

What are trusts and why do we love the model?

As the national association for leisure and culture trusts, at Community Leisure UK we strongly believe in the value of the trust model and are passionate about the power of public leisure services.

But although we want to sing the praises of our members from the rooftops, we are often guilty of assuming that people understand what we mean by the term 'trust model'. A 'trust' is not in itself a legal structure and can take many different forms*. So, we thought we would take a moment to cover what we mean by 'trust' and why we strongly believe it is one of the best models to deliver quality public leisure services.

Our members are all charitable organisations with the principles of non-profit distribution and independence at their heart. This means that every penny of profit generated is reinvested, supporting many of the organisations' charitable aims by cross-subsiding programmes, access and facilities. This cross-subsidy distinguishes the model from some other public leisure service delivery models, as profit generating activities subsidise non-profit generating activities such as health, library and outreach programmes. It also enables income from users who can afford to pay to be ring-fenced to support subsidised access to activities.

Yet, though this is an essential part of its identity, the true value of the trust model extends far beyond the non-profit distributing aspect. Trusts are genuine community anchors, and each of our members delivers slightly different programmes and offers reflecting the local needs of their communities. Independent boards of trustees are at the helm of charitable leisure trusts, consisting of a mix of local people with different skill sets and backgrounds, which provides them with real insight into the local landscape and enables community involvement in agreeing the priorities.

However, in reflecting on the potential of community leisure trusts and their contributions at both local and national levels, we simply can't stress the value of partnership enough. Members have a wide and varied range of partners, from local authorities and health and social care partners to other third sector organisations and charities.

They rely on building strong connections and maximising expertise and assets to optimise their leisure provision, and in successfully doing so can offer a wider range of services and support for all pockets of their communities.



But they can do more! The beauty of the model is that trusts can be agile and responsive in an ever changing and increasing complex landscape.

Members can adapt and diversify to ensure they are resilient and sustainable organisations, which is reflected in the increasingly diverse portfolios of services and assets. At Community Leisure UK, we are continually surprised by some of the incredible, innovative work that our members do, some of which was highlighted at this year's national awards evening. It is a delight to support a collective of passionate and caring trusts and to be able to talk about highly successful and pioneering projects and programmes.

We often hear calls for more sharing of best practice, and a desire to roll out successful programmes into other areas. But, let's be clear: best practice is only truly best practice when it is fully in tune with and designed for the needs of the local population. We absolutely advocate sharing and learning but must be mindful of the differences across communities - whether geographical or social. We therefore believe that we need to open doors with other partners and sectors and have more serious conversations about maximising the contribution and potential of leisure trusts and to recognise the significant role they play in supporting local and national priorities.

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*Trusts are legally formed as:

- Companies limited by Guarantee
- Community Interest Company
- Society with charitable status
- Charitable incorporated organisation
- Scottish Charitable Incorporated organisation

About us

Community Leisure UK is the members' association that specialises in representing charities and social enterprises delivering public leisure and culture services across England, Scotland and Wales.

We:

- provide a nationwide platform enabling members to meet peers and access strategic partners to find best practice solutions to common problems and recommendations to tackle future industry developments; and
- use the power of the collective membership to represent, reach, influence and promote the charitable trust model benefits at a national level, to inform policy and increase understanding of the trust model.

Our Values



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