

**Title of Report: Kirklees Leisure Centre Review**

**Report Content: Overview of the Public Consultation – Process and Responses Received**

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**1 Overview of Public Consultation Process**

- 1.1 Following approval at the Cabinet meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> September 2023, a public consultation has been undertaken on the proposals for the future of the Kirklees Leisure Centres currently operated by Kirklees Active Leisure (KAL).
- 1.2 The consultation launched on 29<sup>th</sup> September and was live until 13<sup>th</sup> November (6 weeks).
- 1.3 People who live, work, study and visit Kirklees were able to participate in the consultation via online or paper survey, or via in-person engagement sessions (targeted at specific population groups, including Black and Minority Ethnic citizens, those with a disability and those with a caring responsibility). Several drop-in sessions were held at the Leisure Centres for anyone requiring support to participate.
- 1.4 A number of individuals, organisations and other stakeholders also chose to contact the Council directly in relation to the consultation. These responses, comments, letters, deputations, petitions, and other correspondence are summarised in Chapter 4.
- 1.5 This paper provides a summary of the overall findings from the public consultation.

**2 Overview of Responses Received to the Consultation Survey**

- 2.1 17,860 citizens participated in the consultation survey (17,143 online, 717 on paper).

***Survey Respondents***

- 2.2 The majority (93%) of responses were from Kirklees residents. Of these, 17% live in Holme Valley, 15% in Colne Valley, 13% in Spen Valley and Heckmondwike, 11% from Batley, 11% Huddersfield West, 10% Dewsbury, 6% Huddersfield East, 6% Denby Dale, 5% Mirfield and 4% Kirkburton.
- 2.3 72% of those who responded are current KAL members, and 97% said they use KAL leisure centres.
- 2.4 22% of respondents are parents/carers of children under 18 who use the leisure centres for school swimming. 10% have been prescribed exercise by their GP to support their health and wellbeing.

***Current Use of Leisure Centres***

- 2.5 Respondents use the leisure centres for the following activities:

KAL Leisure Centre (in order of most frequently used)	Facilities (most frequently used by respondents)
Huddersfield Leisure Centre	Swimming, Gym, Fitness Classes (dry), Fitness Classes (pool)
Batley Sports and Tennis Centre	Swimming, Yeah Days Out, Sports Facilities, Gym, Kids Soft Play, Fitness Classes (dry), Swimming Lessons
Spenn Valley Leisure Centre	Swimming, Gym, Fitness Classes (dry)
Dewsbury Sports Centre	Swimming, Gym, Fitness Classes (dry)
Colne Valley Leisure Centre	Swimming, Gym, Fitness Classes (dry)
Holmfirth Pool and Fitness Centre	Swimming, Gym, Fitness Classes (dry)
Stadium Health and Fitness Centre	Swimming, Gym, Fitness Classes (dry)
Scisset Baths and Fitness Centre	Swimming, Gym, Fitness Classes (dry)
Leeds Road Sports Complex	Sports Facilities, Swimming, Gym
Bradley Park Golf Course	Sports Facilities
Deighton Sports Arena	Sports Facilities, Gym

2.6 8% of respondents said they use other leisure/fitness centres across Kirklees, including other KAL sites (e.g., University of Huddersfield), private gyms (e.g., JD Gym, Everlast Gym, Tru Gym and various hotel gyms), activity specific centres (e.g., tennis, cricket, squash clubs/centres) and a range of community venues.

2.7 Respondents participate in a wide range of sport/activities outside of KAL leisure centres including:

- Recreational walking, gardening etc.
- Sports related activity (football, rugby, tennis, netball, cricket, badminton, dancing, gymnastics, squash, basketball, hockey, cheerleading etc.).
- Running.
- Cycling/biking.
- Fitness activities (such as marathons, triathlons, climbing, bouldering, parkour etc.).
- Yoga, Pilates, meditation.
- Other activities such as golf, martial arts, open water swimming/diving/underwater hockey, bowls/boules/pétanque and horse riding.

### ***Feedback on the Proposals***

2.8 The majority of respondents (60%) agreed with the Core Proposal to keep Huddersfield and Spenn Valley Leisure Centres open. A third (30%) did not agree. 10% were unsure.

2.9 Just under half (46%) of respondents agreed with the Marginal Offer Proposal to keep the named leisure centres\* open whilst under continual review to source alternative funding. More than a third (36%) did not agree with this proposal. 18% were unsure.

*\*Bradley Golf Club, Deighton Sports Arena, Holmfirth Pool and Fitness Centre, Leeds Road Sports Complex, Scissett Baths and Fitness Centre.*

- 2.10 More than two-thirds (69%) of respondents did not agree with the Closures Proposal. However almost one-fifth (19%) agreed that Batley Sports and Tennis Centre, Colne Valley Leisure Centre, and Dewsbury Sports Centre should close. 12% were unsure.

### ***Potential Impacts of the Proposals***

- 2.11 Respondents were asked about potential impacts that the Marginal and Closure proposals might have on themselves and/or their family.
- 2.12 Just under half (48%) felt the Marginal Offer Proposal would have an impact on them/their family and two-thirds (60%) felt the Closure Proposal would have an impact.
- 2.13 Qualitative thematic analysis was undertaken using coding frameworks to analyse the comments received in relation to potential impacts. Key themes included:
- Reduced access to classes/activities/provision

Respondents described potential increases in demand for classes and activities at remaining sites. These were described as already being overcrowded with reduced sites further being unable to provide availability to meet everyone's needs.

Swimming/pool-based classes in particular were mentioned. Respondents highlighted waiting lists for swimming lessons that are already lengthy and felt the closure of pools would exacerbate this. The impact of this would likely be that school swimming lessons would also reduce and the number of children unable to swim would increase (consequently impacting on children's water confidence and safety).

Respondents also commented that some sports (such as tennis and golf), activity clubs (including Get Active Owls for people aged 50 and over, and organised competitive sports) and child-oriented facilities (like Stompers soft play and TagX) are not available at other KAL centres. Respondents expressed that the already limited provision of classes, activities and facilities would particularly affect older people, and children and young people.

It was also commented that the uncertainty around the future of centres, may result in people starting to go elsewhere sooner to mitigate the impact of their local site closing suddenly.

Respondents felt that reduced access to classes/activities/provision would lead to:

#### ***Reduced participation in physical/leisure activity***

Many respondents felt that the proposals would negatively impact the time they had available to participate in physical/leisure activity. The increased distance, traffic congestion, indirect, infrequent and inconvenient public transport, limited private transport options (e.g., car ownership) and difficulties with parking availability meant they wouldn't always be able to access classes/activities due to incompatible timings.

A number of respondents stated that they would cease all participation in leisure/physical activity if their local centre was to close.

### *Decline in physical and/or mental health and wellbeing*

A number of respondents felt that their physical health (including recovery from injury, health conditions such as asthma, Coronary Obstructive Pulmonary Disease and long-Covid, achieving or maintaining a healthy weight and physical disabilities), would decrease or worsen due to the proposals. Others also cited a decrease in fitness and reduced mobility due to reductions in the amount of physical activity they could participate in.

Respondents also described how they access leisure provision to support their mental health and general wellbeing, and that a decline in participation would also result in a decline in these. Comments were made in relation to social connectedness, self-esteem and confidence, and by individuals with a disability, older people and those with previous/current poor mental health.

Some individuals also highlighted previous experiences of depression and suicide and described how participation in activities via their local leisure centres had supported them to remain well. There was a fear of poor mental health returning should centres close.

#### 2.15 Other potential impacts of the proposals included:

- Financial

Respondents described the how the proposals would impact on them financially, including increased costs of travel (fuel, parking, public transport), of activities/leisure provision at alternative sites (particularly private sites) and of memberships (perceived as increasing to offset identified deficits and due to increased demand/oversubscription). Some respondents said they may be unable to afford the additional expenses to access alternative provision.

- Environmental

Respondents also identified environmental impacts of increased emissions and pollution resulting from increased journeys/travel time to alternative leisure provision.

- Loss of services within deprived communities

Respondents also noted that there would be a reduction in local facilities despite residents paying the same in taxes as other people in less deprived areas of Kirklees. Many expressed that the proposals would reduce access to services for those most in need, particularly those who are unable to financially afford to travel to alternative sites using public or private transportation. Some respondents felt that the proposals would result in a loss of community spirit and community hubs, create, or exacerbate health inequalities and reduce footfall and spending in deprived areas.

- Increased demand on public and local health services (NHS)

Concern was also raised about the subsequent longer-term impacts on the demand for local health provisions including GP and NHS services, resulting from potential declines in health and wellbeing of local people as a result of the proposals. This concern extended to the financial implications (including those provided by Kirklees Council) to manage increased demand for local health services.

- Job Losses

There were also concerns raised in relation to existing staff around potential job losses/redundancies at Marginal and Closure Sites, and the increased stress for staff in relation to this.

### ***Potential Barriers to Accessing Alternative Leisure Provision/Activities***

2.14 Respondents were also asked about any potential barriers the proposals might have on themselves and their family in terms of accessing alternative leisure provision/activities. Just over two-fifths (43%) of respondents felt there would be barriers as a result of the Marginal Offer Proposal, and almost three-fifths (56%) felt there would be barriers as a result of the Closures Proposal.

2.15 Qualitative thematic analysis was undertaken using coding frameworks to analyse the comments received. Key themes identified included:

- Travel/Transport

Respondents described not (always) having access to private transport (e.g., car ownership) to be able to travel to leisure facilities further away, along with the inconvenience and safety factors of needing to travel longer journeys with babies and young children.

Many also highlighted difficulties with public transport, including indirect, infrequent and/or inconvenient times of transport, and that these don't always align with class/activity times at alternative leisure sites, particularly when also incorporating an increase in travel time for the extra distance. Traffic congestion, particularly at peak times was also identified as an issue.

Some respondents outlined how young people travel to local leisure centres alone, and that this may no longer be possible with sites which are further away from their present site (impacting on participation in physical/leisure activity and subsequent health and fitness).

A number of respondents again identified that these issues would reduce their ability and/or desire to continue participating in leisure activity regularly or at all.

- Reduced availability of classes/activities

Due to a perceived increase in demand for classes and activities at fewer leisure centres, respondents felt they would be unable to, or find it difficult to, continue accessing classes, activities, and swimming/swimming lessons. This could act as a barrier to how often they could participate in physical/leisure activity.

- Lack of Alternative Provision

Respondents again described a lack of alternative nearby provision for some activities, including TagX, Stompers and/or some sports facilities such as golf and tennis.

- Financial

As previously outlined (in 2.14 above), the increased costs associated with accessing alternative leisure provision (e.g. private sites) was also identified as a barrier to continued participation.

### ***Suggestions for Reducing the Deficit and Attracting Investment Needed***

2.16 Respondents were asked to share their thoughts and views on possible options for reducing the identified deficit in leisure centre funding and attracting the investment needed. Qualitative thematic analysis was undertaken using coding frameworks to analyse the comments received.

2.17 Suggestions for reducing the deficit included:

- Improving operational/financial management.

Many respondents felt strongly that better management and financial/budget planning would enable the sites to be operated in a financially viable way (e.g. similar to how private leisure facilities are operated and managed).

- Reviewing efficiency of operations (e.g., reduced staffing, energy efficiency).

Respondents outlined a variety of efficiencies that could potentially contribute towards reducing the budget deficit, including reducing staffing and senior management levels and using volunteers from the local community to support/facilitate activities.

Reduced opening times to maximise usage and reduce running costs was also suggested – though some respondents also felt extending/more flexible opening hours (e.g., longer mid-week hours, opening on weekends) could help to increase usage and increase income generation.

Some respondents also suggested reducing operational costs through better energy efficiency (reducing use of heat, lighting etc.) and investment in sustainable energy (such as solar panels or wind power). There were examples given of how swimming pool heating costs could potentially be offset using residual heat from local data centres, or by lowering pool temperatures.

- Partial closure (e.g., closing pools and keeping ‘dry’ activities).

It was suggested by many that partial closure of sites may also help to reduce costs. Ceasing or reducing high-cost provisions, such as swimming pools, were suggested whilst retaining ‘dry’ activities. However, there were some opposing comments that identified a desire/need for swimming pools to remain open (e.g., to enable the continuation of swimming lessons).

- Increasing provision (e.g., more classes, wider activity provision) and rental opportunities (e.g., hire to Personal Trainers, sports clubs, community groups, parties).

A number of comments were made in relation to increasing the availability of classes and activities or expanding existing provision (e.g., female only sessions, introducing sports leagues, new sports such as pickleball/padel). Some also felt increasing existing provision for

young people (e.g., holiday clubs, teen gym sessions) would also be beneficial and generate further income.

Other suggestions for generating income were made in relation to expanding the hire of facilities, including to community groups, sports clubs and personal trainers, and in relation to pool/facility hire for private parties, and in terms of holding events such as fun days, open days, sporting competitions, and functions such as fayres, fetes and festivals.

- Advertising/Marketing

A number of respondents suggested that promotional/marketing activity would also be beneficial in raising awareness of existing provision to encourage and increase usage, particularly amongst groups such as teenagers and Black and Minority Ethnic groups.

2.18 Suggestions for attracting investment included:

- Increasing costs (of memberships, activities, parking) - though a number of respondents felt any increases should be reflective of household income, and there were opposing comments that felt reducing costs (of memberships, activities, parking) would attract more members. Reviewing membership options/types was also suggested as a way of being more flexible and attracting new members and income.
- Reviewing and re-directing wider Council spend (e.g., reviewing Council staffing and salary levels, re-distributing other funding received by the Council, selling assets and the use of Council Tax) was also suggested to support investment into the leisure centres.
- A number of respondents suggested fundraising/crowdfunding within the community to help continue current leisure provision.
- Many also suggested applying for funding – including from community, charity and sporting organisations, and from Central Government and the NHS.
- Exploring private investment options, such as from local businesses (including corporate sponsorship), sports clubs and individual donors was suggested.
- Exploring community ownership and/or cooperative partnerships was also suggested.

2.19 Some respondents felt that exploring the options for combined service provision at leisure centres (e.g., the hosting of libraries, pharmacies, post office, shops, food, and beverage operatives) may also attract investment and/or generate further income.

### ***General Comments about the Proposals***

2.20 Many respondents commented that keeping just two leisure centres open (the core proposal) to accommodate all Kirklees residents was inadequate.

2.21 Whilst the strong preference would be not to close any leisure centres, some respondents indicated that they would prefer if some local sites remained open (for example *either*

Dewsbury or Batley not both). Many respondents advocated strongly for their local site to remain open.

- 2.22 It was felt that local communities would suffer in terms of loss of access to much needed, vital facilities and that the proposals would have a significant impact on health inequalities. It was also felt that the needs of local people should be an equally weighted factor alongside finances during decision-making about leisure provision.
- 2.23 Previous investment in sites marked for potential closure were mentioned, in terms of this being a waste of resource.
- 2.24 However there was some support for the proposals amongst respondents. Some felt the proposals made sense due to the financial investment needed to continue provision at all sites, and others agreed that having some, central, provision was better than not having any.

### ***Demographics***

- 2.25 The following data outlines information about survey respondents in relation to the protected characteristics laid out in the Equality Act 2010, plus four additional social characteristics identified as key by Kirklees Council.
- Gender: 66% of respondents identified as female, 33% male, less than 1% non-binary/intersex.
  - Age: Those aged 24 and under made up 4% of respondents, whilst those aged 55 and over made up 38% of respondents.
  - Disability: 22% of respondents considered themselves to have a disability and/or long-term health condition.
  - Ethnicity: 14% identified their ethnicity as non-White British, English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish.
  - Religion: 48% identified their religion as Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations). 42% said they don't have a religion. 10% said they had another religion (including Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Jewish).
  - Sexual orientation: 94% heterosexual/straight, 3% bisexual, 2% gay or lesbian, 1% pansexual or other sexual orientation.
  - Former Armed Forces: 3% of respondents.
  - Carers: 45% having caring responsibilities - 69% care for a child/ren under the age of 18.
  - Low-income households: 19% of respondents have a household income of £20,000 or less.
  - Employment: 71% of respondents are currently working (employed full time/part time, self-employed/freelance, working for family business, other paid work).

## **3 Overview of Responses Received via Engagement Sessions**



- 3.1 Three engagement sessions were held with citizens from Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, citizens with a disability and citizens with a caring responsibility (adults and/or children). 23 people participated in the sessions.
- 3.2 Discussions were semi-structured, based on the key questions in the consultation survey whilst also enabling free conversation. Key themes arising from the discussions are outlined below.

#### *Responses from Carers*

- 3.3 Carers reflected on the importance of access to physical activity, particularly for those with learning disabilities. It was felt the proposals could have a negative impact on their health, as well as the health of their carers.
- 3.4 It was also noted that organisations that support those with a disability (such as Waves Day Provision) use the leisure centres and would also be affected by the proposals.
- 3.5 Potential difficulties with public transport were identified as a barrier to accessing alternative leisure provision, particularly for those with mobility issues. It was suggested that consideration of transport links to other sites and Blue Badge parking availability was needed in decision-making about potential closures. Some carers commented that if local centres closed people wouldn't make the effort to travel to other sites.
- 3.6 Some suggestions were made around reducing the deficit and attracting the income needed to keep the leisure centres open and running as they are now. These included:
- Continuing 'dry' activities (e.g. fitness classes and the gym).
  - Increasing the provision of 'dry' classes/activities – particularly amongst the over 50's where there is a need to increase/maintain physical activity.
- 3.7 It was also commented there could be a role for community groups to get involved in raising awareness of activities/classes provided in other venues, for example local community centres, if local leisure centres were to close.

#### *Responses from Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) citizens*

- 3.8 Citizens reflected on leisure centres acting as 'cultural hubs' enabling diverse groups to all come together as a community. The centres were described as places of comfort where language barriers aren't an issue and older people are socially connected. Local centres were described as "*A multicultural place that you can go to and you can unwind from the stresses of life*".
- 3.9 They also described how there has been a generational shift with younger Asian women getting involved in sport, health, and fitness and that the proposals could have a significant impact on this.
- 3.10 It was felt that BAME groups (particularly in Dewsbury and Batley) would be most impacted by the proposals.

- 3.11 Further concerns about the proposals related to classes and activities being overcrowded/oversubscribed, and that reduced availability of sites and swimming lessons would impact on children’s ability to learn to swim. The costs of alternative provision (e.g. private lessons) were identified as being too high for everyone to afford.
- 3.12 Travel/time was also identified as a barrier to accessing alternative provision.
- 3.13 Citizens stated they would cease participation in leisure activity, which would affect them both mentally and physically. Concerns about subsequent impact on health (NHS) services were also identified.
- 3.14 Suggestions for reducing the deficit and attracting the investment needed to keep leisure centres open included:
- Increasing women-only sessions for Muslim women.
  - Private swimming lessons for adults.
  - Reduced opening hours.

*Responses from Citizens with a Disability*

- 3.15 Citizens described the benefits of participating in local pool-based classes to help with their physical health and mobility and ease pain/symptoms relating to health conditions.
- 3.16 They also highlighted the use of local pools by schools for children’s swimming lessons, the importance of this continuing and the impact on learning/curriculum time if travel to sites further away was required.
- 3.17 They also felt that social connectedness with other local citizens with additional needs, was key for mental health and wellbeing, particularly for children and young people. It was felt the children would participate less in physical activity/leisure if their local leisure centre closed.
- 3.18 Identified impacts of the proposals related to overcrowding due to increased demand for classes, activities and parking at fewer sites, difficulties with travelling further (including traffic congestion and pain from health conditions caused by long journeys)
- 3.19 Suggestions for reducing the deficit and attracting the investment needed to keep leisure centres open related to Increasing membership costs.

**4 Summary of Comments, Letters, Deputations, Petitions and Other Correspondence**

4.1 The below table summarises feedback received from key stakeholders in relation to the leisure centre proposals.

Organisation	Summary
Swim England	Expressed concerns at ‘core offer’ and potential closures of swimming pools across Kirklees. Also provided various statistics on swimming in Kirklees which included the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Of the 309 local authorities in England with responsibility for provision of swimming pools, only 23 have a larger shortage of</li> </ul>

	<p>water than Kirklees. The closure of additional facilities across the area will almost certainly exacerbate these inequalities, making it harder for people to take part in aquatic activities and increasing the number of children leaving Kirklees schools without this potentially life-saving skill”.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Swim England’s recent Value of Swimming report identified that across the Kirklees local authority area alone, swimming generates over £16.5 million of social value each year. This includes £2 million through improved physical and mental health, and £10 million in improved wellbeing.”</li> </ul>
Sport England	Offer of an opportunity for a discussion to investigate if there is any wider support that Sport England can provide as KAL and Kirklees Council consider the future leisure centre offer.
ukactive	The trade body for the physical activity sector states that KAL is a highly valued member and that now is the time when there should be investment in “...preventative measures, embracing true partnership between health and physical activity sectors to save more money.”
Yorkshire Sport Foundation	Expressed their offer of support to Kirklees Council and reiterated that they have worked with the Council for over 20 years and that they have become increasingly aware that the strategic leadership for physical activity and sport within the Council has both reduced and become dispersed. This has resulted in a reduced capacity to bring in external resources and reduced time spent on long term visioning and planning. Further cemented their support in planning and decision making, especially in relation to using facility planning tools.
Yorkshire Tennis Limited	Letter of support to register appetite to support discussions on retaining the valued indoor courts at Batley Sports and Tennis Centre. YTL is keen to work with Kirklees Council to assess how they could contribute to BSTC to maintain provision
Kirklees Active Schools	Stressed the importance of the leisure centres to supporting schools to achieve aspects of the National Curriculum in relation to swimming.
Third Sector Leaders	Representing the views of their members working in the health and wellbeing field who are concerned that closure of leisure centres will impact on the delivery of their activities. They feel that the closures leading to short term savings will be at the cost of health and wellbeing in the district.
University of Huddersfield	Stated that the university has a partnership with KAL who support their students and staff to be physically active across the borough but also partner in various academic areas with KAL providing opportunities for applied practice, placements and research. Expressed concern that the reduction in provision will lead to increases to costs to other cost centres in the public realm such as health and crime prevention.
Batley & Birstall Excellence in Schools Together	<p>Collectively voicing their strong opposition to the closure of Batley Sports &amp; Tennis Centre. Their schools have been inundated with concerns raised by worried parents regarding the fate of the centre, as many of their children and families use it for sport and leisure activities.</p> <p>Pledge of commitment to support the long-term viability of BSTC through a variety of means which includes working closely with KAL, all schools and their network of 21 schools and 8000 households.</p>

West Riding County Football Association Ltd	Expressed concerns at the potential closure of BSTC and wished to start dialogue into the long-term future of the site. Reinforced their previous investment of £508,987 investment made by the Football Foundation into the site towards new changing rooms, improvement of grass pitches and 3G artificial pitch, demonstrating the importance of the facility.
Batley Multi-Academy Trust	Expressed concerns at the potential closure of Batley Sports and Tennis Centre (BTSC). Batley Girls' High School use this site in the provision of their PE curriculum and extracurricular activities, as well as being an important community asset for their communities.  If they were unable to deliver the PE curriculum from BSTC then 1300 girls would be affected. The extra costs of having to hire facilities, transport and the additional staff needed would exceed £117,000 p.a.  Further practical consideration is the fact that utility supplies for BGHS come from BSTC building – all utilities are not separated.
Howden Clough FC – Petition	Howden Clough JFC alone has over 300 children using its facilities per week not to mention the other sporting clubs which include Yorkshire Elite, White Rose and Farsley Celtic. Local schools also use the site as well as the North Kirklees Schools Sports Partnership which delivers physical education to children using these facilities.  The purpose of the petition was to tell KAL and Kirklees Council that the people of Birstall, Batley and beyond will not let a huge part of the community go without trying their hardest to save it.
President, on behalf of the committee and members of Bradley Park Golf Club	Submission of comments in support of keeping the golf course open for both the short and long term.  Acknowledgment that their positive financial situation should continue in the future as the number of current annual users is maintained or even increased.

## 5 Recommendations

- 5.1 It is recommended that Cabinet reflects on the consultation findings and comments, letters, deputations, petitions, and other correspondence received from citizens as part of the decision-making process about the future of the leisure centres.