



Subject:	GLL community engagement and underrepresented target groups update
Date:	6 th May 2025
Reporting Officer:	Jim Girvan, Director of Neighbourhood Services
Contact Officer:	Paul McLoughlin, Partnership Manager

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

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No

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If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Some time in the future

Never

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☐

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

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No

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1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
	To provide members with the annual update for 2024 on community engagement and underrepresented group focused promotional activity.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	Members are requested: To consider and record receipt of the information provide below and at Appendices 1 and 2 attached. CNS officers will be in attendance to respond to any queries raised by members.
3.0	Main Report

3.1	<p><u>Background</u></p> <p>Under the terms of the leisure contract between Belfast City Council (BCC) and GLL, the organisation is required to submit an annual report detailing community engagement initiatives from the previous year. These annual service reports are presented to the People and Communities Committee.</p> <p>As a leading social enterprise, GLL prioritises ensuring full access for all members of the community, with the goal of encouraging more people to become more active, more often. CNS works in collaboration with GLL to promote community outreach and increase regular participation among traditionally underrepresented groups.</p> <p>GLL employs a Regional Business Manager (RBM) whose primary focus is to drive participation and facility usage. The RBM ensures that individuals from all backgrounds are actively engaged in sports and physical activity.</p> <p>To support this mission, the RBM oversees a team comprising three Community Sport Officers and ten Health Officers. Each team member follows a work programme aligned with strategic objectives, aiming to boost participation among both mainstream and underrepresented groups.</p> <p>GLL remains committed to fostering community access by offering a range of opportunities within centres that are accessible, affordable, and welcoming.</p> <p>Additionally, GLL reinvests in talent development through the GLL Sport Foundation, which provides ongoing support to talented individuals.</p> <p>Notably, 56% of Belfast Pay and Play and Pre-Paid GLL members benefit from concessionary charges, helping to reduce affordability barriers and promote inclusivity in participation.</p>
3.2	<p><u>Outcomes and Proposals</u></p> <p>Sport National Governing Body (NGB) and Club Programmes</p> <p>GLL continues to support a range of National Governing Bodies (NGBs) in delivering holiday programmes, grassroots initiatives, and performance programmes. Over the summer months, GLL collaborated with Peace Players International, British Fencing, and Ulster Boxing to provide coaching workshops.</p> <p>Lisnasharragh Leisure Centre regularly hosts All-Ireland Water Polo League events and has also been the venue for several Ulster Swimming Galas. Ulster Boxing competitions are frequently held at centres such as Girdwood Community Hub, Ballysillan Leisure Centre, Brook Leisure Centre, and Whiterock Leisure Centre. Shankill Leisure Centre accommodates the Northern Ireland Futsal Federation League for both male and female participants and, in the autumn, began hosting Northern Ireland Fencing competitions. Additionally, NGBs frequently utilise BCC leisure centres to conduct coach education courses.</p>

BCC leisure centres, managed by GLL, are home to over 200 local sports clubs and performance squads. These centres provide essential training facilities for clubs and performance programmes, as well as hosting a wide variety of local and regional competitions. Sports supported include Gaelic games, boxing, fencing, football, futsal, rugby, tennis, table tennis, cricket, basketball, baseball, netball, softball, dodgeball, swimming, water polo, and martial arts.

School & Youth programmes

GLL collaborates with local Primary and Post Primary schools to provide facilities that support physical education programs. Belfast is home to 116 Primary Schools, 34 Post Primary Schools, and 13 Special Schools. Over the past year, GLL has facilitated school swimming lessons for 96 schools, comprising 84 Primary, 7 Post Primary, and 5 Special Schools.

In June, several centres hosted end-of-term celebrations for both primary and secondary schools. Schools were able to enjoy a range of junior-focused activities and swimming facilities across Belfast as part of these celebrations.

The GLL Holiday Scheme has been expanded to run during Easter, Summer, and Halloween, with 94 supervisors and instructors recruited to deliver these programmes. Across 13 centres, the scheme catered to 3,111 children during the three holiday periods, achieving 89% occupancy of the available spaces. Additional details can be found in Appendix 1.

GLL's lessons and courses programme currently focuses on swimming, gymnastics, tennis, and climbing. In 2024, enrolment numbers included over 6,000 children for swimming lessons, 50 for diving, 232 for tennis, 213 for gymnastics, and 72 for climbing lessons. In 2025, GLL plans to expand its swimming programme to accommodate 6,500 children weekly, alongside increased participation goals: 65 for diving, 250 for tennis, over 250 for gymnastics, and over 100 for climbing.

Brook Leisure Centre has partnered with several Special Needs schools to offer the Air Venture product, enhancing physical education delivery. Additionally, two Special Schools use the sensory pool weekly for lessons, establishing Brook Leisure Centre as a leader in inclusive programming.

Community Outreach

In 2022, GLL introduced community engagement leads in each centre to spearhead local projects and support citywide initiatives. During December, 14 centres participated in the Cash for Kids Mission Christmas campaign, collecting over 1,000 gifts valued at approximately £15,000.

GLL continues its partnership with 'Menshed,' providing space at Girdwood Community Hub, Brook Leisure Centre, and Whiterock Leisure Centre. This initiative focuses on enhancing men's mental health.

The organisation has also supported various mental health charities and initiatives through awareness campaigns and fundraising efforts. Additional staff were provided with mental health and disability awareness training throughout the year,

Brook Leisure Centre hosts the Colin Autism Support Group, offering a space for parents of children with autism and other learning disabilities.

Additionally, Avoniel, Templemore, and Andersonstown centres organised open days, welcoming community organisations to showcase their work to centre visitors.

In October, the Belfast Community Sport team conducted an outreach event at Girdwood Community Hub for Ulster University Sports Studies students. Over 80 students participated in a range of sports and activities during the event. GLL also used the occasion to highlight employment opportunities in Belfast, including student placements and its trainee manager scheme.

Older Participant Programmes

By the end of 2024, more than 20% of Belfast's Pay and Play and Pre-Paid members were aged 60+, accounting for over 8,000 members. The Council continues to offer free access for individuals aged over 60 before 11:00 AM from Monday to Friday.

GLL provides a daily programme of activities tailored to older adults, with offerings expanding steadily throughout 2024. The citywide pool programme ensures that Swim for Fitness (lane swimming) and Swim for All (casual family swimming) options are available daily across Belfast. In addition, GLL runs an introductory physical activity programme designed for members seeking low-intensity, low-impact workouts.

Active ageing activities, such as Danderball, Aqua Aerobics, Pickleball, Table Tennis, Boccia, and Water Polo, are delivered across several centres, including Avoniel Leisure Centre, Templemore Baths, Falls Leisure Centre, Girdwood Community Hub, Grove Wellbeing Centre, Lisnasharragh Leisure Centre, Olympia Leisure Centre Ozone, and Shankill Leisure Centre. Plans are already in place to further expand the programme in 2025.

Throughout the year, GLL Belfast actively participated in Senior Voice Forums and Active Aging/Age Friendly workshops, promoting physical activity and well-being for older adults. Community outreach initiatives were also undertaken, with active sessions delivered weekly for 8 weeks at 8 local Community Centres near GLL facilities. These sessions engaged over 60 participants each week, led by GLL Belfast Community Sport Coaches.

On Thursday, October 10th at Brook Leisure Centre, and Friday, October 11th at Girdwood Community Hub, the Better Club Games were held. Six centres participated, with over 70 individuals taking part in sports and activities such as Pickleball, Table Tennis, Badminton, Bowls, Boccia, Golf, Danderball, and Swimming. Further details can be found in Appendix 2.

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Strategic partnerships and collaborative efforts are well-established between CNS, GLL, and key organisations such as the Public Health Agency, Belfast Health & Social Care Trust, and charitable partners, ensuring effective pathways for chronic condition management.

Girdwood Community Hub also collaborates with the Chest, Heart and Stroke Association, offering weekly low-intensity exercise sessions paired with arts and crafts activities.

People with Disabilities

Belvoir Activity Centre, in collaboration with Disability Sport NI, serves as a dedicated disability sports hub, offering a variety of wheelchair-based sports and activities, including Wheelchair Basketball, Boccia, and New Age Curling.

The GLL Sport Foundation in Belfast currently supports two disabled and Paralympic athletes, providing them with facility access and physiotherapy assistance valued at £1,100 per year.

Brook Leisure Centre features a swimming pool specifically designed to accommodate sensory needs and a wide range of disabilities. The centre runs weekly 'quiet swims,' attracting approximately 20 to 30 participants per session.

GLL partners with Swimming Buddies, an organisation specialising in autism-friendly swimming lessons. These sessions are offered throughout the week at both Brook Leisure Centre and Templemore Baths. Additionally, Brook Leisure Centre facilitates inclusive Air Venture sessions tailored to meet the sensory needs of participants.

In March, Belfast recruited ten Lead Teachers to enhance the management and delivery of Swim School across the city. During November and December 2024, these Lead Teachers attained qualifications as Disability Swim Teachers through GLL's partnership with STA, preparing them to begin Special Educational Needs swimming lessons in early 2025.

Women & Girls

Women represent 48% of current Belfast members, totalling 19,094 individuals.

GLL has collaborated with Netball NI to deliver their social netball programme and has also hosted competitions at Shankill and Olympia Leisure Centres.

Through the GLL Sport Foundation (GSF) programme, GLL supports 69 female athletes, accounting for 49.3% of all supported athletes. These women are empowered to compete at both national and international levels in their respective sports. Shirley McCay, Ireland's most capped sportsperson of all time, serves as the Legacy Ambassador for the GSF programme.

	<p>In partnership with WISPA, GLL delivers female-only fitness classes, including aqua aerobics, yoga, Pilates, and circuits. These sessions are offered at Avoniel Leisure Centre, Belvoir Activity Centre, Brook Leisure Centre, Olympia Leisure Centre, Shankill Leisure Centre, and Whiterock Leisure Centre.</p> <p>Family Programming</p> <p>GLL has developed a well-rounded programme of activities across its centres to encourage family participation. For instance, a 'basic group exercise offering' allows junior members to join in with older family members.</p> <p>Junior group exercise classes have been added to the timetable, with plans to expand this programme in 2025, subject to the availability of qualified staff. Junior gym sessions are also available at all gym centres during after-school hours and school holiday periods.</p> <p>Family-friendly products such as water slides, Surf Belfast and the Aqua Play at Andersonstown Leisure Centre, Air Venture at Brook Leisure Centre, and Aqua Splash at Lisnasharragh Leisure Centre continue to attract families, especially during weekends and holiday periods.</p> <p>All centres offer birthday party packages, which are both affordable and varied, including bouncy castles, climbing walls, laser quest, and sports (both indoor and outdoor), as well as the aforementioned products. In 2025, GLL plans to enhance party room spaces to improve the overall service quality.</p> <p>Wet centres provide weekly family fun pool sessions, featuring floats and inflatables, to add to the enjoyment. Since launching the citywide family membership in August 2021, GLL has seen continued interest. By the end of December 2024, there were over 550 family memberships in Belfast, encompassing a total of 2,326 members.</p>
3.3	<p><u>Summary</u></p> <p>To consider and record receipt of the information provide above and at Appendices 1 and 2 attached. CNS officers will be in attendance to respond to any queries raised by members.</p>
3.4	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None</p>
3.5	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>None</p>
4.0	<p>Appendices</p>
	<p>Appendix 1 – GLL Community Sport and Health Annual Report 2024</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Better Club Games Report 2024</p>