

8.1. MM01: Review of allocation of sporting fields and facilities to promote gender equity, access, and inclusion

Australian and international studies abound with evidence that demonstrates that socially connected and diverse communities have less mental illness and cognitive decline, and are safer, more vibrant and interesting places to live, study, play, and work. Access to safe recreational and sporting facilities promotes health and wellbeing. Yet for girls, women, and people living with a disability, access to safe sporting facilities is too often limited or unavailable.

In North Sydney, and the northern Sydney region more generally, demand for sporting fields and facilities is significantly higher than supply. The December 2023 report commissioned by the Northern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (NSROC) reviewing the supply and demand for sports facilities in the northern Sydney region, revealed a significant and growing shortfall in supply across Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the region. The North Sydney LGA had the least available whilst also the subject of the most intense (and increasing) population pressure.

Council's Community Strategic Plan Vision 2040 supports diversity and inclusion and relevantly includes:

*1.4 Our Living Environment - Provide infrastructure to encourage and support participation in healthy, physical activity and recreation **for all***

*4.1 Our Social Vitality - Increase, celebrate and foster community connectedness, health, **inclusivity** and safety through services and programs*

Indeed, Council's Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2022-2026 (DIAP) states "[a] community with environments, buildings, products, services and information that are equally usable and inclusive has social and economic benefits for everyone" (p.4). Focus Area 2 of the DIAP aims "[t]o increase participation of people with disability in all aspects of community life, including social and cultural engagement and wellbeing (p.15). Action 2.5 states "[p]rovide more and improved inclusive parks, playgrounds and sporting and fitness opportunities (p.17)".

On 2 August 2024 I met with a representative from "Pitch Up" to discuss issues with access to sporting fields and facilities for girls. Pitch Up is Australia's first online sports booking platform focused on increasing fair access to participation opportunities for women and girls. They contacted me in relation to my comments urging schools in our LGA to open their facilities to the community after hours, and to discuss their work in Victoria with LaunchVic and VicHealth to provide fair access for women and girls to higher grade sporting infrastructure and increase opportunities in their local communities.

Pitch Up surveyed 342 sports clubs in 2023 and found that female athletes face barriers that make it harder to participate and reach their best, as they have less than 50% access to fields and facilities, and access times are usually subordinate to male clubs and teams.

Given that the DIAP is almost two years old (adopted in 2022) and the well-documented demand for and barriers to girls' and women's participation in organised sport, it is timely for Council to undertake an urgent review of the allocation of sporting fields and facilities to ensure that gender equity and disabled access is promoted and facilitated to align with Council policies and plans.

I therefore recommend:

- 1. THAT** Council conduct an urgent review of allocation of sporting fields and facilities to be undertaken before the commencement of the winter season to measure access to facilities for training and competition for girls and women and that the review include a breakdown of training and playing hours, times of day allocated between genders and that the review initially focus on Cammeray Park, Anderson Park and North Sydney Oval (including Ovals 1 and 2).
- 2. THAT** Council undertake an audit in relation to opportunity for access to sporting fields and facilities for people with a disability including policies and actions of any sporting clubs hiring Council fields and facilities.
- 3. THAT** Council also review any Hiring Policies and Conditions of Use to ensure that they align with gender equity and access and inclusion principles.
- 4. THAT** a further report be provided to Council and the Access and Inclusion Committee for consideration prior to commencement of the winter sporting season.

**COUNCILLOR ZOË BAKER
MAYOR**