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## Leisure Services

**2022-2023**

<b>Head of Service signature</b>	
<b>Date</b>	25th February 2022
<b>Peer Review signature</b>	
<b>Date</b>	
<b>Director signature</b>	For Audit purposes please ensure this is signed
<b>Date</b>	

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# 1. Introduction.

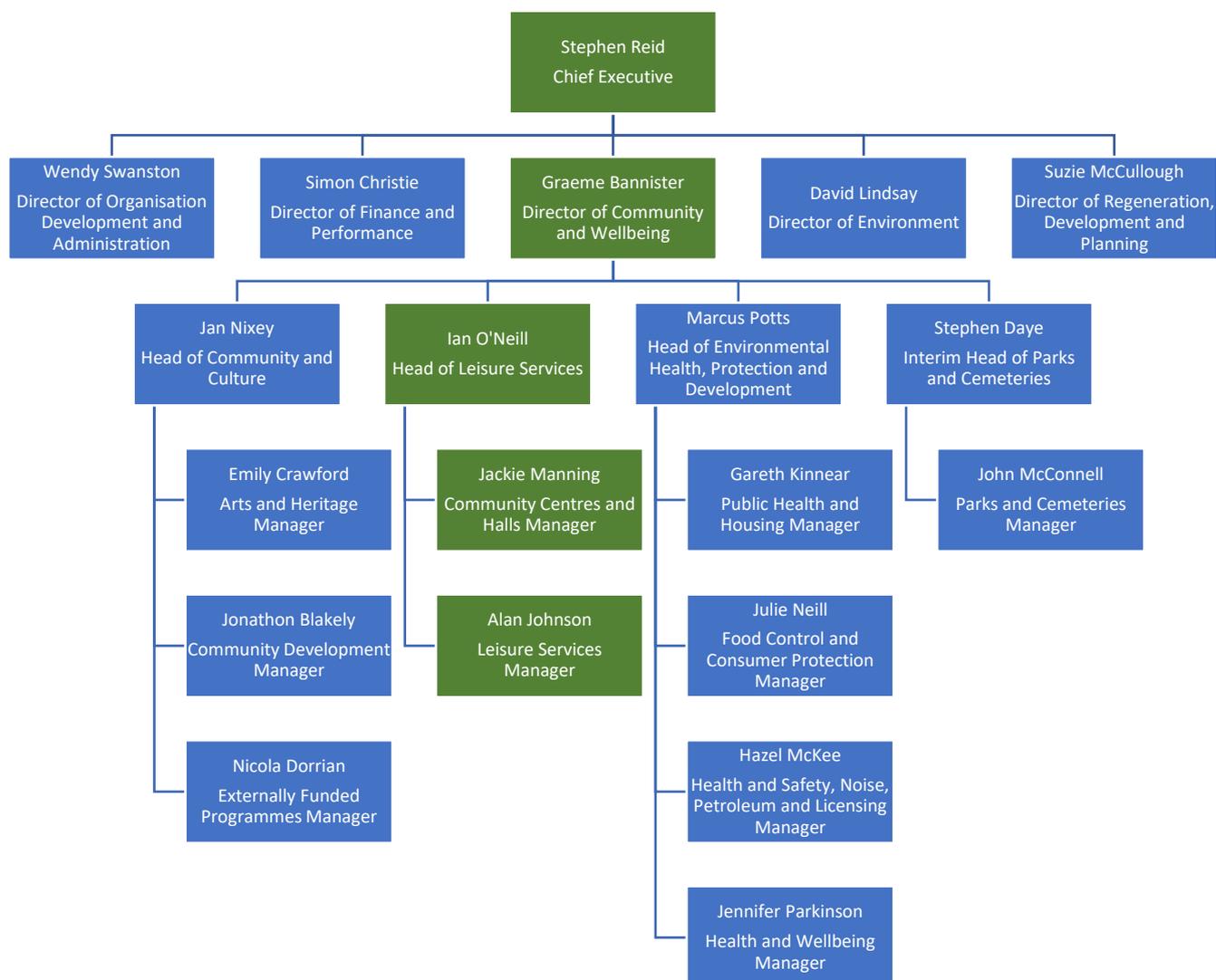
## 1.1 Section Profile:

The Leisure Service comprises of:

Two distinct service units – Leisure Services and Community Centres & Halls. The service area comprises of a Head of Service and a Service Unit Manager for each service unit.

Within the two units there are 218 full time equivalent posts.

The chart below shows where Leisure sits within the organisation, and in green the reporting relationship:



## Leisure Services

The Leisure Services section is delivered through the provision of a range of indoor leisure centres, sports pitches and associated pavilions, tennis courts, bowling greens and a designated Sport Development Unit. The management and operation of the facilities is undertaken by a team of well qualified and skilled individuals all committed to ensuring facilities are fit for purpose and where the service is delivered the delivery is done to the highest standard and specification.

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The service has been developed to offer opportunities for everyone, regardless of their age, ability or gender to gain maximum benefit from their activity whether it is undertaken for health benefits, sporting excellence or simply to make the most of their recreation time. Through direct and indirect support, we help individuals, clubs and associations to maximise their potential to participate in their chosen activity at whatever level they aspire to. This is achieved through, but not limited to, functions such as Sports Development who manage grants to individuals and clubs to fulfil their sporting potential, the leisure centres where everyone can participate in a wide range of sporting, leisure and recreational activities.

## **Community Centres and Halls**

The Council has direct responsibility for the provision of twenty-one Community Centres and Halls across the Borough. These facilities are managed by this section who are responsible for all aspects of the provision including staffing, customer service, budgets and marketing. The section provides a staffing resource for all bookings to ensure that all customers are provided with a quality service.

The Community Centres and Halls section maintain a directory of the users of the Council's community facilities which is available to the public and would encourage attendance at community organised groups or commercial enterprises using the facilities to increase bookings and usage. User Forums have been established in Redburn and Ballygowan to encourage discussion between user groups to improve their experience and drive bookings in these centres, these have been reviewed and there is an intention to expand the programme to include four User Forums over the next two years across the Borough to facilitate inclusion for all the users of Councils Community Centres and Halls. This has not been progressed to date given the pandemic, but the intention is to progress as we recover from the pandemic.

### **1.2 Why do we deliver the service?**

The Local Government Act (NI) 2014 requires Ards and North Down Borough Council to initiate, maintain, facilitate and participate in Community Planning for our district. As part of the Community Plan, Leisure contributes to the wellbeing of our citizens by enabling participation and inclusion through many different means, including sport and leisure and offering facilities for communities to meet so improving the quality of life for our citizens.

Whilst there is no statutory requirement for Council to directly provide leisure facilities or community centres and halls the Council is still required under the Recreation and Youth Service Order (Northern Ireland) 1986. "Each district council shall secure the provision for its area of adequate facilities for recreational, social, physical and cultural activities".

### **1.3 What is the purpose of the service?**

Ards and North Down Borough Council's Corporate Plan - Vision - "*Ards and North Down is a vibrant, connected, healthy, safe and prosperous place to be*".

The Leisure Services section contributes towards several areas of The Big Plan due to the wide span of activities performed within the section:

**All people in Ards and North Down fulfil their lifelong potential (Outcome 1)** – The Community Centres and Halls service unit provide bookable facilities for all members of the Community to avail of, with discounts for community groups across the Borough. The facilities act as venues for many activities aimed at elderly residents of the Borough.

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Within the Leisure Services section, the Sports Development section contributes towards this objective by supporting the work of the Sports Forum to support local athletes and clubs to create pathways for athletic progression across the Borough.

**All people in Ards and North Down enjoy good health and wellbeing (Big Plan Outcome 2)** – The Leisure Services section contributes to this objective by providing and facilitating a diverse and affordable range of quality sport, leisure and recreational opportunities to all our citizens in a safe friendly and vibrant fun environment so affording the opportunity for all to be healthier, happier and proud of the Borough in which they live.

Sport, leisure and recreation, both in structured and unstructured forms, provides our citizens with numerous physical health, psychological, economic and environmental benefits which are associated with a high quality of life through participation in sport, recreation and leisure. This affords the opportunity for a healthier lifestyle for all and facilitates greater cognitive development, self-esteem, social interaction, economic spending, conservation of natural lands and community vibrancy.

## 2. Customers/Stakeholders

### 2.1 Who are your customers and what do you know about them?

Customers/Stakeholders	Profile / characteristics	Interest <i>How much does our work and our plans impact upon this stakeholder and vice versa? (Low, Medium or High)</i>	Power <i>How much influence does this stakeholder have over the success or failure of our work and our plans? (Low, Medium or High)</i>	Support <i>What is this stakeholder's current view of our work and our plans? (Supporter, Neutral or Critic)</i>
Residents	Population: approximately 160,000 residents 20% over 65 17.5% under 15 45% under 40 Life expectancy of 81, highest in Northern Ireland	H	M	N
Elected Members	40 Elected members <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 13 DUP</li> <li>• 10 Alliance</li> <li>• 8 UUP</li> <li>• 3 Green</li> <li>• 1 SDLP</li> <li>• 1 TUV</li> <li>• 4 Independent</li> </ul>	H	H	S
Senior Council Officers	Stephen Reid, Chief Executive Graeme Bannister, Director of Community and Wellbeing, Corporate Leadership Team	H	H	S
Heads of Service,	Ian O'Neill, Head of Leisure, other Heads of Service	H	H	S

<b>Customers/Stakeholders</b>	<b>Profile / characteristics</b>	<b>Interest</b> <i>How much does our work and our plans impact upon this stakeholder and vice versa? (Low, Medium or High)</i>	<b>Power</b> <i>How much influence does this stakeholder have over the success or failure of our work and our plans? (Low, Medium or High)</i>	<b>Support</b> <i>What is this stakeholder's current view of our work and our plans? (Supporter, Neutral or Critic)</i>
Section Heads	Alan Johnson, Leisure Services Manager Jackie Manning, Community Centres and Halls Manager	H	H	S
Staff	218 staff – 179 in Leisure, 35 in Community Centres & Halls and 4 in Administration	H	H	S
Other Sections within Council	Over 900 employees across 5 directorates	H	M	S
Stormont Assembly/ Elected Members	MLAs and MPs active in constituency matters	L	L	N
Central Government including NIEA departments and DfCL	Civil Service departments with legislative and enforcement responsibilities	H	M	N
Health Trusts	Partners in the Health Agenda	H	M	N
SEELB/Schools	Partners in the Education Agenda	H	M	N
Local Community Groups	Locally organised groups to support the Community plans	M	M	S
Sport NI	Provide partner support to Sports Development and funding for sporting activity	M	H	S
Governing Bodies	Provide advice and support to sports clubs	M	H	S
Sports Associations	Provide advice and support to sports clubs	H	H	S

<b>Customers/Stakeholders</b>	<b>Profile / characteristics</b>	<b>Interest</b> <i>How much does our work and our plans impact upon this stakeholder and vice versa? (Low, Medium or High)</i>	<b>Power</b> <i>How much influence does this stakeholder have over the success or failure of our work and our plans? (Low, Medium or High)</i>	<b>Support</b> <i>What is this stakeholder's current view of our work and our plans? (Supporter, Neutral or Critic)</i>
Local Clubs/Leagues	Provide pathways for participation	H	H	S
Local Players	Facility users	H	H	S
Ratepayers of Borough	Fund services through rates	H	H	C
Facility Users	Provide income through paying for services and use the facilities	H	H	S
Facility Non Users	Potential customers, the inactive and disconnected	L	L	C
Suppliers/Contractors	Private sector enterprises reliant upon income from services	M	L	S

## 2.2 What are your customer's and stakeholder's needs/demand levels?

Customers/Stakeholders	Needs / demands from the service
Residents	Well managed leisure and recreational facilities that cater for a wide variety of sports and recreational activities and encourage health and wellbeing in residents whilst being competitively priced. Well managed community halls across the borough with affordable prices and equal access for all residents.
Elected Members	The effective implementation of Council decisions and a responsive and effective service to assist Members with constituency queries.
Senior Council Officers	A well-managed efficient service delivering on Member's expectations in accordance with principles of good governance.
Head of Leisure Services	Services that are well managed and delivered in accordance with principles of good governance.
Section Heads	Teams that are well managed and motivated to deliver high quality services.
Staff	Consistent employment, training and remuneration at appropriate rates. With clear direction and support to complete their jobs with pride.
Other Sections within Council	Reports or requests for information delivered on time and in an appropriate format.
Stormont Assembly/ Central Government	Activities that meet national activity requirements.
Health Trusts	Activities that support healthy lifestyles and specifically management of referral programmes.
SEELB/Schools	Schools swimming programmes and other curricular and extra-curricular activities delivered cost effectively.
NCLT/Serco	Clear communication on shared priorities, alignment of pricing structures.
Local Community Groups	Facilities at reasonable prices.
DfCL	Activities that meet national activity requirements.
Sport NI	Activities that meet national activity requirements.
Governing Bodies	Time and space at agreeable price levels
Sports Associations	Time and space at agreeable price levels
Local Clubs/Leagues	Time and space at agreeable price levels
Local Players	Time and space at agreeable price levels
Facility Users	Clean and safe facilities set up on time at a reasonable price
Facility Non Users	Addition of new activities and marketing that may make them users in the future
Suppliers	Awareness of purchasing procedures and payment in good time when goods have been delivered

Customers/Stakeholders	Needs / demands from the service
Contractors	Clear tender/quotation documentation and timely payment of invoices
NGOs	Partnership approach based on engagement and involvement.
Volunteers	Assistance with facilitating their activities, communication about planned work to best target their activities.

### 2.3 Customer satisfaction / needs

Satisfaction surveys are regularly carried out with Leisure Centre users and Community Halls users to establish their satisfaction levels.

The main source of feedback from residents on the service is via the Residents Survey which Council conducts every four years. In the most recent survey conducted in 2018 the satisfaction levels with each service area were:

Community Centres/services: 98% satisfied, 2% unsatisfied

Leisure Centres: 95% satisfied, 4% unsatisfied, 1% neutral

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## 3. Context, Challenges and Assumptions

### 3.1 Context

The creation of Ards and North Down Borough Council also saw the establishment of a number of new Directorates including the Community and Wellbeing Directorate, within this department a new Leisure and Amenities section was created with the responsibility to manage the delivery of a Leisure Service, Community Centres and Halls and Parks, Cemeteries & Amenities on behalf of the Council. In February 2022, this section was split to both prepare for in-sourcing and management of an enlarged service from April 2023 and to address critical service issues within Parks and Cemeteries. There is now a separate Parks and Cemeteries section which includes Outdoor and Countryside Recreation. The Leisure Services section includes leisure facilities and services, sports development, and community centres and halls provision.

Whilst there is no statutory requirement for Council to directly provide leisure facilities the Council is still required under the Recreation and Youth Service Order 1973 to secure adequate provision for leisure within the Council area. In 2013 North Down Borough Council became the first Council in Northern Ireland to outsource this requirement to an external provider; The Northern Community Leisure Trust (NCLT) and their management agents Serco. NCLT were appointed on a 10-year contract to manage the new state of the art facility, Aurora, and the Queens Leisure Centre in Holywood with the later addition of Ballykillaire and all outdoor pitches managed by North Down Borough Council. In June 2017 Council decided to continue to operate with the legacy Ards service being retained in house. The initial 10-year contract is to end in 2023 following a decision not to extend the contract for a further 5 years. This decision will result in a significant amount of focus being on the insourcing of this element of provision before April 2023.

Leisure operates in a very competitive environment and the full range of leisure, sporting, play and recreational facilities and spaces operated by Ards and North Down Borough Council will compete for the discretionary leisure income, that residents and visitors to the area wish to spend on their chosen leisure activities, with private facility providers, other leisure activities such as cinemas, bars and restaurants, home entertainment and even schools and colleges who are now opening up their facilities for public use.

Community centres and halls operate in a very competitive market where facilities such as Church Halls, Community Houses, Community Owned Halls, Private Social Clubs and Private Hire Facilities are looking to offset running costs by offering their halls for hire at very competitive prices.

Although many of the groups making use of the Council's community centres and halls benefit from discounted rates for use of the facilities, many also benefit by receiving various grants, or have sought payment for hire of the facilities through other Council departments who have supported and assisted with set up and running of these groups.

In recent times Council has seen a reduction in the level of grants coming into these groups and this has resulted in a downturn in the quantity of bookings from these groups.

This Service Plan is written during the ongoing Covid-19 outbreak which has added significant additional pressures to the leisure section as indeed it has across the whole Council. The particular methods for controlling transmission of the virus are in many ways antithetical to the service such as maintaining distance from other people and not gathering in indoor spaces. In addition to this, many of the measures imposed by the Northern Ireland Executive to control the virus have had a direct impact, such as enforced closure of facilities and prevention of certain activities taking place. There has also been an impact on the workforce of the new restrictions in the office environments and an introduction of

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homeworking and virtual meetings necessitated by Council, as well as additional cleaning regimes and restrictions on numbers of staff in enclosed spaces. This situation is a developing one and the context may continue to change as we as a society combat the spread of the virus and its new variants.

### **Political**

This has been the 6<sup>th</sup> full operating year of the new Council and as such we are now starting to fully understand the needs and expectations of the Council towards the delivery of leisure. The next Council elections are scheduled for 2023 and there is likelihood that this election may influence decisions during the incoming year.

With continuing uncertainty around the application of Brexit in Northern Ireland, we do not believe that there will be a major impact on the service whether there is an accepted deal or no deal as we have little interaction with EU bodies and whilst we do employ workers from other EU countries, we are not overly reliant on them. The service also does not purchase significant goods from overseas other than pool chemicals and work has commenced to resolve this potential difficulty.

### **Economic**

Local Authority expenditure is under increasing pressure with reduced central grant and expected low increases in the level of domestic rates, this means that leisure will have to maximise income and minimise expenditure to achieve the highest possible levels of efficiency and effectiveness. Council as a whole will need to pursue external funding in order to fund service improvements.

Disposable income remains an issue for many families with stagnancy in pay meaning families have less to spend on leisure. Unemployment remains an issue in the Council geographic area and with fewer jobs being created there is a distinct possibility this will continue to increase into the future. Leisure will have to ensure that those spending their disposable income on leisure recognise the leisure opportunities provided by the Council as excellent value for money compared to other leisure providers in the area. This in turn presents both opportunities and challenges for our free to use outdoor amenity facilities as users move toward the less formal and more passive forms of outdoor activity.

Areas of deprivation have been identified in the new combined Borough and it is important that access to leisure is maintained in these areas and the leisure section will be required to identify cost effective appropriate methods of delivery to meet these needs.

It is expected that costs of loans, principal and interest, may increase as interest rates from the Bank of England start to go up again.

The Belfast City Region Deal was approved in the 2018 autumn budget and a contractor has been appointed for the development of Bangor Waterfront. This proposed project will have an impact on Leisure facilities in the vicinity at Kingsland, as well as the development of Ballyholme Yacht Club and the proposed greenway routes including along the coastal path.

### **Social**

The provision of local authority leisure in the area does not exist in isolation and we need to take cognisance of national and local trends in leisure and reflect these through our own programmes. The use of the demographic modelling tools to help identify demographic trends in the area will allow the Leisure and Amenities section to develop programmes that reflect the needs of the community.

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Reference will be made to appropriate central government health and sporting initiatives to take advantage of the interest stimulated by these initiatives.

In providing these services, the leisure service will be able to contribute to the Community and Wellbeing Directorate's objectives by applying the principles of the Five Ways to Wellbeing. These are a set of evidence-based actions, which promote health and wellbeing, they are; Connect, Give, Be Active, Take Notice and Keep Learning.

### **Technical**

The growing use of Social Networking sites by the public at large both represents an opportunity and a threat to the provision of facilities and activities undertaken by the leisure service.

Opportunities arise from the ability to contact large numbers of particular sections of society quickly and cheaply with promotional material, whilst the threat arises from the uncontrolled publication of information from many sources about the organisation.

Electronic leisure also poses both a threat and an opportunity for the leisure service; where many people using social media apps can partake in physical activities such as dance and fitness classes in the comfort of their own homes, reducing the need to travel to facilities such as those provided by the leisure service, while opportunity presents itself through the development of more sophisticated group activities that would benefit from the facilities available throughout the Borough.

Online booking is now an integral part of the book and pay options available at our leisure facilities such as the Blacklight Adventure Zone at Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex (ABMWLC). Leisure has rolled out online booking for the "Waves", learn to swim, programme as well as the ability to book and pay for the wide variety of classes available at all our centres. In addition, leisure have added a kiosk system that allows members to check in for a wide range of activities at ABMWLC without having to queue at reception.

Fitness technology is improving all the time, and with the opening of the Ards Blair Mayne Wellness and Leisure Complex, the Leisure Services section is at the forefront of leisure technology and users of our facilities have access to the very best fitness and leisure facilities available. In addition to the innovations noted in the previous paragraph, leisure have added the Technogym Wellness App to all the equipment in the fitness suite; this allows members to track their fitness across all items of the equipment in the gym and follow personalised programmes of activity through the App, allowing gym staff to offer assistance to those that need it most.

### **Legal**

The leisure section is anticipating a decision on the assignment of VAT to Council leisure income imminently. This may lead to a significant impact on the direction of travel in regard to the benefits/limitations of a number of potential operating models for leisure provision going forward. This may have particular relevance given the alignment of the leisure service in April 2023 and the need for stability for the leisure team after many years of constant scrutiny and efficiency drives by Council. It is critical that a period of certainty and stability is provided to the leisure team who continue to provide a quality efficient service despite the most challenging of environments. Management must also be aware of the growing threat of litigation for any type of incident that leads to hurt or injury and ensure the safety of the customers and staff is paramount in any operating environment.

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## **Environmental**

The impact of changing environmental and climactic patterns will continue to be significant and the service will need to take consideration and have the ability to adapt as a result. A major challenge for the Borough as a whole is the impact of coastal erosion, with our coastline being the longest of any Council in Northern Ireland we expect this to have more of an impact than Councils with more limited coastline. For the service coastal erosion affects many areas which we have a direct stake in, for example amenity beaches or the coastal path. The Council can be a major partner in developing a strategy to combat and adapt to such issues.

### **3.2 What changes are you expecting in the next few years?**

Significant interest in the running of the Councils leisure service is anticipated as the Leisure Trust contract comes to an end in April 2023 and the impact on the Council's overall financial position is likely to be a significant factor in the future direction of travel in terms of operating models for this aspect of the service. The development of a leisure strategy will help provide direction to the service once it is complete.

We anticipate with tighter financial controls throughout the Council that there will be less flexibility to fund projects not in plans and greater internal governance demands placed on managers.

As in previous years it is likely that public demands of the service will grow, and Council will be put in the position of having to deliver a greater level of service with less resources.

It is anticipated that the service will need to develop a way of being delivered alongside the pandemic which shows little signs of not being a factor. The new variations have highlighted the challenges that are likely to be faced in service provision going forward and Council will need to exhibit flexibility as societal pressures adjust to the new environment. Leisure anticipate more temporary changes in legislation surrounding this as indeed there already has been over the past few years.

### **3.3 What are your future challenges?**

The ongoing workload issues are still a concern. It is anticipated that the creation of a separate Parks and Cemeteries section with additional resources will be a significant help in minimising the strain on the exhausted management team. However, it is also recognised that the insourcing exercise is likely to bring significant pressures on this same team and therefore it is essential that previous pressures are not replicated with this significant work stream.

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The Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Centre opened in December 2018, however many challenges with its operation remain. The future provision within the space currently known as the Blacklight Adventure Zone needs to be assessed as a priority. This aspect of the building provides significant opportunity to meet the needs of both the family and teenage demographic but, as was originally envisaged, needs a commercial operator who can have the flexibility around staffing and operating that Council has been unable to achieve since it opened in spring 2019. The early successes of the fitness suite, spa and pools will need to be maintained to help keep income levels above expectation, but this can only be achieved by ensuring an appropriate staffing structure is in place.

The service will need to develop and maintain an attractive and competitive pricing policy that will ensure appropriate levels of usage and the meeting of income targets agreed within this plan and budgetary proposals at the start of the year. This pricing policy will take into account the plan to align prices with NCLT and Serco and will seek to harmonise prices where possible.

The service will need to increase participation levels across minority groupings and minority sports to meet government targets in these areas and to meet the gender equality targets of the Council.

The service will seek to identify partners who can help raise awareness levels of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle throughout the Borough to encourage greater participation levels particularly amongst vulnerable groups.

The opportunity to provide a consistent and “joint up” leisure offering by the insourcing decision must be maximised for the benefit of both the users in terms of offering and the ratepayers in terms of value for money.

The service will need to attract more ‘e’ business by promoting the new website for leisure which allows the use of online bookings and payments.

We will need to find ways to reduce the impact of anti-social behaviour around all of our leisure facilities, this behaviour not only damages the structure of the facilities but causes those that want to make proper use of the facilities think twice about using them for fear of being caught up in the bad behaviours of a few individuals.

The service will need to identify possible partners that will help deliver opportunities to the wider community; these partners may come from the commercial community, the health community or even other government departments.

The Disability Discrimination Act will continue to ensure that access issues to facilities and activities for all users with a disability remain at the forefront of our thinking and planning in the delivery of services.

Leisure in the Borough must remain affordable to all which places a greater emphasis on the Council to ensure that they continue to be the main provider of leisure in the area and that it is not left to market forces and the private clubs who are profit driven without the social conscience of the Council.

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Greater use should be made of our external leisure facilities such as our parks, playgrounds, pitches, open spaces, beaches, skate parks and country parks as well as our existing community facilities to deliver leisure, recreation and sporting opportunities to our community and visitors to the area.

The Community Centres and Halls section has recently completed a process of facility modernisation and transformation. It was critical that this process was given support in order to harmonise two distinct workforces from each of the legacy Council areas. The transformation included retaining current staffing levels, resourcing additional functions, and redesigning working patterns to deliver service demands.

Whilst this has now been achieved and the delivery of service is at a much higher level, it also comes with challenges due to the nature of the unknowns of utilisation. This is a unique service which depends to some extent on communities receiving grants enabling them to fund usage of Councils Community Centres and Halls. Other challenging issues include groups obtaining their own premises and the competition of the many Community Houses and Church Halls either undercutting the cost of Councils hire charges or offering free use of their facilities to the community. A further transformation process is envisaged for this service over the coming years. Consideration as to how the Council delivers a community centre (halls) service most effectively and efficiently to meet the differing needs of local communities will be a priority.

Our service will need to work hard to negate where possible the impact of the above. We will endeavour to achieve this by:

- Keeping our facilities attractive and fit for purpose
- Engaging with our customers through engagement forums
- Producing a marketing plan
- Working collaboratively with other stakeholders, both internal and external.

A full facility audit was completed to determine a refurbishment/modernisation capital programme across all Councils Community Centres in partnership with the Councils Estates team. Thirteen of the Councils 21 facilities were earmarked through the facility audit surveys to be brought up to an acceptable standard. Work was agreed and was completed in December 2019. Further refurbishment programmes have and will be undertaken to maintain all the facilities to an acceptable standard for the local communities that depend on these sites.

If the current situation with Covid-19 continues, it is a major threat to the service and its operations. In leisure there has been a real drive to retain memberships by transitioning classes to online delivery and allowing memberships to be frozen to avoid cancellations and allow members to resume their activities once the restrictions lift or they feel safe to do so. The Community Centres and Halls continue to operate with reduced room capacities and certain activities restricted, however a great loss of demand has occurred leading to a steep fall in the numbers of bookings in the sites. If this continues it will impact on the level of subsidy required from the rates to ensure viability of the leisure service. It is hoped that recent announcements (February 2022) will be the beginning of a return to pre-COVID operating models.

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## 4. Opportunity for Improvement

### 4.1 Reflection of Service Performance

A success has been the continued quality service delivered despite very challenging demands in terms of workload, resources and the impact of the pandemic.

In this financial year it is anticipated that the Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex will undertake the two-day assessment programme in line with Aurora.

The suspension of recruitment during the height of the pandemic has resulted in significant gaps in the front line workforce. The filling of these posts must be prioritised if the service is to be able to deliver pre-COVID levels. There are also a number of unresolved staffing issues in terms of pay and conditions which have not been addressed to date and are continuing to cause tensions within the workforce. With an increasingly competitive recruitment market it is imperative that Council is able to attract and retain quality staff in these key commercial orientated positions within the leisure structure.

The expectations of members continue to have an impact on effective service delivery. Despite service plans and budgets being set and agreed on an annual basis, it has become increasingly difficult to deliver against both criteria when significant pressure comes to absorb additional workload without appropriate resources. This places unacceptable levels of stress on key personnel who are, and have been for five years, working in an inappropriate structure which is unlike any other in terms of local government in Northern Ireland.

There has been an increasing burden of governance and back office tasks placed onto front line staff, reducing their capacity for service delivery. As an example, Core must be completed by 10am on Monday morning, which for 7 days a week services creates issues when officers are trying to address serious problems that have arisen over the weekend and that require immediate attention. From finance we are required to review invoicing on a weekly basis and a 'significant issues' report on a monthly basis. We will now have to produce business cases for all new expenditure which are significant in their content and time consuming in their completion. From HR there are a myriad of forms that must be filled in, from starting employees, terminating employees, sick employees and the various stages this process has to go through, all of which keep officers back from the main purpose of their jobs. We also have regular audits completed across all levels of the service. Whilst it is appreciated these are all parts of the modern working environment, the demands this places on front line managers has resulted in a significant focus being diverted away from their front-facing tasks and more priority for back office administration. This reduces the ability to provide a front-facing, effective, quality service, given that no increase in resources was included in this administrative loading for operational managers.

## 5. How Will the Leisure Service Contribute to Corporate Objectives?

The Leisure service can be expected to have a direct impact on the following:

Outcome/Objective	Service objectives
All people in Ards and North Down enjoy good health and wellbeing	The leisure service contributes to this objective by providing and facilitating a diverse and affordable range of quality sport, leisure and recreational opportunities to all our citizens in a safe friendly and vibrant fun environment so affording the opportunity for all to be healthier, happier and proud of the Borough in which they live.
All people in Ards and North Down feel pride from having access to a well-managed sustainable environment	The leisure service portfolio of facilities are maintained with a focus on sustainability whilst ensuring constituents and visitors can enjoy sporting, recreational and leisure pursuits.
All people in Ards and North Down live in communities where they are respected, are safe and feel secure	The leisure facilities are managed with health and safety for all customers, staff and wider communities as a core principle.
All People in Ards and North Down fulfil their lifelong potential	<p>Community centres and halls service unit provide bookable facilities for all members of the Community to avail of, with discounts for community groups across the Borough. The facilities act as venues for many activities aimed at more vulnerable residents of the Borough.</p> <p>Within the leisure service unit, the Sports Development section contributes towards this objective by supporting the work of the Sports Forum to assist local athletes and clubs to create pathways for athletic progression across the Borough.</p>

## 6. Key activities for 2022/23

<b>SERVICE:</b>	<b>Leisure Service</b>
<b>Community Plan Outcome:</b>	All people in Ards and North Down feel pride as they have access to a well-managed sustainable environment
<b>Corporate Objective:</b>	Growing a cleaner, greener local and global environment
<b>Service Objective:</b>	To reduce the impact on the environment in the Borough from all leisure activities
<b>Underpinning strategies:</b>	

What are the Business as Usual activities we will deliver (actions)?	What difference will it make (outputs/outcomes)?	How will we know (measures)?	Lead Officer(s)	Who do we need to help us? (Internal/External partners)
We will manage our pitches to ensure that our estate is fit for purpose	Sustained pitch availability and standard will encourage bookings from Clubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of bookings on pitches</li> </ul>	Alan Johnson	Parks and Cemeteries
Reduce landfill waste from leisure activities with associated increase in recycled waste	We will recycle more of our waste products and send less waste to landfill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase % sent to recycling rather than landfill for Community Centres</li> <li>Increase % sent to recycling rather than landfill for Leisure sites</li> </ul>	Alan Johnson Jackie Manning	Waste and Cleansing

<b>SERVICE:</b>	<b>Leisure Service</b>
<b>Community Plan Outcome:</b>	All people in Ards and North Down fulfil their lifelong potential
<b>Corporate Objective:</b>	Growing the lifelong potential of our community
<b>Service Objective:</b>	We will facilitate all of our communities to achieve their desired potential at whatever sporting, leisure or recreational activity they choose
<b>Underpinning strategies:</b>	

What are the Business as Usual activities we will deliver (actions)?	What difference will it make (outputs/outcomes)?	How will we know (measures)?	Lead Officer(s)	Who do we need to help us? (Internal/External partners)
Continue to promote the Sports Directory across the Borough.	Clubs become more sustainable by attracting increased numbers of players, coaches and officials Public are more aware of the numbers and variety of sporting and recreational activities in the area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of views of online Sports Directory</li> </ul>	Alan Johnson	Sports Forum NGBs Local Clubs Corporate Comms
Attract Clubs to affiliate with the Sports Forum	Increase the number of clubs affiliated with the Sports Forum and able to receive support from the Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of Clubs affiliated with the Sports Forum</li> </ul>	Alan Johnson	Sports Forum Local Clubs Corporate Comms
We will continue to support local clubs and athletes by providing financial support through the Sports Forum Programme	By supporting local athletes to compete in competitions we create a pathway for athletic progression in the Borough  By supporting local clubs to further develop and create pathways for the development of sport across the Borough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of Sports Forum grants awarded</li> </ul>	Alan Johnson	Sporting governing bodies, local athletes and clubs
We will continue to support local clubs affiliated with the Sports Forum through the Capital Grants Programme	By supporting local clubs to develop their facilities it will enhance the level of sporting provision across the Borough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of Capital grants awarded to clubs</li> </ul>	Alan Johnson	Sporting governing bodies, local athletes and clubs
Continue to deliver the Sports Education Programme to sports clubs, coaches and volunteers	To further develop and enhance the skills and knowledge of club personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of individuals attending Sports Education Courses</li> </ul>	Alan Johnson	Sporting governing bodies, Sport NI, accredited training organisations, sports clubs, coaches and volunteers

What are the Business as Usual activities we will deliver ( <b>actions</b> )?	What difference will it make ( <b>outputs/outcomes</b> )?	How will we know ( <b>measures</b> )?	Lead Officer(s)	Who do we need to help us? (Internal/External partners)
We will provide modern, neutral facilities across the Borough for the use of the community	This will enable community groups to have meetings and facilitate bookings for a wide variety of clubs or activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Total hours booked across all Community Centres and Halls</li> </ul>	Jackie Manning	Community groups, Residents of the Borough
Continue to deliver / facilitate a range of Sports Development programmes to include soccer development programme, Annual Schools Sports Series etc.	Provide opportunities for residents to participate in sport and recreation across the Borough and to further create pathway opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participation in Sports Development programmes delivered/facilitated by Council</li> </ul>	Alan Johnson	NGBs/Clubs/Schools/ Residents/Disability Groups

What service development/improvement will we undertake in 2019/20?	What difference will it make ( <b>outputs/outcomes</b> )?	How will we know ( <b>measures</b> )?	Lead Officer(s)	Who do we need to help us? (Internal/External partners)	Is a Business Case required?
We will set up community user forums to encourage local community groups to make use of Community Centres	Local community will become more sustainable and help develop more active and involved communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The number of community user group forums set up</li> </ul>	Jackie Manning	Community Groups Community Development	No

<b>SERVICE:</b>	<b>Leisure and Amenities</b>
<b>Community Plan Outcome:</b>	All people in Ards and North Down enjoy good health and wellbeing
<b>Corporate Objective:</b>	Growing the health and wellbeing of our residents
<b>Service Objective:</b>	We will provide excellent facilities where opportunities for sporting, recreational and leisure activities can take place that improve the physical and mental health and wellbeing of all of our communities
<b>Underpinning strategies:</b>	

What are the Business as Usual activities we will deliver (actions)?	What difference will it make (outputs/outcomes)?	How will we know (measures)?	Lead Officer(s)	Who do we need to help us? (Internal/External partners)
We will provide health referral schemes in association with the local Trust such as the Physical Activity Referral Scheme	We will help people maintain a better quality of life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of people who complete our referral programmes</li> <li>• % of people who take out a membership package at the end of the referral programme</li> </ul>	Alan Johnson	Health Trust
We will maintain high levels of customer satisfaction in our leisure centres	Continued high usage and pride in our facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High levels of satisfaction expressed through customer satisfaction surveys</li> </ul>	Alan Johnson	
We will strive to maintain Quest awards for all leisure sites which have it	It will allow us to ensure that we provide the highest standard of leisure facility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quest awards maintained</li> <li>• Full Quest assessment achieved for ABMWLC</li> </ul>	Alan Johnson	
We will continue to deliver a learn to swim program to teach children and adults to swim	By enabling swimming and teaching children and adults to swim we will encourage residents to be more active and healthier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number enrolled in Learn to Swim Programme</li> </ul>	Alan Johnson	
We will continue to target residents over 60 to remain active	This will help residents remain active and encourage participation in programmes from a wider age group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of Active Aging Memberships</li> </ul>	Alan Johnson	

What service development/improvement will we undertake in 2019/20?	What difference will it make (outputs/outcomes)?	How will we know (measures)?	Lead Officer(s)	Who do we need to help us? (Internal/External partners)	Is a Business Case required?
We will increase the number of fitness classes	There will be more opportunities for people to partake in classes in response to customer feedback and reduce demand in gym	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of fitness classes across all sites in Leisure Ards</li> </ul>	Alan Johnson		No
We will increase the number of people who attend the staffed leisure facilities	Encourage more people to enjoy healthy active lifestyles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Footfall at Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Centre</li> <li>• Footfall at Comber Leisure Centre</li> <li>• Footfall at Portaferry Sports Centre</li> <li>• Footfall at Londonderry Park</li> <li>• Footfall at Aurora</li> <li>• Footfall at Queen's Leisure Centre</li> <li>• Footfall at Bangor Sportsplex</li> </ul>	Alan Johnson	Marketing Section	No

<b>SERVICE:</b>	<b>Leisure and Amenities</b>
<b>Community Plan Outcome:</b>	
<b>Corporate Objective:</b>	Growing a high performing Council
<b>Service Objective:</b>	We will manage our resources effectively to deliver on our service objectives and wider corporate goals whilst delivering good value for money to the ratepayers
<b>Underpinning strategies:</b>	

What are the Business as Usual activities we will deliver (actions)?	What difference will it make (outputs/outcomes)?	How will we know (measures)?	Lead Officer(s)	Who do we need to help us? (Internal/External partners)
We will ensure that there are sufficient staff on duty to deliver the service	It will ensure that the services are fully operational with healthy, enthusiastic and effective workforce	% Staff Attendance	Ian O'Neill Jackie Manning Alan Johnson	HR & OD
We will ensure all staff have access to half yearly Pride in Performance conversations	Staff will clearly understand what is expected of them, what to expect of the Council and how we can improve together	% Staff completing Pride in Performance conversations	Ian O'Neill Jackie Manning Alan Johnson	HR & OD
Spend against Budget	We will retain strict financial control to adhere to Council set budgets for the service area	Spend against budget	Ian O'Neill Jackie Manning Alan Johnson	Finance

Performance Measures (should include those outlined above and relevant measures from Community, Corporate and Performance Improvement Plans plus those that are Statutory)	Is the measure Statutory, Corporate, Existing or New?	2018/19 Actual	2019/20 Actual	2021/2022 Actual	2022/23 Target / Standard
Number of Clubs Affiliated with the Sports Forum	Existing	102	110	101	110
Number of views of online Sports Directory	New	N/A	N/A	600	700

<b>Performance Measures</b> (should include those outlined above and relevant measures from Community, Corporate and Performance Improvement Plans plus those that are Statutory)	<b>Is the measure Statutory, Corporate, Existing or New?</b>	<b>2018/19 Actual</b>	<b>2019/20 Actual</b>	<b>2021/2022 Actual</b>	<b>2022/23 Target / Standard</b>
Increase % sent to recycling rather than landfill for Community Centres	Existing	N/A	N/A	42%	50%
Increase % sent to recycling rather than landfill for Leisure sites	Existing	62%	70%	46%	50%
Maintain or Improve Quest Awards for all Leisure Sites	Existing	N/A	4	4	4
% of people who complete the GP referral programme	Existing	60%	60%	10%	60%
% of people who take out a membership package at the end of a referral programme	Existing	N/A	35%	25%	50%
Number of Sports Forum Grants awarded to clubs and athletes	Existing	161	132	60	125
Number of Capital Grants awarded to clubs	Existing	5	17	8	10
Number of individuals attending Sports Education Courses	Existing	N/A	N/A	51	50
Participation in Sports Development programmes delivered/facilitated by Council	New	N/A	N/A	N/A	1500
Footfall at Ards Blair Mayne Wellbeing and Leisure Complex	New	N/A	N/A	378,900	675,000
Footfall at Comber Leisure Centre	New	147,893	145,552	82,600	125,000
Footfall at Portaferry Sports Centre	New	20,171	18,890	6,200	13,000
Footfall at Londonderry Park	New	46,000	38,375	46,300	52,500
Footfall at Aurora	New	N/A	1,398,422	738,287	1,100,000
Footfall at Queen's Leisure Centre	New	N/A	120,086	78,408	90,000
Footfall at Sportsplex	New	N/A	38,453	88,218	90,000
Total hours booked in community centres	New	No data	20,946.5	5,000	18,000
Number of Fitness Classes per Week	Existing	67	90	76	110

<b>Performance Measures</b> (should include those outlined above and relevant measures from Community, Corporate and Performance Improvement Plans plus those that are Statutory)	<b>Is the measure Statutory, Corporate, Existing or New?</b>	<b>2018/19 Actual</b>	<b>2019/20 Actual</b>	<b>2021/2022 Actual</b>	<b>2022/23 Target / Standard</b>
% Staff Attendance	Existing	92%	93%	92%	95%
% Staff completing Pride in Performance conversations	Existing	N/A	91%	95%	95%
Number enrolled in Learn to Swim programme	New	N/A	N/A	1283	1300
Active Aging Memberships	New	N/A	373	200	300

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**Resources:**

**Are all actions resourced within the current (2022/23) budget plan?** Yes  No

**Will additional resources be required?** Yes  No

(If no please comment in Section A below how the actions will be funded, i.e. Staff Resources, Equipment, Revenue Budget, Capital Budget.)  
(If yes please detail additional resources in Section B below.)

**Section A: N/A**

**Section B: Business Cases have/ will be been submitted for the below activities:**

**Staffing**

Leisure

**Projects**

Leisure Strategy  
Portavogie 3G pitch  
Donaghadee Sports Facilities  
Portaferry Multi Use Pitch  
Comber LC Gym Equipment and new sports hall floor  
ABMWLC Blacklight Zone  
Aurora Roof, Pools and sport hall floor issues  
Queens Sports Hall Floor  
Sportsplex existing and new site identification  
Bangor Waterfront Sports and Recreational Input  
Tennis Strategy

**If the required additional resources are not available, please state:**

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**Resources:***What is the likely impact on performance?*

If we do not have the resources, some parts or all of a leisure centre may have to close until the resources become available. This will have an immediate and ongoing effect on income generation.

*What is the likely impact on the public?*

Public will lose confidence in the service and choose to spend their Leisure Pound elsewhere. If they cannot afford to go elsewhere, it will have an impact on their health and wellbeing, which then will impact their work and by extension the whole of the local economy.

*What is the likely impact on staffing?*

Staff may become stressed with the additional work they have to do or with the thought of losing their careers if centres must close; this may lead to further staff shortages which will exacerbate the issue.

## 7. Risks

Ref:	Risk Description	Gross Risk			Current controls	Residual Risk			Risk Status	Further Action Required	Action Due by	Risk Owner	Notes to explain rationale for scoring, etc.
		I	L	R		I	L	R	Tolerate / Action				
1	GP Referral and Cardiac rehab programmes no longer supported	Moderate	Possible	Med	Ongoing discussions with Trust	Moderate	Possible	Med	Tolerate	No	GP Referral and Cardiac rehab programmes no longer supported	AJ	
2	Schools swimming programme terminated	Major	Possible	Med	Competitive pricing policy and discussions with schools	Moderate	Possible	Med	Tolerate	No	Schools swimming programme terminated	AJ	
3	Major clubs withdraw bookings	Major	Possible	Med	Competitive pricing policy and discussions with clubs	Moderate	Possible	Med	Tolerate	No	Major clubs withdraw bookings	AJ	
4	Building infrastructure failure	Major	Remote	Med	Condition surveys carried out and PPM in place	Major	Remote	Med	Tolerate	No		ION	
5	Insufficient staff to deliver services	Major	Remote	Med	Regular staff training	Major	Remote	Med	Tolerate	No		ION	

Ref:	Risk Description	Gross Risk			Current controls	Residual Risk			Risk Status	Further Action Required	Action Due by	Risk Owner	Notes to explain rationale for scoring, etc.
		I	L	R		I	L	R	Tolerate / Action				
6	Major injury to user of facilities	Major	Probable	High	Regular staff training, inspections of facilities, internal and external audits	Major	Probable	High	Tolerate	No		ION	
7	Major injury to member of staff while on duty	Major	Remote	Med	Regular staff training, inspections of facilities, internal and external audits	Major	Remote	Med	Tolerate	No		ION	
8	Loss of STEM accreditation	Minor / insignificant	Remote	Low	Regular staff training, inspections of facilities, internal and external audits	Minor / insignificant	Remote	Low	Tolerate	No		ION	
9	Breach in legislation i.e. FEPA H&SAW Waste Disposal EMS	Major	Possible	Med	Net Regs Training H&S Working Group. Attend Seminars. Management meetings. Notification from Government depts. Technical and legal expertise.	Major	Remote	Med	Tolerate	No		ION, JM, AJ,	Ensure current controls remain in place
10	Service delivery below accepted standards, resulting in :- Poor profile. H&S Issues. Increased Insurance claims. User quality and visitor quality.	Major	Possible	Med	SDIP Supervision. Visual Checks. Monitor complaints – verbal and written. Monthly Management and Team meetings	Major	Remote	Med	Tolerate	No		ION	Ensure current controls remain in place

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## **8. Resources**

### **8.1 Staffing**

The broad portfolio of front-facing services and significant investment projects continues to provide challenges which regularly results in pressures on staff and the need for difficult prioritisation decisions. Council has changed the structure which will provide a basis for improvement. So long as and the service managers can focus on producing systems with our Council colleagues to deliver a more flexible efficient service by maximising income generation and encouraging more constituents to be more active.

The requirement to deliver an insourcing exercise and the development of both leisure and Community halls strategies will place significant strain on key personnel. Alongside the Councils commitment across a number of capital leisure projects it is imperative that staffing levels are maintained to ensure key personnel are not managing downwards and inwards only. There are key opportunities to develop partnerships, seek external funding and develop key opportunities but only if the relevant staff have time and space to explore these aspects. It is imperative that this is realised if the service is to be developed.

### **8.2 Financial**

The service is provided with a revenue budget which was being finalised at time of writing this plan. Additionally, the service has the responsibility to deliver on a significant capital investment programme.

## **9. Monitoring and Review**

The monitoring and review of this plan will be part of the performance reporting process undertaken on a quarterly basis and the regular reports that go to the Community and Wellbeing Committee of Council and also reports to the full Council.

## **10. Conclusions**

The past six years have proved very difficult for the services because of workload and structure. The current portfolio of capital projects, including 3G pitches and other sports facilities, is a pressure on not just the Leisure section but on all other supporting sections of the Council. Some facilities are beginning to show signs of age and capital investment is required if services are going to continue to be delivered. A key example of this is the situation at Sportsplex. Budgets that are required to deliver a service to the stated level are not being made available and this will result in a detrimental impact to service provision. Whilst focus of the senior staff in this section may be on the insourcing exercise, the community halls transformation and the leisure strategy it will be important to resource any gaps or realign current commitments. The community centre transformation exercise will run parallel with the development of a marketing plan and the roll out of the much needed broadband capabilities across the majority of the portfolio.

The biggest challenge for this service will still be in adapting to the new environment that we find ourselves working in due to Covid-19. With uncertainty about future government-led measures, it will be increasingly difficult to both operate a reduced service and plan for a return to normality with any confidence and the ability to continue to adapt and respond to whatever impact the pandemic continues to have during 2022/23 will be critical in maintaining a service to the constituents of the Borough during this important period.