



**Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council**  
**Personal And Cultural Services Scrutiny Panel**

**Report On The Panel's Scrutiny Of  
Tameside Sports Trust  
2002**

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## 1. Terms Of Reference

The following Terms of Reference were approved by the Panel at its meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2001.

“ To consider the provision of leisure and sports facilities by the Tameside Sports Trust”

## 2. Members Of The Panel 2001/2002

Councillor Bell (Chair), Councillor A Doubleday (Deputy Chair)  
Councillors Craven, Joe Fitzpatrick, P Harrison, Hilditch, Middleton and P Wright

The responsibilities of this Scrutiny Panel were realigned in 2002/2003 but the majority members involved in this review remained with this Panel.

## 3. Method Of Review

3.1 The Panel undertook visits to all ten Sports Trust facilities, facilities at neighbouring local authorities and private facilities in Tameside on the dates indicated as follows; and would wish to thank all those staff for their co-operation, candor and courtesy:-

**Tameside Sports Trust** - 26<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> March 2002

Ashton Pools  
Denton Pools  
Medlock Leisure Centre  
Droylsden Pool  
Dukinfield Pool  
Hyde Leisure Pool  
The Longdendale Recreation Centre  
Etherow Gymnastic Centre  
The Copley Leisure Centre  
The Broadoak Centre

**Neighbouring authorities** - 6<sup>th</sup> April 2002

Grand Central Recreation Centre, Stockport  
Chadderton Sports Centre, Oldham

**Private Facilities** - 6<sup>th</sup> April 2002

The Village Hotel, Dukinfield  
Indigo, Denton

3.2 Mystery Shopping surveys were undertaken by the Quality Audit Team of the ten Sports Trust facilities.

- 3.3 A non-user survey was undertaken by an external market research company on behalf of the Panel.
- 3.4 The Panel interviewed Councillor Philip Wilkinson, Cabinet Deputy, Tameside MBC, Council nominated representative on the Sports Trust along with Mr Jim Burns, Head of Recreation, Tameside MBC, officer responsible for monitoring of the Tameside Sports Trust on behalf of Tameside MBC.

Both Councillor Wilkinson and Mr Burns were asked a series of questions relating to Tameside MBC's perspective of the Tameside Sports Trust in terms of monitoring of information and strategic issues relating to sports in Tameside to ascertain what the authority expected from the Trust and whether this was being achieved.

- 3.5 The Panel met Mr. Gordon Jacques, Chair of the Board of Directors, and Mr Sam Parker, General Manager and Mr. Stuart Bingham, Business Services Manager of the Sports Trust. The Panel questioned the representatives of the Sports Trust about the operation of sports facilities in Tameside, funding, performance monitoring, improvements made to facilities and future plans for development.

## **4. Panel Members Observations Of Facilities**

### **4.1 Tameside Sports Trust Facilities**

- 4.1(a) Members were impressed by the willingness of staff who gave up their time to make the Centres more attractive and comfortable for customers. Complimentary health and beauty therapies were available at Dukinfield Pool via partnership working. Staff were also very helpful and knowledgeable about the facilities on offer.
- 4.1(b) Panel Members raised concern that disabled access was an issue at facilities. There were access problems around centres even if people with a physical disability could get into the building. Concern was raised as to the level of consultation with people with a disability.
- 4.1(c) Waiting lists for swimming lessons were long. It was unclear what monitoring measures were in place to ascertain how many children living in Tameside were unable to swim and this should be considered by Education and Cultural Services.
- 4.1(d) Concerns were expressed as to the fabric of buildings which were not designed and built to meet the current and future needs of the service and had deteriorated due to long term lack of investment.

## **5. Mystery Visits And Telephone Enquiry**

- 5.1 The Quality Audit Team, Tameside MBC carried out telephone surveys and undertook mystery customer visits to all of the Tameside Sports Trust facilities, this exercise was completed in February 2002.

### **Mystery Guest Visits**

- 5.2 The criteria for this exercise was one which was produced by QUEST and used by the leisure industry to ensure a relevant and consistent approach.
- 5.3 Services at the facilities differed considerably. Where additional investment had been made by the Sports Trust, the facilities had greatly improved.
- 5.4 The positive aspects identified throughout this exercise were the improvements where there had been additional investment and front line staff, who generally were helpful and courteous. There were some instances of lack of information and situations where advanced information would have prevented the mystery guest experiencing problems later in the visit. No allowance was made for people who were making their first visit and in two visits assistance was received from other guests. The mystery visitors were pleased with the quality of cleanliness within the facilities, colourful and informative notice boards and the availability of a wide range of activities.
- 5.5 Monitoring and information regarding sunbed facilities differed considerably across facilities and there was the need for more formal information and instruction about their use.
- 5.6 Disabled access at the front entrances to the facilities was good in the majority of instances, however, disabled access within the facilities needed consideration.
- 5.7 Issues relating to individual Sports Trust Facilities were communicated separately to the Business Services Manager, who responded very positively, promising to instigate the appropriate action.

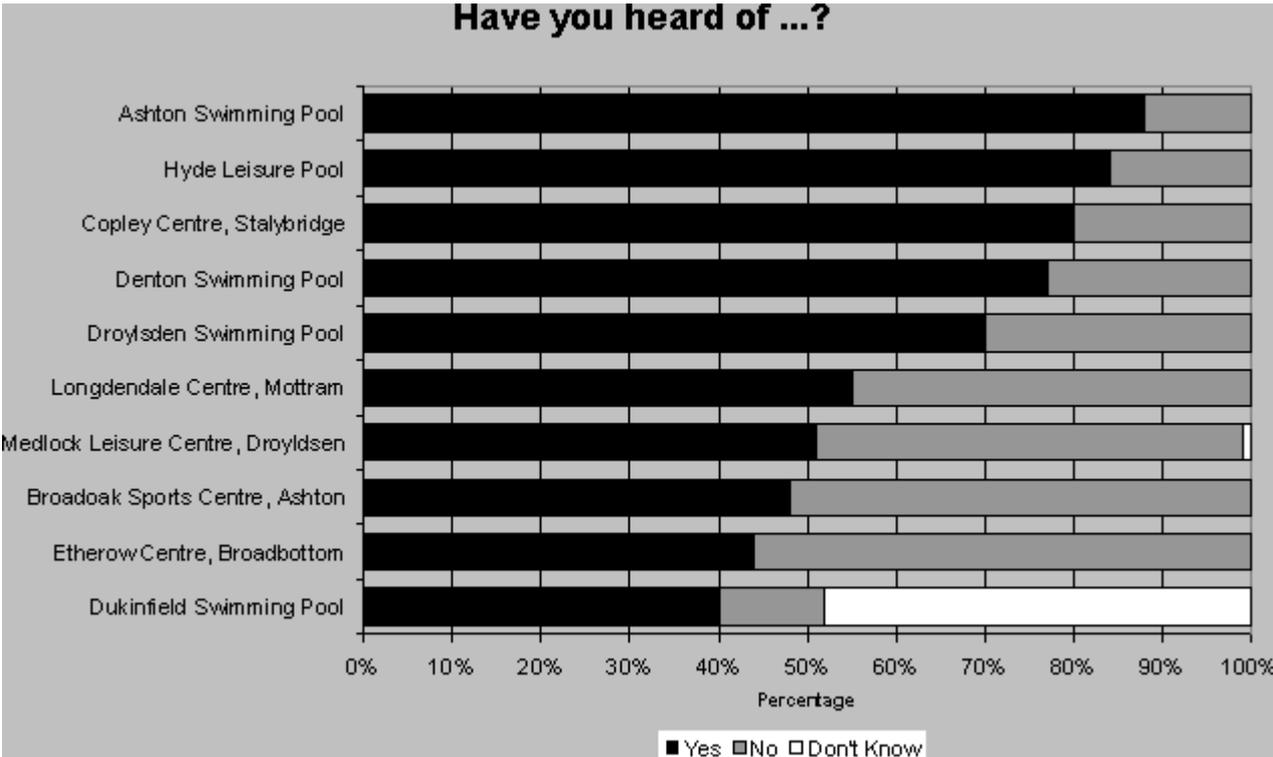
### **Mystery Guest – Telephone Enquiry**

- 5.8 Telephone response times were good with the majority of calls answered within 5 rings. Calls were generally politely answered and enquiries were comprehensively dealt with.
- 5.9 Staff had a clear understanding of the products on sale at the swimming pools and the facilities available and dealt with enquiries without having to refer to anyone else. The impression given was that staff were interested and friendly.

## **6. Non-User Survey**

- 6.1 The Scrutiny Panel commissioned the Policy Unit to undertake research in order to gain the views of Tameside residents who do not use Sport Trust facilities.
- 6.2 A questionnaire was developed jointly by the Sports Trust and the Policy Unit to ensure that the maximum amount of information be captured during the interview. A telephone survey was undertaken during March 2002.
- 6.3 In order to gain a wide range of views from all parts of the Borough, the research company interviewed 225 residents, divided equally across all nine towns in the Borough. 49% of residents were in full or part time employment, 32% were retired whilst the remaining were either not working or in education. 7% were under the age of 25, 63% were between 25 – 60 years and 30% were over 60. 64% of people had access to a car.
- 6.4 While understanding the importance of taking part in sport activities some people felt that they were unable or simply did not want to.
- 6.5 The types of activities people want to do are, in the main, on offer somewhere in the Borough although people may not be aware of this fact or they are not available at a time they want.
- 6.6 The cost of activities did not seem to be a factor although people would always want to do things for free.
- 6.7 Awareness of the Sports Trust was low.
- 6.8 People did seem to be aware of the Tameside Leisure Key Card scheme but did not understand the benefits.
- 6.9 Each respondent was asked if they had taken part in any sport or recreational activities during the last year with 44% responding in the affirmative, many undertaking two or more activities. The top five activities mentioned were swimming and water sports, walking, gym and keep fit, football and cycling.
- 6.10 Residents undertook their activities at a range of places from sports centres, swimming pools and community/school halls to playing fields and on the street outside their homes.
- 6.11 55% of people stated that they did not do any sport or recreational activity at all. The top four reasons given for this were no time/too busy, too old/disabled, health problems or were not interested in sport or recreational activities. None of the respondents identified issues around the cost of entrance, equipment or child care.
- 6.12 All respondents were asked if there were any activity they would like to take up in the future. In total, 26 separate activities were mentioned with the most popular being swimming, badminton, bowling and dancing. Other activities such as ice-skating, curling and volleyball were a few activities mentioned by individuals.

6.13 Respondents were asked about their awareness of the sport trust facilities. There was a mixed response with the larger facilities being the most well known. Smaller facilities had lower levels of awareness. Local residents knew more about their own towns facilities than ones located in other towns. The exception to this was Dukinfield swimming pool as 60% of people either had never heard of it or didn't know included local residents.



**7. Interview With The Cabinet Deputy, Community Services And The Head Of Recreation, TMBC**

7.1 The criteria used for appointments to the Board of Directors was the responsibility of the Board. Appointments would not only be made to people with sporting backgrounds but also with business/financial knowledge.

7.2 There were two representatives of the Council appointed to the Board.

7.3 The Sports Trust received grant from the Council to manage and organise these facilities to the same level as the budget allocation.

- 7.4 The Sports Trust had been able to achieve savings and attract considerable additional investment funding which had enabled the Trust to carry out improvements to facilities. For example, the programme of work in 2000/2001 was £100,000.
- 7.5 Since its inception the Sports Trust had marketed its facilities in a more assertive way, but this would only be successful if the Trust had good facilities to market and the aim was to ensure that they continued to be improved.
- 7.6 The proposals for the new centre at Medlock Street, Droylsden, would incorporate not only a new swimming pool but also a renovated sports centre which, it was proposed, would be a centre of excellence for people with disabilities.
- 7.7 The Sports Trust needed a clear identity and separate signage would help to this effect.
- 7.8 There was a need for improved performance measures and this was reflected in the revised performance measures that the Trust was introducing. Alternative systems measures available utilising for example swipe cards which would give useful information and it would be possible to investigate a link with the Connexions Service to increase the involvement of young people. Connexions will also have a Community Fund of nearly £2m and the Sports Trust can apply for funding.
- 7.9 The Trust was considering Performance Indicators based on quality rather than income, although these did appear to be some what limited.
- 7.10 Discussion also touched on the rationalisation of single site football pitches and the strategic provision of sports and changing facilities.

## **8. Interview With Mr Gordon Jacques, Chair Of The Board Of Directors, Mr Sam Parker, General Manager And Mr Stuart Bingham, Business Development Manager, Tameside Sports Trust**

- 8.1 Mr Jacques and Mr Parker set out the development of the Sports Trust which had received the ten Council facilities, staff and funding.
- 8.2 The priority for the Trust was to provide a wide range of services to the community within a balanced budget which also depended upon the allocation from the Council.
- 8.3 The Trust was looking forward to the new facility at Droylsden and also a £1m investment in sports pitches.

- 8.4 It was hoped that if funding was available the new facility at Droylsden would include a hydro pool for disabled children and existing facilities would also be improved. There was a £1m development plan which would provide eight, six a side, synthetic turf football pitches at The Copley and Medlock Centres.
- 8.5 The Sports Trust had a very limited budget for marketing, although this had slightly improved. There had been an attempt to change the image of the Sports Trust for the benefit of the consumer. There had been a culture change with staff and an ambitious management team had been given encouragement.
- 8.6 Concern was expressed about grant funding for the Trust, which inhibited its ability to plan ahead. For example, the amount of grant for 2002/2003 had been communicated to the Sports Trust, two weeks in the 2002/2003 financial year.
- 8.7 The Sports Trust was considering additional ways of providing more customer based services and better monitoring information. The use of swipe cards, although expensive, would capture more information. The Trust management was liaising with Leisure Services and IT Services to see whether this could be progressed.
- 8.8 The Council was reviewing the Leisure Key Scheme which could target certain priority groups.
- 8.9 It was felt that people still associated the Sports Trust with the local authority and it was accepted that this would take time to change. Improving services was a priority and it was hoped that the Trust's profile would increase as more people used the improved facilities.
- 8.10 Interest in activities such as swimming has declined in recent years, but things such as aqua fit were more popular – there was a need to respond to public demand
- 8.11 The sports Trust had been undertaking self assessment in the last 12 months to identify areas for improvement. The Trust was utilizing the QUEST material for assessment.
- 8.12 The Sports Trust was aware of certain difficulties for disabled people accessing the facilities. These had been inherited when the buildings were transferred from the Council. The Trust was awaiting the recommendations of a disability access survey for all its sports centres this report and would act upon them accordingly.
- 8.13 Development plans were prepared for each facility and there was a need to invest in replacement of equipment to keep premises open such as £40,000 for a new filtration system at Ashton pools and extensive refurbishment plans for other facilities.
- 8.14 Opening hours were being reviewed. Again these had been inherited from the Council.
- 8.15 A similar situation applied to the Sports Trust's charging policy which was being benchmarked with similar organisations, through the QUEST system.

- 8.16 Both Mr Jacques and Mr Parker stated that they had found the scrutiny exercise positive and had added value to the Trust's operations. The Trust operated with an open door policy and welcomed feedback. The Trust wanted to provide the best service possible and the mystery shopping exercise had proved very useful.

The Trust was a charitable limited company and was happy to co-operate and have an open relationship with the Council and its organisation.

## **9. The Borough Treasurer's Observations**

The Borough Recreation Officer and Borough Treasurer will work with the Tameside Sports Trust management, during 2002/2003 to agree a method of budget allocation which allows the Trust to improve its financial planning processes.

## **10. Conclusions**

- 10.1 The Panel felt that the Trust had made good progress during its period of operation and its ability to attract additional funding had fully vindicated the decision to establish it as a body separate to the Council.
- 10.2 There was a need for the Trust to project it self as a separate organisation separate from the Council and to leave behind the feeling of "Council Baths". The Trust needed to consider a more cohesive marketing strategy for its image and facilities. This should include more leaflets in ethnic minority languages, more advertising and the creation of a more distinctive, different web site.
- 10.3 There was a need for better performance monitoring information with the emphasis on quality issues. Consideration should be given to means of collecting and analysing customer data which would enable management to be able to target priority groups. The authority should also set performance targets for the Trust to meet in relation to its own priorities.
- 10.4 If the Trust was to prosper in a competitive commercial world, it needed to have greater opportunity to undertake long term financial planning and be aware of its funding from the Council over a more realistic period than year on year.
- 10.5 The staff employed at the centres visited by Members had indicated that they had commitment and enthusiasm for the Sports Trust.
- 10.6 Although the staff had exhibited clear customer care, further training and regular support would help this put more effectively into practice.
- 10.7 The new development at Medlock Street, Droylsden, was a great opportunity for the Trust to develop a new state of the art sports and leisure facility which could cater for all sections of the community.
- 10.8 There was a need for greater investment in the Council's sports pitches, whilst not depriving the community of facilities for informal play and recreation.

Management by the Sports Trust could provide for additional funding and improve their management.

- 10.9 The Trust was extending QUEST quality self assessment arrangements to all the Trust's facilities as an objective measure of performance and quality and this was welcomed by the Panel.
- 10.10 The scrutiny Panel, at its meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2002, was informed by the Head of Recreation that Councillor Wilkinson had resigned as a Council representative on the Board of Directors and nominated Councillor Sweeton as his replacement.

The Panel felt that it was more appropriate that the Council was represented on the Board of Directors of the Sports Trust by a non executive elected member who was not responsible for "liaison with the Tameside Sports Trust". It was noted, however, that the Council's other representative was not an elected member of this Council and it was felt that wherever possible, such representation should be undertaken by a Tameside Councillor.

Tameside's representatives should also have regular briefing/debriefing meetings with the Cabinet Deputy responsible.

## **11. Recommendations**

- 11.1 That the Trust endeavor to allocate further resources to marketing its separate image and the facilities that it can offer to members of the Tameside public, such as sports awareness and healthier Tameside fitness programmes.
- 11.2 That the ongoing programme of staff training relating to customer care be monitored and if necessary extended.
- 11.3 That the Trust undertake an audit of the disabled facilities in its swimming pools and sports centres to ensure that they comply with the provisions of disabilities discrimination legislation.
- 11.4 That the Council facilitate long term financial planning by the Trust, by giving a commitment to the amount of grant payments for more than one year at a time. This would enable the Trust to plan service improvements over a longer period with greater assurance.
- 11.5 That performance measures linked to meeting the Council's priorities be established.
- 11.6 That the use of the Tameside Leisure Key Card be promoted and linked to the provision of client/customer information.
- 11.7 That clearer links be established between the Trust's expectations and the Council's objectives that are measurable, to ascertain whether the Trust is meeting the objectives of the Council.