



Best Value Review Sports Services

Challenge Panel Findings

(May 2004)

Section One - Summary

An overwhelming sense of optimism for the future of the Sports Service was expressed by all stakeholders interviewed by the panel. A major catalyst for this has been the appointment of a new management team. The new Assistant Director and the Head of Sports have been praised for their commitment, willingness to openly engage and realism towards what can be directly delivered by the Service with a finite budget. People were confident that solid improvements would be delivered while remaining realistic about the timescale needed.

The Draft Sports Strategy has helped to provide direction to the Service and staff have welcomed a document which provides a clear rationale for what can be delivered.

Re-organisation of the management structures of the service has yet to translate into significant impacts on the ground. Stakeholders recognise that these new structures will take time to deliver significant improvements and are presently giving the service the space to do this.

The Sports Service is therefore at a significant juncture in terms of translating strategic commitment into demonstrable action, that is tangible to all its stakeholders.

Section Two - Introduction

A panel met over two days to explore and challenge the sports services Best Value Review. This panel consisted of:

- Andy Donald – Assistant Director Regeneration (Convenor)
- Cllr Tom Taylor – Chair Scrutiny management board
- Brian Litchfield – Policy & Performance Officer
- Julia Woodman – Policy & Performance Officer
- Clementine Femiola – LSP Health Development Manager - Brent PCT
- Melanie Rodrigues – Sport England (Social Inclusion Officer)

This panel interviewed a variety of stakeholders including;

- Strategic Officers and Members
- Sports Clubs
- Partner Agencies
- Providers and staff

Questions were framed to explore progress made against issues identified by the audit commission. These questions followed four key themes:

- What are we about, what's the reason for doing what we do?
- Performance Management
- Partnership
- Delivery Procurement

During the two days two further improvement themes emerged, namely;

- Bridge Park – Its role and future development and marketing of the site.
- Sports Clubs – Their role in helping to deliver the Council's priorities for Sport.

The findings and recommendations within the report are framed around these six themes.

Section Three - Findings & Recommendations

Theme one: What are we about, what's the reason for doing what we do?

Findings

There is a shared understanding amongst stakeholders about the role the Sports Service should undertake. They feel this role should include:

- Leadership, due to the range of facilities they have access to
- Co-ordinator
- Ensuring a socially inclusive market place for access to sports
- Develop the 'well being' of the local community.

Stakeholders stated that the Draft Sports Strategy did not make it explicit that sports was being undertaken for community wellbeing rather than 'sports for sports sake', even though clear decisions had been made. Stakeholders stated that the strategy was very descriptive and that links were not being made between needs of the residents, gaps in current service provision and what the service is going to focus on.

Recommendations

Although the sports strategy is for Brent as a whole, the role the sports service and other partner agencies need to play in its delivery needs to be made clearer.

In defining the services market position the strategy needs to identify:

- A direct link between Corporate Priorities and market position
- Correlate the demographic profile of the borough with an analysis of need
- How the service should concentrate on its primary target audiences
- The interrelationship of public, voluntary and private sector markets in providing a broad range of sports services throughout the Borough

Although the panel recognise that progress has been made, further baseline evidence of current sport / leisure provision (and opportunity for provision) by all providers is needed, particularly about community groups that do not solely identify themselves with sports clubs but do offer sporting opportunities e.g. the Neasden temple. This mapping would establish where acute facility/provision gaps are. Correlated with a needs analysis it would further demonstrate which groups are affected by any shortfalls.

Theme two: Performance Management

Findings

Interviewees felt that current indicators focused too strongly on volume and usage rather than impact – particularly given our wider agenda for sports.

Recommendations

The Strategy needs to demonstrate the council's wider rationale for sports provision in Brent. In particular how the service's proposed actions will practically deliver the council's priorities.

The Strategy needs to provide clear links between;

- Priorities
- How these will be delivered?
- What will be the outcome / impact on the local community?
- Measures to demonstrate impact and wider 'quality of life' outcomes. These should be developed with other partner agencies (e.g. PCT).

A more comprehensive action plan would help to clarify these issues.

Theme three: Partnership working

Findings

Stakeholders said that sports provision in Brent is very fragmented and this is leading to duplication in some areas and gaps in others. Information about 'what's going on' is not well publicised. An example was given of 5 basketball programmes running in Stonebridge, all in exclusion of each other.

The role of Sports Development is not clearly defined, yet many agencies such as Schools, PCT and the Police thought the council had a linchpin role in developing strategic partnership working.

The Services relationship with schools is improving and the Assistant Director has created a good dialogue with the Development Managers in schools.

The appointment of a new PE advisor is welcomed and it is hoped they will co-ordinate the bidding / project planning for a variety of funding programmes.

The following issues were commented by stakeholders;

- Things have yet to change on the ground, particularly in terms of joined up working.
- They felt there was a funding 'tension' between focusing on the council's deprived neighbourhoods and improving school sporting provision across the borough.
- Sports development officers need to establish closer links with schools.
- Closer links need to be brokered between clubs and schools.
- There is minimal use of school sporting facilities by local communities.

Work is also ongoing with agencies such as the PCT which could link with the Sport Services wider quality of life agenda. For example the PCT have sought HAZ and external funding to deliver a variety of physical exercise initiatives. Trained instructors are used to encourage physical activity in a variety of community settings such as social clubs and day centres. The agency has been keen to involve a variety of community and faith groups in trying to break down barriers to physical exercise. The PCT are seeking to employ a PE co-ordinator to further develop ongoing initiatives and employ more physical instructors.

Most stakeholders recognised and welcomed the improved levels of consultation / engagement. However some groups, particularly those not solely orientated towards sports felt that there was still significant room for improvement, for example some felt that forums such as 'Friends of Brent' (a group for looked after children) could have been used more effectively by the Sports Service. There was also a need for greater engagement with estates.

There needs to be greater utilisation of sport to develop self esteem, help young people with their life experiences and anger management. However coaches, particularly in the club environment need to be developed to have the skills to work with these groups.

Recommendations

The role of the Sports Development Service needs to be clarified particularly in respect of:

- Brokering links between schools and sports clubs to ensure an affordable progression between the two for young people.
- A clear delineation of roles with the youth service, particularly in relation to the summer university.
- Better co-ordination of sports development and coaching activities between the sports service and other agencies such as the Police and neighbourhood renewal teams.

- Building the capacity of other people to supplement sports development activities e.g. the ability of park wardens to organise semi-formal sport and recreation.

There needs to be greater co-ordination between Education Services (at a strategic level) and the Sports Service. This would further progress:

- Co-ordination of sporting activities within schools.
- Wider community access to school based sports and recreational activities. DFES funding is available under the 'Building Schools for the Future' initiative aimed at maximising community use of school facilities. The Sports Service need to establish which schools are using this funding to upgrade their recreational facilities and what this will practically mean in terms of sports / leisure provision.

Fragmented sports provision in Brent is further evidence that the Sport Development Service needs to take a greater co-ordinating role between agencies delivering sports provision.

The Sports Forum could also be utilised as mechanism for disseminating planned activities by agencies / services and publicising this via a calendar of events.

There is potential for the Sports Service to capacity build by linking into initiatives ongoing with agencies such as the Police and PCT. In terms of effective deployment of coaches/ instructors consideration should be given to joint funding of more 'generic' community coaches who are able to coach multi –sports / physical activities.

Theme four: Delivery & Procurement

Findings

There was scant evidence of a full options appraisal in relation to the future delivery arrangements for the Sports Service beyond the existing contract, which terminates in 2006.

The preferred delivery options suggested in the self assessment do not concur with the Procurement / contract Review for Vale Farm and Charteris Leisure Centre recommendations within the self assessment. The Assistant Director was able to provide evidence to the panel why this would not be feasible.

More radical options should be pro-actively explored and promoted e.g. the S. Kilburn NDC proposals for a sports facility present a real opportunity for excellent new sports facilities in the Borough. The proposal is grounded in some real finance, which if combined with a capital receipt from the closure of Charteris could help achieve a far superior facility.

Joint business planning takes place between the Sports Service and the Contractor (Leisure Connection). However stakeholder's experiences of the facilities at Vale Farm & Charteris varied in terms of cleanliness and the helpfulness of staff.

The service recognises that it needs to undertake a full review of its charging and pricing structure. Stakeholders expressed concern that present pricing policies, particularly with the hiring of pitches acts as a constraint for community clubs.

Recommendations

The Sports Service needs to evidence;

- The processes by which it reached its conclusions on preferred delivery options for each centre.
- Why a PPP approach as recommended in the Procurement Review would not be feasible.

- How it has considered opportunities to improve (re-configure) the existing provision through regeneration opportunities in South Kilburn and Wembley.
- How it has considered the potential of the private market to deliver affordable sports services.

The Service should carefully consider the most appropriate contractual arrangements particularly where negotiations are underway for new facilities i.e. South Kilburn plans and Charteris contract.

The Sports Service should undertake a full customer care review. Robust customer care arrangements should be an integral part of future contract negotiations. Charter Mark may offer a useful standard.

In undertaking a pricing / charging review the Sports Service should consider the following;

- How to incentivise use for the target market use for target market whilst maximising income for future re-investment in the service. i.e. Membership Cards targeting different types of user, pricing subsidies to incentivise use during low demand periods (vice versa).
- Ensuring that any future pricing /charging review includes the Parks Service and is complementary.
- A broader spectrum of payment / booking arrangements (i.e. on –line booking / payment) to facilitate ease of access to services.

Theme five: Bridge Park

Findings

The sense from stakeholders is that Bridge Park is beginning to change for the better, with a greater variety of facilities such as a Muslim women's' aerobic session. However the Centre needs more marketing and a greater variety of activities.

A long term commitment has been made by the Senior Management Team, to the Centre becoming a key provider of sports activities, rather than one of 'rooms for hire'.

This message has yet to change the views of users and staff towards the centre. The centre still carries the stigma of a troubled history and stakeholders commented that this still affects the local community's (St Raphael's / Stonebridge) willingness to use the centre.

Recommendations

The Council's review report on Bridge Park (Jan 04) acknowledges this and provides clear strategic options for the centre.

These now need to be translated into tangible / visible outcomes for the local community e.g. a re- launch for the centre, to engender an atmosphere of change for the better i.e. a free open day for the local community in which a variety of activities / promotional events are on offer. This event could also be used to pilot a greater range of leisure / sporting activities.

Theme six: Sports Clubs

Findings

The role of sports clubs in helping to deliver Brent's wider agenda for Sports needs further clarification. In discussing this stakeholders stated that clubs and the sports service need to explore:

- Uniform standards regarding health & safety and child protection procedures across clubs. How should the council risk manage these issues if it is looking to work with these clubs?
- Should Brent council be a funder or co-ordinator? – Funding was seen as the main mechanism to get clubs on board. Should the Sports Service act as a direct funder to a discrete number of clubs that can help fulfil our strategy? Should the Sports Service act as a grant co-ordinator for clubs seeking to bid for national funding initiatives?
- Partnership working through practical support – should the Sports Service act as a support service, providing good practice information on club constitutions.
- The role of Brent Sports Council (BSC) – The organisation does not have defined role for the co-ordination of sports clubs within Brent, works with only a small minority of clubs (10) and relies heavily on the voluntary commitments of its organisers and may not currently have the capacity to fulfil the sports services ambitions as a intermediary with sports clubs.
- More open dialogue when considering practical issues of facility development. An example was given that highlighted concerns from clubs re the Willesden development;

‘The change from 8 lane to 6 lane Pool has meant that County meets cannot be held in the borough. Clubs felt ‘the goalposts’ had been moved without consultation and after the ASA had signed consent to an 8 lane pool’

Recommendations

The Sports Service should engender good practice on health & safety and child protection procedures via development of protocols or access to good practice information e.g. Sporting bodies such as the ASA produce its own good practice for coaches on Health / Safety, Child Protection and links to coaching bodies good practice could be available from the Sports Services web pages.

In terms of risk managing joined up working with clubs, the Sports Service need to ensure minimum standards such as ‘Club Mark’ are met, coupled with insurance and appropriate / up to date coaching qualifications.

Further development with clubs could be engendered through the Sports Services hosting a range of coaching courses run by sporting bodies.

Brent Sports Council needs to undertake a liaison / mediating role on behalf of sports Clubs it needs support to deliver this.