

# NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

### LEISURE SERVICES TASK AND FINISH GROUP

6 December 2006

#### Present:

Councillor Brendan Glynane	(Chair)
Councillor Brandon Eldred	
Councillor Arthur McCutcheon	
Dr Mike Gillespie	UNC (Co Optee)
Thomas Hall	Corporate Manager
Ian Redfern	Leisure Services Manager
Tracy Tiff	Scrutiny Officer

#### Witnesses

Vanessa Brown	N-Sport
Councillor Penny Flavell	Portfolio Holder

#### 1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Andrew Simpson.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited attendees to introduce themselves.

#### 2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2006 were agreed as a true record.

#### 3 Witness Evidence

##### 3a) N-Sport

V Brown, Director, N-Sport, gave the Task and Finish Group a brief presentation on Northampton Borough Council and Northamptonshire Sport.

It was emphasised that:-

- N-Sport had won Team of the Year 2006 in the Northamptonshire Business Awards
- N-Sport was runners up in the Community Investment Award
- N-Sport had been set up via DCMS funding and represents the county strategic and delivery agencies of sport and physical activity for Northamptonshire
- N-Sport works with its partners including:-
  - 3000 participants
  - 200 coaching courses

- 267 young volunteers
- 97 clubs accredited
- The following has been achieved in working with Northampton Borough Council:-
  - Every Day Sports Campaign
  - Youth Games – Largest Team
  - Workforce workshops – 128 attendees from NBC
  - Provision of Active Sport
  - 28 clubs accredited
  - Support for Inclusive Fitness Gyms (IFI)
- The following has been achieved in working with Northamptonshire Borough:-
  - Support for funding for Street Football Programme
  - Support for Quest and presentation at the Conference
  - Spring Boroughs Support
  - Promotional events – Cricket Ground and Saints Walk
  - Promotion of Community Sport Network
- N-Sport has a three-year sports strategy 2006-2009 and the future of the partnership has been agreed as 'Growing Northamptonshire through the power of sport.'
- The Sports Partnership will have four strategic themes to which it will focus priorities, investment and support:-
  - Sport
  - Physical activity
  - Community
  - Education and skills

The Task and Finish Group asked questions and heard:-

- HE and FE co-ordinators link with young people through the college structure and with Community Sport.
- DCMS funding must go back into sport. N-Sport engages with young people to ascertain the activities they require and to explain the available opportunities. It is important for young people to be aware of clubs such as the athletics club. When they are ready to develop their preferred sport it is important that they know who to contact and where to go.
- A BME (Black, ethnic and minorities group) Officer is employed in the Spring Boroughs ward to engage with young people. From March 2007, Kingdom Hall will be used for the co-ordination of a multi games area. Basketball will be provided for boys and dance for girls. The programme will comprise of education and exercise. At the end of the 10-week session there will be a basketball tournament and a dance session. A further bid has been submitted for another multi games area.
- It is a decision for the borough and district councils to decide how they best use the Community Sports Network
- The telephone survey that was carried out recently will be used by the Government department as a baseline regarding a delivery system for sport. Benchmark data will be issued to the Leisure Services Manager.
- There is good data to support GP referrals in this area. GPs are encouraged to utilise the scheme. It is essential as it demonstrates the value of physical activity.
- N-Sport has made a commitment to roll out the Community Sports Network to all districts in the county. There is an established network in Corby and a relatively new network in Northampton.
- N-Sport is in the process of implementing a performance measurement system that will measure performance management and value for money.
- The growth agenda to the town is key. For example, when the Royal and Derngate Theatres were refurbished, funding was put in for a theatre that the town will need in

10-15 years time. A similar line of thinking should apply to leisure facilities in the town.

- N-Sport is looking to engage with the private sector, but cautiously. It is essential that there is a community-managed resource. If the private sector was relied on totally for leisure provision, there would be difficulties engaging with hard to reach groups.
- Community provision should be used in a way that encourages the use of open spaces. N-Sport has acquired information regarding community development from Cambridge that has been used as a benchmark.
- A lot of dialogue has taken place regarding how urban sports can engage young people. A great centre (Adrenaline LA) for urban sports has been developed at the north of the county.

The Chair thanked V Brown for her informative and interesting address.

### **3(b) Portfolio Holder**

Councillor Flavell advised that she took up her role as Portfolio Holder in June 2006 and her main emphasis has been on planning.

The Task and Finish Group had at its last meeting developed a set of core questions to put to the Portfolio Holder and her responses were given at the meeting: -

#### **1. What should the leisure policy and strategy look like?**

Strategy should define aims of the service, objectives/targets and how they will be measured, who is responsible and how they will be held to account. It should state where we want to be in say 5 years' time, what needs to be done to get there and a broad timetable. It should state council's policy regarding forms of provision and ownership. The public (users and non-users) should have the opportunity to be involved in developing the strategy.

#### **2. What is NBC's distinctive role in leisure provision?**

Ensuring or enabling adequate access to leisure services for the whole community (whether provided directly by NBC or not) to achieve the benefits described below. NBC leisure services are a vehicle for delivery of government objectives, through active partnerships.

#### **3. What are the objectives, purpose and benefits of leisure services?**

The administration has not formulated an explicit statement of objectives for this service, and looks forward to the task and finish group's proposals. However, the group will probably want to consider the following –

Objectives: To help to ensure an active, healthy and well-integrated population across all sectors; to contribute to the attractiveness of Northampton's quality of life; at a reasonable cost.

Benefits: reduced obesity, reduced incidence of acute and chronic health problems associated with inactivity (e.g. heart/circulatory diseases), improved ability of older people to lead independent lives, improved safety through ability to swim, new skills for young people, reduced anti-social behaviour through positive social activity and improved self-esteem, improved attractiveness of the town to current and potential residents, employers, visitors and investors

#### **4. How do leisure services contribute to Govt agenda for health, LAA etc?**

See benefits above. LAA includes Govt and other targets relating to:

- Promoting independent living for older people

- Improving quality of life and reducing social isolation for older people
- Reducing obesity in children and adults
- Ensuring children and young people achieve healthy lifestyles
- Increasing take-up of sports facilities

#### **5. How is success measured?**

At present, by volume of use and income levels against expenditure. The Quarterly Performance Review (QPR) includes the performance indicator of number of swims per 1000 population (currently above target). Qualitative success is measured through the rigorous assessment involved in Quest and Charter Mark accreditation.

In future, the LAA performance management system will report on indicators related to those targets. We need to be able to measure how the benefits are distributed within the community, e.g. by age.

#### **6. What are the administration's intentions for the future of the service?**

The administration will be discussing these in the near future, in the light of this overview and scrutiny review.

#### **7. What is the role of leisure services in growth and regeneration?**

#### **8. What are the issues for leisure in the projected expansion of the town?**

Taking these together, a high standard of leisure provision is one of the aspects of quality of life that investors, companies and individuals look at when deciding whether to come to a particular town. So it is important for the projected growth of Northampton that the town can offer something attractive. Leisure facilities or activities are seen as a key part of regeneration, offering a focus for building communities and improving the environment. Growth in numbers of residents also implies a demand for more facilities, and possibly in different places. Whether or not NBC provides these directly, it has a role in assessing the need and facilitating the provision. Identifying suitable sites is a part of this.

#### **9. How do we assess value for money?**

Benchmarking with others is difficult given the variety of forms of provision and of objectives. However, there are networks which help to do this. The audit commission has recently published a study which should help to set the national scene. At a local level, year-on-year comparisons of costs are helpful in showing an improved VFM situation. The leisure service is one area where the unit cost approach (e.g. cost per swim) has great potential. An assessment of value must include the views of customers and community, gauged by growth in use and by direct surveys.

#### **10. What are the administration's expectations on financial effects?**

At the time of writing, this will be reviewed as part of the budgetary process. There is no expectation that the net subsidy will grow.

#### **11. What areas of improvement are needed?**

The service is generally well regarded by customers and is well managed. Overall policy and aims, which link leisure services to key corporate goals, need to be defined, which is the work of this task and finish group. Improvement in the physical condition of Lings Forum is desirable.

#### **12. What are the shortfalls or gaps in the service?**

It is not clear whether the service meets the needs of all sectors of a diverse community. There is a possible gap in provision for the north-west of the town, and a need to match supply with demand arising from growth. The town lacks a swimming pool suitable for competition, despite a thriving swimming club.

#### **13. How does the service meet objectives for different age groups?**

Some examples - Young children and their parents are catered for by special classes and a crèche. Activity for older children and adolescents is encouraged through concessionary rates, special sessions and the work of the sports development unit. Schemes addressing young people whose life styles put them at risk of ill health include the Body4Life initiative. The GP referral scheme and heart failure initiative apply to all ages but in practice particularly to people in their middle and later years. Facilities for clubs and groups during the daytime are well used by older people. The new gym equipment includes apparatus dedicated to people with a variety of physical impairments, which also benefits a proportion of older people.

The Task and Finish Group asked supplementary questions:-

**What in your opinion are the three key points to drive a Leisure Strategy for the next five years?**

- Participation
- Matching resources with the growth agenda of the organisation
- Recognising young people's needs but also recognising the older person.

**There is a concern how success is measured and that measures might not be congruent, is this because a Strategy is not in place?**

There needs to be a balance regarding how much money to spend but the Administration is open to proposals/options that this Task and Finish Group might propose. It may be that once options are articulated the Administration may discover it has a firm view.

I Redfern confirmed that in the past performance had been measured but over the past three years the following issues had been identified:-

- Increased participation
- Number of swimming pools per population

In the future there is the need for a robust Strategy. Performance measurement can be produced around the Strategy. The Audit Commission has published performance management measures and these could be used as a baseline, as appropriate.

**How will leisure services be determined in the light of the growth agenda?**

This is an issue that requires careful consideration as do WNDC and Section 106 agreements.

Councillor Flavell emphasised that some of the questions posed have proved difficult to answer at this stage.

The Chair thanked Councillor Flavell for her responses.

#### **4 Northamptonshire County Council's Healthier Communities Scrutiny Committee**

The Task and Finish Group was informed that neither the Chair or Deputy Chair of NCC's Healthier Communities Scrutiny Committee was able to attend the meeting but had provided a brief précis of the work that the Committee was potentially due to carry out this year.

The Committee is potentially due to carry out a certain amount of work relevant to leisure services in the current year, but this is not a major focus of its work programme. The

Committee has shortlisted a review of the 'role of cultural services in building healthier communities' as a scrutiny project that it may carry out at the beginning of 2007. It will also look at cultural/leisure services when scrutinising, for example, the NCC draft budget for 2007/2008 and the new Community Service Plan.

Councillor Eldred confirmed that he is a member of this Scrutiny Committee and commented that this Group's report might be of assistance to the Committee. When the report had been received by NBC's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet he would present a copy to NCC's Healthier Communities Scrutiny Committee. Should the Committee set up a leisure services Working Group it might approach NBC for co-optees.

## **5 Desktop Research – Quest Status**

The Scrutiny Officer had undertaken research with Local Authorities that had obtained quest status with an assessment score of 70% or more. Five leisure services had responded and copies of their Leisure Services Policy/Strategy had been obtained. It was emphasised that some of the organisations contacted were in their third or fourth assessment, whereas NBC was in its first assessment. The average first time quest assessment mark was 60-65%.

The Task and Finish Group commented that elements of the other Local Authorities Strategies might be useful when the Group makes its proposals to what NBC's Leisure Strategy should contain.

## **6 Results of the Leisure Use Survey**

The results of the Leisure Use Survey were circulated. 31 responses had been received. It was noted that the public had asked for additional sessions such as yoga, Pilates, ballroom dancing and longer hours of opening. These sessions are already offered and the leisure centres are open from 7.15am to 11.00pm.

The Task and Finish Group commented that 31 was a very small sample but there was a need for the leisure services facilities to be promoted. There is a need for a robust sample size.

M Gillespie suggested that this could be a good project for one of his sports students to undertake and the survey questions could be used as a template for the future.

It was suggested that a recommendation of the final report could include that should a Leisure Services Strategy be developed that when it is circulated that a copy of the questionnaire be circulated with copies of the Strategy.

**AGREED: That a recommendation of the final report could include that should a Leisure Services Strategy be developed that when it is circulated that a copy of the questionnaire be circulated with copies of the Strategy.**

## **7 Baseline Data – Audit Commission Report: Public Sports and Recreation Services – Making them fit for the future**

T Hall advised that this document makes an important contribution to the review. It is useful in identifying the benefits and objectives and states the key directions that Councils will have to take to meet these objectives. The document in particular details:-

- Direct provision
- Trusts

- Private Sector provision

*It states that strategic planning of sports and recreation is underdeveloped and is weakened by the lack of a robust assessment of current sports and recreation provision, community needs and future demands. Partnerships across councils, with the private sector and other external partners are rare. Councils are focussing on maintaining and managing the historic provision of sports and recreation facilities within their locality. Successful strategic engagement between leisure services and the health and education sectors is not common, and opportunities for better use of resources are being missed. This is most evident where there are two tiers of local government. There are nevertheless some good examples of the management of sports and recreation provision characterised by clarity of purpose and strong partnership working.*

*Councils' approach to options appraisals is inconsistent and often limited despite a strong private sector and trust market. In the study's survey two-fifths of councils based their management option decision on a desk-top analysis. In a fifth of cases councils initially limited the breadth of options to be assessed and one in ten councils undertook no options appraisal at all. Market testing is limited with only one-third of councils in the survey market testing their services through a competitive tendering process. This process is often poorly managed and focussed on financial criteria. In these cases councils cannot demonstrate that they are delivering the best value option.*

The Group was advised to take note of this document particularly strategic planning and the appraisal of options. There is a need to examine the Council's current provision, for example, the growth agenda and an appropriate way of meeting this and to examine appropriate partnerships.

**A potential recommendation might be that NCC's and NBC's Leisure Service Strategies marry up.** It was noted that N-Sport's Strategy represents NCC.

## **8 Date of Next meeting**

The next meeting was noted as 8 January 2007 commencing at 6pm. This meeting would be utilised as a free flow workshop facilitated by Dr Gillespie.

A final meeting would then be arranged to finalise the Chair's report.

The meeting concluded at 8.15pm