

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

GOVERNANCE & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 17 DECEMBER 2010

AUDIT SCOTLAND REPORT: PHYSICAL RECREATION SERVICES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Report by Depute Chief Executive/Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise Governance and Scrutiny Committee of the main findings of the Audit Scotland Report, Physical Recreation Services in Local Government which was published on 21st October 2010.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Audit Scotland Report examines how Councils across Scotland organise physical recreation services, how much is spent and the performance and impact of the services. The report also explores council's links with ALEOs (Arms Length and External Organisations).

3. KEY MESSAGES

- 3.1 The key messages from the report can be summarised as follows:

3.1.1 Physical recreation services are provided through a wide variety of arrangements, including direct council delivery and an increasingly common use of arms-length and external organisations (ALEOs).

3.1.2 Councils have broadened their emphasis from a traditional focus on sport to also encouraging more people to take regular exercise through a range of activities, such as walking or cycling. However, there are weaknesses in strategic planning and strategies often lack clearly defined target groups, baseline information and specific and measurable targets.

3.1.3 In 2008/2009, councils and ALEO's spent around £656 million on physical recreation services. However, the current financial outlook for public spending will make it difficult to find the investment that is needed in local facilities and to sustain service levels and quality over the longer term.

3.1.4 Attendance is increasing and customer satisfaction is generally high. However, councils and ALEOs lack information about the people who are not using services and the reasons why, and have limited evidence of the impact their services make on increasing the number of people getting enough exercise.

- 3.2 The Key Messages resonate in East Ayrshire and reflect the current situation. There are facilities delivered by Trusts (Galleon Centre, Visions); Health

related activities (Walking; Community Health Improvement Partnership (CHIP); Mind, Exercise, Nutrition, Do It (MEND), form an integral part of the Councils Leisure offer; the services will be affected by public spending restrictions and attendances are increasing. The need to discover more about why people do not use facilities has been identified in Best Value Service Reviews and efforts have been made to address this issue within Leisure Services.

4. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 The report makes six key recommendations and suggests that an action plan is prepared to address areas of improvement and that this plan is monitored and reported onto a Council Committee. Having regard to the Council's standing arrangements in respect of Community and Service Planning the most appropriate way for the Council to address actions arising from the recommendations should be to include them in future Service Plans.

4.2 In terms of the recommendations the Council has already made considerable progress in identifying and addressing the issues raised. The recommendations and current council position can be summarised as follows:

4.2.1 Ensure physical recreation strategies contain specific, measurable targets. Performance management arrangements should monitor outcomes and provide reports on the impact services are having on strategic objectives, such as improving the physical and mental health of target groups by helping them get more exercise.

Most measures for sports facilities are output based however within Leisure Development outcomes are more specifically measured and targeted and services such as CHIP and MEND have extensive outcome measures in place.

The Action Plan arising from the Council's adoption of a Leisure and Culture Strategy in 2009 identifies the impacts and outcomes expected from Leisure Services including those involving Physical Recreation. In addition the Councils' Leisure Services have a direct role in delivering the actions and commitments of the Single Outcome Agreement particularly in relation to National Outcome 6: We live longer, healthier lives.

4.2.2 Review arrangements to support elected members serving on ALEO boards and ensure councillors are briefed on their roles and responsibilities and how to manage any potential conflicts of interest that might arise.

Arrangements for support to Councillors serving on external bodies were reviewed in 2007 and Councillors are briefed on their roles and responsibilities as Board members. The Council provides Administrative and Legal support to the Board of the Kilmarnock Leisure Centre Trust and assists Councillors with issues as they arise and with guidance on the Councils Code of Conduct for elected members.

- 4.2.3** Closely monitor the impact of reductions in public spending on plans for investing in leisure assets and facilities and ensure long-term capital investment strategies take account of 'whole-life costs', such as maintenance, refurbishment and the cost of upgrading facilities.

The Councils' Capital commitments to programme projects for new Sports Facilities (Athletics Stadium, Stewarton Sports Centre) remain unaffected by the current budget situation. The ongoing review of community facilities utilises whole-life costs to support future planning for council buildings and all proposals for new facilities and developments undergo a thorough option appraisal before investment is committed.

- 4.2.4** Ensure that pricing structures and concessionary schemes are regularly reviewed, and their affordability and impact on participation is considered as part of strategic planning.

The Council's Charging Strategy was reviewed in 2009 and the impact of changes in prices is taken into account annually when charges are renewed by Cabinet. The Council uses a Challenge of Charging Checklist to ensure that any charges are subject to detailed appraisal before being submitted for approval. The Checklist ensures that the impact of any revised or new charges has been assessed in terms of factors such as equality of access and service usage.

- 4.2.5** Ensure performance information is used to compare the cost and quality of physical recreation services with other council areas, to help identify efficiency savings and to help understand the impact of reduced spending on services where this is required.

Extensive benchmarking is carried out with our 'family' of Councils, through APSE and with South Ayrshire Council in relation to Facility costs and operations using the locally developed EASA quality model.

- 4.2.6** Improve their understanding of which people do not use services and the reasons why. Councils should use this information to set priorities, help develop effective pricing policies and to target priority groups.

Public consultation relating to the development of the Leisure and Cultural Strategy featured work with the Residents Panel and this enabled views of non-users of Leisure Services to be collated and used in the strategy. Further work needs to be carried out, to develop improved feedback mechanisms for non-users of facilities.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1** The report provides a useful overview of current Physical Recreation Service provision in Scotland. The key findings and messages reflect issues and challenges which have been recognised in East Ayrshire in Best Value Service Reviews. While the report identifies problems and weaknesses it does not assist with identifying solutions or additional resources.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 It is recommended that Committee:-

- (i) note the key findings and messages of the Audit Scotland Report; and
- (ii) remit to the Depute Chief Executive/Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services to ensure that recommendations in the report, which are listed in Section 4, are included in future Leisure Service Plans.

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