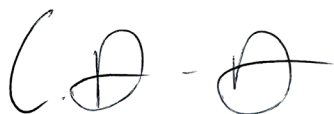


LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: All
REPORT TITLE Cabinet Adviser Report on Opening Up Access to Sport for Young People	
REPORT OF Cabinet Adviser on Opening Up Access to Sport for Young People	
FOR SUBMISSION TO Children, Schools, and Families Scrutiny Committee	DATE 13 March 2024
SUMMARY OF REPORT This report contains the findings and recommendations of Councillor Camron Aref-Adib in his role as Cabinet Adviser on Youth Mission. Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information No documents that require listing have been used in the preparation of this report. Contact Officer: Clarissa Frias, Cabinet Officer London Borough of Camden, 5 Pancras Square, London N1C 4AG clarissa.frias@camden.gov.uk	
RECOMMENDATIONS The Children, Schools, and Families Scrutiny Committee is asked to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Note the report of Councillor Camron Aref-Adib, Cabinet Adviser for Youth Mission; and 2 Discuss and comment on the recommendations made by the Cabinet Adviser, which will be incorporated in a report to Cabinet. 	



Signed by: Councillor Camron Aref-Adib, Cabinet Adviser on Opening Up Access to Sport for Young People

Date: 28 February 2024

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The Leader and Cabinet of Camden Council established four Cabinet Adviser roles to provide evidence-based recommendations and policymaking support to the Cabinet of the Council. The Cabinet Advisers are appointed by the Leader in conjunction with the wider Cabinet and Committee appointments made each year. The report appointing Cabinet Advisers for the 2023/24 municipal year can be found as a Single Member Decision by the Leader of the Council in June 2023.
- 1.2 Cabinet Advisers are to be appointed yearly to engage, research, and develop recommendations in a particular policy area, working with Cabinet Members, wider elected members, and the community.
- 1.3 The Cabinet Adviser roles are non-executive roles and do not sit as part of the Cabinet. They do not have decision-making powers and are limited to collaboration and recommendation-making to the Cabinet and relevant portfolio holder. Cabinet Advisers are expected to present their findings to Scrutiny in its policy and oversight function to provide opportunities for discussion of their findings and for the relevant Cabinet Member(s) to respond.
- 1.4 Following this, their report will go to Cabinet, alongside a report outlining the views of scrutiny and a response from the relevant Cabinet Member. This will allow Cabinet to consider the report, the views of Scrutiny and the Cabinet Member together; and formally decide whether to accept the recommendations.
- 1.5 Councillor Camron Aref-Adib was appointed as the Cabinet Adviser on Opening up Access to Sport for Young People, to work alongside Councillor Sabrina Francis, Cabinet Member for Young People and Culture. This report provides the findings and recommendations of Councillor Aref-Adib in support of Camden's youth mission to ensure that every young person has access to economic opportunity to be safe and secure. Sport can play a major role in supporting young people's wellbeing and confidence, and in turn their ability to access economic opportunities. This report is particularly focused on opening up access to sport for those under the age of 18 in Camden by removing the existing barriers to participation. Those under the age of 18 are referred to in this report as 'children', 'youth', and 'young people'.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The benefits of sport and physical activity for young people cannot be overestimated. From the clear health benefits to the role sport can play in tackling anti-social behaviour, such as boosting confidence and teamwork, and increasing employability, participation in regular

sporting activity can have a transformative effect on the lives of young people.

2.2 Indeed, the latest UK Chief Medical Officer's physical activity guidelines state:

"If physical activity were a drug, we would refer to it as a miracle cure, due to the great many illnesses it can prevent and treat".¹

2.3 Meanwhile, the International Labour Organisation has directly highlighted how sport promotes youth employment, by enhancing confidence and developing soft skills ranging from teamwork, dedication, and creativity.² Further, the NGO, Sport and Dev.org, presents research that shows that young people who volunteer or participate in sport often have greater success in gaining employment.³

2.4 Additionally, the British Active Student survey found that 90% of students agreed that involvement in physical activity or sport improved their employability or university prospects.⁴

2.5 This background highlights the critical role that sport can play in advancing Camden's youth mission which aims to ensure that by 2025, every young person has access to economic opportunities to be safe and secure.

2.6 Of course, opening up sport alone cannot secure the success of this mission. Yet, all too often, it is overlooked as a key policy tool in supporting young people and has been labelled by campaigners as an "open goal".⁵

2.7 Despite the clear benefits of physical activity to children, their access to sporting and physical activity opportunities remain unequal. Data from Sport England highlights the significant disparity in the levels of physical activity among children whose families are in the top 10% of annual income in England, compared to those in the bottom 10%:

¹ "UK chief Medical Officers' physical activity guidelines", 2019, *Department of Health and Social Care*

² "How can sport help to promote youth unemployment", 2014, *International Labour Organisation (ILO)*

³ "Sport can build young people's employability skills", 2021, *Sport and dev.org*

⁴ "Physical active students have improved wellbeing and social connections, new survey from UKactive and partners shows", 2020, *Association of colleges*

⁵ " 'An open goal': Sports stars urge policymakers to build on growing investment in sport for development, 2023, *Sport and dev.org*

49.1% of children in the top 10% of income are classed as active, compared to 41.7% of those in the bottom 10%.⁶

- 2.8 Moreover, the inequality in access extends to other demographics including gender. The latest data from Sports England highlights that 49.8% of boys are active, compared to 44.9% of girls.⁷
- 2.9 This analysis shows the scale of the challenge that policymakers face to level the playing field when it comes to access to sport.
- 2.10 This report will analyse the current equality of access for children in Camden to sporting and physical activity opportunities, and use this analysis to recommend plausible and concrete actions that will help level the playing field.
- 2.11 As someone who grew up in Camden and was fortunate enough to regularly participate in sports, including but not limited to being a member of Highgate Newtown Football Club, winning a Camden School Sport's Association tournament in primary school, and visiting and playing cricket at Lord's Cricket Ground with New End School's cricket team, this holds a personal significance for me. Participating in these physical activities had a profound impact on my personal and professional development, and I want to ensure that all children in Camden are afforded the same access to sport that I experienced growing up here.

3. Camden's current sport offer

Camden offers several ways for children to get involved in physical activity, including:

3.1 Provision in schools

Sport and physical activity are offered in schools before, during, and after the school day. Camden's sport and physical activity service provides optional service packages through a traded services agreement with primary schools. Through schools' participation in the Healthy School Programme, Camden's Early Years School and Families Team support schools to meet the curriculum requirement for at least two hours of physical education/activity per week for pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2; and a minimum of 90 minutes (with the aim of at least two hours) for pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4.

⁶ "Active lives dataset", 2022, Sport England

⁷ "Active lives dataset", 2022, Sport England

3.2 Leisure centres

Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL), under the brand Better, has six leisure centres in Camden: Pancras Square Leisure, Swiss Cottage Leisure, Talacre Community Sports Centre, Kentish Town Sports Centre, Oasis Sports Centre, and King's Cross Fitness. These leisure centres offer a range of activities from swimming and gymnastics, to football and fitness classes.

3.3 Camden Council's sport and physical activity service

Camden Council's sport and physical activity service provides a year-round range of supervised activities, competitions, community outreach activities, and targeted programmes for girls. The service also provides a sports education programme for 16+ students not in education, employment, or training (NEET).

3.4 Voluntary and community sector

Local sports clubs and community and youth organisations play a major role in providing a quality and safe environment for children to participate in physical activity in Camden. To demonstrate the scale of this activity, in 2022, the Camden Community Centre Consortium (C4) delivered a total of 55,000 sport and physical activity opportunities to Camden residents. Meanwhile, the Young Camden Foundation supports 167 Camden-based youth organisations, of which 38 offer opportunities to participate in sport.

3.5 Multi-use game areas (MUGAs) and outdoor gyms

The full list of multi-use game areas (MUGAs) in Camden's open spaces and housing estates, including the cost associated with use, is set out in the appendix. Of the 83 sites with MUGAs, 64 are free, and this figure goes up to 66 when including those that are free to under 18s at certain times. There are also 13 outdoor gyms in Camden.

3.6 Parks and green spaces

Regent's Park, Parliament Hill and Hampstead Heath, Primrose Hill, Waterlow Park, Kilburn Grange Park, Lincoln Inn's Fields, Cartwright Gardens, Maygrove Peace Park, and Canteloves Gardens offer Camden residents the opportunity to participate in a range of sports. These include football (Regent's Park), tennis (Regent's Park, Parliament Hill, Waterlow Park, Kilburn Grange Park, Lincoln Inn's Fields, and Cartwright Gardens), cricket (Regent's Park), athletics (Parliament Hill), basketball (Argyle Square, Maygrove Peace Park, and Canteloves Gardens), and outdoor gyms (a range of sites including Primrose Hill, Canteloves Gardens, and Maygrove Peace Park). Among these parks and green spaces, Waterlow Park, Kilburn

Grange Park, and Lincoln Inn's Fields are managed by Camden Council.

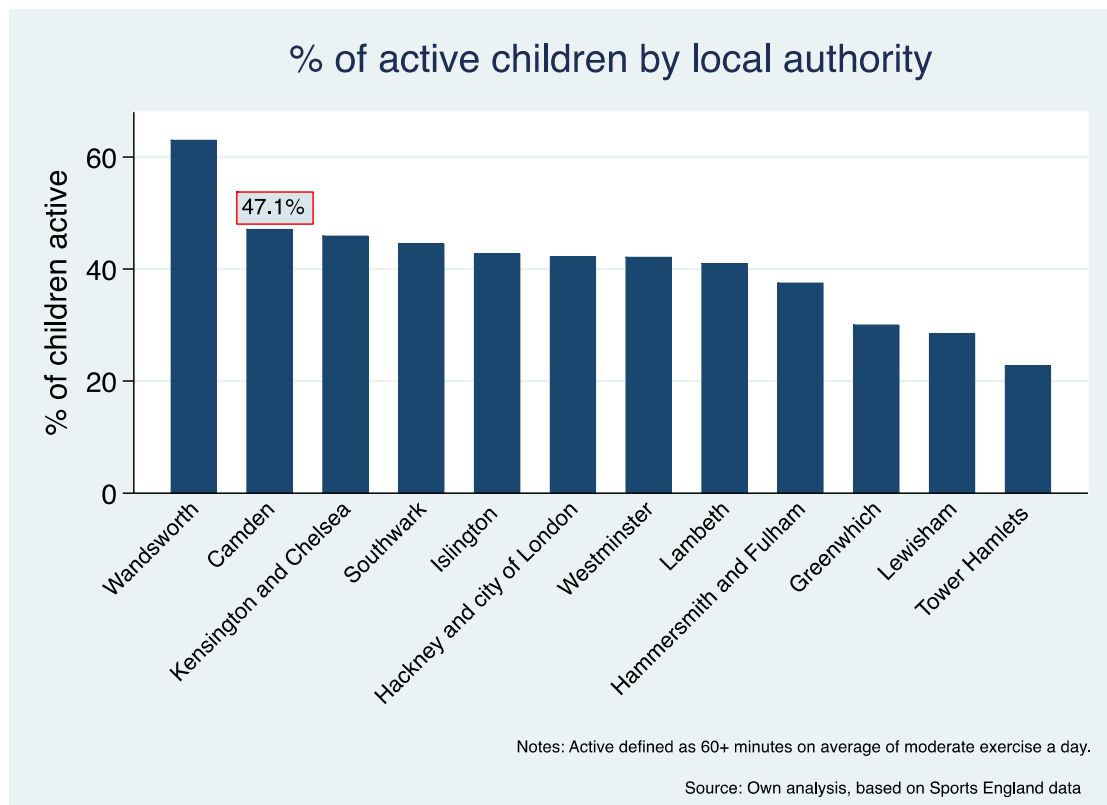
- 3.7 All of the above form part of Camden's physical activity offer. Camden Council's physical activity service brings these different stakeholders together to connect them strategically and improve access to services for children.
- 3.8 The centre of this strategic activity is Pro-Active Camden (PAC), a voluntary strategic partnership body for the development of opportunities for sport and physical activity in Camden.

4. The state of play: An analysis of the data

4.1 How does Camden compare?

Compared to inner city London local authorities, Camden performs well with respect to the overall numbers of active children (defined as, on average, 60+ minutes of moderate exercise a day). Analysing data from Sport England, Figure 1 below highlights that Camden ranks second in terms of the percentage of active children, with only Wandsworth performing better.

Figure 1



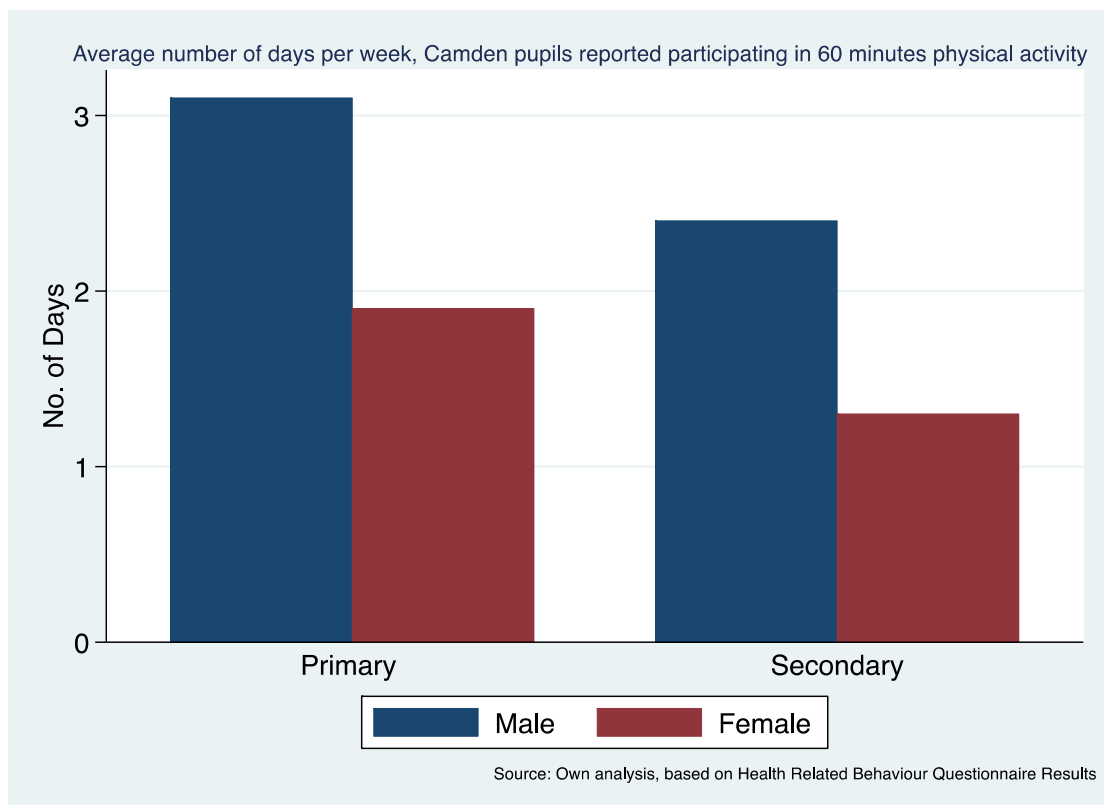
However, digging deeper into the data shows that, whilst the overall outlook may seem positive, significant inequities in access to sport persist in Camden.

4.2 Gender

4.2.1 Similar to the national picture, physical activity amongst girls in Camden is significantly lower than that of boys. An analysis of the results from the Health Behaviour Related Questionnaire, completed by 1307 primary school pupils and 1312 secondary school pupils in 2021/22 in Camden, shows the scale of the challenge.

4.2.2 The results, presented in Figure 2, show that boys participate in physical activity over one day a week more than girls in both primary and secondary school. Furthermore, alarmingly, there is a sharp drop in the amount of physical activity undertaken by both boys and girls between primary and secondary school.

Figure 2

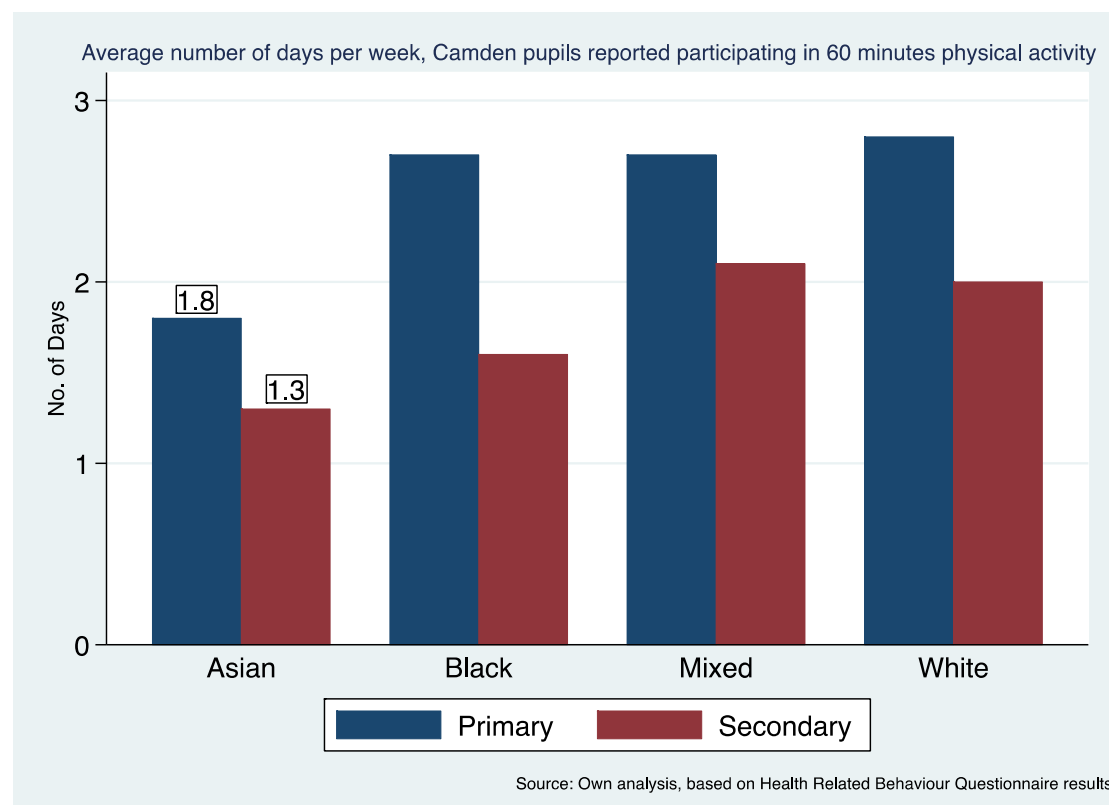


4.2.3 There has also been a worrying drop in the number of Year 6 girls in Camden schools reporting high self-esteem, with just 21% reporting high self-esteem in the latest Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire compared to 39% in 2017. This lack of self-esteem can then have a knock-on effect in reducing participation in activities such as sport.

4.3 Ethnicity

4.3.1 When it comes to ethnicity, the Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire also reveals some worrying results. Specifically, participation in physical activity among Asian children in Camden is significantly lower than that of their counterparts in both primary and secondary schools. Asian children in Camden secondary schools report participating in 60 minutes of physical activity just 1.3 days a week.

Figure 3



4.3.2 Delving deeper, the intersectionality of gender and ethnicity is vital to note. For example, of the 38 participants at Camden's weekly wildcat girls football programme last year, there was not a single participant from a Somali or Bangladeshi background. This intersectionality is explored further in Section 5.6.

4.4 Leisure centre membership

4.4.1 Child membership of Camden leisure centres currently stands at 5,393 members. Alarming, this marks a decline of 34.9% since 2019. This decrease is consistent with a general fall in membership of 38.5% over the same period. Whilst the pandemic undoubtedly contributed to this decline, the decrease in both general and child membership still raises concerns.

4.5 Disability

- 4.5.1 The most recent census data from 2021 show that 15.2% of Camden's population are considered disabled under the Equality Act 2010.
- 4.5.2 Worryingly, a consultation carried out by the London Inclusion Sports Academy in 2023 found that children living with special education needs and disabilities (SEND) in Camden are three times more likely to be inactive than their peers.
- 4.5.3 This analysis has shown that whilst Camden is performing well relative to our counterparts with respect to the overall numbers of active children, the overarching data masks significant discrepancies between certain groups. The limited physical activity among girls, individuals from Asian backgrounds, and those with disabilities is particularly concerning. This highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions aimed at expanding access to sports for all residents in the borough.

5. **Identifying the barriers**

After conducting roundtables with a variety of local sports clubs, including football, athletics, and hockey; engaging with the London Inclusion Sports Academy; collaborating with schools; and conducting a survey of 147 pupils at Maria Fidelis School and Parliament Hill School, similar key barriers that young people in Camden face when accessing sports came up consistently. These barriers are thematically grouped below. The quotes at the beginning of each sub-section are taken from the roundtables and survey responses.

5.1 Affordability

"It's the kids whose parents have more money or time who can play."

"My parents have too much stuff to do and can't afford to buy the kit".

- 5.1.1 Sport can be expensive and despite the significant efforts of the Council, affordability remains one of the biggest barriers. Research from London Sport this year found that 38% of Londoners stated that the cost-of-living crisis has negatively affected their ability to exercise.⁸ This figure rises to 57% amongst ethnic minority Londoners and 48% among disabled Londoners.
- 5.1.2 Camden has 64 MUGAs that are free, a figure which increases to 66 when you include Coram's Fields, which is free for under-18s, and

⁸ "Cost-of-living and its impact on sport and physical activity", 2023, *London Sport*

Castlehaven Community Centre sports pitch, which is free from 4pm to 6pm on weekdays for under-18s. Yet, despite this provision, affordability was mentioned by both local sports clubs and pupils as one of the primary barriers limiting access.

- 5.1.3 Opportunities for free informal sport participation are plentiful, but the challenge is the cost associated with formal sports participations and competitions. Many of the sports clubs in Camden offer sport for young people at discretionary rates or even entirely free. However, this puts significant strain on the clubs, with one remarking that almost their entire funding goes on pitches, which is evidently unsustainable.
- 5.1.4 Furthermore, high upfront costs for equipment in sports such as hockey presents a major challenge in opening up access. Significantly, the impact of equipment cost even spreads to sports with lower upfront costs, such as football, with one local club stating that some children are attending training and games in trainers rather than football boots.
- 5.1.5 Local sports clubs also noted that many of the facilities in Camden are run by third parties as opposed to the Council itself, stating that this could often lead to high prices. There was a broad consensus among clubs that the more facilities run by the Council in-house, the better for affordability.
- 5.1.6 Analysing the table presented in the appendix, it's evident that prices for the MUGAs that charge in Camden vary significantly. The challenge arises from the multitude of providers - GLL, schools, charities, and community centres - each offering different pricing structures, making a uniform pricing system almost impossible.
- 5.1.7 One of the key pricing points is the rates charged by GLL, who runs the leisure centres in Camden. Community clubs are charged a lower rate of £80.40 per hour for MUGAs operated by GLL, whilst those who purchase an annual membership charged £101.30 per hour, and non-members pay £128.50 per hour. This pricing structure generally reflects GLL's model of charging higher rates for groups that are able to pay, in order to subsidise others. However, given the social value that many of our community clubs provide, it can be questioned whether this subsidy is sufficient. For instance, Coram's Fields, undoubtedly one of the highest-quality MUGAs in the borough and managed by the Coram's Fields and Harmsworth Memorial Playground charity, is able to offer its facilities completely free for those under 19, covering costs through charges to adults. Whilst this pricing model requires striking a difficult balance, a review is necessary to determine whether GLL is achieving this balance as effectively as other providers, such as Coram's Fields.
- 5.1.8 Moreover, the sheer range in pricing can make it extremely difficult for consumers, and leave some spaces underutilised. Some operators

offer different prices for off-peak and peak times, whilst others provide concessionary rates for various groups. Additionally, some operators offer memberships, encompassing a wide array of options. This variety can make it very challenging for parents and clubs to determine the most cost-effective choice. Consequently, amidst this confusion, they may choose not to select any option at all.

5.1.9 Ultimately, it is difficult to influence pricing of external providers which highlights why many clubs are frustrated at the limited number of in-house Council-run facilities. Camden is not alone in this regard. Indeed, many of the clubs mentioned that they use facilities in nearby local authorities, experiencing similar frustrations regarding pricing there.

5.1.10 Where we can influence pricing, particularly in our leisure centres, it is imperative that we keep this under constant review. The broad model of subsidising young people and community organisations, through higher prices to adults, is the right one. However, questions remain whether we should go further by providing greater subsidies, as well as simplifying our pricing structure, to support young people and community organisations to make sports more affordable and available.

5.2 Access

“How can we build a community here if we have to play in Hackney or Enfield?”

5.2.1 The difficulty in securing facilities locally was raised by a number of local clubs.

5.2.2 Local clubs were frustrated that they felt they were not being given priority in securing pitch access in Camden and neighbouring local authorities, despite the social value that these clubs provide by offering young people the opportunity to play competitive sport for free or at a very low cost.

5.2.3 This has led to some clubs being forced to use facilities as far as Enfield and Hackney, which in turn acts as a barrier to participation for the local population in Camden.

5.2.4 It is imperative to ensure that our local clubs, which are doing so much good work in the community when it comes to opening up access to sports, have access to the facilities that enable them to do so.

5.2.5 During the 2022 Camden Youth Review, one theme that emerged from the workshops was the impression that young people had:

facilities and space for sports activities in Camden are not shared fairly among the community.⁹

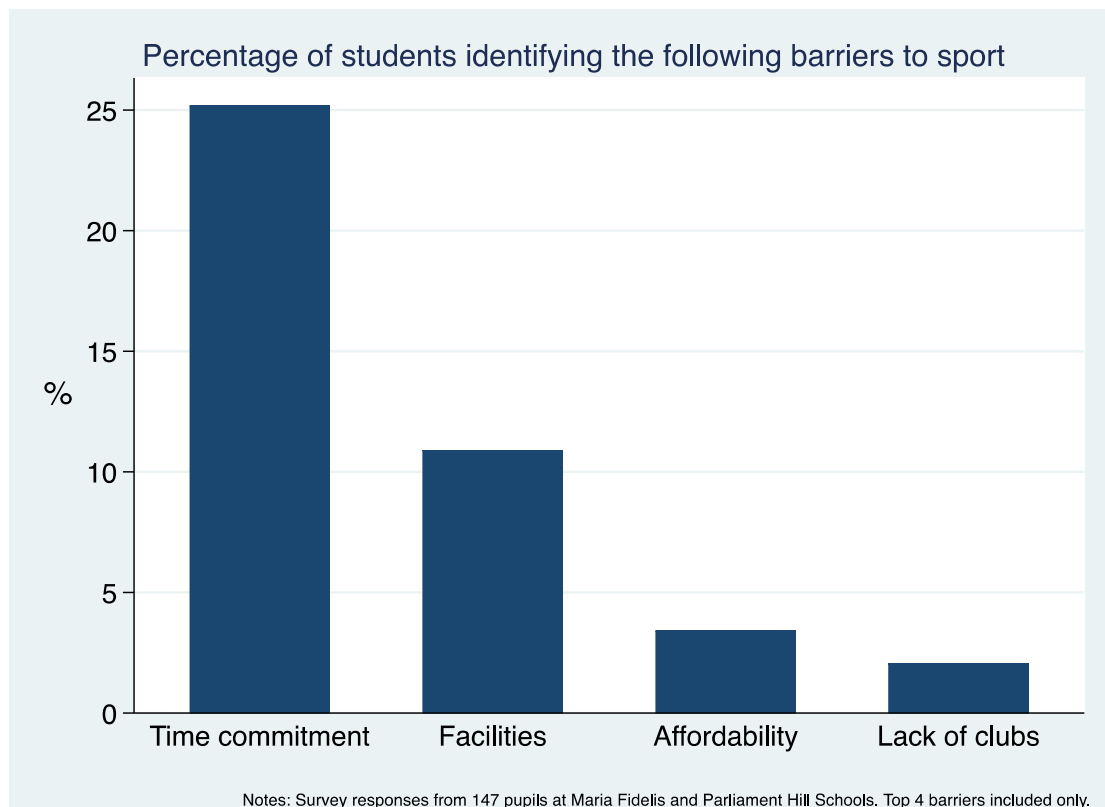
5.3 Quality of facilities

“The state of the MUGAs in Islington is much better.”

5.3.1 The quality of the facility is really important for young people. For instance, there are certain sports that many children do not want to play on a tarmac surface.

5.3.2 The lack and quality of facilities was the second highest barrier to sports participation identified by students from Maria Fidelis and Parliament Hill, behind only time commitment, as shown in figure 4.

Figure 4



5.3.3 In a roundtable discussion, one club noted the poor quality of the surfaces of Camden's MUGAs as a barrier to informal sports participation. Indeed, the Football Foundation's Camden plan report, published in 2019, identified 10 MUGAs in Camden in need of improvement. These were the MUGAs at Acland Burghley and Regent High schools, Malden Road MUGA, Castlehaven Community Centre, Kilburn Grange Park, Bucklebury MUGA, Maygrove Peace

⁹ Cabinet member for young people, equalities and cohesion, "Youth review: Findings and recommendations for a new Camden offer for young people", 2022

Park, Lymington Road Estate MUGA, Alexandra and Ainsworth Rowley Estate MUGA, and Peckwater Estate MUGA.¹⁰ Of these MUGAs, Lymington, Kilburn Grange Park, and Alexandra and Ainsworth were renewed in 2023.

- 5.3.4 Furthermore, there are a limited number of MUGAs that are 3G or 4G. These are artificial surfaces that replicate a good standard natural turf pitch. In Camden, there are only 5 facilities with 3G MUGAs, compared to 15 in Islington. Research from the Football Foundation suggests that these surfaces can increase levels of use up to 20 times compared to non-3G surfaces, demonstrating the economic as well as social return on investment they provide.¹¹ It must be acknowledged that this is football-focused in terms of usage, given that 3G is not suitable for other sports such as basketball.
- 5.3.5 Yet, there are other non-tarmac surfaces, such as astro turf, that are compatible with football and a wide array of other sports. The lack of astro turf in the borough was specifically identified by a number of pupils at Maria Fidelis in their survey responses.
- 5.3.6 It was also noted in one roundtable with local sports clubs that some of the best facilities in the borough are within private schools, and that more could be done to push them to open up access to these facilities.
- 5.3.7 Talacre Sports Centre has a world-class gymnastics facility and it is no wonder that demand for it is oversubscribed. This oversubscription will be partly addressed through a 20% expansion of provision at the site via the Council's successful levelling-up funding bid.
- 5.3.8 Quality matters for take-up, and whilst Camden has some outstanding facilities, notably Talacre, it is clear that the state of our MUGAs across the borough can be significantly improved.

5.4 Safety

"Getting children to the club is a nightmare in winter."

- 5.4.1 Clubs noted that in winter months, it is especially difficult to get children to the facilities for after-school activities with parents concerned for their safety.
- 5.4.2 One club noted that many children's parents are unable to attend competitions, tournaments, or other events with them, and therefore a coach is often required to meet the children prior to the event to

¹⁰ "Local football facility plan: Camden", 2019, *Football Foundation*

¹¹ "Local football facility plan: Camden", 2019, *Football Foundation*;

accompany them. This puts added strain on the club and limits the number of events they can facilitate access to. The 2022 Camden Youth Review identified the timing of activities as extremely important for young people.¹²

5.4.3 Addressing safety concerns in terms of travel to and from sporting venues is critical to opening up access to sport.

5.5 SEND provision

“We need to make sure we are reaching the corners of society.”

5.5.1 There is a lot of good work in Camden, providing sporting opportunities for children with SEND. Camden Disability Sport and Physical Activity Network plays a key role in coordinating this.

5.5.2 In particular, the football offer via Camden Disabled Football Club (16+), London Inclusion Sport Academy, and the Camden and Islington Youth Football League has strong take-up, as well as Camden’s annual disability access day.

5.5.3 However, it was clear from discussions with members of Camden’s Disability Sport and Physical Activity Network that there is a need for more provision, particularly during holidays and weekends. There was a consensus that much of what is being offered in terms of SEND sporting provision for young people in Camden is good, but there simply isn’t enough of it.

5.5.4 Moreover, one member of Camden’s Disability Sport and Physical Activity Network noted that provision beyond football needs to be expanded, as a priority.

5.5.5 GLL has a critical role to play here. Some of the SEND services that were offered regularly at our leisure centres before the pandemic have been cut, such as Active for All at Talacre, which used to have over 30 attendees regularly (now Active for All is just an annual event). It is imperative that our leisure centres are able to provide suitable provision for SEND children.

5.5.6 Concerns were raised by members of the Disability Sport and Physical Activity Network that the SEND provision at GLL-run leisure centres is limited to none.

5.5.7 The key for SEND provision is to scale up projects that are already working and ensure that our leisure centres are able to provide the specialist provision that is necessary. SEND sporting provision should

¹² Cabinet member for young people, equalities and cohesion, “Youth review: Findings and recommendations for a new Camden offer for young people”, 2022

be able to be accessed from the general and main sporting providers, not just through specialist initiatives and programmes sitting outside of the main sporting infrastructure.

5.6 Confidence, enjoyment, and social value

“I want to be with my friends then I will feel comfortable.”

“The ball never comes to me.”

- 5.6.1 Sometimes overlooked, enjoyment itself is critical to opening up access to sport. If a young person does not enjoy or is not confident at participating in sport, no matter what you do to tackle the other barriers, they are unlikely to take it up.
- 5.6.2 In Camden, the data show that enjoyment in physical activity varies greatly between primary and secondary schools, and especially amongst different ethnic groups. In Camden’s Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire (HBRQ) from 2021/2022, just 65% of Asian children in secondary school reported enjoying participating in physical activity, compared to 81% of white and 78% of black pupils.
- 5.6.3 Moreover, Asian children account for just 10% of Camden’s leisure centre membership in the 0-12 years age bracket, despite accounting for 17% of the total population, demonstrating the impact that this lack of enjoyment could be making.
- 5.6.4 Meanwhile, the drop in reported enjoyment of all ethnic groups between primary and secondary schools is significant. At primary school level, 87% of children in Camden report enjoying physical activity, dropping to 77% in secondary school.
- 5.6.5 Mirroring this change in participation, one local sports club reported a high drop-out rate of girls at the club as they move from primary to secondary school, although of course this could be for a range of reasons not limited to enjoyment alone.
- 5.6.6 Evidently, this lack of enjoyment of physical activity amongst certain groups is acting as a major barrier to participation, contributing to some of the results presented in Section 4. In particular, around lower physical activity levels within the Asian community.
- 5.6.7 What is particularly noteworthy is that the biggest barrier to sport identified by students at Maria Fidelis and Parliament Hill was the time commitment, as shown in Figure 4. 25% of all respondents said that time commitment was a barrier to them participating in more physical activity. However, not a single boy identified time commitment as a barrier, meaning this percentage is entirely comprised of girls’ responses. In fact, nearly one in three girls stated that time commitment was stopping them from taking part in more physical

activity. This view could be partly driven by a lack of enthusiasm for sports, viewing it as something that takes up time, rather than something to look forward to and enjoy. It could also be driven by other factors such as changing requirements. Previous research has highlighted that while boys can play sports such as football at break time in their uniform or the clothes they are already wearing, girls often feel the need or want to change before playing sports at break time, which creates an additional barrier.¹³

- 5.6.8 To create enjoyment where it does not currently exist, and to maintain it through the transition to secondary from primary school, is extremely difficult. This requires radical thinking around issues such as coaching and mentoring, and looking beyond traditional sports to alternative ones.

6. Breaking down the barriers: Policy recommendations

The following six recommendations are put forward to open up access to sport for those under the age of 18 in Camden. While these recommendations do not address all the barriers to physical activity participation for young people, they represent a critical starting point. The recommendations are ordered from the low-hanging fruit first, i.e., the easiest to achieve, to the hardest to achieve last.

- 6.1 Revamping our MUGAs: Reform our audit process and prioritise resurfacing those in need
- 6.1.1 Of the 10 MUGAs identified in the Football Foundation's Camden Local Plan in 2019, only Alexandra and Ainsworth Rowley Estate MUGA has been resurfaced with a 3G surface.
- 6.1.2 The Council needs to urgently reform the audit process assessing the state of our MUGAs. Currently, the only requirement is that the MUGAs pass health and safety conditions. Functionality and whether the MUGA is in a fit state to encourage use is not considered, allowing our MUGAs to deteriorate badly and become unused. The level of deterioration that the MUGA in Kilburn Grange Park reached before refurbishment is a perfect example of this. The surface was uneven, falling apart, and deteriorated to the point where the Council had to cease taking evening bookings. It was only recently that it was finally resurfaced.
- 6.1.3 The audit process must also acknowledge inequalities within the borough. Of the 8 MUGAs in estates and green spaces identified as

¹³ The Guardian, "By secondary school it's too late' – readers on promoting girls' school sport", November 2017

priorities for investment by the Football Foundation (presented in Section 5.3.3), over half are in our most deprived wards.

- 6.1.4 We also need a greater emphasis on non-tarmac surfaces. We know that there are certain sports children do not want to play on a tarmac surface. Of the respondents at Maria Fidelis, 20% specifically mentioned the lack of astro turf, i.e., a non-tarmac playing surface, as a primary barrier to sports participation. In this regard, Camden is significantly behind our neighbouring boroughs. Islington has three times as many MUGAs with 3G surfaces (non-tarmac) as Camden.
- 6.1.5 By improving the state of our MUGAs, particularly on housing estates, we can encourage informal sports participation. However, considering the pressures on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), funding for improving the MUGAs on our estates is tight. It is important that we explore alternative funding sources, such as through the Football Foundation, Sport England, Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding, and S106 funding. In the words of one community club, we need to ‘teach kids to have high expectations’, and the current state of some of our MUGAs does not fulfil this goal, as illustrated by the picture below of the MUGA at Spencer Rise Estate in my own ward, taken in December 2023.



Notes: Spencer Rise Estate MUGA, December 2023

6.2 Remodel the Camden Active Mark (CAM) to help with access and affordability

6.2.1 The Camden Active Mark (CAM) is a progressive framework for organisations providing sporting and physical activity opportunities in Camden. It aims to support community organisations in providing quality sport and physical activity and has three levels, dependent on the activities of the club: basic (known as development), middle (known as beacon), and advanced (known as beacon+). The benefits of having a Camden Active Mark are listed on the Council's website as follows:

- Opportunity to review current policies and processes to make potential improvements.
- Increased chances of successful funding applications.
- Receive a letter of support from Camden Council Sport and Physical Activity Team.
- Be part of a collective effort to ensure sport and physical activities are safe for residents of all ages and backgrounds.
- Officer support and guidance to achieve each level.
- Support for identifying and applying for funding grants.
- Activities promoted through partners and colleagues for delivery.
- Access to appropriate training and resources.
- Included within official Camden marketing and promotion.
- Opportunities to be part of London Youth Games representing Camden.
- Part of an exclusive email list to receive information on funding, programmes, and initiatives first.

6.2.2 At present, there are just nine sports clubs with a CAM, suggesting either that clubs are unaware of it or feel that the benefits to it are minimal. There are challenges around administering the CAM and keeping it up to date, and whilst there used to be a dedicated council officer responsible for the CAM, there has been a vacancy for this position over the last 3 years.

6.2.3 The CAM should be drastically remodelled to help tackle two of the critical barriers to sports participation: affordability and access.

6.2.4 The CAM should be made simpler with levels easier to understand than 'development', 'beacon', and 'beacon+'. Most importantly, the CAM needs to grow in outreach and have tangible benefits to clubs through access and affordability.

6.2.5 The Council should work with sports facilities in the borough to help secure access at affordable rates for clubs with the CAM, based on the social value these sports and youth clubs provide to the community. This support would then incentivise, in a ripple-effect,

more clubs to apply to have CAM status. It will also have the twin effect of ensuring all our facilities, whether run by GLL or other providers, are used at high capacity throughout the year.

6.2.6 By reforming the CAM along these lines, whilst also expanding it, the Council will create a clear structure and pathway to setting up a local sports or youth club, identified as a key challenge that faced many local organisations when they launched.

6.2.7 It will also help secure access at affordable rates to our facilities for our local clubs who are delivering so much for young people in the borough and ensure they are on a sustainable footing.

6.3 Scale what's working, particularly around SEND provision

6.3.1 There is plenty that Camden is doing right in the sector, with many fantastic projects underway. There is no need to reinvent the wheel and if we can appropriately scale some of these, this will go a long way in opening up access. The key area where we need to scale is our SEND provision.

6.3.2 From gymnastics for children with special needs at Talacre, to football sessions at Camden and Islington Youth Football Club for children with SEND, and from the disability swimming sessions at our leisure centres to London Inclusion Sports Academy's sports open days, there is much to celebrate regarding the existing SEND provision in the borough. However, ultimately the challenge lies in the fact that there is not enough of it. The Council should work with providers like the London Inclusion Sports Academy to scale up their provision for SEND children, whilst also holding GLL to account on their specialist provision for SEND in our leisure centres. This also extends to holiday provision, with a legacy report published by the Young Camden Foundation, recommending that Camden Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme should have a greater focus on SEND inclusion.¹⁴

6.3.3 One particularly good news is the successful £7.7 million levelling-up funding bid by Camden Council, which includes expanding the outstanding gymnastics facility at Talacre. This will result in more gymnastics provision in Camden, including for SEND children, in one of the most oversubscribed facilities in the borough.

6.3.4 A further project to consider scaling up is a pilot project focused on girls' physical activity taking place in Hawley Primary School. This project, co-designed and delivered by Camden's Early Years School and Families Team, Sports and Physical Activity Service, and Hawley Primary School Senior Leadership Team, aims to reduce the number

¹⁴ "Camden summer holiday activities and food programme: Legacy report", 2021, *Young Camden Foundation*

of young girls dropping out of physical activity participation through a preventative approach. The project targets reducing the impact of the transition from primary to secondary schools, where we see a large drop-out rate of girls in physical activity, as shown in Section 4.2.2.

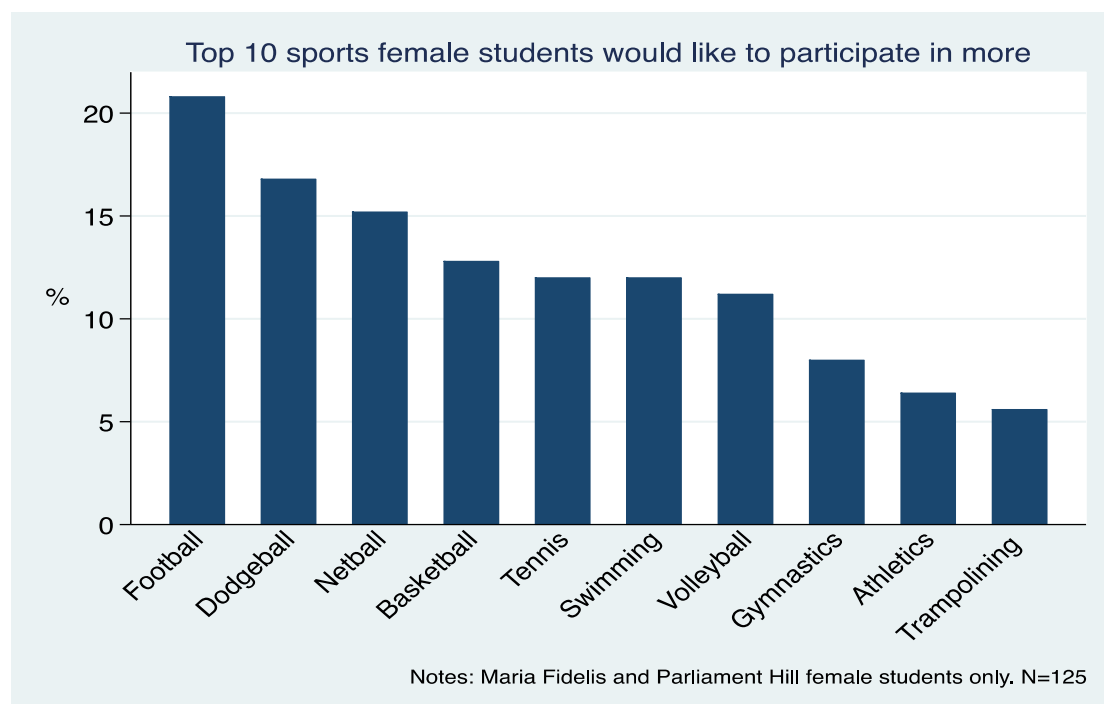
- 6.3.5 From September 2022, all Year 5 girls (15 pupils) at Hawley Primary School have been attending 8-10 physical activity sessions per term. These sessions are conducted by a female multi-sports coach during school tutor time from 3pm to 4pm. The group had the opportunity to pick different sports or activities they'd like to try over the year, delivered in partnership with local activity providers which included boxing, skateboarding, and football. Key to the project is the choice it provides the girls and the range of activities they can undertake. After each new sport and activity, the girls have an opportunity to reflect on its effect on their physical and mental wellbeing.
- 6.3.6 The project ran in the 2022/23 school year, and the monitoring and evaluation shows that the project has had a lasting positive effect on the girls, with overwhelming positive responses recorded in terms of increased enjoyment in physical activity (73%), increased confidence in trying new physical activity (80%), and physical activity skills (80%). Teachers and parents also remarked that some of the quieter girls came into their own growing in confidence and stepping up in classroom situations.
- 6.3.7 Scaling and refining this project, such as by incorporating sessions focused on friendships and relationships, will undoubtedly pose a challenge. Nevertheless, it presents an exciting opportunity to address the high drop-out rate of physical activity observed among girls in this age group.
- 6.4 Spearhead a recruitment drive for coaches from underrepresented groups
 - 6.4.1 Camden needs to consistently evaluate our workforce and the role models we are providing. If we aim to increase the participation of Asian children in physical activity, as highlighted in Section 4.3 to be significantly below their counterparts in Camden, we need to recruit more Asian coaches and mentors.
 - 6.4.2 This is a significant challenge. In Camden's Sports Education and Training Programme, which targets 16-19-year-olds aspiring for careers in sport and physical activity, only 2% of participants in 2022 were from Asian backgrounds. However, this figure has increased to 7% in the 2023 intake.

- 6.4.3 Camden is not unique in facing this challenge. Indeed, latest data from the FA show that just 2.7% of football coaches in England were from Asian backgrounds.¹⁵
- 6.4.4 I am pleased that following discussions with Camden officers in 2022 and 2023, the Council is currently looking into the reasons for the underrepresentation of Camden's South Asian community in taking up local sports offers.
- 6.4.5 We need a drive to promote more local Asian male and female role models in sports, prioritising community outreach into our underrepresented communities, whilst also ensuring that all children are aware of Camden's Sports Education and Training programme offer.

6.5 Modernise through alternative sports delivery

- 6.5.1 A diversified sports offer is critical to opening up access to sport. Figure 5 below presents the top 10 sports that female students at Maria Fidelis and Parliament Hill stated they wanted to participate more in. Admittedly, traditional sports remain very popular in the borough. Football is the sport that the largest number of girls want to take part in more. However, it is crucial that we expand our physical activity offer to alternative sports if we are to increase uptake amongst those children not currently active.

Figure 5



¹⁵ "A year 3 update on our Asian inclusion strategy", 2023, *The FA*

- 6.5.2 The responses from the 125 female students demonstrate the vast breadth of sports that are appealing to young people. In total, 19 different sports were identified as sports the students would like to take part more in, and Figure 5 presents just a snapshot of this.
- 6.5.3 Many of these are less traditional sports such as dodgeball and trampolining, where our offer is limited in Camden. The range of responses highlights the need to consistently innovate and modernise our sports offer in Camden.
- 6.5.4 The popularity of dodgeball is a particularly interesting area to look at. This could be related to the low barrier to participation – minimal equipment is required and there is unlikely to be a necessity to change before playing, making it a low-effort sport to engage in. There could be a correlation between the popularity of this sport with girls who also identified time commitment as their biggest barrier to participation in sport, highlighted in Figure 4.
- 6.5.5 Another area to look at is the delivery of a BMX track. Camden does not currently have a track and a report on open spaces in Camden from 2014 identified the benefits and demand for a BMX track in the borough. This is not just to increase physical wellbeing but also as a safe space for young people to socialise. However, given this report is from 2014, a more up-to-date needs assessment should be carried out before any such track is developed in Camden.
- 6.5.6 Furthermore, as part of the Hawley Primary School project discussed in Section 6.3.3, girls in Year 5 at the school took part in an activity with a skateboarding company. This proved extremely popular despite few of the girls having taken part in the activity before, highlighting the benefits from engaging children in alternative sports and the growing demand for skate parks in the borough.
- 6.5.7 The Council should also look at restoring existing facilities that provide less traditional sports, such as the climbing wall at Swiss Cottage leisure centre.
- 6.5.8 Sports clubs can act as a second family to children. It is vital that those children who might not enjoy the most popular traditional sports, such as football, are able to find alternative clubs and activities that they enjoy. Modernising our sports delivery can make this happen. There are plenty of avenues to explore and the potential delivery of a BMX track, additional skate parks, and restoring Swiss Cottage leisure centre's climbing wall are good places to start.
- 6.6 Explore opportunities for an 11-a-side 3G football pitch in Camden as and when additional land and development opportunities become available.

- 6.6.1 Football remains the most popular sport in the country, and its popularity has increased significantly among girls, not least shown by the responses from female students at Maria Fidelis and Parliament Hill shown in Figure 5.
- 6.6.2 The lack of 11-a-side football provision in the borough will not be solved overnight, and this recommendation is very much one for the long-term.
- 6.6.3 Camden currently does not have any 11-a-side 3G football pitches, with Coram's Fields the largest football site in the borough split into three 8-a-side pitches. Neighbouring Islington has three full sized 3G pitches (two at Market Road and one at Whittington Park). Westminster has one pitch of this type at the Paddington Recreation Ground. In fact, Camden is the only inner-city London borough without at least one standard figuration 11-a-side 3G facility.
- 6.6.4 Whilst there is significant excess demand for 11-a-side facilities across north London, we are fortunate that the facilities in Islington are close to the Camden border. The Council does retain the freehold of the football pitches at Chase Lodge in Mill Hill, which are under a long-term leasehold to Hampstead Town Football Club.
- 6.6.5 Nevertheless, the lack of provision for 11-a-side football within Camden remains an issue. Parliament Hill football pitch has consistently experienced drainage issues, restricting its availability. Although the Parliament Hill master plan aims to tackle this problem, as of now, no funding has been allocated for its implementation. Regent's Park currently has one hybrid pitch (which combines natural and synthetic grass) and plans to install a second one in the spring. It would be beneficial for Parliament Hill to analyse the successes of these pitches.
- 6.6.6 We face an acute housing crisis in Camden and the priority for land development should always be the provision of affordable housing. However, as land and development opportunities become available, the Council should also bear in mind the lack of 11-a-side provision and explore potential avenues for the development of an 11-a-side 3G football pitch, which will help ease the excess demand and open up access.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 Tackling the inequalities in access to sport for young people in Camden will have far-reaching benefits. From enhancing both physical and mental health to fostering employment skills through participation in physical activities, expanding access to sports is a readily available opportunity too frequently overlooked in policy.

- 7.2 There is much that Camden is getting right in boosting young people's sports participation, not least shown by the fact that we are second in inner city London in terms of the percentage of active children.
- 7.3 However, much remains to be done, as underscored by the disparities in gender, ethnicity, and disability evident in children's sports participation in Camden. This report has delved deeper into these inequalities and produced a series of recommendations. These recommendations aim to break down barriers to sports, ensuring that access is opened up to more young people, thus bringing along numerous added benefits. The demand from young people is evident, – over half (53%) of respondents at Maria Fidelis and Parliament Hill schools stated that they wanted to participate in more physical activities. Camden must tap into and harness this demand.

8. Acknowledgments

- 8.1 There are a host of local voluntary and community sector organisations, coaches, and teachers who I would like to thank for their ideas and input on this report, in particular:

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Highgate Harriers

Maria Fidelis School

Parliament Hill School

West Hampstead Hockey Club

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- 8.3 Finally, I would like to thank Councillor Sabrina Francis, Cabinet Member for Young People and Culture, for her advice and guidance during my role; as well as Councillor Marcus Boyland, Cabinet

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9. Finance Comments of the Executive Director Corporate Services

The Director of Finance has been consulted and comments are incorporated within the body of the report.

10. Legal Comments of the Borough Solicitor

The Borough Solicitor has been consulted on the report and has no comments to add to the report.

11. Environmental Implications

All the programmes and work outlined in this report have positive environmental implications for Camden and are built from, or strongly aligned with, the Camden Climate Action Plan, Biodiversity Strategy and Clean Air Action Plan.

12. Appendices

Appendix 1 - List of multi-use game areas (MUGAs) in Camden's open spaces and housing estates.