

1. Background and Methodology

Shropshire Council's consultation on its draft Leisure Facilities Strategy ran for 6 weeks from 16 September 2020 to 29 October 2020. The draft strategy aims to support the delivery of sport and physical activity, and leisure services in Shropshire, and aims to demonstrate the relationships between Shropshire Council and partners and stakeholders. The consultation highlighted that the new strategy seeks to remove the current three-tier system of investment in facilities which would have resulted in the closure of facilities. It seeks to replace it with an approach based on community needs, aspirations, partnership, sustainability and resilience, whilst enabling a more commercial approach to service delivery. Other key changes highlighted within the consultation communications were the adoption of a more commercial approach, where appropriate, to service delivery, a more community-based health and wellbeing service-based approach, and the aim for a more sustainable offer across the whole of Shropshire.

The consultation was promoted through a wide range of communication channels including through the Council's newsroom and 'Get Involved' consultation pages, local partnership newsletters (e.g. Shropshire Association of Local Council and Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly) and directly to key stakeholder groups and the Leisure Services contact lists. Individuals, groups and organisations were encouraged to participate using an online survey, in writing by post and email or to contact Shropshire Council to request alternative forms of feedback method. Particular attention was placed on flexible response methods, recognising that the coronavirus pandemic was limiting the council's ability to provide safe, face to face engagement.

2. Consultation Responses

The consultation resulted in 60 survey responses and 5 comprehensive written responses. All of the written responses were collaborative responses from town and parish council and local organisations representing others. It is important to note that those written responses were not from individuals but form more collective representations. The main points and feedback from the written consultation responses are included throughout this report and alongside the survey data but each one has also been read and considered in full (and to understand the context for the relevant community) by Leisure Services lead officers.

Chart 1 Survey respondents by type

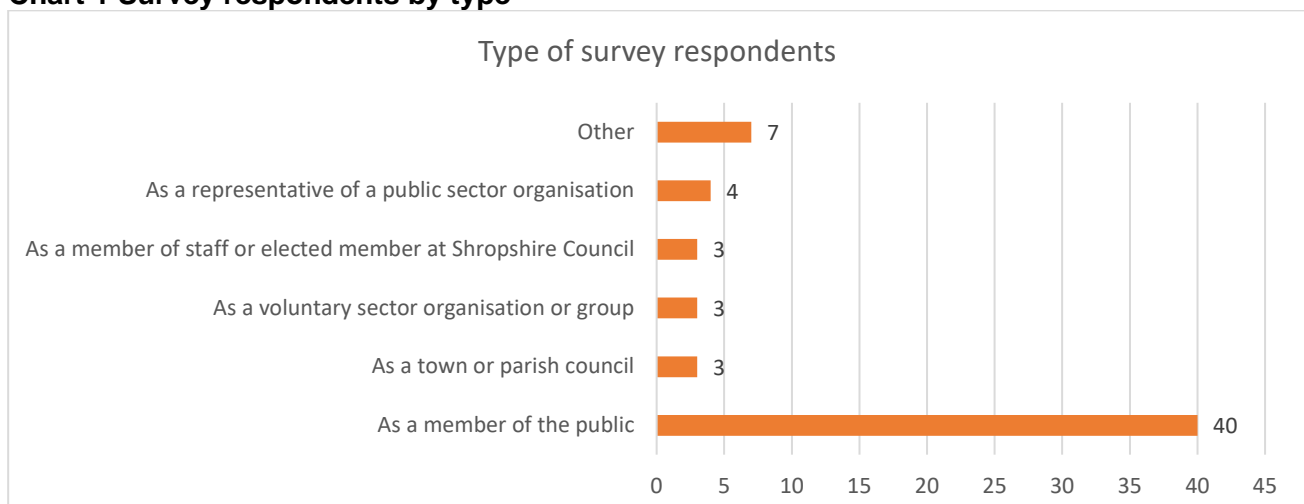


Chart 1 displays the survey responses by type of respondents. 40 of the 60 responses were from members of the public (67%). Other responses included private sector or independent leisure organisations, associations, clubs and service providers. For confidentiality, this report does not attribute any of the comments made to the organisation or representative group.

Shropshire Council includes equality, diversity and social inclusion questions within its surveys and consultations as a way of understanding how representative feedback is of the wider community. With some consultations attracting responses from organisations or town and parish councils, this is less relevant, however, when considering public responses, it is important to see if feedback has been obtained from the range of people who currently, or could, access leisure services in Shropshire.

Chart 2 shows that 49% of the survey respondents were female and 38% male (some preferred not to say or did not answer). Chart 3 shows that younger age groups were under-represented within the consultation feedback (80% were over the age of 30).

Chart 2 Gender of survey respondents

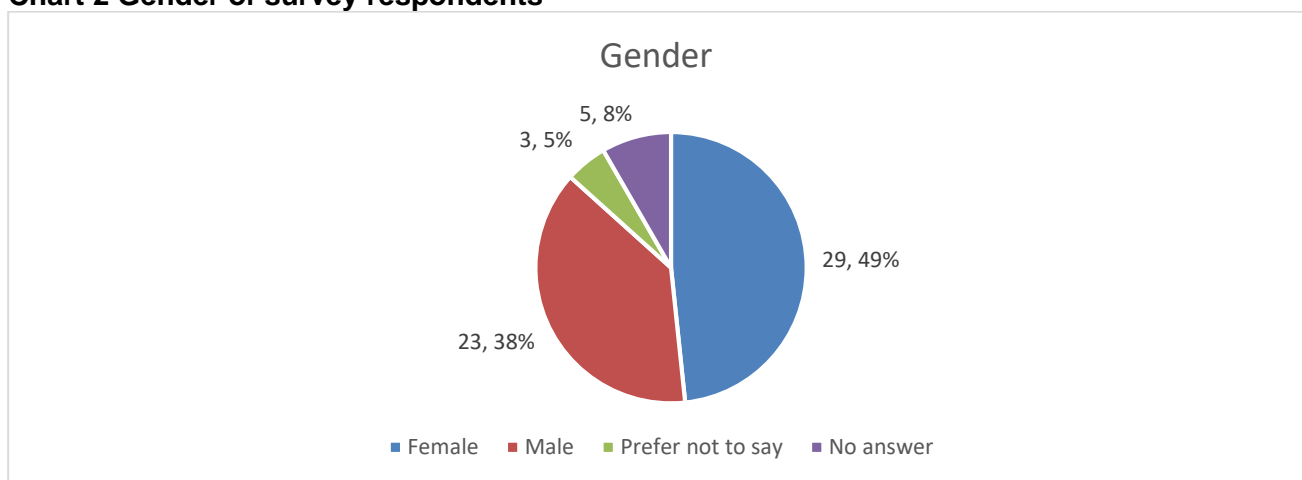
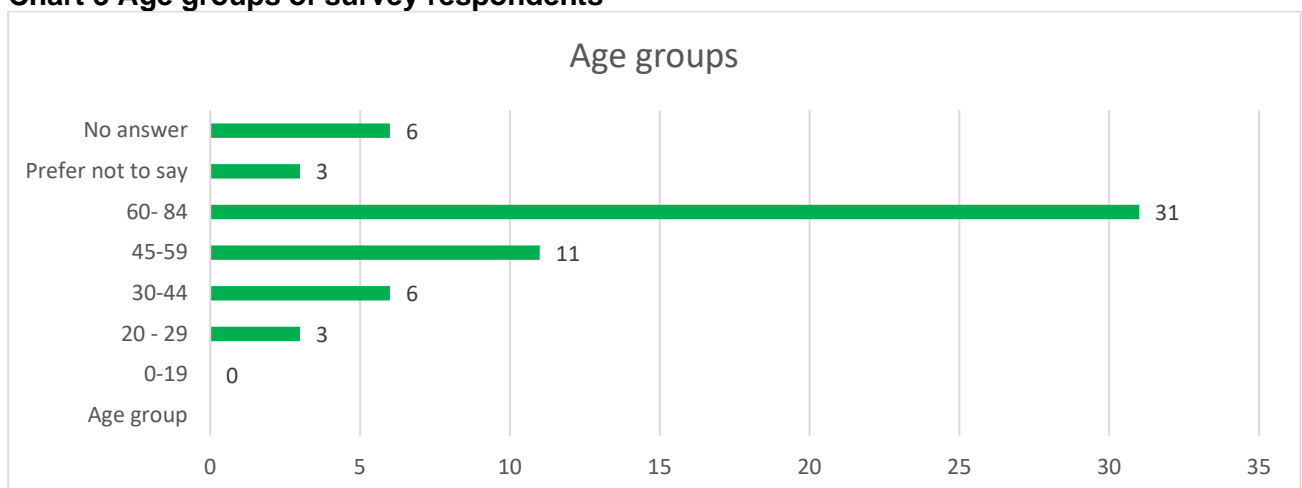
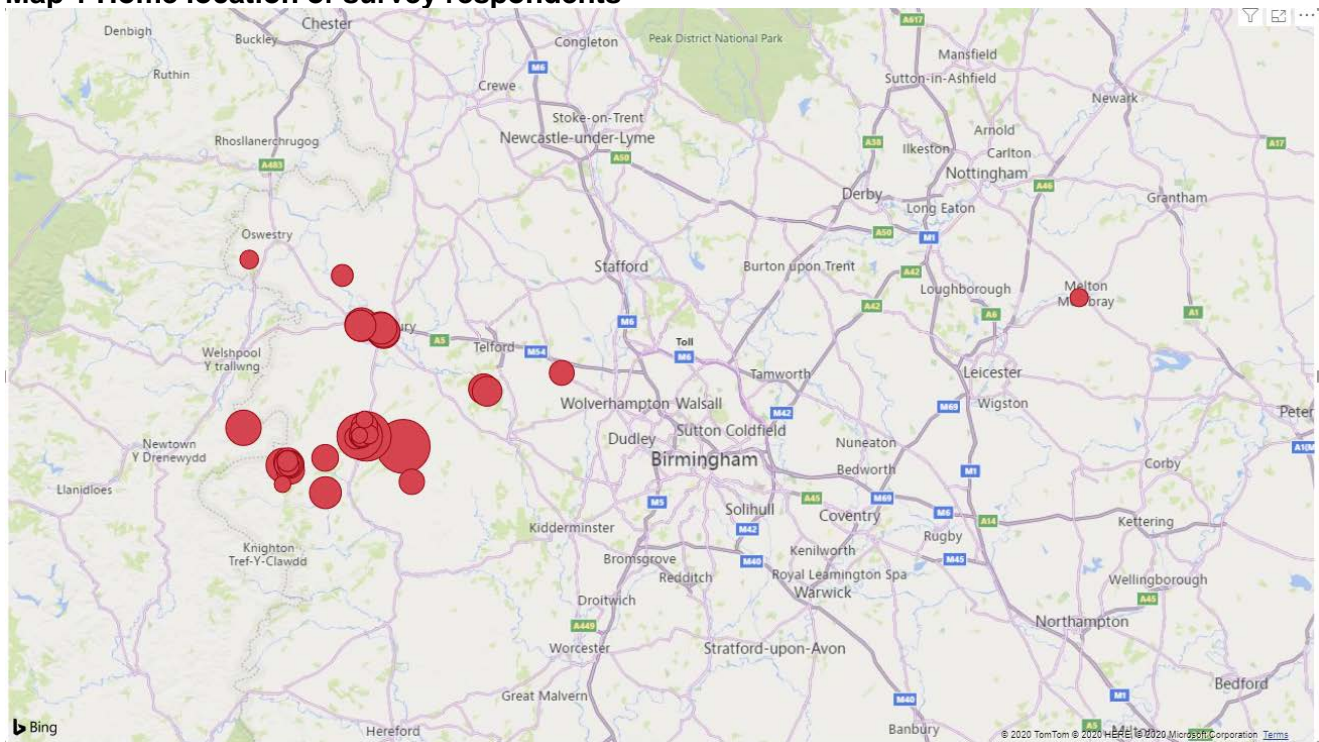


Chart 3 Age groups of survey respondents



The locations of survey respondents were considered by asking people for their postcode. This can help build a picture of which communities within the county have responded and where there may be some geographical under-representation. Map 1 highlights that there was a particularly good response from Church Stretton and surrounding area, and from Bishop's Castle area. Respondents generally live in Shrewsbury and south Shropshire with very few survey respondents from the northern or eastern areas of the county.

Map 1 Home location of survey respondents



Understanding which groups may be underrepresented in the consultation response will be helpful for future engagement design. 78% of the survey respondents have an ethnic origin of 'White (British, Irish, Gypsy or Irish traveller)' and 3% have the ethnic origin of 'Other White background e.g. French, Bulgarian, Lithuanian, Portuguese, White South African, etc. No other backgrounds were represented within the feedback. 12% of the survey respondents have a long-standing illness or disability that limits their daily activity. It was helpful to see survey respondents highlighting issues around access and disability within their responses.

Survey respondents were asked 'If you have any comments with regard to diversity, equality or social inclusion that you would like us to consider in our work on the strategy, please provide your feedback'. 12 people included comments. All have been considered but and a few examples are included below.

Example comments - Equality, diversity and social inclusion

- *Exercise on prescription is invaluable.*
- *... Swimming is part of the National Curriculum - having to travel long distances will discourage learning to swim and take up time from other subjects. This discriminatory against children.*
- *....with a genetic eye condition, I would find it impossible to travel to Ludlow or Shrewsbury in 30 minutes by public transport. All leisure facilities must be accessible to all groups whatever their age, disability or gender...*
- *Please include us oldies, who would have difficulties in travelling to remote centres. Essential also for very young to learn to swim, without wasting time travelling to remote pool. Pool is great leveller, where all ages and incomes meet and mix. I've met new friends of all ages there*
- *Church Stretton leisure centre and pool contribute massively to community cohesion and social inclusion - one of few opportunities for all ages and incomes to mix and meet, enjoying same healthy activity.*
- *Without the Church Stretton pool, I and many others with transport, finance or time difficulties would be excluded from swimming, a key activity particularly for the very old and the very young. Travelling also adds stress to what should be a pleasurable activity (so discourages it) and adds to pollution.*

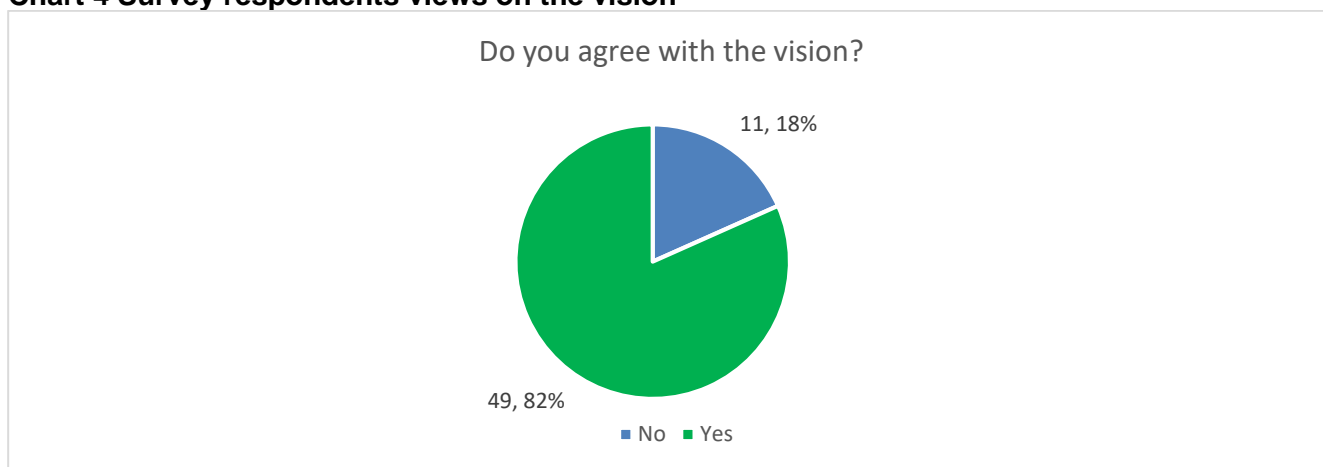
Survey respondents were also asked whether they are an informal or unpaid carer to a friend or family member who needs regular care and support. 7% of the survey respondents have caring

responsibilities. This is also an important issue within social inclusion and that mix of representative feedback can be helpful in the establishment and delivery of policy and services. This data, highlighting where feedback gaps may exist, can be used to inform the Equalities and Social Inclusion Impact Assessment prepared alongside the draft Leisure Facilities Strategy.

3. Strategy Feedback

The consultation survey included a range of questions designed to prompt feedback on the draft document. The first of the questions was 'Do you agree with the vision?' The vision within the draft Leisure Strategy is 'Shropshire will be a county where healthier, active lifestyles are encouraged, supported and facilitated for everyone'. Chart 4 shows the results. 82% agree with the vision and 18% do not. To understand any concerns with the vision, survey respondents were asked to explain, and 15 comments were provided. Examples are shown below (including comments on the vision shared within detailed written documents forming non-survey consultation responses).

Chart 4 Survey respondents views on the vision



Example comments – Feedback on the strategy vision

- ... whilst it is aspirational, it is not providing any substance in the way of funding or expertise.
- Vision is not clearly stated – it is lost in mass of words.
- The vision is not clearly stated.
- The sentiment of the vision is good; however, it is not supported by the strategy.
- The statement is too vague. There is no mention of any commitment on the part of Shropshire Council to ensure that anything happens, not any timeline for achieving the vision.
- The general thrust of the strategy is to invest in supporting future growth areas by dis-investing in facilities in existing towns. This will inevitably disadvantage smaller rural towns, making access to leisure services more inequitable in those areas.
- You describe the aging nature of the population but then discuss looking at leisure provision on a place basis which will inevitably result in people having to travel further to access facilities. Much of south west Shropshire is a rural, farming based community with leisure facilities providing a vital meeting point. There is a poor provision of public transport between hubs in the area and so will result in a proportion of the population being unable to access facilities at greater distances.
- The Vision would generally meet the Community need; however, delivering the Vision will be extremely difficult particularly in the rural areas given the inevitable future funding constraints.
- How can I? Much of it is not plain English: for example, what does 'place based' mean? Supporting residents to contribute to place-making is another example of opaque council speak. I suspect it is designed to discourage engagement and to facilitate a council agenda. I worry that an overly commercial approach will be to the detriment of leisure facilities. I accept that councils are underfunded, it seems to me that there is a battle to be fought on that front. An overly commercial approach may be to the detriment of the poorer members of the community who probably need these facilities most. I would ask that imagination and political flexibility be used to help this community section.

- However, there is an immediate need to recognize the fundamental challenge in responding to Covid-19 in the short to medium term and the impact this has had and will continue to have on leisure and how the council intends to work with its current partners to address this issue.
- Shropshire is fortunate enough to have a closed road cycling facility and throughout this while strategy there is not one mention of it! I also feel cycling would be an answer to a lot of the issues raised within the proposed strategy and feeding into becoming greener!
- On the whole the Town Council broadly supports the vision of healthier and active lifestyles, but we do not see how this document sets out the parameters for that in terms of its breadth of sport and the use of facilities. This is a document that really deals with Shropshire Council's Strategy in managing its sports estate rather than taking an overview of leisure facilities across the board and it is only in doing that will the final part of the vision be achieved (supported facilitated for everyone).

Feedback - The Vision

The main messages from all the written comments appear to fall under the following main 'themes':

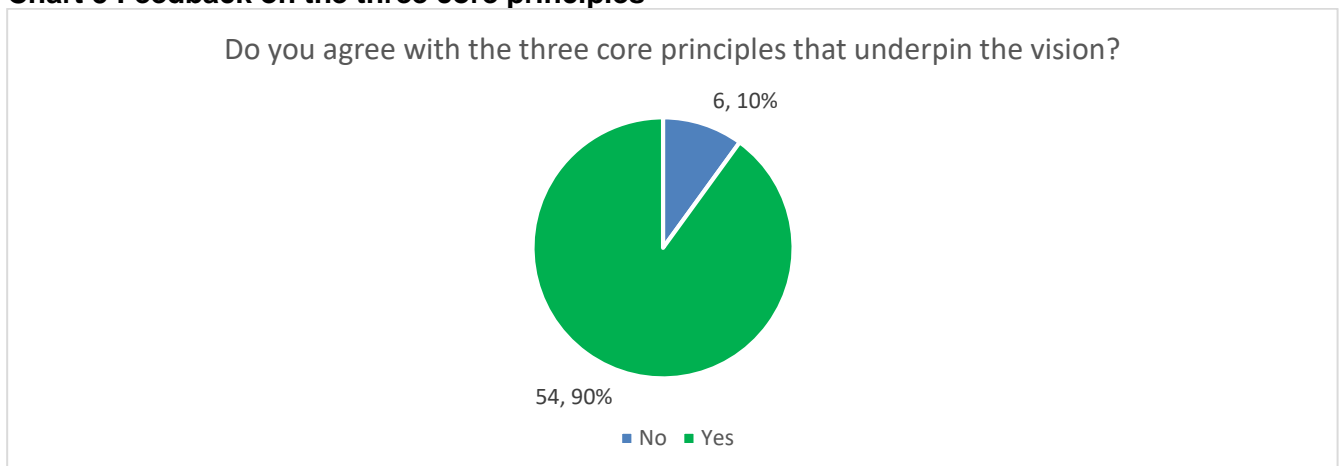
- Suggestions that there may be a slight mismatch or disconnect between the overall vision and the content/ detail (i.e. the main body of the document not fully reflecting the vision).
- A concern that the vision is not linked to clear, measurable timescales, outputs and outcomes.
- Concerns that the vision will be hard to achieve in a rural county, without adequate resources or investment.
- Concerns around access to leisure services and facilities and adequate public transport and the importance of local facilities for community members' fitness and health.
- Concerns around the commercial approach.
- Future uncertainty/ need for review as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.
- Request for inclusion of cycling issues and a closed road cycling facility.

The next question asked about the core principles underpinning the vision.

- Support for the creation of a high quality and sustainable indoor leisure facility mix, which provides accessible and inclusive activities for all Shropshire residents leading to increased participation and active lifestyles, thereby meeting community need;
- Recognising the importance of leisure facilities as relevant community spaces, accessible to all and offering opportunities for the delivery of a wide range of activities, services, support and entertainment to local communities and people; and
- A commitment to work with a wide range of partner organisations and individuals as co-creators and co-deliverers* of leisure facilities so that they best reflect the differing needs of local communities. * including existing leisure operators (independent trusts, schools), Town / Parish Councils, voluntary sector, etc.

The overall feedback on these 3 principles is shown in Chart 5. 10% (6 respondents) are not satisfied with the three core principles but 90% (54 respondents) are satisfied. To understand any concerns an open comment box was included, and 13 comments were provided.

Chart 5 Feedback on the three core principles



Example Comments – Feedback on the 3 core principles

- *The principles reflect national direction and thinking. The strategy does not give confidence that these principles can be delivered on.*
- *I think that the health aspect is under-written.*
- *The first principle of a "high quality and sustainable indoor leisure facility mix" implies that commercial viability is the major consideration. Dis-investment in smaller town leisure provision will undermine their social and economic resilience, disadvantaging elderly residents in terms of their health and social care and deterring younger families from settling in those communities.*
- *It should focus on indoor and outdoor facilities*
- *High quality, outdoor provision should also form part of the core principles. For example, cycling is a key activity to help meet the aims of the vision but there is no reference to this within the leisure strategy.*
- *It is not clear what may be meant by a sustainable mix. The suspicion must be that this is a get-out phrase which will allow Shropshire Council to shed any responsibility for maintaining facilities in smaller and less well-resourced communities. The commitment to partnership, while sounding good, is undermined by disparities of power and resource. There is no commitment to maintaining equitable access to facilities in and for each local community.*
- *... a number of the terms used in draft strategy are woolly and much of the responsibility is off-loaded to 'partners' with no real indication as to how the partners are going to be funded separately or working together nor is there a plan for how their success is going to be measured. There is particularly no mention of what steps Shropshire Council might take to initiate building facilities with such partners should their occurrence be lacking.*
- *... What happens if local fundraising and partnerships fail to raise adequate funds? I understand SC's wish to reduce spending, but this is short-sighted - what about the physical and mental health and wellbeing of all those who can't travel (time, financial constraints). There'll just be higher health and social care costs.*
- *Church Stretton has a significant elderly population. We need our local, accessible leisure centre and swimming pool. These must be properly funded, even if in partnership with non-council organisations. Enthusiasm and support for pool already evident, but community itself will have great difficulties now, with Covid19, in raising necessary funds.*
- *The issue is Private sector provision as we become more aware of the need for personal fitness the private sector provision is less and less viable by Covid restrictions. Covid is a progression over two years but is highly likely to be followed by other threats of epidemic proportions. Fitness may not be economic in pure, financial terms but vital in social terms. This what Government is all about. Doing for the people collectively what we as individuals could not afford, by using taxation in the broader sense to subsidise the facilities. The private sector has no such mandate. It is required to make profit in any given site. Given that Hotels and clubs are sustained by their members and guest who pay for the facilities they may not welcome the wider public for whom it is unaffordable at their rates. So, the private sector does not address the public need and any such provision should be seen as Serendipitous and unreliable to the policy.*

Feedback - The Principles

Main messages from all the feedback comments, reflect some of the previous comments and, to summarise, were:

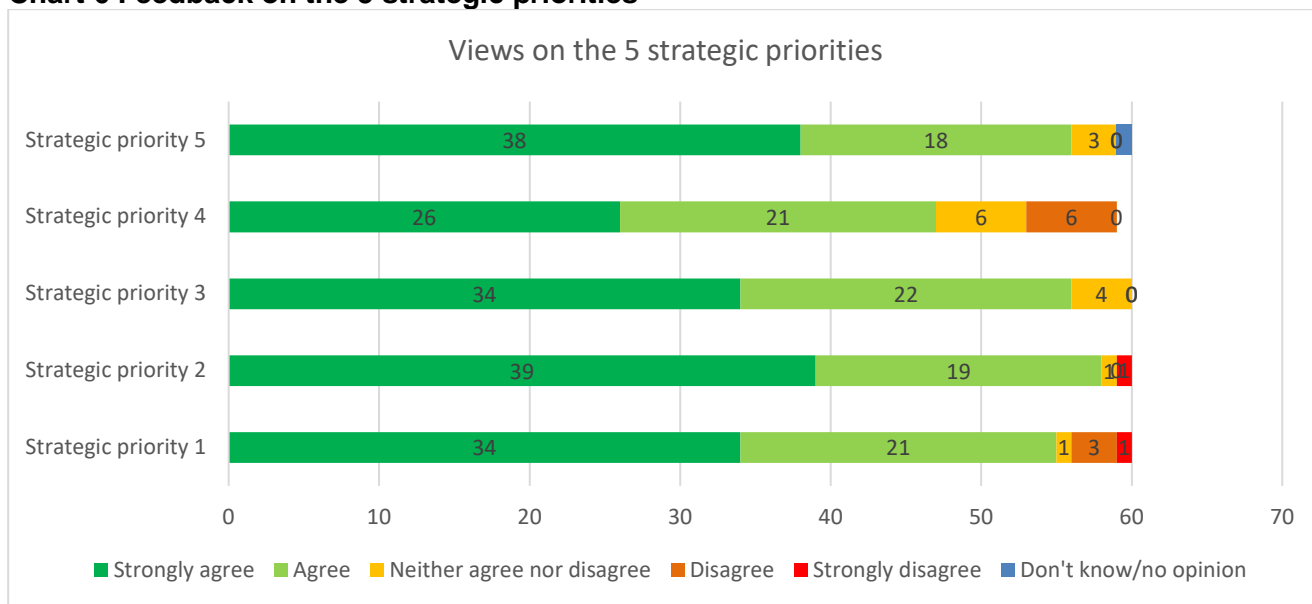
- A concern that the core principles are not necessarily linked to clear, measurable timescales, outputs and outcomes.
- Suggestions that indoor and outdoor leisure (e.g. cycling) should be covered within the strategy.
- A request that health forms a stronger focus.
- Concerns about community fundraising and sustainability of smaller rural leisure facilities and services. (Specifically concerns that Shropshire Council may be trying to pass responsibility or financial burdens onto community-based organisations).
- The importance of accessible, local services and reducing the need to travel.
- Uncertainty over the impact of the pandemic and possible changes in private sector provision.

The draft strategy contains 5 strategic priorities:

- **Strategic priority 1** To work with partners to support the people of Shropshire to live longer, healthier and quality lives through sport and physical activity with a focus on young and older people
- **Strategic Priority 2** To support the resilience of local communities and the development of Place by strengthening local communities through sport and physical activity
- **Strategic Priority 3** To support economic growth by developing opportunities for people to reach their full potential by providing employment, volunteering and tourism opportunities
- **Strategic Priority 4** To take a cross county-based approach to the delivery of high quality facilities through targeted investment, partnership opportunities, community empowerment and commercial acumen in order to reduce levels of subsidy
- **Strategic Priority 5** To aim to reduce our carbon footprint in line with the commitment of Shropshire Council to the declaration of Climate emergency to become carbon neutral by 2030.

Chart 6 presents the results following a question within the survey asking for opinions on the 5 strategic priorities. Overall the feedback is very positive. 92% or more strongly agreed or agreed with priorities 1, 2, 3 and 5. Very small numbers had concerns. None of the survey respondents disagreed with strategic priority 3 or 5, 1 person strongly disagreed with strategic priority 2, and 4 disagreed with strategic priority 1 (of those 1 strongly disagreed). There was overall support for strategic priority 4 but there were more concerns (6 disagreed, no-one strongly disagreed but a smaller overall proportion agreed or strongly agreed (78%).

Chart 6 Feedback on the 5 strategic priorities



There were 16 comments within the survey made to explain any concerns about the 5 strategic priorities. Examples are shown below with extracts from the detailed written consultation responses.

Example comments – Feedback on the 5 strategic priorities

- *As a vision and priorities, they are relevant, appropriate and in line with the latest national strategy consultation and “Big Issues” from Sport England. However, since there is no evidence readily available of past performance against these, or similar, aims and there is no recognition of any of these principles and priorities within the basic thinking and needs analysis of the strategy, (other than the introduction and context) there is no reason to expect that any of these will be achieved through this strategy.*
- *Strategic priority 1. We feel that this should be more inclusive to all sectors of society regardless of age, ability, gender, race, disability etc.*
- *I have strongly disagreed to ensure that you read this. Suggest that 2 also takes explicit account of the need to future-proof against risks. For example, if we had been much more forward*

thinking about the hazard of a pandemic, we would have found it much easier to design risk mitigation in at the start. Always cheaper and more effect than retrofitting.

- *Strategic priority 4 - DISAGREE – whilst Shropshire Council seeks parity of service delivery across the county, this report identifies anomalies in need (particularly around aging populations).*
- *4. Overtly, this comprises several priorities, but I suspect the first few are there to disguise the real priority of cutting council spending which may lead to reduction in services.*
- *4 - targeted investment - strongly agree. 4 - reduced subsidy - very worried.*
- *Priority 4 - anxious about future survival of Church Stretton pool, with reduction in subsidy. Would like Council to invest in our pool and leisure centre.*
- *Although I agree with the priorities, I have concerns about reductions in subsidy for Church Stretton. The Covid and climate emergencies seem an ideal time for the Council to insist on proper Central Government funding to promote a healthier, greener, more caring, more inclusive society. Forcing people to travel to distant health facilities does nothing to achieve those aims.*
- *..... strongly agree with all of the strategic priorities set out within the draft though the means by which these laudable priorities will be achieved is lacking; notable any commitment to investment in expert people such as coaches and organisers to fill the glaring gaps in the current provision and to make the most use of the facilities which exist. It looks like a wish list looking for some 'free' miracle workers.*
- *..... Engaging with partners is a dangerous proposal since the partners have no social duty of care to the public in continuity. Any private partnership is vulnerable to collapse if the partner collapses for whatever reason. It should all be in public ownership. Outsourcing is a different debate. It does not change ownership and outsourcers are routinely expected to need to be changed and the process is there for that. There is no such thing as partnership with outsourcers. They do not share risks and can opt out, at any time, by going bankrupt.*
- *I would like to see investment in my local leisure / swimming pool services I do not wish to travel on regular basis to other parts of the county*
- *The action plan associated with each priority fails to show how each will be delivered.*
- *In the draft leisure facilities strategy, each strategic priority has one or two key 'actions' associated with it, which in fact are not actions at all, rather they appear to be good intentions.*
- *The leisure strategy upon which SC is seeking comments lacks any ambition. In particular, despite national policy establishing growth targets, SC strategy does not identify any growth other than population increase.*

Feedback - The Priorities

The main messages were:

- Two survey respondents mentioned the importance of ensuring priority 1 reflects the needs of those with disabilities and access needs (and focuses on inclusion, recognising that people all have different needs). Access and travel were also mentioned.
- A suggestion that priority 2 may need to consider changes generated by the pandemic and a focus on risk.
- Principle 4 caused the most concern due to mention of reduced subsidies and concerns that council funding/investment may not be adequate.
- Concerns around appropriate partnerships and community involvement in a way that will not undermine the sustainability of local leisure services and facilities.
- A request for more detail concerning how the strategic priorities will be delivered.
- There is a comment requesting more ambition and growth.

The consultation survey was designed to try and better understand what people liked best about the draft strategy and any areas for improvement in the content/design. Several statements were used within one main question to obtain views:

- The draft strategy provides a context for the strategy and development of leisure facilities in Shropshire.
- How the draft strategy fits with other strategies and plans is clear.
- The draft strategy gives a useful insight into the future needs of Shropshire's population.
- There is adequate information about Shropshire Council's leisure facilities.
- The changes in approach (how the strategy differs from the last strategy) are clearly explained.

- The actions that will be undertaken to implement the strategy are clear.
- The draft strategy clearly sets out the objectives for each priority.
- The strategy explains how communities and partners will be engaged in a place-based approach.

Chart 7 shows feedback on each of the statements above. Overall the feedback was positive with many more people strongly agreeing or agreeing compared to those who disagreed or strongly disagreed. On average, 36 of the 60 survey respondents agreed with each statement and 10 disagreed but the totals varied by question.

The statements with the greatest levels of agreement/satisfaction were ‘the draft strategy provides a context for the strategy and development of leisure facilities in Shropshire’ and ‘the draft strategy gives a useful insight into the future needs of Shropshire’s population’. This suggests that people are happy that the strategy is based on robust evidence and local context.

The statement with most disagreement was ‘the strategy explains how communities and partners will be engaged in a place-based approach’ (17 disagree). 12 people also disagreed with each of the following two statements: ‘there is adequate information about Shropshire Council’s leisure facilities’ and ‘the changes in approach (how the strategy differs from the last strategy) are clearly explained’.

Chart 7 Feedback on key elements of the draft strategy document (content/design)



To understand the feedback in more detail, survey respondents were asked to add comments and 28 comments were made. Examples are included below alongside extracts from the written consultation responses.

Example comments – Strategy contents

- *Section 1.21 of the strategy raises some key points regarding deprivation, rurality, mobility and car ownership and the importance early health interventions. Sadly, none of these factors are adequately considered, if at all, within the needs analysis.*
- *‘There is adequate information about Shropshire Council’s leisure facilities’ – Disagree - it does not help in understanding the provision of facilities.*
- *‘The actions that will be undertaken to implement the strategy are clear’ – Strongly disagree - Members struggle to see how these actions will achieve the overall vision. Actions feel like they are more likely to provide rationale for disinvestment/devolution without resource. At a time like this when leisure is ever more important to maintain both physical and mental wellbeing, we believe it is not a time that Shropshire Council should be considering the withdrawal of funding.*
- *‘The strategy explains how communities and partners will be engaged in a place-based approach’ – Disagree - there is very little reference to engagement and certainly not place based.*

- *It is not clear exactly how communities and partners will be engaged - it just says they will be.*
- *The draft strategy resembles more of an aspirational mapping exercise as it misses any real focus on financial resources or how the council will better address and facilitate partner links with public health, GP's etc. We would welcome a clearer identification of how place plans will truly engage with partners. The draft strategy also gives mixed messages as it refers to investment in poor quality swimming facilities but goes on to say it will consider a rationalization of swimming pools (closures); a strategy cannot do both.*
- *I would like to see more detail regarding the investment of specific swimming pools to enable them to continue as a valuable asset to communities.*
- *Very concerned about swimming provision in Church Stretton. Being able to access a swimming pool outside of Church Stretton within 30 minutes is amazingly optimistic. Other than for someone living next to the town centre bus stop, at about one time of day would under 30 minutes be possible without a car. Using a car goes against lowering carbon footprint - a key strategy point...*
- *Insufficient information regarding transport links to facilities. Are the residents without cars spread evenly over the county? Would services be used more had transport not been reduced? Can community transport be improved to improve sustainability of leisure (and other) services? Not sure the actions are clear- the aims are clear, certainly.*
- *It is not clear how the Strategy contributes to Shropshire Council's commitment to reduce carbon emissions. For example, the closure of any facilities, particularly in small towns, will mean increased travelling, and therefore increased emissions*
- *Sense of place is vital. Larger central pools do not have the same friendly community feel or promote a sense of place. We swim at Church Stretton because we can walk or cycle there and because it is extremely friendly and welcoming. We would be heartbroken to lose it and would almost certainly not be motivated to travel.*
- *See other comments but the strategy is not deliverable if it depends on partners. It suggests to me that having lost the Shrewsbury battle the Council wants to reopen it using a new complex strategy, that will not work, to cover a new approach to an old and dismissed strategy of Quarry disposal. There is nothing new in the strategy since the existing is all with Partners and simply needs to be maintained first and improved second. Following Covid the entire strategy is in tatters. Population dynamics will trend to migration from City to rural Areas which cannot be assessed yet. It is the wrong time to review strategy when change dynamics are making it obsolete before printing.*
- *My assessment looks very negative and may seem unduly critical. But this is simply because there are no quantified outcomes or outputs, nor performance / delivery measures, and no evidence that the strategy is going to deliver any change. I appreciate that a strategy is a very high-level plan, but there are insufficient numbers in this to show any robustness. I regret feeling the need to say this.*
- *3.3.2 the strategy does not clarify how additional commercial or voluntary facilities will be taken into account or indeed how they are included in any demand-based calculations.*
- *Not all facilities are factored into this leisure strategy. Shrewsbury sports village is home to a closed road circuit which needs addressing and needs expanding on. This draft strategy does not fully encompass the full potential or opportunities for development.*
- *This strategy does not relate in any way to the six sub-areas of the county, identified in the Playing Pitch Strategy. Reference is made to a "place-based approach" but there is no definition of "place". In relation to Church Stretton, there is a disconnect between the acknowledged need for investment in the Leisure Centre and subsequent commitments only to invest in swimming pools in Shrewsbury and Whitchurch....*
- *It is clear there is a clear opportunity to integrate cycling provision, activation and cycling opportunities into the strategic framework which would then benefit lots of key areas highlighted in the strategy and wider priorities for local authorities such as becoming carbon neutral and encouraging behavioural change.*

Feedback - Strategy Content and Design

Very similar themes were highlighted when survey respondents were asked about content and different elements of the strategy. was a very dominant theme. Messages mentioned, that were also touched on in previous sections included:

- How communities will be engaged.
- Developing understanding of place-based approaches.
- The importance of measurement and impact.
- The importance of ensuring the strategy adequately covers health.
- The need for access and transport.
- The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on future planning and delivery

Other main messages highlighted within this section, but not as well covered previously, included:

- Suggestions for reflecting the needs analysis findings more strongly in the strategy content/delivery.
- Concerns that that strategy will mean withdrawal of funding and support.
- Concerns that swimming provision is not emphasised and several concerns for the sustainability of Church Stretton swimming pool.
- Requests for alignment with the Playing Pitch Strategy.
- A focus on the importance of carbon reduction and reducing environmental impact.

The rest of this report considers more general feedback on the draft strategy in 4 main sections:

- A. Positive feedback
- B. Negative feedback
- C. Gaps – points for consideration
- D. Overall views and other comments

A. Positive Feedback

40 survey respondents made comments when asked 'What do you like best about the draft strategy?' and positive comments were also included within the 5 comprehensive written consultation responses. Some example comments to illustrate this positive feedback are included below:

Example comments – Positive feedback:

- *The Town Council commends the work in tying this document with the Local Plan. Members feel that that the need to have a comprehensive sports offer is going to be crucial in keeping a diverse and aging population healthy and active.*
- *Plenty of detail about the various sites across the county.*
- *The strategy suggests a desire to keep local facilities open.*
- *The vision, principles and priorities are appropriate for this county and reflect national thinking. A place-based approach is a vast improvement on the Tier-based 'hub' system.*
- *The tiers have gone, and SC has agreed to work with local communities.*
- *The fact that the previous Tier based strategy has been replaced.*
- *Shropshire is very diverse given its rural nature and therefore a more site by site approach is a better fit than a blanket one shoe fits all approach.*
- *I hope that The Council will invest adequately in our Stretton pool and centre. I also like the fact that the strategy recognises the true value of accessible leisure activities for all*
- *That community is put at the centre of the strategy to provide for the future. In particular, that local swimming pools are valued. That SC will work with other stakeholders and provide investment.*
- *It is welcome that the strategy recognises the value of retaining leisure service provision not just on a "commercial approach" but also on a "more community-based health & wellbeing service based approach".*
- *That the importance of keeping communities fit and therefore healthy, both physically and mentally, is recognised at both ends of the age spectre.*

- *The place approach, involvement of communities, and improving physical health and mental wellbeing.*
- *The recognition that the strategy needs to be developed further to focus on community needs and aspirations and is not based on a one size fits all approach. Also, that there is a recognition that removal of services could severely impact on communities, putting additional stress on the NHS and the economy in our market town.*
- *That it is beginning to look at the needs of communities, not to generalise from urban ones.*
- *The stated approach of this revised Leisure Facilities strategy is to focus on creating and retaining a sense of belonging, or 'place', rather than focusing on specific services and buildings. This is consistent with national thinking and, in theory, moves away from a bricks and mortar approach to one which generates a feeling of community. However, each place must be relevant; large enough to generate economies of scale whilst enabling a unique identity and retaining a feeling of belonging and loyalty.*
- *.... leisure services will be one of the key components of a post-COVID recovery both in terms of individual physical and mental health and wellbeing, but also of community wellbeing, strengthening the bonds within a community to add resilience and a sense of place for every member.*
- *The time is to be bold, to be innovative and to work with willing, skilled and capable partnerships in order to not only retain existing services, but to re-energise provision so that no element of society is discriminated against.*

Positive Feedback – Main Messages

The common themes coming through the positive comments and feedback concerning what people like best about the strategy appear to be:

- General agreement that the strategy is an improvement on the previous strategy and represents an opportunity to work in a slightly different way.
- Significant support for the fact that the tiered model is no longer included.
- Recognition that the Council would like to retain and invest in leisure services (and a recognition that budget restraints are a national issue for local authorities and not caused locally).
- Positive feedback on the local community approach, and the recognition within the strategy that different communities have different needs.
- Support for the inclusion of health within the strategy and links between the strategy and positive impacts on health (including reference to supporting health needs linked to the coronavirus pandemic).

B. Negative Feedback

The consultation was designed to identify changes and improvements. Of the 60 survey respondents, 19 provided comments in the survey suggesting concerns or areas of dissatisfaction. Extracts from the 5 written responses have been incorporated into the example comments below.

Example comments – Negative feedback:

- *We would have liked to see a broader approach to leisure facilities across the county so the areas for development/investment can be clearly defined and embedded in things like the Local Plan and Place Plan.*
- *.. whilst the strategy references the housing growth in the Local Plan review for each of the settlements, it doesn't then identify how that development relates to the existing facilities, to analyse the impact this housing growth might have, nor does it draw out how those developments might contribute in terms of developer contributions.*
- *That it lacks evidence for deliverability, any figures, any clarity on who key partners are and the nature of the partnership synergy. That it completely omits any mention of the needs of future superstars.*
- *The report states that there is sufficient sports hall provision however our consultation indicates that there is a significant lack of provision for indoor netball within the County. Your analysis uses 'badminton courts' as the indicator of demand and in our view this method is outdated.*

Badminton is generally in decline whereas netball is increases. The report needs to better reflect the trends in participation associated within sport and recreation and how the facility mix will better provide and cater for these emerging trends.

- I feel that many sections and appendices are based on historic information. E.g. CS swimming pool is rated as 'poor' No explanation why; yet recent surveys have shown this not to be the case.*
- Unfortunately, the Objectives under the Strategy Summary are so vague as to be basically meaningless ('We will work with local Town and Parish Councils and forums of interest to support the local area', 'We will protect the right opportunities in the right places', 'We will regularly review our services based on local need and financial considerations' etc).*
- While the strategy recognises the challenges presented by an ageing population and of younger people, it is unfortunate that these key facts are not considered to any depth elsewhere in the strategy and appear to simply be rhetoric. Additionally, by amalgamating disparate 'places' and failing to recognise demographics in the analysis of need, the strategy discriminates against both the young and the old by totally failing to recognise their individual needs and the broader savings which catering for these needs could bring.*
- The Sport England Active Lives Survey data of 2018/19 shows that over the period 2015/16 to 2018/19 the percentage of the adult population classed as active (i.e. performs >150 minutes of moderate activity a week) increased nationally by 1.1% but over the same period in Shropshire the percentage dropped by 3.7%. Evidence of monitoring of the performance of SC leisure services is difficult to find..... It is possible that the lack of robust monitoring may explain why SC activity performance is amongst the worst in the country in both pre- and post-COVID reporting data.*
- ... the strategy is somewhat light in its detail regarding the qualitative issues at some of the sites, and that the strategy lacks an action plan.*
- In para 1.12, whilst the sub areas are referred to, I don't really think they are used in the analysis of how pools and halls are used, so I'm not sure this really helps the strategy as presented?*
- Very discriminatory against smaller market towns and rural communities versus the larger centres. Everyone has to pay for these facilities.*
- Given the current pandemic situation this is the wrong time for trying to launch a revised strategy and believe it would be more prudent to defer until the covid impact has been fully accessed and accounted for rather than seeking to reduce resources for community facilities when they are at their greatest need. We believe a 3-year recovery strategy with a direct coloration to covid would be better suited and give the service more time to return to previous levels of engagement. Less resources with less customers is not a sustainable position long term and this would not meet any 'commercial' parameters.*
- The Strategy skirts around the key issue of affordability, by using words such as "sustainable". There is no recognition of the fact that the closure of facilities for "commercial" reasons has longer-term implications for the health and well-being of communities, and that, therefore, short-term decisions work against the overall aims and vision of the Strategy. Even on economic grounds, it should be recognised that the presence of leisure facilities in a town brings people into town from the surrounding countryside, contributing to the viability of local businesses.*
- The Plan ends with a reiteration that the CC has limited funds and the success of this new strategy will be dependent on working with partners on a commercial or voluntary basis..... Overall, this document does not have much relevance to or reference to those living in our area!*

Negative Feedback – Main Messages

The common themes appearing within the collated feedback seem to fall into the following categories:

- There are some concerns that the emphasis on Shropshire Council facilities means the strategy isn't broad enough or holistic.
- Consultation respondents identify some gaps, and these are explored in more detail in the following section.
- There are some suggestions that not all needs have been fully considered (these comments relate broadly to different geographic needs/communities, and more specifically to groups within the community with different needs e.g. health and disability needs).

- There is some feedback to suggest that some of the evidence upon which the strategy is based is not up to date and not reflective of recent trends or feedback.
- The feedback indicates that there is a lack of detail concerning deliverables and measures.
- There is support of the links to the context of the Local Plan, but feedback is that there is a lack of detail concerning how the local plan and developer contributions may be used effectively to support the strategy.
- The feedback highlights significant concerns regarding the affordability of the strategy delivery, the impact of coronavirus (both on finances and future needs) and concerns that the commercial issues are not yet fully understood.

C. Gaps and points for consideration

Within the survey feedback 33 of the 60 respondents took the time to add comments around perceived gaps within the draft strategy document. The written responses also suggested gaps for consideration. Although the comments below are only examples, they are illustrative of all the feedback received and reference can be made to the original and full comments where needed. To highlight messages, example comments are grouped into main themes.

Example comments – Gaps:

Strategy content and approach

- *I do note that the report concentrates on the facilities provided by the Council, and therefore does not consider other facilities that play a part in meeting the needs of Shropshire residents, such as those facilities on education sites and other privately-run facilities. I'd recommend that you look at this as a potential next phase of work to build on the findings of the strategy.*
- *The Sport England stated aim is to increase the number of people who are regularly active in England by 500,000 nationally between 2016 and 2020. Despite this national imperative, SC's strategy contains no growth in facility usage and therefore displays little ambition to improve the health and wellbeing of Shropshire's residents through physical activity.*
- *Sport England are undergoing a strategic consultation on future strategy in which they identify the 'Big Issues' in which they should play a role. If these are a priority for Sport England, then it is probable that they should be a priority for SC too. [These cover inequalities, climate emergency, health and wellbeing, digital and data, workforce, active environments, diminishing local resources and capacity and school experiences].*
- *...there is currently a lot of cycling activity happening across Shropshire but there is still much more that can be done to build on this by putting it as a key focus in your leisure strategy. In particular, Shropshire Council can help facilitate greater connectivity between the community and club/ sport landscape.*
- *...the larger housing sites should contribute to swimming pool and sports hall investment using Sport England's Sports Facilities Calculator. I've done this against the backdrop of the findings of the strategy that you have sufficient quantitative provision, but that there are issues with the ageing stock that are affecting the quality of the experience for users. If the strategy made this link between the facility investment needs and the opportunities to secure developer contributions, I think this would help*
- *The strategy identifies "developing a commercial approach to service delivery where appropriate in order to reduce overall subsidy to the service". This can and has been successful where certain things are in place: - efficient buildings in terms of energy management - building design to allow management of staff resource during off peak time - population density to ensure there is a demand for services. Without the above there will always be challenges to run community / older facilities without subsidy and therefore upfront investment will support this vision.*

Success and Measurement

- *The Government's 'Sporting Future: A new strategy for an Active Nation' December 2015 defines 23 KPIs. Some of which are directly applicable to the SC leisure facilities strategy and others which can be adapted for local analysis and performance tracking.*

- *The draft leisure facilities strategy gives no indication of what success looks like, nor how it will be managed, measured and controlled. Having no indication of performance against the previous strategy, it is impossible to comment on the effectiveness of existing collaborations to inform changes and practices in the future.*
- *SC should develop, and include within the strategy, meaningful KPIs to inform Councillors, officers and the Public. A performance management framework, in line with national objectives, should be constructed to cover all aspects of the strategy. The framework will provide the opportunity for a feedback loop to be in place to inform future management decisions and strategic direction.*

Engagement and Partnerships

- *Exactly how communities & partners will be involved and what will be expected of them.*
- *Inclusion of those with disabilities.*
- *There is no mention of the need to take account of accessibility issues for rural communities. Given poor transport links in many parts of the County, there is a pressing need to maintain leisure facilities provision in smaller towns. It is unclear how the User Forums will be constituted.*
- *It is not clear what constitutes "User Forums" or how they would be involved.*
- *How is SC leveraging the skills and experience of partnerships in order to further the strategic objectives? Energize is but one of several Partners including Place Making Leads, Parish and Town Councils and facility operators mentioned within the leisure facilities strategy. Who in SC is responsible for ensuring such Partnerships are efficient, effective, offer value for money and deliver the services they are contracted to?*

Workforce

- *...the professional workforce in the sport and physical activity industry is notably undervalued and staff turnover, particularly of young, disaffected staff members, is high. There is no mention of a workforce strategy or career plan to ensure that SC Leisure facilities are properly staffed and maintained by appropriately qualified personnel. There is no obvious evidence available of staffing requirements and skills review across the county.*

Area based concerns

- *There is a real focus on investment in both the North and Centre of Shropshire and very little in the South of the county. It is disappointing to see Ludlow mentioned for investment at the beginning of the draft document but then falls out in the latter part when sound investment plans around commercial investment and carbon footprint reduction have been tabled previously which match the strategy principles and objectives*
- *There is little / no mention of facilities in our area and Bridgnorth. There is an overwhelming concentration on what are described as the 'three main market towns of Ludlow, Oswestry and Shrewsbury'. Market Drayton and Whitchurch are also mentioned several times but the only mention of Bridgnorth is an acknowledgement that it has a sports hall run by Halo Leisure. In the section on swimming pools, the one in Bridgnorth is not even mentioned.*
- *Shropshire Council should commit absolutely to investing in Church Stretton pool and leisure centre. In spite of encouraging words about fostering a local sense of place and identity, I would like a definite undertaking to invest.*

Concerns, suggestions and opportunities

- *Some sports are basically ignored in the document – squash, indoor tennis & indoor bowls – which states that they 'do not need any additional support or planning' without any justification or evidence for this.*
- *Netball facility provision (indoor and outdoor) is lacking mention within the Strategy analysis and actions. As a growing female sport, its omission is very surprising. There is a long term need for increased access to appropriate indoor provision at Church Stretton Leisure Centre (with the correct court size, surface, posts and run offs) and investment in floodlights at Telford Langley Leisure Centre.*

- *Improvement of existing facilities, what sports will be developed and there is no mention on cycling to help with priority 5.*
- *The Cycle Circuit is a perfect hub for cycling and will encourage these people who are new to cycling or are rediscovering cycling as place to progress on the cycling journey. There is real opportunity to utilise the facility such as working with British Cycling to host things such as our recreation programmes which are already well participated in across Shropshire, with guided rides starting and finishing at the circuit using the café as a social base for the riders to start and finish at.*
- *Through coaching sessions at the circuit, you could also open this up for school use with children attending the sessions to help get them into the sport and have the clear exit route of the club sessions already in place to point them towards. With support from the council there is also scope, to offer sessions for those in deprived communities, disability sessions, hard to reach communities and target the inactive.*
- *Where is the encouragement and aspiration to increase the usage of obvious facilities that promote social contact, wellbeing and activity such as bowls?*

Health

- *The limited number of references to 'health' within the strategy document each extol the positive impact that sport and physical activity can have on the health of an individual and of the community. Health is mentioned in the vision, and Strategic Priority 1 in the context of 'we will...' We need to understand what will be done, how these will align with the local strategy and place plans and especially who will be responsible for the success?*
- *...little effort seems to have been put into Exercise on Referral (EoR) or other similar schemes from a SC delivery perspective. It may be the intention to outsource these to delivery partners – in which case why is there no information?*
- *Aside from recognising that changes brought about by COVID-19 and its aftermath with impact the requirement for future facilities need and investment, the strategy makes no other mention of COVID, or indeed how it will influence facility and investment decisions. The media has highlighted specific COVID-recovery referral schemes in Wales to aid the recovery of those with both acute and "long" COVID symptoms. Would such a scheme be beneficial to Shropshire, and if not, why not?*

Digital and Marketing

- *Following from Sport England's observation that the industry lags behind in digital transformation, the use of digital means of delivery might be appropriate.*
- *Where is the marketing around towns and villages, the 'stands' on high streets, the welcome for prospective clients and taster days? In fact, where are any of the techniques used by the commercial sector to attract clients?*

Gaps – Main Messages

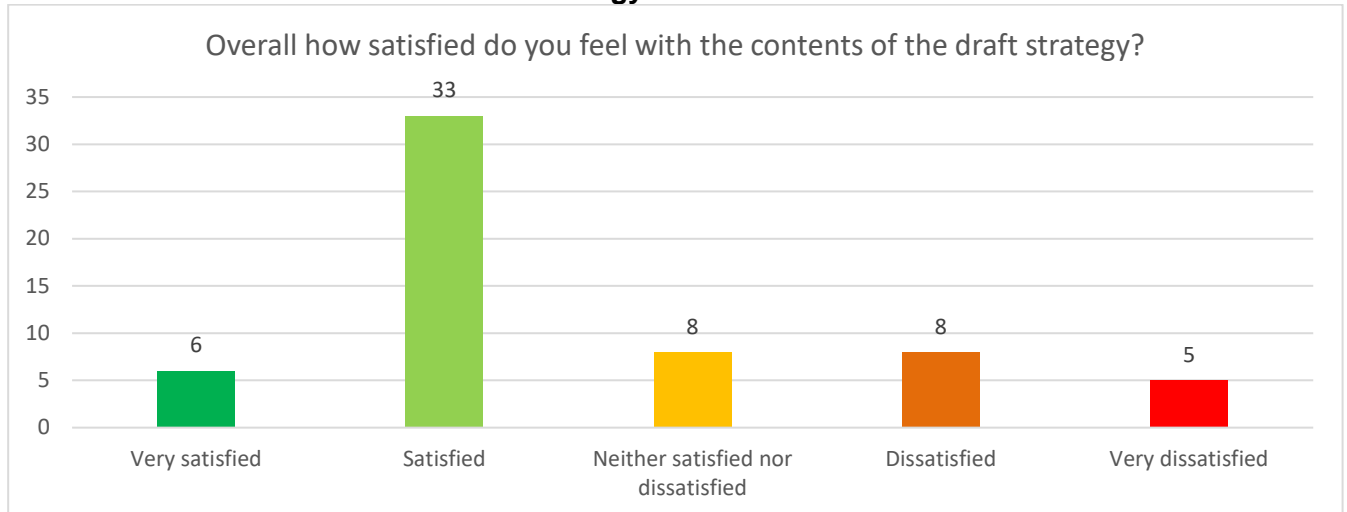
It is hard to summarise the feedback on gaps, because each must be fully considered in more detail, but bringing all the suggested gaps together highlights that the fall under the main themes picked out above (including the comments not provided as examples):

- Approach (suggestions that perhaps the strategy should be more focused on development, improvement and investment).
- Measurement (requests for a focus on measuring impact and success).
- Engagement and partnerships (requests for detail).
- Workforce
- Area-based concerns or gaps.
- Suggestions – indoor and outdoor activities e.g. cycling, netball, bowls, tennis and squash.
- Health
- Digital and marketing

D. Overall views and other comments

Overall feedback on the draft strategy is more positive than negative (see chart 8 below). 65% of survey respondents highlighted that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the draft document and 22% have some levels of dissatisfaction (the remainder did not have an opinion or did not answer the question). The reasons for any dissatisfaction or concerns have been thoroughly explored above.

Chart 8 Overall feedback on the draft strategy



22 other comments were provided at the end of the survey forms. No new issues were mentioned, and comments generally highlighted issues that had been previously raised. Despite this, those last comments are helpful because they highlight the main messages survey respondents wanted to emphasize, and a few illustrative examples are shown below. Those making use of the Church Stretton swimming pool were keen to show their support for this facility.

Other comments- examples:

- *Please lobby Central Government to rethink its spending policy - what better time than now? - so we can get realistic grants for all our pools and leisure centres. I have used Church Stretton pool regularly since it opened fully to the public in 2010. I am not a natural 'belonger', but using the pool gives me a sense of connectedness to my community, and I have met and interacted with far more fellow residents than I ever did before. The pool is invaluable to me.*
- *We have seen that Central Government can find funds for causes it considers essential. Funding for Stretton's pool and leisure centre is definitely essential: Covid and the climate emergency have hammered home the need for healthier, greener living. We need our local facilities, accessible to all incomes and age-groups without polluting travel.*
- *As a member of the Church Stretton Leisure Centre regularly using the pool and other classes, it has been and is a lifeline both mentally and physically. It is an essential asset to the community here and very much appreciated.*
- *I strongly feel that the need to keep local swimming pools is vital for the needs of everyone.*
- *Any strategy must show equal access for all groups, especially those without cars, disabled or women. Any strategy must show inclusion for all groups, especially those without cars, disabled, women and families.*
- *You have clearly identified that you have an increasingly older population. As such we endorse the Actions for Indoor Bowls, which is popular with older people*
- *The strategy makes reference to the need to minimise carbon transmissions, but there is little to suggest how this will be done.*

4. Summary

Main themes within the consultation feedback are highlighted throughout the report in the blue boxes. Similar messages were highlighted throughout, partly due to the collective responses submitted by some communities. 65 consultation responses were received in total and more of those were from the south of the county with a cluster from the Church Stretton area. The consultation achieved a good mix of individual and community responses alongside responses from leisure professionals and organisations. Despite not achieving large numbers of responses, the feedback that was obtained was detailed and considered. Key findings from the analysis are:

- There is widespread support for the strategy. Feedback highlights that the strategy is an improvement on the previous strategy and the general approach (including removing the tiers of provision) is welcomed.
- Consultation respondents would like more information and detail, particularly around impact and measurement and more detailed action planning and funding/investment plans.
- Although consultation respondents acknowledge the budget restraints faced by Shropshire Council, the overall message is that the strategy should go further and be more ambitious. There is a recognition that investment in leisure may lead to significant improvements in health.
- There is a sense that the coronavirus pandemic could help to both highlight the importance of physical activity but also increase the need for/demand for leisure facilities in the future.
- The feedback suggests that many would have liked to see Shropshire Council adopt a broader scope for the strategy, beyond the facilities and services Shropshire Council has influence over and extend the coverage to include a much wider range of indoor and outdoor leisure facilities and activities.
- There are strong messages from individuals that they wish to see leisure facilities and services that are accessible for all needs, promote inclusion and are available in the local area.
- There is support for the local community approach, but this is accompanied by concerns that this needs to be backed up by adequate resources, expertise and effective engagement.
- The feedback may seem critical at times, but it is clear from the overall tone and full responses that consultation respondents are generally very supportive of the work of Shropshire Council's Leisure Services department and quite a few commented on their desire to work in partnership, participate in engagement and support the future implementation of the strategy.