

Uckfield Leisure Centre - Summary of Equality Impacts

The council has duties under the Equality Act 2010 (Section 149) to pay ‘due regard’ to the impact of proposals where these may disproportionately affect people because of their legally protected characteristics¹. In order to identify any such impacts and to assess whether negative impacts can be avoided or reduced, an initial assessment of equality impacts was undertaken and as a result two specific questions were asked in the consultation to invite perspectives on this². In making a final decision on the options proposed, Members are required to pay rigorous and proportionate attention to the duties set out in of the Equality Act and this equality information, and to consider it alongside all the other factors and information related to these proposals.

The following equality impacts were identified in the council assessment and by respondents to the consultation survey:

- Problems with transport to other facilities:
 - Buses too expensive or infrequent service, potentially disproportionately impacting on younger and older people, disabled people and carers, and parents.
 - Barriers for non-drivers, with potential disproportionate impacts as above, on younger and older people and disabled people.
- Impacts of closure on physical and emotional well-being, with specific potential impacts on disabled people (both in relation to physical and mental health), older people (in relation to physical and mental health and social isolation) and younger people (especially disabled children and those with SEN and/or who are neurodivergent).
- Negative impacts of increasing loneliness and isolation (specifically older and disabled people, but potentially for people sharing all characteristics, especially after the increased pressures of Covid-19). The leisure centre was described as a place where people from a range of backgrounds could socialise.
- Specific impacts were noted as possible for women who may have more caring responsibilities and limited time and/or income to access alternate venues.
- The benefits of swimming were highlighted as a low impact exercise, especially for older and disabled people with limited mobility and/or joint pain, and during pregnancy. People with these characteristics were also highlighted as potentially being more likely to have problems with transport to other venues. The evidenced benefits of swimming on self-confidence, especially to women and girls was also noted.

¹ The legally protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage/civil partnership, pregnancy/maternity, race/ethnicity, religion/belief, sex and sexual orientation.

² The two questions were: “Please describe ways in which permanent closure of the dryside and/or wetside facilities to the community, or the alternative options identified above, would or may particularly affect persons sharing any of the following “protected characteristics” [they were then listed]” and “If your answer to the question above identifies any adverse/negative impact in relation to persons with one or more particular protected characteristics, what steps do you consider could or should be taken to reduce/remove or avoid such impact?”

- The national curriculum requirement to provide swimming instruction in Key Stage 1 or 2 was noted, particularly impacting younger people. Swimming was identified as an invaluable life skill, especially for children, as well as good for exercise.
- The pool was identified as being better for young people with SEND and/or who are neurodivergent than larger alternative facilities, as it is quieter. It was also noted that change and longer travel times can be very challenging for children and young people with SEND and/or those who are neurodivergent. Its facilities for disabled people (hoist, accessible toilets and changing facilities) were also noted to be better than alternatives.
- Sessions at the pool had been specifically aimed at older and younger people, as well as post-natal classes and mindfulness sessions, and removal of those was seen as a specific loss, especially where alternate activities are limited locally.
- The impacts on people living on low incomes was also noted, as limiting the ability to travel to other venues.

Impacts are identified in relation to a number of the legally protected characteristics: age (older and young people), disability (mental, physical, sensory and neurodiversity), pregnancy/maternity, and sex (women).

Mitigations identified if the centre is closed include the following:

- The national curriculum requirement to provide swimming instruction in Key Stage 1 or 2 remains a duty on schools. This can be delivered at other local facilities.

Respondents also proposed the following which would require further agreement or action by other organisations:

- better provision/council subsidy of bus routes or a shuttle bus to alternate venues (although this was noted not to overcome all the barriers),
- improving facilities at other venues and ensuring that they are fully accessible and inclusive to everyone,
- some suggested ways of increasing funding (such as Lottery bids, raising entry costs, room hire),
- guaranteed lessons and sessions at alternate venues for those enrolled at Uckfield (again noted not to address all barriers), or
- simply not closing the leisure centre (the vast majority of responses proposed this).

In terms of consultation responses, respondents were asked to complete an equality monitoring form.

- More women responded to the consultation than men: 62% women, 31% men, and less than 1% defined in another way. 7% chose not to say.
- Less than 1% of people defined as transgender;
- People from a wide range of age ranges responded to the questions: almost half of all responses came from people aged 35-54 (a total of 46% of respondents). Age breakdown:
 - 16-24: 6%
 - 25-29: 3%

- 30-34: 6%
- 35-29: 11%
- 40-44: 13%
- 45-49: 12%
- 50-54: 11%
- 55-59: 7%
- 60-64: 7%
- 65+: 14%
- 10% preferred not to say.
- Of those who answered the question, 6% said they were disabled, which is lower than the Wealden Census 2021 figure of 15.7%. 8% chose not to say.
- 3% of respondents identified as being lesbian, gay or bisexual: approximately in line with the Census 2021 figure for Wealden. 18% chose not to say.
- In relation to religion, 45% had no religion; 37% had a religion; and 17% preferred not to say.
- 2% said they were pregnant or had had a baby in the last 26 weeks.
- In relation to ethnicity, 86% identified as being White British (Wealden: 91.8%); 0.9% identified as being from a different white ethnicity (Wealden: 4.3%); 1% were Asian/Asian British (Wealden: 1.4%); 0.7% were Black/Black British (Wealden: 0.4%); 2% were from Mixed/Multiple ethnic backgrounds (Wealden: 1.7%); and 0.2% were Arab (Wealden: 0.1%). 3% preferred not to say.