



Place Services Scrutiny Committee

Leisure Services Task and Finish Review

May 2024 – November 2024

Councillors –
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Contents

Chair’s Foreword and Acknowledgements.....	3
1. Introduction and Terms of Reference	4
2. Method of Investigation	5
3. Background	5
Newton-le-Willows Health & Fitness	6
Queens Park Health and Fitness	6
Sutton Leisure Centre	7
Data and Service challenges.....	7
National, and Local Context	8
United Nations Sustainable Development Goal indicators 2, 3, and 13.....	9
4. Findings	10
Newton Health & Fitness Site Visit.....	10
Sutton Leisure Centre & Queens Park Health and Fitness Site Visits	10
Leisure Services and Public Health.....	11
5. Conclusions	13
6. Recommendations.....	17

Chair's Foreword and Acknowledgements

The Council's Leisure Service is a crucial service that supports community cohesion, residents' wellbeing, and physical health. The Service acts as a crucial facilitator for public health programmes and aids in the delivery of council Public Health outcomes both directly and indirectly. The Service provides a diverse range of activities, clubs and facilities which positively support residents and the Public Health team. Despite the fantastic work being done, it was vital to review the whole offer and review what more can be done to maximise the benefits for residents and the Council.

Before undergoing the Task and Finish review, the Place Services Scrutiny Committee received data from a public perception survey which highlighted that many residents were not aware of the breadth of the Service. This created a need to investigate public perception and how as a council we can improve this.

The opportunity to visit three of the leisure sites was incredibly welcomed and it was wonderful to see the fantastic work that was being done at these sites. The site visits gave great insight into the work that was being done and changes that can be made to enhance the offer and share good practice.

Having the chance to receive data and have discussions with officers from both Leisure Services and Public Health was greatly appreciated. It was useful to discuss existing policy, funding, and cross departmental work. I hope that these discussions, the recommendations, and findings in this report will help to strengthen the relationship between departments and create more proactive and positive campaigns to help achieve public health targets and boost public perception of the Service.



Councillor Robyn Hattersley
Chair of the Leisure Services Task and Finish Review Group

1. Introduction and Terms of Reference

- 1.1. This Task and Finish Review was commissioned by the Place Services Scrutiny Committee as part of its work programme for the 2023/24 Municipal Year at a meeting on 12 June 2023. This review was chosen as Members of the Committee had expressed an interest in Leisure Services, to scrutinise how the Leisure Services transformation options would support and add value to the wider Council priorities, such as reducing health inequalities and supporting commercialisation.
- 1.2. At the beginning of the review, the Group agreed the following aims and objectives:
- To understand how the service contributed to the Council's priorities, Public Health priorities and tackling inequalities,
 - To understand how customer data & intelligence is used to lead service development, facilitate improvement, and guide decommissioning,
 - To understand how the service could improve the management and maintenance of the facilities, to meet customer expectations,
 - To identify the levels of investment required and where should that investment be targeted,
 - How the service supports the Council's journey to net carbon zero.
 - How value for money was embedded in the service and the level of commerciality within the services, and
 - To submit findings to Cabinet and officers for consideration.
- 1.3. During the Task Review, Members acknowledged that to cover all of the aims and objectives set out in the initial scope would be ambitious. It was therefore agreed to steer the lines of enquiry towards how the service contributed to the Council's wider priorities, such as Public Health priorities and tackling inequalities, social value, and the use data and intelligence. During the Task Review, while Members did consider the commercialisation and Net Zero aspects of the review, work with regard to commercialisation was already underway via the transformation project lead and therefore this element was not extensively considered to avoid duplication. Members did suggest however, the potential for a further piece of work on Environment and Net Zero in relation to Leisure Service in the next municipal year.
- 1.4. This review was conducted to support the achievement of five of the six Council Priorities including: 1. "Ensure children and young people have a positive start in life", 2. "Promote good health, independence, and care across our communities", 3. "Create safe and strong communities and neighbourhoods for all" 5. "Create green and vibrant places that reflect our heritage and culture", 6. "Be a responsible Council".
- 1.5. Members and officers who took part in the Task and Finish Review were:
- Councillor Robyn Hattersley (Chair),
 - Councillor Terry Maguire
 - Councillor Anne McCormack

- Councillor Damian O' Conner
- Councillor Marlene Quinn
- David Boocock, Head of Culture and Wellbeing,
- Shirley Goodhew, Consultant in Public Health
- Jeff Barston, Team Manager, Active Lives, Leisure & Fitness
- Jane Ascroft, Active Lives Leisure & Fitness Team Manager
- Jim Flatley, Active Lives Leisure & Fitness Team Manager
- Mathew Cunliffe, Public Health Practitioner
- Gisselle Spencer, Gissell Spencer, Registrar Public Health
- Lyndsey Ogden-Dabbs-Programme Manager Localities and Leisure
- Karl Allender, Scrutiny Support Officer

Method of Investigation

- 2.1 The review began with an initial meeting at Newton Health and Fitness on 9 May 2024. Members were provided with an insight into the recent facility upgrade and investment and were provided with information on where there was a need for further investment.
- 2.2 The Task Group conducted two site visits on 18 July 2024, first to Sutton Leisure Centre, and second to Queens Park Health and Fitness. This was to further Members understanding around the wider service provision and, the maintenance needs and challenges faced by the service.
- 2.3 Next, the Group met with officers of the Council on 17 September 2024 to hear from them about the Council's current approach to collaboration and the joined-up work across the service areas to support the Council's priorities of reducing inequalities as well as how public perception of the service could be enhanced to better target those with health improvement needs, in-turn, supporting the Council's Public Health agenda.
- 2.4 The Group met on 22 October 2024 to discuss their findings and agree their conclusions and recommendations.
- 2.5 All the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the Task Group from the review are documented in this report which will be submitted to the Place Services Scrutiny Committee on 6 January 2025 for approval before being submitted to Cabinet on 19 March 2025 for consideration and response.

2. Background

- 3.1 At its first meeting at Newton Health and Fitness on 9 May 2024, the Head of Culture and Wellbeing provided an overview of both the service and the recent options appraisal conducted to inform the Council on future management options that could be considered in an effort to reduce the level of subsidy related to the delivery of the Council's Leisure Services.

- 3.2 The Council operates three Indoor Leisure Facilities, Newton Health and Fitness, Queens Park Leisure Centre, and Sutton Leisure Centre. The Leisure Service also managed 24 outdoor sites including Cricket, Football, Rugby, and Crown Green Bowling facilities, the largest of which was Ruskin Sports Village.
- 3.3 The Leisure Service also had a Sports Development Team who supported the voluntary sector sports clubs, deliver exercise sessions in local communities, and deliver the school games programme.
- 3.4 Last year: 2022/23, those sites collectively received 1.3 million visits. There were over 7,000 members who paid a monthly subscription and the service collected income of over £3m. It was however recognised that the service needed to change to maximise the health and well-being outcomes of residents, optimise the commercial opportunities and meet the challenge of rising costs.
- 3.5 As part of the options appraisal, a baseline assessment of the current service highlighted that income per square metre of floor space was well above what would normally have been expected. Income per fitness station, members per fitness station, and staffing as a percentage of income also positively exceeded industry benchmarks.
- 3.6 Officers reported that demand for some services remained high although no specific supply and demand analysis was included in the presentation.
- 3.7 Officers further expressed that the service was cross cutting covering five of the Council's 6 priorities. From learn to swim, exercise and wellbeing opportunities, community development and empowerment with a focus on enhancing and supporting community clubs.

Newton-le-Willows Health & Fitness

- 3.8 In 2020/21, this facility received a £4.2 million refurbishment including Willowbees Adventure Play and Immersive Cycle Studio, both of which are not available at any other Leisure site. This facility included an extended fitness studio, 25-metre pool and an outdoor floodlit synthetic pitch. The refurbishment also included the construction of a Swimming Pool changing village and a brand-new group exercise studio. Members were informed of plans to upgrade the synthetic pitch to a 3G surface and replace the current floodlights which were not energy efficient with LED lights, and a scheme to introduce Photovoltaic Cells for energy generation and other measures to reduce the site's energy consumption. The facility was located on the periphery of the Borough bordering Warrington, Ashton, Golborne, and Leigh and had a significant commercial opportunity. The facility hosted school swimming lessons, private lessons, & public pool sessions as well as fitness and wellbeing classes.

Queens Park Health and Fitness

- 3.9 Queens Park Leisure Centre was rebuilt in 2010 as part of a £3.6-million project. The complex offered a five-lane 25-metre pool, wet and dry changing rooms, consultation / therapy room, fitness suite, refurbished sports hall, and an activity room. The facility hosted school swimming lessons, private lessons, & public pool sessions as well as fitness and wellbeing classes.

Sutton Leisure Centre

- 3.10 Comprising of an 8-badminton court sports hall, activity room, 2 squash courts, 400m synthetic athletics track and artificial football and hockey pitches. Sutton Leisure centre has the largest indoor hall in the borough. It was used for many large events which included national judo competitions, the election count and even on one occasion a televised boxing event. The facility previously operated a 25metre swimming pool, cafe and bar however were decommissioned in 2013 as part of cost savings brought about through government cuts to local authorities to reduce operational cost. Sutton had seen the least amount of investment across the service in respect of the indoor operation. However, in 2021 a new state of the art 3G floodlit football pitch was installed following a football foundation grant funding of £677,000.
- 3.11 The closure of the swimming pool, café and bar had meant that a significant area of the building was not currently in use. The majority of the facilities users were Sports Clubs, who used the facility for both training and competition, unlike the other two sites visited where the majority of users are individuals using the pool, fitness facilities and exercise classes. Members acknowledged that the facility needed significant investment if it was to be brought up to a similar standard as both Queens Park and Newton facilities.
- 3.12 Although the facility was achieving success in terms of footfall, this was being achieved with an ageing building and facilities including the athletics provision. The Task Group was informed that there was currently no significant planned maintenance investment in the short term at Sutton Leisure Centre.

Data and Service challenges

- 3.13 The Council's Active Lives Strategy 2022-2027 highlighted the findings of the National Active Lives Strategy which identified that locally, 62% of adults classed themselves as physically active. 46% of children were active for at least an hour a day across Merseyside, fewer people were active than the national and Northwest averages (58% compared with 63% and 61% respectively), Almost 70% of adults and 37% of children were overweight or obese, and fewer adults walked or cycled than the national and Northwest average.
- 3.14 Officers informed the Task Group about the legacy of impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic and that attendance at facilities in St Helens had recovered quicker than those in neighbouring authorities and are now above pre-pandemic levels. Officers explained the impact the closure of Parr Swimming Pools and Fitness Centre in 2019 due to significant health and safety issues with the roof resulting from deteriorating building condition. The sites three pools hosted 75% of School swimming along with

a full programme encompassing swimming clubs, private swimming lessons, public swimming, and water aerobics. The Centre also provided a fitness facility and hosted a popular weekly walking group. The closure of the pool had a significant impact on the supply of pool space, especially impacting the ability to meet school swimming demand. It was noted that Leisure Services was not a statutory service and did not have a statutory obligation to provide swimming pools, however, schools did have a national curriculum obligation to ensure that pupils can swim 25m using a recognised stroke by the end of key stage 2.

- 3.15 The demand for pool space was significant in the Borough. As a result, pool space for school swimming had been shared equally between all schools requesting it. Although every school who requested it, was provided with programmed water space, the number of pupils reaching the Key stage 2 standard was falling year on year, which was concerning. Compounded by limited pool space, public sessions at the weekend often reached maximum bather loads meaning provision was regularly closed for access control for intermittent periods with a 1 out 1 in system being operated. This was most frequent at Queens Park Health and Fitness.
- 3.16 Members discussed that swimming pools being busy may be off putting for some families leading to them choosing not to access swimming at the Council's facilities. It was also suggested that the cost-of-living crisis may have also detrimentally affected low-income families from accessing swimming meaning some children were not accessing a swimming pool other than the limited water time during school swimming. As such, the ability to swim well had a direct correlation with the choice to pay for private lesson or join swimming clubs. This therefore will disproportionately impacted those who can't afford to pay for private lessons or swimming club fees affecting access to opportunity and potentially increasing health inequities. Members and officers highlighted that to mitigate the issue of pool space demand, investing in further pool space should be considered, however, this would inevitably increase facility costs and the potential need for further investment and subsidy. Members acknowledged the challenge of balancing investment in Leisure Facilities which would come at a cost with the Council's wider budget pressures.
- 3.17 Although Leisure Services did not have a statutory responsibility for swimming, there are many responsibilities that the Council does have which are addressed as a direct responsibility of having swimming as part of Leisure Services. Some of these include tackling loneliness and isolation, health inequalities including mental health, substance misuse recovery, water-based rehab enhancing the safer community's agenda, local employment opportunities, progress routes for elite athletes and cancer rehabilitation programmes.

National, and Local Context

- 3.18 The next section outlines some national, and local context as well as strategies and initiatives that this review is in some way related to.
- 3.19 The Council's Leisure Services is subsidised with a net service cost of £1.5million; however, it was acknowledged that the services directly contributed to the health and wellbeing of the Borough's residents and therefore Council recognises that this is an investment in supporting the health and wellbeing of residents in the borough. Part of

the scope of this Task Group review was to look at, to what extent this happens and how this was measured.

- 3.20 Being active can help to prevent and manage over 20 conditions and illnesses including some cancers, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, and depression. It was well known that being active, along with a healthy diet, helps to maintain a healthy weight and was an important part of helping to reduce levels of obesity and improve general wellbeing. However, it was acknowledged that there were substantial inequalities in sport and physical activity participation related to health, socio economic groups and gender.
- 3.21 Some of this was evidenced in the Council's performance indicators. Members over the course of the year had monitored and raised concerns over several areas where performance was below target covering all the Council priorities particularly in areas in relation to Public Health and the issues of health inequalities. Some of these indicators include:

Adult Social Care and Health (Public Health) Performance Indicators

- PH-018 Mortality rate due to suicide and injury of undetermined intent per 100,000 population
- PH-023 Under 75 mortality rates from cardiovascular disease

Children and Young People Performance Indicators (Public Health)

- PH-002 Percentage of children in reception year who are overweight or obese.
- PH-003 Percentage of children in Year 6 who are overweight or obese.
- PH-006 Smoking status at the time of delivery
- PH-007 Under 18 admissions to hospital for alcohol specific reasons per 100,000 population

Place Services Performance indicators

- G&P-007 Percentage of residents economically inactive due to long term sickness

United Nations Sustainable Development Goal indicators 2, 3, and 13

- 3.22 Members had also monitored the St Helens and UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) indicators. Key challenges where the Borough lags the England average had not significantly changed since the 2023 report and are highlighted below against the relevant SDGs.
- 3.23 The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, included 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) covering a range of environmental and social issues.
- SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) covers a range of metrics including 'percentage of children in reception year who are overweight or obese', 'percentage of Children in Year 6 who are overweight or obese', and 'Obesity: QOF prevalence (age 18 years +)'.
 - SDG 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing) covers a range of areas including: 'Healthy Life Expectancy – Male/Female', 'Under 75 mortality rates from respiratory disease (1 year range) per 1,000 population', 'Under 75 mortality rates from

cancer (1 year range) per 1,000 population', Under 75 mortality rates from cancer (1 year range) per 1'000 population'.

- SDG 13 (Climate Action) including 'CO2 Emissions per Capita'

3.24 St Helens Council agreed a motion to commit to contributing to the achievement of the SDGs by ensuring all reports and policy papers include an SDG assessment indicating which goals will be impacted by decisions.

4 Findings

Newton Health & Fitness Site Visit

4.1 At the Task Group's first meeting at Newton Health and Fitness, Members were provided with a facility tour.

4.2 During the tour, Members gained insight into both the facility refurbishment and the wider provision available. Whilst the refurbishment had made a significant improvement to the facility, some areas within the centre remained untouched, such as the outdoor changing rooms, and the pool hall. Whilst the refurbishment means internally the building looks modern and well maintained it had to be accepted that it was an aging building built in the late 1990's with the pool hall itself dating back to the 1960's. The exterior and the internal layout having been partially modified to allow for better use of floor space and modernisation which had worked to freshen up its appearance. Officers noted that the biggest challenge in relation to budgets was Swimming pool running costs as the oldest part of the building, its design, was not as energy efficient as a modern pool, this was compounded by rising energy costs.

4.3 Members noted that the social media communication was very good and questioned how this was managed. Officers explained that this activity was managed by one staff member at Newton Health & Fitness who had a personal interest in this work and was predominantly done outside their normal day to day duties.

4.4 Officers highlighted the member age demographic and the lack of members in their late teens to early twenties which was evidenced. Members expressed that the potential of expanding the leisure centre user profile by developing a more targeted activities offer, specifically aimed at the following priority groups, including disability groups within:

- Young People and Teenagers, (Health Fitness and Education)
- Children and Families (e.g., Health and fitness Sessions), and
- Middle aged men (Mental Health and Wellbeing)

Sutton Leisure Centre & Queens Park Health and Fitness Site Visits

4.5 A site visit to Sutton Leisure Centre and Queens Park Health and Fitness took place on 18 July 2024.

4.6 Unlike Newton Health and Fitness, the indoor facility at Sutton had not seen any significant investment in recent years. Attributed to Government budget cuts, the 25-metre swimming pool was mothballed in 2013 and had subsequently not been

reopened. As well as a pool, the facility once provided a bar and cafeteria as well as a training room which were also decommissioned in 2013. Sutton had two squash courts which were operational however squash participation had declined nationally, as the only two public courts in the borough there is demand but use is not as high as it was. However, the sports hall was well used, as were the outdoor facilities. Sutton was unique in that it had the only athletics facilities in the borough, including a running track which served St Helens Sutton Athletics Club, allows general public access, and facilitated via Sport Development, the popular 'Couch to 5K' programme. Whilst it was noted that the athletics facility was not commercially viable, the positive social value was evident in that it facilitated popular community activities, promoted healthy lifestyles, and increased the social value of the facility. It is however in urgent need of refurbishment but there is at present no budget identified to undertake this work.

- 4.7 Members acknowledged the facility location and the potential value a quality facility would have on the community. The location had access to a train station, bus links, and ample onsite parking. Moreover, the area had already seen significant housing developments and further housing developments were planned over the course of the next 15 years in the catchment area which presented an ideal opportunity for leisure facility investment.
- 4.8 Members noted that the facility at Queens Park Health and Fitness appeared fresh and modern. Usage had been extremely high since the rebuild in 2010 particularly in the swimming pool. Officers highlighted that prior to the Covid-19 Pandemic, classes such as Aerobics and Zumba were almost always oversubscribed however, officers confirmed that these numbers had not returned to pre covid levels, broadly; it was suggested that this was due to a change in customer behaviour and exercise trends which had moved on since 2020.
- 4.9 The user group demographic for Queens Park was disproportionately weighted in favour of the over 50's and the facility managers indicated that on Fridays, a number of sessions were targeted at this age group and remained popular; this was an example of the use of data and intelligence to steer the programme design based on understanding of the facility's user base.

Leisure Services and Public Health

- 4.10 Following the site visits, the Task Group held a meeting on 17 September 2024. The focus of this meeting was to hear from officers from both Public Health and Leisure Services to understand the Council's current approach to collaboration and the joined-up work across the Service areas to support the Council's priority of reducing inequalities. Consideration was also given to public perception of the Leisure Service, and how this could be enhanced to better target those with health improvement needs, thereby supporting the Public Health agenda.
- 4.11 Aims for the meeting were to explore:
- To what extent Leisure Services contributed to the wider Public Health determinants and the value Leisure Services provided for the Council and the Borough in dealing with such challenges.

Appendix 1

- To what extent Leisure Services collaborated with partners and stakeholders in supporting the Council's priorities in dealing with health inequalities.
 - What the Leisure Service was doing to support the wider health challenges and,
 - To understand what the Service was doing now, and what it could do in the future to maximise its potential in supporting the wider Council health agenda.
- 4.12 Officers highlighted that the Council's Public Health Department contributed £985,414 towards Leisure Services. This subsidy was divided between Leisure Services, £583,520 and Sports Development £311,895.
- 4.13 The Public Health department sends an annual return to the Office of Health Improvement and Disparity (OHID) showing the outcomes of spend on programmes and the outcomes achieved. During the pandemic reporting ceased temporarily, however the quality assurance processes are now more rigorous.
- 4.14 Members questioned how success and value within Leisure Services was measured. Officers highlighted that popularity in membership uptake and income received from the various membership options was the key indicator for success. The service was unique in what it delivered and given the available space; and in comparison, with similar council run facilities, the service far exceeded what would normally be expected. Officers also highlighted that over 40% of its members lived in the 20% most deprived communities in the borough, evidence that the service was reaching many of those residents for whom price can be a barrier to participation.
- 4.15 Members discussed how Leisure Services contributed to the Council's priorities including those in Public Health such as health inequalities, increasing physical activity, mental wellbeing, and healthy weight, all of which had historic poor performance related data in the Borough. Although the Leisure Services did contribute to the wider council priorities, to what extent was, by and large, unreported. Members highlighted that the Service appeared to be operationally focused as opposed to having a focus for strategic outcomes and producing measurable results in delivering the Council Health and Wellbeing Priorities.
- 4.16 As well as this, the service was somewhat functioning in isolation to the wider public health agenda. Members agreed that silo working would not produce the best outcomes going forward. A shift in the Services' core offer and vision should be considered in collaboration with public health and the wider stakeholders to produce a collective vision which should be documented clearly within the Leisure Objectives / Active Lives Strategy and public health related strategies. This however would have to be considered, and balanced against the Services commercial objectives with a view to maximise the potential of both aims and objectives.
- 4.17 Members suggested that this would amount to a cultural shift in the function of Leisure Services in terms of what Leisure Service does in its duty as a public service. While this may be ambitious, Members agreed that small changes such as those set out in the recommendations will provide a steer on implementing positive change.
- 4.18 Furthermore, it was noted that the reduction of pool space outlined above had amounted to a direct impact on swimming ability in Primary age children, in turn, negatively impacting on the Council's priority 1 "Ensure children and young people

have a positive start in life” While the service was delivering programmes for children, these were limited by the water space available. Members raised concerns over the impact of any further maintenance challenges, particularly around the service’s swimming pool provision and that robust planning should be factored into any transformation and maintenance strategy to prevent the loss of another pool.

- 4.19 Members questioned the access criteria for both council and commissioned services including room hire within the Leisure Centres. Officers highlighted that although public health subsidised the Leisure Service, the Service was still bound by the set, and agreed, Council charges meaning that Public Health service providers were not granted any further subsidy in booking fees for room hire at the Leisure Centres.
- 4.20 Further discussions led to the view around reducing costs for room hire while aiming to be more commercially savvy was noted. Evidence was produced by colleagues regarding the investment return on health and wellbeing programmes. According to Sports England for every £1 spent on community sport and physical activity, a return on investment of £3.91 was created. This added value was created through, among other things, improved life satisfaction, savings in health and social care and a reduction in crime. Therefore, for every pound saved or not spent, money could be spent elsewhere.
- 4.21 Officers discussed the need for increased collaboration to mitigate the increasing challenges faced in terms of the economic challenges in tackling rising costs and decreasing the need for subsidy, along with the need for direct action in tackling health inequalities. Officers agreed that closer working relations between Leisure Services and Public Health could be improved acknowledging that collaboration would likely to have provided better outcomes considering the context of the current economic landscape. The need for closer working relationships between Leisure Services, Public Health, and commissioned services particularly in sharing data and intelligence for the purpose steering programmes, delivering programmes and monitoring progress and health outcomes was required.
- 4.22 Members questioned how the service engaged with residents. The residents survey results were discussed although it was noted that the specifics and level of detailed questions may not have been specific enough for reliable results. As well as this, as a proportion, only a small percentage of responses were received allowing for limited qualitative intelligence. However, the results provided indicated that in the 2022/23 Survey RS-004 Percentage of residents agreeing St Helens offers a variety of opportunities for people to be physically active was 53% down 22.1% and RS005 Percentage of residents agreeing St Helens offers a variety of opportunities for people to 51% down 12.1%. Members discussed that there was a need to understand this data as to why it had dropped and focused customer engagement was the way to achieve it.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 It was acknowledged that Leisure Services did contribute enormously to the wider public health agenda. Members discussed that it was not just about exercise but the added social value and maximising its potential benefiting physiological wellbeing, providing a sense of long-term purpose which in turn, may contribute and support the NHS, local health services, doctors, hospitals, and clinics. While this was

acknowledged, it was further accepted that Public Health and Leisure Services need to work closer with a focus on monitoring performance and outcomes going forward. Members therefore agreed that tighter links between Public Health and Leisure Services should be explored improving the monitoring and recording of tangible outcomes.

- 5.2 Officers noted that Leisure Services did currently work with partners and stakeholders including the many community sports clubs across the borough, however, with a more focused approach, members suggested that linking commissioned services within the facilities, through Public Health, could improve a collective culture, vision, and purpose which could be developed. This would however require Public Health input and support. Members agreed that this link would directly improve health outcomes for residents as well as enhancing the Go Active brand in providing a holistic, multi-faceted service and enhancing public perception, increase facility use and membership uptake, as well as adding social value and delivering public health outcomes, while maintaining a balanced approach between commercial and health driven activities.
- 5.3 Evidence provided from the V4 consultants explicitly stated that operationally, the Service was exceeding expectations. The improvements suggested within this report however was to bring in line the strategic aims with the wider council priorities, particularly those specific to public health, and to achieve a joint vision, measurable outcomes, adding too, and maximising social value. While the service was achieving operational success, how effective it was in evidencing wider health outcomes was less evident. Collectively, Public Health and Leisure Services should work more closely to establish the key performance health outcome indicators that Public Health want to see the Service contributing to.
- 5.4 Members of the Task Group agreed that the cost of hiring space for public health programmes and other service providers is currently a barrier to public health commissioned services making use of the Council's leisure facilities. Members suggested that considerations were needed to be given to fees and charges, specifically room hire and how the balance between the commerciality agenda, price setting and achieving public health outcomes were balanced to increase participation, and public health programmes, therefore increasing the Leisure Service's contribution to improving public health outcomes and reducing health inequalities. As such, the current fees and charges policy should be reviewed to enable flexible pricing of room hire for Council funded services and partners such as the NHS, or the development of a public health related service rate as an option for specific spaces within the facilities.
- 5.5 There was therefore a consensus among the Task Group Members that by enabling access in reducing the cost for joint programmes, there would inevitably be a return and increased social value. However, in light of the Councils over-stretched budget challenges, this would however require a focused approach to limit any financial impact on the Council, and to ensure deliverable outcomes are evidenced to support any such subsidy versus its value.
- 5.6 Members discussed the scope of opportunity for Leisure Services to support potential programmes such as dietary & weight management, smoking cessation, mental

health support and disability groups etc. Leisure Services did not have staff for these programmes at present, and that Public Health commissioned delivery of these services through other contracts with City Health Care Partnership and Merseycare. Members discussed whether staff could be further upskilled, developed, and trained in order to help and signpost to programmes such as dietary & nutrition programmes, and weight management. Officers highlighted that Leisure Staff had already received Make Every Contact Count (MECC) training and are able to sign post residents to the Public Health contracted providers.

- 5.7 However, this was not being actively monitored and reported on. Members agreed that again, supporting a cultural change, in terms of the core offer, and in line with the transformation programme through development and engagement, staff would feel empowered, be upskilled, whilst supporting both the Leisure Service users, residents, and the wider public health goals. Members suggested that the Leisure Service share the skills audit of its staff with Public Health and consider how it could progress and develop service options.
- 5.8 Whilst a service rebrand was discussed, the consensus was that this was not a realistic approach or indeed required. The investment for a full service re brand would incur significant cost, moreover, the Go Active brand had been proven a success. It was suggested however that a cultural shift in relation to what the Leisure Service provided should be explored, and that Leisure Centres should not just be for exercise or swimming, but holistic health hubs aligning with partners to engage those who may not wish to use the fitness facility but can access services to support their wellbeing. Members proposed that the service should be open to both members and non-members where residents could get support or, for example, have blood pressure or health checks and that public health to work with Leisure services to make use of the communal spaces to provide the relevant blood pressure and health checks.
- 5.9 As many non-users already access the facility regularly as spectators (e.g., during children's swimming lessons), it was suggested that there was an opportunity to engage with members of the public on programmes like the 'Know Your Numbers campaign' and potentially increase non-user engagement in leisure or public health programmes. It was acknowledged that this would require cross service planning to maximise the social value, and Public Health outcomes of such activities while considering, as a byproduct, enhancing income streams by engaging with potential new customers. As well as this, ensuring that such activities had no or limited financial implications on the service.
- 5.10 Furthermore, Members acknowledged that Leisure Service should consider how success was measured and may need to be more focused on the delivery of outcomes with agreed targets which can be reported against. With public health challenges ever-growing, leisure services undeniably provide opportunity for improved Health and wellbeing of our residents. Members agreed that all opportunities have to be considered to maximise and enhance social value.
- 5.11 Members suggested the development and implementation of an effective and robust Leisure Services communication and marketing strategy, that addresses the health benefits of Physical activity, While the service did have a staff member who

effectively controlled communications, it was not directly part of their job role, and it was agreed that this could be further improved and balanced across the whole service. Members acknowledged how well the social media output for Newton Health & Fitness worked and suggested it would be helpful if this could be centralised to ensure coverage across the brand was balanced. Members commended the social media activity work and highlighted the importance of marketing, promotion and to enhance the services product commercially.

- 5.12 Members suggested that to ensure that the wording of future resident's surveys were to be concise, clear, and meaningful to be able to gather accurate public perception data. Furthermore, public engagement whether through Surveys, online surveys, customer focus groups should be considered as part of the services marketing and communication strategy.
- 5.13 Members discussed to what extent the service used data for the purpose of intelligence and steering specific health and wellbeing activities to target individuals and groups with specific programmes. Officers agreed that the service is data rich although it does not explicitly maximise its potential in using the data for intelligence. Officers agreed that the Service captured lots of varied data and therefore the opportunity to reach target groups however, Members did question the extent to which that was being utilised. Member suggested that with the support of public health, the data relevant to public health projects should be utilised to focus target groups and supporting the monitoring of outcomes of programmes such as the (know your numbers) campaign. Equally, leisure service should explore translating data into intelligence for the purpose of its commercial and transformation objectives.

In summary, the site visits provided members with an oversight and perspective of the Council's leisure and fitness provision. Members agreed that the 3 sites visited highlighted a consensus that each provision offered separate operational functions connected via the Go Active Brand, however the look and feel of each facility was different and not consistent in aesthetic look and feel.

- 5.14 Members agreed that the service was operationally driven in its approach. While it added value to the Council's priorities enabling residents of the Borough to stay fit and healthy, it wasn't taking direct action in collaboration with the wider public health priorities in its service delivery. While some outcomes were reported on and being monitored via the Council's performance reporting system (e.g. CC-002 Number of visits to Council managed sports and leisure centres), Members suggested that considerations for further indicators being produced with Public Health will capture additional outcomes providing evidenced based service, and social value.
- 5.15 It was clear that Sutton Leisure Centre had the scope for a successful provision, however significant investment would be required to either bring this facility up to a revised and improved standard or a complete rebuild if it is to be commercially viable, and to support the Council's Net Zero Strategy. Members agreed that Sutton Leisure Centre does not add value to the Go Active brand in terms of membership provision, accepting however that it does play an important role for servicing local sports clubs. While the facility served a sector of the population, this being mainly sports clubs, of which, 70% of sports club's use Council Leisure sites for training and for competition, a similar gym model as at Queens Park and Newton had proven that it would likely to

be both popular and successful, particularly given the increasing housing investment in the catchment area.

- 5.16 Members agreed that the current Swimming Pool provision was a major challenge for the Service in its ability to provide and maximise water-based learning. Whilst it was noted that the Service was doing everything it could in meeting this challenge, significant investment to enhance the Swimming offer would be required to improve Swimming outcomes. This, in turn, would increase the ongoing finance pressures and subsidy needed which officers and Members accepted as the main challenge facing the Leisure Service in terms of increasing or enhancing its provision.
- 5.17 Members discussed the decommissioning of Sutton pool due to the Councils financial pressures , and the decline of the building condition of Parr Pools and Fitness leading to its closure and that this was something that needed to be considered in the forward planning of any transformation and commercialisation programme in terms of how the Council intends to maintain its current estate if the service is to be commercially viable, able to reduce its deficit and, meet the Councils Net Zero target. It was however noted that this was already in place and as part of the Council commercial strategy, a focus of sustainability and reducing any financial impact was being addressed. However. The loss of both of these provisions had detrimentally affected the services ability to maximise its potential in increasing the health and wellbeing of residents and to enhance the profile of the Go active brand. It was further noted that the period of austerity and central government funding cuts on council budgets had directly impacted the funding available for both maintenance and Service investment.
- 5.18 Furthermore, the use of social media and marketing was driven by a staff member who takes pride in this area albeit, this was not their specific job role. Although Members credited this staff member, it was suggested that it would be of value to expand this role to ensure all leisure provision had the same level of exposure and not just weighted towards Newton Health and Fitness. It was noted that this may potentially incur cost to the operation if explored.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1 Based on the findings and conclusions of the review the Task Group recommends that:
1. Establish a robust reporting system including agreed targets, to regularly report back the contribution and outcomes made by the Go Active Service to the delivery of the St Helens People Plan and Active Lives Strategy via joint working groups, including the Active Lives Steering Group.
 2. In the annual review of fees and charges consider how they can better support partnership working, especially joint working with public health, who tackle health inequalities within the borough.

3. Leisure Services, together with Public Health, to further consider how the core offer and service provision can further reflect the focus on reducing health inequalities.
 - 3a. Health and Wellbeing Services commissioned by the Council via Public Health to be encouraged to deliver awareness and outreach activities within the reception/common areas at the Go-Active sites.
 - 3b. Go-Active to work proactively with Public Health on their delivery of health improvement campaigns for the borough.
 - 3c. Recognise the role the Go-Active team have in the delivery of health improvement messaging and tackling health inequalities.
 - 3d. Ensure that the Go-Active service's employees have the requisite skills and tools to contribute to tackling health inequalities within the community.
 - 3e. Work to establish a consistency of aesthetics within the Go-Active estate that emphasises the role the facilities play in tackling health inequalities and improving wellbeing.
4. Establish a marketing plan that reinforces the Go-Active Services role in addressing health improvement.
5. To ensure that the future resident surveys are written in collaboration with Service Directors (Link officers) ensuring that the wording is clear and concise to gather accurate and meaningful public perception data.
6. Marketing activity undertaken by Go-Active should, where appropriate, target communities where health inequalities are greatest