

# Leisure Centre's Review

Feeding back to you

## Why we consulted

A public consultation exercise was instigated following a report to members of the Council's Cabinet on 2nd December 2014 detailing leisure savings proposals.

## When we consulted

2nd December 2014 to 16th January 2015

## How we consulted and who responded

- The main element of the consultation process was a survey, which was available on-line and in hard copy format. There were 3,699 responses to the survey.
- There were no significant differences in responses between genders, age, and leisure centre preference other than where identified in the feedback below.
- Residents were advised of the consultation through the council's website, emails to Gateshead Active Cardholders and displays within leisure centres.
- There have been meetings with stakeholders regarding the following leisure centres:
  - Gateshead Indoor Bowling Centre with the Gateshead Indoor Bowling Club, Gateway Studios
  - Birtley Leisure Centre with Competition Line UK Ltd
  - Dunston Activity Centre
  - Whickham Thorns Outdoor Activity Centre
  - Gateshead International Stadium
- The Gateshead Swimming Action Group was informed of the proposals at their meeting on 6th December 2014.
- Feedback was sought from Primary school Head Teachers regarding the impact the proposals might have on the organisation of school swimming as well as the introduction of a hire fee for school swimming of £70 per session for a maximum of 30 pupils
- The Council also received six separate petitions in relation to the review.

## Feedback

### Leisure centre use

Over 98% of respondents stated that they had used a leisure centre in the last 12 months. 56% of respondents were female with approximately 20% of respondents being from each 10 years age-group band from 25 years to 65 years and over. Over 95% of the respondents considered themselves to be white with just less than 7% of respondents considering themselves to have a disability however this increased to 18% of those who most used Gateshead Indoor Bowling Centre.

Respondents indicated which leisure centre(s) they most used.

Leisure Centre	Number of respondents	In addition, respondents were also most likely to use .....	No.	%
Dunston Leisure Centre	1111	Blaydon LC	441	40%
Gateshead Leisure Centre	1062	Heworth LC	299	28%
Blaydon Leisure Centre	963	Dunston LC	441	46%
Heworth Leisure Centre	727	Gateshead LC	299	41%
Dunston Activity Centre	519	Dunston LC	268	52%
Birtley Swimming Centre	473	Gateshead LC	166	35%
Gateshead International Stadium	400	Gateshead LC	193	48%
Birtley Leisure Centre	251	Birtley SC	133	53%
Gateshead Indoor Bowling Centre	235	No significant alternative		
Whickham Thorns Outdoor Activity Centre	147	Dunston LC	76	52%

The age distribution of respondents across the leisure centres they most used was reasonably consistent however Gateshead Indoor Bowling Centre had a greater proportion of respondents over 65 years and Gateshead International Stadium had a greater proportion of respondents aged 18 years to 34 years.

Women were the predominant users, based upon leisure centre preferences made within the survey, at Birtley Swimming Centre, Blaydon Leisure Centre, Dunston Activity Centre and Whickham Thorns Outdoor Activity Centre with men predominant at Gateshead International Stadium and Gateshead Indoor Bowling Centre. There was equal preference between genders at the remaining four leisure centres.

#### **Patterns of use at different times of day**

The respondents who use the leisure centres during the week favour the mornings (60%) and an evening between 5pm and 8pm (47%). The mornings (75%) are also most popular by the respondents who use leisure centres on a weekend. This reflects the analysis of usage information.

#### **Factors influencing choice of leisure centre(s)**

78% of respondents used their chosen facility as it was close to their home with 60% stating that the opening times were convenient. 26% stated that their chosen activity was only available at their preferred centre particularly those respondents who regularly use Gateshead Indoor Bowling Centre (61%) and Whickham Thorns Outdoor Activity Centre (56%). Further comments were received that club activities, a

particular member of staff and the condition / cleanliness of a leisure centre can all have a bearing upon the respondents preferred leisure centre.

### **Ways in which people travel to leisure centres**

78% of respondents stated that they used private transport to travel to a leisure centre, with respondents who used Blaydon Leisure Centre using private transport the greatest (86%). 30% of respondents walked to their preferred leisure centre particularly those who regularly used Dunston Activity Centre (39%), Heworth Leisure Centre (39%) and Gateshead Leisure Centre (34%). 21 % stated that travelling to another centre would be difficult. Only 14% of respondents used public transport with the highest proportion being those respondents who used Gateshead Indoor Bowling Centre (48%). Respondents can use multiple forms of transport to travel to a leisure centre, hence the figures don't equate to 100%.

### **Impact of proposals on use of leisure centres**

70% of respondents stated that the proposals would affect the way they use leisure centres, ranging from 55% at Blaydon Leisure Centre and 60% at Gateshead Leisure Centre, where minor changes were proposed, to 75% at Gateshead International Stadium and between 84-91% at all other centres. 73% stating that they would not be prepared to change the day or time they use their preferred leisure centre. 20% would use their preferred leisure centre at a different time and 12% stating they would go to an alternative leisure centre. Reasons quoted for not being flexible regarding their use of leisure centres included work commitments, personal preferences, travel restrictions, childcare, children's sleep patterns and a link to a particular activity or club. A number of respondents stated they wanted flexibility of when they could attend.

### **Willingness to pay more for leisure centre activities**

56% of respondents would not pay more for activities however those aged under 18 years and over 65 years were more willing to accept increased activity charges. 76% of respondents who are GO members would not be willing to pay more. Those respondents who used Gateshead Indoor Bowling Centre were more willing to accept increased prices with only 13% of respondents not willing to pay more.

### **Overall support for proposals**

60% of respondents stated that they were not happy with the proposals and did not support them. 5% were happy with the proposals and supported them, with a further 20% who were not happy with the proposals but understood the reasons why and support them. 14% had no strong feeling either way or did not know.

With regard to opening between Christmas and New Year the majority were in favour of opening before 10am with the greatest proportion suggesting 9am however opening 8am to 3pm would suit the majority of respondents.

### **Levels of interest in possible involvement in management committee**

4% of respondents would contribute to a management committee with some leaving their contact details. This was greater at Dunston Activity Centre (7%), Whickham Thorns Outdoor Activity Centre (10%) and Gateshead Indoor Bowling Centre (18%).

## Ideas for reducing costs/increasing income

The final question in the survey requested any suggestions to reduce costs or increase income of the leisure centres. The repeated suggestions were:

- Increase the general level of prices
- Lower the general prices of prices
- Reduce gym induction fee
- Introduce swimming charge for babies
- Reduce Active Card prices
- Increase the GO membership fees
- Reduce the GO membership fees
- Remove the concession price for GO members
- Create different GO membership categories
- Improve the promotion of activities
- Introduce a proactive sales team
- Introduce special promotional periods
- Allow cancellation of classes on-line
- Introduce a surcharge for non-attendance to classes
- Introduce parking fees
- Improve access control
- Resolve the issue of people sharing membership cards
- Turn lights off
- Introduce a café at Dunston and Blaydon Leisure Centre
- Too many staff on duty
- Increase sponsorship
- Engage with private sector to organise some activities
- Introduce a scheme of voluntary donations
- Seasonal opening times
- Hire out space to commercial organizations.

## Next steps

The council's budget for 2015-16 was agreed at Cabinet on 24th February 2015 and approved by Council on 26 February 2015. The results of the leisure centres review consultation were included in the [Cabinet Report](#). The report set out revised proposals, which are summarised below:

1. For the 3 specialist centres, the council will seek alternative ways to run the centres in the future. This could result in a community asset transfer, partnership or acquisition by a private company. If there is no alternative option for a centre the subsidy will cease from 1 October 2015 and the building will close. This could achieve a saving of £120,000. The 3 specialist centres are:
  - Dunston Activity Centre
  - Gateshead Indoor Bowling Centre
  - Whickham Thorns Outdoor Activity Centre
2. Review and renegotiate partnerships in order to reduce the council's subsidy. This could achieve a saving of £100,000. These opportunities will be explored for each centre but the centres with most potential are:
  - Gateshead International Stadium
  - Birtley Leisure Centre

3. The operational running of the Leisure centres will be reviewed. This will include the use of Casual staff, holiday and sickness cover, use of out of hours and premium rates of pay, catering and cleaning. This could achieve a saving of £100,000
4. Reduce the opening hours for the universal provision. The opening hours will not be reduced to the degree of the original proposals and efficiencies will also be achieved by reviewing shift patterns. This will achieve a saving of at least £180,000. See the [Cabinet Report](#) for details of recommended changes to opening hours.