

North East Derbyshire District Council

Cabinet Briefing Note – Review on Leisure Activities for Children (Communities Scrutiny)

INTRODUCTION

The outcomes from the Residents Survey, undertaken in November 2023, was presented to all four Scrutiny Committees in February 2024.

One of the key areas of improvement highlighted within that survey was activities for children. The Communities Scrutiny Committee had noted this area as a potential topic to review and agreed to pick this up as part of the 2024/25 Work Programme.

The Committee had already heard about the Extreme Wheels events offered to the older children/teenagers across various locations in the District as an initiative to reduce anti-social behaviour as part of an overview of the Community Safety Partnership at its meeting in May 2024. However, they were aware that this was just one activity available and the Committee decided to review the activities available for children, on offer by the Council, at its meeting on 24 July 2024. The Committee carried out the work as a 'Spotlight' review on the subject.

The review also compliments similar reviews undertaken under the previous administration in 2020/21 regarding childhood obesity and younger residents, and in 2022/23 regarding leisure provisions for older residents.

It was in this context that the Committee interviewed the Centre Manager (Eckington and Killamarsh) and Duty Officer (Killamarsh).

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The review aimed to:

- Understand and assess what the Council offered, in terms of activities for children;
- Understand and assess how the Council promoted such activities to children;
- Identify any opportunities to increase participation and new memberships;
- Evaluate what had been successful; and
- Identify room for improvement.

KEY FINDINGS

Strengths/Observations

The Centre Manager (Eckington and Killamarsh) and Duty Officer (Killamarsh) explained that the Council had recently been investing in its leisure facilities. This included the new Clay Cross Active leisure centre, and refurbishments at

Killamarsh Active, Eckington Pool and Dronfield Sports Centre. These were being funded through the Council and a number of external partners including the Town Deal Fund. The Committee received an overview of the Council's four Leisure Centres. They were impressed with the facilities and agreed that the Centres were an excellent facility for residents of all ages and the communities.

The Centre Manager (Eckington and Killamarsh) and Duty Officer (Killamarsh) informed the Committee about the services and activities offered to children and older children/teenagers in the District. Members heard that Leisure Services provided a wide range of activities that were available across our Leisure Centres aimed at children of all ages from 0 years to 16+ years. Activities included soft play areas and swimming sessions for babies and toddlers, through to samba football coaching, swimming, gymnastics, performing arts and kick boxing aimed at the older children. They were also informed of the various offers available during the year including the 7:1 swimming, this is where you get 7 days swimming for the price of 1, this offer was also available on the soft play activity for the younger children. There was also the "Quid a Kid" on racket sports during the school holidays.

The Committee heard that the Council was working well with partners to improve the services on offer. These include the provision of holiday camps, roller discos, karate and other activities for children to get involved in.

Members heard how the Council has linked with Fairplay, a charity that supports children and young people with disabilities and additional needs, and their families, across North Derbyshire, to offer monthly SEN activity sessions.

The Centre Manager advised of the links with schools to provide activities such as:

- Lifeguard training – Eckington Junior School
- Gym and Sports Hall activities – Henry Fanshaw School
- Use of library and café – Killamarsh Junior School
- SEN from 16+ years – Landmarks Specialist College
- There were also links with the local SNT for the "Cops v Kids" games, where local Police Officers took part in role reversal games with local school children.

The Committee heard about Extreme Wheels from a previous meeting and that it was offered to the older children/teenagers as a free initiative to reduce anti-social behaviour. The Committee were pleased to hear that there was no charge for the children/teenagers to participate in Extreme Wheels and that these events were well received. However, they did acknowledge that the events were only held several times a year across the District and were externally funded.

The Committee were also informed about the Active & Healthy Lifestyles Team that support community outreach work. The activities included:

- After school clubs

- Delivering curriculum based sports
- School lunch time physical activity sessions
- Delivering the ten-week Five50 Programme related to the National Childhood Measurement Programme
- Active Neighbourhood Pilot Scheme – hosting a number of creative workshops, campaigns and events
- Family walking and jogging groups.

Members were informed that although Clay Cross Active was currently under development, with an opening date of Winter 2024, a lot of consultation work with the local community including children had taken place already to determine what they would like to see at the new Leisure Centre, these had been taken into consideration when designing the Centre and will also incorporate new activities such as Tag Active. The Committee were pleased to be informed of the consultation work that had taken place to determine the Clay Cross Active offering. They felt that it would be a good hub for the community and attract users from further afield.

The Committee were impressed with the number of activities on offer, and that these services were well organised. Members also agreed that the staff delivering those services were a credit to the Council showing positive attitude and genuine care towards others.

Areas for Improvement/Observations

The Committee were informed of the pricing structure for juniors in terms of accessing activities across our Leisure Centres, and the different pricing structures in place, which had been designed to suit the needs of the users. These were as follows:

- Junior membership which includes unlimited visits to the pool, gym and aquafun - £19/month
- JustDoMore+ membership which is linked to an adult's membership - £12/month
- Pay as You Go, fees vary depending upon the activity (this is also applicable to ad-hoc activities such as soft play, holiday camps, roller discos etc).

Members felt that the cost for children/teenagers to access the Council's leisure facilities were slightly high. Although they appreciated that membership gave the users access to unlimited visits to the pool, gym and aquafun, they felt that the initial £19/month membership was still too high especially during the current cost of living crisis. The Committee recognised that the cost of the membership for children/teenagers would reduce to £12/month if linked to a parent/carer membership but this was relying on the child/teenager having an adult member signed up, which would not always be the case, and the Committee agreed that the membership pricing structure for children/teenagers should be explored.

In addition, the Committee discussed the possibility of exploring a voucher scheme to reduce leisure access costs for those families who use local Food Banks and/or are on benefits.

The Committee noted that the Council was promoting the services and activities it offered through a number of different channels which included targeted marketing through social media, leaflets, magazines, and the Council's website. The Committee felt that most of the marketing was targeted towards adults i.e. the parents of children/teenagers, and agreed that it may be beneficial to target children/teenagers directly whether that be through schools or other means. They also felt that by having a questionnaire/survey aimed at children/teenagers to directly respond may be useful so that the Council can hear their views on what they would like to see in the future.

CONCLUSION

Given the discussions at the Communities Scrutiny Committee they agreed to make specific recommendations to Cabinet. These are:

- (1) Review fees and charges around young person activities to ensure activities are inclusive and accessible for all young people, reporting the outcome to committee.
- (2) Increase the offering to open up the membership to allow access to more activities such as Tag Active, soft play or access to other fitness classes.
- (3) Increase engagement with older children/teenagers, this includes targeting non-users as well as current users, by way of questionnaire/survey out to schools within the District and using social media channels. Reporting the outcome back to committee.
- (4) Targeted promotion of the activities we have on offer to children, specifically older children/teenagers.
- (5) Encourage young people to engage in sports and leisure activities, not just within our Leisure Centres but also outside the Leisure Centres such as Extreme Wheels, Climbing Walls, outdoor sports i.e. football and running.

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