

**Manchester City Council  
Report for Information**

**Report to:** Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee - 12 October 2021

**Subject:** Review of Leisure Recovery

**Report of:** Strategic Director - Neighbourhoods

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### Summary

The report provides an overview on the leisure centre recovery position in Manchester, following the most recent restart on Monday 12<sup>th</sup> April 2021. The report sets out the performance of the various sport and leisure centres compared to their pre-pandemic levels. The report details usage data, lesson and course uptake information and health and fitness patronage. The report also highlights demographic data and how this has changed during the pandemic for protected characteristic groups.

### Recommendation

Members of the committee are invited to consider and comment on the information in this report.

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**Wards Affected:** All

<b>Environmental Impact Assessment</b> - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city
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Sport and Leisure provision is making a strong commitment to environmental sustainability through investment to improve the estate. This is embedded within the management of the existing estate and the plans for the improvement over the next period. All leisure capital projects currently underway will incorporate carbon technologies to contribute to achieving the zero-carbon target.
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<b>Our Manchester Strategy outcomes</b>	<b>Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS</b>
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	The Sport and Leisure sector is a key economic driver within the city not only as an employer, but also in attracting inward capital investment to create sustainable world class sporting facilities and place-based services that support to deliver a diverse sport and cultural offer for our residents.

A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	The capital programme includes substantial investment in education and training and also contributes meaningfully to employment within the Manchester economy, creating jobs across the leisure sector and local labour market
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	The Sport and Physical Activity Strategy provides place based services at the core of neighbourhoods and creates significant opportunities for all communities within the city to engage and participate at all levels of the sporting pathway.
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	Investment is being channelled to modernise the leisure estate, notably investment in sustainable and affordable sport and leisure services, contributing to the ambition on achieving the zero-carbon target for the City. This is embedded within the management of the existing estate and the plans for the refurbished and replacement leisure facilities over the next five years.
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	The Sport and Leisure sector has over the last twenty years invested significantly in new assets that have helped drive the city's growth agenda. The Sport and Physical Activity Strategy seeks to deliver new high quality assets across the city that will continue to support our growth ambitions over the next decade.

**Contact Officers:**

Name: Fiona Worrall  
Position: Strategic Director - Neighbourhoods  
Telephone: 0161 234 3826  
E-mail: fiona.worrall@manchester.gov.uk

Name: Neil Fairlamb  
Position: Head of Parks, Leisure, Events and Youth  
Telephone: 0161 219 2539  
E-mail: neil.fairlamb@manchester.gov.uk

Name: Nicky Boothroyd  
Position: Facilities Contracts Manager  
Telephone: 07946 524475  
E-mail: n.boothroyd@mcractive.com

**Background documents (available for public inspection):** None

## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the leisure centre recovery position in Manchester, following the most recent restart on Monday 12<sup>th</sup> April 2021. The report sets out the performance of the various sport and leisure centres compared to their pre-pandemic levels. The report details usage data, lesson and course uptake information and health and fitness patronage.

## **2.0 Background**

- 2.1 The UK Government took the decision to close all public leisure centres in response to the COVID-19 pandemic on March 20<sup>th</sup> 2020. In Manchester, the decision affected 578 staff, 3 million visitors and 90,000 regular users across the sport and leisure facilities, which are operated on behalf of the Council by a range of providers. Consequently, the facilities stopped trading initially for a four month period. From early June 2020 the Elite Training Programme was reinstated under UK Sports guidance and the service repurposed several sites to support the NHS in the response to COVID Testing and Vaccination programmes.
- 2.2 In July 2020 restrictions were lifted for leisure activity and the phased reopening of leisure centres was agreed, with all centres operating a pre booked system for the pool or the gym. This enabled the provision of a broad range of permitted services that sought to meet the needs of residents whilst balancing the requirement to maintain social distancing.
- 2.3 In November 2020 the UK Government announced a second lockdown however Manchester took the decision to continue to deliver the Education Swim programme and the Elite Training Programme as these were permissible under the restrictions.
- 2.4 The third lockdown, which occurred from 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020 until April resulted in the full closure of leisure facilities except for the provision of the Elite Training Programme. Leisure facilities re-opened on a phased basis from 4<sup>th</sup> April 2021 and have remained open to date.

## **3.0 Current Position**

- 3.1 As was reported in the 2020/21 financial year the restrictions have had a profound impact on participation levels in sport and physical activity, which dropped in Manchester by approximately 5% over the last year. The Pandemic has also created a significant financial challenge for the service, with income reducing substantially. To stabilise the leisure contractual arrangements and meet critical expenditure costs, the council injected significant additional financial resources last year and have made provision for a further £2.5m for this year as the facilities seek to recover from people withdrawing from regular participation in sport and leisure.
- 3.2 It has now been five months since the restrictions started to lift, during which time activities have been carefully reinstated in line with the government

roadmap. Indoor Sport and Leisure facilities were permitted to reopen on the 12th April 2021 and across the Manchester portfolio all centres opened on that day with restrictions in place. During the initial period, two metre social distancing remained, which restricted numbers in the gyms, swimming pools and in group exercise classes when they returned on the 17<sup>th</sup> May 2021. Other control measures included: sessions being pre bookable either by the operator mobile apps or in centre; centres being cashless; one-way systems; and enhanced cleaning. When restrictions lifted fully on 19th July 2021 sessions returned to pre-pandemic capacity limits and the one-way systems were removed across all centres. Certain sessions remain bookable in certain centres, but for the most part this requirement has been removed. A small number of venues have reintroduced cash payments, but this is something which is being reviewed periodically to evaluate if it has a long-term effect on usage and access for hard to reach groups. Cleaning remains a large focus at all the centres and the enhanced cleaning has been maintained.

- 3.3 Almost all of the activities that can return to the facilities timetables, have done so. The health suites were one of the last areas of the facilities to reopen due to the small size of these areas and concerns around adequate ventilation and they opened at the start of September on the GLL centres and in July at Wythenshawe Forum. Within the GLL operated centres, adult swimming lessons have not yet returned and the citywide Better Active Aqua programme is running at 72.8% of its pre-pandemic session numbers across the centres. The pool and group exercise timetables have all returned but the centres have used the closure periods to review their offering and some of the facilities have changed their programmes. The programmes also had to change due to National Governing Body COVID guidelines to ensure that the centres were compliant when reopening and after the restrictions have lifted some of the centres have kept the changes as users have enjoyed and embraced the changes. There will be certain clubs or organisations that have not returned to the centres, but this will be due to the clubs finding alternative locations for their activities or they may still feel nervous about returning. East Manchester Leisure Centre no longer operates a group exercise timetable post pandemic due to lack of numbers attending the classes at that facility, but it has not affected the number of people joining the centre as it has more members now than it had at the same time in 2019.
- 3.4 A total of 130 out of 143 schools swam during academic year 2020/21 and the average attendance was 14 out of 35 sessions. There are approximately 14,000 pupils that have had their school swimming experience disrupted due to lockdowns and closures over the past 2 academic years. This has caused approximately 30% of pupils to not achieve all 3 elements of the national curriculum. The start of the 2021/2022 academic year saw all schools return to the educational swim programme with the schedule running 237 sessions a week. MCR Active are also working closely with GLL and SLM to introduce 'top up' sessions through the school holiday periods where pupils who didn't achieve the national curriculum swim standards can work towards achieving them.
- 3.5 A number of Manchester's leisure facilities including Moss Side Leisure Centre, Denmark Road Sports Centre & Belle Vue Sports Village delivered a variety of

alternative services after reopening and were being used for other purposes such as COVID-19 testing and vaccinations. The only facility that remains for COVID related services is the Manchester Tennis and Football Centre, which is being used as a mass vaccination centre and has taken up three of the six indoor tennis courts for its operation.

3.6 Customer feedback continues to be very positive and the introduction of the new activity and capacity levels at the appropriate time has gone smoothly in most cases.

3.7 Certain levels of sporting events were permissible during lockdown under UK Sports Guidance Manchester hosted the following events.

- National Swim Championships [Olympic Qualifier]
- National Squash Championships
- Cycling Talent Camp
- Manchester Giants Home Game
- Speedway

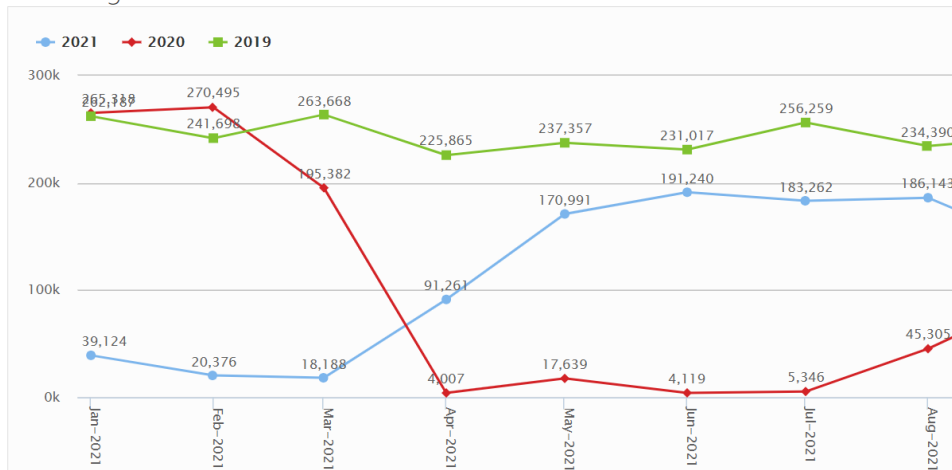
Restrictions on events were lifted on 19<sup>th</sup> July which saw the return of spectators to our centres, the first major events that saw the return of spectators were

- Bryggen International Athletics
- British Athletics Championship

#### 4.0 Participation & Usage Levels

4.1 The graph below details the usage across the centres over the last 3 years for comparison. August 2021 usage data is tracking around 20% behind the same month in 2019, this could be due to a number of different factors, such as consumer hesitancy to return to accessing some or indeed all activities at the centres, residents using alternative methods for exercising which they developed in lockdown and possibly a reduction in funds due to the post pandemic situation resulting in not being able to afford a gym membership.

Total Usage Year On Year



4.2 **Health and Fitness Members** - The table below highlights the number of health and fitness members each centre had on the 1<sup>st</sup> September 2021 compared to the same date in 2019. Most centres have less members than they had in 2019 apart from East Manchester Leisure Centre and Whalley Range Sports Stadium who have more. Whalley Range did go through a refurbishment whilst it was closed from March 2020 and also reopened with a new programme, which sees a strong woman only provision in the gym and group exercise timetable that has proved popular with local residents. The reasons for the strength of the performance in East Manchester is less clear.

<b>Health and Fitness Members</b>	<b>01.09.2019</b>	<b>01.09.2021</b>	<b>% vs 2019</b>
Arcadia	1,663	1,397	84%
Belle Vue	702	684	97%
East Manchester	1,419	1,666	117%
Hough End	3,847	3,493	91%
Manchester Aquatics	3,101	2,511	81%
Moss Side	1,975	1,820	92%
North City	1,625	1,440	89%
Whalley Range	184	307	167%
Wythenshawe Forum	2868	2227	77.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,384</b>	<b>15,545</b>	<b>89%</b>
Abraham Moss (closed)	1,438	173	12%

4.3 **Swim School Members** - The table below highlights the number of people attending the swimming lesson programme at each centre on the 1<sup>st</sup> September 2021 compared to the same day in 2019. After an extensive marketing campaign including one moth free swimming lessons, the pre-paid lessons have seen a resurgence in people returning. The centres are constantly looking to put more lessons onto the programme to deal with the demand of children who haven't been swimming for over a year and to accommodate the new children who are starting out on their swimming lesson journey. It should be noted that the numbers are slightly inflated given that Abraham Moss closed at the start of the first lockdown and some of its lesson users switched to alternative sites. More recently, the same scenario has arisen for the Manchester Aquatics Centre as this centre is due to close for refurbishment in the coming months.

<b>Swimming Lessons</b>	<b>01.09.2019</b>	<b>01.09.2021</b>	<b>% vs 2019</b>
Arcadia	716	576	80%
East Manchester	1,482	1,211	82%
Hough End	1,114	1,264	113%
Moss Side	264	371	141%

North City	951	1,059	111%
Manchester Aquatics (Diving)	122	75	61%
Wythenshawe Forum	1224	1416	115%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,873</b>	<b>5,972</b>	<b>101%</b>

4.4 **Free swimming** - was also offered to all Manchester residents who are 16 and under during the summer holiday period. Compared to 2019, numbers were down at all but 2 of the leisure centres. Contributing factors included a reduction in pool time at some centres due to reduced capacities and advanced booking being required online or via the app. All centres are now looking at reintroducing free swimming over the weekends for 2 hours each day. GLL are looking at a campaign ahead of October half term to encourage young people back to the pool. Free swimming is also offered to all Manchester residents at any time who are over 60 and since the centres reopened in April 2021 and up to the end of August 2021 there have been 19,332 visits which is encouraging.

4.5 **Sports Course Members** – Sports Coaching Courses returned; previously specific data was not collected for courses. Sports courses remains a challenge despite a positive Summer of Sport campaign, with both taster and intensive sessions held across all dry sports to drive users to weekly lessons and courses. GLL have a dedicated lessons and courses campaign targeted around the return of children/young people returning to school which was launched in September to drive regular participation. The table below shows participation across the learn to programmes for each sport, the programmes are showing growth with participation above 500 users.

	<b>01.08.2021</b>	<b>01.09.2021</b>
Belle Vue Basketball	48	55
Belle Vue Gymnastics	15	16
Moss Side Gymnastics	45	60
Tennis	322	325
Wythenshawe Forum Gymnastics	42	47
Squash	24	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>496</b>	<b>526</b>

4.6 **Summer Holiday Programme** - An exciting and varied Summer Holiday programme was provided in the summer to provide the widest selection of activity programmes, including the following:

- Super Active Camps
- Gymnastics
- Basketball
- Tennis
- Squash
- Mountain Biking
- BMX
- Water Sports

These activities mirror many of the sports Great Britain were competing in for medals in the Olympic & Paralympic Games in Tokyo and the camps were hoping to inspire many local young children to take part in regular weekly sports activity and beyond. In total across the whole summer holiday activity programme there were 1,505 visits and 922 of these visits (61%) were the Holiday Activity Funded places (HAF) where these young people benefitted from free daily packed lunches as well as free activities. In total across the partnership 100 young people were signposted and joined the weekly learn to programmes for their chosen sport, with some of these who were part of the HAF programme.

- 4.7 To further capture the enthusiasm and excitement the success of the Olympic Games created, GLL ran an event called the I am Team GB event on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> August 2021 at the Manchester Regional Arena. Medalists from Tokyo – Katie Archibald (GB Cyclist), Ryan Owens (GB Cyclist), and Bianca Walkden (GB Taekwondo) all attended where residents and the Olympic stars took part in various activities like athletics, basketball, squash, balance bikes, taekwondo and Watt bikes. The event attracted 335 attendees and many of these were children who will be inspired to take part in different sports in the future.

## 5.0 Equalities Information

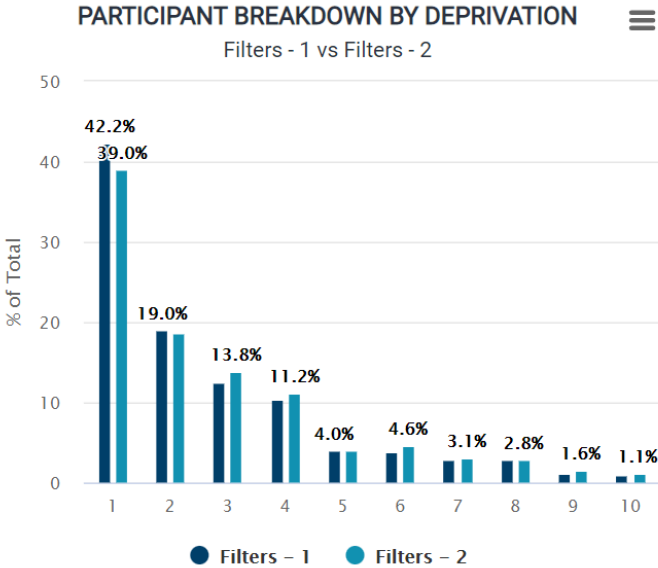
- 5.1 The charts in Appendix 1 highlight the changes to the equality data over the last 12 months. The charts on the left side highlight data for August 2019 and the right side highlights data for August 2021. Overall whilst usage still remains below pre-pandemic levels, the representation of under-represented groups has improved considerably and therefore uptake is now much more closely aligned to the demographics of the City. As can be established from the charts, the following improvements are noticeable:

- **Gender** - the ratio of female to male members has improved during the pandemic which is encouraging and maybe attributed to the enhanced women only provision that has been introduced at Whalley Range Sports Stadium.
- **Age** – There are a higher percentage of members aged 0-15 and over 60 in 2021 compared to 2019. Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) funding was utilised across the centres to bring young people back into the centres and accessing local provision at no cost. The free swimming programme has also been reintroduced across all centres to encourage under 17 year olds to swim.
- **BAME** - There are a higher percentage of BAME members of the community accessing the leisure facilities in 2021 compared to 2019.
- **Disability** - The number of records of members with a disability has doubled since before the centres closed for the various lockdowns. The number of people with a learning, health and multiple disabilities has increased from 2019 and this provides the operators data in which to guide the programmes.



## 5.2 Usage in Areas of Deprivation

5.2.1 The below graph has been extracted from the Sport England Moving Communities platform. MCR Active are accessing this as part of the National Leisure Recovery Funding (NLRF), which they are utilising as part of the recovery process. The profile of leisure centre participants (by area of deprivation) has been compared in Manchester. Filter 1 highlights July 2019 data and filter 2 highlights July 2021 information. The graph indicates the proportion of users by decile of deprivation, pre-covid and in recovery. It shows that the proportion of people attending from areas of higher deprivation (deciles 1-2) is slightly lower than in 2019, but the people attending from the areas of lower deprivation has increased slightly or stayed the same, which suggests a sharper focus needs to be placed on addressing this through the winter.



## 6.0 Conclusions and Next Steps

6.1 The Leisure facilities in Manchester seem to be recovering well against the various lockdowns which occurred in 2020 and 2021. The health and fitness figures are not yet at 2019 levels, but the trajectory is going in the right direction and all the signs look positive. The centres need to carry on keeping the high cleanliness standards that have already been managed to gain greater customer confidence in the following months as well as adding more activities to their programmes.

6.2 The Swim School is performing well against 2019 figures and most centres have already surpassed their 2019 numbers due to a huge demand for these courses and participants transferring from facilities that have closed or are due to close due to capital investment. The pool programmes are being continually reviewed to ensure that the right balance is struck between meeting swimming lesson demand, appropriate community use and club access.

6.3 The centres will continue to review their programmes to make sure that they are offering activities which appeal to all areas of the local community and target the most vulnerable and affected by the current situation.

6.4 The following next steps will be prioritised through the autumn and winter

- Maintaining high levels of cleanliness to grow resident confidence to return.
- Continue to offer discounted access and price offers during 2021/22 financial year to incentivise uptake.
- Progress extensive student recruitment campaign.
- Return Better Aqua Activity to 100% during October.
- Increased focus on the return of residents from higher deprivation areas.
- Intensive push on sport course take up.
- Return of all schools for schools swimming.
- Resumption of adult swimming lessons.
- Resumption of full events programme.
- Extensive HAF Programme and contribution to Year of the Child.
- Large scale new year new me campaign.