



**Gwynedd Council  
Leisure Services  
Sufficiency Review  
October 2013  
Draft Report  
Executive Summary**

**Just Solutions  
Leisure Consultants**

This is an executive summary of the 2013 Leisure Sufficiency review conducted on behalf of Gwynedd Council to inform future provision and plans.

## **FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES**

### General Principles

The review report recognises that Leisure Centre closures are not the way forward but that fundamental changes - revised opening hours and new approaches as well as different co-location models to achieve more footfalls as well as savings - will all have to be considered if services are to be maintained in a climate of ever increasing financial pressures.

Furthermore, betterment can only be achieved with the bringing together of services – creating more reasons for more people to use facilities, alongside new models of management embracing different approaches, appropriate to each community - all with a focus on the headline outcome of improving the health and wellbeing of the people of Gwynedd.

It is also recommended that setting up a trust to manage the current portfolio of facilities in order to achieve immediate tax savings does not necessarily represent the right long term solution for Gwynedd – certainly not in the first instance. Changes in tax benefits may be on the horizon and the long term commitment to a new universal management model is likely to restrict the scope to make future changes and achieve other savings and betterment. There is no 'quick fix', instead a range of new approaches are needed which it is anticipated should deliver target savings that exceed the NNDR savings that would be achieved by putting facilities into a trust management model.

### Two to Three Year Modernisation and Change Programme

The report emphasises that the many challenges facing Gwynedd Council - maintaining services across a large geographical area, for many small communities with particular rurality issues to overcome - cannot be successfully addressed as a result of any single new approach contained in any one service. Instead, a fundamental change programme is recommended that will impact across the range of community as well as central operational services and will need to be implemented over a 2-3 year period.

### Wider than Leisure - Corporate Decisions Required

The benefits and efficiencies set out within the report are unlikely to be secured without their consideration and adoption at a senior corporate level – the proposed gains cannot be achieved through changes to Leisure Services in isolation.

### Leisure Investment Outcomes

The alignment of Leisure for the purposes of improving health outcomes is quite clearly central to Gwynedd Council's vision for preventative action i.e. encouraging increased physical activity levels in order to reduce the pressures on Health and Social Services.

However for such a strategy to be successful the only truly cost effective 'vehicle' for achieving the health outcome is to deliver an inspirational education experience – creating a world where young people are responsible for their own healthy and active lifestyles and encouraging them to take a lead in the future organisation of sport.

Children and young people must be the focus – it is essential to influence lifestyles from the early years - this is where Leisure can make the biggest contribution to help address the 'health of the nation' issues.

The potential to impact on the most acute problems and burdens on the Health and Social Care Services is more difficult to address. Alongside this, it needs to be recognised that the majority of Leisure Service investment is in facilities, where most of the regular custom is not from the priority and 'at risk', target audience for Health and Social Care Services. There needs to be a greater Health Service commitment to fund any future ill-health preventative Leisure initiatives.

For these reasons, an impact on Health and Social Care priorities should not be the sole justification for future investment in Leisure. The Leisure investment case for education, regeneration and tourism, 'better community' objectives also needs to be championed. Physical activity and sport can significantly contribute to economic and community regeneration – the visitor economy and lifelong learning.

The report recommends that Gwynedd Council consider the following themes as priorities for the future Leisure strategy:

1. Motivating children and young people to adopt and maintain healthy, active lifestyles
2. Helping to keep older people involved and active in their local communities – more outreach, than Leisure Centre orientated - enabling local organisations to provide low cost ways of supporting older but less independent people to lead healthy lives
3. Supporting other providers e.g. the voluntary and private sectors
4. Encouraging greater use of the natural environment
5. Providing essential support, underpinning and celebrating sporting success
6. Providing specialist interventions as a public service only where there is both evidence of need and no other alternative provider.

## Principles and Rationale informing the Future Priorities and Design of Services

No longer is it feasible to provide the same service to all... given the expected budget savings that will be demanded, the report recommends careful consideration is given to the rationale underpinning future service priorities – an ‘entitlement to business’ rationale is presented as a means of defining the scope of future provision - distinguishing between the purpose and unique/essential role of the Authority alongside those services that are ‘optional’ and can be delivered in a different way. These are summarised as follows:

- Essential ‘entitlement’ services – which the Local Authority has a duty to provide. For example:
  - education and learning - an entitlement for all young people to acquire literacy, numeracy and in the case of Leisure - physical literacy skills through an ‘inspirational’ learning experience.
  - compensation programmes – a responsibility to provide specialist interventions where no others will i.e. adult literacy; assistance to support people with special needs; home assistance - supported independent living programmes for older people
- Optional services – providing facilities to satisfy adult ‘leisure time’ activities – responding to ‘market choice’ for example:
  - the ‘business’ offer – market led activities serving a leisure and lifestyle need – personal choice amongst the adult community competing with a range of alternatives including commercial products – health and fitness; 5-a-side football; golf; ‘holiday leisure’; free outdoor recreation i.e. walking, jogging and cycling; many club sports.
  - these services will benefit from the application of more ‘commercial’ business models.

The process of distinguishing between such fundamental different purposes helps inform the rationale for the future provision. No different to other Local Authorities, Gwynedd Council wishes to ensure future services deliver better outcomes yet achieve efficiency savings. This demands a review and clarification of the service rationale, purpose and priorities – becoming an essential reference point informing future delivery – such principles should also apply across non-statutory and statutory services including youth and library provision but the principles can only be determined corporately.

## **STRUCTURAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

### The 'Leisure' Mix

In order to shape more efficient and effective community services the report recommends that the current 'Leisure' - sport and physical activity service be positioned and marketed alongside other 'leisure', 'culture' and community betterment and lifelong learning services – a complementary 'package' of community culture, leisure and lifelong learning products, services and facilities - libraries, theatres, museums and galleries, arts, play and youth services, community centres, church halls, schools - all a community resource for leisure and lifelong learning activities.

These services share the same wider health and well-being/better community/visitor economy purposes and outcomes and would benefit from the application of a consistent business and entitlement modelling.

Brought together, they can be managed and delivered to provide a joint community focus and better offer as well as a greater range of efficiencies i.e. co-location and management; shared outreach services.

## Positioning Leisure in the Right Service Department

The report recommends that further consideration be given to the most effective future position for Leisure within the Council's structures if it is to increase community impact and achieve efficiencies.

The current departmental location of Leisure, set alongside Care Services, is not considered to be the optimal positioning. There is no doubt operational managers have worked hard to make the current structures work well and this has led to a number of improved methods of working as well as financial outcomes. However to achieve greater impact and support more radical change enabling more efficiencies the report recommends one of two more complementary placements:

- Either -
  - Education and Lifelong Learning – where the service can be better focussed on supporting children and young people to learn the necessary skills to enjoy a physically active healthy lifestyle aligned to the education and learning 'entitlement'.
    - Pros: a priority area; raised status for Leisure; better position to influence and support schools; supports a learning community model if adopted for future local service delivery
    - Cons: danger of becoming a low priority 'lost' within a bigger education service; not best placed to provide other adult and community services – the aforementioned business model
- Or -
  - Economic and Community Development – aligned to community regeneration and betterment and serving the visitor economy.
    - Pros: a closer all-round affinity between Leisure, Libraries and Culture services and delivering community development and economic regeneration; a separate

- 'platform' from which to commission and offer support services for the young people's entitlement as well as specialist interventions such as older people's activities
- Cons: a lower priority service mix and less affinity with the health outcomes

### The Management Approach

The report refers to a number of different local as well as central management delivery models. A universal approach is not recommended – rather appropriate models that best serve the needs of different communities, building on the strengths of each local catchment area.

The management models proposed for consideration may be summarised on three levels:

- **Rural community models** - 'learning community' /'community enterprise' models – harnessing the strengths of the local communities – retaining and improving community services – making better use of local resources – facilitating local decision making and ownership – maximising the secondary school role – developing the local leadership role of Town and Community Councils - sharing resources and enabling the voluntary sector at the heart of future decision making. The approach securing more sustainable community delivery models including greater levels of co-location, shared management and resources.
- **Larger town models** - supporting and enabling the development of a stronger strategic management model for the provision of specialist leisure facilities in the larger population and tourist destination centres. The strategic managers, who have a higher degree of leisure management expertise could be also be used to provide support services to the rural community management models.  
The larger town models would also be expected to pursue



more sustainable community delivery including greater levels of co-location, shared management and resources – particularly maximising the use and management of the large Leisure buildings for youth, tourism and library services.

Into the future, the strategic centres could be further reviewed alongside alternative management options including consideration of a more commercial approach; Trust management models etc.

- **Central management** – alongside the aforementioned changes in operational delivery leading to greater community independence or strategic specialisation, the report recommends a move towards a more streamlined, central model responsible for commissioning and reviewing delivery of the Council's priority outcomes and the provision, or 'purchasing' of, specialist support services where needed (in some cases this might draw on the specialist skills available in the strategic hubs).

## **MORE LOCALLY APPROPRIATE OPERATING POLICIES**

### Different Facilities and Communities

The report recommends a range of more specific approaches appropriate to each locality. These are briefly summarised as follows:

- Special priority to be given to supporting the communities of Tywyn, Dolgellau, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Bala, Bethesda and Penygroes – developing new ways of overcoming rural disadvantage and isolation – in order to maintain the leisure offer but through new approaches to management and sharing of resources – embracing, engaging and supporting the education and voluntary sectors and allowing the design

of different opening hours and pricing policies to better suit local circumstances and needs

- Re-shape the Barmouth offer looking at options for service co-location and a greater management alignment with the commercial/visitor economy
- Re-design of the future aquatic offer in Bangor to take account of new development plans alongside a rationalisation of the existing leisure offer
- Review of the Arfon Tennis Centre to consider more 'commercial' mix of facilities
- Re-shape the design and use of Porthmadog Leisure Centre to bring together a wider range of services (Library and Youth) under one roof and management.

#### Generic Recommendations

- Further align the aquatic plan to the Swim Wales vision
- Develop a vision and plan in conjunction with the Outdoor Partnership to maximise the use of the outdoors.

### **FINANCIAL MATTERS**

The 2015/16 and beyond budget targets will become increasingly challenging for Leisure. The cost of maintaining the current leisure stock will naturally result in a greater focus on buildings and how they are managed - this will continue to be a headline issue.

Over the last 3-4 years the Centre Managers have made great progress reducing the net running costs of the Centres – with the overall operational recovery increasing from 49% to 57% with a further projected increase to 64% in 2012/13 – a net saving of over £470k over 3 years set to exceed £800k over 4 years by the end of 2012/13.

All the Leisure Centres have delivered improvements, for example: increasing the number of direct debit payees; reducing staff costs;

and improved marketing - all assisting in generating additional income.

However, with Leisure Service spending in Gwynedd still above the national average and Local Government cuts set to worsen from 2015, it is considered that further significant savings will only be achieved by introducing more radical changes.

This study has not entailed a detailed interrogation and analysis of the current financial performance of each individual Leisure Centre to inform specific efficiency savings (although a number of practical changes are recommended for different facilities in the report).

This was not felt to be an appropriate first step. Instead it is recommended that consideration needs to first of all be given to a sequence of principles:

- i. the rationale (business/entitlement)
- ii. different local delivery models and options
- iii. options for shared cross-service management and co-location models
- iv. leading to a review of central management models

All of the above would inform future operational change and lead to a wide range of efficiency savings as well as better community solutions.