

The Facilities Improvement Service

How has the service come about?

The DCMS, Audit Commission and Sport England have all independently come to the conclusion that there is the need to develop a specialist service to provide a stronger focus on support for Local Authorities (LAs) in ensuring the provision of a range of good quality, sustainable and demand led community sports facilities.

In June 2006, the Audit Commission published a report titled “Public sports and recreation services – making them fit for the future.” Within this report, a number of criticisms were made towards the strategic planning of facilities, resulting in poor provision in terms of location, quality and failure to meet changing needs and customer expectations. Within the report’s recommendations, there was identified a need to ensure that LAs improved their strategic planning of sport and recreation provision by assessing current and future needs, collaborating with other sectors and working across boundaries in the procurement, planning and delivery of services. In addition, there was a need for LAs to appraise options for facility provision in a transparent way, testing the market to ensure that the best options were identified.

Traditional means of facility funding, such as Lottery is diminishing. Public spending on sport and recreation has fallen in real terms over the past 10 years. This has left us with a portfolio of facilities which are out of date, poor quality, often in the wrong place and without the investment required to offer a needs led product to drive up participation.

New investment is occurring, via Building Schools for the Future (BSF), Learning and Skills Council, Planning Gain and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), but without a clear strategic vision and direction at the local level, the impact of such investment will fail to be maximised.

There is therefore a clear need for change, with radical new approaches towards the investment and provision of sports facilities. There is therefore a need to work in partnership to deliver this step change, and, encourage others to follow suite.

Who will we work with?

Sport England has put in place the Facilities Improvement Service which will be delivered by experts in the field. The service will facilitate strategic change management within LAs to improve the ways in which they plan for sport and recreation, with the emphasis of challenging existing thinking and engrained cultures. LAs will be encouraged to develop a



robust understanding and assessment of need by being trained in the use of key strategic planning tools such as Active Places Power, which will then underpin LAs planning for sport.

The service will work with up to 3 LAs per region per annum. Demand for the service is already high; therefore priority selection criteria using participation data from Active People and Facilities data from Active Places will be used to draw up a prospective list of LAs. Further engagement and final selection will be determined by further dialogue with each individual authority.

What outputs will be achieved?

- The development and implementation of one or a number of strategies such as a sports facility strategy, playing pitch strategy or a PPG17 needs assessment.
- Increased capacity of LA staff to plan for sport more effectively using a robust understanding of need.
- Local Authority achieving more integrated and cohesive strategic planning, which will establish changes in relationship management so that all key agencies in the local area work together.
- Be in a position to make radical changes to facility provision and be better placed to utilise a wider range of funding opportunities
- Reduce subsidies by achieving increased utilisation and adopting new sustainable models.

What outcomes will be achieved?

Generally, it is hoped that the main outcome of this service will deliver a reshape in the future of sports facility infrastructure in England for the next generation. The work will begin to draw together a standard approach to planning facilities, which will then lead on to a much improved use of the many finance, procurement and management options which are currently and will be available.

The service will begin to ensure that the provision of sports facilities is done in a completely needs led, strategic fashion. This could result in a number of rationalised stock, new facilities in better locations that respond to local need, a change of programming or management and better use of the investment opportunities that exist through BSF and PFI.

LA's will be in a stronger position having improved their capability and skills to become more sophisticated in dealing with the next phases in the process for those that need/wish to develop new community sports provision. Ultimately, LAs will be much more able to respond to local need, and as such, be in a better position to provide facilities that will enable participation to increase.