

<b>Report to:</b>	<b>TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>
<b>Relevant Officer:</b>	John Blackledge, Director of Community and Environmental Services
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	19 June 2019

## LEISURE SERVICES UPDATE

### 1.0 Purpose of the report:

1.1 To consider an update on the work undertaken, future plans and performance of Leisure Services.

### 2.0 Recommendation:

2.1 To scrutinise the work of Leisure Services and identify any matters for further scrutiny.

### 3.0 Reasons for recommendation:

3.1 To ensure effective scrutiny of Leisure Services.

3.2a Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.2b Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

3.3 Other alternative options to be considered:

3.4 Request Internal Audit to programme in to the annual work plan. Refer to external audit.

### 4.0 Council Priority:

- 4.1 Leisure Services contribute to all three council priorities;
- Priority One 'The economy: Maximising growth and opportunity across Blackpool';
  - Priority Two 'Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience'
  - Priority Three 'Organisational Resilience'

## 5.0 Report Information

### 5.1 Scope of the Report

5.1.1 The report provides an update on the work undertaken within the services with year-end finance and Key Performance Indicator figures for 2018/19.

#### 5.1.2 Leisure Services

5.1.3 Leisure Services deliver a broad range of activities and programmes from within the three main leisure facilities and in community settings to help local residents to lead an active and healthy lifestyle.

5.1.4 The scope of this report includes all service areas within Leisure, as set out below:

- Leisure facilities;
  - Palatine Leisure Centre
  - Blackpool Sports Centre
  - Moor Park Health & Leisure Centre
- Outdoor Activities Service
- School Games programme
- Active Blackpool GP Referral programme
- Family Weight Management programme – Making Changes
- Better Start Volunteer Programme
- Outreach and Street Games programmes.

5.1.5 A background paper providing a detailed overview of the scope of leisure services can be found at Appendix 9(a).

5.1.6 In 2018/19 the Leisure Services received over 1million attendances to activities and facilities provided across Blackpool, with the three main leisure facilities alone seeing over 992,000 attendances.

5.1.7 The leisure service provides a range of activities and programmes to meet the growing demand of supporting people to lead an active and healthy lifestyle. The range of services include targeted programmes that are free at the point of delivery along with a broad range of universal activities, which are available at a subsidised rate. The leisure facilities offer a range of concessionary pricing options for targeted groups along with 'pay as you go', direct debit and annual membership options for those accessing the facilities on a regular basis.

## 5.2 **Budget Information**

- 5.2.1 Leisure Services has an annual expenditure budget of £5,875,000 and an annual income target of £4,010,000, resulting in a net annual cost of £1,865,000 to Blackpool Council for the provision of leisure services.

## 5.3 **Service Performance, Highlights and Challenges**

- 5.3.1 A Performance dashboard can be found in Appendix 9(b) giving a more detailed overview of patronage, member and retention performance in key areas along with customer feedback statistics for 2018/19 compared to 2017/18.

## 5.4 **Health and Fitness**

- 5.4.1 Leisure Services operate health and fitness facilities at all three of its leisure centres. The facilities include dedicated fitness studios, spinning studios and exercise class studios at each site. In 2018/19 the health and fitness facilities had over 247,000 visits across the three sites with Moor Park Health & Leisure Centre seeing the highest number of visits. Whilst this figure is less than the previous year, the growth in health and fitness members by 5% compared to the previous year and the slight improvement in retention for health and fitness members, demonstrates that the health and fitness provision remains popular amongst local residents and that once we have them engaged, they receive a positive experience that retains helps them.
- 5.4.2 The health and fitness income targets remain a challenge for the service, but a number of capital developments to improve and refresh the facilities to help attract a new market are being developed. The main focus of these developments will be at Palatine Leisure Centre and Blackpool Sports Centre, where the facilities are looking tired and in need of a refresh.
- 5.4.3 Investment into Blackpool Sports Centre changing rooms and ground floor toilets has been confirmed and work will start on these at the end of June. Currently the facilities are under utilised due to the condition, which has made it challenging for the centre to attract early morning users who could shower post workout and go straight to work. The refurbishment will create a modern, high quality feel to the ancillary facilities that will enable the centre to attract a wider corporate market.
- 5.4.4 A review of the exercise class programme across the centres took place in 2018. The aim of the review was to gain feedback from customers, staff and industry experts to produce a high quality exercise class programme that would meet the needs of customers, reflect industry trends and enhance the overall performance of the sites. As part of the process, focus group workshops were carried out with customers at each centre as well as staff who delivered the programme.

5.4.5 The review resulted in indepth analysis of the timetables compared to high performing timetables elsewhere and ultimately some classes being removed and new classes added to the timetable. Overall, the number of classes were reduced to help improve the overall percent capacity of classes and customer experience. The changes resulted in some animosity and negativity from a small number of customers who enjoyed these classes, but will put the service in a better position to attract a new audience in the longer term.

## 5.5 **Active Blackpool**

5.5.1 The Active Blackpool programme is a referral programme aimed at individuals who would benefit from additional support to lead a more active lifestyle. The service works closely with a number of specialist health teams including stroke, cardiac, cancer, diabetes, bariatrics and MSK (musculoskeletal) as well as GP surgeries to support patients within these services to lead an active and health lifestyle through a range of activities and programmes.

5.5.2 The programme is open ended, allowing customers to access the service for life. There is an ongoing cost for customers from the start of the programme, giving them the opportunity to 'pay as you go' or pay for a membership via a monthly direct debit (£20/month).

5.5.3 The service has a very strong partnership with the Cardiac Rehabilitation Service ran by Blackpool Victoria Teaching Hospital, who work in partnership to deliver a cardiac rehabilitation programme for clients who have a cardiac condition, including heart failure, from the leisure facilities. To support the growth that this programme has seen in recent years, the service invested in additional staff, supporting them to gain the BACPR qualification enabling them to deliver specialist cardiac exercise classes.

5.5.4 The service have recently strengthened the referral pathway with the stroke team based at Blackpool Victoria Teaching Hospital, who were keen to develop specialist physical activity provision for individuals who have suffered a stroke as part of their rehabilitation programme. As part of this partnership, the stroke service paid for a member of the active blackpool team to complete a course specialising in exercise for patients with neurological conditions, with the aim of putting on some specialist classes. The member of staff recently completed the qualification and a range of specialist classes will be added to the timetable in Summer 2019.

## 5.6 **Learn to Swim**

5.6.1 The learn to swim scheme which runs at both Palatine Leisure Centre and Moor Park Health and Leisure Centre provides an opportunity for children to learn to swim, develop their aquatic skills and ultimately progress into the local swimming club, Blackpool Aquatics. Leisure Services work in partnership with Blackpool Aquatics to provide a seamless progression pathway and competitive swimming opportunities for local people.

5.6.2 The learn to swim programme has seen further growth in the previous 12 months, and is

projected to continue growing over the next two years, which presents an opportunity for increased income generation and an increase in the number of children learning a vital life skill.

5.6.3 However this growth presents a number of challenges in balancing the demand for water space across the two swimming pools, to meet the demands of a wide range of customers from local clubs to families and fitness swimmers. A key focus in the previous 12 months has been on growing the pool of qualified swimming coaches as demand nationally is not currently being met. A range of coaching courses have been organized and delivered from Palatine Leisure Centre to support local individuals interested in becoming swimming coaches and looking for local employment. A recent coaching course has resulted in an additional three newly qualified teachers who will support the growth of the programme.

## 5.7 **Feel Good Factory**

5.7.1 Leisure Services have two Feel Good Factory facilities – one at Palatine Leisure Centre and the other at Moor Park Health & Leisure Centre. The facilities are aimed at the older generation and adults who are inactive. The facilities offer a range of toning equipment that are easy to use and low impact in a friendly and social setting, providing a workout environment that is relaxing and informal.

5.7.2 In December 2017 a number of changes were made to the booking system for the Feel Good Factory, as a large number of customers were booking back to back sessions, which isn't recommended and was resulting in new customers being unable to book a slot, resulting the service struggling to attract new customers due to the lack of availability. These changes have contributed to a reduction in the patronage for these facilities, due to customers no longer being able to book two sessions back to back. Whilst the patronage has reduced, the number of members using the facilities at both sites has increased positively and the retention has also improved demonstrating that customers are happy with the service they are receiving.

5.7.3 A further contribution to the reduction in patronage for the feel good factory facilities has been an issue recently identified by the service, where customers had not been checking in for their session. This does not impact on the income for the service as the customers pay via monthly direct debit, however it does impact on the patronage figures and has since been address by the service.

5.7.4 Shape Master, the company who manufacture the feel good factory equipment and highlighted us as a good practice facility due to having one of the highest membership numbers per facility in the country as well as an above average length of stay for feel good factory customers.

## 5.8 **Outdoor Activities**

5.8.1 The Outdoor Activity Service renewed their Adventure Activities Licensing Authority license in March 2019, enabling them to continue providing a range of watersports activities including kayaking, canoeing and raft building on Stanley Park Lake to children and young people across Blackpool. In addition, the service offers a range of outdoor activity packages, including high ropes activities, team building, den building and ecological activities, rock climbing and bouldering.

5.8.2

The service is continuing to increase the range of groups and organisations it works with including an ongoing partnership arrangement with the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) who now include 20 hours/ week of outdoor activities as part of their curriculum offering to all of their pupils. Furthermore, a number of primary and secondary schools have purchased education packages to enable local children to develop their skills and experiences through outdoor activities.

5.8.3

An ongoing challenge for this service remains the unpredictable nature of British weather, which impacts particularly on 'pay on the day' customers to both the high ropes course and watersports activities. The service has focused on developing the number of groups and schools who purchase longer term packages over several weeks or months as these are less impacted by the weather.

## 5.9 **Swimming**

5.9.1 Swimming is offered at Moor Park Health and Leisure Centre and Palatine Leisure Centre. The programme offers a range of opportunities to enjoy the pools from family fun sessions to fitness swimming. The pools are also utilised for adult and children's swimming lessons, school swimming, swimming clubs and events and competitions which can place conflicting demands on the space available and present a challenge for public swimming space.

5.9.2 Swimming is often seen as a wet weather activity, particularly with families looking for an activity to do at weekends and during school holidays. Swimming patronage dropped by 13,000 attendances across both sites in 2018/19 compared to the previous year and following some detailed analysis, there is no clear drop in any specific users groups – pay and play, contract and free swimming all saw a reduction in attendances. Therefore it is believed that the reduction is as a result of the dry sunny weather over the summer of 2018 as the main impact was seen between May and October.

## 5.10 **Customer Engagement**

5.10.1 Leisure Services take a proactive approach to engaging with customers and encourage them to provide feedback on their visitor experience to enable the service to make informed decisions on how to improve the service.

- 5.10.2 Leisure Services uses an internationally recognised system for proactively measuring satisfaction amongst service users. A more detailed overview and performance information taken from the system can be found at Appendix 9(c).
- 5.10.3 Net Promoter Score®, or NPS®, measures customer experience across a number of business sectors internationally. Customers are asked ‘On a scale of 0 - 10 how likely are you to recommend Moor Park Health and Leisure Centre to friends and family?’ Appendix 9(b) shows that between May 2018 and May 2019 over 8,500 feedback questionnaires were sent to customers with over 1,200 responding. Both the number of questionnaires sent and the number of responses were an increase the previous year which demonstrates that our customers are actively engaged with the service enabling us to develop and improve the service based on the most recent feedback.

## 6.0 **Service wide challenges**

- 6.1 The service strives to continually provide opportunities to increase the health and wellbeing of Blackpool residents through a range of free and low cost initiatives, projects and activities. In recent years the amount of external funding opportunities available to local authority leisure providers has reduced significantly making the opportunity to provide targeted projects and activities challenging. Furthermore, the drive to realise savings and reduce the net subsidy of providing leisure has resulted in increased income targets in the more commercial activities provided, such as health and fitness.
- 6.1.1 The continual need to balance the drive to increase income with supporting Blackpool residents to lead a healthier lifestyle through subsidised initiatives can be challenging, particularly when communicating our service aims and objectives to partners and third sector organisations.

## 6.2 **Service Brand**

- 6.2.1 Sport Blackpool has seen significant service growth since the ‘Sport Blackpool’ brand was established in 2007. Over time the service has taken on new areas including the Active Blackpool health referral programme, the PE and School Sports Team, Cycle Blackpool and the Outdoor Revolution Team. The service offering is far wider than the names suggests, encompassing a broad range of activities, facilities and programmes designed to encourage a support healthy and active lifestyle.
- 6.2.2 Many partners and customers believe that ‘Sport Blackpool’ is simply the facility operations, which it traditionally was and are unaware of the wider community, schools and health work the service undertakes. Feedback from partners and customer is that it puts many of people off as they believe we are about sport specifically rather than health, wellbeing and active living, which better reflects the range of programmes and services we deliver. In preparation for the refresh of the Sport and Physical Activity Strategy, we have been speaking with a number of internal and external partners who have all expressed surprise at the breadth of

the service.

- 6.2.3 From surveys carried out previously, there is a strong brand recognition that Sport Blackpool is a Council service, which is positive; however, the lack of recognition for what Sport Blackpool encompasses means that the Council is not getting the recognition for the activities and programmes that didn't traditionally sit under the Sport Blackpool brand.

Furthermore, a number of other leisure operators, trusts and organisations who previously had 'Sport' in their title have moved towards a brand name that better reflects the broader work they do, such as Active Lancashire who were previously Lancashire Sport and UKActive who were previously the Fitness Industry Association (FIA).

## 7.0 **Key achievements in 2018/2019**

The key achievements of the service in 2018/2019 have been:

### 7.1 **Blackpool Sports Centre 3G Pitch**

- 7.1.1 Blackpool Council has been awarded a £308,133 grant from the Premier League and The FA Facilities Fund towards the project. The council worked alongside the Football Foundation and the Lancashire County FA to compile a five-year Football Development Plan, which is a vision of how sport will be played on site with an emphasis on increasing participation.

- 7.1.2 The number of teams using the new pitch is set to grow from 60 to 86 teams in junior and adult formats, with 15 new female teams created. This will support a predicted increase of over 150 female players and is expected to result in an 85% growth in football participation within this demographic.

- 7.1.3 Significant growth in the number of Under-14 footballers using the site is also expected. This has been identified as a key objective to deliver and is expected to result in nearly 200 new players, which will be supported by the formation of 21 teams within this age group.

### 7.2 **Facilities Maintenance**

- 7.2.1 A working group between leisure services and property services has been established, which has enabled a focus to be given to addressing some of the maintenance challenges within the facilities. The group has identified a number of key priorities and funding to address some of these, however it is evident that funding is not available to address all of the priorities identified and the group will continue to explore funding options for identified works.

#### 7.2.2 **Stanley Park Lake**

Parks and Leisure Services secured £30,000 from the Coastal Revival Fund to carry out two



studies on Stanley Park Lake – an economic feasibility study that explores the opportunity to develop the watersports offer and the economic impact this could have on the town alongside an ecological study that explores the range of options available for dredging the lake to improve the overall water depth and ecological habit for local wildlife. Both studies commenced in April 2019 with the first draft of the reports due in the coming weeks. Once these are complete, opportunities will be explored to identify external funding opportunities to dredge the lake in line with the processes identified within the ecological study.

### 7.2.3 **Direct Debit Collection Review**

The direct debit collection process for leisure services was reviewed in 2018 and market testing took place to explore opportunities for an external collection company to take on the direct debit collection process. Following a tender exercise and the review of submissions from a number of companies it was agreed that the direct debit collection process should remain in-house.

### 7.2.4 **Website refresh**

The Sport Blackpool website was completely refreshed and launched 2018, providing greater functionality on mobile devices and a more visually appealing platform with improved functionality.

## 8.0 **Future Priorities**

8.1 Following the completion of the feasibility studies, Leisure and Parks will continue to work in partnership with the Friends of Stanley Park to explore external funding opportunities that would enable the lake to be desilted along with wider park infrastructure improvements. This work could enable a greater range of watersports to be offered such as sailing, windsurfing, stand up paddle boarding and potentially open water swimming.

8.1.1 Leisure Services are currently developing a number of project proposals that could see significant investment in the leisure facilities and provide a new range of activities and opportunities for local residents. These proposals will be developed in the coming months, with the intention of implementation within this financial year, should the proposals be given permission to proceed.

8.1.2 Following changes to the VAT exemption criteria for leisure services last year, Blackpool Council received a rebate. A corporate decision was made to ring fence £500,000 for maintenance of the leisure facilities. The new working group is currently identifying the key priorities for investment, with agreement already reached to refurbish the changing rooms at Blackpool Sports Centre and reconfigure the reception entrance at Palatine Leisure Centre.

8.1.3 Blackpool's Sports and Physical Activity Strategy requires reviewing and rewriting. The process will involve consultation with key partners and integration of other relevant strategies locally, regionally and nationally. This work will be carried out over the coming

months, with a draft strategy ready for sharing in Autumn/Winter 2019.

- 8.1.4 As part of the preparations for refreshing the Sport and Physical Activity Strategy and commencing a consultation process with partners linked to this, the service will rebrand themselves as 'Active Blackpool'. This service name better reflects all of the work the service does and will enable all areas of the service to be reflected in its name. A rebrand will enable newer parts of the service that were not incorporated within the original 'Sport Blackpool' brand development to be brought into the rebranding and feel part of one team.

Does the information submitted include any exempt information?

No

**9.0 List of Appendices:**

Appendix 9(a) – Leisure Services Background Paper  
Appendix 9(b) – Leisure Services Performance dashboard  
Appendix 9(c) – Net Promoter Score (NPS) Overview

**10.0 Legal considerations:**

10.1 None

**11.0 Human Resources considerations:**

11.1 None

**12.0 Equalities considerations:**

12.1 None

**13.0 Financial considerations:**

13.1 See body of the report and Appendix 9(b).

**14.0 Risk management considerations:**

14.1 None

**15.0 Ethical considerations:**

15.1 None

**16.0 Internal/External Consultation undertaken:**

16.1 None

**17.0 Background papers:**

17.1 None