Asset Transfer of Public Sport Facilities to Volunteers

SVRN, October 2015

Presented by
Dr Lindsay Findlay-King and Gordon Macfadyen,
Department of Sport Exercise and Rehabilitation,
Northumbria University

Research Team

• Dr Geoff Nichols, Sheffield University Management School
g.nichols@sheffield.ac.uk
• Dr Deborah Forbes, Newcastle University Business School
deborah.forbes@newcastle.ac.uk
• Dr Lindsay Findlay-King, Northumbria University
lindsay.findlay-king@northumbria.ac.uk
• Gordon Macfadyen, Northumbria University
gordon.macfadyen@northumbria.ac.uk

Overview

• What is asset transfer and the current picture among sport facilities in the UK?
• What methods did we use?
• What are some examples (and a model) of asset transfer?
• What has changed within the facilities?
• What has worked well/success factors?
• What are the challenges volunteer groups face with asset transfer?
• Conclusions and questions raised.

Recent Asset Transfer in SPORT

• Swimming pools and sport/leisure centres.
• Also happening with libraries.
• Volunteers plan and execute the transfer to trust-status themselves.
• Take roles of governance and delivery afterwards.
• An alternative to local government closing non-statutory services as a consequence of reduced funding.

Methods

• Semi-structured interviews with managers and volunteers (sometimes the same person);
• In 12 facilities (8 sport facilities and 4 libraries);
• Mainly facilities transferred from local government to volunteer control;
• One facility built by the community, and one facility in an authority which developed volunteers to work alongside employees;
• All interviews conducted 2014-15.
• (NB. Libraries were Conwy, Ecclesfield (Sheffield), Jesmond (Newcastle) and Salford Leisure Services.)
Overview


1993 Support created Leeds Entrepreneurism Year.

Baths, Edward limited (now Swimming Ltd) run Swimming Pool, was paid staff role by Ownership. Supervision of the pool, operated as a charity. Run by volunteers since 2002.

Stability: excellent LA support – business planning and technical training, rate relief, favourable leases, grants, liability protection, TUPEE (re-deployment?), political goodwill.

Distinctiveness: distinctive service, sensitive and responsive to consumer needs (volunteer market info. system).

Entrepreneurialism: compete to survive; shorter chain of command; free from corporate (LA) ‘shackles’ & political interference; running costs cut – by attention to detail for each item.

Loyalty: community loyalty to a facility (sometimes iconic buildings).

Key Volunteers: lead volunteers’ USPs – political, social capital, access to knowledge.

Volunteers on Board in operational roles/task completion.

Paid staff role interchangeability.

Close watch on costs (e.g. renegotiated utility bills).

Success Factors (cont’d)


Overall: 'greater sense of responsibility for success (whether volunteers or paid staff). Grow community engagement.'

Focus: focus on single/smaller number of services (e.g. the pool) rather than a larger or several leisure centres.

Prices and opening times.

Volunteers.

Paid staff.

Success Factors

Stability: stable community and key volunteer teams (local population and/or internal to an existing volunteer club set-up).

Key Volunteers: lead volunteers’ USPs – political, social capital, access to knowledge.

Loyalty: community loyalty to a facility (sometimes iconic buildings).

Skills: skills package from existing volunteers or grown from members/community.

Conviction: confidence and belief.

Balance: get the right balance of long-term volunteer team and interim member volunteering – but acknowledge all volunteers.

Appointments: key paid manager appointments – head-hunting, waiting for the right person.

Changes in the Facilities – post-transfer

Building change and refurbishment.

Grants and fundraising.

Service change: grow usage; different activities and group users; fill all space/time; make sure earlier and later opening times are well used.

Prices and opening times.

Volunteers on Board in operational roles/task completion.

Paid staff role interchangeability.

Close watch on costs (e.g. renegotiated utility bills).

Legal Status and Volunteer Involvement

Delivery Governance By Paid Staff Governance by Volunteers

Delivery By Paid Staff

King Edwards Baths, Sheffield

Wirksworth Pool, Derby

Richmond Pool, North Yorkshire

Jesmond Pool, Newcastle

Tadcaster Swimming Pool, North Yorkshire

Wirksworth Pool, Derbyshire

A small swimming pool, the pool operates as a charity. Run by volunteers since 2002.

Volunteers run the pool. The pool is run by volunteers since 1994. Two pools, fitness suites and small social area. Trust is a registered charity, limited by guarantee.

Paid Staff role run the pool. The pool is run by volunteers since 1994. Two pools, fitness suites and small social area. Trust is a registered charity, limited by guarantee.

A centre which houses a fitness suite, swimming pool, steam room and space for community events, meetings and fitness classes. Established in 2003, community led since 2013.

Centre of gymnastics, dance studio, activity and fitness rooms. Transferred in 2011 to Deerness Gymnastics Academy which specialises in acrobatic gymnastics and tumbling. The facility is operated by a limited company (some members of the club) and the club is a charity.

A small swimming pool, the King Edward VI School Swimming Pool Trust, formed in 1984 to run the pool.

Local community group established to support the pool in February 2011 and re-opened in January 2013 as an Industrial Provident Society on a 25-year lease from the Council.

Houses a fitness suite, swimming pool, steam room and space for community events, meetings and fitness classes.

The trustees are volunteers, and both paid workers and volunteers manage the pool and deliver the service.

Example - Bramley Baths, Leeds


- Opening hours reduced in September 2011 as part of a spending review by Leeds City Council.

- Local community group established to support the pool in February 2011 and re-opened in January 2013 as an Industrial Provident Society on a 25-year lease from the Council.

- Houses a fitness suite, swimming pool, steam room and space for community events, meetings and fitness classes.

- The trustees are volunteers, and both paid workers and volunteers manage the pool and deliver the service.
Challenges

“...It’s not as easy as just handing someone the keys and saying ‘you run the pool’” (Facility Manager, Tadcaster Community Swimming Pool)

1. Need a particular ‘can do’ mentality/drive for this volunteering to be successful.
2. Breaking down skills requirements – professional and technical/building-related trade needs. Harder to get volunteers for the roles of responsibility (e.g. health and safety).
3. High expectations of volunteers.
4. Managing enthusiastic, but unrealistic ideas of new volunteers.
5. Agreeing the terms of the lease, and need decent length of lease to be eligible for bank loans and capital grants (25 years plus).

Challenges (cont’d)

6. Finance is a continued challenge – sustaining facility capital costs and paid staff salaries. Strategic application for grants.
8. Staff costs need to be reduced or removed – local employment cuts or staff on less favourable terms. Issues around TUPE.
9. Council may not co-operate or support – viewed as unwelcome competition or even with suspicion.
10. Insecurity/disincentive of relying on local authority support.

Conclusions and Questions Raised

• Limitations: sample size – exploratory.

• Need to look further at:
  – National picture;
  – Those that failed to transfer or failed after transfer;
  – Local government and supporting body perspectives.

• Importance due to:
  i. Sustainability – the volunteer-led model is working;
  ii. This will keep happening – so need to learn lessons;
  iii. Relying on volunteers to save especially the ‘little pools and centres’.

References


ANY QUESTIONS?