

Case Study:

# HOW IS CALDERDALE LEVELLING UP THROUGH THE PROVISION OF NEW LEISURE FACILITIES?

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# ADEPT

The Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport

## INTRODUCTION

Halifax has high levels of deprivation and health inequalities. Nineteen of Calderdale's 128 local areas are among the 10% most deprived nationally. Eighteen of these are located within Halifax, which is amongst the most deprived areas in terms of the living environment and health deprivation.

Calderdale's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment identified a gap in life expectancy between the most and least deprived areas of Calderdale of seven years for men and nine years for women. Depression is significantly above national levels, with mental health referrals increasing by 18% since Covid-19.

Low productivity levels are linked to health deprivation, inequalities and low levels of physical activity. Physical activity levels decrease as deprivation increases.

The pandemic has exacerbated poverty and health inequalities by worsening pre-determinants for ill-health. Although more affluent populations have become more active since the pandemic, 49% have become less active including people from ethnic minorities and those with long-term health problems.

Following the development of its Town Centre Masterplan in 2014, Halifax has a strong record on town centre regeneration. This has seen significant capital investment into the city centre. Key projects in development include a new bus station and improvements to the town centre under the Future High Streets Fund.

Calderdale's leisure assets are owned and operated by Calderdale Borough Council. The leisure sector has been recovering following the periods of closure and reduced customer numbers during the first years of the Covid-19 pandemic. There is now significant financial pressure from rising utility bills.

## ACTIVE CALDERDALE

**Active Calderdale** is a programme to encourage people in the area to become more active, more often, with the aim of becoming the most active borough in the North by 2024.

It is one of 12 local delivery pilots, supported by £2.65 million funding from Sports England. Funding was awarded in 2020 to support pilot areas to understand and address barriers that stop people getting active.

The funding is being used to test ways in which physical activity can be embedded across the borough – including through health and social care – within the workplace, parks and open spaces, and voluntary and community organisations.

## A NEW LEISURE AND COMMUNITY CENTRE FOR HALIFAX

Alongside the Active Calderdale programme, a major capital project is planned to build a new leisure centre with integrated community services in Halifax. The new building would replace two former leisure centre sites in Halifax – the Halifax Swimming Pool and the North Bridge Leisure Centre.

The project has been in development for some years, with both leisure sites considered aging assets that were in need of replacement. Due to high operating / maintenance costs, the two sites have generated an annual deficit of c.£1.4 million.

In 2021, Calderdale Borough Council was successful in bidding for £12.2 million Levelling Up funding to support the capital costs of the new leisure centre project, with remaining funding to be paid back over time through income generated by the new facility.



### Key objectives of the project included:

- to improve Halifax's cultural and leisure offer and perception of place by developing a modern, high-quality leisure and wellbeing destination
- to safeguard at least 667,600 visits to the leisure centre, supporting health, wellbeing and productivity benefits and retaining town centre footfall
- to cater for a broad range of service users and increase the frequency of exercise, particularly amongst disadvantaged target groups
- to attract investment and footfall to the town and to safeguard 38 permanent jobs

The plans for the new Halifax Leisure Centre include a gym, six-lane pool, sports hall and dance studio, wellness suite and adventure climbing. It is intended to cater for an increased number of members with discounts for disadvantaged groups.

Plans for the centre also include co-located community services including a centre for independent living to support older people to stay active for longer. A wide range of council service areas have been involved in the design of the new centre including adult social care and public health, as well as the sports services and asset management teams.

The Active Calderdale programme also supported engagement with local communities to ensure that the services and facilities meet the needs of diverse communities, with a focus on those that are known to be less active. A strong relationship was built with Trinity Sixth Form Academy, based in the centre of Halifax, which would use rooms and facilities as part of health and physical education courses.

The specification for the new leisure centre incorporated energy efficient and carbon footprint reducing technology throughout the building. This included innovative pool filtration systems, rainwater harvesting, combined heat and power system and air source heat pumps.

Improvements in the design and physical appearance of the site are also hoped to reduce anti-social behaviour, improve community safety and amenity value, supporting the wider regeneration of the town centre and perceptions of place.

## WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW?

**Plans for the new leisure centre were approved by Calderdale's Cabinet and planning committee in March 2022. However, in November 2022, as part of a wider review of capital projects, the Council announced that it had to take the difficult decision to pause the development of the new Halifax Leisure Centre.**

The decision was taken due to rising costs for the project, the likelihood of further rises as the project progresses and the multiple budget pressures facing the Council following the impact of the pandemic.

Deputy Council Leader, Jane Scullion, said: *"We are devastated to have to put the new Halifax leisure centre and swimming pool on hold... Pausing the leisure centre project for now gives us time to review the delivery strategy and reassess the procurement, design and inflationary impacts"*.

## SUCCESS FACTORS

- **Calderdale had a strong business case** prepared for this project at the time of bidding for Levelling Up funding. The project had been in development for several years and the potential benefits were well established.
- **The project was closely linked to the Active Calderdale programme** (Sport England grant funded), data and awareness of deprivation and the links between poverty, low levels of physical activity and productivity.
- **The Active Calderdale programme enabled a strong focus on increasing physical activity amongst disadvantaged groups.** Dedicated funding to identify and address barriers to physical activity has supported the business case for the leisure centre project.
- **There was strong collaboration across council service areas** including the sports services team, public health team, asset management and regeneration teams. Sports and leisure facilities are considered as part of the public health landscape.



## CONSTRAINTS

- **The financial viability of leisure services is under severe pressure.** In this case the project to deliver the new Halifax Leisure Centre has been impeded by rising construction and materials costs. There is also a shortage of specialist consultants and skilled labour to take the project forward. Future pressures, including the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on membership levels, and rising utility bills have also created uncertainty and led to the need to reassess procurement, cost and design in the current market. The Council will continue to safeguard the 38 permanent jobs associated with the project.
- **The cost of borrowing for the LA has also increased.** This has had a twofold impact with both an increase in the amount that needs to be borrowed due to rising costs, but also an increase in the cost of borrowing due to rising interest rates.

## LEARNING POINTS

- **Leisure services play an important part of people's perceptions of place and are linked to multiple benefits** including health and wellbeing, economic productivity and also improving the environmental performance of the Council's estate. There is a strong link between the Council's public health function and leisure services.
- **Actions to deliver new community infrastructure, linked to levelling up, are at risk to the financial context that councils are now working in.** To deliver projects that will make a real difference to local communities, councils need increased certainty about funding, and ongoing financial support, in line with inflation.

## LINKS

Active Calderdale Programme, via: <https://active.calderdale.gov.uk/>

Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On (2020), via:  
<https://www.health.org.uk/publications/reports/the-marmot-review-10-years-on>

Fair society, healthy lives: the Marmot Review (2010), via: <https://www.instituteofhealthequity.org>

Build Back Fairer: The COVID-19 Marmot Review (2021), via: <https://www.health.org.uk>

Levelling Up the United Kingdom (Feb 2022), Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, via:  
<http://www.gov.uk/official-documents>

Levelling Up Fund Prospectus (March 2022) Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, via:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications>

*During 2022, the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport led a project to explore how local authorities are levelling up through action to address disparities in multiple domains - public health, local environmental quality, exposure to climate risk and socio-economic deprivation.*

*This project was in collaboration with the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, the Association of Directors of Public Health, the Association of Directors of Children's Services and the Local Government Association, recognising the synergies between our work areas, and the links between wellbeing and place.*

*This case study is one of a series of examples which look at how local authorities are levelling up, across service areas.*

- ADEPT members are the place-making strategists and policy shapers across top tier local authority areas
- ADEPT members are specialists, delivering services and sharing best practice across key sectors including environment, planning, housing, transport and economy
- ADEPT members design strategies for the future, taking communities beyond 2035
- ADEPT members operate in networks, cutting through boundaries to work with partners across the political, public, private and community sectors
- ADEPT members provide opportunities to develop new talent, supporting the place directors of tomorrow

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