



Sports & leisure papers

This briefing provides an outline of the key issues from the European White Paper in Sport and a paper on 'Developing the local government services model' produced for the DCLG. It is provided to local authority chief executives, councils leaders and all sports and leisure contacts

Key issues

1. This briefing paper summarises the key issues from the European white paper on sport and a working paper on developing the local government services model.
2. Some of the issues will be discussed at APSE's national sports and leisure seminar in Stoke-on-Trent on 6-7 March 2008.
3. This paper includes a list of questions and the answers will be circulated to APSE membership.

1. Introduction

At the last APSE sports and leisure advisory group meeting, it was requested for APSE to produce a briefing paper on the key issues from the European White Paper on sport and on a paper called 'Developing the local government services model' which was produced for the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) by PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP. This briefing paper summarises the issues contained in these papers, includes a list of questions for APSE members and provides an APSE comment. The links to these documents are as follows:

White paper on sport: http://ec.europa.eu/sport/whitepaper/wp_on_sport_en.pdf

Developing the local government services model:
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/workingpaperleisure>

2. White paper on sport

The white paper on sport was published in July 2007 and highlights the importance of sport in terms of its societal role and contribution to the economy. It aims to give

strategic direction to sport in Europe, to encourage debate on specific problems, to enhance the visibility of sport in EU policy-making and to raise public awareness of the needs and specificities of the sector.

In terms of the societal role of sport, the white paper highlights that approximately 60% of European citizens participate in sporting activities on a regular basis and sport is an area that greatly interests citizens. The paper then states 'however, the recognised potential of the sport movement to foster health-enhancing physical activity often remains under-utilised and needs to be developed' (p4). The paper states that public authorities and private organisations from member states should all contribute to achieving the objectives of the World Health Organisation of a minimum of 30 minutes of moderate physical activity per day for adults and 60 minutes for children. The Commission recommends strengthening the co-operation between the health, education and sport sectors at ministerial level to develop coherent strategies and also proposes to develop new physical activity guidelines with member states before the end of 2008.

The Commission want to enhance the role of sport in education and training and promote sport and physical education as essential elements of quality education and as a means to make schools more attractive and improve attendance. The paper argues that volunteering in sport organisations needs to be recognised and enhanced and the Commission will launch a European study on volunteering in sport.

The paper highlights the social inclusion role of sport in helping people steer away from delinquency and states that 'the specific needs and situation of under-represented groups therefore need to be addressed, and the special role that sport can play for young people, people with disabilities and people from less privileged backgrounds must be taken into account' (p7). The Commission believes that better use can be made of the potential of sport as an instrument for social inclusion, including its contribution to job creation and to economic revitalisation in disadvantaged areas. They will target action at improving access for girls and women to physical education and sport and will encourage member states and sport organisations to adapt sport infrastructure to take into account the needs of people with disabilities.

In terms of its impact on the economy, the paper points to growth, job creation, local and regional development, tourism, upgrading the infrastructure, as well as the costs of physical inactivity. However, the launch of policy actions and enhanced co-operation on sport at EU level needs to be underpinned by a sound knowledge base and the Commission aims to develop a model to measure the economic impact of sport. In addition, the Commission invites member states to reflect upon how best to maintain and develop a sustainable financing model for giving long-term support to sports organisations.

The paper also covers the organisation of sport in terms of the specificity of sport, free movement and nationality, transfers, players' agents, corruption and licensing issues and sport's relationship with the media. The conclusion of the white paper highlights the need for structured dialogue and co-operation with member states.

3. Developing the local government services model

A working paper on the future of the leisure services market was produced in May 2007, which sets out the key findings from recent research undertaken by PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP on behalf of the DCLG. The paper is part of a wider study of key local government supply markets and considers the development of the

community leisure market in local government. The paper states that the UK leisure market has a challenging agenda; to meet participation targets and that UK leisure provision compares unfavourably against peer group nations on sporting and health outcomes. It highlights that currently sporting provision is fragmented and at present there are four types of providers; in-house, private owner-operator, private providers contracted to local authorities and trusts.

The paper states that stock in public ownership is in a poor condition with an estimated £550 million required to keep it in working order – more than double that required in 1995. It argues that current funding streams are limited and delivery against funding streams has been slow.

The paper criticises strategic planning in the public sector; claiming it is asset-focused, lacks strategic direction and fails to consider what the optimum range and locations should be. In addition, it is claimed that it bypasses opportunities for rationalising provision across local authority boundaries, sharing resources or recognising the contribution of the private sector or facilities on school sites. The paper goes on to state that service delivery frameworks are largely unco-ordinated between public, private and voluntary sector leisure providers. As a result, provision is not optimised to demand and may crowd out new providers from entering the market.

The paper claims that there is limited data to inform strategic planning. Also, there is a fragmentation of funding; the majority of public investment in sports facilities in recent times has been through schools facilities (accounting for 78% of new facility development in 2004), whilst private investment has been mainly in private health club development.

Therefore, the limitations in the current market of provision are claimed to be:

- There is little market challenge to in-house providers
- Duplication of back office functions in single site providers
- Partnerships with the private and voluntary sector are not well established
- The need to improve market dialogue and market intelligence
- The quality of local authority procurement is variable

The paper then goes on to cite a number of opportunities which are available from these challenges, including:

- Co-ordinating public, private and voluntary sector provision and investment
- Local authorities to 'focus their efforts from direct delivery to strategic commissioning and market management'.
- Develop a needs assessment based on benchmarking participation and other social outcome data
- Encouraging a mixed economy of supply through developing alternative service delivery models.
- Improve market dialogue and intelligence and joint commissioning with partners in health and education
- Standardisation in procurement
- Decoupling service delivery from assets; such as targeting funding at disadvantaged groups

- Re-configure existing patterns of service delivery through strategic asset planning; for instance releasing leisure assets to community or third sector ownership

The paper then makes suggestions, including:

- For local authorities to shift from focusing on delivery to one of market management and strategic commissioning.
- Policy direction or regulation may be required to de-couple delivery from strategy.
- Opening up the leisure market to a greater number of players across the public, private and voluntary sectors.
- A clearer framework of standards which can be applied across all providers
- Account for the contribution made to cross-cutting outcomes such as crime reduction, educational attainment and wellbeing.

4. APSE comment

The above papers seem to conflict with each other; the white paper on sport focuses on the societal and economic importance of sport whilst the working paper focuses on funding and managing the leisure market in terms of public, private and voluntary provision.

Lord Coles' Review of National Sports Effort and Resources showed that investment is needed but there is little financial incentive to do so in areas of greatest deprivation. However, as highlighted in the white paper on sport, this is where the benefits can be felt most. Where facilities are bringing opportunities to improve health and education and reduce crime and social exclusion to the most deprived members of the community, their contribution is invaluable.

A change in management option is not a quick win solution to the historical lack of investment in leisure. This was evidenced in the National Audit Commissions report, Public Sports and Recreation Services, which identified that no single management option delivers the best overall value for money or consistently results in higher investment or levels of participation.

The working paper acknowledges the wider contribution of leisure in meeting social objectives, particularly public sector leisure provision. It states that in local authority centres 11% of customers are from social class D/E compared to 6% in the private sector. Therefore, if local authority leisure has a stronger role in meeting the needs of the community, surely, there needs to be more investment in public facilities to increase participation by target groups.

APSE would encourage the further recognition of the important role played by local authority leisure in meeting a wide range of national and local goals. This means creating a joined up policy framework to put councils at the heart of developing and delivering on healthy communities and challenging funding through local authorities.

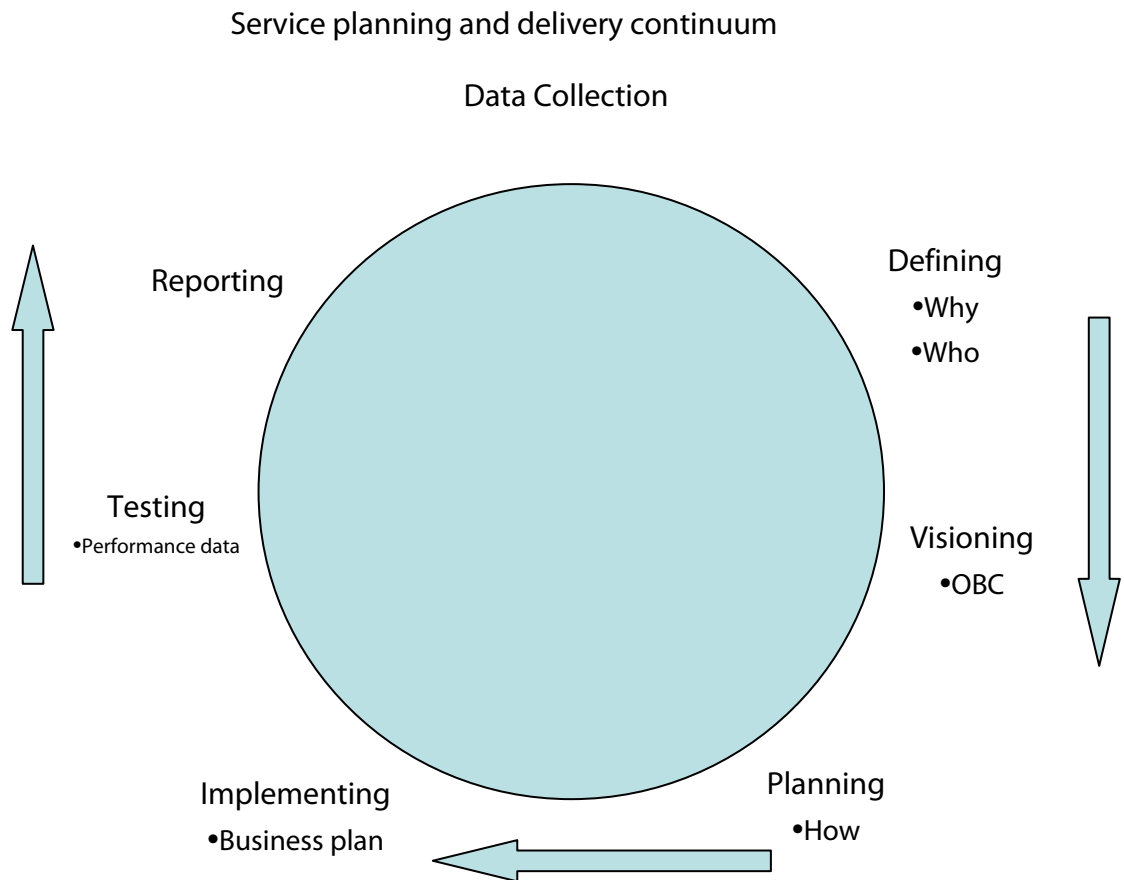
It is APSE's view that local government is uniquely placed to deliver on these agendas by co-ordinating strategy and provision with other departments and services such as parks and open spaces, schools and services to older people and partnering with bodies such as the police and health sectors. Partnership working can result in not only efficiencies but also providing responsive, personalised, seamless services to the public. An example

is smart cards providing concessions for leisure, parks and transport; a joined-up approach which would be more difficult to achieve if services were fragmented under a range of providers.

There is a need to see beyond the silo of the cost of leisure provision and to take a more strategic outlook – an investment in leisure will reduce costs to National Health Service and the Criminal Justice System and will improve the economy through an improvement of the nation’s health and well-being.

Investment in leisure is lacking and no management model can give councils the large capital investment they need to replace ageing facilities. The new £20 million threshold for attracting PFI credits may well mean that only larger councils with large developments will be able to access or afford that funding. Prudential borrowing powers are being used by some local authorities as a route to securing investment in facilities as they can raise capital at a cheaper rate than private sector bodies. In addition, this route saves councils from being tied up in long-term rigid contracts that are focused on income generation as opposed to social policy objectives. The potential of prudential borrowing therefore needs to be realised by more councils.

APSE has developed an improvement model which provides a potential solution for linking objectives strategically in order to provide the more holistic benefits leisure can bring to entire communities locally. This is summarised in the diagram below, which shows the continuous cycle of defining users and delivering services accordingly.



The APSE national sports and leisure seminar in Stoke-on-Trent on 6-7 March 2008 will explore some of the issues contained in this briefing paper and has a session dedicated

to promoting positive activities. For more details, please contact Steven Keefe at the APSE office (email: skeefe@apse.org.uk)

5. APSE questions

Below are listed a number of questions; please respond to enolan@apse.org.uk and all of the responses will be circulated between APSE membership.

- (1) Should the role of public sector leisure provision be to meet community needs or profit-driven?
- (2) What is the public value of providing community sports and leisure (e.g. economy, job creation, etc)?
- (3) What are the social objectives of sports and leisure?
- (4) What is the answer to under-investment?
- (5) Is under-investment to blame for declining participation?

Debbie Johns

Principal Advisor, APSE