

## **Belfast City Council**

### **Belfast City Council submission to the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure committee, Inquiry into participation in sport and physical activity**

Belfast City Council welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the inquiry on participation in sport and physical activity. In general, the Council supports the committee's aim which is to identify, and analyse the current position in particular with adult participation in sport and physical activity. The Council commends the intention to arrest the decline and focus on barriers to improve participation over a short period of time.

The Council is committed to improving the quality of life for now and for future generations for the people in Belfast. Within this, we are working to improve the health and well-being of all those who live, work and visit Belfast. We do this through the provision of a range of services, including the provision and programming of quality parks, open spaces and leisure environments that people value and use.

Most recently, we have launched the Belfast Health Development Unit. Its aim is to reduce the 'health gap' (variations in life expectancy and disease/disability free years between those who live in the more deprived areas and those who live in affluent areas) which exists in Belfast. The Unit is sponsored by the Council, the Public Health Agency and Belfast Health and Social Services Trust, but will involve a much wider partnership in the development of a health and wellbeing plan for the city. This plan will specify a number of key priority areas of work which all partners can unite behind, and physical activity has already been identified as one of these priorities, where the focus will be on improving wellbeing and tackling the increasing problem of obesity. This development represents a 'community planning' approach to health, with the health and wellbeing plan for the City being aligned with the Local Commissioning Plan.

As the inquiry concludes, the council would welcome opportunities for discussion on areas of future collaboration as the inquiry's recommendations move into implementation.

#### **1. Background**

The Council concurs with the general findings in the Inquiry's research paper 112/09. The decline in participation levels in Belfast, as in the rest of Northern Ireland are of concern to the Council. The need to address the levels of physical inactivity by promoting an active lifestyle is well recognised, and the following report reflects this acceptance of the role of physical activity well documented across the UK and further afield:

"There is a growing awareness of the significant contribution that sport and physical recreation can make to improve society "

(OFMDFM [February 2005] Poverty & Social Exclusion Project – Lone Parent Households in Northern Ireland,

In line with the policy and programme agenda which has been emerging since the 1990s, most recently through the Sports and Physical Recreation Strategy, the Council has taken significant steps to reflect policy aims in its own physical activity strategies and service provision.

#### **2. Belfast City Council: Current Role and Opportunity**

The Council is currently completing a strategic review of leisure and one of the key recommendations is on generating a more active city. Elected members will be considering in the next few months how to strategically lead and develop - through effective partnership working – the improvement in levels of activity, health and wellbeing citywide and what service

and facility provision will achieve this. This will be linked to the work of the Belfast Health Development Unit mentioned above.

The City Council recognises its key role in leading the development of an active and healthier city. This is reflected through its commitment to an improved quality of life for our residents and visitors, underpinned as a key action under the Better Leadership theme of within the Council's 2010/11 Corporate Plan.

In terms of delivery, the Council currently provides a wide range of services within communities which impact or have the capacity to impact on levels of activity and on people's health and wellbeing. These include leisure services, community services, environmental health, good relations, community safety, city development, parks and open spaces, pitches and playgrounds, services for children and young people and older people, good relations, economic development, regeneration, and culture and arts.

This inquiry is emerging at a time when the Council is proactively affirming its role in contributing to an active Belfast through the evolving RPA and with the emergence of the joint Belfast Public Health Development Unit and Belfast Local Commissioning Group. It is inevitable that decisions about budgets, contracts and service finance in relation to active living and wellbeing will determine a greater need for effective strategic partnership working which the council will drive for the future generations in the city.

Developing effective commissioning work with central government departments and Sport NI is also an increasing role for the Council in relation to generating active communities. This role involves giving advice, lobbying in relation to policy and responding to consultations, delivering grant aid or availing of capital funds to develop provision. Recent examples have included responses to the inquiry into obesity; administration of the Active Communities grant aid and the installation of high-specification floor for Shankill Leisure centre.

As part of the council's current strategic review of leisure, the Council is aware that it has an ageing stock of leisure centres which is difficult to continue to resource at current levels. It also acknowledges the cultural shift required in terms of moving from straight-forward leisure provision to being a key mechanism through which to improve health and well-being in the city. This review will inform how the Council will provide and "partner to provide" for a broad range of leisure and physical activity outcomes, potentially over the next 20-30 years.

We are committed to strategically leading the development of a positive leisure vision for the city and believe we are well-positioned to deliver a significant role in improving activity levels given our related range of services, including:

- Open access and activity programmes in our leisure provision where over 5,000 people access our facilities per day;
- 'Support for Sport' and Park Event grant aid which supports local community initiatives;
- BOOST leisure membership scheme which incorporates an ability to pay principle which is important in reaching those who have affordability issues
- A portfolio of leisure assets including leisure centres, parks, pitches, playgrounds and open space;
- Health programmes, such as the GP referral scheme under the "Healthwise" initiative and Healthy Families pilot programme to target fitness and obesity levels respectively in target groups;
- A focus on food safety, healthy eating and nutrition through our Environmental Health Service as well as the provision of allotments and increasingly community gardens;
- Generating economic and social development through funding and programmes of support e.g. Neighbourhood Renewal & PEACE funds to deliver healthier communities and places to live;

- our ongoing work in education and participation across all our services.
- Programming to attract a wide range of groups to take part in physical activity – young people, older people etc.

### **3. The council's supporting analysis**

The Council supports immediate action to redress the ongoing decline in participation levels and as it seeks to confirm in its future strategy on how to plan participation citywide it realises the cost to society which inaction will bring:

- When cost of physical inactivity is added to that of obesity, the cost to the Northern Ireland economy in 2010 is likely to exceed £500m (DHSSPS [March 2002] Investing for Health).
- A Department of Health report (July 2006) suggests that the current levels of obesity among UK men (22%) will rise to 33% by 2010 unless action is taken (Department of Health [July 2006] Forecasting Obesity to 2010).
- Data from 2004/05 indicates that in Northern Ireland 24% of young children are overweight or obese (DHSSPS & DE [December 2005] Fit Futures: Focus on Food, Activity and Young People).
- £886 per head of population per year in providing what amounts to a 'national sickness service' and we spend £1 per person per year on sports and physical activity which could actually prevent a lot of that sickness (Health Select Committee [May 2004] Obesity – Report of the House of Commons Health Committee).
- The National Audit Office (National Audit Office [February 2001] Tackling Obesity in England) estimated that the direct and indirect cost of obesity to the UK economy was approximately £3bn in 1998; latest projections suggest this figure will have risen to £7bn in 2010 – in Northern Ireland this would equate to an annual figure of £196m.
- In the period 1997-2004, the incidence of overweight or obese boys has increased from 13% to 19% and among girls has risen from 20% to 27%.
- The council has reviewed data from the government committee reports which suggests more than 2000 deaths per annum can be attributed to physical inactivity.
- In the NI strategy for Sport and Physical recreation 2007-2017 it was noted that with "the rise in overweight/obesity rates as an 'epidemic' – a word traditionally used to describe the spread of infectious diseases. One consequence of this obesity epidemic has been the increasingly early onset of type 2 diabetes among children as young as ten years old, with the attendant risk that for the "first time in modern history....a generation of children may not live as long as their parents'(53)"
- The 2005/06 NI Health & Social Well-being Survey reported that 'being overweight or obese reduces life expectancy by 9 years and it significantly increases the risk of developing coronary heart disease and cancer.'

It is difficult to assess the cost to the economy and to an individual's educational, social and personal development of growing inactivity or the positive contribution physical activity makes to an individual and a community. What follows is an outline of the cost if this trend is not reversed:

- (DHSSPS [March 2002] Investing for Health report confirmed that without tackling levels of activity a wider cost to the Northern Ireland may be:

- An increasingly unhealthy population
  - Lost opportunities to improve educational achievement among children and young people, especially those who feel marginalised
  - Lost opportunities to improve social cohesion and achieve 'A Shared Future'
- Sport and physical recreation can make a significant contribution to local communities and achieving the vision of 'A Shared Future', the aim of which is to promote good relations between the people of NI (University of Stirling [on behalf DCAL] October 2005,
  - Through volunteering, individuals can develop a range of skills which are transferable into the broader community context (DSD [June 2003] A Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal – People and Place, DSD [October 2004] Investing Together – A Report of the Taskforce on Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector).
  - Sport and physical recreation, as forms of physical activity, can play a vital role in improving public health. They can, for example, contribute to reductions in incidences of obesity, cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, colon cancer, osteoporosis, anxiety and stress (Department of Health [April 2004]
  - Within an educational environment, there is early evidence to suggest that participation in sport and physical recreation can contribute to a child's improved academic performance and perceived self-esteem (University of Edinburgh [February 2003] Primary School Children and Sport in Northern Ireland) and are effective vehicles for re-engaging marginalised young people (Centre for Leisure Research [on behalf of SNI] [June 1999] An evaluation of Youth Sport NI).
  - Coach education and sports volunteer support programmes make significant contributions to the skills and competencies available to the community and to employers (Home Office [January 2006] In the Boot Room Second Interim National Positive Futures Case Study Research Report). Participation in sport and physical recreation equip people with transferable knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes to enable them to make a positive contribution to society (Home Office [October 2004] Report of the Russell Commission on Youth Action and Engagement).
  - There are over 12,500 people employed in sport and physical recreation industries in NI (SNI [October 2001] The Value of Sport).
  - In recent years there has been growing recognition of the added value that sport and physical recreation can bring to communities. Good examples exist of sporting organisations developing their community and increasingly community-centred organisations are delivering many of their objectives through sport and physical recreation (SNI [November 2005] Community Sport: Developing a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and Baseline Findings).
  - It contributes to young people being involved in positive activities, often diverting them away from antisocial behaviour.

#### **4. The nature of participation**

There is a clear passion for and interest in sport and physical recreation across NI (Genesis Strategic Management Consultants [on behalf of DCAL] [May 2006] Strategy for Sport in Northern Ireland Testing Report).

The most recently available data indicates that 53% of the population aged 16 and over claim some level of participation in sport and physical recreation in the last 12 months (NISRA [March

2006] StasisDCAL – Sports Bulletin 2/2006 [findings from the 2004/05 Continuous Household Survey). This contrasts with the previous data [1999] that put participation at 59% - a decline of 6% in as many years.

This data only measures participation 'at least once in the last 12 months', contrasting with the recommendation of the Chief Medical Officers in the UK that 'all adults should take part in a minimum of 30 minutes moderate intensity physical activity at least 5 times per week in order to achieve health benefits (Department of Health [April 2004] At least five times a week – Evidence on the impact of physical activity and its relationship to health – A report from the Chief Medical Officer).

The 'Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People in NI 2006-2016' reports only 36% [aged under 16] participate in sport/physical activity 3-5 times per week (OFMDFM [March 2005] A Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland 2006-2016). This figure contracts with the estimated 1 in 3 young people in NI who are overweight/obese (DHSSPS & DE [December 2005] Fit Futures: Focus on Food, Activity and Young People).

There are continuing disparities in participation rates between:

- Men and women (NISRA [March 2006] StasisDCAL – Sports Bulletin 2/2006 [findings from the 2004/05 Continuous Household Survey) – in 2004/05 there was a 13% gap between the number men and the number of women participating in sport on a regular basis.
- People from higher and lower socio-economic groups (Economic and Social Research Centre [November 2005] Sports Participation and Health among Adults in Ireland) – approximately 70% of ABC1 compared to 54% of C2 and 32% of DE participating in sport on a regular basis.
- People with and without a disability (SNI [February 2006] Disability Mainstreaming [unpublished paper]) – people with a limiting, long-standing illness are less than half as likely to participate in sport compared to the rest of the population [30% cf. 63%]
- Older people [aged 60+ years] and younger people [<60 years] – recent data suggests that while up to 64% of people under 60 years of age have participated in sport [including walking] at least once in the last 12 months, this drops to 28% for people aged over 60 years (NISRA [March 2006] StasisDCAL – Sports Bulletin 2/2006 [findings from the 2004/05 Continuous Household Survey, Belfast Healthy Cities [April 2006] Older People: Health, Social and Living Conditions)

## **5. Patterns of Physical inactivity**

The Council seeks to improve its monitoring and measurements of patterns of activity; participation; progression. In so doing, we aim to measure the contribution of the Council to reversing trends in inactivity and poor health, developing an outcomes-focussed service. It is critical that local government is able to quantify its enormous contribution to promoting activity and well-being.

The Council would welcome a co-ordinated approach to measuring participation and progression in sport and physical activity as well as guidance on measuring the outcomes of intervention, in order to assess the true picture taking place locally and regionally.

## **6. Belfast practice - examples of Belfast City Council contributing to increased participation of adults**

### **6a. Boost leisure discount scheme**

The introduction of the Boost leisure discount scheme has seen an increase in both registered users of leisure centres and leisure centre throughput. In April 2006 the number of registered leisure centre users was 10,506. By April 2009 this figure had increased to 38,244, an increase of over 200% in 3 years. The number of registered users has continued to rise and as of February 2010 stood at 41,723.

Leisure centre throughput has seen a similar increase during this period. In January 2007 total leisure centre throughput was 1,218,750. By January 2010 this figure had increased to 1,704,321 an increase of almost 50%.

### **6b. Healthwise**

An exercise referral scheme for sedentary adults, who have been referred from a primary healthcare professional. Adults can be referred for any of the following, but not exclusive to:

- BMI greater than 25
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure

In 2008/09 Belfast City Council worked with over 1,000 sedentary adults through the Healthwise Scheme. For 2010/11 Belfast City Council has increased its capacity to deliver this scheme through the employment of 2 full time coaches dedicated exclusively to exercise referral.

### **6c. Cardiac Rehab phase 4**

An exercise referral scheme for adults following a coronary episode and the successful completion of a hospital based Cardiac Rehab phase 3 programme. 2009/10 saw the introduction of this scheme in the Belfast area. During this time over 100 adults participated in this scheme.

### **6d. Healthy Families**

A family based intervention programme to promote healthy eating and physical activity. This programme will initially work with 25 families to assess the impact of the programme.

### **6e. Centre based activity programme**

Belfast City Council leisure centres provide a diverse range of physical activity programmes across 10 sites within Belfast. The extent of the activity programme varies dependant on the time of year, but in any given week we provide between 200 to 300 activity classes for adults. Attendance at these classes ranges from 1,500 to 3,100 adults per week. We attract over 285,000 fitness suite visits per year.

The range of physical activities has greatly improved over the past 15 years with greater awareness of the benefits of everyday activities such as walking, gardening etc. Organisations have made great strides in providing different activities to appeal to those uninterested in mainstream sports such as yoga, pilates, salsa dancing, walking groups, old time dancing, Tai Chi, activities in the park etc.

Over 13,500 children attend our leisure centre-based summer schemes each year and about 1,000 children a week participate in the 'Make a Splash' swimming programme.

### **6f. Support for Sport grant aid and club development**

Support for Sport provides £180,000 of funding annually to local sports clubs and community organisations participating in physical activity. Grants range from £1,000 to £5,000. The areas

covered in the funding include coach education, new club/section start up costs, Try-it events to attract new members and sport festivals for competitive opportunity.

In the 2009/10 financial year Support for Sport has impacted 14,464 participants. Of this 6,612 are over the age of 16. Participation could be through a range of categories such as coach education or actual physical activity events/competition. However we make the assumption that were there is coach education undertaken, it benefits the whole of the club by providing increased opportunity for continued quality participation.

Club development initiatives encourage clubs to become “Fit for purpose” and enable them to function more effectively. It also ensures correct procedures are in place e.g. Child Protection and Vulnerable Adults, Code of Conduct etc.

On the whole there is greater focus on getting women and young girls into physical activity than men due to the unbalanced participation levels. Activities have been set up in such a way that they are more accessible in terms of time, cost by finding funding to offer the activity reduced or free of charge, free child care is often offered and women only sessions available. One option used in a community setting is to bring the activity to the women where the physical activity happens on their doorstep i.e. local church, community hall etc.

#### **6g. Partnership involvement**

The council's existing business involves activity programme in indoor leisure sites alongside outdoor provision of activity classes during summer months.

Other opportunities for internal partnership working include:

- Promotion of health and physical activity through the Belfast Health Development Unit.
- Work with Public Health Agency on delivery of Healthwise Scheme.
- Work with community services on delivery of Healthy Families.

The council has developed partnership delivery and working with a range of governing bodies including:

- Swim Ireland in promoting women into swimming;
- ethnic minorities in women only pool sessions,
- women's learn to swim programme and introduction to Waterpolo
- NI Athletics Federation – establishing initiatives like “Walk a Mile Run a Mile” targeting female walkers and encouraging them to move into a more structured exercise programme in a safe environment
- Special Olympics – establishing clubs based out of Leisure Centre
- Working with Bowls associations to access funding and helping to draw up development plans etc. that will attract younger members

- Working with Health Trusts and Community organisations to promote armchair aerobics, Boccia, walking leaders etc.

## 8. Conclusion

The Council is in a unique position to provide support, guidance and opportunities for participation simultaneously in order to prevent, manage and overcome inactivity through co-ordinated and community led action. We would welcome the opportunity to work closely with the Department as it makes its final recommendations in relation to this timely inquiry.

The Council would welcome the following elements within the recommendations emerging from the inquiry into participation in sport and physical activity:

- (i) Clarification of an agreed target for improving levels of physical activity and arresting inactivity with a regional participation plan with targets that can be effectively measured;
- (ii) A commitment to change the focus of resources from dealing with the results of inactivity to promoting activity at the outset. An examination of an integrated financial management approach to promote and provide opportunities for activity and participation from social to elite progression is a recommended action for all statutory agencies involved;
- (iii) Confirmation of the priority targets to be addressed collectively for example the levels of inactivity during early years, at school leaving age and into adulthood;
- (iv) Recognition of the tri-partite nature of the problem whereby levels of activity, nutrition and education of weight management will arrest inactivity, obesity and are intrinsically interlinked. There is a need to co-ordinate effective partnership working to effectively address through programmes and opportunities for activity, weight management or intervention programmes and education;
- (v) Examination of the current statutory powers with a precise aim to ensure the built environment, transport modes and regeneration promotes activity of all citizens;
- (vi) The feasibility of the application of international best practice at a local level and where the relevant roles and responsibilities should lie;
- (vii) A co-ordinated and agreed referral process for intervention programmes and guidance on target areas e.g. post school leaving age, adulthood and women;
- (viii) Interlinking intervention with attractive events and activities which naturally motivate people e.g. the World Cup; athletic championships; Olympic games etc and to support and co-ordinate activities around these key dates;
- (ix) Focus on outreach to those 'hard to reach' groups.

The council hopes this response provides an insight into the issues, barriers and opportunities for solutions and the council welcomes further approaches as part of the inquiry in participation in sport and physical activity.

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For further detail on the council's response to the inquiry into participation in sport and physical activity please do not hesitate to contact Elaine Black on 028 9027 0445 or [black@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:black@belfastcity.gov.uk). Please note this draft response has been submitted by the Parks and Leisure Committee and is subject to Council ratification on 1 May 2010.