

From: Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services

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To: Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee – 2 March 2021

Subject: Sport and Physical Activity Service – new service delivery model

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of report: n/a

Future Pathway of report: n/a

Electoral Division: all Divisions

Summary: This report provides an overview of the Sport and Physical Activity Service at Kent County Council (KCC), outlining its leading role in delivering a programme of activities across each of the districts in Kent, to realise the local vision 'More People, More Active, More Often'. The report outlines a recent review of the service and proposal to implement a new delivery model to position it as the strategic lead for sport and physical activity, responding to the recently published 10-year strategy for Sport England whilst making an even greater contribution to achieving wider outcomes for Kent and Medway.

Recommendation(s):

Members of the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee are asked to note and comment on the contents of this report.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Kent Sport and Physical Activity Service is a 'blended' service comprising Kent County Council (KCC) funded staff and Sport England funded staff - the Active Partnership for Kent and Medway - working together as the lead single team for sport and physical activity for the county of Kent. The blended service has existed since the County Sport Partnerships (now Active Partnerships) were launched nationally in 2005 and prior to this, there was a Sports Development Unit at KCC.
- 1.2 The service works with a range of partners across Kent and Medway including local authorities, leisure providers, sport governing bodies and community safety teams, as well as the education, planning, transport, health, adult social care and, critically, voluntary and community sectors. It seeks to reduce levels of inactivity and provide opportunities for people and communities to engage in sport and physical activity for their enjoyment, contributing to the achievement of wider health and social outcomes. This is in alignment with the five 'Big

Issues' identified in the 10-year (post Covid-19 pandemic) strategy for Sport England:

- Recover and reinvent;
- Connecting communities;
- Positive experiences for children and young people;
- Connecting with health and wellbeing; and
- Active environments

- 1.3 In partnership with School Games Organisers, it is the Sport and Physical Activity Service that coordinates and manages the delivery of the highly successful countywide Kent School Games programme. Delivery has continued throughout the Covid-19 pandemic via online individual and team challenges to help young people keep physically active. This included the My Active Rainbow Challenge involving over 400 primary aged young people in a series of challenges and rewards, including Kent School Games medals.
- 1.4 For secondary school aged young people, the service delivers the Satellite Club programme, providing opportunities for young people to try new activities and helping to bridge the gap from school sport to community clubs. Delivery has continued virtually during the past year and included over 900 young people involved in online box fit, hockey, basketball and handball sessions.
- 1.5 The service is also working with health partners and leisure providers to ensure that there are activities available which suit those who are less active and will benefit their long-term health and wellbeing. This has included the launch of the new Everyday Active website to support health professionals to have productive conversations with patients about physical activity and equip them to provide appropriate local activity suggestions.
- 1.6 Kent's Sporting Memories project, managed and co-ordinated by the Sport and Physical Activity Service, was recently announced as the winner of two national Community Archive and Heritage Group awards. The project explores, preserves and promotes the rich history of sport in east Kent through oral history and reminiscence sessions. The activities contribute to improving the mental and physical well-being of older people (50+), in particular, those experiencing social isolation and loneliness and those living with dementia through tapping into their passion, knowledge and love of sport.

2. Supporting Covid-19 response and recovery

- 2.1 Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, the importance of exercise and physical activity in terms of both physical and mental health has been increasingly recognised and remains a highly prominent feature of Government guidance and policy. At the outset of the first lockdown, the Chief Medical Officer for England stated:

“There is no situation, there is no age and no condition where exercise is not a good thing.”

- 2.2 The pandemic has caused severe disruption to, and had a significant impact on, the sport and physical activity sector. The Sport and Physical Activity Service

has responded by playing a pivotal part in supporting the sector and encouraging Kent's residents to be active, as well as tackling inequalities in participation levels.

- 2.3 The service has secured over £250,000 of external funding to support the sport and physical activity sector. This has included the ongoing management and distribution of two grant aid funded streams; an 'Everyday Active' small grants programme and a 'Tackling Inequalities' funding programme. The small grants programme provides support to clubs and organisations whilst the Tackling Inequalities funding is aimed at reducing the impact of Covid-19 and the widening inequalities in sport and physical activity.
- 2.4 There is also a strong relationship between the Sport and Physical Activity Service and Explore Kent Service, led by KCC. Explore Kent provides a wealth of information about 'low barrier to entry' physical activities such as walking and cycling, and quality assures a significant number of promoted routes by working closely with the Public Rights of Way and Access Service. During the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been an unprecedented level of demand for this information. There have been circa 100,000 downloads of route guides in the first half of 2020/21 and this represents an almost doubling of the number compared to the same period in 2019/20. These physical activities serve to connect people to nature and natural spaces to benefit their mental health.

3. Kent Sport and Physical Activity Service Review

- 3.1 The blended model, comprising KCC and Sport England funded staff working together as a single team, is hosted by KCC. There is a Partnership Board (the Kent and Medway Active Partnership Board) that acts as an independent governing board for the Active Partnership and this oversees, scrutinises and guides delivery. KCC is represented on the Board that also includes cross-sectoral representation, including school sport, further education, elite sport and public health. The relationship between KCC (as host) and the Board is underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding.
- 3.2 In the summer of 2020, an independent review of the blended model was commissioned by KCC. There were three key strategic drivers for the review; the emerging (as was) 10-year (2021-2031) strategy for Sport England, the response and recovery to the Covid-19 pandemic and the retirement of the postholder simultaneously occupying the Head of Service and Active Partnership Director role.
- 3.3 The independent review included:
 - A desk-based review of key strategic documents including business plan objectives and annual achievements;
 - A review of the two primary models (hosted and independent) for Active Partnerships, alongside the respective governance, staffing and financial structures in operation across England;
 - A series of stakeholder interviews including with, for example, the KCC Cabinet Member, Chairman of the Kent and Medway Active Partnership Board, Sport England and other local and regional stakeholders; and
 - Staff workshops engaging both KCC and Sport England funded staff.

- The review appraised four options:
 - A fully independent Active Partnership where it would be established as a separate legal entity and KCC would continue to invest through a funding or commissioning arrangement;
 - Blended model merged into a single Active Partnership team hosted by a third party and KCC would continue to invest through funding and/ or commissioning of the Partnership;
 - Maintaining the existing status quo; and
 - Blended model merged to a single Active Partnership team 'actively' hosted by KCC.
- 3.4 In the backdrop of the current economic climate, the review identified the need for the value of the sport and physical activity agenda to be strengthened to enable a greater contribution to the achievement of positive social, economic and environmental outcomes. It recognised that whilst fundamental changes to the current delivery model were not required, maintaining the status quo would not enable the Sport and Physical Activity Service to position itself in a strategic lead role, and properly influence systems change as required by Sport England and to achieve related strategic outcomes across Kent and Medway.
- 3.5 The review concluded that an evolved operating model (the fourth option outlined at paragraph 3.4) represents the preferred option. This would maintain the hosting relationship with KCC given the benefits this provides but would also seek to simplify the governance arrangements to provide the Active Partnership with greater independence to establish its position as the strategic lead for sport and physical activity in Kent and Medway, increasing its future level of impact. The preferred option would enable the delivery of the required 'step-change' but would also maintain a greater degree of stability given the current dynamic nature of the wider operating environment.
- 3.6 The other three options appraised were discounted for a variety of factors including, for example:
- Option one - there is no real evidence that a fully independent Active Partnership can achieve a greater impact or enjoy more security than a hosted model;
 - Option two - no preferential third-party host was identified but stakeholders did raise a number of concerns about alternative host providers although in the current economic climate, no willing or able alternative has come forward; and
 - Option three - maintaining the status quo would not address issues such as leadership and profile, leading to a potentially adverse impact on momentum in view of the transformational opportunities provided by the Covid-19 response to strengthen the value of sport and physical activity to positively contribute to a wider range of outcomes (option three).

4. Implementation

- 4.1 It is proposed that the implementation of the preferred option to merge the blended model to a single Active Partnership team is progressed without delay and commences with the appointment of an Active Partnership Director in

spring 2021. This is a key leadership role and will drive the strategic positioning of sport and physical activity across a wide range of key agendas at KCC and more widely, with regional and national partners.

- 4.2 The merger of the blended model would see the creation of a single body of Active Partnership staff. The service review did not consider organisational structures. However, given the proposed change to the operating model, it was recommended that the Active Partnership reviews the current staffing structure to ensure it is well placed to respond to the level of investment from core funders and the outcomes they articulate. The new Active Partnership Director will play a lead role in taking forward this recommendation and KCC has a well-established Service Re-design approach to underpin this process.
- 4.3 The preferred option would continue to see KCC host the Active Partnership and retain its representation on the Kent and Medway Active Partnership Board. However, the role of the County Council would be as an 'active host', where it sets out clear and defined outcomes to be achieved in return for its investment (outlined in Section 5). This allows the County Council to retain its commitment but simplifies the structure of the team. The Active Partnership would also be required to establish outcome-based measurements aligned to a new strategy for sport and physical activity in Kent and Medway.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no financial implications arising from the proposal for the blended model to merge into a single Active Partnership team.
- 5.2 The investment by KCC in the Sport and Physical Activity Service will be reduced by £100,000 in 2021/22, from £311,300 in 2020/21. This reduction has been offset by an investment of £100,000 in 2021/22 from the Public Health Grant.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 This report introduces Members to the Sport and Physical Activity Service at a critical moment when the importance and value of exercise and physical activity continues to be championed, particularly for its benefits on both physical and mental health. The key recommendation emerging from a recent service review provides a significant opportunity to for the service to deliver transformational change across Kent and Medway, building upon the momentum established during the Covid-19 pandemic and embedding sport and physical activity in the range of policy responses to follow.

7. Recommendation(s)

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Members of the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee are asked to note and comment on the contents of this report.

8. Background Documents

- 8.1 Towards an Active County - A Strategic Framework for Sport and Physical Activity in Kent and Medway 2017-2021 - https://www.kentsport.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Strategic_Framework_2019_Refresh_Web.pdf
- 8.2 Sport England (2021) Uniting the Movement - a 10-year vision to transform lives and communities through sport and physical activity - <https://www.sportengland.org/why-were-here/uniting-the-movement>

9. Contact details

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