



# **Access of older people to sports and leisure facilities.**

**Report of the Adult Social Care scrutiny panel task group**

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## Recommendations

1. That officers from Community Care, the Sports Services and Brent Adult and Community Education Service (BACES) work together on the '*activities for older people*' web page on the council website, particularly on improving the site in relation to physical activity for older people.
2. That officers in the Sports Service work closely with the Communications unit to encourage the promotion of the current and future discounts available for older people at leisure centres, particularly the increased discounts available to those aged over 60 from January 2006. Officers are to ensure that:
  - Information is kept up to date and accessible
  - 'Traditional' methods of informing people are continued, and the internet is not the only mode of communication, particularly for the older population.
3. That the Sports Service carries out some further research into communication methods by testing the extent to which word of mouth knowledge is shared. This should take place once the 'active for life' exercise programme for over adults aged over 50 at Bridge Park has been given a sufficient amount of time to be fully implemented and rolled out, and the service has a baseline of figures against which any testing can be compared.
4. That as part of its work programme for the financial year 2006/2007, the issue of transportation and lack of information about the transportation options for older residents to access sports and leisure facilities is further researched by the Sports Service and the Transportation Unit, and that this is reported back to the Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel.
5. That the 'Brent integrated Care co-ordination service'<sup>1</sup> project considers the promotion of physical exercise and sport in their action plan, particularly in relation to the identified key element of '*preventative services being commissioned from the voluntary sector*'.

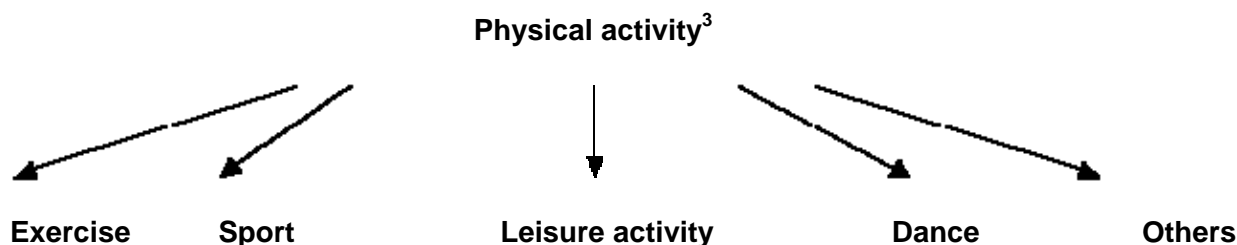
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<sup>1</sup> A pilot project being carried out as part of the Department of Health's pilot '*partnerships for older people project*'

## Introduction

### **Background**

Physical activity can be described as an umbrella term that has multiple dimensions<sup>2</sup>. Forms of physical activity such as exercise, sports and dance are considered as sub-categories of physical activity.



There is growing evidence of the importance of physical activity for the older adult. The World Health Organization (1997) and the American College of Sports Medicine (1998), have identified the range of benefits of participation in regular physical activity for older adults. These include immediate and long-term physiological, psychological and social benefits particularly for certain conditions directly associated with old age.

*“A regular programme of moderate exercise is a very appropriate recommendation for almost all older adults. Moreover, there is no known pharmacological remedy that can so safely and effectively reduce a person's biological age and enhance his or her quality-adjusted life expectancy.”*  
(Shephard, 1997)<sup>4</sup>

### **Physical activity and successful ageing**

Adopting a more physically active lifestyle can add years to life, even for previously inactive people. There is increasing evidence of the benefits of physical activity in relation to disease prevention, mobility, independence and quality of life. Amongst older people, particularly within specific communities, there can often be a rather negative view and image of older adults expressed through the portrayal of age-related changes in functional capacity as a *decline*.

Participating in physical activity can have multiple benefits to older people – it can help to improve an individual's functional capacity and strength, thus subsequently helping to maintain independent living and caring skills. In addition to this, physical activity can provide psychosocial benefits, helping to improve mood and anxiety, as well as social benefits – thus leading to improved quality of life.

### **The benefits of physical activity**

- Disease prevention and management, and improvements to quality of life
- Psychological benefits
- Social benefits
- Reduction in the complications of immobility

<sup>2</sup> The first International Consensus Statement (Bouchard et al 1990)

<sup>3</sup> Source: President's Council on Fitness and Sports, 2000

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.bhfactive.org.uk/areas\\_of\\_interest/spm/pa\\_older\\_people.htm](http://www.bhfactive.org.uk/areas_of_interest/spm/pa_older_people.htm)

- Reduction in costs of health and other services.

### **National Policy Context**

On 16<sup>th</sup> November 2004, the Government published the Public Health White Paper 'Choosing Health - making healthy choices easier'. The Department of Health now requires each Primary Care Trust to develop a local strategy to implement the White Paper by April 2006 and reduce local health inequalities by addressing six key areas:

- Reducing the number of people who smoke
- Reducing obesity and improving diet and nutrition
- Increasing exercise
- Encouraging and supporting sensible drinking
- Improving sexual health
- Improving mental health

Increasing Physical activity is an integral part of this strategy, which is being developed locally by Brent tPCT, working in partnership with the council and other local organisations and stakeholders.

The objectives of access of Older People to Sport and Leisure have been expressed at a national level in the Green Paper, *Independence, Well-being and Choice* (March 2005), which articulates the government's vision for the future of social care for adults in England. The document proposes amongst other things;

*"Greater focus on preventative services to allow early, targeted interventions, and the use of the local authority well-being agenda to ensure greater social inclusion and improved quality of life"*<sup>5</sup>

In addition to this, standard 8 of the *National Service Framework for Older People* relates to the promotion of health and active life in older age, with the aim of extending the health life expectancy of older people. The standard is to be promoted through a co-ordinated programme of action led by the NHS, with support from councils.

### **Local Context**

The Sports Service in Brent currently provides four main services:

1. *Recreation Commissioning* – 'client role' for management of two council owned sports centres - Charteris and Vale Farm.
2. *Bridge Park Community Leisure Centre* - direct management role.
3. *Sports Development* – Support management and organisation of activities, both directly and through partnership working
4. *Information* – about sports opportunities and service provision across the borough.

In June 2004, the Executive approved the strategy for Sport and Physical Activity in Brent (2004 – 2009)<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/10/66/80/04106680.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.brent.gov.uk/sports.nsf/0/3cd6f029fe7db8d980256e54003494ac?OpenDocument>

The strategy identifies six key themes that should be the strategic focus for all providers of sport and physical activity in the Borough and two of these are:

- Increasing awareness of sports opportunities
- Reducing barriers to participation and ensuring equity in sport

Further to this, the strategy also identified specific target groups that were under represented in terms of levels of participation in sport and physical activity in Brent. Therefore, the decision was made to focus on carrying out additional development work to raise the physical activity levels of the following five target groups:

- Young people
- **Older people**
- Women and girls
- Black and ethnic minority people
- Disabled people

### ***Choosing Health Brent***

Brent Council intends to support Brent tPCT and local NHS Trusts to tackle health inequalities, by integrating our local response to the Public Health White Paper within the development of the borough's Community Strategy and its associated action plan, the Local Area Agreement.

## Discussion

### ***Membership of Task Group***

The Review Group was chaired by Councillor George Crane. The full membership is as follows.

- Councillor G Crane
- Councillor C J Patel
- Councillor R Colwill

The Review Group was supported by Dhara Vyas, in the Policy and Regeneration Unit.

### ***Scope of the Task Group***

The task group was initially set up in response to concerns around older people's access to sports and leisure facilities in Brent, which surfaced during the joint inspection of older people services (June 2005). The issues raised by the inspectorate arose from the annual sports and leisure centre user survey, undertaken in 2003, which found that only 5% of users are aged 60 and over.

However, when the findings of the 2004 sports and leisure centre user survey became available, they showed a marked increase in the percentage of users aged 60 or above. In 2004, the survey found 14% of users were 60 and over (compared to 20% of the borough population aged 60 and over).

The Task Group were content with the response given by the head of the sports service to those figures (attached at **appendix 2**).

The sports and leisure user survey undertakes suitable annual consultation on the customer profile, usage patterns and satisfaction levels of sports service users. The survey also assesses the catchment area of each sports centre.

As a result of this information, the Task Group decided not to undertake site visits to sports centres, and decided to concentrate instead on the 'access to information' element of the scope.

The Task Group felt that the two main priority groups to be encouraged to take up physical activity were:

- 50+ age group who are still economically active
- 50+ age group who are retired

The full scope of the review is attached at **appendix 1**.

## ***Methodology***

The work of the Task Group comprised the following:

- a mapping exercise detailing existing services and facilities being provided (**appendix 3**);
- a letter to all Members of Brent Council seeking their comments;
- an article in Brent Magazine inviting the public to comment;
- a letter and questionnaire to voluntary and community groups working with older people (**appendix 4**).

### Mapping Exercise

The Task Group undertook a mapping exercise, detailing existing services and facilities on offer by the council and other organisations, including statutory partners and those in the voluntary and community sector. The mapping exercise details a number of organisations that currently encourage the take up of sports and the use of facilities in the borough by older people, and is attached at **appendix 3**. *This list is not exhaustive.*

In undertaking the mapping exercise, it became increasingly clear to the task group members that a big issue is the difficulty older people must face when trying to access information on *what* is available, *where* these activities takes place, and *how* they might access the information about them.

The task group then agreed that would focus on this issue and concentrate on consulting with as many organised groups as possible in order to ascertain where those who do physical activity find the information, and what other potential barriers prevent more of Brent's older people from accessing sports and leisure services in the borough.

### Letter to Members of Brent Council

The task group wrote to all Members of the council in August 2005, detailing the work of the task group and inviting them to comment with any observations that may have been made regarding older peoples access to sports and leisure facilities in the borough.

### Brent Magazine

An item was also placed in issue 45 (August 2005) of 'The Brent Magazine'<sup>7</sup> inviting the public to get in touch to discuss their views about sport and leisure provision in the borough.

### Voluntary and Community Organisations

A letter and questionnaire (attached at **appendix 4**) were despatched to seventy eight voluntary and community organisations that work with older people. The aim of the consultation was to hear from those who work closest with older people, in order to

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<http://www.brent.gov.uk/news.nsf/24878f4b00d4f0f68025663c006c7944/5057737a35c50fe18025704400320242!OpenDocument>



ascertain their views as to how older people best access information, and what would encourage further take up of physical activity in the borough.

The bulk of the consultation carried out was amongst those who have contact with or work with older people, and is exploratory. It is not representative of the views of all people working with older people in the borough, but it is indicative of what the views may be across this population of people.

In order to give this research some substance, **recommendation 4** of this report is aimed at building upon this preliminary research.

**Appendix 5** details the numeric breakdown of responses, and also some extra graphic representations of this information. There was a response of 23.07% (18 respondents). This is considered a 'good' response rate, as 'traditionally postal research has low response rates (typically 20- 25%, and in some service sectors response has been as low as 5%)<sup>8</sup>. However, it should be recognised that this is a small sample size, and the research did not seek the views of older people directly.

#### Best Practice elsewhere

The Task Group looked at the websites of number of authorities when comparing web access:

- Newham
- Coventry
- GLA
- Surrey
- Queensland (Australia)

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<sup>8</sup> Brent Council Consultation Toolkit - <http://intranet.brent.gov.uk/Consultation.nsf/24878f4b00d4f0f68025663c006c7944/1ba5f40a89659aaa80256b28005e24ff?OpenDocument>

## Key findings

### **Mapping exercise**

The results of which are attached at **appendix 3**. When carrying out this research, it became clear to members of the task group that although there are many different types of physical activity aimed at for older people in Brent, it is difficult to access information about the different options available.

### **Brent Magazine & consultation with Members of Brent Council**

The limited comments that were received from both Members and from the public raised the issues of:

- transportation
- active citizenship
- the use of 'word of mouth' to share information
- swimming pools in the borough
- information on available services

All of the responses received were considered by the task group, and have fed into the conclusion and recommendations of this report.

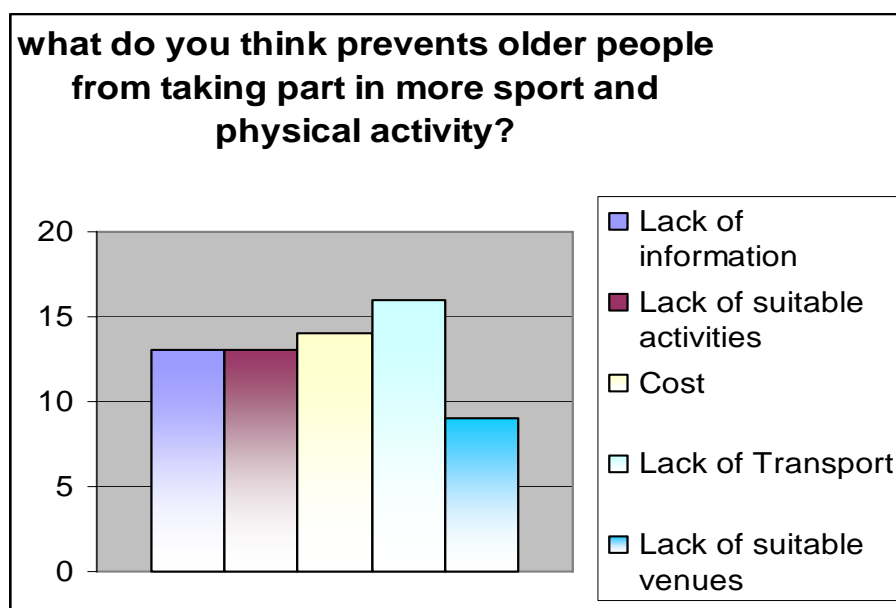
### **Survey of voluntary and community organisations**

78 organisations were sent a questionnaire in September, and 18 organisations responded.

The majority of respondents believed that older people in Brent do consider sport and physical activity to be important.

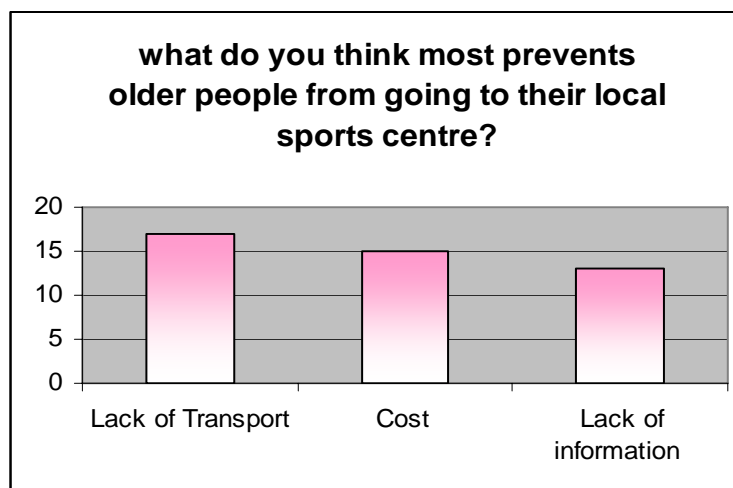
When asked about what prevents older people from taking part in more sport and physical activity, organisations cited a lack of transport (16 responses) as the most important factor in preventing older people from taking part in more sport and physical activity, followed by a lack of information and a lack of suitable activities: (*Chart 1*)

**Chart 1**



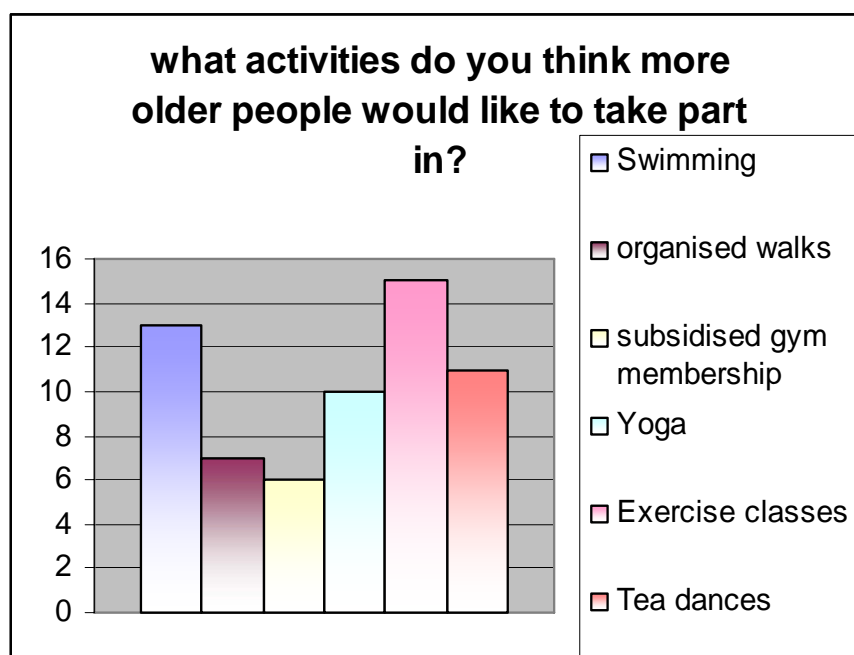
Respondents were asked what they think most prevents older people from going to their local sports centre, given the options of 'cost', 'lack of transport' and 'lack of information'. Similar numbers of respondents chose each of the three options, with respondents most frequently citing a 'lack of transport' as being a barrier (17 responses), with cost (15) and a lack of information (13) following closely behind. Once again transportation is identified as a key important factor in preventing older people from accessing more sport and physical activity (*chart 2*)

**Chart 2**



Turning to the question of what kinds of activities more older people might like to participate in, we can see that of the options given, organised exercise classes (15 responses) and swimming (13 responses) are the two most popular activities identified. This information is represented in *chart 3*.

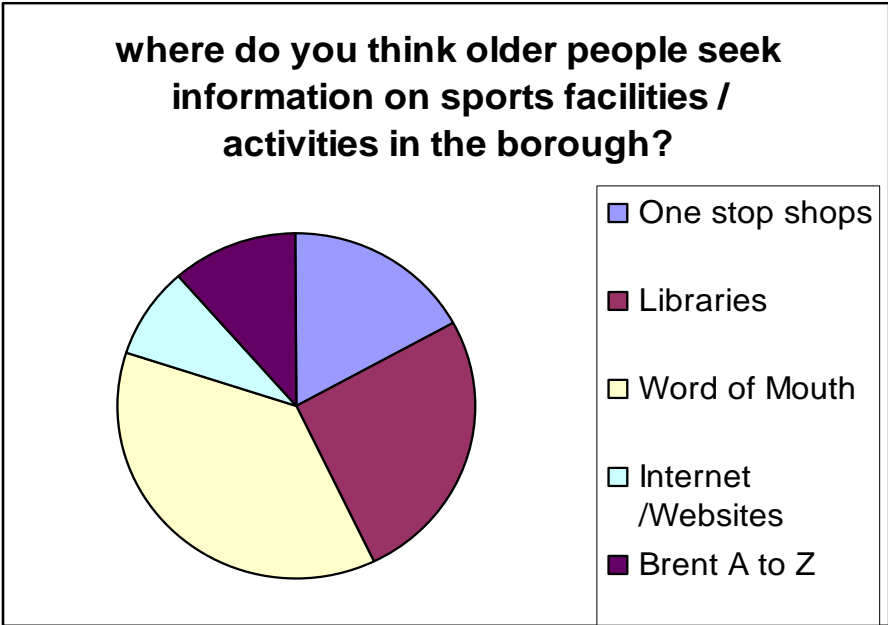
**Chart 3**



*Chart 4* tells us where the respondents think that older people currently seek information on sports facilities and activities in Brent. It is clear that word of mouth is

one of the most popular ways in which it is thought that older people get information, closely followed by libraries. – **Recommendation 3** of this report is directly linked to this.

**Chart 4**



## **Conclusion**

The task group has found that whilst there are many organised activities in Brent that people can do to stay active in older age (as identified in the mapping exercise (**appendix 3**)) there is more work that can be done by the council and its partners to encourage the take up of sport and physical exercise by more older people in Brent.

There are a number of discounted and free ways in which older people can access sport and leisure, including leisure cards providing 40% discount to various activities<sup>9</sup> and also the access to free swimming for the over 60's, on production of a freedom pass. In addition to this there are walking groups in parks and there is much organised provision by local community groups and by Brent Adult Community Education Services (BACES).

The new contract for Vale Farm and Charteris<sup>10</sup> will require the new contractor to provide an exercise referral programme, in conjunction with Brent tPCT. There is also the requirement for an exercise referral scheme at Willesden<sup>11</sup>. Both of these programmes are at no one off charge to Brent Council.

### ***The Department of Health - 'Partnerships for Older People Projects' (POPP).***

The Department of Health's Older People and Disability Division is leading on a project called 'Partnerships for Older People Projects' (POPP). The strategic aim of the project is to test and evaluate (through pilots to be established during 2006/07 and 2007/08) innovative approaches that sustain prevention work in order to improve outcomes for older people

Brent has had a successful bid to become a pilot project – the Brent integrated Care co-ordination service'. A key element of the project will be *preventative services being commissioned from the voluntary sector*. The task group recognises that physical activity and encouraging healthier lifestyles can play a key part in this.

In addition to this, there is a direct link to the 'Choosing Health Brent' strategy currently being developed by Brent tPCT in partnership with the council and other local providers, as well as the other 'knock-on' positive effects that increased physical activity can have on the quality of life of vulnerable older people

### ***Access to information - Website***

When considering access to information, the task group looked at examples of best practice from other authorities. The task group found that whilst the council has a page on 'Activities for Older People', many links on this page go through to the 'Brent Brain' site for contact information, whereas the links could go directly through to the sports pages on Vale farm, Bridge Park and Charteris sports centres which then details all their classes and activities. This page is maintained by BACES, and the task group agreed that this website was not as informative or as attractive as it could be. **Recommendation 1** of the report addresses this.

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<sup>9</sup> from January 2006

<sup>10</sup> Contracts come into force April 2006 -2013

<sup>11</sup> 25 year contract

In addition to this, the task group also found that there could also be written text about the Active Life programmes, the free swimming for older people and the forthcoming 50+ activities at Bridge Park.

### **Access to information - Leaflets**

The outcome of a recent overview task group on 'Quality of life for older people<sup>12</sup> was the production of a "signpost" booklet. Best practice from other boroughs concluded that producing a signposting booklet on services for Older People has been a very valuable not only in promoting and enabling older people to enjoy a better quality of life but also in postponing dependence on key services. Such a booklet was identified as being an important step to filling many of the gaps in Brent's information provision.

### **Access to transportation**

The task group has looked into the issue of transport for older people in order to aid this population of people in accessing sports and leisure facilities and activities in the borough. It has found that there is much existing transportation provision in for older people in Brent.

Brent Community Transport (BCT) provides accessible, affordable transport services and solutions in Brent. BCT specialises in the area of provision of transport to the elderly and disabled. And works across an extensive network of voluntary and statutory agencies, the services access a number of sports centres, including

- Bridge Park Complex,
- Vale Farm Sports Centre
- Willesden Sports Centre
- Cannons Health Centre,
- Jubilee Centre (Queens Park)
- Harrow Leisure Centre,

BCT also provides transportation to numerous leisure facilities, including Bingo, social clubs, friendships clubs and day centres.

There are three main BCT services which directly provide transport to the older population of Brent, a summary of the way in which they operate is attached at **appendix 6**.

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Recommendations based on the findings of the task group are detailed on page 1 of this report.

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<sup>12</sup> This report and its summary are available upon request from the Policy & Regeneration Unit.

## **Acknowledgments**

The task group would like to thank officers in the sports service and in the consultation team for their help and assistance in carrying out the work of this group.

The task group would also like to extend its thanks to the respondents to the consultation carried out.