

5.2.1 Sport and Leisure

The Council currently has four leisure centres; Oak Park in Walsall Wood, Bloxwich, Darlaston and Gala Baths in Walsall town centre. The average age of these is 40 years and they are in need of replacing. The Council's emerging Active Living Review is exploring opportunities to replace two and possibly improve the third. Such an approach will help the Council deliver its purpose to 'maintain and improve the health and wellbeing of all its residents' and make *more people, more active, more often*. The 'Your Place, Your Wellbeing Walsall Lifestyle Survey' (2012) identified that a third of Walsall residents would be likely to undertake more physical activity if sport and leisure facilities were improved. The survey also indicated that swimming and gym were the two activities that were both most popular and those that people were most interested in doing more of. Where facilities have been modernised elsewhere, case studies suggest attendances can increase two or even three-fold. Not only does this attract more people to take part in physical activity and recreation but also contributes to self-confidence, social inclusion, healthy weight management and improved mental health.

Particular success has been achieved with the Free Swimming for under-16s – a national programme extended in Walsall by a partnership between Walsall Council and NHS Walsall. The programme has resulted in a large increase in participation from young people, particularly from disadvantaged communities. Such programmes encourage young people's physical activity and contribute to tackling the problem of childhood obesity.

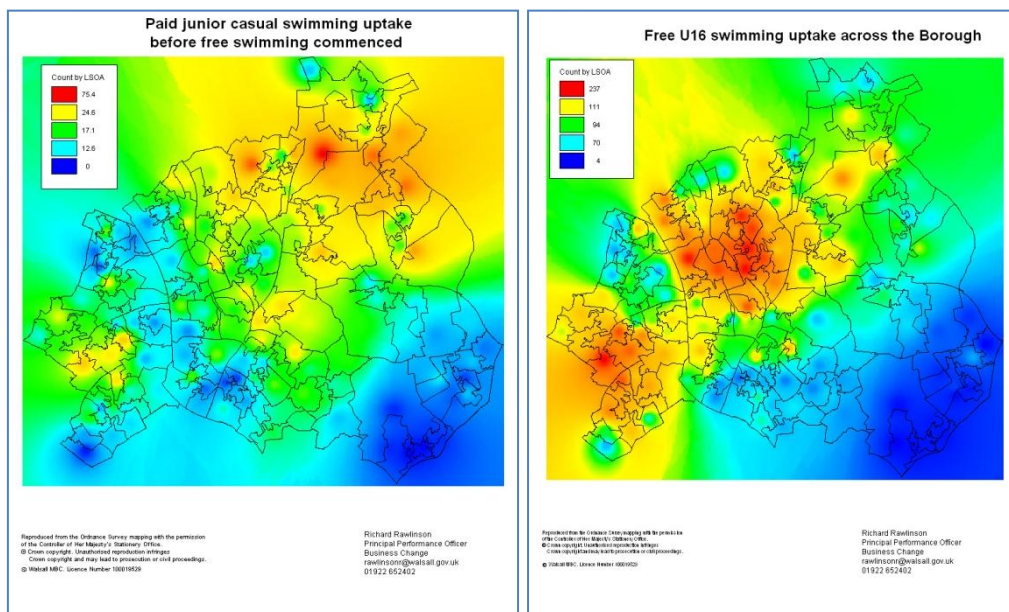


Figure 1 Uptake of swimming by under 16's (mapped by postcode of residence) before and after free swimming scheme introduced in Walsall (Source: Walsall MBC)

Research by Sport England, Barnados and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation indicates that people with disabilities require additional support to access sport and leisure provision and as a result are often excluded from such provision. This is highlighted in the large percentage (80%) of adults with learning disabilities not meeting the Department of Health's

minimum recommended level of physical activity – this is considerably higher than the general population (53%-64%).

Considerable progress has been made in the last 12 months as part of the Council’s Active Living Review – with Sport & Leisure and Public Health colleagues conducting more than 100 face-to-face interviews and piloting a range of interventions to encourage sedentary people to become more active. The review has seen the adoption of the principle of *Proportionate Universalism* based on a core universal service from Leisure Centres along with additional support to nine defined target groups as indicated below:



Figure 2 Proportionate Universalism Petal Diagram

Following the success of free swimming and the Active Living Review the Council’s leisure discount scheme was simplified and enhanced to encourage greater use from these target groups. This has proven a tremendous success with more than 3,000 people registering in the first 6 months, a quadrupling of the previous scheme’s enrolment. Enrolees have come from all categories – including a credible number self-declaring as being overweight!

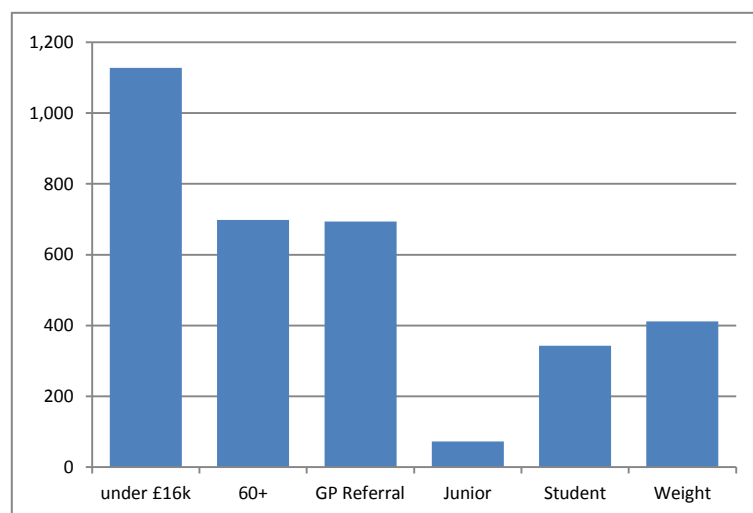


Figure 3 Uptake of Walsall’s Leisure Discount Scheme within first 6 months (Source: Walsall MBC)

More impressive was the attendance levels of these new users. On average these users were visiting the leisure centres just over **once a week**. This is far in excess of Walsall's leisure centres' other registered users (who access on average 20 times a year) and is particularly impressive given these users are from traditional "hard to reach" groups with the vast majority new to exercise.

Priorities for action:

- *Where possible Upgrade or replace facilities so that there is good provision of attractive leisure facilities in the borough – with a particular focus on swimming and fitness provision*
- *Promote strong and consistent messages about the benefits of physical activity and healthy lifestyles and provide clear information about local provision e.g. through development of a single access telephone number and website*
- *Work with key organisations e.g. WHG to develop and promote joint leisure schemes*
- *Identify a consistent set of target groups and priority geographical areas*
- *Share data regarding targeted groups and populations across all partner agencies.*
- *Continue to develop and promote the Move-it scheme and consider expanding to other services.*