



## REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF LONDON FACILITIES

### Introduction

1. The Fundamental Financial Review (FFR) identified the London Facilities as an issue, noting in particular the considerable sums of money that pass to the Recreation Centre at Chadwick Street and the London Grounds at Chiswick and Eltham. But that review, for reasons of time, left the issue unexplored. Two years ago I was asked to take it up. A number of factors have interrupted the work over that period. But I think that the delay has if anything been useful (see, for example, para 8 below). It has also become clear to me that **what** is needed is relatively straightforward. The harder part is **how** we achieve it; and that, I have concluded, is a matter for steady incrementalism rather than a one-shot prescription. So I have limited myself to indicating the first stages.

2. In reaching my conclusions I have had the benefit of the experience and ideas of a number of colleagues, including a small group which met from time to time. While I think that we are of one mind at most points, nonetheless, now that we have reached the stage of a final report each of them must feel free to comment and disagree from his or her own particular standpoint; none of them is committed, therefore, to what is said here, for which I take responsibility. I have also had the benefit of comments from the three current bodies most concerned (the Management Committees for the London Grounds and for the Recreation Centre, and the London Region Committee) on a “consultation draft” outlining my proposals; I am grateful for their helpful and constructive responses, which I have (I hope faithfully) reflected in this final report.

### What is the problem?

3. This review had its origins in the FFR. But the longer it has gone on, the more I have been convinced that the issue is (fundamentally) one not of finance but of management.

4. London is different – a cliché with which all CSSC discussion of London seems to begin. There are clear differences, certainly; the largest single concentration of members and potential members and of government buildings; but also most of those members clear off to relatively distant homes at the end of the working day. Then we have two facilities which are national rather than merely local, namely the Sports Ground at Chiswick (C) and the Recreation Centre at Chadwick Street (CS). On top of these, there is a wider range of activity available to our members in London than in any other part of the country (and some distinctive Sport Representative Bodies – SRBs – like the riding and rowing clubs, and the Whitehall Theatre and Whitehall Orchestra); yet, perversely, awareness of what is on offer is probably less than it is anywhere else; members, even organisers, involved with one activity can be largely ignorant of what else is available, or of CSSC as a whole rather than their own small part of it.

5. But I think it is right to acknowledge that London is also the same as other areas in many important respects. I have heard again and again the call for more and better communications and publicity, better liaison between Departmental Associations (DAs), SRBs and the London Region; and the lament that there are not the volunteers any more with the time to devote to everything from communications and publicity to committee work (look at CS's problems in finding an hon treasurer, a matter to which I return at para 18 below), or that even the most successful activity can be vulnerable to the activities of the Grim Reaper or staff movements, and lasts only as long as there is a particular volunteer enthusiast around to keep it going. None of that is peculiar to London.

6. London, though, is what I have been asked to look at. If some of my suggestions are felt to be of wider application, that must be for others to consider. I would be disappointed, though, if change in London were delayed as a consequence, or out of respect for the Principle of the Dangerous Precedent.\*

7. Sometimes the complaints (for want of a better word), about communications or liaison or publicity or continuity, are expressed as criticism of Head Office ("What are HO doing about this?" or "We asked HO to do something months ago but nothing's happened"); but that seems to me to prejudge the prior question, namely "Who should be doing what about this?". They also ignore some of the work that has been done to improve matters in recent years – changes in *Leisure Scene*, a London-based website, the employment of an assistant for the Sports and Leisure Executive (SLE); the recent resuscitation of a forum for small departments; the issue of a comprehensive London Information Booklet prepared by the Region; and generally the continuing efforts of volunteers throughout London to keep rolling a heavy stone up a steep hill.

8. We must acknowledge, though, if there is still dissatisfaction, that more needs to be done.

## **The Way Forward**

9. As I see it, the trick must be to establish a mechanism which will provide and manage the facilities which our membership in the London area wants and will use; indeed, part of that mechanism should be concerned with systematically finding out and responding to what the membership wants and will use. I think this is bound to mean more professional management – in the sense both that our management must be more professional, and that more of it must be paid. That runs counter to the FFR's emphasis on capping administration costs; but when one looks at the capital employed in our London facilities, we may have to pay more to get a decent return (in terms of usage by our members rather than revenue); and anyway, if we can't get the unpaid volunteer to do the work, either it will not get done or we must pay for it. This again, I suggest, is not peculiar to London; and you can see the ROKO venture as

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\* The *Principle of the Dangerous Precedent* is that you should not now do an admittedly right action for fear you, or your equally timid successors, should not have the courage to do right in some future case, which, *ex hypothesi*, is essentially different, but superficially resembles the present one. Every public action which is not customary, either is wrong, or, if it is right, is a dangerous precedent. It follows that nothing should ever be done for the first time. (F M Cornford, *Microcosmographia Academica*)

professionalising our estate. It may be that, in the longer term, the revenues which we hope to derive from our estate will finance wider professionalisation.

10. The call for improved liaison is, I think, an expression of a perception that CSSC's London facilities need to be seen as a whole. While there is cross-membership of the CS, London Grounds and London Region committees, liaison in practice seems to happen more by accident than by design.

11. The temporary doubling-up of the posts of manager at C and CS has provided an opportunity to experiment with one aspect of "integrated management". There have been problems; and there is general agreement that the job is too big for one person, a weakness which has now been addressed by the recruitment of a senior member of staff to CS. But there have also been some useful pointers.

12. There is scope, and indeed a need, to extend "integrated management". What we have at the moment looks more like disintegration. The manager at CS and C works for Head Office (HO) at High Wycombe, reporting to the Chief Executive. The staff are appointed and employed by the committees. The SLE (with his assistant), who works out of CS, and has a major task of DA liaison, is a member of HO staff reporting (now) to the Head of Marketing. The London-centred SRBs with their own facilities such as the boathouse and the stables are autonomous, with a link to HO in the person of the Sports Development Manager. And so on.

13. Any increase in integrated management is going to reduce the power and role of the existing committees, and bring the London facilities more clearly under HO direction. In the case of the national resources at C and CS, that seems logical enough. The logic for going further and including the London region committee is the idea of treating the whole of what is available to our membership in London as an entity.

14. But people are – rightly – wary of centralisation. The centre can easily get out of touch and arrogantly prescriptive (and if there is one thing that characterises CSSC, it is the diversity of its constituent bodies and what they offer – one size does not fit all, and attempts to impose uniformity by Procrustean methods will do damage); those at the periphery always have Someone Else to blame. While it is encouraging that Investors in People scrutineers have found among our members high levels of satisfaction with the responsiveness of HO, we cannot rely simply on that. Any move towards increased HO management of London facilities will have to be counterbalanced by a mechanism to ensure a real dialogue about the needs and views of the user.

15. What I propose, in essence, is as follows. The senior staff at C/CS, and the SLE, are to form a new single group charged with "making London work". I am not here offering a detailed senior structure for C/CS. This will need to be determined in the light of job descriptions derived from an analysis of all the tasks that we want delivered. But while I envisage that there will be a single overall "London Activities Manager" (LAM), located at either C or CS. I also suggest that at all times there does need to be one person at each site competent to take all the practical decisions that arise from day to day in the management of the facilities, and to sort out crises before they become disasters. I also take the point that, whichever site the LAM is located

at, the manager of the other site must have proper responsibility as its manager and not as “Deputy LAM”, for all that he would no doubt deputise in the LAM’s absence.

16. The LAM role is, clearly, crucial. The particularities of the job specification, and whether the job could be combined with one or other of the Manager posts at C and CS, are questions for later consideration . All I would say here is that a post of this importance should be publicly advertised so that we give ourselves the best possible chance of getting the best person.

17. These staff would be (a detached) part of HO. The overall manager would be clearly identified as a member of the senior team at HO, along with the Heads of Marketing, Finance, Personnel ... This would also be important if, as I suggest, the SLE were, as part of the London team, to report to the London manager rather than (as at present) the Head of Marketing. We must preserve the strength of the present arrangement under which the London SLE, for all that his job is in some respects different from that of his colleagues, is nonetheless still seen and managed from Head Office as one of a single group, and kept in close touch with his colleagues in other Regions.

18. Responsibility for promoting and developing CSSC activities in London would fall to this group of staff. Treating them as a single group should make for greater flexibility, eg to cover local crises or to enable a member of staff at one location to acquire and offer the benefit of specialist knowledge across the region. It should also go some way to address the problem of continuity, keeping things going when a key volunteer falls by the wayside. As I have said, I do not wish to prescribe at this stage how many posts covering which functions there should be. But one idea that may be worth pursuing is that many of the present functions of the hon treasurer at CS and the London Grounds could be assumed by a paid member of staff. This would both address the chronic difficulty of finding a treasurer, and be consistent with the idea that “technical” specialist services (personnel, finance, publicity for example) should be undertaken by paid staff, leaving volunteers to concentrate their enthusiasm on the support of sporting activity or on oversight of the paid staff.

19. Readers will by now perhaps have spotted that much of this thinking is informed by the roles of and relationship between HO staff and the Management Board, particularly since the changes made a few years ago. As Honorary Treasurer, for example, I do not (which is perhaps just as well) attempt to do the work which the Finance staff are paid to carry out; but I and Finance Committee colleagues do concern ourselves with, and report to the Management Board on, both the overall state of CSSC’s finances, and the financial systems and the way these are operated by our staff. Nor does the Finance Committee draw up the budget; but we do scrutinise very carefully and if appropriate amend a draft prepared by the Head of Finance in consultation with the Chief Executive.

20. This distinction of roles holds more generally. Most proposals or ideas (from minor changes to major exercises like the Strategic Plan) will be worked up by the staff, sometimes on their own initiative, sometimes at the request of a committee; and will then be considered, modified, accepted or rejected by the committee.

21. The question then arises, what would happen to the existing Management Committees in London. I suggest that it would be quite out of keeping with the way CSSC runs its affairs for there not to be some sort of committee of volunteers to provide broad oversight of the work of the paid hands, and to represent and to ensure accountability to the membership. If there is to be a single group of staff for London, there should also be a single “London Strategic Committee” (LSC) to replace the three existing bodies. (The term “strategic” is not essential, and the word has unfortunately lost much of its meaning through over-use, but I include it to emphasise that the role is to be concerned with high-level, long-term issues. It should not be necessary, for example, for members of that committee to show their faces at C or CS any more often than members of the Management Board turn up at High Wycombe.) Such a committee needs to be small – between 5 and 10 members, chosen for what they can offer rather than as representatives of any particular interest group. One possibility would be to constitute this as a further (sub)-committee of the (national) Management Committee. I am not sure that this is the best approach, since the London remit would extend into those of all three of the present committees, which could lead to overlap and confusion; and we would not, I fancy, want to go down the road of having elections to the Management Committee with a particular geographical bias (shades of West Lothian). The fact that the staff would be closely involved with the work of HO, and the near-inevitability that at least one member of the Management Committee would also be a member of the LSC however that membership was chosen, should be enough to ensure that the two bodies did not operate each in ignorance of the other’s doings.

22. We had an entertaining discussion in our group about the name for this proposed committee. There does seem to be a fashion for changing names, usually in the direction of meaninglessness, either by using initials only (no doubt in the hope that people will forget what they ever stood for) or by inventing some high-sounding nonce-word nonsense (Consignia!). “Sports and Leisure London” seemed to have some appeal. I think this a matter that can be left to a later date.

23. More important is the composition of the committee. As I have suggested, it should not be large. (Wallace’s Second Law of Bureaucracy states that the efficiency of any meeting varies inversely with the square of one less than the number of persons present.) The Chair should be held by a Management Board appointee; knowledge and experience of CSSC in London would be valuable. Then there would be one nominee from each of: Chadwick Street; the London Grounds; London Region; a Departmental Association active in London; a Sport Representative Body active in London. The crucial point about these nominees is that they should not be “delegates”, each representing the views and interests of his or her parent bodies, but should act collectively as members of the committee in the interests of London as a whole. I suggest that the overall manager of London activities should also be a full member of the committee. There would be room for one further nominee, eg a member of the Management Committee, if that were felt useful; and no doubt others, eg Head Office staff with a particular interest in a topic under discussion, or someone from a club particularly concerned with an agenda item, would be invited to attend *ad hoc*. The SLE and other staff from the London group would provide the secretariat.

24. What further structure should there be below the LSC? One idea is to have a “User Committee” to replace each of the three current main organisations (C, CS,

London Region). I have had a range of reactions to the idea of such committees: and I can certainly sympathise with the view that they can be talking shops of the worst sort, composed of serial complainers and single-issue advocates who would turn up to meetings, sound off, and do nothing; and unless the committees had a real role, they would not attract people with a significant contribution to make. On the other hand, no-one disputes the need for a strong user input, and we would all, no doubt, like to think that there are users who have constructive suggestions to make about the facilities and would react constructively to ideas for developing them. The question then is how best to tap this resource. What I think is beyond doubt is that, whatever route we go down, much would depend on the permanent staff for stimulating and supporting the users both in bringing their own ideas to the table and in responding to ideas from elsewhere. And if there were to be a User Committee, that should not relieve the staff of the essential task of continually surveying user opinion by other means.

25. Whether the LSC should have its own sub-committees (for example, to pursue the Management Committee analogy, for Finance, Estate, and Sport and Leisure) is, I think, for the LSC itself to determine.

26. What I have proposed so far takes in C and CS and London Region. I think that this is quite enough to begin with. I can see the prospect in the longer term of extending the idea of professional support in such specialisms as finance and personnel to certain London-based SRBs in particular, and to (especially the smaller) DAs with a membership largely confined to London. But we need to work such things out as we go along.

27. In creating a new management structure I see the first steps as

a. to discuss these proposals with the present committees; I regard the circulation of my earlier consultation draft as the first stage of that process, which is essential to the successful implementation of any change; and

a. to draw up a series of job descriptions for the “London Group” staff based upon an analysis of the tasks to be undertaken. This would then need to be looked at in the light of the potential costs of such a structure.

## **Implementation**

28. If the broad proposals set out here are acceptable (and reactions to the consultation draft suggest that they are) there will need to be a mechanism for working out the details and putting them into practice. For this purpose I suggest that we establish the LSC in “shadow” form as the Implementation Group. There is nothing sinister or shadowy about this device. It simply means that we would appoint a body with the composition of the proposed LSC some time before it was formally constituted, so that it could run itself in as the existing bodies were running themselves down (and, indeed, formally voting themselves out of existence), and thereby ensure a smooth transition. The Implementation Group, serviced by C/CS staff, would have the remit of determining the tasks to be carried out and their priority order, and then seeing that programme through to the point at which the Group

became the LSC. I attach as an appendix a number of possible tasks. I do not want to predict or prescribe any particular length of life for this “shadow” Group, save to say that it should not run for more than a year, and preferably a good deal less than that.

### **Other issues**

29. There are a few other matters to which I should draw attention.

30. First, I am aware that I have left Eltham on one side. It is not particularly well used, and it is perhaps not in the best place for transport. But I am reluctant to condemn any facility until we have seen what a new management structure can achieve. I am also chastened by the experience at Dundee, where the prospect of closure by HO after a period of remote management by HO provoked local enthusiasts into saving their club and making a real go of it (so far). If we can challenge members in the SE of London, working with the management, to develop a plan for making best use of Eltham in the light of eg changes in availability of facilities elsewhere or on the disposition of government offices, we might, as they say, get a result; and if that result was, in the end, closure, we could not be said not to have tried. In view of the ending of the lease shortly, this would have to be an early matter for consideration by the Implementation Group.

31. Secondly, I am well aware that clubs, areas, DAs, SRBs, especially the small ones, find it difficult to obtain volunteers to do necessary but sometimes demanding jobs like keeping the books. One service that a properly-staffed London management could offer would be to help out with such things. Money is an obvious candidate; and in the longer term there may be scope for a centralised system. But employment law and liabilities are not getting any less onerous, and one can only feel for small volunteer-led organisations that have one or two paid staff. We would have to think about costs (recharging? reduction of grant?). The matter is not altogether straightforward if one remembers that some large DAs have paid officers, but paid by their departments, and do not suffer any loss of grant as a result, so we might seem to be penalising the smaller bodies. On the other hand, we have to control HO costs, and goods and services offered free can be abused.

25. Thirdly, this review has been conducted against a background of some uncertainties, such as whether we might obtain the freehold of CS. I hope that what I have suggested makes sense independent of such things. All I would add is that the fact that C and CS are national rather than just local facilities means that any question of putting them into the ROKO pot (assuming we did purchase the CS freehold) would require an approach that recognised their national status.

26. Fourthly, I am aware that these proposals raise again a number of “constitutional” issues. There is the question of proprietary club status, a matter which has been reviewed on a number of occasions in the past. It has implications beyond London, and I do not wish to do more here than simply flag it up. Then there is the matter of the employment status of existing staff at C and CS if the present Management Committees are replaced by a LSC. These issues require early attention, and legal advice.

27. Finally, three things which take us back to the origins of this study in matters financial.

- a. It has been suggested that the mechanisms for calculating, paying and managing the annual grants to the London facilities needs review. I don't want to tread on the Finance Committee Chairman's toes as he picks his way through this difficult ground. It is also a matter which the Implementation Group might consider.
- b. The pricing of the facilities at both C and CS needs review. So far as I can gather, the present rates charged, eg for the hire of a room or a pitch, are the product of years of incrementalism more or less related to RPI, with an occasional check against local competition. I think we need to go back to basics, to work out what each room/pitch costs, and relate our charges to both that and to comparable "commercial" hirers. Full economic cost (with an allowance for profit) would ideally be the charge to non-civil service users; such a charge would need to be adjusted if it were not competitive with what is on offer elsewhere in the local market. The discount from that charge for civil service users would then be whatever we decided it should be. But what is important is that, in the case of both the full and the discounted charge, we would know what is the cost to CSSC in terms of a shortfall against the full economic cost, ie the degree of subsidy; that figure could then be a useful performance indicator, or could be the basis for a performance target (eg to reduce the subsidy by  $x$  per cent over  $y$  years).
- c. There is an immediate need for some works at both C and CS. For all the uncertainty, we cannot defer this indefinitely; and it makes little sense to aim for an improved management structure charged with "making London work" if any options dependent on spending money to make what is offered more like what is wanted are to be closed off. I suggest that the current London Grounds and SCRC committees be asked to draw up a prioritised, costed list of works, as a basis for discussion with HO.

R A Wallace  
December 2001

## London Review: Appendix

### **Some possible tasks for early consideration by the Implementation Group**

- The LAC's Terms of Reference (subject to confirmation by Management Committee) and remit, "standing orders" etc (and name!)
- The LAC's sub-committee structure
- How best to tap into user opinion
- Analysis of duties/tasks of London Group staff, followed by ...
- Staffing structure for London Group staff, with Job Descriptions
- Whither Eltham?
- Financial arrangements