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Auditor General for Wales

Delivering with Less: Leisure Services – Isle of Anglesey County Council

Audit year: 2018-19

Date issued: March 2020

Document reference: 1815A2020-21



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Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. This document is also available in Welsh.

The team who delivered the work comprised Alan Hughes, Bethan Roberts, Sara Jones and Jeremy Evans under the direction of Huw Rees.

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Summary report

Summary

What we reviewed and why

- 1 This review is a follow-up to the Auditor General's 2015 national report **Delivering with Less – Leisure Services**. It considers the impact of reductions in local government funding on the Council's leisure services and the effectiveness of the Council's arrangements for delivering those services.
- 2 In this report we use the term council leisure services to mean sports and recreation services provided directly or indirectly (for example, underwritten by a partnership agreement or contract). This only covers the provision and management of sport and leisure centres, including indoor and outdoor facilities and wet and dry centres on school sites¹. Our definition does not cover or include activities relating to tourism, library services, parks/open spaces, museums/heritage or the arts.
- 3 In the 2015 national report we reported that the Council was focussing on in-house provision of leisure services and was focussed on making the best use of resources. The Council are constrained by the financial challenges they face and are consequently focussed on improving their financial and operating environment.
- 4 This review considered:
 - whether leisure service resources had reduced since our 2014-15 report;
 - the Council's Leisure Strategy and its performance against the vision set out in the Strategy;
 - the Council's arrangements for considering the future sustainability of the leisure service and exploring and appraising alternative delivery models;
 - the Council's governance and monitoring arrangements in relation to leisure performance; and
 - how service users feel about the leisure service and whether they are able to inform service design and delivery.

What we found

- 5 Our review sought to answer the question: Does the Council have effective arrangements to ensure the service provides value for money and determine future models of leisure service delivery?
- 6 Overall, we found that: **The Council has continued to deliver its leisure centres with less resources and it has a clear vision for the future of the service, but run-down facilities pose a financial challenge.**

¹ Anglesey sport and leisure centres are in Amlwch, Holyhead, Llangefni and Menai Bridge where the centre is located with a school.

We reached this conclusion because:

- there has been a reduction in the Council’s leisure service resources since 2014-15, and the service net cost has decreased;
- the Council has a clear vision for its leisure service and is effectively considering the service’s financial sustainability; the Council recognises its run-down leisure centres are a risk;
- the Council has robust performance monitoring and governance arrangements, but recognises it could improve its understanding of the outcomes achieved; and
- most service users are happy with the leisure service and the Council uses customer feedback to inform the design and delivery of the service.

Proposals for improvement

Exhibit 1: proposals for improvement

The table below sets out the proposal for improvement that we have identified following this review.

Proposal for improvement	
P1	The Council should explore opportunities to make further use of data to improve understanding of the effects of its outcomes.

Detailed report

The Council has continued to deliver its leisure centres with less resources and it has a clear vision for the future of the service, but run-down facilities pose a financial challenge

There has been a reduction in the Council's leisure service resources since 2014-15, and the service net cost has decreased

7 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- the Council has kept all four of its leisure centres open, but following a Vibrant Viable Places Grant investment, in the last four years, the Council has transferred some of its outdoor sports and recreation facilities to Town and Community Councils. This has reduced the Council's spend on leisure services.
- there has been a reduction of between four and six full time equivalents (FTE) in the overall number of staff, and amendments made to job descriptions. Employment terms and conditions have remained the same throughout the leisure service over the last four years.
- there been a 77% reduction in the leisure services budget in the last four years. This has been partly offset by an increase in income of 31% and a fall in expenditure of 11%. Overall, the leisure service net cost has reduced from £610,600 to £252,400 between 2014-15 and 2018-19.
- however, between 2015-16 and 2018-19 the service has overspent. Overspends have ranged from 38% to 77%, the 2018-19 overspend being 42%. This suggests that delivering within the base budget is not possible.
- Welsh Government data shows the Council's gross revenue expenditure on Sports and Recreation Services decreased by 6% between 2014-15 and 2017-18. As a result, in 2017-18 leisure revenue expenditure per head of was the eighth highest in Wales.

The Council has a clear vision for its leisure service and is effectively considering the service's financial sustainability; the Council recognises its run-down leisure centres are a risk

8 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- the Council has considered the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 in setting priorities and developing its new strategy for leisure services. For example, the Council is collaborating with a range of partners in an effort to deliver an integrated approach to preventative health care. However, the Council needs to consider how it

further embeds an integrated approach across services internally to ensure that all staff are thinking about how benefits from their service can be maximised. Internal collaboration needs to be further strengthened particularly with Education, for example, integrate leisure centres with education facilities as part of the 21st century schools programme.

- the Council's new Leisure Strategy (Draft) which is linked to the main Council plan's priorities, itself sets out clear priorities to ensure current and future resources can be utilised effectively to deliver outcomes. The new strategy vision is to 'Maintain, improve and provide high quality, flexible, accessible and affordable facilities to meet the current and future well-being needs of Anglesey.' The current in-house Leisure Function is delivering the vision of the Leisure Strategy:
 - the number of people visiting Anglesey sport and leisure centres to participate in physical activity² has increased 8% since 2014-15. This is against an all-Wales increase of 5% over the same period and places the Council tenth highest in Wales.
 - the Council has established a more commercial approach and culture to raise income levels and reduce the Council subsidy.
 - the Council has modernised some of its leisure facilities and equipment, and its payment and booking system, but recognises that its overall building infrastructure is run down and inefficient.
 - the Council can demonstrate examples of improved well-being through leisure. For example, 85% of its National Exercise Referral Scheme participants felt that the exercise programme had led to an improvement in health.
- the Council has invested in its facilities and equipment, refurbishing several existing sites including the fitness room at Holyhead, undertook a refit including all new equipment, the first 3G pitch on the Isle of Anglesey at Plas Arthur, Llangefni, and fitted LED lighting in each leisure centre to reduce energy costs.
- the Council has assessed its buildings and found them to be rundown and in need of refurbishment, which increases the risk of incurring additional cost. The Council has considered its financial position, its scope to invest and the impact of the suspension of a nuclear build project in delivering its plan. It recognises that securing enough capital funding together to improve the leisure centres will be a challenge.
- the Council has focussed on taking a commercial approach to leisure by investing in its facilities and growing membership and income to make the service more self-sustaining. This is beginning to have an impact and whilst overall the service

² Defined as the number of visits during the year to Anglesey sport and leisure centres per 1,000 population where the visitor will be participating in physical activity.
[InfoBaseCymru, Leisure and Culture, Local Authority: table](#)

is not yet self-sustaining, in 2018-19, income at Plas Arthur Leisure Centre in Llangefni was 9% more than its expenditure.

- the Council appointed an external company to review its leisure service and a public consultation was undertaken to help establish local needs and identify potential alternative delivery models to ensure the future sustainability of the service. The Council has reviewed and compared potential alternative delivery options that included retaining the service in-house, outsourcing to the private sector, a leisure trust or procure on the open market. For the mid-term, it is the Council's intention to retain the four leisure centres and implement an investment programme to maintain current provision.

The Council has robust performance monitoring and governance arrangements, but recognises it could improve its understanding of the outcomes achieved

9 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- the Council has a clear accountability structure for its leisure service, and a management information dashboard system that allows officers to monitor performance.
- the Council recognises it could make further use of its data and technology to improve understanding of the effects of its service. For example, further work is needed to maximise its Self-Service System reporting capabilities to enable more targeted and tailored approaches to service. Greater use of data analytics has the potential to help the Council to identify non-users and target their services more effectively. Also, further analysis of its data could provide better understanding of the outcomes of different activities.
- officers and the Deputy Chief Executive monitor and challenge performance at regular service-level meetings. Leisure performance is also reviewed by the County Council's Partnerships, Communities and Service Improvement Transformation Programme Board.
- annual service challenges also provide both senior officers and councillors the opportunity to scrutinise and challenge leisure performance.

Most service users are satisfied with the leisure service and the Council uses customer feedback to inform the design and delivery of the service

10 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

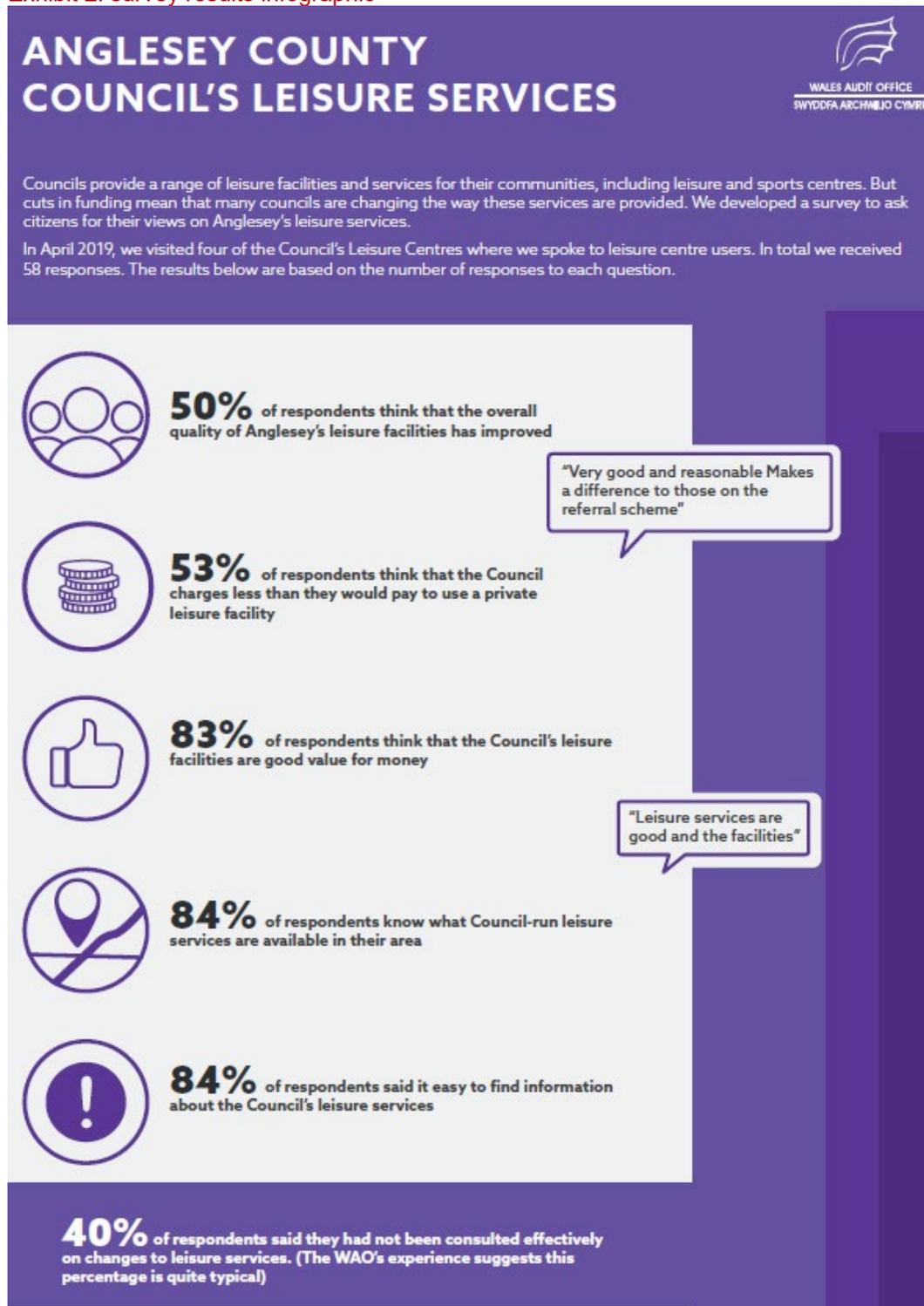
- most respondents to our survey³ are happy with the Council leisure services:
 - 50% think the quality of the service has improved in recent years, 32% think the quality of the service has stayed the same; and
 - 83% consider the service good value for money.
- most people we spoke to were well informed about local leisure services:
 - 84% are aware what services are available locally; and
 - 84% said it is easy for them to find the information they need.
- the Council proactively engages with service users and can demonstrate that it uses customer feedback to inform service design and delivery.

³ In April 2019, the Wales Audit Office conducted a survey to gather citizens' views on leisure services in Anglesey. The results of the survey are summarised in Appendix 1.

Appendix 1

Survey results infographic

Exhibit 2: survey results infographic



The most popular reasons for choosing to use the Council's leisure services are:



62%

convenient location



62%

reasonable costs



34%

convenient opening hours

"Friendly staff and welcoming"

The leisure facilities most used by respondents are:



75%

Gym



24%

Café



20%

fitness classes

"Could do with a bit more money invested in them"



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Wales Audit Office
24 Cathedral Road
Cardiff CF11 9LJ

Tel: 029 2032 0500

Fax: 029 2032 0600

Textphone: 029 2032 0660

E-mail: info@audit.wales

Website: www.audit.wales

Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru
24 Heol y Gadeirlan
Caerdydd CF11 9LJ

Ffôn: 029 2032 0500

Ffacs: 029 2032 0600

Ffôn testun: 029 2032 0660

E-bost: post@archwilio.cymru

Gwefan: www.archwilio.cymru