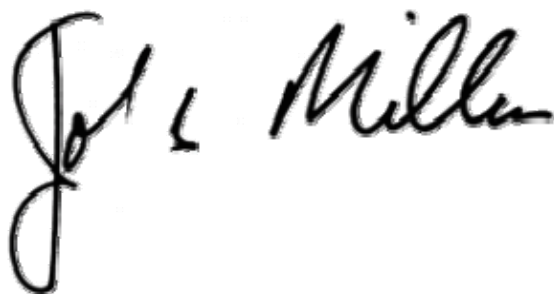
## Equality Impact

19. This report has been developed in full accordance with the Council's equality and diversity policies and should in no way have any prejudicial impact on different racial groups, disabled people, either gender and/or relevant groups. The needs of children and young people have been considered when progressing this work.

## Recommendation

20. It is recommended that:-

Members note the content of the report and comment accordingly



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**John B Millar**  
**Director of the Urban Environment**

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## **Background Information**

Facilities Inquiry – Report and Recommendations: Inverdale J. Central  
Council for Physical Recreation May 2010