Local authority Sport and Recreation Services in England: Where next?

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The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) is a not-for-profit local government body working with over 300 councils throughout the UK promoting excellence in public services. APSE is the foremost specialist in local authority frontline service providers in areas such as waste and refuse collection, parks and environmental services, leisure, school meals, cleaning, housing and building maintenance.

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Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the many local authority personnel who took part and a particular thank-you to Rob Bailey of APSE for his support throughout the research process.

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Published by APSE

October 2012

ISBN: 978-1-907388-15-6

Contents

Executive Summary 5

1.0 Introduction 9

1.1 Purpose of the report 9
1.2 Who is the report for? 10
1.3 Research objectives 10
1.4 Research rationale 10
1.5 Research Strategy 10
1.5.1 Preliminary research 10
1.5.2 On-line survey 11
1.5.3 Interviews 12
1.5.4 Data analysis 13

2.0 Findings 14

SECTION A: How did we get here? **14**
2.1 Service-orientation models 1970s-2012 14
2.1.1 The welfare-oriented model 14
2.1.2 The market-oriented (or 'enabling') model 16
2.1.3 An ensuring state model 17
2.1.4 Emerging service-orientations: mutual or residual state? 18
2.1.4.1 The mutual or ownership state model 19
2.1.4.2 The residual or subsidiary state model 23
SECTION B: Where are we now? **25**
2.2 Key issues and challenges facing Sport and Recreation Services 25
2.2.1 Responding to the impact of budgets reductions 25
2.2.2 Selecting modes of service delivery 27
2.2.3 Embedding the administrative and political status of SRS 30
2.2.4 Mediating central government policy trajectories 31
2.2.5 Establishing and sustaining a role and remit for SRS 33
SECTION C: Where are we heading? **34**
2.3 Strategic directions: pre-emptive, reactive or defensive? 34
2.4 Identifying components of the 'pre-emptive' local authority sport and recreation service: towards best practice 37

3.0 Case study: Sport for All? 43

4.0 Conclusions 45

5.0 Recommendations 47

6.0 Further research 48

References 49

Executive Summary

Financial health

- The 'financial health' of Sport and Recreation Services (SRS) was generally weak across two thirds of authorities prior to the current economic downturn and is significantly weaker following the Comprehensive Spending Review of 2010
- Certain regions of England are disproportionally affected by the scale and pace of reduced budgets. This finding is consistent with the findings of the Audit Commission (2011)
- The extent of the impact of reductions in local government finance on SRS is in part related to a number of factors including the administrative and political status of the service area within each authority; the priorities of the incumbent political party; existing modes of service delivery; partnerships and funding arrangements with external agencies; the evidence base to support SRS; and the strength of the business case
- Local authorities have demonstrated differing responses to actual and anticipated budget reductions from 'pre-emptive' to 'reactive' to 'defensive' as outlined in this report
- A third of SRS are poorly prepared for the political and financial challenges ahead and may need to design a more robust model of SRS based on the principles of the 'ensuring council' and characteristics of the 'pre-emptive model' as outlined in this report

Modes of service delivery

- Trusts are now an established mechanism for service delivery across almost a quarter of authorities and this is set to increase as authorities seek to reduce financial commitments in the current economic and political climate
- Private sector delivery of local government services is not extensive in many geographical areas of the UK. Currently, there is only a marginal platform for extending private sector management of public sector provision in these areas
- One finding of note is the gap between aspiration and the feasibility of service mergers between local authorities. However, thematic working within councils has gathered momentum over the last decade
- Moving forward, it is likely that the local sport sector will experience an increasing fragmentation in forms of provision. This raises questions regarding service accountability, equity, quality and sustainability
- One third of authorities have responded pro-actively to the Big Society agenda with others either demonstrating resistance to delivering services through voluntary or private sector organisations or not having the capacity to do so.

The administrative and political status of SRS

- Across two-thirds of local authorities, the administrative and political status of SRS has weakened considerably in the last decade
- Downsizing and the fragmentation of leisure departments in recent years has meant that the strategic coherence for SRS has been undermined
- In one third of authorities where there is a degree of integration between discretionary services and the wider strategic objectives of the authority, SRS remains a valued, albeit instrumental, component of provision
- What becomes clear from the research is the increasing difficulty of 'making the case' within local government for SRS and in particular for developmental aspects of the portfolio
- Advocacy for SRS is generally weak in two-thirds of local authorities and only a third of SRS representatives considered the 'voice of sport' to be 'adequately represented'
- Elected member support for SRS varies from pro-active to benign, indifferent or hostile and in general terms the shift from committee to executive-led decision-making processes has not

favoured SRS

- More positively, acquiring unitary status has benefitted SRS in former two-tier authorities in the majority of cases

Service-orientation/policy trajectories

- SRS are working within and across differing and sometimes competing 'models' of provision that combine market and welfare orientations
- The traditional welfare orientated model is being challenged by the coalition government's Big Society agenda which is promoting the mutual state model or a residual state model for SRS as detailed in this report
- The emphasis on market-led practices has in some cases marginalised welfare goals where 'widening participation' has become a peripheral policy concern and focus of investment, at least in respect of mainstream budgetary commitments
- Sport for All/widening participation has become resource dependent on external resources leaving services vulnerable to 'the cuts'
- Within an expanding portfolio of policy objectives over the last decade, priority has increasingly been given to central government policy agendas around 'performance related' sport and to local government concerns around place shaping, showcasing and economic objectives rather than 'sport for all'
- A policy shift has taken place from a 'sport centred' focus at the local level towards utilising 'physical activity' for social policy purposes over the last decade, particularly health-related objectives but also to the role of sport in anti-social behaviour and crime-related objectives

Role and remit

- Fundamentally, local authorities must decide in the current economic and political climate, what it is that SRS should prioritise and invest in and from what to retreat
- For one-third of authorities, it cannot be claimed that there exists evidence of a coherent strategic response to the current crisis
- In practice, a range of short-term measures exist to either 'defend' or rationalise SRS
- Two-thirds of authorities observed a shift from the role of 'provider' to 'facilitator' since 1997 and within the next 5 years, two-thirds perceive the core remit of sport services being one of 'facilitator' and/or 'enabler'

Key challenges and recommendations

- The ensuring state model or 'ensuring council' offers policymakers and practitioners a foundation on which to design and deliver services of community benefit. The principles of the ensuring council reflect the key stewardship role of local government and recognises that local government has to have the capacity, knowledge, skills and ability to intervene effectively on behalf of local communities. However, local authorities configure their service delivery arrangements, they cannot ultimately divest responsibility or fulfil a purely residual role without undermining core purpose and legitimacy.
- Key challenges facing SRS over the next decade include: developing a coherent role and remit distinct from private, third sector and community providers; managing further budget reductions; engaging with alternative modes of service delivery; mediating central government policy agendas; and embedding SRS within the political and administrative structures and objectives of the authority
- The components of a SRS that can successfully negotiate the current context include: acquiring political support; taking a longer-term strategic view despite short-term challenges; innovative leadership and a pro-active staff working towards community benefit; aligning services to corporate objectives, particularly around health and adult social care; and achieving a zero-

deficit budgetary strategy over the short to mid-term

- With some urgency, SRS need to acquire evidence-based data to 'make the case' both in economic and social terms
- In service reviews, it is recommended that an assessment is made of 'guarantees' around accountability, equity, quality and sustainability that SRS can offer and that other providers are less likely to deliver
- SRS need to look beyond municipal boundaries, departmental silos and service areas in designing services fit for purpose in the twenty-first century
- A significant 'democratic deficit' exists at the local level with SRS needing greater visibility in and engagement with local communities in any future service model
- Fundamentally, it is recommended that SRS management team develop a clear and coherent relationship between the financial, social and political components of SRS as outlined in this discussion document, with 'community benefit' being the core remit
- It is recommended that SRS utilise professional bodies, local improvement networks and independent researchers to build a stronger case for retaining and potentially expanding services.

1.0 Introduction

In the wake of the Coalition Government's Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) 2010 (HM Treasury, 2010a), Emergency Budget of 2010 (HM Treasury, 2010b) and subsequent local government finance settlements (Berman and Keep, 2011; Department of Communities and Local Government, 2010), this report begins to assess:

- The impact of the 'cuts' for Sport and Recreation Services (SRS)
- Responses to the 'cuts'
- The options for SRS moving forward.

As highlighted in a recent report from the Audit Commission (2011), local authorities face significant challenges in the current economic climate. As a discretionary service in England, SRS face disproportional reductions to budgets by comparison with statutory services, potentially affecting front-line services and community benefit.

This report assesses SRS *as a whole* but centres on two core components of the SRS portfolio in particular:

- Facility management (for community and elite sport use) either financed through mainstream budgets and managed by SRS and/or external operators, notably leisure trusts (charitable bodies and/or private sector operators) (Audit Commission, 2006)
- Welfare-oriented sport development such as outreach (increasingly funded from external sources; mainly agencies of central government). Only 20% of councils fund programmes to 'widen participation' including outreach through mainstream budgets (see case study)

To a lesser extent, the report makes reference to,

- Programmes that utilise sport and physical activity to improve health (financed to a significant extent by Primary Care Trusts or other external agencies, although Health is to returned to local government control)

Other components of the SRS portfolio are not the specific focus of this report, but are referred to 'in passing' due to the limitations of space, including:

- Event management related to economic and/or social/community objectives, and/or place shaping or showcasing agendas (financed by local authorities in most cases)
- Sport-specific development related to competition and performance (increasingly funded through national government bodies of sport utilising National Lottery monies)
- Programmes related to youth crime and anti-social behaviour (funded by external agencies in the main)
- Programmes related to educational objectives (funded through council education budgets and/or external sources)
- Parks, playing field and pitch management (part internal and part external funded or operated and funded by a separate council department from SRS)
- Other initiatives related to sport, recreation, physical activity and/or play.

The research indicated that the portfolio of policy objectives has expanded over the last decade despite decreasing mainstream budgets. However, the 'core business' in most SRS was not clearly articulated in many cases. Instead, SRS has been 'pulled in different directions' as policy trajectories tend to 'follow the funding'.

1.1 Purpose of the report

- To encourage local authorities to reflect on the current and future role and remit of sport and recreation services (SRS) in any review process taking place in the context of local government finance reductions
- To encourage local authorities to assess the value and contribution of SRS and to encourage SRS to 'make the case'
- To disseminate examples of innovative decisions and actions taken (or being considered) by local authorities to retain and/or develop components of the SRS portfolio despite mainstream budget reductions

1.2 Who is the report for?

The report is primarily for local authority SRS managers (officers), elected members with oversight of SRS and service delivery personnel in English local government. Representatives of professional bodies may find aspects of the research of use or value. Separate reports are being prepared for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Despite issues around devolution, it is anticipated that the themes of this report will have resonance across UK local authority SRS.

1.3 Research objectives

The findings within this report relate to six broad, overlapping research objectives:

- To assess the impact of, and responses to, the coalition government's Comprehensive Spending Review 2010 and subsequent local government finance settlement on sport and recreation services (SRS) in England
- To identify and compare differing service-orientations in SRS, namely: 'welfare-oriented'; 'market-oriented'; an 'ensuring state' model and emerging 'models' since 2010
- To identify and assess trends in SRS policy trajectories, the administrative and political status of SRS, changing modes of service delivery, or other trends
- To assess the issues and challenges facing SRS managers in establishing, delivering, maintaining and retaining services
- To identify a successful 'model' of SRS that has the capacity to endure the current economic recession and the effect of national political agendas including changes to local government and governance
- To make recommendations based on 'best practice' in developing and making the case for SRS

1.4 Research rationale

The rationale for the research is premised on:

- The importance of investigating how local government seeks to regulate, distribute, redistribute and reconstitute resources that can have a substantial impact on the life chances of individuals and local communities
- The relative scarcity of research on SRS despite significant levels of investment at the local level via local authorities (Carter, 2005)

1.5 Research Strategy

1.5.1 Preliminary research

Prior to an on-line survey delivered with the assistance of APSE and subsequent interviews with senior personnel in SRS across the UK (mainly England to date), a review of existing literature relating to local government SRS was undertaken. This included,

- The development of the leisure/sport profession (Coalter, 1985, 1990; Houlihan, 2001)
- The role of leisure/sport in the welfare state (Coalter, 1995; Haywood, 1992; Ravenscroft, 1992, 2001)
- Sport/recreation service management (e.g. Robinson, 2004)
- The impact of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) (Coalter, 1995; Henry, 2001; Nichols, 1995; Nichols and Taylor, 1995) and a study of CCT in ten district authorities in the Midlands (Collins, 1997)
- The role of sport in urban regeneration (Gratton and Henry, (*eds*.) 2001)
- Research on *Sport for All* within 29 London Borough authorities (McDonald, 1995) and other studies of *Sport for All* (Lentell, 1993; McIntosh and Charlton, 1985)
- The use of local authority subsidies including leisure cards (Collins, *forthcoming*; Collins and Kennett, 1998; Collins and King, 2001: *unpublished*)
- Case studies of sport development in four local authorities (Houlihan and White, 2002: chapter 5); and research in specific localities such as in Belfast (e.g. Bairner and Shirlow, 2004; Roberts and Brodie, 1992); Leeds (Bramham, 2001); Liverpool (King, 2009); and Sheffield (Roche, 1992;

Taylor, 2001)

- Comparative studies between sport policy in UK local authorities with authorities in other EU countries (e.g. Dulac and Henry, 2001)
- The role of local government leisure/sport in building citizenship (Ravenscroft, 1993; Coalter, 2007)

Stage two of the preliminary research was a review of reports produced by:

- Professional bodies such as the Association of Professional Service Excellence (APSE); Chief Leisure Officers Association (CLOA); Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMSPA); and the former Institute of Sport and Recreation Management (ISRM)
- The Local Government Association (LGA) and its Improvement and Development arm (formerly IDeA)
- DCMS and Sport England
- The Audit Commission
- CIPFA, in respect of leisure/sport budgets and spending patterns

The third stage of the preliminary research was an analysis of current and prior sport strategies of a sample of UK authorities (only 61% of councils have established a strategy specifically for SRS). Document analysis revealed a number of policy priorities, categorised, in no particular order, as

- Facility-based delivery of services for the community and elite athletes
- Initiatives around place shaping that intended to re-image or showcase a locality through staging sport events and related to this, the pursuit of European and National 'City of Sport' status
- Elite and performance-based sport-specific sports development
- Investment in widening participation (within a community recreation remit) or *Sport for All* such as outreach work targeted 'hard to reach' groups
- Sport and physical activity programmes as components of social policy where sport is an instrument to improve health, for example, within a 'social inclusion' agenda
- Sport and physical activity in schools, where the local authority is a partner, e.g. dual-use site management
- Support for grass-roots sport and recreational opportunities delivered through the voluntary or 'Third' sector, including grant-aid

1.5.2 On-line survey

Following the preliminary research, the research strategy consisted of two stages spanning one year (2011): an on-line survey and a series of interviews.

- An on-line survey of SRS was undertaken in December 2010/January 2011 via access to the APSE and IMSPA databases of members across the UK
- 110 responses were acquired; 95 from local authorities in England, 6 from Northern Ireland, 5 from Scotland and 4 from Wales.
- The focus of this report is therefore on the 95 English authorities given the small sample size in other nations and allowing for differences related to devolution, although the findings made are likely to have UK scope.
- Type of authority: of the 95 English authorities, 35% are District level authorities and 13% County level and 30% Unitary (formerly two-tier). 16% are Metropolitan Borough Councils and are 6% London Borough Councils
- Geographical distribution: each region of England is represented in this report although more authorities in the North-West of England responded: North-West 28%; South and West 20%; Midlands 17%; North-East 15%; South-East 14% and London 6%
- Political control: 45% of authorities are under Conservative control as of May 2010, and 22% Labour, with 8% Liberal Democrat and 25% under No Overall Control (NOC)
- The main purpose of the survey was to generate 'lines of enquiry' to be pursued through interviews

- The survey consisted of questions relating to the themes identified in *table 1*. Thus a framework was established to make comparisons across and between authorities.

1.5.3 Interviews

A combination of face-to-face and telephone interviews with senior local authority officers who agreed to contribute to the research (45 to date) was undertaken in two periods of 2011: March/April and July/September

- This facilitated a more in-depth analysis of the survey responses
- The focus of this report is the findings from English authorities.
- Type of authority: 19 district, 11 MBC, 7 unitary, 3 LBC, 5 non-England
- Political Control: 16 Labour, 16 Conservative and 3 Liberal Democrat, 5 NOC (*England only*)
- Geographical distribution: 11 North-West; 9 South-West; 6 South-East; 6 Midlands; 4 North-East and 4 London; (*England only*)
- A further thirty to forty interviews are anticipated across the UK throughout 2012. Hence, the research is at a middle stage and this report can therefore be considered an *interim report* or as a *discussion document* for consultation rather than a final report
- Despite the small sample size, it is argued that the findings to date can be generalised to some extent around the core themes identified in *table 1*
- Further research planned for 2012 is outside the scope of this report and will consist of case studies of specific authorities (King, *forthcoming*, 2012)

Table 1: Framework for comparing local authority sport and recreation services

Policy trajectory	Policy priorities, portfolio components, current and future role and remit (e.g. direct provider, facilitator, enabler)
Political and administrative status	Authority type and change in authority type, Executive type, authority size and resources (human and financial), local political control and continuity of control, status within the political portfolio, location of administrative unit (e.g. Leisure, Culture, Community, Education), representation at Executive Board level and within cabinet or committee structures, officer-member relations, departmental relations and the extent of thematic working
Funding context	Financial capacity and discretion to support discretionary services, e.g. central government grants, local council tax and business rates (NNDR); trends in budgets, funding commitments and spending patterns, level of internal subsidy, level of Central Establishment Charges and other financial 'constraints' on budgets
Modes of governance	Extent and nature of public-private partnerships and engagement with PFI, extent of outsourcing including leisure trust management, extent of service mergers with other authorities
Relationship with central government	Impact of devolution and localism agendas, response to 'steering mechanisms' or policy instruments, response to national sport policy, relationship with Sport England or other government agencies, relationships with non-sport sector government bodies, e.g. in the Health sector
Impact of CSR	Current and planned cuts to budgets and services, strategic and operational responses
Local infrastructure for sport and recreation	Existing public sector provision, change in the extent of private and Third sector provision locally, changes in school sport organisation and provision, local authority relationships with private and Third sector sports bodies

1.5.4 Data analysis

Analysis of the survey data attempted to ascertain,

- trends in priorities
- trends in budgets
- trends in outsourcing services
- administrative and political changes
- core and peripheral relationships and partnerships both internal and external to the authority
- the impact of reductions in funding
- models of service-orientation
- Subsequently, 'lines of enquiry' pursued through semi-structured interviews with local authority officers and sector representatives included,
- strategic and operational responses to the cuts
- the extent to which local political control and officer-councillor relations have shaped SRS priorities and practices
- the relative influence of central government policy agendas on local level SRS
- resource dependencies
- re-organisations and the embeddedness of sport services
- personal and professional networks or coalitions and organisational culture
- service status, representation and 'voice'
- levels of discretion in policy setting
- the capacity for innovation
- the legacy of prior policy
- other themes, issues and challenges as they emerged

Combined with the survey data, the interviews assisted in constructing 'models' of provision or service-orientation (see figures 1, 2, 3) that reflected changes in SRS across a forty year time-span (the early 1970s to date).

2.0 Findings

SECTION A: How did we get here?

2.1 Service-orientation models 1970s-2012

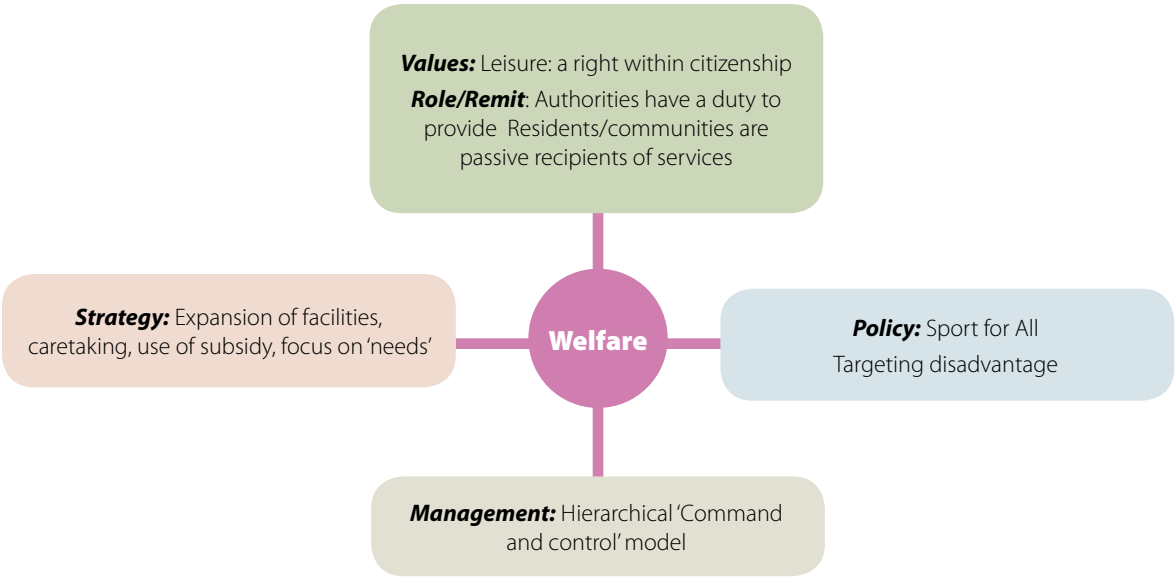
- The current economic climate coupled with national political change means that SRS will be compelled to review service delivery.
- The idea of presenting the 'models' in this report is that they may be of utility in councils undertaking service reviews
- Local government SRS are working within differing and sometimes competing 'models' of provision that are legacies of forty years of local authority investment in SRS
- The research findings indicate that no single authority in this study operates exclusively within one model. In practice, SRS operate across service-orientations
- Given that councils are both an administrative and a political unit and that local government is both an arm of central government and an 'independent' unit of government (Barnett, 2011) some ambiguity in service-orientation was anticipated.
- Nonetheless, it is feasible for local authorities to establish a coherent remit for SRS and many have done so.

2.1.1 The welfare-oriented model

Within this model (*Figure 1*), the leisure professional,

- Has a social responsibility, regardless of its dominant economic ideology and the economic climate, to provide for the basic 'leisure needs' of society (Ravenscroft, 1993)
- Views leisure as a right where local authorities have a duty to provide as the 'accountable body' based on a public sector ethos
- Utilises subsidy where appropriate to provide 'services for all'

Figure 1: A welfare-orientated model



Findings:

- The research indicates that urban authorities in particular are attempting to retain elements of this model, such as subsidised provision and acting as 'caretakers' or stewards of services
- In many cases the scale of direct provision has created increasing demands on services and a resource dependency on the local state that is increasingly difficult to sustain in a 'mature' welfare state experiencing financial curtailment
- Some local authorities in the last decade, have utilized the CPA framework to build aspects of citizenship whereas others have arguably extended welfare but not necessarily citizenship (a point made by Coalter, 1998)
- Many local authority SRS have found difficulties in engaging local communities in decision-making affecting SRS and consultation in some cases has been limited in scope and value. 'Community benefit', however defined, is variable across authorities in practice if the local authority is 'isolated' from the communities it serves
- For authorities within this model: sharing services with other authorities was minimal; and the extent and quality of partnership-working with external agencies and communities was variable
- One remaining legacy of the era of welfare professionalism is the hierarchical control structures, given that thematic working practices across and between departments were not extensive in one-third of authorities
- Compounding the 'crisis' of the welfare model is the legacy of an aging facility stock.
- Whether this 'model' *as a whole* is sustainable in the current political and economic context is questionable if not unlikely.
- Nonetheless, many interviewees maintained the principles on which this model emerged are arguably worth retaining and SRS managers have sought to do so. For example, although strategies around subsidised services have changed, subsidy remains a core practice in the majority of authorities.

2.1.2 The market-oriented (or 'enabling') model

This approach was espoused through the Conservative governments of the 1980's/90's and continued in a modified form under 'New' Labour 1997-2010

SRS managers are attempting to deliver services within the practices of the private sector, e.g. outsourcing services to reduce costs, and adhering to the practices of New Public Management, e.g. pursuing performance-related targets in an 'auditing culture'. See Figure 2.

Figure 2: A market-orientated approach

Findings

- In the last decade, SRS are increasingly required to produce a 'business case' in order to justify the continuation of subsidised services
- The majority of SRS have responded to the market-orientation of services pro-actively
- The majority of SRS have arguably demonstrated efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery and service quality has increased over time despite budgetary constraints
- However, despite the introduction of CCT, *Best Value* and Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA), for example, there exists significant remnants of old systems and attitudes, and substantial resistance to coerced forms of change originating in central government
- Private sector delivery of local government services is not extensive in many geographical areas of the UK. The research demonstrated that the vast majority of facilities are managed by the local authority
- Also, most sport-related events are delivered through local authorities rather than private sector companies although the trend is increasingly towards managed partnerships for event management
- In this model, interviewees observed that the local authority is not necessarily a core provider and guarantees around welfare or social policy objectives may be undermined
- Interviewees criticised this model for compromising accountability, equity, quality and sustainability in service delivery in some cases and to varying degrees.

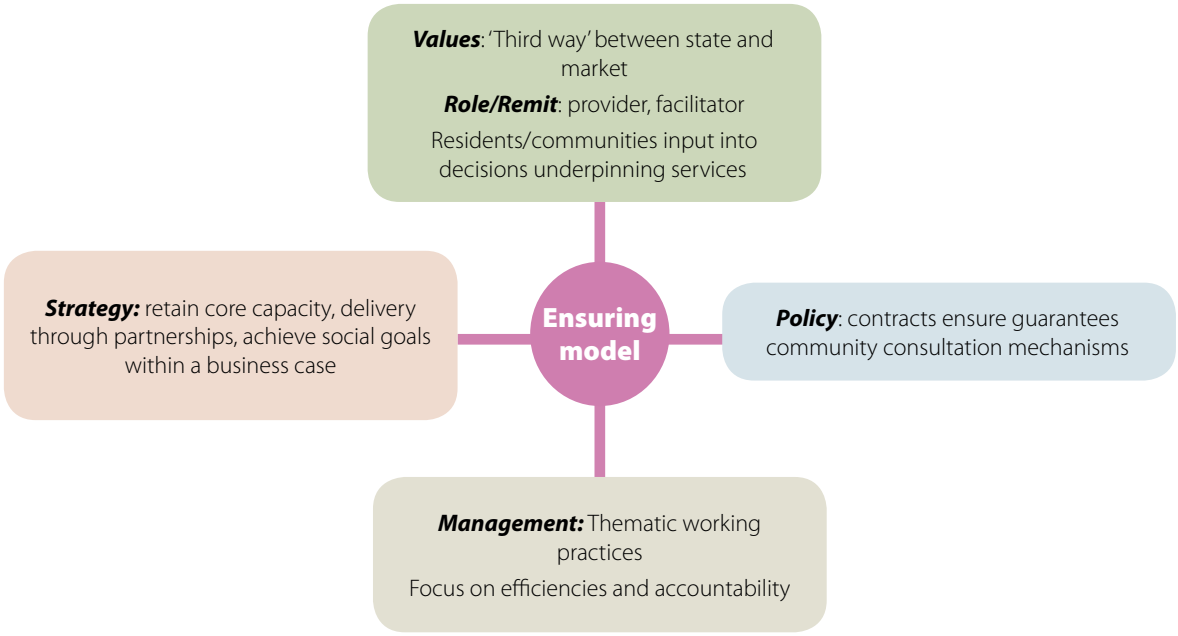
2.1.3 An ensuring state model

APSE (2012: 5) identify the role and remit of the 'ensuring council' in stating that it is 'built on ideas of democratic accountability, stewardship of place, a strong core of directly delivered services, promoting public value, social justice, civic entrepreneurship and innovation, financial capacity and empowering both local communities and the staff who service them'.

This implies that SRS should operate within a framework that delivers services through collaboration (Giddens, 1998; 2009) whilst retaining the core capacity to provide services

Modes of delivery are underpinned by guarantees around accountability, equity, service quality and sustainability

Figure 3: An ensuring state model



Findings

- Two-thirds of SRS operate broadly within the parameters of this model that has evolved from the 'welfare-oriented' model
- Where best practice exists, the ensuring state model offers 'guarantees' around accountability, equity, quality and sustainability that other non-state providers are less likely to deliver and many authorities have aligned service priorities and delivery with 'community benefit' in mind
- However, a gap remains between aspiration and reality in many cases. For example, if the ensuring model is about being accountable to local residents and communities, then the research would indicate a variable response to this agenda, if not a 'democratic deficit' in some instances
- On the other hand, some authorities in this study have sought to engage with local communities and devolve influence over decisions impacting on SRS through 'neighbourhood management' structures and policy processes where responsibilities are negotiated rather than imposed
- In terms of equity, the policy objective of 'widening participation', claimed as the core policy priority by the majority of survey respondents, sits uneasily with the principles and practices of the 'market' (*see case study in this report)*. This tension is nothing new. As far back as the late 1980s, pre-CCT, the Audit Commission noted that 'Local authorities have found it hard to strike the right balance between social and financial objectives' (AC, 1989: 1).
- In terms of 'quality', the research indicates that the majority of SRS are offering an experience at least of equivalent to that of many private and voluntary providers and at affordable prices.

Customer satisfaction is generally high and the relationship between price and perceived value explored in other studies suggests 'value for money' is delivered in the majority of local authority areas

- However, an aging facility stock can compromise perceptions of 'quality'
- In terms of 'sustainability', it is difficult to claim that programmes managed and delivered through SRS have the capacity to be sustainable given short-term funding and political agendas
- SRS could strengthen its case through more extensive assessment of programme inputs, outputs, outcomes and impacts. The absence of evidence-based data is a significant 'gap' in provision in the majority of local authorities (*see recommendations*)
- It is debatable whether the establishment and expansion of service management through leisure trusts (*see section on modes of service delivery*) ensures that community benefit is central to SRS. In many cases, the move towards trusts has been motivated by the opportunity to reduce costs rather than any move towards defending welfare objectives. For example, only 32% of survey respondents believed that trusts had been introduced to defend *Sport for All*
- On the other hand, interview-based research revealed that many leisure trusts have retained a focus on social or welfare goals, e.g. targeted use of subsidy, where there is a robust management contract that prioritises welfare objectives, but not in all cases
- The embedding of this model has arguably been compromised by both financial and political factors, largely, although not exclusively, outside of the control of SRS managers and other senior officers.
- Aligning the core principles of the ensuring council with the practices of the 'pre-emptive' model (see Section C of this report) offers policymakers and practitioners opportunities to design and deliver robust, high quality and accountable services.

2.1.4 Emerging service-orientations: mutual or residual state?

The issue of what role local authorities should play in service ownership and delivery is not new and brought about by a recent change of government (see Demos, 2004 for example). In fact, as APSE (2012: 9) note, many models have been proposed in recent years. This report focuses on the three existing models that have shaped SRS as outlined and two emerging models that are beginning to shape service remits, roles and modes of delivery, namely mutual (or co-operative) and residual (or subsidiary). (Given the economic downturn since 2008, the issue of service-orientation has been foregrounded and government action has gathered pace. With the election of a coalition government in 2010, advocates of the 'Big Society' project (Blond, 2009, 2010; Conservative Party, 2010) prefer the concept and practices of a 'smaller' state or 'leaner and fitter' state. According to Blond both the state and market tend to empower vested interests and monopolies over time and dis-empower both associational life and poorer populations. From this viewpoint, the *Big Society* seeks to empower mediating institutions between the state and market. In the case of sport and recreation, intermediate institutions may include those in the voluntary and community sector (Third sector), private sector bodies and non-state schools.

In one understanding of the *Big Society*, local government is itself an intermediary institution given that it is democratically elected and semi-autonomous of central government, itself more commonly associated with 'the state'. From this perspective, SRS has an important role in brokering the interests of communities, voluntary sector bodies and private sector organisations in the local sport sector. State schools governed locally may also be considered components of the *Big Society*. As a 'work in progress', the organisations that sit within or outside of the *Big Society* is in part determined locally depending on the mixed economy of provision in each location.

For SRS,

- A distinction can be made between the 'mutual state' model otherwise known as the ownership state or co-operative state (figure 4) and the 'residual state' model (figure 5) sometimes referred to as the 'subsidiary state' (see NLGN, 2011) that has also been associated with the Big Society.

2.1.4.1 The mutual or ownership state model

The mutual or ownership state model is based on the concept and practice of co-production (Boyle, 2009, 2010; NESTA, 2010) where the engagement of communities in service-making, ownership and/or delivery is central (Innovation Unit, 2009) and localism is a key driver (Blunt and Harris, 2010; IPPR/Pricewaterhouse Coopers, 2009a)

This model or service-orientation tends to focus on building the capacity of communities to 'manage services themselves'. This may include a service-orientation towards voluntary sector organisations that already exist (and where there is a demand) or may involve 'community development' initiatives that focus on creating or realising a demand in poorer communities (and therefore a more extensive role for SRS is implied) whilst withdrawing direct financial support for those who can support themselves

The implication of this model is that SRS should move towards delivering *bespoke services* tailored to local factors (Leadbetter et al, 2008)

This model requires a 'new social contract' between the local authority and individuals and communities

Mutual ownership has become a feature of a few councils. See for example, Lambeth's report, 'The Co-operative Council' - ' Sharing power: A new settlement between citizens and the state' (Co-operative Council Citizens' Commission/Lambeth Council, 2010). The authors of this document state,

'Lambeth Council's belief [is] that, in general, councils should better utilise the local knowledge and expertise of their citizens when identifying the outcomes they seek to realise or the way in which they design and deliver public services. This is important as Lambeth Council, and the wider public sector, are increasingly recognising that a solely provider-led approach to improving performance (rigorous audit, service expertise and a relentless focus on performance indicators) will not deliver the best from the public services the council is responsible for, or build the level of public confidence necessary to ensure long-term survival' (Lambeth BC, 2010: 11).

Capacity-building can involve developing micro-level (e.g. ward) plans based on equitable principles across wards but also facilitating local diversity related to the existing local infrastructure for sport and recreation. For example, planned independent mutual ownership in Lambeth SRS includes parks and adventure playgrounds

A key component of the *Big Society* is the concept and practice of localism or devolving powers to the smallest unit of organisation such as the level of the neighbourhood (Conservative Party, 2009)

Hence recent legislation around the *Community Right to Bid* and the *Community Right to Challenge* (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011a and 2011b). Local organisations in the sport sector or community groups with a rationale related to sport could take ownership and/or the delivery of services currently owned and/or delivered through SRS.

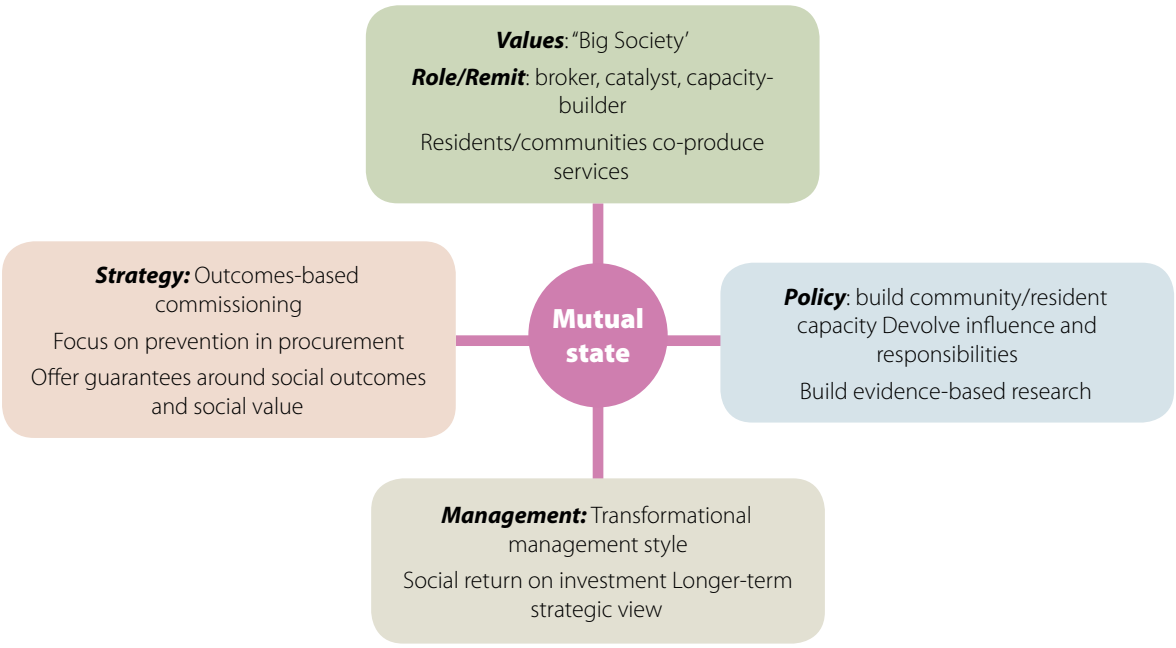
The *Public Services* (*Social Value) Act* (2012) increases pressure on local authorities to deliver services that have social, economic and environmental value.

Further, the *Big Society* emphasises a re-invigoration of volunteerism as a key component of associational life and this policy trajectory also implies support for social enterprise, charities, mutual and co-operative bodies.

For local government SRS the key challenges include complying with new legislation, devolving powers, facilitating community ownership and delivery of services and therefore the need to build capacity within communities, stimulating volunteering and active citizenship, and evidencing the social and financial value and impact of facility and programme usage, for example. Local government decisions regarding services are also expected to be accountable and transparent to public scrutiny.

In summary, the local authority in this model requires coherent political leadership as the democratically-elected body, and as an administrative unit, officers support communities through capacity-building.

Figure 4: A mutual state model



Findings

- In practice, SRS in local government across England are variably aligned to the components of the *Big Society* if defined in terms of the Mutual state
- The research underpinning this document identified specific examples of where councils were adapting to the mutual state model. **Examples follow**. It also identified the 'gap' between achieving a mutual state model and the current orientation of SRS.

Community ownership or delivery of services

- In this study, 69% of SRS interviewees expect the voluntary and community sector to increase its role over the next five years
- Research by CLOA found that transferring assets to community groups was being considered by 39% (CLOA, 2011).
- There are differences in progress towards a mutual state model where it is considered desirable and/or feasible. One senior officer stated that 'there are small pockets of the borough where community delivery could be achievable'. In some counties and regions, interviewees stated that the Third sector is 'becoming involved in a structured way' where the focus is on developing 'community sport hubs'.
- At Parish Council level management with volunteer aid has operated through local trust arrangements for up to a decade. In this sense, the *Big Society* agenda is not recent
- One interviewee stated that 'some authorities have transferred open spaces management to parish council level … where the 'community are paying more for some services'
- Another interviewee observed that 'Parish and Town Councils already manage many services at a sub-regional level … Parish councils own and manage parks and pitches'
- A respondent noted that 'our authority already has a *Big Society* focus' given that two leisure centres are 'run by a community trust with no subsidy' and operated by volunteers
- A policy officer stated that self-managed council owned facilities exist in his region, e.g. both a gymnastics club and a professional football club deliver community programmes using a council facility.

Investing in volunteering

- DCMS (2011) research found that a third of the population are contributing to culture/sport sectors in terms of volunteering and/or charitable giving, but volunteering is the smaller contribution. The research also found that sports volunteers are in higher income categories or 'wealthy achievers'. Further, those 'building the Big Society' are more active citizens, are involved in communities, and have the capacity to participate. This presents significant challenges for SRS
- The response of SRS in this study has in some cases been one of investing in up-skilling volunteers
- A number of councils assist with marketing/publicity for clubs/volunteers and retain a direct delivery role where skills are not in place
- A distinction made can made between generalists and volunteers with expertise (often paid) in a local 'mixed economy' of volunteering.
- Simply replacing paid staff with volunteers was considered a disadvantageous approach by the majority of respondents in this study

Establishing Trusts to manage and deliver services

- A leisure trust can be considered a 'fusion' of commercial objectives and local authority social policy objectives
- Whether establishing a trust to manage and deliver services is considered to be an action coterminous with the *Big Society* is debatable, but for many authorities, it is a reality, and is a growing trend across England
- It is generally anticipated that there will be fewer DSOs within 3 years and an expansion of leisure trusts to replace direct delivery
- In the survey, 74% expect an increase in outsourcing some services and for almost all this includes investigating the option of establishing a trust with council representation on the board of trustees (11% without representation)
- However, only 26% thought that trusts had been established to 'defend community sport'. One interviewee stated that 'in the main … trusts were set up because of the need to be seen as enabling' and this was a political decision
- Although it is facility management that is now trust-led in many locations, in fewer, sports development has been transferred to a trust whereas in other locations, delivery by community clubs via a leisure contractor is more prevalent
- In a survey by CLOA (2011), 'Over 50% of respondents stated that they were currently undertaking or considering alternative delivery models' and the trust model is being planned or underway in 41% of authorities
- In a survey conducted by the author for this discussion document, 62% of authorities observed a shift from provider to facilitator since 1997.
- A trend away from direct provision in all traditional areas is therefore discernible and this raises questions regarding the role and remit of SRS

Is there other evidence of an emerging mutual state model?

- Although, as CLOA (2011) identify, 'transformation of the delivery of culture or sport services was already underway' in many authorities, it is also clear that there is less appetite for 'transformation' in other authorities
- The study suggests that few SRS are currently building the capacity of staff to deliver the mutual state model locally
- Outcomes-based commissioning and procurement of services where the focus is on effectiveness alongside efficiency is at an early stage of development
- Collating an evidence base around social impact and social value to generate positive externalities, e.g. utilizing Social Return on Investment (SORI) audits, is not as yet a common practice
- It cannot be claimed from the research undertaken to date that a transparency and accountability

of decision-making is widespread

- The extent of inter-governmental working and cross-departmental thematic working around whole system efficiencies, joint procurement, strategic/cross-boundary initiatives and so on, is limited in practice
- Supporting local diversity and specifically marginal groups/interests appears, if this is to be considered an aspect of the *Big Society*, is variable across council SRS
- In many locations, retaining developmental/preventative services or 'transformational services', e.g. via effective outreach programmes, has not been a priority in practice, which in turn undermines the emergence of a 'mutual state' model.

Interviewees raised a number of concerns around shifting the current service-orientation towards a mutual state model, including,

- For many, the *Big Society* agenda was considered only to be feasible and desirable in authorities with the capacity to operate without a significant community dependency on local authority services.
- Replacing a 'dependency culture' with a model of co-production is unlikely in the short-term in many localities
- The promotion of a local diversity of service provision could equate to a 'post-code lottery' of provision according to some interviewees. From the research it became clear that defining 'fairness' is problematic across local authority SRS provision and there was little consensus
- Many councils focus on civic engagement rather than ownership, e.g. a London council has established a community plan that includes ten initiatives of which four are sport/leisure related. Direct ownership of facilities and SRS services was limited in practice
- Capacity-building in communities beyond 'voice-based' mechanisms for engagement such as building competencies and confidence of communities was not a core feature of the majority of SRS
- In only a few authorities, SRS act as a 'broker' and a catalyst for mutual ownership and service delivery to date which raises questions about the timescale required to build a 'mutual state'
- Defining the boundaries of the voluntary and community sector is problematic, where it is underpinned by state support. The growth of state support for the Third sector under New Labour has receded from the Comprehensive Spending Review of 2010
- As one interviewee observed, there are 'a finite number of volunteers' and the use of unpaid staff raises questions around service quality standards, investment, and the robustness of accreditation
- Many interviewees raised concerns around realising the mutual state in an economic downturn. Others however thought that a period of austerity would facilitate the emergence of alternative service-orientations
- In a sense, the mutual state does not present leisure professionals with *new* challenges. However, the *scale* of the challenges do increase significantly in the current economic and political climate.

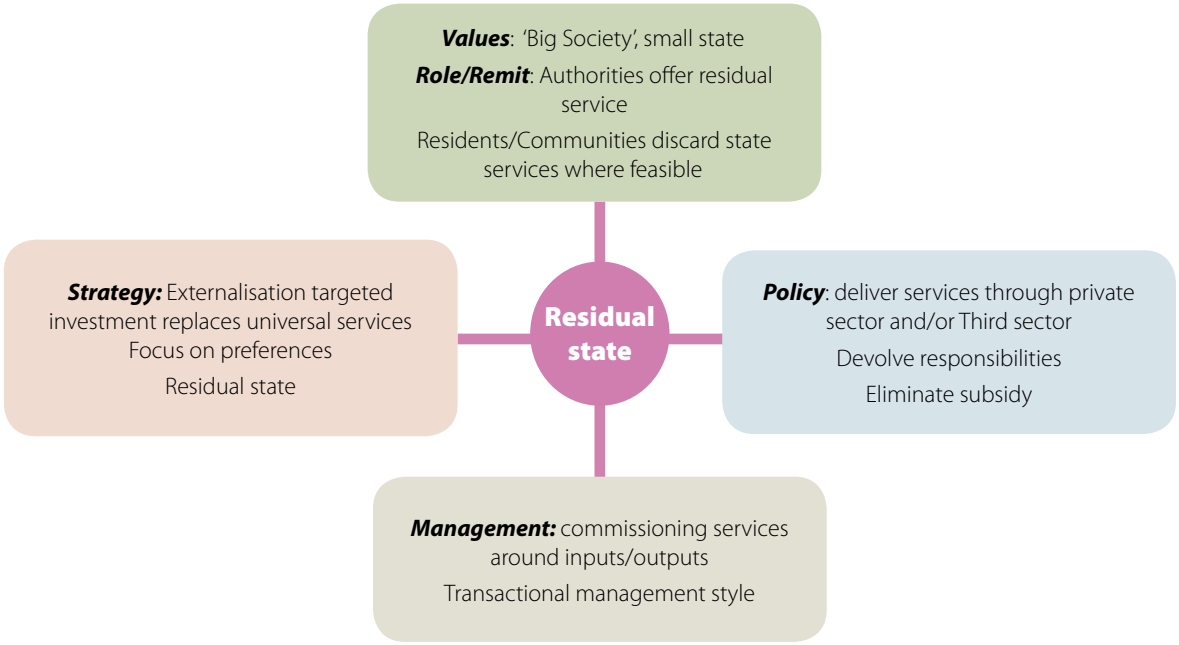
2.1.4.2 The residual or subsidiary state model

- In this model, the local authority no longer has the monopoly on service provision and in some cases direct service provision is downgraded and replaced with a residual service, where, for example, SRS would be commissioning unit (see NLGN, 2011)
- Investment for SRS is therefore sought through the private sector, e.g. for new facility construction. Public-Private Partnerships and the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) for example, play a key role in the infrastructure around sport and recreation services in this model
- This model is oriented towards replacing universal (usually subsidised) services with the targeted use of resources so as to avoid creating a resource dependency on the state and make financial savings. Who is entitled to free or inexpensive services is therefore a question SRS must confront in a service review
- This model emphasises transactional management in line with the 'market-oriented' model. Retaining or extending contractual arrangements and/or further developing an internal market

is an objective

- This model priorities 'efficiency' as a concept and practice and the understanding of 'value' is closely related to cost. Therefore delivering the 'business case' is the priority of SRS
- Arguably, if the *Big Society* is synonymous with a 'smaller' state, then a private sector expansion of the ownership, management and delivery of services replaces services formerly under local authority control
- Whereas the mutual state model includes local government as a partner (although not necessarily a direct provider) in the leisure sector, where its precise role and remit is negotiable and related to local factors, the residual state model in effect reduces the role and remit of SRS to a more marginal, subsidiary position within the sector as a whole
- The general policy trajectory of this model implies that SRS will provide 'safety net' services, with 'leisure', including sport and recreation, being a marginal focus for direct local authority investment.
- The 'residual' council is in effect an extension of the market-oriented or 'enabling' model.

Figure 5: A residual state model



Findings

- 39% of survey respondents expect the private sector to increase its role in the sector over the next five years
- Private sector externalisation was cited as priority option for 28% in research by CLOA (2011)
- In the author's research, 20% of councils cited PFI as a 'significant funder' and 23% expected to extend the use of PFI over the next five years
- 24% of authorities took account of the local private sector expansion in planning services and attempted to provide services based in facilities to an equivalent standard to the local private sector offer
- 50% noted the influence of 'KPI culture' over the last decade
- In the case of one London authority, the stated plan is to outsource 65% of direct provision by 2012 and eventually to outsource all direct provision. From the research data available to date, it appears that many other councils are actively evaluating other delivery structures.

- In this model, unprofitable services requiring higher levels of subsidy tend to remain in-house in practice, e.g. one interviewee cites an aging swimming pool with a disability-specific focus as an example
- However, only 10% of councils identity private operators as delivery partners
- Interviewees raised a number of concerns around shifting the current service-orientation towards a residual state model, including,
- A potential reduction in accountability and transparency
- The externalisation of services to the private sector can be expensive and not necessarily value-for-money
- Staffing can be affected in terms of salary and working conditions although interviewees referred to TUPE as a mechanism protecting staff
- A more fundamental erosion of service ethos was highlighted by a number of interviewees
- Political intervention in preferred contractor arrangements was cited as potentially damaging to improvements around accountability
- The research did find that many councils had removed developmental aspects of the SRS portfolio in the period 2010-12, especially services requiring subsidy
- It is statutory services delivered by established professions that are being preserved while preventative, community based provision remains vulnerable to further budgetary reductions.
- In practice, many Councils are removing grants to voluntary sport sector bodies rather than reducing council-led services or staffing

Summary

- Approximately one third of local authority sport services in this study argued that the *Big Society* ideas and practices are not new and authorities already operate within such a framework.
- Another third of authorities are at a 're-positioning stage' and are 'remaining flexible' to the Big Society concepts and practices as they emerge.
- For the remaining one-third, 'the tendency is towards retrenchment and maintaining employment in the current climate … as opposed to strategic planning' (CLOA interviewee). In these areas, non-state provision for sport and recreation is a scarce resource and there remains a significant resource dependency on both central and local government to 'provide'
- The findings indicate that many English councils are adapting in the current economic crisis to a 'residual' state model, rather than the more aspirational and transformative 'mutual' state model envisaged by elements of the coalition government
- By contrast, many other SRS are seeking to retain the 'ensuring state' model that emerged under the previous Labour government, itself a 'third way' between the welfare and market-led orientations that preceded it.
- In can be concluded that as of mid-2012, the *Big Society* agenda is a 'work in progress' rather than a coherent framework to underpin local government service priorities or practices and has been interpreted differently at the local level as a result, in line with existing service-orientations
- In recent surveys, local government members of APSE raised concerns about the financial capacity and long-term sustainability of Third sector management of services and prefer to retain 'core capacity' within the public sector (APSE, 2011a; 2011b)
- On the other hand, in many cases, there has been little professional or political incentive for SRS to facilitate social enterprise outside of local authority control.
- The aspirational mutual state outcome of citizen control of budgets is perhaps a longer-term objective, one that potentially undermines the role of the leisure professional. As one interviewee stated, residents 'would prefer to pay professionals' to establish and deliver services
- Where *Big society* means 'bypassing local authorities' with direct funding to neighbourhood level, questions can be raised around service quality, accountability, access and sustainability
- Interviewees noted that the local authority offers accountability through a legal framework and via elected representatives
- It was also noted by interviewees that increased competition between delivery agencies may lead to a situation where there is 'no coordination of the offer'

- Other interviewees observed that the availability of volunteers to deliver services is an issue in some localities due to resident lifestyles/working patterns and there are difficulties of 'tying volunteers to contracts' and a senior officer added that the 'capacity to take-on more [volunteers] is constrained' because of 'inflationary costs and lack of funding … to enhance the local infrastructure'
- In summary, delivering the mutual state model requires a significant revision of the existing service-orientation, policy and practices across the majority of councils whilst delivering a 'residual state' model presents fewer obstacles for councils seeking to reduce spending on discretionary services such as SRS (or having little choice but to do so) in the short-term.

SECTION B: Where are we now?

2.2 Key issues and challenges facing Sport and Recreation Services

2.2.1 Responding to the impact of budgets reductions

As identified by the Audit Commission (2010a, 2010b, 2011), local government faces 'tough times'. A number of reports have highlighted likely reductions in local government finance (e.g. CIPFA/Solace, 2009) since the beginning of the economic downturn in 2008.

Research by the Local Government Association (LGA) demonstrated a disproportional impact of the cuts on discretionary services in the budgets for 2011/12, at least for 13% of authorities (Centre for Social Justice, 2011). Assessing the impact of reductions in local government finance on SRS has only recently begun (e.g. CLOA, 2011) although SRS being 'under threat' is nothing new (Taylor and Page, 1994). However, in the current economic climate, the challenges faced by SRS are more severe than in prior decades.

Overview

- The research revealed a varied response from SRS to the 'cuts' depending on the administrative and political status of the service area within each authority, the priorities of the incumbent political party and existing governance arrangements, among other factors
- A pattern is emerging of local authorities protecting statutory services whilst discretionary developmental and preventative community-based provision is in decline
- Across authorities, it cannot be claimed that there exists evidence of a coherent strategic and operational response to the current crisis. In practice, a range of short-term measures to 'defend' or 'rationale' SRS were identified
- Financial considerations rather than local political party priorities underpin the majority of decisions around which services to cut. For example, in one long-standing Labour controlled Northern authority where charges had been raised for facility use, one senior policy officer stated: *'this reflects the financial pressures we are now facing. A few years ago it would have been hard to envisage … the Labour Group ever increasing charges in this politically sensitive area'*
- Impact on budgets
- The decline in the scale and scope of SRS is compounded by the fact that almost half of authorities cite decreasing budgets from 1997 onwards (CIPFA data cited in Collins, *forthcoming*) with revenue funding the hardest hit
- This trend is not new. Taylor and Page (1994), in a survey of over 250 authorities, noted a 'crisis' in local authority financing for sport and recreation and a danger that the response to financial cuts at the time were likely to be targeted at services with the least potential to generate income, mirroring the current pattern of responses across two-thirds of authorities
- Further, SRS rely on internal subsidy in most authorities and in many urban authorities this is up to 50%. SRS therefore operate at a loss despite an increasing focus on making a 'business case'. This in turn weakens the case for protecting subsidised services from the impact of the cuts
- Moreover, there has been an increasing resource dependence on external monies such as the National Lottery and Area-Based Grants to support mainstream budgetary commitments as the

survey findings highlight

- The 'financial health' of SRS was therefore generally weak prior to the current crisis and is significantly weaker now.

Impact on facilities

- In terms of facilities, in the period 2010-15, SRS face an uncertain future where opening hours are being reduced to cut costs and many foresee facility closures as inevitable
- However, replacing older stock is politically problematic despite the fact that in one city, typical of many, 80% of facility usage is generated by 50% of the existing facilities leaving half of facilities heavily subsidised and generating little impact on participation
- The majority of authorities, at the time of writing, are still intent in retaining facilities, despite the pessimism demonstrated in the survey responses, and to this end, some have 'salami sliced' budgets to at least postpone what may prove to be inevitable: namely, widespread closures
- Increased cross-sector and cross-boundary consortia bidding is being considered by a few councils in order to replace an aging facility stock. This approach, however, is the exception rather than the rule
- It was observed by interviewees that some authorities have been more pro-active than others in opening-up poorly used facilities to sport clubs and general community use
- A common response in many authorities has been to replace 'free use' for specific socio-economic groups with a nominal fee both in terms of facility use and participation in programmes. Although the removal of 'double subsidy' is welcomed from the standpoint of efficiencies, 'hard-to-reach' groups may be affected by raising barriers to access

Impact on programmes

- In some cases, rather than 'defend' services, the economic downtown and local government finance reductions has offered an opportunity for radical service rationalisation. In District authorities in particular, sport/s development has been disproportionately affected with many authorities cutting all developmental services
- In terms of programmes, as a result of responses to budget reductions, two-thirds of authorities are reducing commitments to programmes such as school holiday schemes
- The significant impact on 'welfare-oriented' SRS that reductions in local government funding will have and is already having in many locations

Impact on SRS contribution to social policy objectives

- Interviewees stated that reductions in the budget for SRS coupled with raising service charges is likely to impact negatively on health and anti-social behaviour objectives delivered through neighbouring departments and other partners
- The removal of resource intensive commitments such as GP Referral schemes, despite evidence-based data that indicates health gains in some instances, highlights how short-term savings made by budget reductions compromises sustained investment in pre-care interventions
- The 'hidden savings' made for the local authority and partner agencies of investing in SRS are not currently made explicit in the majority of cases
- Survey respondents observed that funding cuts will also impact on 'buy in' from external partners, unravelling relationships established with educational and health providers, for example, over the last decade

Impact on spaces to participate

- Financial commitments to maintaining parks, playing fields and pitches are being reduced across a raft of local authorities, potentially impacting on both organised and casual participation in sport and recreation
- To commit fewer resources to maintaining spaces can also affect quality of life and perceptions of place. Although off-set to some extent by external funding sources, the 'hidden costs' of non-investment are not explicit in the majority of cases

Regional differences

- Certain regions of England are disproportionally affected by the scale and pace of the reduced budgets. Interviewees in authorities in North-West England, for example, observed that there has been little time for councils to adjust to the cuts. By contrast, interviewees argued that local authorities in more affluent areas of the UK have greater capacity to defend discretionary services should they choose to do so
- The Audit Commission (2011: 11) note that it is District authorities that have been affected most by changes in central government funding support between 2010 and 2012, which in turn may be one factor explaining the loss of sport development services and whole units in some areas of England

The changing economic and political context may open up new opportunities for SRS, such as,

- The ongoing re-organisation of the Health Sector (Department of Health, 2010) where sport services can potentially access monies to tackle rising levels of obesity
- There may be opportunities for commissioning from Children's Services around the new 'Outcomes Framework' (Department for Education, 2008)
- In terms of future options, one authority in the Midlands region responded to the cuts by focusing its mainstream resources on 'participation', given that local authorities have been increasingly marginalised at the 'Foundation' and 'Performance' levels through central government funding of school sport partnerships and NGBs respectively (Houlihan and White, 2002)
- Utilising the framework of the Sport Development Continuum (Hylton and Bramham (eds.), 2008: 5), this authority has re-engaged with the remit for 'widening participation' and scaled down its portfolio to its 'core' objectives.

However,

- Levels of innovation appear to vary considerably across authorities and opportunities to acquire new funding to support SRS may not be taken or savings made may not be re-allocated back into SRS
- Further, in some authorities, long-serving staff, whether innovative or not, are retained ahead of investing in front-line services for the community. A re-organisation resulting from an internal review could focus on developing 'innovative capacity' rather than re-deployment.

In summary, responses to the 'cuts' are many and varied across England, with SRS demonstrating innovative coping strategies in many cases despite operating under threat of significant staffing reductions and/or loss of services. By contrast, other councils are rationalising services or 'phasing out' components of the SRS portfolio.

2.2.2 Selecting modes of service delivery

As noted earlier in the report, the reduction in budgets for SRS, particularly in the current context, coupled with the gradual marginalisation of the service area, has led to a review of modes of service delivery in almost all authorities (CLOA, 2011).

Trends: towards trust management

- It can be noted that for a number of authorities, the preference for in-house management is being challenged, predominantly in response to financial pressures.
- 41% of facility management is in-house with 24% of authorities delivering via Trusts (with charitable status) and 7% via private sector operators (the other 28% operate within a mixed economy of provision including school and voluntary sector management)
- The research indicates a shift towards trust management and away from in-house management over the last seven years by comparison with Audit Commission (AC) data for 2005 (AC, 2006: 12). This is a continuation of a general trend since the introduction of CCT and more recently, the *Local Government Act* of 1999
- The Audit Commission survey of forty authorities found that 70% had replaced DSO with a trust since 2001(cited in Collins, 2010). More recent surveys (CLOA, 2011) and this report identify a

growing trend towards trust management

- Looking forward, 74% of survey respondents anticipate a 'very likely' or 'likely' increase in outsourcing services. In this respect, 72% anticipate an extended role for Trusts
- A former Head of Leisure Services and current CLOA representative described Trusts as the 'predominant force' in emerging forms of commissioning. What can be claimed from the ongoing research is that trusts are now an established mechanism for service delivery and this is set to increase as authorities seek to reduce financial commitments in the current economic climate
- For example, one large authority on Merseyside claimed potential savings of £1.4m per annum if it moved to Trust management

Options

- As the Audit Commission (2006: 5) identify, 'No single management option delivers the best overall value for money, or consistently results in more investment or higher levels of participation.'
- The short-term costs of setting up a trust can often be off-set against the savings from operating through a trust in the mid-term (NNDR and VAT savings).
- Differences in the type of Trust need to be considered by SRS managers prior to committing to externalisation, e.g. some trusts operate as companies limited by guarantee and others have charitable status (either registered charities or exempt charities)
- Of the alternative options to in-house provision available to SRS, 'hybrid trusts' appear to offer a potential solution in the current economic climate, where set-up costs are low and the council can retain influence through a robust management contract (see Audit Commission, 2006: 42 for an analysis of the options). However, this may require a partnership arrangement with a private sector operator
- As found in research conducted by CLR (1993) and more recently the Audit Commission (2006), there was minimal take-up of local authority services by private sector contractors

Private sector management

- By comparison with trusts, interviewees argued that there was only a marginal platform for extending private sector management of public sector provision where only 3% of authorities identified the private sector as a core partner in formulating policy or strategy and only 10% in a delivery capacity as of 2010/11
- Accurate data on the overall extent of private sector involvement in delivering local authority SRS requires further research but the findings of this study do not indicate a significant expansion since 1997
- Nonetheless, early findings from Northern Ireland (see King/APSE, *forthcoming*) suggest a rapid increase in private sector interest in managing and delivering SRS

Voluntary and community sector management

- The survey undertaken to support this report also revealed that 69% of SRS officers anticipate an extended role for the voluntary sector in service delivery between 2010-15.
- Further research will be needed to ascertain to what extent the 'Big Society' agenda impacts on SRS
- It can be noted that research by APSE (2011b) questioned the levels of accountability that would emerge from increasing service delivery through co-operative and mutual organisations

Issues raised

- Notable concerns raised by senior officers included: future savings are not guaranteed by operating through a Trust; the current economic climate reduces the possibility of Trusts investing in facilities; the extent to which a trust has the flexibility to raise income and 'how 'profits' are allocated'; and it was noted that management contracts can leave 'less room for manoeuvre' politically

- As noted by the Audit Commission (2006: 5), where savings have been made via outsourcing sport services, 'the re-investment of significant levels of savings in sports and recreation provision is infrequent'
- Many senior officers also argued that in terms of value-for-money, there was little justification for outsourcing services as most authorities delivered a quality of services at least equivalent to services delivered by private sector providers
- Given this context, many SRS managers have sought to be self-sustaining thereby reducing the motivation to introduce trust management. A strong business case for SRS is unlikely to lead to outsourcing unless an ideological preference for outsourcing exists
- Under CCT, Collins (1997: 209) observed that many authorities 'did not specify the requirements of services that could be said to serve the needs of disadvantaged minorities'. Fifteen years later, it is questionable whether *Sport for All* is protected within contracts with trusts (*see case study in this report*)
- Moreover, research by the Audit Commission (2006, cited in Collins, 2010) found that very few trusts had a remit for sport development but instead focused solely on the management of facilities
- This is in part an outcome of increasing financial pressures on sport services since the 1990s (CELTS, nd) where 'community recreation and sports development' (a CIPFA category that can be related to spending patterns) has been disproportionately affected by contrast with spending on facilities and facility management
- The argument for and against the rationale and practices of leisure trusts are not within the scope of this report but it can be noted that as authorities provide (charitable) trusts with a grant, set the terms of the management agreement (policy, pricing, programming) and have political influence on the Board (albeit variable), they are in effect an 'arm of the state', and it is therefore local government that needs to establish robust mechanisms for 'defending' community benefit and the interests of its staff where TUPE applies
- What can be claimed is that policy priorities and practices across different trusts vary considerably and trusts do not necessarily offer 'guarantees' of minimum quality standards and accountability to local communities or sustainable equitable provision.

As one size does not fit all, councils need to decide on the mix of delivery mechanisms based on an analysis of:

- the intended *outcomes* of SRS rather than simply considerations of cost
- local needs and/or demand
- the *capacity* of external providers to meet service guarantees around accountability, equity, quality and sustainability
- the *level of competition* to provide services across the public, private and Third or voluntary sectors and where SRS might retain a role
- the *capacity* of the local authority to retain provision in its current form

As a result, councils have options including,

- Retaining government arrangements, e.g. keeping services in-house or DSO
- Extending governing arrangements, e.g. establishing inter-municipal partnerships around a 'regional offer'
- Moving services into an existing trust or setting-up a trust whilst retaining site ownership and/or a degree of financial, social and political control to guarantee accountability
- Outsourcing services to one or more private sector operators
- Devolving services to community organisations, voluntary sport bodies, schools, social enterprises, mutual and co-operative bodies, or others
- Divestiture, e.g. leasing sites to community groups and/or selling assets
- Franchise arrangements with preferred contractors who can guarantee service accountability, equity, quality and sustainability

Clearly, in any review, SRS need to make balanced judgements that take account of financial, social

and political demands within a coherent model of service-orientation. Decisions also need to be underpinned by a consensus around the balance between transactional management (contractual arrangements, usually with a financial-orientation and short-term) and transformational management (that emphasises longer-term social objectives centred on building community capacity to function without extensive state support). Underpinning these decisions, the research findings imply that SRS must identify and action a coherent role and remit that is distinct from other providers; one that offers the maximum community benefit (see 2.2.5).

2.2.3 Embedding the administrative and political status of SRS

A critical theme to emerge from the research was the significant impact on SRS of frequent administrative and political re-organisations (Leach, 2009) by comparison with embedded statutory services. In the period 1997 to 2010,

- Pressures to re-organise and reduce expenditure have had a significant impact on the administrative and political status of SRS
- 70% of sport services have moved administrative location on at least one occasion in line with internal re-organisations related to central government pressures around 'modernisation' and/or policy re-alignments related to local changes in party political control
- 61% of authorities experienced at least one change of political control during this time period
- Interviews revealed how party political control can result in a change in policy trajectory affecting the distribution of resources. However, the survey data did not indicate a significant impact on policy and practice from political change for most authorities, where SRS was treated as a marginal policy concern whichever political party had control
- Further instability resulted from 20% of sport services between 1997 and 2010 experiencing a change in principle authority type, mainly from District to Unitary status, the benefits of which were disputed by interviewees. However, the consensus was that unitary status benefitted SRS more so that two-tier service provision and this is supported by research by the Audit Commission (2006)

In practice, SRS has been 'passed from pillar to post' where, between 1997 and 2010,

- 56% of SRS had been re-located within and between political portfolios and only a small minority had acquired distinct representation at the level of the Executive Board
- Moreover, many authorities had changed from a process of decision-making through committee structures to a cabinet model that mirrors central government. As interviewees observed, officer contact with elected members had diminished considerably over time where the opportunity for influencing decision-making processes has been reduced
- However, the picture differed across authorities of differing type (unitary or district for example), size, resources, and the length of term in office of the incumbent political party
- In this turbulent context, only 33% of respondents considered the 'voice of sport' to be 'adequately represented'
- Further, interviewees witnessed elected member expertise and commitment to sport services varying considerably from pro-active to benign to disinterested or even hostile to spending on SRS
- In part, these findings explain the absence of a 'strategic overview' for SRS in many locations and the urgent need to align SRS within the corporate objectives of the local authority.

In many authorities a permanent disagreement exists around where sport services should be located.

- Downsizing and the fragmentation of leisure departments in recent years has meant that the strategic coherence for SRS has been further undermined. [The gradual decline of broad-based leisure directorates can be traced back to the early 1990s in some parts of England].
- For example, one authority in the North-West of England has sub-divided its leisure services into eleven units as of April 2011 with components of the former department merged with other service areas
- It is unsurprising, in this context, that for the majority of authorities, acquiring 'buy in' from

other service areas towards corporate policy goals has been a barrier to acquiring internal status

- Moreover, strategies for SRS have become detached from the corporate objectives of councils and the research indicates that leisure professionals have to some degree resisted engagement with non-sport related objectives
- In late 2010, the majority of SRS (49%) remain a component of leisure services (usually within larger departments or service areas). The remaining SRS are located in Community Services, Cultural Services, Education, or elsewhere, usually with marginal status
- Whereas almost half of authorities in England had a dedicated leisure/recreation department prior to CCT, research by CLR (1993) noted that 25% of services had moved from leisure to non-leisure departments after CCT was introduced. This trend appears to have gathered pace.

In recent years, the political salience of sport at a national level has increased and as a result the visibility of SRS within local government has increased, as has the level of scrutiny, particularly in the current political and economic environment. For example,

- The 'contribution' of sport and leisure in meeting corporate objectives is increasingly under scrutiny. Limited evidence-based data to 'make the case' has not assisted in defending services post the CSR 2010
- Interviewees cited 'nervousness' around producing a sport strategy in the current economic and political climate. Only 61% of authorities have a stand-alone strategy where, in a period of welfare state expansion under *New* Labour, a strategy was viewed as 'an expansionist document' indicating a degree of strategic confidence
- Nonetheless, in some larger authorities where there is a degree of integration between discretionary services and the wider strategic objectives of the authority, SRS remains a valued, albeit instrumental, component of provision
- However, these findings only confirm general trends spanning two decades. LRU (1994), reviewing 17 authorities, found no direct correlation between re-organisations and the 'leisure philosophy' of departments implying the absence of a coherent policy trajectory for SRS
- Finally, nearly twenty years ago, a senior SRS manager wrote, *'I believe that once … departmental identity disappears, the process will have begun whereby the erosion of leisure services under any name can be more readily legitimised. It's the start of a process whereby elected members can reconcile themselves to losing their sports development sections … and closing wet and dry facilities'* (Collins, 1994:25).
- Two decades later, the need to embed SRS into the administrative and political structures and processes within local authorities remains, where distinct departmental identity is increasingly absent
- The embeddedness of SRS in some local authorities has taken many years of relationship-building and 'making the case'. Local level political support is a pre-requisite for SRS to be valued and it's resource base retained.

2.2.4 Mediating central government policy trajectories

A significance aspect of changing modes of governance affecting SRS relates to central-local government relations (Laffin, 2009) and the 'modernisation of local government' (Cochrane, 2004; Newman, 2001, 2005; Rhodes, 2007; Wilson and Game, 2006) where building trust between central and local government has at time proved problematic (Lowndes, 1999; Wilson, 2003). It is also problematic to disentangle and isolate the current political and economic context from the previous thirteen years of a Labour administration where there was significant re-investment in components of the welfare state, following a period of welfare state contraction under Conservative administrations 1979-97 (Cocks, 2009).

The impact of the 'modernisation' agenda was a key theme to emerge from this study.

- For SRS, this 'modernisation' took the form of CCT (see Henry, 2001: chapter 5), *Best Value* (Sport England, 1999), CPA and Comprehensive Area Agreement (CAA), as frameworks for increasing efficiency, effectiveness and accountability
- From the research it is clear that a growth in Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and the embedding of an auditing culture impacted on delivery and in some cases stifled innovation

and local discretion

- Notably, 81% of survey respondents observed that a focus on service level indicators had downplayed a focus on 'local need' to a 'moderate to high' extent
- Although there is evidence from interviews of SRS taking an instrumental view of adapting to or resisting central government pressures through the period 1997-2010, the ongoing cuts to local authority finance are beginning to have a more significant impact, one that SRS cannot circumvent
- For example, looking to the future, 50% of authorities foresee mergers between local authority services
- However, of note is the gap between aspiration and feasibility where only 23% of SRS currently work with neighbouring authorities in policymaking and 14% in service delivery around sport-related services
- As observed by the Audit Commission (2006: 5), 'Councils often focus on maintaining and managing their historic pattern of local sports and recreation provision. Cross-boundary planning and rationalisation of sport and recreation facilities is limited. Few councils work in partnership in the procurement of their sports and recreation services'. It can be claimed that over the last few years that little has changed in this regard, although joint procurement is beginning to gain momentum in some locations
- Interviewees observed that some authorities 'want to go further' in this respect, but it was recognised that 'this is not always politically feasible' highlighting the perpetual tension between local government as both an administrative and political unit of governance
- Hence the critical need to integrate financial, political and social aspects of SRS (*see figure 7*) in designing any future 'embedded' and sustainable model
- It is recognised however that local authorities have been subject to a curtailment of powers over time and a decline in discretion has in many cases, coupled with the growth of an 'auditing culture', compromised opportunities for SRS managers to develop a longer-term strategic view
- The research found a reduction in the number of senior managers with oversight of SRS since the cuts began to take effect, which raises concerns regarding the potential to undertake a meaningful review leading to strategic decision-making
- The Coalition government's stated interest in extending 'localism' may benefit SRS in terms of levels of self-determination but further research is needed over the next decade to determine whether SRS will acquire extended discretion and autonomy in practice.

Other findings relate to the impact of changing national policy agendas.

- One of the key findings from the survey and interviews was a policy shift from a 'sport centred' focus at the local level over the last decade towards utilising sport for social policy purposes (DCMS, 2002)
- For example, 74% of SRS took action in response to the central government agenda for health, where 'physical activity' rather than 'sport' was central to emerging links between sport services and health agencies (King, 2009: chapter 8)
- In fact, the research found that government intervention in policy areas such as health, education and youth justice impacted significantly on the strategic and operational aspects of delivering sport services
- Apart from social policy objectives, national sport policy increasingly focused on elite sport (Green, 2004; 2006) particularly towards the end of the *New* Labour term in office (DCMS, 2008)
- Local authorities demonstrated a range of responses to this agenda that to some extent highlighted tensions between both elite and mass sport objectives (Collins, 2008)
- The research found that although some authorities demonstrated a commitment to aspects of performance-related sport and sports events to fulfil both 'showcasing', place-shaping and economic rationales, the majority claimed to have prioritised 'widening participation'
- However, in practice, authorities demonstrated a limited level of commitment to this policy objective as the case study on *Sport for All* (*see 6.0*) clearly demonstrates
- In contrast, authorities have largely welcomed a policy orientation towards performance-related sport either as a result of 'following the funding', or ideological consensus with central

government, or national policy trajectory 'fitting' embedded local level priorities. Given the financial control that central government wields over local government in England, these findings are not unsurprising.

2.2.5 Establishing and sustaining a role and remit for SRS

Within broader debates about the role and remit of local government and the state (e.g. Skelcher, 2000; Stoker, 2005), across the majority of local authorities, SRS has struggled to find a distinct identity and purpose. The findings of this report serve to highlight this issue. In respect of the role and remit of SRS,

- 62% of survey respondents observed a shift from 'provider' to 'facilitator' since 1997 and within the next 5 years, 61% perceive the core remit of sport services as being one of 'facilitator' by comparison with 12% as a 'provider'
- A further 27% identified their core remit moving forward as 'to ensure services for specific groups/resident communities' implying a level of provision will be retained within the 'ensuring' state model
- In this regard, one senior officer noted the extent of local authority provision in many urban areas where it would be unlikely that the private and Third sectors could 'fill the gap' if SRS were withdrawn
- Many interviewees acknowledged that the local state is limited in what it can achieve and local communities do not necessarily benefit from services provided *for* them
- In this context, and given the ongoing significant reductions in public sector finance, local authority service areas are attempting to re-define their role and remit including SRS
- A new 'model' would require SRS to develop a coherent strategic approach centred on 'core' objectives that can be differentiated from private sector and Third sector delivery of sport and recreation services
- Redefining the role and remit of SRS requires an assessment of the relationship between the local authority, local communities and residents and potentially this equates to developing a new social contract based around: services provided, who services are provided for, and the method by which services are funded (CIPFA/Solace, 2009)
- Redefining the role and remit of SRS is likely to be framed within any redefinition of the broader role and remit of local government (see NLGN, 2011, for example)
- However, SRS management can pre-empt such changes (that offer both opportunities and threats) by remaining flexible in terms of management and modes of delivery whilst protecting core values and priorities
- In a sense, the question of the role and remit of SRS moving forward is nothing new (Audit Commission, 1989). However, the severity of the economic recession may result in innovation and not simply a review
- One policy trajectory that SRS must acquire or retain alignment with is in response to the health 'crisis' including the decline of physical activity and rising health problems and costs including obesity. To paraphrase one commentator, 'physical activity may be the only policy hook for sport after the ramamatazz of the 2012 Olympic Games fades'.

Given uncertainty regarding the role and remit of SRS in the next decade, the following section of this report assesses and compares differing strategic directions that SRS are taking now.

SECTION C: Where are we heading?

2.3 Strategic directions: pre-emptive, reactive or defensive?

In broad terms, the research findings indicate that,

- One third of authorities have anticipated recent political and economic change and re-organised services to include valued components of SRS. The 'pre-emptive' or 'pro-active' authority is in a strong position to defend specific aspects of the SRS portfolio
- One third of authorities are undertaking a review process in 2011/12 as part of an 'adapt to survive' strategy. The 'reactive' authority is skilled at 'muddling through' a crisis but the current crisis is more sizeable and requires a strategic response in addition to an operational response
- One third of authorities, as one senior officer put it, 'have not gathered pace so far'. In these authorities the tendency is towards retrenchment. The 'defensive' authority focuses on organisational survival as a core priority. These services may have little chance of survival beyond the short-term
- The three responses to the current political and economic environment are represented diagrammatically as follows (*figures 4, 5, 6*). Each of the three responses are detailed with examples taken from interview-based research coupled with document analysis
- This report will then highlight examples of 'best practice' demonstrated by SRS in 'pre-emptive' authorities where organisational survival and continued development is the most likely outcome despite the current political and economic environment
- It can be concluded that managing SRS over the next decade will be a significant challenge for SRS officers if sport and recreation are to remain components of local authority work
- In this regard, a period of economic austerity may generate meaningful innovation across many authorities. Many services, as is demonstrated in this section, are well placed to manage economic and political change.

Figure 6: Components of a pre-emptive SRS

Agreed core values and shared policy focus Coherent remit	Political and administrative embeddedness	Strong business case
Innovative, outward-looking, strong leadership, case-makers	Buy-in from external organisations	Strong evidence base

- In this authority type, SRS is a valued component of the local authority service portfolio, albeit a relatively minor service area by comparison with Education and Adult Social Care for example
- SRS has a degree of political and administrative embeddedness often as a result of long-standing relationships with other service areas and individuals within the authority
- Over time, the SRS leadership has made a case for sport-related services centred on a strong business case that allows social objectives and practices such as *Sport for All* a degree of recognition and permanence on the policy landscape
- In terms of the business case, managers aim to operate as a neutral cost service and most currently operate to a minimal deficit strategy which in turn acquires significant political support and recognition within wider corporate planning objectives
- As observed by the Audit Commission (2006: 5) 'Leadership and commitment from the top within the council and partner organisations are strong in successful services'
- These authorities tend to identify and assess political, social and financial gains, benefits and drivers within a cycle of continuous improvement. Critically, 'pre-emptive' authorities

frequently re-examine assumptions underpinning decisions around service priorities and resource allocation

- These authorities are engaging pro-actively with thematic working practices across service areas; ; and are prepared to consider new or emerging models of local governance (e.g. NLGN, 2011)
- In some cases, Strategic Commissioning Models have or are being explored as services shift from transactional to transformational in nature (e.g. Carson et al, 2010)
- This level of forward planning and flexibility facilitates the likely retention of valued services despite the policy environment
- Moreover, these local authorities are usually active partners in Local improvement networks, in for example, the drive towards improving accountability to local residents and communities (LGA, 2011)
- Although the 'cuts' will affect SRS in these councils, the impact is likely to be proportional to adjacent service domains
- Specific actions taken by SRS are cited at point 2.4.

Figure 7: Components of a reactive SRS

A short-term strategic direction, conflicting service-orientations	Partial embeddedness within the authorityLimited elected member support	Weaknesses in the business case
Managers adopt a 'adapt to survive' strategy	Variable buy-in from internal and external organisations	Making the case is problematic

- SRS in approximately a third of authorities have consistently been under pressure to 'modernise' both from within the authority and from external agencies of central government
- SRS have responded by placing an emphasis on the business case often to the neglect of *Sport for All*
- Strategic documentation reveals a tendency to adapt to frequent policy changes and re-organisations in other sectors such as health, education, youth justice and in terms of national sport policy, but often without a clear internal strategic direction or a published strategy for SRS
- As a result of pursuing funding to maintain core budgets and a lack of embeddedness within the authority, given frequent administrative re-locations and change in local political control, among other factors, SRS attempts to 'muddle through' without a coherent strategic direction
- SRS in these authorities will be or is being affected by the 'cuts', but in some cases, may be able to continue as a downsized or more focused service
- Although SRS within these authorities have adopted a 'adapt to survive' strategy underpinned by pro-active leadership in many cases
- Nonetheless, by comparison with the 'defensive' authority, SRS in this group of authorities are demonstrating a capacity to defend services, at least in the short-term.

Figure 8: Components of a defensive SRS

Lacking a strategic direction Conflicting aims Policy-taking	Marginalised services, subject to frequent re-organisations No clear alignment with corporate objectives	Weak business case Subsidy-oriented Resource dependent
Inward-looking, defensive, risk averse Competent management but lacking leadership	Little or no buy-in from both internal and external organisations	Little or no evidence base to support the case for SRS

- SRS in the 'defensive' scenario have few options. Although many of these authorities continue to provide services *for* communities, because of a weak business case and poor levels of political support, among other factors, services will be or have already been cut significantly, particularly developmental services
- In terms of strategic thinking and planning, the Audit Commission (2006: 4) found that, in some authorities, 'The strategic planning of local sport and recreation services is underdeveloped with little robust assessment of current private and public leisure provision, community needs and future demand'. Also, '60 per cent had no strategic plan in place to secure long-term investment' (AC, 2006: 20)
- In terms of the business case, 'Performance management is weak, and this restricts the ability of councils to assess the impact of services on local and national priorities' (AC, 2006: 4)
- Moreover, in respect of facilities, the AC concluded that for a number of Councils, 'progress towards ensuring the appropriate management of public sector sports and recreation facilities has been slow and uncertain'
- In regard to partnership-working, the AC found few effective partnerships with external agencies across the majority of councils and the incentive for partnership-working had been primarily 'driven by external funding opportunities rather than a planned strategic approach'
- In the case of 'defensive' SRS, little may have changed since the AC report, and arguably a radical overhaul of services is required with immediate effect
- It could be argued that for some councils unsympathetic to SRS, the current economic downturn coupled with cuts to local government finance offers an opportunity for a 'phased withdrawal' or 'managed decline' of services leading to cessation
- However, the additional costs incurred by other service areas by withdrawing SRS can outweigh retention. However, in 'defensive' councils, 'making the case' has not been a priority and/or the case has not been heard
- As observed by the Audit Commission (2006: 53), 'Poor performance in areas such as participation or customer satisfaction is rarely a factor that triggers a detailed options appraisal'. However, the threat of significant cuts to services and the knock-on effect on other (statutory) services may serve to initiate a review process.

In sum, despite the best efforts of service managers and staff, due to a lack of political support, administrative embeddedness and other factors as outlined, SRS in these authorities face an uncertain future.

2.4 Identifying components of the 'pre-emptive' local authority sport and recreation service: towards best practice

Those authorities identified as 'pre-emptive' have taken a number of decisions and actions that have strengthened the status of SRS within local authorities. These include financial, political and social policy related decisions.

First, a key component of 'making the case' for SRS has involved developing a stronger business case. Specifically, 'pre-emptive' authorities are:

- Taking a strategic (and longer-term) view, including planning to phase out an aging facility stock and replacing it with multi-activity hubs (physical activity, exercise and sport) aligned to healthcare, education and/or new housing developments, for example
- Generating additional income through accessing and utilising statutory service budgets, where SRS can demonstrate a contribution to reducing costs and workload. As statutory services 'may need to make a greater contribution to future savings' (Audit Commission, 2011: 33) it is important that SRS demonstrate how their services contribute to saving monies for services such as Education, Health, Adult Care services and elsewhere (IDeA, 2010)
- Introducing 'whole system efficiencies': pooling resources, merging services and rationalising 'back office functions'. As noted by the Audit Commission (2011: 34), 'Spending on services can be reduced with minimal impact on service users by improving efficiency' although finding savings simply through efficiencies cannot fully off-set the impact of the cuts for SRS in many locations
- Forming 'commissioning hubs' to share expertise and other resources within and across local authority boundaries
- Operating to a 'minimum deficit strategy' with the aim of zero deficit within the mid-term or sooner via a process of commissioning services. Officers demonstrated that self-sustaining services are less likely to be affected by the 'cuts' or unsupportive political intervention
- Maximising the use of assets rather than closing or reducing services. Where a number of authorities have simply reduced facility opening hours to reduce costs, others have sought to 'fill' off-peak times with income generating activities. For example, in one city, a tennis centre was used for multi-use activities when demand for tennis was scarce. The research found that many clubs and schools struggled to find local affordable spaces to undertake physical activity and sport. Even where the income generated is not significant, it is arguably the duty of the authority to provide access to public facilities
- Building the capacity of organisations to be self-managing is a role that SRS has undertaken by a number of authorities. In some locations, clubs and schools managed sessions in SRS facilities at a low or zero cost to the local authority. A number of dual-use school sites are managed along similar lines.
- Ensuring that subsidy is targeted and is not 'indiscriminate', e.g. re-defining discounted access to facilities around a revision of eligibility criteria
- Securing value for money through undertaking an options analysis for modes of service delivery with reference to a local needs analysis. This may include curtaining or devolving services not within core values or core capacity of SRS to agencies who can deliver specific non-essential services, where this is the case. Other authorities have or plan to up-skill staff where expertise in specific aspects of the portfolio was currently limited. Alternatively, expertise has been bought-in by a number of authorities in this research sample
- Avoiding the temptation to make *short-term* financial fixes such as reducing services and staffing, the sale of assets, and the use of reserves or unsupported borrowing without longer-term strategic oversight and an operational plan that lacks buy-in from partners and funders
- Examining the assumptions on which reserves are earmarked or unallocated. In a few authorities, where SRS is valued, reserves have been used to off-set the impact of the cuts, albeit that this action may only be part of a short-term strategy. Nonetheless, some interviewees argued that the use of reserves can 'buy time' whilst SRS is under review and whilst sustainable strategies to

retain SRS are established

- Anticipating changes in central government support. The Audit Commission (2011: 42) found that a third of single tier authorities and a half of District authorities had not accurately forecasted changing levels of central government support. This study of SRS made similar findings where Councils 'ahead of the curve' had re-organised to protect valued services including, in approximately a third of authorities, SRS
- Assessing the financial capacity of third sector organisations to deliver services whilst accounting for 'uncontrollable costs' in forward planning, e.g. the rising costs of utilities that affect facility provision and potential asset transfer to community groups
- Utilising the shift from one year to three year budgetary planning cycles that has offered councils the opportunity to plan beyond the very short-term in, for example, establishing more effective partnership-working with external providers and in terms of taking a longer view on investment in facilities
- Seeking, via service reviews, to raise capital receipts through the sale of land no longer utilised for sport or recreational purposes and where 'latent demand' is unlikely to emerge, with the intention of creating a sport and recreational infrastructure across a geographical area (and involving more than one local authority) that is 'fit for purpose'
- Generating additional income from trends such as non-traditional sport and physical activities and adapted sports, accounting for lifestyle changes such as the boom in health-related fitness. Many aspects of the traditional portfolio of sports are no longer major income generators. Currently, many councils are successful in generating income via 'learn to swim' schemes. Swimming programmes are favoured by health sector agencies and therefore reducing mainstream budgetary support has been achieved
- Identifying the core business: In terms of sport-specific components of the portfolio, many councils have retained or even expanded their activities via a funding relationship with NGBs of sport over the last decade. NGBs in effect fund the development officers. The council may also consider 'passing on' the administrative costs of hosting an officer to the NGB. Arguably, sport-specific development is not the core business of local authorities and there is limited justification for the local taxpayer to underwrite these activities. In order to retain a 'showcasing' and 'place-shaping' agenda through sport, NGBs and elite event organisers have been included in such as strategy with minimal public sector funding support.

The second component of a successful strategy to defend and develop SRS is managing the political environment. 'Making the case' here is making a political case for SRS, given variable levels of 'buy in' from political leaders, and given that political embeddedness is not a core feature of SRS in two-thirds of councils. Examples include:

- Identifying political gains and benefits in aligning SRS to corporate objectives, e.g. linking SRS to employment-related objectives, or youth justice, education or health goals. Demonstrating savings to statutory services (budget holders) is one aspect this approach
- Maximising support from Health sector bodies by ensuring representation for SRS on the new or planned Health and Well-Being Boards (particular as the Boards will consist of political appointees). Building on partnerships with PCTs is a starting point. One authority in this research cited a physical-activity based health programme (including sport) that demonstrated £2000 per month saving in the cost of medicine. This data raised the profile of SRS and acquired political support for further resources
- Brokering to claim a stake for sport and physical activity in respect of dual-use sites. Alignment to education services may prove to be problematic in the next decade given marginal representation on Local Education Partnerships and the changing powers of school Heads. Nonetheless, community use of school sites has been successfully negotiated with elected member support in some localities
- Raising the profile of SRS within the authority through community events; elected member involvement in community sport projects; circulation of 'good news' stories; representation on boards such as select committees; presentations and a general 'awareness-raising exercise' for elected members who often do not have sector expertise

- 'Piggy-backing' on national events that raise the profile of sport such as the forthcoming Olympic Games in London. This involves re-branding existing activities linked to local communities without committing additional resources. In some locations, SRS can simply offer guidance and the use of sites for community-organised and community-run 'mini-Olympics'
- Maximising the use of the local media and local third sector advocates and sport lobbyists via a local cross-sector sports forum for example to promote the work of the council. The research found that approximately 80% of SRS have a role within local sport forums, offering an opportunity to make a community-led case for SRS. As interviewees observed, community support for local authority services will be increasingly important in an economic downturn
- As observed by the Audit Commission (2011: 39) it is 'good local decision-making' that shapes the financial health of services around local priorities, even in the context of the cuts. In those Councils where SRS have been significantly affected by responses to the cuts, it is in part because of the low priority afforded to protecting SRS on the one hand and/or the likelihood that 'the case' for SRS hasn't be made or heard by those in positions of influence.

The third component of a successful strategy to 'make the case', defend and develop SRS was identified as retaining a social policy focus within an increasingly hostile economic climate. Actions taken by 'pre-emptive' authorities to retain a welfare-orientation tend to operate within the 'ensuring council' model and therefore combine financial and political considerations within the 'social case'. Actions include:

- Collating evidence of impact including using audits of social and economic gains, benefits and impacts, and presenting the case to Heads of Services, CEO and Council Leader or Mayor
- 'Tailoring the offer' to align SRS with the corporate objectives of the authority that include a social policy dimension
- Setting robust management contracts with trusts around pricing, access and guarantees on investment
- Building accountability and visibility in local communities in conjunction with the more pro-active elected members at ward level
- Up-skilling SRS staff to build community capacity to self-manage and deliver services
- Allocating rights to communities to use disused council owned land or buildings for sport and recreational purposes. The council may be required to support this option with revenue in the short-term to avoid the community asset becoming a liability. Building community capacity will reduce costs
- Providing communities with the opportunity to own and/or deliver services where there is capacity. Contracts should ensure accountability, equity, quality and sustainability of services
- Integrating sport development with service components that generate surplus income and/or integration with facility management
- Delivering services through partner agencies that can deliver inexpensive social objectives with significant impact and/or bringing services back in-house where guarantees have not been met
- Communicating messages to partners and funders around 'physical activity' rather than 'sport' where it is expedient to do so (this does not mean abandoning sport-based activities)
- Ensuring policy changes in education allow for the retention of community use of dual-use school sites
- Developing targeted services for groups excluded by mainstream provision. In a context where an increasing fragmentation of provision can be anticipated, SRS need to broker contracts that facilitate social inclusion
- Supporting only social enterprises that build capacity and community leadership and developing new finance for social impact. Interviewees stated that developing community capacity will take time and requires building trust between SRS and local residents where a 'trust gap' exists in many localities
- Making use of 'dead time' in facilities in order to generate income, increase opportunities and avoid the 'political fallout' of closures. As stated in this report, research identified many voluntary sport clubs who required the use of SRS facilities but had experienced 'barriers to access' implying that a latent and untapped demand for facility use exists

- Building active volunteering and sense of citizenship whilst avoiding using volunteers to simply deliver services. This requires SRS to establish a forum or other mechanism to enable volunteers to have a voice. The benefits to SRS are increased visibility and legitimacy within communities; increased support from elected members at ward level; and reduced direct costs of provision
- A number of authorities, rather than cutting sports development units, are sharing sport development functions across municipal boundaries. This required an agreement on the definition of 'sport's development'
- A number of authorities have justified the use of subsidy for targeted groups based on the 'wicked issues' in the local area, e.g. anti-social behaviour and youth crime. Evidence-based evaluation of these programmes in essential to gain the support of key partners and funders over the longer-term.

All of these actions and others may require a new understanding of the role and remit of SRS and a 'new deal' between the state and the individual and community. Although 'defensive' councils perceive a threat rather than an opportunity in this respect, 'pre-emptive' councils have recognised that a 'mature' welfare state can no longer simply provide services for a passive resident-base to 'consume' but must re-define the role of the local authority.

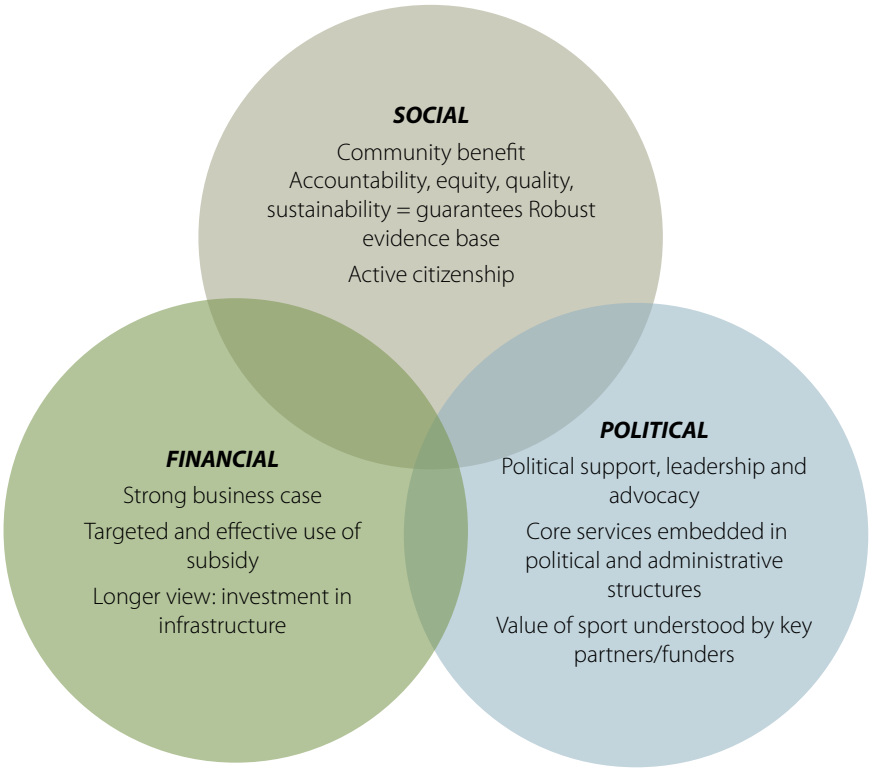
- Three core roles for councils can be evaluated in any review of SRS: namely, financial (providing value for money); social (ensuring and enabling opportunities for all); and political (reducing the 'democratic deficit' and increasing active citizenship: see figure 9)

Further, a number of 'pre-emptive' authorities have already identified new opportunities moving forward, including:

- Promoting the merits of low cost health-related programmes such as swimming schemes to GP Commissioners
- Aligning services to the new 'outcomes framework' for education
- Tailoring services to 'fill the gap' where Youth Services have been cut
- Emphasising links with community safety agendas in the wake of the 'riots' of 2011
- Developing targeted, intensive, low cost interventions where SRS takes the role as a 'community activator', very much in line with the community recreation and *Action Sport* initiatives of previous decades
- Importantly, many authorities recognised that providing facilities for community use is only one part of building a culture of participation locally and outreach continues to be critical in this regard (although this is the area where the cuts are having the largest impact: *see case study*)
- Utilising the increased emphasis on localism and the changing role of elected members as an opportunity to raise the profile of SRS.

Over time 'pre-emptive' SRS have become an embedded component of local councils. A merging of the political, financial and social aspects of SRS has taken place. A level of embeddedness offers SRS the possibility of enduring an economic crisis and further political change.

Figure 9: Framework for a successful SRS



SRS aligned to this 'model' are those operating within the parameters of the ensuring council. This model offers guarantees that the private and third sector cannot or would not choose to deliver. For example,

- Equity of access and availability of services
- Targeted rather than 'indiscriminate' use of subsidy for the most vulnerable groups in society
- Robust management contracts with external delivery agencies to ensure fairness, e.g. in pricing of services
- Sustainability of programmes beyond the funding life-span and quality standards
- A quantification of social impacts to increase accountability and 'make the case' for sport-related services both internal to the local authority and with external partners, particularly in the health sector
- A strong business case to support social policy objectives
- Apart from social and financial objectives, arguably, SRS would encourage 'political citizenship' where local communities and individuals have the opportunity to influence service quality and accountability, as service users
- One role for SRS is therefore to build the capacity of local people to engage with community development objectives relating to SRS
- Rather than being a threat to leisure professionals and elected members, taking actions to facilitate active and 'political citizenship' has the potential to generate social and political gains for the local authority and the profession
- For SRS to become a co-producer in addition to a direct provider of local services where officers operate 'within' the community rather than alongside the community requires a sea-change in management culture and practices across many authorities.

It can also be noted that for the financial, social and political components of SRS to be aligned and integrated, a management culture of continuous improvement is necessary underpinned by,

- Taking a longer-term strategic view

- Pro-active leadership
- Innovative financial management
- Investment in the continuous professional development of officers
- Thematic or cross-departmental working practices
- A client-facing service-orientation
- Providing added value in service management
- A culture of managed risk-taking
- Promotion of a learning culture
- Seeking the support of professional bodies, improvement networks and independent researchers
- Continuous evidence gathering including service benchmarking e.g. APSE performance networks.

At the heart of SRS responses to political and economic change is *innovation* (see Hall, 2010; Harris and Albury, 2009; I&DeA, 2007, 2009; IPPR/PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2009b; Mulgan, 2007; The Young Foundation, 2010a, 2010b: for example).

Arguably, two-thirds of councils in this study have demonstrated varying degrees of innovation in SRS despite increasing financial constraints, the legacy of prior commitments and in many cases, an indifferent level of political support.

3.0 Case study: Sport for All?

In this section of the report, 'sport development' is defined in terms of *Sport for All*. This involves policy and practice to widen participation into physical activities inclusive of sport. Targeted programmes or outreach is therefore the core focus although services in many cases are also aligned to social policy objectives such as building social inclusion. In this study, these services were quantified through an assessment of the allocation of dedicated resources such as staffing, time, budgets, targeted programmes, priority use of facilities and the use of subsidy.

The survey findings included:

- Only 20% of authorities supported *Sport for All* with mainstream funding
- 33% did not have a 'community sport' unit and only 50% of authorities had dedicated staffing
- 25% did not allocate dedicated time to outreach
- 33% had not upgraded community facilities in the period 1997-2010
- Only 32% of respondents believed that leisure trusts 'defended' *Sport for All*
- 46% cite decreasing budgets for SRS since 1997 where the CIPFA category of 'sports development and community recreation' is a lesser priority within SRS portfolios
- 61% cite increasing dependence on Area Based Grants that have now been curtailed
- 34% cite a high dependence on National Lottery funding
- As of 2011, many authorities (particularly District authorities) have cut all sport development functions related to *Sport for All*

Looking forward to the period 2010-15, survey responses included:

- 89% foresee revenue budgets falling and affecting sport development programmes
- 86% anticipate staff cuts
- 84% expect to raise charges
- 71% foresee a negative impact on other service areas
- 67% expected a reduction in the opening hours of facilities and 47% anticipated facility closures
- 53% expect to reduce financial commitments to parks, fields an pitches utilised for both organised and casual participation
- Only 50% distributed grants or provided match funding where 'widening participation' was a policy objective

The Audit Commission (2011) also observed responses to the local government finance settlement that included,

- Cuts in the volume and frequency of services
- Changes in quality or minimum service standards
- Restrictions in eligibility, and/or
- New or increased fees and charges
- Arguably, given the incoming coalition government focus on reducing public sector spending, it is 'widening participation' that will be disproportionately affected, particularly as many authorities have 'hollowed out' developmental services requiring subsidy.
- This is not to suggest that all authorities have abandoned 'welfare-oriented' policy, only that its survival in the portfolio of SRS had become resource dependent on external funding sources from central government, leaving it vulnerable to 'the cuts'.
- If the generic objective of 'widening participation' has diminished, then practices founded in community recreation, where the focus is on an objective of 'bottom up' community empowerment in the promotion of Sport for All have diminished even further.
- Instead, it is area-based initiatives funded directly through central government and its agencies, such as Sport Action Zones, that were tasked with enabling communities to deliver sport with differing degrees of success (Collins and Kay, 2003; Coalter, 2007; Walpole and Collins, 2010; King, 2009: chapter 10). These initiatives have now ceased.
- This trend away from mainstream funding support for welfare goals is not recent however but

can be traced to the early 1990s (Lentell, 1993) despite the relative success of demonstration projects (McIntosh and Charlton, 1985).

- In a study of 29 London Borough authorities, McDonald (1995) found that less than half had a 'community focus' with the majority of the others operating essentially as 'Income Generators' (following the introduction of CCT), or 'Sport Developers' with a focus on sport-specific development across a narrow range of activities and competition-based.
- In the period 1997-2010, the research found that many authorities have been pre-occupied with extending NGB funded sport-specific objectives. Arguably, as of 2011, 'community-oriented' services remain a marginal policy concern across a raft of authorities.
- Nonetheless, as McDonald (1995: 90) concludes, 'the shift from 'community' towards sport-specific development and income generation is uneven, reflecting the importance of … local conditions and strategies [related to] the prevailing ideological, political and financial environment'.
- From the ongoing research it is clear that the local economic and political environment is having an uneven impact on sport service priorities and practices in the context of the cuts.
- The research found that authorities with a tradition of welfare-orientation, where SRS is embedded into the personal and professional networks and culture of the authority, supported by a continuity of party political support, have the capacity to sustain a focus on 'widening participation', at least in the short to mid-term.
- In regard to community-oriented development officers, McDonald (1995: 84) concluded that 'it is difficult to be optimistic about their long term existence'. Over a decade later, this insight has proven to be accurate. In summary, the future prospects of Sport for All appear to be poor and if this is the case, then the legitimacy of local government SRS provision where Sport for All is not a portfolio component must be questionable.
- It can be noted from the ongoing research that a focus on 'widening participation' and outreach competes with other components of a broad SRS portfolio such as sport-specific development around competition and performance in line with national level sport policy (Collins, 2008; Green, 2004, 2006 and 2009) and 'development through sport' objectives (Houlihan and White, 2002) such as the use of sport in building social inclusion (Collins and Kay, 2003) and in meeting health-related objectives (King, 2009).
- In this context, services traditionally requiring subsidy have been squeezed, particularly where mainstream budgets support an aging facility stock and where the 'business case' for SRS as a whole has not been strong.
- Given that the private sector caters primarily 'for higher income customers and [there is] … less emphasis on young people or sports development (Audit Commission, 2006: 11), it is arguably a duty of SRS to retain a focus on Sport for All, in the form of community recreation, outreach, and generic sports development, for example, as opposed to cutting these services.
- The Audit Commission (2006: 9) concluded that 'All councils have the power, under the Local Government Act 2000, to secure the economic, social and environmental well-being of their residents'. Arguably, one aspect of this policy trajectory is to place an emphasis on Sport for All.
- Given the findings of this case study, it is concluded that the 'ensuring council' model offers the greatest potential for retaining or renewing a focus on Sport for All if combined with the good practice examples found in the 'pre-emptive' council.

4.0 Conclusions

- Fundamentally, authorities must decide in the current economic and political climate, what it is that SRS should prioritise and invest in and from what to retreat.
- As of 2011, debates around the role and remit of SRS are amplified by the severity of an economic recession combined with a political and 'ideological challenge' to a welfare-oriented model of the state.
- Central to this challenge facing local government is finding a consensus around the limits and legitimacy of welfare state interventions.
- The research findings can be related to different models of SRS aligned to differences in political control and competing understandings of the role of the state.
- The findings do not however indicate that ideological positions are wholly coherent or unambiguous. As Bailey and Reid (1994) observed, sport policy is juxtaposed between competing ideologies of the market and welfarism. Balancing social and economic imperatives has proved problematic however services are managed and delivered.
- In this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that there is little agreement about the specific objectives and priorities of services or how services should be delivered.
- In this period of economic austerity, SRS must be innovative to survive. CIPFA/Solace (2009: 3) suggest three courses of action: initiating or extending whole system efficiencies; devolving decisions to the local level with minimal national oversight which 'will help in turn to rebuild local public accountability'; and redefining the relationship between the individual and the state.
- From the research conducted to date, it is clear that the move towards 'whole system efficiencies' is beginning to take place across authorities and is already in place in a small number. However, it cannot be claimed that 'building public accountability' or moves towards drawing up a new 'social contract' between the council and local residents has had a notable effect across SRS to date.
- Retrenchment leading to the cessation of components of SRS is proving to be a likely outcome in a third of local authorities.
- Nonetheless, for local government to curtail all services connected with SRS is a political risk and therefore an option being taken by some elected members is to retain ownership but outsource those services not considered to be the 'core business' of the council.
- Alternatively, SRS can up-skill staff to deliver a capacity-building agenda in local communities. In many localities this will be challenging in the short-term in part because of a high level of dependency on the local authority in the host community in many regions of England.
- The enhancement of local autonomy through the 'Big Society' agenda raises fundamental questions about the role and remit of SRS. It also raises challenges around procurement and commissioning.
- Moving forward, it is likely that the local sport sector will experience an increasing fragmentation or plurality of forms of provision. This plurality of forms may include SRS, private sector organisations, voluntary sector clubs, schools, community interest groups, mutual's, co-operatives, social enterprises and charitable trusts among others.
- This raises questions regarding service accountability, equity, quality, and sustainability. It cannot be assumed that competition between providers will result in a higher quality of services and critically, it cannot be assumed that a plurality of delivery mechanisms equates with a wider distribution of power and influence in line with the emerging localism agenda.
- Whether the new localism agenda will devolve powers to the local level in practice remains to be seen. 'Guided localism' may prove to be a compromise of central and local discretion over service-orientation. There are indications from the research that central government has extended its influence over local level institutions during the *New* Labour era. SRS will have to be innovative in developing responses to localism in order to retain a role at neighbourhood level.
- However, the planned re-organisation of health services back within local authority control provides an opportunity for SRS to align services and acquire resources

- A constructive and mutually beneficial relationship between central and local government, in conjunction with professional bodies, is urgently required if discretionary services such as SRS are to be valued and resourced.
- In practice, the extent of SRS involvement and intervention in the lives of local communities, in respect of providing, facilitating and enabling, is likely to depend in part on the specific characteristics of the local socio-economic and political context.

Additionally, **what becomes clear from the research is the increasing difficulty of 'making the case'** within local government for SRS and in particular for developmental aspects of the portfolio.

Currently, 'making the case' can be interpreted as making a 'business case' in most authorities.

- A 'survival strategy' is evident in many authorities where advocacy is weak both within local government and within the wider leisure profession (Houlihan, 2001) although this may change.
- Collins (2010: 314) concludes that central government are 'sidelining and downplaying local authorities, the main gateway into sport on an open-access bases'.
- Arguably, SRS must re-engage with social outcomes and social value through policy vehicles such as 'community recreation' and *Sport for All* in order to retain or reclaim legitimacy as an accountable body to local communities and individuals.
- The concept and practices of 'civic professionalism' (Stewart, 1994, cited in Houlihan, 2001) could underpin the work of SRS in capacity-building within local communities.
- However, innovation in terms of facilitating and enabling 'community empowerment' is problematic where SRS use traditional 'top-down' approaches to engagement and where building capacity requires resource-intensive and sustained interventions over time.
- In the context of declining resources in an economic recession and the short-termism of an adversarial political system, redefining the role and remit of SRS is urgently required where it has not taken place.
- Looking forward, it is possible that local authority SRS will be required to deliver bespoke services rather than universal services for all, that in some cases, may meet only the needs and/or demands of only a few.
- In this environment, there is a need for a new social contract between the state, community and the individual that requires a distinct role for SRS, complemented by sustained private sector investment and Third sector commitment. The quality of the 'mixed economy' of provision will be critical for service users if access and opportunity for all are to be achievable objectives.
- Establishing a role for SRS is problematic in the current policy environment and is complicated by ambiguous central government discourse around extending localism, autonomy and discretion on the one hand and constraining it on the other.
- Successfully negotiating this complex policy environment whilst maintaining a core policy focus within the model of the 'ensuring council' (and maintaining services) poses a significant challenge to SRS, given its relatively weak administrative, political and financial status within two-thirds of local authorities.
- The question then is 'where next?'

5.0 Recommendations

- In agreement with the Audit Commission (2011: 7), SRS should 'identify councils facing similar challenges, and learn from other's approaches'.
- Where a review of services (rationale, service-orientation, priorities/objectives, core capacity, resource allocation and modes of delivery) has not taken place, it is recommended that an immediate review be instigated. This may require an independent perspective in some cases
- SRS need to clearly identify who are the beneficiaries of services currently provided within the SRS portfolio in establishing a coherent remit moving forward
- In any review, it is recommended that an assessment is made around a set of 'guarantees' that the voluntary and private sector cannot necessarily deliver: namely, accountability, equity, quality and sustainability.
- It is recommended that the business case is strengthened through planning to operate within a minimum or zero deficit strategy over the short to mid-term. This may require a more focused core service remit and investment coupled with the delivery of services not identified as 'core business' by partner organisations
- For example, mainstream funding support for sport-specific (performance-related) sports development or event management could be replaced with NGB funding and/or private sector finance. Core services should focus on maximising community benefit within the 'ensuring council' model
- Where alignment of SRS to the corporate objectives of the Council has not taken place (one third of authorities), it is recommended that this forms part of any review
- SRS need to look beyond municipal boundaries, departmental silos and service areas in designing services fit for purpose in the twenty-first century
- Replacing aging facilities, given financial constraints and the limitations of PFI and unsupported borrowing options, requires increased cross-sector and cross-boundary consortia bidding
- It is recommended that an emphasis is placed on collating evidence based data to be disseminated in support of the case for retaining SRS and that officers pro-actively demonstrate the value of SRS to elected members
- It is recommended that a programme of up-skilling staff takes place in order to build the capacity to defend SRS in the difficult years ahead and/or buy-in innovative working practices and new thinking where an 'innovation gap' exists
- Fundamentally, it is recommended that the SRS management team develop a clear and coherent relationship between the financial, social and political components of SRS as outlined in this report.

6.0 Further research

- Although the survey encompasses a large enough sample of local authorities to establish generalisations,
- The research to date does not provide a 'complete picture' of local authority SRS. Further, this report has focused on English authorities (excluding the small number of responses from Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales), the next stage of the research is therefore to pursue the many lines of enquiry generated in different regions of England and across the UK, accounting for the impact of devolution on the sport sector (Thomson, 2008).
- Further research will map, assess and attempt to explain the impact of the 'cuts' and responses from SRS via a series of in-depth case studies of specific authorities given that these early findings do not account for the impact of funding reductions that will emerge throughout 2011/12 and beyond.
- The outcomes of this process are to be documented and disseminated to APSE, CIMSPA and CLOA members and a further outcome is a monograph (King, *forthcoming*, 2013).

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