



CABINET – 15TH NOVEMBER 2023

**SUBJECT: SPORT AND ACTIVE RECREATION STRATEGY (SARS)
IMPLEMENTATION**

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMY AND
ENVIRONMENT**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update the Cabinet on the substantial activity undertaken to implement the Council's Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2019-2029 and to seek approval of the Implementation Plan at Appendix 1.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Council's 10 year Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2019 – 2029 was approved by Cabinet on the 14th November 2018. The definition of Sport and Active Recreation in relation to this Strategy is based on the range of sport and physical activity opportunities provided by Caerphilly County Borough Council in conjunction with our key partners. As the mid-point of the life of Strategy approaches this report provides an update on the significant delivery and implementation of the Strategy together with a look forward to future.
- 2.2 The United Kingdom is reported to spend the smallest proportion of expenditure on recreation and sport out of 15 similar European countries. However, since the implementation of the Strategy in January 2019 there has been almost £3 million of investment in Caerphilly Council's sport and leisure facilities including 5 new dual use 3G football and rugby pitches, an athletics hub, a hockey hub, and the refurbishment and redevelopment of fitness suites in 2 leisure centres. These targeted investments recognise the importance of providing residents with high quality, fit for purpose, aspirational facilities to support high levels of engagement. As such, the leisure facility provision in Caerphilly County Borough Council and the ongoing investment is the envy of many other areas in Wales and there are exciting plans for further significant investment in the future.
- 2.3 Our vision for sport and active recreation is to encourage healthy lifestyles and support our residents to be more active, more often. This report presents a wide range of interventions and activity including inspiring future generations of children and young people, supporting local sports clubs and sporting success, providing specialist interventions such as exercise referral, engaging volunteers, helping to keep older people active, maximising the use of all our community amenities and the local

environment, encouraging people to take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing, working with our schools and maximising community access to school based facilities, and investment in strategic facilities. The aim for the remainder of the Strategy is to build upon the achievements to date.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That Cabinet consider the content of this report and recommendations made by the meeting of the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee on 31st October 2023.
- 3.2 That Cabinet approve the Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2019-2029 Progress and Implementation Plan at Appendix 1
- 3.3 That Cabinet recognise the current budget pressures being experienced by the service and understand that steps will need to be taken to overcome these pressures. The SARS is a key component of addressing this issue.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 To provide an update and facilitate Cabinet input into the implementation of the remaining period of the 10 year Strategy.

5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 In 2016 a Wales Audit Office review concluded that the Council needed to develop and agree a holistic vision and strategy for its sports and leisure services. Following extensive public consultation Cabinet endorsed the Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2019 -2029 on the 14th November 2018 and it was formally implemented on 1st January 2019. In April 2020 Audit Wales returned to assess progress with the 2016 recommendation and recognised that with the Strategy the Council had taken effective action to develop and agree a holistic vision and strategy for its sports and leisure services with further important steps required to deliver those strategic ambitions. This report sets out progress against those steps and provides updates against the actions within the strategy.
- 5.2 The Strategy provides an ambitious and holistic vision and future purpose for the delivery of sport and active recreation across the county borough, establishing key principles which inform future direction and action including three key outcomes:
 - Better Health;
 - Healthier and Prosperous Communities;
 - Securing a more efficient and financially sustainable future offer.

The Strategy also sets out the following purpose, principles and priorities to further inform this approach, namely:

- to encourage healthy lifestyles and support our residents to be 'more active more often'
- by encouraging a collective responsibility and approach to provide and promote appropriate opportunities across a range of organisations
- to promote positive messages about health and physical activity
- to improve standards of performance and celebrate local success in sport

- 5.3 Reflecting the above the attached Implementation Plan at Appendix 1 encompasses a wide ranging programme of activity including direct delivery, working with and supporting partners, facilitating, and delivery by others. Noting the significant progress that is presented it should also be noted that a little more than one year after introducing the Strategy the world was engulfed in the coronavirus pandemic. The cessation of sport and leisure provision due to the pandemic resulted in the staff being redeployed to support the continued delivery of key and essential services and the use of leisure centres in Newbridge and then Pontllanfraith as Mass Vaccination Centres.
- 5.4 Services adapted dynamically in the face of the pandemic including the development of a dedicated free to access You Tube channel providing a range of Group Exercise classes that would traditionally be available in leisure centres. Through this approach clients of our National Exercise Referral Scheme were provided with continuity of their care virtually. The Sport and Leisure service has now developed a significant digital presence to support regular communication and engagement with existing and new users across a range of platforms. The service utilises all available social media platforms and has developed a service specific 'Leisure Lifestyle' app with over 43,000 downloads.
- 5.5 As can be seen from Appendix 1 the Council is involved in the delivery of multiple interventions with the support of partners including Public Health Wales, Welsh Government, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, Aneurin Bevan Health Board, and Sport Wales. These interventions in conjunction with partners include:
- National Exercise Referral Scheme
 - Sport Caerphilly
 - Positive Futures
 - Good Boost
 - Green Prescriptions
 - Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme
 - Free Swim Initiative
 - 60 Plus Active Leisure Scheme
- 5.6 In 2022/23 there were 57,700 visitors to Sport Caerphilly activities and 1752 attendees at the Positive Futures Outreach programme. In the same year there were 764 referrals into the National Exercise Referral Scheme with 60% of clients who attended the first exercise session completing the full 16 week programme. Sport Caerphilly have supported numerous clubs across the county in accessing just under £250,000 of funding through the Be Active Wales Fund during 2022/23. This continues to be a priority area with a target of £275,000 in 2023/24. Participants in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme have increased from 113 pre-Covid in 2018-2019 to 169 in 2023-2024 with an additional 80 having been offered a place, but are yet to take it up which would see numbers rise to 249.
- 5.7 The Sport and Active Recreation Strategy recognises that high levels of physical activity are enjoyed in a wide range of environments stretching from the countryside to highways, paths and bridle ways used for walking, cycling and jogging. Our natural resources provide significant opportunities to increase activity levels. In November 2020, the Council formally adopted a Green Infrastructure Strategy. A number of key developments and improvements have also taken place to help shape the outdoor environment and improve the scope and access for residents to participate in active recreation. For example, works to install a new jogger's path at the Showfield in Blackwood were completed in 2022 at a cost of £80K, which was funded by Parks

Services and the Welsh Housing Quality Standard programme. The relocation of Caerphilly Adventures to Cwmcarn Fforest Drive has been beneficial to both and has been backed up by additional investment in water sports facilities, E-bikes, and an orienteering course.

- 5.8 Our Healthy Walks programme is proving as popular as pre pandemic levels and the Volunteer Training Progression Plan continues to grow with more volunteers getting involved in leading walks. As part of the Caerphilly Landscape Partnership, all healthy walking routes have now been reviewed and graded and walking guides have been updated. The Caerphilly Challenge Series is organised by Countryside Services, in conjunction with Caerphilly Adventure Group and the Ramblers Associations as well as Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and continues to go from strength to strength. In May 2023 480 walkers, a record number of entries, completed the challenging routes of up to 22 miles across the stunning countryside of Caerphilly County Borough. Green Prescriptions are a form of social prescribing, a way for health and social care practitioners to connect with the people they are supporting with a range of non-clinical sources of support in the community. Working in conjunction with Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB), Parks Services have been instrumental in developing an offering in the north of the county borough at Rhymney Park. This initiative allows participants to undertake community-based activities such as litter picks in conjunction with Keep Wales Tidy.
- 5.9 In terms of more formal outdoor facilities the Council continues to maintain 120 grass sports pitches, 20 outdoor bowling greens, several tennis courts and cricket squares. In August of this year a circa £100,000 investment to bring a football pitch back into use at The Ynys, Fleur de Lys was completed. In addition, a £755,000 Welsh Government grant funded the opening of the Oakdale Athletics Hub at Rhiw Syr Dafydd Primary School in March 2022. The facility includes a 300m 6 lane running track and off field events including high jump, long jump, shot put, javelin and discus.
- 5.10 Since the implementation of the Strategy outdoor and other facility investment has taken place including:
- £390,000 to provide a new hockey hub at Sue Noake Leisure Centre, Ystrad Mynach and a 3G pitch at Idris Davies School.
 - £315,000 replacement of the outdated Artificial Turf Pitch (ATP) and supporting infrastructure, including fencing, lighting and changing rooms at Bedwas Leisure centre with a modern, dual use rugby and football 3G pitch.
 - An investment of £295,000 to replace the outdated Artificial Turf Pitches (ATP) at St. Cenydd Community School, Lewis School Pengam and Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni with 3 new dual use 3G football and rugby pitches.
 - A £73,000 project to provide the Cruyff Court (Aaron Ramsey) at Trinity Fields School providing a safe place where children and young people can interact with each other socially and develop healthier lifestyles.
- 5.11 Following the implementation of the Strategy there has also been targeted investment in our indoor facilities and, for first time since direct debit memberships commenced in 2007, in excess of 6000 membership payments were collected in September 2023. Investments include:
- £875,000 at Newbridge Leisure Centre redeveloping the Fitness Suite, a new Dance and Group Cycling Studio, new pool play equipment and a changing room refurbishment.

- A £100,000 refurbishment of the Fitness Suite at Heolddu Leisure Centre

The service has also taken time to ensure that the customer voice and views are sought and implemented. The Net Promotor Score model is utilised which provides customers with an opportunity to provide real time feedback based upon their experience of the services they receive. At present Sport & Leisure has a score of 57% (benchmark 41%) which ranks the service in the top 25% of similar services across the United Kingdom

- 5.12 As can be seen implementation of the Strategy contributes to and is influenced by the Council's broader Place Shaping plans. There has been continued investment in leisure facilities and in terms of our leisure centres there has been a focus on our 4 strategic sites at Caerphilly, Risca, Newbridge, and Heolddu in accordance with the Strategy. Caerphilly Leisure Centre is due to be replaced by a new £33.6 million Leisure and Wellbeing Hub in 2026 supported by £20m of UK Government Levelling up Funding. This investment will provide a high quality, aspirational facility aimed at encouraging our residents to engage in active recreation as part of daily life and as such supports aspirations of generational change. Whilst the 3G pitch at Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre is in use the indoor facilities are currently closed, the building having been used as a Covid-19 Mass Vaccination Centre by the Health Board since September 2021 until June of this year. Its future will be considered in the context of the wider leisure facilities including the Centre for Vulnerable Learners being built on the adjacent site and due to open next year.
- 5.13 Following discussions with three Secondary Schools to maximise the use of their community assets Sport & Leisure Services will manage facilities at Islwyn High, Blackwood and Ysgol y Gwindy ensuring a consistent delivery model and availability. Further discussions are scheduled to take place subject to the completion of the PFI process at Lewis School Pengam and Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni. This builds upon the aspiration within the Strategy to create more sustainable facilities by managing and promoting community use within the Sport and Leisure facility portfolio and closer alignment to the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme.

Conclusion

- 5.14 The Council has worked hard to ensure that the principles, vision and ambitions set out in the Strategy are the focus for day to day operation and longer term policy and development planning, fully embracing the scope, opportunities and challenges this represents. The Strategy remains relevant, even more so, given the impacts on physical and mental health and well-being of the pandemic, the cost of living crisis, financial pressures of the Council overall, the Health Service, and the sport and leisure service budget position. The implementation of the Strategy encompasses a range of activity which supports the emerging Corporate Plan and in particular Well-being Objective 3 - Enabling our Communities to be Inclusive as well as the Council's broader Placeshaping plans.
- 5.15 There is a wide evidence base of the positive impacts of engaging with and leading a healthy lifestyle in areas such as personal health, educational attainment, mental health, regeneration, community cohesion and social wellbeing. The adoption and implementation of the Strategy has provided a robust policy platform upon which further efforts in support of these aims can be achieved.
- 5.16 Positive progress has been made against the backdrop of a global pandemic. In a recent report published by the Sport and Recreation Alliance (SRA) the United

Kingdom was highlighted as spending the smallest proportion of general government expenditure on recreation and sport out of 15 similar European countries. The leisure facility provision in Caerphilly county borough council and the ongoing investment is the envy of many other areas in Wales. This review of the implementation of the Strategy reflects considerable ongoing investment in Caerphilly county borough. Many more challenges lay ahead, however it is clear that the approach being adopted by the Council and with its various partners and stakeholders is resulting in tangible improvements for the residents of the county borough. The aim for the remainder of the Strategy is to build upon the achievements to date.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

- 6.1 There are no assumptions associated with this report.

7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 As this report provides an update on the progress and implementation of the existing Sport and Active Recreation Strategy an Integrated Impact Assessment has not been completed.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Like all other Local Authorities, Caerphilly CBC continues to face significant financial challenges. Due to the unprecedented levels of inflation experienced during the 2022/23 financial year (Consumer Prices Index (CPI) peaking at 11.1%), the current economic outlook, and a range of temporary budgetary measures that were approved as part of the Council's 2023/24 budget, our updated Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) shows a savings requirement of £48.335m for the two-year period 2024/25 to 2025/26.
- 8.2 More specifically, the Council's Leisure Centre budgets are under pressure with an overspend of £482k being reported against the 2022/23 budget of £2.424m, and with a projected overspend of £452k currently projected for the 2023/24 financial year. These overspends are largely driven by increased energy costs which makes a focus on more modern buildings all the more important.
- 8.3 Given the scale of the challenge that the Council faces, a financial strategy that seeks to continuously salami slice our services and deplete our reserves is not a sustainable or an appropriate approach. The Council will therefore require new approaches to service delivery to ensure that the projected savings requirement of £48.335m for 2024/25 and 2025/26 can be achieved. The Sport and Active Recreation Strategy sets out a clear vision that supports new ways of working that will ensure that high quality, fit for purpose and affordable facilities are available to support high levels of engagement across the county borough.
- 8.4 There are no direct financial implications arising from this progress update report. The costs of various projects and investments are reflected in the report and the Implementation Plan at Appendix 1, each of which will be subject to appropriate decision making processes

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no personnel implications directly associated with this report. Staff are at the heart of the sport and leisure services that the Council provides and their passion and commitment is regularly recognised by service users.

10. CONSULTATIONS

- 10.1 The views of the listed consultees have been reflected within this report.

The Sport and Active Recreation Strategy (SARS) Implementation was considered by the Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee on 31st October 2023.

A Member enquired about the evidence behind using Sport Wales funding for the over 60s on outdoor e-bikes and also asked about promoting the benefits of taking a walk. The Sport and Leisure Development Manager provided information on organised walks that were taking place across the County Borough and the 60 plus bike scheme which was developed during lockdown restrictions when leisure centres were closed. The Chair asked officers to note the Members' comments on promoting the benefits of a walk to the elderly.

One Member enquired if the Cruyff Court Aaron Ramsey at Trinity Fields School would be accessible to the wider community. The Sport and Leisure Development Manager advised that this would be the case but highlighted that a lack of floodlights limited its use during winter months. The Member also asked for an update on the installation of equipment in play areas. The Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services advised that to the best of his knowledge purchased equipment had been installed but that he would check with the service area and respond to the Member outside of the meeting.

A Committee Member questioned if the focus was still on the four strategic centres as originally outlined given the investment at other sites. The Member also questioned the assertion that users of the indoor space at Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre had relocated to another site. In addition, he queried if the sports facilities at the Centre for Vulnerable Learners (CVL) was a replacement for the leisure centre, as it was initially described as an additional facility for residents. The Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services advised that it was never the intention to invest solely in just the four strategic leisure centres. Members also heard that the CVL was included in the strategy as it was part of the whole offer in terms of leisure facilities across the County Borough. The Corporate Director for Economy and Environment highlighted that most leisure facilities were linked to schools and therefore inextricably linked to the Schools Strategy. He also outlined how the CVL was described as an additional facility at the planning application stage because at the time a decision had not been reached on the future of Pontllanfraith Leisure Centre. The Sport and Leisure Facilities Manager gave examples of clubs who had relocated from the indoor space at the centre, one example given was Oakdale Badminton Club which had moved to Islwyn High School. The Member stressed that he welcomed all investment in leisure facilities and outlined that he knew of some clubs who thought the relocation was a temporary measure whilst the centre was being used as a vaccination hub.

One Member had concerns that by recognising current budget pressures and steps that may be taken to overcome them, as outlined in the recommendations, Members might be sanctioning future closures of leisure facilities. The Member also queried if a struggling leisure centre in the future could be considered for a Community Asset Transfer. The Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services highlighted to Members that if a leisure facility was experiencing financial challenges transferring to a community-run model would not necessarily remove those challenges. Committee heard how the recommendation acknowledged the pressure on public sector finances. Members heard how savings of £48M would have to be made over the next two years, and the overspend identified in the report due mainly to increased energy costs was also highlighted by officers.

A Member raised the issue of disability sports and queried the role of CCBC in facilitating this sport. The Sport and Leisure Development Manager advised that the "Insport Series" was run by Disability Sport Wales in collaboration with the 5 Local Authorities in the Gwent Region. Information on sports available was promoted on the Council website and the officer agreed to share further information with the Member outside of the meeting.

The Council Leader welcomed the Strategy and highlighted the brave decision made by Councillors in 2018 to keep leisure services in-house rather than outsourcing the service like other Local Authorities.

Having noted the content of the report, it was moved and seconded that the recommendations are supported and should be forwarded to Cabinet for approval. By way of Microsoft Forms and with one verbal vote (and in noting that there were 13 for, 2 against and 0 abstentions) this was agreed by the majority present.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976

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Consultees:

Councillor Chris Morgan, Cabinet Member for Waste, Leisure and Green Spaces
Councillor Andrew Whitcombe, Chair Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee
Councillor Shane Williams, Vice Chair Housing and Environment Scrutiny Committee
Christina Harrhy, Chief Executive
Dave Street, Deputy Chief Executive
Mark S Williams, Corporate Director for Economy and Environment
Robert Tranter, Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer
Lynne Donovan, Head of People Services
David Roberts, Interim Finance Manager
Michael Headington, Green Spaces and Transport Services Manager
Jeff Reynolds, Sport and Leisure Facilities Manager
Jared Lougher, Sport and Leisure Development Manager
Sue Richards, Head of Education Planning and Strategy
Andrea West, Sustainable Communities for Learning – Manager
Philip Griffiths, Green Space Strategy and Cemeteries Manager

Jonathan Davies, Parks and Countryside Operations Manager
Stephen Harris, Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer
Sean Spooner, Sport and Leisure Services Area Team Leader
Sian Jones, Sport and Leisure Services Area Team Leader
Matthew Taylor, Sport and Leisure Services Area Team Leader
Natalie Thomas, Sport Caerphilly Team Leader
Niall Sheridan, Caerphilly Adventures Team Leader
Craig James, National Exercise Referral Team Leader
Kevin Lodge, Community Centre Services Manager
Andrea Goss, Business Support Team Leader

Background Papers:

Sport and Active Recreation Strategy 2019-2029 – report to Cabinet, 14th November 2018

‘Sport and Active Recreation Strategy - Progress Update’ – report to Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee, 14th September 2021

Making the UK the most active nation in Europe - Sport and Recreation Alliance

Appendices:

Appendix 1 Sport and Active Recreation Strategy Progress and Implementation Plan.