

Briefing Note

Title: Physical activity and sports action plan

Committee name: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 24 February 2025

Responsible officer: Richard Gibson, Head of communities, wellbeing & partnerships

This note provides information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Cabinet or a committee but where no decisions from Members are needed.

If Members have questions relating to matters shown, they are asked to contact the officer indicated.

This briefing note is provided to the Committee to update it on the development of the Council's Physical activity and sports action plan. The action plan is scheduled to be presented to Cabinet on 8 April 2025 and will also be discussed by Overview and Scrutiny at its meeting on 31 March 2025.

The note sets out a summary of the work undertaken to date – and the key recommendations from this work, a summary of demographic information and the results of consultation and engagement. Together, these elements provide the context for the drafting of the action plan

Summary of progress to date

In the council's corporate plan 2023-2027, we set out our commitment to:

“Work with partner organisations to develop a sports strategy for Cheltenham, to improve and further develop sport provision and help ensure more opportunities for external funding in order to improve health and wellbeing opportunities for local people”

In 2023, the Council worked collaboratively to develop an overarching [vision for physical activity and sport](#) that was agreed by Cabinet in July 2023.

Cheltenham is a place where everyone has the opportunity to enjoy and benefit from physical activity and sports, creating active, healthy and happy communities.

This vision was supported by three outcomes:

- Our physical and community infrastructure is accessible and affordable but also high-quality and sustainable;
- Cheltenham is a place where all our communities enjoy and benefit from physical activity and
- We will collaborate to create active and inclusive communities.

The Council also committed to updating its playing pitch and built leisure and sports facilities strategies. These strategies provide a picture of current infrastructure and how well it meets future needs, along with a set of recommendations to improve provision.

Work on the strategies commenced in July 2023 with work on the [Built Leisure and Sports Facilities strategy](#) being reported to Cabinet in April 2024. [The Playing Pitch strategy](#) was prepared on a longer timeframe to enable the full assessment of both winter and summer sports provision. This was presented to Cabinet in July 2024.

Cabinet also endorsed the move to the third phase which will see an over-arching physical activity and sports action plan which is planned to be presented to Cabinet on 8 April 2025.

Cabinet in April 2024 also agreed to commission consultants to undertake an options appraisal of the future provision of Leisure at Cheltenham and the Prince of Wales stadium.

The built leisure and sports facilities and playing pitch strategies

A summary of the key findings and recommendations from the Built Leisure and Sports Facilities Strategy are as follows:

- Sports Halls (Leisure At Cheltenham). Given its importance as the only year-round public sports facility in the borough, plus its extensive off-peak availability and proximity to communities that might have greater health inequalities, recommendation that CBC consider options for the future of the site;
- Sports Halls (community-based). Work in partnership with schools to increase community access to sports halls via community use agreements, and encourage investment/modernisation where community access is given;
- Swimming Pools (Leisure At Cheltenham). Consideration of options to ensure that future water space meets the demand of the local population and maximises flexibility in programme delivery;
- Swimming Pools (community-based). Despite Cheltenham having large supply of pool space, the recommendation is to retain and invest in the pool sites and encourage access to school sites through good communication, partnership and community use agreements;
- Prince of Wales Stadium – Given that England Athletics (EA) see the venue as being strategically important in the South West with three affiliated athletics clubs based there, work with EA to lever capital investment into the resurfacing the track to protect its long-term future;
- Tennis - Recommendation to protect park tennis and explore opportunities for an indoor tennis centre;
- Village Halls – Recommendation to explore opportunities for village halls to take more sports that do not require a high sports hall ceiling;
- Bowls – protect existing bowls greens through the local plan;
- Indoor Cricket – consider working with Gloucestershire County Cricket to find and provide suitable accommodation for cricket clubs to access indoor cricket facilities;
- Wheeled Sports – consider building a new skatepark as part of the strategic housing development at North-West Cheltenham; and
- Community use agreements – Recommendation to protect community access to school-based sports facilities.

The key findings and recommendations from the Playing Pitch Strategy include:

- Football – 44 sites that provide 95 pitches. Via the local football facility plan, the recommendation is to develop a prioritised plan for sites with poorer-quality grass pitches and poor-quality ancillary facilities and protect security of access to school sites;
- 3G pitches - There is only one 3G pitch in Cheltenham at All Saints Academy meaning a shortfall of 4 full size artificial grass pitches. Via the local football facility plan, the recommendation is to develop a prioritised plan to secure investment in 3G pitches;
- Rugby - 43 rugby union pitches within the Borough across 15 sites, 28 pitches are on education sites. The recommendation is to protect and improve pitches;
- Hockey – 5 clubs with 25 teams – the recommendation is to address the lack of access to artificial pitches;
- Cricket - 12 sites in the Borough that provide 22 grass cricket pitches - the recommendation is to increase pitch capacity on council owned sites;

Demographic data

From the latest Sport England data (Nov 22-23) from Sport England, 71% of Cheltenham's population are considered to be active (exercising for at least 150 minutes a week) and 18.9% are considered to be inactive (exercising for fewer than 30 minutes a week) Although this compares favourably with 21.5% inactive for the county and 25.7% inactive nationally, there are areas of Cheltenham and groups of people where inactivity levels will be higher. In addition 30.9% of children and young people are classed as less active.

Low income - People living in our lower income neighbourhoods are at risk of lower activity levels. Nationally, 1.5 times people are classed as inactive in the most deprived communities (33.7%) when compared to the least deprived communities (20.5%).

Disabled people – Nationally, we know that 40.8% of people who class themselves as disabled are inactive compared to only 20.7% who class themselves as non-disabled – a participation gap of c.20%.

Ethnicity - Nationally, 33% of people from the Asian ethnic group are classed as inactive, compared to 24.3% of people from white British origin.

Younger women - Whilst similar rates of adult women are classed as active when compared to men, school data from the Gloucestershire online pupil survey showed that whilst 60% of boys do the recommended level of activity, only 48% of girls achieve this. In addition, 46% of girls don't exercise because they find it embarrassing compared with only 21% of boys.

Children and young people – from Sport England's active lives data for children and young people (2023-24), whilst 48.3% of children are active in Cheltenham (doing the recommended average of 60 minutes or more a day), 30.9% are classed as less active (less than an average of 30 minutes of activity a day).

Consultation and Engagement

The council carried out a physical activity survey between Jan and March 2024 and which had 163 responses.

- 87% of respondents felt either reasonably or very active;
- 90% of respondents are either reasonably or very interested in being more active;
- Over 60% of respondents enjoy being active either around their neighbourhood, in local parks or in the countryside.

Top 5 ways of keeping active:

Option	Total	Percent
1. Walking	104	63.80%
2. Cycling	45	27.61%
3. Running	44	26.99%
4. Pilates / yoga	44	26.99%
5. Indoor swimming	38	23.31%

Top 5 barriers:

Option	Total	Percent
1. Costs of taking part	68	41.72%
2. Lack of time	53	32.52%
3. Having to book in advance, or be a member	38	23.31%
4. Feeling nervous to start a new activity or go to a new place	34	20.86%
5. Getting to places to be active	29	17.79%

The action plan will also draw on engagement with local young people via the work carried out by the St. Giles Trust over the Summer of 2024. In the survey, which had 578 responses and which was reported to [Cabinet in February 2025](#), young people told us that their most popular free time activities were

1. hanging out with friends (62%);
2. online activities (59%);
3. and sport/physical activity (45%).

Given the interest of young people in sport and physical activity, there are three recommendations from the St. Giles Trust. These are:

1. Enhance sports infrastructure: Investment in youth-specific sports facilities such as more gyms, football pitches, and recreational areas to meet demand;
2. Offer affordable physical activity programmes: Collaborating with local sports organisations to offer free or low-cost programmes to help remove financial barriers and increase participation;
3. Promote inclusive sports opportunities: Developing programmes that cater to a wide range of interests and abilities will ensure all young people, regardless of skill level, feel welcome to participate.

Summary of key themes for the physical activity and sports action plan – grouped by outcome:

<p>Our physical and community infrastructure is accessible and affordable but also high-quality and sustainable</p>	<p>How to address the shortfall in 3G pitches.</p> <p>How to secure additional investment into improving the quality of pitches and ancillary facilities at sites where these are identified as being poor.</p> <p>How to ensure that Leisure At Cheltenham and the Prince of Wales Stadium continue to play a vital role in the health and wellbeing of our community.</p>
<p>Cheltenham is a place where all our communities enjoy and benefit from physical activity</p>	<p>How to address inactivity inequalities faced by people on low incomes, young people, disabled people and people from ethnically diverse communities.</p> <p>How to build capacity within sporting clubs and associations so that they can meet demand – particularly in communities that have less access to professional support and resident capacity.</p>

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	How to ensure that our parks have a range of non-sporting options available to keep people active.
We will collaborate to create active and inclusive communities.	<p>How to ensure that local schools continue to provide access to sporting and physical activity infrastructure.</p> <p>How to ensure that Cheltenham is seen as a priority for funding decisions made by Sport England and the various sporting national governing bodies.</p> <p>How to ensure that sports and physical activity are seen as priorities when it comes to the planning system and the use of s.106 and CIL funds.</p> <p>How to support a network of sporting and physical activity providers.</p>

Care will be taken to ensure that the action plan, that is scheduled to be presented to Cabinet on 8 April 2025 and discussed by Overview and Scrutiny at its meeting on 31 March 2025, can realistically be delivered within available staff and financial resources.

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