

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 23 April 2008

Agenda item: 12

Wards: All Wards

Subject: Reference from Regeneration and the Public Realm Overview and Scrutiny Panel: Scrutiny Review of Sports and Active Recreation Provision in Merton

Lead officer: Abdool Kara, Assistant Chief Executive

Lead member: Councillor Chris Edge, Chairman of the Regeneration and the Public Realm Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Key decision reference number: 632

Recommendations:

- a) That Cabinet considers the findings and recommendations from the Scrutiny Review of Sports and Active Recreation Provision in Merton and agrees a response and action plan to implement accepted recommendations to be submitted to scrutiny within two months of the Cabinet meeting date.
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1. Purpose of report and executive summary

- 1.1 To present to Cabinet the findings and recommendations of the Task Group appointed by the Regeneration and the Public Realm Overview and Scrutiny Panel to review sports and active recreation provision in Merton.
- 1.2 Cabinet is invited to consider the report and recommendations arising from the scrutiny review and agree a response and action plan to implement accepted recommendations.

2. Details

- 2.1 The Regeneration and the Public Realm Overview and Scrutiny Panel appointed a Task Group to carry out a review of sports and active recreation provision in Merton with a view to contributing to the Council's future thinking with regard to the provision of such services.
- 2.2 To carry out this review, the Panel established a task group, chaired by Councillor Marc Hanson, involving Councillors Jeremy Bruce, Karin Forbes, Stephen Kerin, Brian Lewis-Lavender and Russell Makin. The review aimed to look at existing council sports and active recreation provision, including the most appropriate way of delivering the service in the future. This included assessing future facility and structural requirements, and ensuring the right facilities are in place to meet local need, at the right cost, including the impact of changing populations on demand.
- 2.3 The Task Group reported their findings to the Regeneration and the Public Realm Overview and Scrutiny Panel, at their meeting held on 16 April 2008.

2.4 The Regeneration and the Public Realm Overview and Scrutiny Panel endorsed the recommendations of the Task Group for submission to Cabinet at this meeting.

3. Alternative options

3.1 Cabinet is constitutionally required to receive, consider and respond to recommendations emanating from overview and scrutiny within two months of receiving them at a meeting.

3.2 Cabinet is not, however, *required* to agree and implement overview and scrutiny recommendations. As such, Cabinet could choose to act on only some – or indeed none – of the recommendations set out in the review report.

4. Consultation undertaken or proposed

4.1 Details of this are contained in the review report. In addition to this, the review was publicised in the local press, council publications and on the council's website.

4.2 The findings of the Sports and Active Recreation Provision Task Group, and subsequent recommendations endorsed by the Regeneration and the Public Realm Overview and Scrutiny Panel, are intended to inform the Cabinet of scrutiny members' views when considering sports and active recreation provision in the Borough and how it can be improved.

5. Timetable

5.1 The Task Group met on a number of occasions prior to submitting its Final Report and conclusions to the Regeneration and the Public Realm Overview and Scrutiny Panel to endorse for submission to Cabinet at this meeting.

6. Financial, resource and property implications

6.1 None for the purposes of this report

7. Legal and statutory implications

7.1 None for the purposes of this report

8 Human rights, equalities and community cohesion implications

8.1 It is a fundamental aim of the scrutiny process to ensure that there is full and equal access to the democratic process through public involvement and engagement. The reviews involve work to consult local residents, community and voluntary sector groups, businesses, hard to reach groups, etc and the views gathered are fed into the review.

8.2 Scrutiny work involves consideration of the human rights, equalities and community cohesion issues relating to the topic being scrutinised.

9 Risk management and health and safety implications

9.1 There are none specific to this report. Scrutiny work involves consideration of the risk management and health and safety issues relating to the topic being scrutinised.

10. Appendices – the following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report

10.1 Appendix A – Final Report of the Sports and Active Recreation Provision Task Group

11. Background Papers – the following documents have been relied on in drawing up this report but do not form part of the report

11.1 Sports and Active Recreation Provision Task Group Meeting Notes

11.2 Minutes of the Meetings of the Regeneration and the Public Realm Overview and Scrutiny Panel

12. Contacts

- Report author:
 - Name: Kate Martyn
 - Tel: 020 8545 3857
 - email: kate.martyn@merton.gov.uk
- Meeting arrangements - Democratic Services:
 - email: democratic.services@merton.gov.uk
 - Tel: 020 8545 3356/3357/3359/3361/3616
- All press contacts - Merton's Press office:
 - email: press@merton.gov.uk
 - Tel: 020 8545 3181
- London Borough of Merton:
 - Address: Civic Centre, London Road, Morden, SM4 5DX
 - Tel: 020 8274 4901

13. Useful links

13.1 Merton Council's Web site: <http://www.merton.gov.uk>

13.2 Readers should note the terms of the legal information (disclaimer) regarding information on Merton Council's and third party linked websites.

13.3 <http://www.merton.gov.uk/legal.htm>

13.4 This disclaimer also applies to any links provided here.

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London Borough of Merton

Report and recommendations arising from the scrutiny review of sports and active recreation

Regeneration and the Public Realm
Overview and Scrutiny Panel
April 2008

Task group membership:

Councillor Marc Hanson (Chair)
Councillor Jeremy Bruce
Councillor Karin Forbes
Councillor Stephen Kerin
Councillor Brian Lewis-Lavender
Councillor Russell Makin
Councillor Dennis Pearce

Scrutiny support:

Kate Martyn, Scrutiny Manager

For further information relating to the review, please contact:

Address: Scrutiny Team
Chief Executive's Department
Merton Civic Centre
London Road
Morden
Surrey SM4 5DX
Tel: 020 8545 3857
E-mail: scrutiny@merton.gov.uk

Acknowledgements:

The task group would like to express its thanks and appreciation to all those residents, council staff and partners who contributed to this review, through preparing information and attending meetings to answer questions.

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Summary of recommendations

- 1 As part of its consideration of the future running of the three council-owned leisure centres, the Council should consider whether they could be run in partnership with either not-for-profit organisations, as in the example of Tooting & Mitcham Hub, or the private sector – as long as the principle of reasonably priced public access can be maintained.
- 2 There should be a council-owned leisure centre in Wimbledon that includes a swimming pool.
- 3 A review of the use of space at Wimbledon Leisure Centre should be undertaken with a view to establish what options are available to provide facilities within the Latimer Road building. The review should then include an assessment of what action is required to bring the building up to standard to provide these facilities.
- 4 In light of the conclusion of the space review, the council should investigate the potential for either a new facility in Wimbledon (constructed using the proceeds of the sale of the old site), or a comprehensive refurbishment of the existing building at Latimer Road.
- 5 A mixed-use leisure facility should be provided in Morden, preferably a new facility to replace Morden Park Pool.
- 6 The council's three leisure centres should include a basic facility mix comprising of – as a minimum – a main pool with adjacent sauna/ steam room, a teaching pool, a gym, and a flexible studio for fitness/ relaxation/ dance classes.
- 7 A large, flexible sports hall for indoor sports such as netball, badminton, five-a-side football, and squash courts should be provided in at least one of the council-owned leisure centres, although they are not necessary at each site.
- 8 The specification for the new leisure centres contract should incorporate a requirement, similar to the 'Kids swim for £1' scheme, to encourage children to use the facilities.
- 9 The lead Cabinet Member and officers should work with Greenwich Leisure Limited, the current holders of the leisure centre contract, to improve the cleanliness and state of repair of the centres.
- 10 The new leisure centre contract should contain clear targets and benchmarks for cleanliness and maintenance standards and increasing participation at all centres, along with a requirement to measure customer satisfaction regularly and work to improve satisfaction. The contract should also link payment to performance against these targets.

Introduction

- 1 At the beginning of the 2007/08 Municipal Year, the Regeneration and the Public Realm Overview and Scrutiny Panel decided to carry out a review of sports and active recreation in the borough, with a view to contribute to the Council's future thinking with regard to the provision of such services.
- 2 To carry out this review, the Panel established a task group, chaired by Councillor Marc Hanson, involving Councillors Jeremy Bruce, Karin Forbes, Stephen Kerin, Brian Lewis-Lavender and Russell Makin. The review aimed to look at existing council sports and active recreation provision, including the most appropriate way of delivering the service in the future. This included assessing future facility and structural requirements, and ensuring the right facilities are in place to meet local need, at the right cost, including the impact of changing populations on demand.
- 3 Members of the task group have consulted with the Sports Forum, Greenwich Leisure Limited and the Leisure Centres Advisory Committee as well as seeking views from the public. As part of the review, on 15 August 2007, the task group toured the borough's three leisure centres and the Tooting & Mitcham Hub.
- 4 This was followed by an exercise to gather the views of leisure centre users using a series of day-long sessions for task group members to speak directly to service users.

13 January 2008	Cllr Jeremy Bruce at Wimbledon Leisure Centre
15 January 2008	Cllr Brian Lewis-Lavender at Tooting & Mitcham Hub
16 January 2008	Cllr Brian Lewis-Lavender at Canons Leisure Centre
18 January 2008	Cllrs Karin Forbes and Russell Makin at Morden Park Pool
Sessions with leisure centre service users	

- 5 Members of the task group also visited leisure facilities in other boroughs to provide a comparison to the services available in Merton:
 - Rainbow Centre, Epsom¹
 - Xcel Centre, Elmbridge²
 - Phoenix Centre, Sutton³
- 6 To see a different model of leisure and sports provision in the borough, the task group also visited Tooting & Mitcham Hub, an example of a non-profit distributing organisation.
- 7 In light of the Cabinet's aim to agree how to structure leisure centres and associated facilities and services in the borough from December 2009 onwards, the Regeneration and the Public Realm Overview and Scrutiny

¹ <http://www.gll.org/borough/epsomandewell.asp>

² <http://www.elmbridge.gov.uk/leisure/facility/default.htm>

³ <http://www.sutton.gov.uk/leisure/leisurecentres/Phoenix+Centre/phoenixinfo.htm>

Panel agree to carry out this review to assist Cabinet in developing this thinking. This report identifies recommendations around:

- The number of public leisure centres required in the Borough;
- The preferred location of public leisure centres across the Borough; and
- The preferred facility mix within the council's leisure centres.

8 The recommendations from this Scrutiny Review that are approved by Cabinet will be considered for inclusion in the specification for the long-term leisure centre management contract.

Merton's existing leisure centre facilities

- 9 Merton has three public leisure centres: Canons Leisure Centre in Mitcham, Morden Park Pool and Wimbledon Leisure Centre, which are managed on behalf of the Council by Greenwich Leisure Limited.

Canons Leisure Centre Maderia Road, Mitcham	Morden Park Pool London Road, Morden Park	Wimbledon Leisure Centre Latimer Road, Wimbledon
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25m main pool • Teaching pool • Wellness fitness centre with over 100 stations • Dance studio • Low impact studio • Sports hall • Squash courts • Sauna suite • Crèche • Car parking available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 33.3m competition pool, including 4m diving facilities • Teaching pool • Wellness health and fitness centre with 30 stations • Sauna • Car parking available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30m main pool • Teaching pool • Wellness fitness centre with 85 stations • Dance studio • Separate free weights room • Crèche • Small car park
Facilities at each of the Council's leisure centres		

- 10 On 15 August 2007, the sports and active recreation task group undertook a tour of the Merton leisure centres⁴ and Tooting & Mitcham Hub, accompanied by Cllr Maurice Groves, Cabinet Member for Community Services.
- 11 At Morden Park Pool, the task group discussed the challenges the existing building and facilities pose the Council. Built in 1967, the Morden Park Pool building poses serious problems:
- There have been long-running problems with the tiling and the ceiling of the swimming pools and netting has had to be strung up to prevent debris falling from the ceiling above the main and teaching pools
 - The changing facilities are run down and in need of refurbishment.⁵
 - The main pool has four-metre dive pit, but one of the diving boards needs replacing. As part of the diving facilities, there is an underground viewing area which is now closed to the public as it is leaking. It would be very costly to repair
 - In addition to this, in general the fabric of the building is dated
 - The main 33.3m pool is an outdated size (modern pools tend to be a standard 25m length). There is a teaching pool, but modern pools tend to have larger teaching pools
 - The layout and space allocation of the building creates challenges:
 - The main pool has a large viewing gallery. This creates waste of space and modern pools do not usually have this kind of gallery,

⁴ The task group visited Morden Park Pool and Canons Leisure Centre on 15 August and visited Wimbledon Leisure Centre separately at a later date.

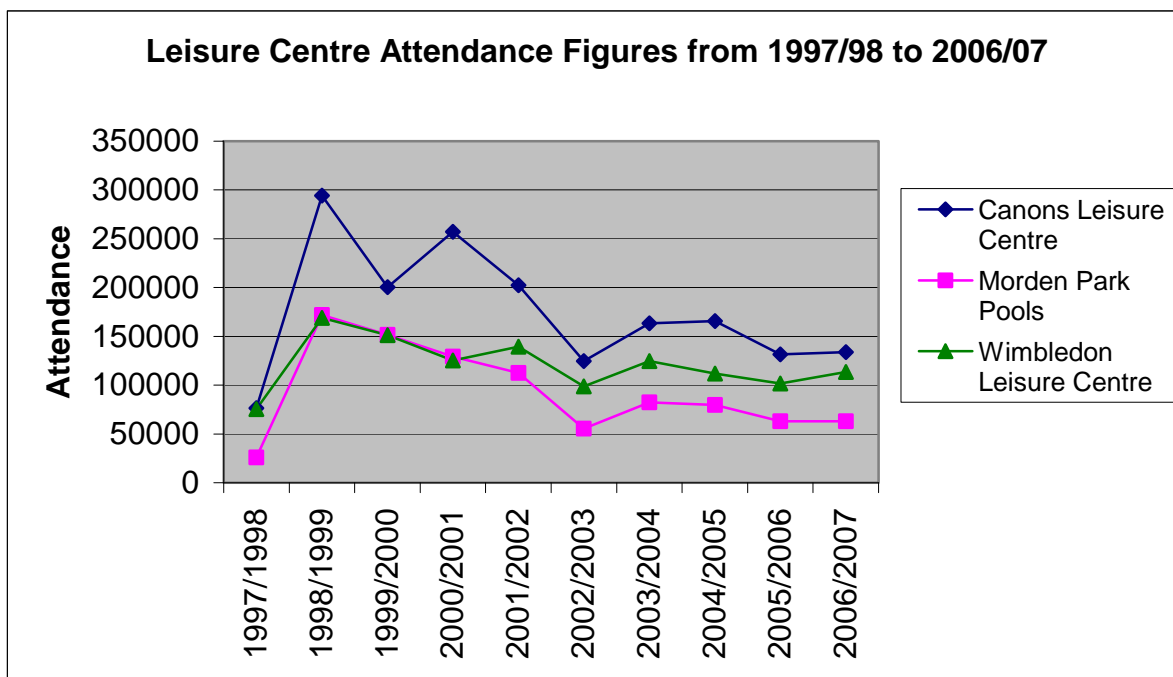
⁵ The task group notes that a contract has recently been let to refurbish the changing facilities at Morden Park Pool and works will commence in May 2008.

- generally tending to have multi-use areas, such as café areas overlooking the pool
- The sauna is located in a remote part of the building, which is not ideal.
 - The gym area is comparatively small, with only 30 fitness stations, due to the space constraints of the existing structure.
- 12 It is clear to the task group that significant work is required at Morden Park Pool to bring the existing facilities up to an appropriate standard, for example repairing the ceilings and the leaking diving viewing area, and refurbishing the changing facilities. But going further than this, the task group believes that the current building does not lend itself to the modern style of facilities that the council should provide.
- 13 At Canons Leisure Centre, a number of areas were recently refurbished in 2006, including the entrance/reception area, dance studio and the 100-station fitness suite. The members also viewed the changing facilities, the pools (and the main pool's Poseidon anti-drowning equipment), the main sports hall and the squash courts. In comparison with the Morden Pool complex, the Canons Leisure Centre is clearly in a better state of repair.
- 14 Wimbledon Leisure Centre, built 1901 as one of the original 'baths', houses a 30m main pool and small teaching pool, a large fitness suite and an exercise studio. Particular difficulties at Wimbledon Leisure Centre include the poor state of some of the group changing facilities and showers. However, a new area has recently been refurbished and opened to provide a modern 'village' changing area and a new sauna is planned for works to commence shortly. Part of the building is closed off following a fire in 1987, reducing some of the space available for use. However, there remain challenges due to the age of parts of the machinery, and potential problems with the glazed roof.
- 15 All three council leisure centres pose challenges with regard to the quality and state of the buildings, plant and machinery and there is a need for improvements or replacements to be made. In 2005-06, the Council set aside £500,000 of capital funds to construct new dryside facilities at Morden Park Pools. It was subsequently determined not to progress with this investment as the evidence was such that something more radical needed to be considered in relation to this leisure centre. This budget has been called upon to help meet the emerging, often urgent, improvement needs:
- Site surveys and design costs for the sports hall projects – £36,688
 - In November 2007 the Director of Corporate Services, acting under delegated authority, agreed to a virement of £90,000 from the Morden Park Pools Dryside Capital budget to replace the failing boilers at Canons Leisure Centre.
 - In December 2007,⁶ Cabinet approved further virements the Morden Park Pools Dryside Capital budget to carry out other work:
 - Replacement boilers at Wimbledon Leisure Centre – £90,000
 - Various urgent works at Canons Leisure Centre – £100,000
 - Various urgent works at Wimbledon Leisure Centre – £100,000

⁶ http://www.merton.gov.uk/democratic_services/ds-agendas/ds-reports/_7000-7999/7261.pdf

- Various urgent works at Morden parks Pools – £83,312

16 The trends in leisure centre attendance across the three leisure centres show that attendance has been slowly declining since 2003/04, although 2006/07 saw a slight increase of 2,387 in attendance at Canons Leisure Centre and a more substantial increase of 12,021 in attendance at Wimbledon Leisure Centre. These increases are likely to be linked to improvements made in these two leisure centres over the last two years. Morden Park Pools continues to decrease year on year from 2003/04.



Canons Leisure Centre	133,941
Morden Park Pools	62,846
Wimbledon Leisure Centre	113,617
Attendance in 2006/07	

17 It is clear that the Council needs to decide on the future of sports and active leisure provision in the borough and determine a course of action that will deliver quality facilities to meet this vision. As it stands, significant investment is required to bring Merton's leisure centres up to a suitable standard with the range of facilities and locations in place in order to maximise attendance.

The views of service users

- 18 As part of the task group's work, members wanted to find out what people using the council's leisure centres thought about the facilities. In addition to this they wanted views on how service users would prioritise particular parts of the facilities available at leisure centres and how they would like them to be improved.
- 19 With this in mind, in January, the task group took a stall to each of the council's leisure centres and the Tooting and Mitcham Hub. The stall gave details of council-run leisure facilities across the borough and provided an opportunity to talk to the councillors about their views on local leisure facilities. A questionnaire was also available and service users were asked to complete them. The questionnaire comprised a collection of closed and open questions to find out service users views on whether the local authority should provide leisure facilities, where they should be located and what should be available within council-run leisure facilities. The questions put to service users and a summary of their responses is set out at Appendix I.
- 20 99 surveys were returned. 62% of the respondents used Wimbledon Leisure Centre regularly, 5% used Canons Leisure Centre regularly and 40% used Morden Park Pool regularly. Headline findings from the survey is as follows:
- All of the people who filled out the questionnaire thought that the local authority should provide sports and leisure facilities. This is unsurprising, given that respondents were all users of local authority sports and leisure facilities.
 - 55% of people thought that the leisure centres should be located where they are now. The next three most popular responses with regard to location was 'close to public transport' (12%), 'in town centres' (9%) and in 'accessible areas' (9%).
 - People who responded overwhelmingly prioritised swimming and gym facilities as the most important parts of leisure centres that they would want to see kept (54% and 24% respectively).
 - When asked to identify priorities for new facilities to be added, the most popular suggestions from respondents were sports halls (for indoor badminton/ netball/ football) (14%), sauna/ steam rooms (11%), more or later fitness classes (10%), and more for children and young people (8%).
 - People were asked whether taxpayers should fund free casual swimming for all school-aged children and young people. 64% of respondents said 'yes' and 33% said 'no'. Another 3% said 'yes' and 'no', suggesting that in some circumstances they would agree to this, in others not. Comments given in response to this suggested that schools should receive free or cheaper swimming, or children could receive cheaper rates, or children and young people in compulsory schooling (school years 1-11) should receive free casual swimming, but not older young people.
 - When asked if they would be prepared to pay more for their leisure pursuits, 42% said 'yes' and 58% said 'no'.

- Finally, the questionnaire asked 'If you could change one thing about leisure and sports provision in Merton what would it be?'
 - The issue raised most concerned the cleanliness and state of repair of the council leisure centres, with complaints in particular about shower facilities, cleaning and changing rooms.
 - Next, respondents wanted to see improved swimming facilities, with more pools, upgraded facilities, warmer water and cleaner water.
 - The next group of comments focussed on facilities for children and young people with regard to access to swimming lessons, holiday programmes, facilities for teenagers and a broader range of activities for children.
 - A number of people drew particular attention to the need to refurbish Morden Park Pool, with some suggestions to widen the offer at Morden.
 - Other issues raised included parking, racquet sports, gym equipment, opening times, and cost.

The views of the task group

Who should provide leisure facilities?

- 21 The task group is strongly committed to publicly accessible leisure centres. This review involved mapping private facilities, council-owned facilities and other models such as the Tooting & Mitcham Hub.

- Tooting & Mitcham Hub is a centre for health, fitness and leisure, providing a community facility in the previously unused corners of Tooting and Mitcham United FC's stadium, in one of the most deprived areas of the borough.
- The Hub is supported by local council, businesses, community organisations and sports groups. The shared aim is to improve the strength and depth of these links by working on a range of new and exciting health and leisure projects which link to other facilities in the Wandale Valley. Key partners include Tooting & Mitcham United FC, Sport England and Merton Council
- The Hub came after a number of years where Merton's Leisure Development Team had been unable to secure appropriate facilities in the St Helier and Ravensbury wards to provide Summer and Easter Plus holiday short-course programmes. This had led some people to question the shortfall of provision in this area.
- A survey of children with disabilities determined that they wanted more football opportunities and they wanted safe play areas, whilst older disabled children wanted safer play areas where they could play and could accommodate their physical needs. Young people were saying they wanted places to go and meet friends and they wanted more football, football leagues and dance opportunities.
- The residents wanted to get rid of the eyesore of the football stadium and wanted something that more benefited the community.
- The council facilitated the club's access to £1.45m of external funding to develop the stadium and provide 'not for profit' community facilities - including a multi purpose room with full catering facilities, café bar, fitness gym, a play zone and multi use spaces. The facility was conceived as being one venue where a whole family could engage in leisure and cultural activities in different places within one location.
- The Hub's facilities include:
 - Play Zone – soft-play centre for children under 12 years, with interactive and stimulating features.
 - Challenge Zone – a supervised race/obstacle course, testing ingenuity, speed, balance, dexterity, coordination and determination for the over 8's
 - all-weather pitches are available for football, hockey, touch rugby and Kwik Cricket.
 - studio for dance, drama, boxing classes
 - junior football
 - school holiday drama and football camps
 - 65 station gym
 - 6-a-side football league
 - café bar
- The Hub offers facilities at reasonable prices (either pay-as-you-go or contract).
- The Hub is not subsidised by Merton Council

Background information on Tooting & Mitcham Hub

- 22 The task group was impressed by the way that the Tooting & Mitcham Hub had developed. Members were particularly interested in the way that the community focus formed the basis of a successful business.
- 23 Members of the task group were interested in seeing the Council explore how the three council-owned leisure centres might be run in the future in partnership with either not-for-profit organisations, such as the Tooting & Mitcham Hub, or the private sector – as long as the principle of reasonably priced public access could be maintained.
- 24 This model may be of particular interest in relation to any new centre at Morden, which may require external finance in order to be delivered.

Recommendation 1: As part of its consideration of the future running of the three council-owned leisure centres in the borough, the Council should consider whether they could be run in partnership with either not-for-profit organisations, as in the example of Tooting & Mitcham Hub, or the private sector – as long as the principle of reasonably priced public access could be maintained.

Locations and facilities

- 25 As part of their considerations of this topic, the task group had initially questioned whether there was a need for a council-owned leisure centre in Wimbledon, given the number of private leisure facilities in, or near to, Wimbledon. Members queried whether the private facilities meet the local need and therefore any council-owned facilities duplicate services available elsewhere.

<p>Wimbledon</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannons Health Club, The Broadway • Esporta Health & Fitness, Worple Rd • Wimbledon Racquets & Fitness Club, Cranbrook Road • YMCA, The Broadway <p>Colliers Wood</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virgin Active Health Club, North Road 	<p>Raynes Park</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • David Lloyd, Bushey Road • Results Health & Fitness, Kingston Road <p>Mitcham</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fitness First, Upper Green East • The Hub, Tooting & Mitcham Football Club, Bishopsford Road
Examples of private leisure facilities in Merton	

- 26 Having examined the views of service users (gathered through the above mentioned survey and face-to-face discussions in the leisure centres), user trend data, and information contained within the National Benchmarking Service 2007 report for Wimbledon, the task group is now convinced that the council should continue to provide leisure facilities in Wimbledon. Although there are a number of private facilities in Wimbledon, the membership costs are often prohibitive for people of low or restricted income. There is a distinct need for a public facility in Wimbledon that provides a low-cost option for people seeking a range of leisure options and that includes a swimming pool.

Recommendation 2: There should be a council-owned leisure centre in Wimbledon that includes a swimming pool.

- 27 There remains a question about whether the building housing Wimbledon Leisure Centre is appropriate for the facilities that the centre currently provides, or would want to provide in the future. There are challenges around the layout of the facilities as a result of space constraints generally, and in light of the parts of the building closed off following fire damage in 1987. There are also more general historic problems with the operation and fabric of the building due to aging plant and machinery. The recent conditions survey of Wimbledon Leisure Centre recommended that the layout needs to be reviewed to establish how best to use the space available.

Recommendation 3: A review of the use of space at Wimbledon Leisure Centre should be undertaken with a view to establish what options are available to provide facilities within the Latimer Road building. The review should then include an assessment of what action is required to bring the building up to standard to provide these facilities.

Recommendation 4: In light of the conclusion of the space review, the council should investigate the potential for either a new facility in Wimbledon (constructed using the proceeds of the sale of the old site), or a comprehensive refurbishment of the existing building at Latimer Road.

- 28 The task group then considered the argument for the spread of council-owned leisure centres across the borough. Members felt strongly that the council needs to ensure that council-owned leisure centres are placed in locations that allow residents across the borough to access leisure facilities. Part of this analysis involves looking at where alternative, private leisure facilities are available. In light of the relative lack of alternative leisure facilities in the east of the Borough, it is clear that there is a need for council-owned leisure facilities to be provided there. Canons Leisure Centre has demonstrated positive work with regard to the percentage of visits from both low-income service users, and service users from black, Asian and other ethnic groups. For this reason, the task group believes that the location of the facility at Canons Leisure Centre is appropriately placed.
- 29 A similar argument applies to facilities in Morden, in that there are no alternative leisure facilities in Morden, although the task group noted the relative proximity of the new facilities at The Hub. Members of the task group are clear in their opinion that the Morden Park pool building is unsustainable for future use as a leisure centre for a number of reasons:
- The building is in dire need of repair, for example the crumbling roofs of the pools, the changing facilities, and the leaking dive observation area;
 - The use of the space is unsuitable for modern leisure facilities and difficult to change, for example the swimming gallery, the remoteness of the sauna facilities, and the relatively small gym area;

- The offer at Morden Park Pool is limited to the gym and swimming due to a lack of flexible space in which to put on studio classes or play racquet or team games.

30 It is the view of the task group that at the very least Morden Park Pool should be completely refurbished and extended to create more flexible spaces. The task group's preference, however, is that a new facility should be built in Morden to provide a new swimming pool, teaching pool, gym and flexible use space for classes and/or team or racquet sports. The task group believes that there may not be sufficient demand to justify the expense of building and maintaining a high dive facility in this new facility, but Cabinet should explore the feasibility of this option further. One suggestion could involve building this new facility on the adjoining metropolitan open land in Morden Park, with an exchange for the existing Morden Park Pool site when the new leisure centre is up and running.

Recommendation 5: A mixed-use leisure facility should be provided in Morden, preferably a new facility to replace Morden Park Pool.

31 Members of the task group have looked at what local council-owned leisure centre users want from the facilities they use. This has enabled the task group to identify a basic facility mix that the council's leisure centres should comprise:

- a main pool;
- a teaching pool;
- a gym; and
- a flexible studio for fitness/ relaxation/ dance classes.

Recommendation 6: The council's three leisure centres should include a basic facility mix comprising of – as a minimum – a main pool with adjacent sauna/ steam room, a teaching pool, a gym, and a flexible studio for fitness/ relaxation/ dance classes.

32 A large, flexible sports hall for indoor sports such as netball, badminton, five-a-side football, and squash courts should be provided in at least one of the council-owned leisure centres, although they are not necessary at each site

Recommendation 7: A large, flexible sports hall for indoor sports such as netball, badminton, five-a-side football, and squash courts should be provided in at least one of the council-owned leisure centres, although they are not necessary at each site.

33 Some specific issues were raised as part of the review: subsidised swimming for children and young people, and challenges that need to be tackled immediately, rather than waiting for the new leisure centre contract to be negotiated and let.

Subsidised swimming

- 34 The task group believes strongly that the council-owned swimming facilities have a key role to play in ensuring that children learn to swim and are introduced to regular exercise. The task group was impressed by the 'Kids swim for £1' scheme and was keen for this – or a similar scheme – to be incorporated as part of the specification for the new leisure centre contract.

Recommendation 8: The specification for the new leisure centres contract should incorporate a requirement, similar to the 'Kids swim for £1' scheme, to encourage children to use the facilities.

Expectations of contractors

- 35 It is imperative that the council works with Greenwich Leisure Limited, the current holders of the leisure centre contract, to improve the cleanliness and state of repair of the centres. Users of the facilities raised particular issues about shower facilities (cleanliness and lack of shower curtains), general cleaning around the centres and poor standard changing rooms. The new contract will not come into play until December 2009. In order to encourage existing leisure centre users to keep using the centres – and to avoid losing the increased numbers of users at Canons and Wimbledon Leisure Centre – improvements need to be made now.

Recommendation 9: The lead Cabinet Member and officers should work with Greenwich Leisure Limited, the current holders of the leisure centre contract, to improve the cleanliness and state of repair of the centres.

Recommendation 10: The new leisure centre contract should contain clear targets and benchmarks for cleanliness and maintenance standards and increasing participation at all centres, along with a requirement to measure customer satisfaction regularly and work to improve satisfaction. The contract should also link payment to performance against these targets.

Summary of responses to the sports & active recreation questionnaire

In January, the task group took a stall to each of the council's leisure centres and the Tooting and Mitcham Hub, The stall gave details of council-run leisure facilities across the borough and provided an opportunity to talk to the councillors about their views on local leisure facilities. A questionnaire was also available and service users were complete them.

The questionnaire comprised a collection of closed and open questions to find out service users views on whether the local authority should provide leisure facilities, where they should be located and what should be available within council-run leisure facilities.

99 surveys were returned. 62% of the respondents used Wimbledon Leisure Centre regularly, 5% used Canons Leisure Centre regularly and 40% used Morden Park Pool regularly

1. Should the local authority provide leisure and sports facilities?
(NB: Questionnaire gave 'yes' or 'no' as potential responses)

	Number	Percentage
Yes	96	100%
No	0	0%

2. Where should publicly provided leisure centres be placed in Merton?
(NB: No prompt was given to respondents. Some people gave more than one answer to this question)

	Number	Percentage
Where they are now (including separate references to Wimbledon, Morden and Mitcham)	50	55%
Close to public transport	11	12%
Town centres	8	9%
Accessible areas	8	9%
Somewhere with car parking	5	5%
Raynes Park	2	2%
Colliers Wood	2	2%
Wimbledon Village	1	1%
New Malden/Motspur Park	1	1%
Haydons Park	1	1%
Residential areas	1	1%
Mid-way between town centres and residential areas	1	1%

3. What is the one most important part of a leisure centre that you would want to see kept?
(NB: No prompt was given to respondents. Some people listed more than one leisure centre facility as 'most important')

	Number	Percentage
Swimming pool	68	52%
Gym	31	24%
Wellness centre/ fitness classes	8	6%
Cheap facilities that are easy to access	5	4%
Diving	4	3%
Badminton courts	3	2%

All of it	3	2%
Friendliness of staff	2	1%
Tennis	2	1%
Sauna	2	1%
Activity centre	2	1%
Weights	1	1%
Boxing	1	1%
Car park	1	1%

4. If you could add any new part to a leisure centre - what would your priority be?
(NB: No prompt was given to respondents. Some people listed more than one leisure centre facility as 'priority')

	Number	Percentage
Sports hall (for indoor badminton, netball, football)	12	14%
Sauna/steam room	9	11%
More/later fitness classes	8	10%
More for children & young people (soft play through to activities aimed at teenagers)	7	8%
Improved changing facilities / showers	6	7%
Athletics	4	5%
Healthy food/ café	4	5%
Better pools (including diving)	4	5%
Tennis/ outdoor courts	4	5%
Outside football	3	4%
Squash courts	3	4%
Parking	2	2%
Acrobatics facilities	2	2%
Access to sauna from pool	2	2%
Health suite for treatments	2	2%
Training pool	2	2%
Leisure pool	1	1%
Roller blading/ ice rink	1	1%
Rock climbing	1	1%
Food and nutritional education	1	1%
Weights	1	1%
Bowling alley	1	1%
More machines in the gym	1	1%
Affordable gym access	1	1%
Golf	1	1%

5. Do you think that taxpayers should fund free casual swimming for all school-aged children & young people?
(NB: Questionnaire gave 'yes' or 'no' as potential responses)

	Number	Percentage
Yes	62	64%
No	32	33%
Yes and no	3	3%

Comments

- Yes, if provided as part of schooling.
- Definitely not!
- No, but the cost could be less for children.
- Should be free for children, but not for young people.

- Swimming lessons should be free to schools.
- For school years 1-11, yes; for years 12-13, no.
- £1 for a swim session is quite reasonable, however I do think primary schools should teach swimming.
- Not free, but low price.

6. Would you be prepared to pay more for your leisure pursuit?

(NB: Questionnaire gave 'yes' or 'no' as potential responses)

	Number	Percentage
Yes	39	42%
No	53	58%

7. If you could change one thing about leisure and sports provision in Merton what would it be?

(NB: Responses have been grouped under headings – no prompt was given to respondents)

Maintenance and cleanliness

- Repair what needs repairing
- Buildings decorated to a higher standard - not expensive just to a nice level
- Better maintenance of facilities e.g. showers, hand washes, water fountains and towels are often faulty or out of stock
- The swimming pool / changing rooms/ showers/ toilet all need a clean up. They are unchanged since I came here as a child
- Update changing rooms Morden pool
- I've used shower facilities at Canons and Wimbledon - both not pleasant to use - grubby and old
- The shower facilities!! Curtains on showers in gym, warmer water!
- Showers, toilets and changing rooms
- Newer facilities - changing rooms – lockers - new showers
- Refurbish the swimming pool changing rooms, shower facilities
- Better changing areas/ facilities and café areas - Canons/ Morden are very poor
- Cleaner facilities
- Cleanliness
- Better upkeep. Toilets changing areas are disgrace in Morden
- Cleanliness of showers and toilets
- Cleanliness
- The changing rooms in the Morden pool need improving (cleaning)
- Could do with a bit of a 'smarten up'
- Showers and cleanliness
- The distinction between who is responsible for various things seems unclear. There should be a clearer distinction between Merton Council and the leisure centres, giving the leisure centres more power to carry out day to day repairs

Swimming facilities

- Improve and invest in swimming facilities
- More swimming pools
- Make the pool water warmer
- Warm water in pools
- More swimming pools
- More swimming pools. Swimming sessions with lanes for people who are training
- Better pool
- Make swimming pool cleaner
- Temperature of the swimming pool

Children and Young People

- The booking procedures for swimming lessons are very complicated & more assistance with which level a child should be put in when first starting would have made it easier. The whole process needs to be more user friendly & easier to access
- More swimming lessons for children. It is virtually impossible to access swimming lessons for children at Wimbledon Leisure Centre most of available spaces are already taken by children already on courses
- Swimming is very reasonably priced for children but can be expensive if you go as a family
- To provide more activities for children outside the holiday period i.e. under 5s, mother and toddler groups and after school activities for the over 5s i.e. sports games drama
- More football and tennis lessons at weekends for young children
- If an adult was using the fitness suite they could have their teenage child use it alongside them. That was no extra supervision would be needed for the child
- The times that teenagers can use fitness facilities at present at Morden is restricted to Saturday mornings. Being able to do this during the week would be helpful

Morden Park Pool

- Total refurb of the Morden park pool as promised at least a year ago. Peeling paint/broken pool tiles/ clapped out boilers does not make for a pleasant experience, and totally lets down the excellent teachers, which is why my children still come here. This pool has not changed in any way since I trained here 20 yrs ago
- Upgrade Morden pool urgently!!
- More sport facilities – it would be nice if a sport centre like Morden pool provided more indoor sports facilities for the borough like Canons which has a massive sports hall
- Demolish Morden, build a Guildford spectrum here
- Refurbish and modernise Morden pool
- Spend more money on the Morden facilities
- A new centre nearer the town centre of Morden

Opening times

- Opening times over bank holidays/ xmas period, etc
- More classes early for beginners e.g. 7 a.m., 7.15 a.m.
- On a Saturday start time to be 8 am instead of 8.30 am
- More opening times of small pool (i.e. afternoon)
- More classes in the evening, smaller (up to 10) per class

Parking

- Free parking
- Free parking like it needs to be.
- Free parking!!!
- Dry secure cycle parking

Squash/ tennis/ badminton

- Squash courts, better maintenance of equipment.
- More squash courts
- More tennis courts
- Easier access to badminton courts etc

Gym equipment

- Better gym equipment, spinning classes, open earlier in the morning so I could go before work
- More equipment
- Better and more comprehensive gym equipment. E.g. bench press and boxing bags
- Keep the equipment clean at Wimbledon

Cost

- Provision is good although (maybe because I am from the midlands) a bit expensive.
- Make it cheaper
- Better quality for the cost. The facilities are OK but fall behind current gym standards provided by others

Other comments

- The staff - especially at Canons.
- Advertising
- Make an area that's adults only.
- Add a sporting league element (i.e. football, ultimate Frisbee, etc)
- More sports facilities for all
- Have a café
- Location