



# An Aquatics Strategy for Belfast

Draft for consultation

July 2018

Active  
Belfast  
Ltd.

**GLL**  
better for everyone



Belfast  
City Council

# 1. Introduction and background

Belfast City Council, Active Belfast Limited and Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) are partners in delivering the leisure service for Belfast. As partners, we have committed to developing a strategy for aquatics for the period 2018 – 2030.

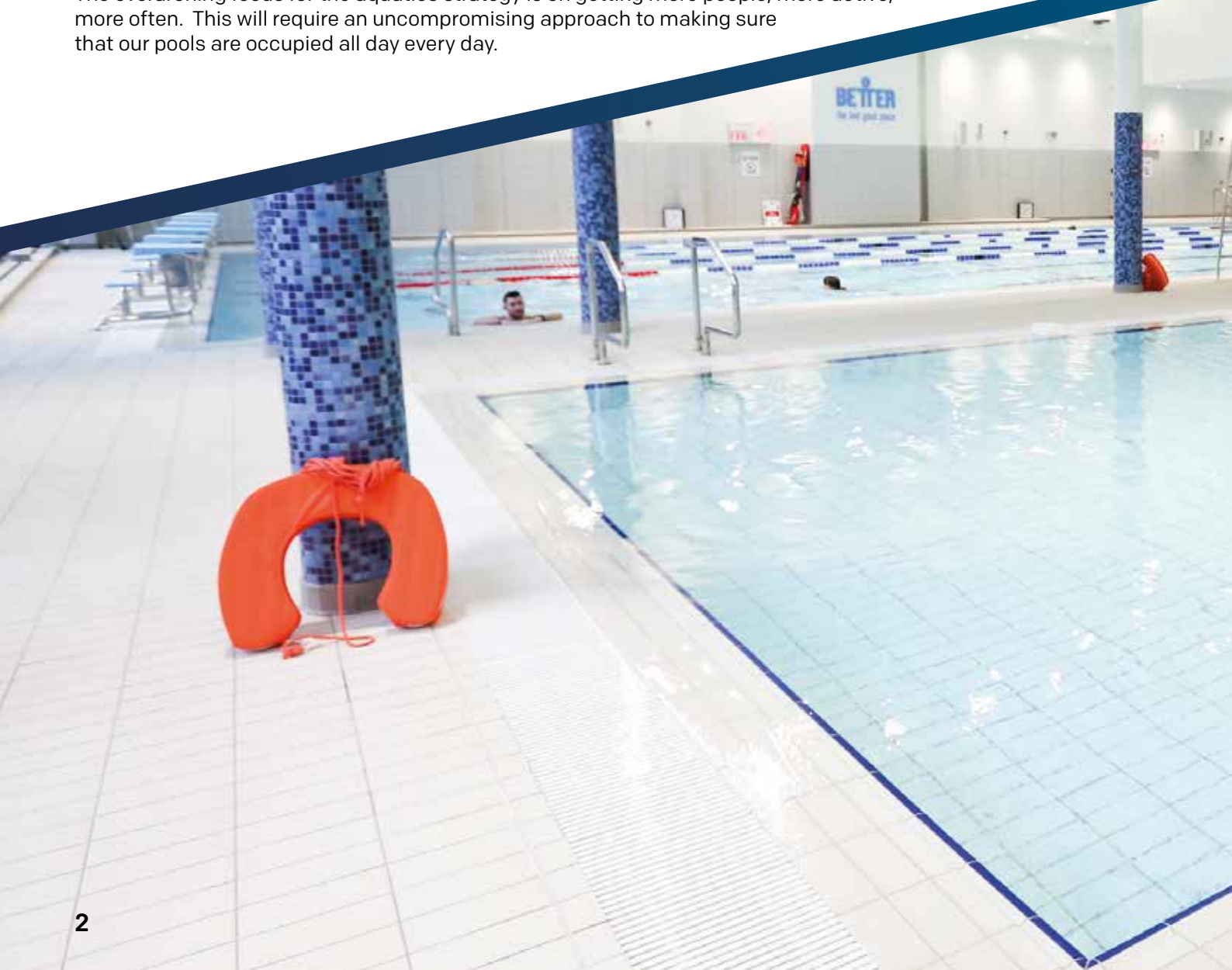
Active Belfast Limited was set up by the council to oversee the delivery of the council's leisure services in Belfast. In January 2015, Belfast City Council and Active Belfast Limited awarded Greenwich Leisure

Limited a 15 year contract to directly manage and deliver leisure services in their leisure centres. The leisure partnership is built around the following nine principle objectives:

1. **5\* service at 3\* prices**
2. **Focus on health and wellbeing outcomes**
3. **More than sport** - broader impact of sport and contributing to the Belfast Agenda
4. **Value for money** - reducing deficits and dependence on Belfast City Council rates subsidy
5. **Democratically accountable**
6. **Well connected** - well run, well used and well promoted centres and activity programmes
7. **People focused** - staff development
8. **Balanced investment** - strategic citywide approach to local provision
9. **Partnerships and collaborative working** - internal and external partnerships

Belfast City Council has embarked on an ambitious and exciting £105 million Leisure Transformation Programme.

The overarching focus for the aquatics strategy is on getting more people, more active, more often. This will require an uncompromising approach to making sure that our pools are occupied all day every day.



## 2. Understanding the drivers for change

The Belfast City Council commitment to a capital investment fund of £105m demonstrates unprecedented confidence and leadership. It is imperative that the transformation of leisure extends beyond the physical re-development of the centres. The new pool facilities will provide exciting opportunities which must be welcomed as a catalyst for positive change.

We need to provide a top quality value for money service and at the same time reduce dependency on council rates subsidies.

The council's leisure service can contribute significantly to achieving improvements in general health by getting more people, more active, more often. The re-development of

our centres, and pools in particular, will only partially achieve the council's ambitions in this regard. We need to maximise participation in water based activities by developing all day programmes with access for all citizens.

We recognise that there are other agencies with strategic plans that are closely aligned to the aims of our aquatics strategy. We will explore every opportunity to work in partnership with government departments, Sport NI, health trusts, sport governing bodies, clubs, schools and community organisations.





Belfast has a population of approximately 335,000 within an overall figure of 675,000 for the wider Belfast metropolitan area. The local population is anticipated to grow steadily but not dramatically over the next five years. While people are living longer and the 60+ population continues to grow in line with national trends, we are still a 'young city'. One fifth of the population is under 15 years old.

Like most other capital cities, Belfast exhibits a wide range of socio economic conditions. On the one hand we are a vibrant, economically active, exciting and developing city. However, we also have areas of extensive deprivation.

Health inequalities present a significant challenge. 24% of the Belfast population have a long term health problem or disability that restricts daily activities. There is an eight year variance in life expectancy along one Belfast bus route.

Persistent disadvantage is now an accepted reality. The most deprived areas in 1970 remain so, despite almost 50 years and a succession of government initiatives. Belfast has nine of the ten most deprived wards in Northern Ireland.

Statistics source: 'About Our City (Belfast City Council Position Statement, LGA Peer Review 2015)'

## Why do we need an aquatics strategy?

- Our capital investment and service transformation offers unprecedented opportunities and we need to deliver on social, cultural, economic and in particular health benefits. We need a robust plan to maximise delivery of these benefits
- We need to drive increased pool occupancy and participation for all water based activities and develop the diversity of opportunities for Belfast residents in order to contribute to a healthier, better connected and more vibrant city
- We need to demonstrate value for money and justify the capital investment
- We need to harness all available resources and maximise partnership working as keys to achieving success
- We want to ensure that the profile of aquatics grows and is recognised for making a significant contribution to the Belfast Agenda
- We want to establish and maintain top quality facilities and customer services
- We need to reduce financial operating deficits and dependency on council subsidy while maximising the number of citizens benefiting from our aquatics provision

### 3. Our strategic vision

To provide a top class aquatics service designed to promote social regeneration, tackle health inequalities, ensure affordable equitable access for all, maximise participation and enable people to reach their full potential.

This aquatics strategy is written taking account of the capital investment programme and with particular focus on alignment with the Belfast Agenda 2017 – 2021 key priorities of:

- growing the economy,
- living here,
- city development, and
- working and learning.



### 4. Baselines and targets

Belfast City Council currently (2018) operates 13 leisure centres, seven of which are ‘wet centres’ with a total of nine separate pools. As a result of the capital investment programme, by 2025, overall provision and the locations of our wet centres will be transformed and the total number of pools increased.

- 45% of all centre visits in 2017 were to the pool
- 25% of all GLL Sports Foundation supported athletes are from aquatics disciplines
- 14 Belfast based aquatic clubs use Belfast City Council pools

Working towards 2025 and on to 2030, a set of key performance indicators will be agreed to reflect the objectives and priorities set out in our aquatics strategy.

The success of our strategy will be measured against growth in the number of people using our pools alongside the total number of visits. In short, we want to fill our pools but we will focus equally on attracting new users as well as increasing the frequency of use.

It is only by attracting more people into water based activities that our key priority of delivering real health benefits can be achieved. A comprehensive set of

measurements will be developed as part of our action plan. It is important that our performance is measured accurately and the information collected is specific to our key objectives.

We want to ensure that we remain focused on:

- the safety and quality of our facilities,
- delivering real health benefits,
- making a difference through community impacts,
- customer satisfaction,
- staff development, and
- value for money.

The table below sets out our initial baseline and long term targets. Performance and impact measures will be expanded through the development of our strategic action plan and included in annual progress reports and strategic reviews.

Measure	2017 Baseline	2030 Target
Pool visits per year	900,000	1,500,000 per year
School swimming lessons per week	212	300 per week
GLL ‘Better Swim School’ lessons per week	433	800
Better Swim School members	3,300	7,500
Club booking lane hours per week	378	450
Disabled group booking lane hours per week	28.5	50
Aquatic group exercise class lane hours per week	38	50
Fitness lane hours in ‘swim for all’ sessions per week	160	300
Grow female pool visits to 50%	371,700	750,000 per year
Grow 60+ age group pool visits to 12%	83,700	150,000 per year
Grow people with disability pool visits to 5%	33,300	75,000 per year



## Key objectives

- Delivery of our ambitious £105m facility investment programme on time and on budget
- Providing high quality aquatics facilities and services with a focus on safety for all
- More people able to swim a minimum of 25m
- Improved health and wellbeing through regular participation in water based activities. More people, more active, more often
- More people motivated to try new aquatic disciplines
- Improved opportunity and support for all to reach their aquatics potential through learning, playing, training and competing
- More people realising their aquatics potential through strong club partnerships and robust athlete development pathways
- Development of effective partnerships with statutory, educational and sporting bodies to deliver on the benefits of aquatic activity
- Strong continuous improvement with room to grow
- Diverse and innovative aquatic programmes
- A more skilled and productive workforce

# Belfast City Council Leisure Transformation Programme

Belfast City Council is committed to a £105million capital expenditure budget and a phased plan for the physical re-development of leisure facilities over a 10 year period leading up to 2025. The programme will provide balanced investment across the city with each city area having wet and dry health and fitness facilities, general indoor activity spaces and extensive outdoor sports and recreation provision. Active Belfast Ltd will work closely with the council in delivering this once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform leisure provision in the city.

The Leisure Transformation Programme has been developed in consideration of 10 'wet centres'. The initial development phases include a long term commitment to seven wet centres including five new build developments. A site map on page 7 illustrates the locations of our 'wet centres' along with descriptions of the pool facilities at each.



# Map of Belfast's wet leisure centres

Open or committed wet centres under the current Leisure Transformation Programme project schedule.

## Currently open:

### Falls: opened 2005

6 lane 25m pool with partial moving floor

### Grove: opened 2008

6 lane 25m pool with partial moving floor, 8m x 13m teaching pool

### Olympia: opened 2017

6 lane 25m pool with partial moving floor, 7m x 12m teaching pool

## New builds:

### Andersonstown: opening 2019

6 lane 25m pool, 10m x 15m teaching pool, extensive leisure water with indoor surfing basin

### Brook: opening 2019

4 lane 25m pool with partial moving floor

### Girdwood Community Hub (phase 2)

Phase 2 of the Girdwood development includes the provision of an indoor sports facility. The final facility mix for the indoor sports centre has not yet been agreed.

### Robinson: opening 2019

8 lane 25m pool with partial moving floor, 13m x 17.5m teaching and diving pool, confidence water

### Templemore: opening 2021

6 lane 25m pool with partial moving floor, four lane 25 yard pool

## Existing centres.

### Avoniel

The existing Avoniel Leisure Centre has a 6 lane 25m pool. Avoniel will close in 2019 to be replaced by an extensive indoor and outdoor dry sports facility. An additional 6 lane 25m pool has been added to the facility mix at Templemore to replace the existing pool at Avoniel.

### Ballysillan

4 lane 25m L shaped pool with shallow teaching area

### Shankill

Abstract leisure pool with wave machine and slides incorporating a four lane 25m training area

### Templemore

The existing Templemore facility will close in 2019 to be replaced by a new facility on the same site.

### Whiterock

6 lane 25m pool



## 5. Timeline

**Our aquatics strategy includes a 12 year action plan which will inform the development of aquatics activities in the city from 2018 to 2030.**

The 12 year period has a natural mid-point in 2024 at which time the £105m capital investment programme will be complete. This will provide a key review point as from 2024 onwards all new pool facilities will be fully operational and ready to support our ambitious participation targets.

We are committed to continuous improvement and performance monitoring and will ensure that these remain central to all performance evaluations throughout the life of the strategy. We will produce 12 annual progress reports and four key stage strategic reviews in 2021, 2024, 2027 and 2030.

## 6. Strategic objectives and priorities

Strategic objectives have been developed to cover all aspects of the council's pools including facility management, service delivery and future development. The overall strategy is built around priority areas clustered under the broad themes of 'What we want to do', 'How we want to do things', 'Who we want to do it for' and 'What we want to achieve'.

### What we want to do

#### A citywide strategic approach to access, programming and bookings

- Deliver balanced city wide facility provision with local unique selling points
- Provide services and programmes that promote cross city travel
- Develop an area based programme built around north, south, east and west access
- Develop innovative community focused aquatic programmes to promote health and well being and social regeneration at both local and city wide levels

#### Fair access based on geographic location

- Establish an area based approach to delivering equal access to 'local' facilities
- Ensure priority is given at an area level for access to recreational sessions and casual fitness lane swimming

#### Equitable access for all users recognising the different needs of particular groups

- Provide fair access to pools recognising the different needs of particular groups and individuals
- Establish challenging targets to increase overall pool visits, the number of unique individuals using our pools and particularly from traditionally underrepresented groups

#### Balanced and fair booking policies with an emphasis on shared use

- Increased access for group bookings
- Promote shared use to maximise pool occupancy and participation
- Establish a booking policy accepting the principle of restricting exclusive use





## How we want to do things

### Modern, well maintained, safe and clean facilities

- Recognise that the quality and safety of our facilities must become and remain a key priority
- Ensure that our leisure facilities are safe, secure and clean with particular regard for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults
- Our centres will be well branded throughout and provide current, accurate and easily accessible customer information
- Excellent facilities will be matched by excellent services delivered by professional, well trained, helpful and welcoming staff
- Performance will be robustly monitored with customer feedback systems and annual customer satisfaction surveys at the heart of our quality assurance programme

### Policies to cover how we operate our pools

- We will ensure that our pool operating procedures and conditions of use are clear, consistent and well communicated
- Our pools will be managed to provide a safe, comfortable and enjoyable environment



## Who we want to do it for

### Pricing and affordability

- We will have a clear and transparent schedule of charges for all aquatic activities, pool hire and membership categories
- We will maintain concessionary rates for specified user groups alongside preferential discounts for Belfast residents
- We will ensure that pricing does not become a genuine barrier to participation
- The schedule of charges will be reviewed annually
- Fees and charges will be set to encourage growth in participation while effectively managing annual budgets
- Pricing will be based on a logical approach for fees and charges and the fundamental principle of equity for like for like services

### Focus on priority target groups

- Our pool operating procedures, programming and marketing will support and encourage increased participation from Section 75 listed categories and other traditionally underrepresented groups
- Our policies will be designed to ensure increased participation and equitable access for all citizens
- Priority target groups will be identified and provided for to ensure that pool availability and access do not become barriers to participation, the pursuit of personal goals or achieving full potential

# What we want to achieve

## Increased participation in water based activities

- More individual people participating more often
- More people motivated to try new water based activities
- Improved health outcomes through participation in water based activities
- More people participation from traditionally underrepresented groups

## Promoting skills and attainment

- More children able to swim at least 25m
- Equal opportunities for citizens to pursue goals and realise their potential
- Clear athlete development pathways, including partnerships with clubs and sport governing bodies, alongside robust area based opportunities
- A more skilled, flexible and productive workforce

## Developing effective partnerships

- Effective partnerships and joined up action plans with external agencies and community groups
- Successful partnerships with aquatic sports governing bodies and clubs

## Reputation for excellence

- Challenging brand standards and performance targets
- A reputation for quality, innovation and creativity
- High quality aquatic facilities with a focus on safety for all
- Strong continuous improvement with room to grow

## Action plan

- Develop a detailed action plan within three months of the launch of our strategy
- Ensure that the action plan includes annual performance reports and key strategic review points

**For more information and queries please contact:**

Noel Munnis  
Partnership Manager  
City and Neighbourhood Services Department,  
Belfast City Council,  
4th Floor, Cecil Ward Building,  
4 – 10 Linenhall Street,  
Belfast,  
BT2 8BP.

Email: [munnis@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:munnis@belfastcity.gov.uk)

Tel: **028 9032 0202** extension **3526** - Direct Line **028 9027 0394**