

Leicester City Council Scrutiny Review

‘Encouraging Women to Participate in Sports and Physical Activities in Leicester’

A Report of the Heritage, Culture, Leisure and Tourism Scrutiny Commission

28 February 2023 – Heritage, Culture, Leisure and Tourism Scrutiny commission meeting.

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Encouraging Women to Participate in Sports and Physical Activities Task Group

TASK GROUP MEMBERS

Cllr Elaine Halford (Chair)

Cllr Susan Barton

Cllr Nita Solanki

Cllr Ruma Ali

Cllr Mohammed Dawood

THIS REVIEW WAS LED BY COUNCILLOR ELAINE HALFORD

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Chair's Foreword

Being active and having a positive relationship with sport and physical activity is important to women's long-term health and wellbeing.

We know that the COVID pandemic has resulted in more home working, which has led to changes in lifestyles, fitness and health with positive and negative effects on physical activity habits. We need to understand women's attitudes and behaviours to sport and physical activity to promote and encourage participation.

The Heritage, Culture, Leisure and Tourism Scrutiny Commission set up a Task Group in November 2021 to undertake a review into 'Encouraging Women to participate in Sports and Physical Activities in Leicester.'

The task group heard evidence about the sports opportunities for women by council-run services and of wider community-based opportunities; It also heard evidence of the barriers that exist for women to participate and explored good practice ideas of what can be done to encourage women to be more active and in better health.

The task group review meetings for evidence gathering were held online due to the covid restrictions.

I would like to thank witnesses organisations and officers who gave evidence to this review. Thank you to members of the task group for their time and contributions to this review.

Councillor Elaine Halford

Chair of the Task Group, and Chair of Heritage, Culture, Leisure and Tourism Scrutiny Commission, Leicester City Council.

REPORT

1. Introduction

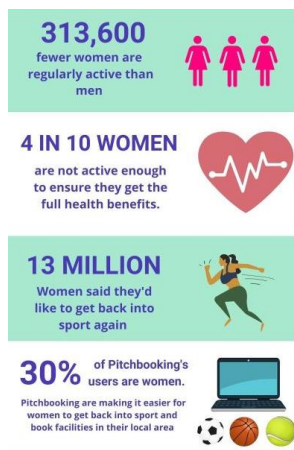
1.1 Today's leisure market offers a fantastic choice of activities for women to take part in. Budget gyms have boomed, our green spaces have been revolutionized with park runs and park gyms, and fitness trails have grown rapidly, while technology has broadened the appeal of fitness activities. Over this time, councils have been grappling with austerity. This reduction in budgets, when combined with a rapidly changing leisure market, has altered the range and quality of local sport and leisure provision.

1.2 Leicester City Council and city partners offer a wide range of opportunities for women to participate, both within a formal setting or recreationally. Sports Services in particular provides numerous services and programs across its portfolio of leisure facilities. There is also a range of opportunities for women to participate in neighbourhoods and community-based activities, and via parks and open spaces; community and faith organisations; local community centres; sports clubs and forums; gyms and fitness organisations and many more. Some of these are captured in the report.

2. Background

2.1 Participation levels in sport have historically always been consistently lower for women than for men. Right now [there are over 700,000 more inactive women than men in England](#), a trend that was only made worse over the course of the pandemic and recurring lockdowns. The recent [Active Lives Adult Survey commissioned by Sport England](#) revealed that the drop in activity levels for women was more sustained than for men, suggesting it will take longer for women to return to pre-pandemic activity levels. The same study suggests that more support is needed across the board to help women get active again.

Sport England national data shows:



- 2.2 Leicester City physical activity and gender data from 'Active Lives Survey 2017/18' shows females are less active than men, for example 65% of men participate in 150+ minutes of activity a week, in comparison to 61% of women.
- 2.3 According to Local Authority Health Profiles data 2020/21, Leicester's proportion of physically active adults is worse than the percentage for England and the Region, the data shows: Leicester 55.4%, Region 64.5% and England at 65%.
- 2.4 Leicester City Council and work with partners has identified that more work is required for Leicester residents to be more active and to encourage participation in informal physical activity; activities for family participation; and to utilise partnerships and key stakeholders involved in sports and physical activities e.g. professional sports clubs; universities and community sector organisations.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Mayor and Executive is asked to consider the following recommendations:

- 1) Women need to know that they are welcome to participate in sports and physical activities by wearing clothing that is comfortable for them and culturally acceptable. **To consider better signage in facilities and raising awareness of the availability of alternative clothing e.g. swimwear, gym-wear and cyclewear.**
- 2) There is a need to address the shortage of female gym trainers, coaches and fitness instructors at facilities. **To consider carrying out recruitment, training and apprenticeship programs to attract women into these positions.**
- 3) Women can be inspired and motivated by role models and sporting champions. **To consider involving local and national women with sporting related achievements e.g. the Lionesses who are champion winners, and individuals like Summaya, who has shared her experience via the media and via podcast following her journey to learn to swim in adulthood.**
- 4) Members were impressed by the success of 'The Girl Can' campaign used by Active Leicester. Research shows that many women are put off taking part in physical activity due to a fear of judgement. 'This Girl Can' seeks to tell the real stories of real women with videos of their personal experiences and exercising **To consider using videos and inspiring women with real stories they can relate to can help to increase participation.**

- 5) **To consider new approaches to attract families and friends groups to participate in sports and physical activities together.** For example: a friend's invitation makes sport participation more attractive and there is also safety in numbers. Socialising with friends and family is rewarding and bonding becomes a strong external motivator. (*The Health & Wellbeing Survey in Leicester shows that there is a lack of suitable structured activity provision for families to exercise together. Whilst parks and open spaces are available for informal family friendly activities, the leisure centres and sports clubs often offer adult and child physical activity sessions separately*).
- 6) Participation in sport must be enjoyable and provide an experience worth repeating. **To support women to focus on feeling good about themselves and their achievements e.g. rewards and celebration are important.**
- 7) **To consider new initiatives such as combining fitness sessions with health promotion sessions for women.** For example 'The Fitness Factory Gym' in Leicester held an open day event inviting members and non-members, offering a variety of free taster fitness sessions combined with a health promotion session, including mental health and wellbeing talk with Q&A. (*open day events like this are successful and attracts many local women plus existing members bring along families and friends*).
- 8) **A need for powerful messaging and marketing to educate and motivate women to incorporate moderate exercise as part of their daily lives. It is essential to connect with women about the health and mental health benefits to exercising. Evidence shows that most residents would try a fitness tracker or health app if recommended by a health professional, suggest that this be piloted for women who are interested.** Women are involved in many different daily routines and journeys e.g. using the stairs, housework and gardening, school runs and walking to local shops, so it's a case of changing mind-sets to link physical exercise with better health
- 9) **We need more engagement with other groups of women across the city e.g. with single parents, with carers, and family carers too. Suggested that sub-groups be formed, as it is very important to reflect on this.**
- 10) **Gaps exist around community champions, ambassadors and mentors To consider engaging local people as ambassadors and community champions to support and empower women to be the best possible version of themselves. For example: Active Together have successfully**

involved community champions like Zee from Zfit who runs her own ladies-only Zumba and Boxercise classes at venues across Leicester all of which aim to empower women.

- 11) **We need more fitness instructors and activities leaders and mentors to do outreach work to support women in the community, such as in community centres; places of worship; health centre hubs and public spaces.** Sport England research shows that making sport the 'norm' for women relies on local women of all ages, sizes and faiths, becoming active, celebrating it and encouraging other to join in. Therefore by taking an activity into the community, both physically through outdoor sessions or venues in new and unexpected places can attract new circles of women.
- 12) **To encourage women to be involved in sports governing bodies and community leadership roles to influence decision-making.** Women remain less represented in leadership and coaching roles and face continued challenges in terms of equal pay and coverage in the media. This imbalance is magnified among some sub-groups e.g. BME women and disabled women. There are many reasons for this and most relate to social and cultural factors.
- 13) Task group members felt that many more organisations offering paid for activities and non-paid free sports and physical activities exists across the city e.g. community-based, grassroots sports and informal groups. **To consider engaging with smaller community-based organisations that are well placed in the hub of residential areas and more accessible for women (community-up approach).** To support joined up working, sharing resources and support for accessing funding sources.
- 14) **To reach out to female students in the city to promote sports and physical activities and healthy living.** For example: *'Freshers week' for university students is an excellent time to connect with female students to promote what is available in the city.*
- 15) **To encourage businesses, universities, hospitals etc... in the city to promote active travel plans and promote sports and physical exercise activities available in the city to benefit health and wellbeing for women employees.**
- 16) **Members praised sports partnerships as working well together. To consider including 'Netball' in future projects. To consider a cricket friendly environment for women and a need for role models** (Leicestershire County Cricket Club informed members that there is a lack of cricket facilities).

- 17) **That the Council increase publicity and marketing of Leisure and Sport facilities and activities on offer across the city.** Wider publicity is needed to reach more women via internal and external methods e.g. members bulletin, ward community meetings, internal face newsletter, council website, community centres, hospitals, G.P surgeries and health centres, face-to-face, local radio and social media.
- 18) The review report evidence and recommendations has captured valuable information. **This review needs to inform and shape the new strategy being developed.**
- 19) This review did not cover 'girls participation' in sports and physical activities, however, we are aware that national data shows: school-age girls are more interested and tend to participate in sports and activities, but then they seem to drop out as they get older for various reasons. **We suggest that this topic be added to future work programmes – possibly Childrens scrutiny jointly with our Heritage scrutiny commission.**
- 20) This review did not cover 'women's safety issues' when accessing sport or physical activity opportunities, although we are fully aware that this can be a barrier for some women. **We suggest that this topic be looked at in the future as it is essential that women and girls feel safe and secure to participate in sports and physical activities.**
- 21) Members praised the public health and sports services, Active Leicester, Active Together and partners for their commitment and expertise to support and develop new initiatives for women to participate (*see diagram 7.66 showing example of partnership working success*). Members supported future plans to increase women's participation, see 7.82 'looking forward' and Appendix C 'Active Leicester: context and future vision.

The evidence and the good practice captured in this review report to be taken forward by the council and partners.

3.1. CONCLUSION

The task group found that sports and physical activities can be experienced by women in many different ways across the city.

More work needs to be done to educate and motivate women to understand the importance of being active as part of their health and wellbeing journey throughout their adulthood. There are very real short-term and long-term health benefits to women being active and healthy. We need to ensure that our neighbourhoods are enriched with the offer of feel-good-factor physical

activities and sports to encourage women to participate on their own and with friends and family.

The review found positive examples of good practice and initiatives existing and being developed and felt that women are probably unaware of the variety of what is available in the city. We need women role models, and women community leaders to inspire and motivate women.

We need to do more work with communities and partners to help women to understand that activities can be an experience for them, their families and friends and that it can be fun and social, and can be carried out in daily life, and can be cost effective / free to participate. We want to enrich our neighbourhoods in Leicester with activities and sports that women can enjoy.

4 Local Context – strategies and budget

Leicester City Council, Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2019/24. Getting people more active is a key public health priority <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/media/185984/joint-health-and-wellbeing-strategy-2019-2024.pdf>

Active Leicester

Active Leicester encourages participation and encompasses all sports in the city. We have seven leisure centres with swimming pools and gyms; one climbing wall; one athletics track; one golf facility and several dedicated football pitches.

<https://www.leicester.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/sport-and-leisure/>

Active Together (Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland) support people to make physical activity and sport more accessible and part of our everyday lives. <https://www.active-together.org/>

5. Leicester City Council Sports Services budget

5.1 Leicester city council has recently invested in developing and improving the Leisure and Sports centres facilities across the city. Active Leicester has a budget of £30k per annum to promote its services. A balanced approach to marketing is taken to ensure it appeals to a wide audience. Promotion and campaigns include female-only imagery. This budget came into situ in 2021; prior to this the service did not have a dedicated marketing budget.

5.2 Leicester City Public Health Services budget

5.3 Public Health services provide £67,000 to Inspire Together per year, approximately £15,000 of this funding per year goes towards the provision of

the WHISPA delivery. This totals £75,000 for the previous 5 years' delivery. £60,000 has been allocated to Leicester City in the Community over the last 5 years, of which we expect 30% participation from women and girls.

- 5.4** Predicted budgets for year ahead - The Inspire Together funding will be reduced as a result of the recent PH budget reviews and £47,000 will be the new yearly allocation.
- 5.5** Funding to the sports clubs is unlikely to continue, however we will continue to support them to apply for funding bids from Sports England and each sports club's governing body. This will ensure that a focus remains on supporting women and girls into sports and physical activity in the absence of direct funding.

6. Purpose and Scope of the review

- 6.1** The purpose of the review was to better understand the challenges and issues faced by women who want to participate in sports and physical activities and to explore what is available for women to participate in, including examples of good practice to promote increased participation.
- 6.2** The task group held evidence gathering sessions with witnesses, as below. These meetings took place online due to the covid pandemic restrictions.
- Sally Slade (Active Travel Team Leader, Leicester City Council)
 - Uma attended for Kirit Thakore (Founder of BlazeFit, an online fitness, workout and dance company, Leicester)
 - Amanda Howe (Managing Director of WALX Leicester East, walking group)
 - Anisha Karolia (Owner of My Gym Fitness Factory, Leicester)
 - Leicester City Football Club in the community (Allison Tripney)
 - Leicestershire County Cricket Club (Mark Barber)
 - Netball England, East Midlands (Val Kindred)
 - Leicester Hockey Club (Sarah Treanor, Vice President)
 - De Montfort University (Fiona Dick, Head of Sports)
 - Leicester University (Matthew Weir, Director of Sports)
 - Active Together Organisation, Leicestershire (John Bryne, Active Partnership Director, and Jo Spokes, Sports Development Manager)
 - Councillor Piara Singh Clair, Deputy City Mayor and Executive Lead for Sports Services.
 - Councillor Vi Dempster, Executive Lead for Public Health Services.
 - Sports & Leisure Centres, Leicester City Council
 - Victoria Ball, Andrew Beddows and Charles Hurley, Lead officers, Leicester City Council
- 6.3** Task group evidence gathering included:
- a) Gathering evidence from internal and external witnesses (listed in the report)

- b) Senior officers in sports and public health division providing supporting evidence and reports at the Heritage, Culture, Leisure and Tourism Scrutiny Commission meetings.
- c) Conducting an online survey questionnaire via the councils consultation website and through Sports & Leisure Centres in the city, to engage the views of women in the city.
- d) Inviting wider participation in the review by promoting the survey questionnaire via council staff 'FACE' newsletter, and via the 'Elected Members' bulletin, and via HealthWatch Leicester.
- e) Desk-top research of related documents, reports and data.
- f) Inviting Summaya, local BBC radio presenter (as a role model inspiring Asian women to participate in learning to swim) to Heritage, Culture, Leisure and Tourism Scrutiny commission meeting. Her story and experience informed the review.

7. TASK GROUP FINDINGS

7.1 Snapshot of activity levels for women in Leicester

- Leicester has a higher percentage of inactive women (+3.7%) and a lower percentage of active women (-5.4%) when compared nationally.
- There is a 5% gap between male and female participation, with the highest levels of inactivity amongst people from ethnic backgrounds.

The task group conducted an online survey questionnaire to engage the views of local women to inform the review, results at Appendix A. This shows:

- 142 women (out of 191 responses) said sport and physical activity is very important to leading a happy and healthy life, and 44 said it was important.
- 136 women (out of 179 responses) said they never participated in paid-for physical activities in community locations; private gyms and sports clubs.
- 119 women (out of 178) said they never participated in paid-for physical activity at Leicester City Council leisure centres.
- 140 women (out of 174 responses) said they never participated in free physical activities such as parkrun or informal sports groups.

7.2. Active Leicester operates 7 leisure centres, a golf course, and an athletics stadium. The city also has a wealth of parks and open spaces for people to be active in. The services and facilities are well placed, in the hearts of the

city's communities. Most leisure centres are accessible within a 20–30-minute walk, thus reducing the barriers associated with distance and transport.

7.3. National and local documents

The task group was informed that a wide range of research and reports existed on the topic of Women's participation in Sport and Physical Activity (reference list is at the end of the report).

Key reports:

- Sport England: Go Where Women Are
- Sport England: Helping Women to Get Active
- Sport England: The Girl Can
- Active Together Partnership (Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland)
- Active Leicester: Women in Sport Current Best Practice
- Active Leicester: New Strategy Development
- Leicester Health and Wellbeing Joint Strategy

7.4 Members have been provided with supporting information, research and presentations about the positive work carried out by the council, by leisure, sports and public health services to encourage women to participate in sports and physical activities in the city. The task group recognised that this work was well-documented. **Appendix C** 'Active Leicester, Women in Sport sets out the current best practice, as evidence.

7.5 **What are the key issues and barriers preventing women from participating?**

Many of the issues and barriers captured by the task group are similar to existing reports and research about women's sports.

Task group evidence identified these barriers and issues:

- Location of facilities e.g. distance to travel and lack of transport
(In Leicester, most leisure centres are accessible within a 20–30-minute walk, thus reducing the barriers associated with distance).
- Lack of time e.g. family, childcare, lifestyle, work and caring commitments
- Financial e.g. cost of sessions, cost of gym-wear and cost of equipment
- Accessibility e.g. women only sessions, women-led sessions and timings of sessions
- Family commitments and childcare e.g. women often prioritise family time over themselves.
- A lack of confidence in taking an initial step to join activities.

- Cultural barriers and beliefs e.g. exercise 'is not the norm' for women in some cultures.
- Lack of role models
- Women prefer to exercise with their family, friends and at a location that is close to home
- Lack of childcare provision for parents who wish to join sessions.
- Body confidence, appropriate clothing e.g. women at Cossington Street Centre in particular were anxious in terms of participating.
- Many women were said to be put off by the stigma associated with gyms, (and it had been hard to overcome that barrier when promoting gym services to women).
- It had also been stated that there were often cliques with activity classes and this could deter others from having the confidence to participate.
- Women were not always confident being led by male instructors (there was a shortage of female personal gym trainers and female swimming instructors across council-run sports and leisure centres).

7.6 Research in 2017 sought to look in depth at the motivations and barriers to participating in physical activity for young mums who live in Wycliffe and Eyres Monsell wards in the city. Evidence pointed to the following:

- Many had the desire to undertake activities as a family and it was felt that there was a shortage of such provision.
- The provision was overall not flexible enough in its offer to young families
- Parents were sometimes reluctant to leave babies in unfamiliar childcare settings.
- Parents preferred local, community-based provision closer to home, rather than provision that required more extensive travel, which was a particular issue for those without access to a vehicle.
- Classes were not always culturally appropriate
- Parents did not always feel safe undertaking classes in open parks, even with the presence of children.

7.7. Active Leicester have been involved in research projects over the last five years to understand barriers and issues and have taken steps to address many of these. For example, since the programme of refurbishment at local leisure centres had been completed there had been an increase in the take-up of female participants due to the changed physical environment of the buildings becoming more appealing and welcoming. There was praise for the high take-up for women-only sessions offered e.g. at the Evington and Cossington centres.

7.8 Recommendations identified by the task group:

- 1) Women need to know that they are welcome to participate by wearing clothing that is comfortable for them and culturally acceptable. *To*

consider better signage in facilities and raising awareness of the availability of alternative swimwear, gym-wear and cyclewear.

- 2) There is a need to address the shortage of female gym trainers and female coaches and instructors at facilities. *To consider carrying out recruitment, training and apprenticeship programs to attract women into these positions.*
- 3) The use of role models to inspire and motivate women to participate. *To consider local and national women with sporting related achievements e.g. the Lionesses who are champion winners, and individuals like Summaya, a local radio presenter who has shared her story / podcast to learn to swim in adulthood.*

7.9 What can be done to encourage women to participate?

[‘Go Where Women Are’ says Sport England](#), and remove the barriers that prevent women participating in sport. In their research they highlight that the barriers can be categorised as either physical or emotional. There are several key actions that facility owners can undertake to remove the physical barriers. Access to sport has to be practical and fit in with the other time commitments and requirements of the female population. Going where women are means understanding their constraints, such as *“staying for children’s bedtimes, family mealtimes and accommodating work schedules.”*

7.10. Members heard evidence about ‘This Girl Can’ national campaign

<https://www.thisgirlcan.co.uk> (Sport England launched in 2017). A national initiative showing 2.8 million women were inspired to exercise due to the campaign, 1.6 million started exercising and 1.2 million increased their participation.

‘The campaign has successfully persuaded nearly 4 million women across the country to take action. This research shows that many women are put off taking part in physical activity due to a fear of judgement – this might be about the way they look when they exercise, that they’re not good enough to join in or they should be spending more time on their families, studies or other priorities. This Girl Can seeks to tell the real stories of women who get active or play sport in the way that’s right for them using images that show what activity really looks like in all its sweaty, jiggly glory. We never judge and we don’t care what other people think.

7.11. Members heard that ‘The Girl Can’ campaign has helped many providers to inspire and encourage women to participate in sporting and leisure activities, for example:

- brought the initiatives directly to women instead of expecting women to travel to them. The campaign had 95 million views worldwide and had brought £66 million to the economy.

- to increase resilience, which had brought 700,000 followers on social media, with 50% of 40-60's recognising at least one of their adverts.
- aimed to challenge and overcome cultural barriers.
- Over 13,000 partners have signed up to use the 'toolkit', including the council.

[\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Heritage Culture Leisure and Tourism Scrutiny Commission, 01/03/2022 17:30 \(leicester.gov.uk\)](#) Task group members praised this campaign and council officers in using this good practice to encourage women's participation in Leicester.

7.12. Recommendations identified by the task group:

- This is an excellent video produced by 'The Girl Can' campaign. We should use videos and real stories to inspire and encourage women in Leicester. We need to have targets in place to succeed in motivating and encouraging women to participate.
- That the Council increase publicity and raise awareness of Leisure and Sport facilities on offer across the city. Wider publicity to reach more women, via internal and external methods e.g. members bulletin, ward community meetings, internal face newsletter, council website, community centres, hospitals, G.P surgeries and health centres, face-to-face, local radio and social media.

7.13. Key evidence captured by the task group of what can be done to encourage women to participate:

- Support and mentoring to build confidence
- Creating a sense of togetherness, for example with a social element. A need for new approaches to attract families and friends' groups to participate in activities together.
- Women like to see a sense of achievement. Helping women to focus on feeling good about oneself and the sporting experience e.g. certificates of achievement, rewards and celebration are important.
- Using the word activity, not sport, to encourage women to participate
- More work was needed to be done in terms of listening and engaging with women in order to lift each of the barriers that prevent or deter participation.
- Encourage women to use open spaces available e.g. in Belgrave women do not participate in football, mostly men use the recreation sports ground.
- Lack of cricket facilities e.g. need to create a cricket friendly environment for women and need role models.

- There was sometimes a tendency for women (particularly those with children) to put themselves last, and this was a mentality that was difficult to alter. However, more work was needed in terms of engaging with this cohort.
- Body confidence was a significant barrier. The notions of embarrassment and shame needed to be removed.
- A mapping exercise of what is on offer for women within neighbourhoods and organisations e.g. communities up approach. Supporting and promoting grassroots sports and activities.
- A shortage in the supply of toilet facilities on parks often deterred women engaging in sporting and physical activity.
- A campaign to encourage more women to become sports and gym instructors should be considered.
- Supporting and promoting grassroots sports and activities

7.14. The task group heard evidence from a selection of individual organisations in the community that provide successful sports and physical activities for women in Leicester:

Evidence captured from 'BlazeFit' company, Leicester (fitness, dance, exercise and wellbeing sessions):

- Online sessions, e.g. bangra fitness, bollywood dance, body workout exercises. Now branched out doing leg, bum and tum, and various exercises etc.. We have a team of instructors who lead various sessions.
- We are a company, main customers by paid subscription (approx. £20 per month), We also offer many non-paid free sessions.
- Our online exercises are very popular especially with older women, we have expanded to offer sessions for elderly and vulnerable women, e.g. gentle exercises sitting on a chair.
- We have themed days with sessions for special occasions e.g. Navratri, Diwali and various other festivals and events in the calendar year, this keeps people interested, engaged and upbeat.
- We have expanded to offer much more now than before. Mainly targeting everyone, but mainly our customers are women. By offering online sessions women can remain in their own homes and manage family and childcare issues.
- Our live sessions are very popular, and also offer recorded sessions. The recorded sessions very useful for women to access at their convenience, and there is a high demand for these.
- We lead and host many charity events and good causes to raise funds e.g. for Alzheimers and British Heart foundation etc.. (we have a charity event coming up involving our customers to raise funds). Our customers plus their families and friends all get involved to help raise funding with charity events.

7.15. Evidence captured from a walking group organisation (A Leicester East area WALX Leicester East is a friendly, sociable walking and fitness group)

- A walking group, with café access, offers different types of walks and trails.
- We offer total body workouts, exercise and many walking activities.
- We offer yoga and mindful – but all in the context of outdoors activities combined with walking.
- Vast majority of customers are women, slightly older generation, most of them looking for social activity and to get out. Sometimes restricted by confidence and some have various health issues e.g. cardiovascular.
- A gym-style model prepaid by customers, approx. £18 per month.
- We also have a selection of online activities.
- We offer a walking festival in the summer, one coming up shortly.
- Have trained staff to help support walks. People feel confident and enjoy the exercise.
- However, we need to address issues of travel to and from these walks – as this can be a barrier (*the task group helped Amanda to link up with Sally from Transport, LCC, for advice on transport*).
- Generally, we all need more engagement with other groups of women across the city e.g. single parents, and with carers, and family carers too. Suggested that sub-groups be formed, as it is very important to reflect on this (*task group members agreed*).

7.16. Evidence captured from ‘My Gym Fitness Factory’ organisation

- Culture and religion can be one reason why women do not participate e.g. clothing for sport activities (women want to cover up in public)
- Another barrier is that many Asian women have not grown up with sports and exercise – it’s a generational thing / not the norm for some women.
- We cater for women for private sessions and try to make women comfortable – we tailor the sessions. We hand hold and build confidence and take them through step by step and this has been positive as for most of them it breaks down barriers and they feel comfortable.
- Online sessions are good, especially for women who are unable to get out much.
- Face to face sessions are better for many women as some women look forward to leaving the house and getting out, these sessions are the highlight of their week, good for their mental health and wellbeing and something to look forward to, e.g. for the Bollywood classes we have about 40 women who attend regularly.
- We promote on social media all the time – which is very popular.
- We have planned an International Women’s Day event and offering free taster sessions combined with women health talks (including mental health issues) with a Q and A session. This will also be available to access online.
- What is needed is more education and more understanding about the physical links to exercise and mental health – we need to educate women and promote how it can help them. (*Task group members agreed*)
- The leaders of any activity needs to be reflected in the people taking part in activities, and vice-versa, role models are important.

7.17 Task group members comments:

- That women in the Belgrave area are not keen to cycle – many women either go to the Neighbourhood Centre or use outside gyms or walking for exercise. *(however, Active Travel officers informed members of plans for new wellbeing projects in Belgrave for women to keep active – this is a positive step)*
- Many people have missed the interaction and social element during the pandemic.
- That we need more fitness leaders and fitness instructors to do outreach work e.g. with community centres, places of worship etc. and possibly offer home visits.

7.18. Members identified these recommendations:

- We need more fitness instructors and activities leaders and mentors to do outreach work e.g. with community centres, places of worship, health centre hubs and public places.
Sport England research shows that making sport the ‘norm’ for women relies on local women of all ages, sizes and faiths, becoming active, celebrating it and encouraging other to join in. Therefore by taking an activity into the community, both physically through outdoor sessions or venues in new and unexpected places can attract new circles of women.
- A need for new approaches to attract families and friends groups to participate in activities together.
The Health & Wellbeing Survey in Leicester shows that there is a lack of suitable, structured activity provision for families to exercise together, whilst parks and open spaces are available for informal family friendly activity our leisure centres and sports clubs often offer adult and child physical activity sessions separately..
- Task group members felt that they had a good insight and heard valuable evidence from these organisations. These organisations were all very committed to helping women in the city and welcomed being involved in providing evidence. Their good practice, approaches and ideas should be taken into account by sports and physical activities providers in the city.
- Good practice initiative - holding an open day event inviting members and non-members, offering a variety of taster fitness sessions and combining this with a health promotion session e.g. mental health and wellbeing talk with Q&A. *(The fitness factory gym in Leicester said events like this are successful and attracts many local women – plus existing members bring along families and friends).*
- Generally, we also need more engagement with other groups of women across the city e.g. single parents, and with carers, women with disabilities

and family carers too. *Suggested that sub-groups be formed, as it is very important to reflect on this.*

- Task group heard valuable evidence from a handful of organisations, however many more organisations (offering paid for activities and non-paid free activities) exist across the city e.g. community-based, grassroots sports and informal groups. *Suggest making use of existing groups and networks (community-up approach), to identify what activities are available within neighbourhoods as this would provide more choices for women to participate; more scope for joint-up working; scope for learning from each other and scope for accessing funding sources.*

7.19. The task group heard evidence from Transport Strategy, Leicester City Council (relies on external funding for schemes)

7.20. Active Travel Neighbourhoods Team mainly delivers behavioural change initiatives to encourage sustainable travel in **businesses, schools and the **community**. Recently the team has also been delivering the **Safer Streets Healthier Neighbourhoods programme**.**

Examples of work carried out:

- We lead on activities for active travel in the city. We provide advice and services (dipping in and out) with working with all council departments, including sports and leisure centres, and public health services to advise on travel plans and transport needs.
- We have an active travel neighbourhoods team who lead on active travel plans, walking and cycling schemes and initiatives in the city to encourage people, including women to exercise and enjoy the outdoors.
- Women in the city are involved in many different daily journeys in their local areas e.g. school runs, going to local shops, so it's a case of changing mind-sets to walk or cycle for better health.
- We are trying to make cycling more appealing in terms of clothing e.g. cyclewear that is more trendy, comfortable and appropriate for all women (*there is more than lycrawear out there!*).
- We find that girls in their younger and teenage years tend to cycle and play sports more, but this reduces as they move into adulthood.
(*Schools Sports Partnership work identifies women and girls as a priority area, particularly secondary age girls who are more likely to drop out of formal sporting opportunities*).
- We do a lot of work with schools in the city to promote cycling and walking.
- We work with businesses, universities, hospitals etc... in the city to promote active travel plans for employees, this includes women employees.
- We do lots of community engagement work which benefits women in the city, e.g. cycle training programme based as Cossington Recreation Ground; Walk Leicester Forum – meeting of all organisations within Leicester that deliver some sort of walking activity.

- Community Cycling Project – E-bike initiative to encourage South Asian communities in Leicester to think about keeping active and moving in different ways. This initiative was really popular, and we identified that women over the age of 55 years in particular wanted more cycle training to increase their confidence in using a cycle again.
- New projects planned – weekly wellbeing walks in Belgrave. A good walk can do wonders for your mental wellbeing. Also to encourage more women to consider taking up cycling to increase their fitness and keep active in a green way.
- British Cycling has launched its first ever Women and Girls' Club Toolkit: this contains advice, tips and best-practice examples to make cycling appealing to females (*publicised on Active Together website*).

7.21. The task group survey question asked women '*how often do you participate in recreational, non-paid physical activity per week re: Cycle to work or school?*' Out of 178 responses:

- 123 women said never,
- 39 said 1-3 times a week, and
- 9 said 4-6 times a week.

7.22. **Good practice example:** A focus on having fun and building confidence has been effective in breaking down the barriers to cycling in hard-to-reach communities in Hackney. Family cycle clubs were set up so the whole family could learn to cycle (using pool bikes) in a relaxed informal environment. All who completed the course received a free (recycled) bike and lock.

7.23. Recommendations identified by the task group:

- A need to educate and motivate women to include exercise as part of their daily lives would be a more realistic way to target more women to increase activity. *Women in the city are involved in many different daily journeys in their local areas e.g. school runs, walking to local shops, so it's a case of changing mind-sets to walk or cycle for better health.*
- To encourage and support businesses, universities, hospitals etc... in the city to promote active travel plans for employees, and to also promote sports and physical exercise activities available in the city to benefit health and wellbeing for women employees.
- We need to use local people as ambassadors and community champions to support and empower women to be the best possible version of themselves. *Active Together have community champions. For example: Zee from Zfit is one of their best examples who runs her own ladies only Zumba, Hiit and Boxercise classes at venues across Leicester all of which aim to empower women.*

- 7.24.** The task group were aware of the steps taken by sports and public health services to address many barriers identified by women and accept that even if provision is available for people to be active, then that doesn't always translate to people becoming active. Often people's motivations and readiness to change can stop people from using sports and leisure facilities / services. The task group recognised that the service is progressing with different approaches to marketing as a positive step in the right direction.

Active Leicester has learnt a lot over recent years on how to balance a universal sport and physical activity offer, with a targeted approach to its services. It is a tricky balance to achieve. However, the scope and spread of dedicated female sessions, in centres with most demand, have gone part of the way to meet this need. Other targeted approaches include:

- More work was being undertaken to try and encourage women to participate at an earlier age, with female entry ages being low in comparison to male.
- Women-only sessions are often offered due to the cultural diversity of Leicester, and these are particularly well-attended.
- The centres also provide opportunities for third parties to undertake activity – such as swimming and badminton clubs.
- An online programme of activity was launched during the pandemic, but this ceased due to generally low uptake.

- 7.25.** Public Health services is fully aware of the barriers that many residents face to being physically active and as a result have developed more focus on encouraging people to be active through increased daily activity such as active travel, walking, cycling, scooting to school or work for example. Activity in parks and open spaces such as play with children and use of outdoor gyms.

7.26. Partnership working with Leicester City Council was praised by sports clubs, partners and universities who contributed to this review.

Evidence captured by the task group:

- Partnership working initiative, the student women's basketball team at De Montfort University currently benefit from specialist coaching from the Leicester Riders Club and also play their home British University and College Sports (BUCS) league and cup fixtures at Leicester Riders impressive 2,500-seat Leicester Sports Arena.
- Leicester Hockey Club - Students are benefiting in Leicester with experiences in everything from umpiring to media work and administration to help their CVs stand out and prepare them for the world of work.

- The University of Leicester and Sporting Equals have signed a strategic partnership to promote ethnic diversity (includes BME women) across sport and physical activity to address the lack of diversity amongst sports leaders, sport governing bodies, and leadership roles.
- The Universities said further work is required to train up women coaches, women mentors, and women leaders within sports.
- The Universities reported that ‘freshers week’ is an excellent time to promote and provide information to female students relating to sports and physical activities and healthy living.
- **Leicester Tigers with their Project Rugby Asian** sports foundations project to actively support Asian women into Rugby.
- **LCitC Active Women Project** – 5-year project focussing on women between the ages of 18-49 in the Wycliffe ward area. The project is aimed at getting women from the local community engaged in some form of physical activity. The project has currently engaged with 1305 participants and offers 13 sessions per week.
- **Netball East Midlands: Leicester** – Women and Girls receive coaching on game play (part of Grassroots Netball initiative). The Netball Club identified that they need to be involved in partnership working in the city on par with other clubs e.g. Leicester City Football Club and the Tigers Rugby Club
- **Leicester Tigers Foundation Women and Girls Programme** – project aimed at offering women’s only rugby sessions in the city and utilising the recent success of the Red Roses to inspire women to get involved. Leicester Tigers have also recently set up a women’s team to again create role models from our community to inspire other women to become active.
- **Leicestershire CCC Community Women and Girls** – A dedicated women and girls’ officer is in post to develop opportunities for women to get active and involved within cricket from a young age. This includes the women’s cricket league which is played in the summer.
(The cricket club identified that there is a lack of cricket facilities e.g.need to create a cricket friendly environment for women and need role models).

- **National Governing Bodies of sport (NGB's)**- The majority of NGB's follows Sport England's ten-year strategy of 'Uniting the Movement'. This strategy aims to transform communities and lives through the power of sport and physical activity. Removing barriers to participation are a key theme of their strategy. An example of this in practice is through the Leicestershire and Rutland County FA, who have KPIs for the number of female players (4,982 players by June 2024) playing the game across Leicestershire and Rutland. Players can come from affiliated team or recreational groups. Female players are underrepresented across the county and city when compared to census data, so the County FA are working to give opportunities to everyone across Leicester. These ambitions will be replicated across the wealth of NGB's operating in the city. Active Leicester supports their work.

- **PlayZone Initiative** - The PlayZone programme is currently being developed and finalised, but this is a programme with the Football Foundation that will see ballcourts across the city developed into state of the art, attractive facilities aimed at certain priority groups, one of which is Women and Girls. The courts will be bookable and will have several programmed sessions each week purely for women and girls. The courts aim to be accessible, attractive, well-lit and safe spaces to encourage women to attend and participate.

- **Wesley Hall Community Centre** – Wesley Hall offers several opportunities for women within their local community. They are seen as a trusted provider within their community and thus attract and encourage women to attend their sessions. Some examples of the opportunities offered are Women aerobic and weight management, sewing classes, yoga classes, slimming world, and Zumba classes.

- **Active Together Partnership** – Active Together link into some of the national campaigns for example 'This Girl Can' and at times offer similar initiatives. An example is in March whereby they offer 'Lets get Moving This March' which is a programme that allows women to have a go at multiple activities from their own homes, for example Zumba, Bhangra, Nordic Walking. Active Together also have community champions. Zee from Zfit is one of their best examples who runs her own ladies only Zumba, Hiit and Boxercise classes at venues across Leicester all of which aim to empower women to be the best possible version of themselves www.active-together.org

7.27. Recommendations identified by the task group:
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- Need to reach out to new students in the city e.g. universities, to promote sports and physical activities and healthy living. *'Freshers week' for students is an excellent time to connect with female students to promote what is available in the city.*
- More work needs to be done to train and attract more female coaches, mentors and leaders in sports.
- Leicestershire County Cricket Club identified that there is a lack of cricket facilities. *For example need to create a cricket friendly environment for women and need role models.*
- Women need to be involved in sports governing bodies and community leaders, to influence decision-making. Women remain less represented in leadership and coaching roles, especially BME women. *Women remain less represented in leadership and coaching roles and face continued challenges in terms of equal pay and coverage in the media.*
- Members praised Active Leicester, Active Together and partners as they have the knowledge and expertise to support and develop new initiatives. *Many smaller community-based organisations are well placed in the hub of residential areas and more accessible for women but some lack the expertise and resources to develop new initiatives and access funding.*

7.28. The different methods used to offer sports and physical activities, e.g. in-person, digital online

7.29. Benefits of Social Media platform – It's highly recommended that all sports and physical activities providers has a presence on social media platforms. Doing so, will widen your reach to a range of demographics. Social media can be used to highlight any trials you may be offering. Moreover, with social media's ability to host visual content – it can be used to showcase your staff, venue and facilities. It also provides greater exposure for any offers, discounts or deal you may be offering. Social media is also a great medium for prospective members to contact you with any query's or provide valuable feedback to improve your sports club/venue. Not to mention, visitors or permanent members can use social media to post reviews of the club and or classes and facilities, helping to attractive new customers.

7.30. Task group evidence shows:

- a) It was felt that word of mouth is ultimately the most powerful method of communication.

'Active Leicester service finds that word of mouth is a more powerful form of promotion. Therefore, we aim to deliver the right product with excellent

customer service to ensure women that do use our services are telling their friends and family’.

- b) The service carefully considers the appropriate use of imagery as part of marketing campaigns.
- c) Users from certain centres (such as Spence Street) did not find out about opportunities online – in comparison with users at other centres. In these case, greater outreach is required. (recommendation)
- d) Most residents would try a fitness tracker or Health App if recommended by a health professional (*recommendation – promote women to use fitness tracker or health app*).
- e) It was felt that the service could do more to promote mental health benefits from participating in sport as part of marketing strategies (recommendation)

7.40. According to Sports England research: *Access to 24/7 online booking enables sports facilities to be available at all times. When the [booking process has been simplified and made accessible](#), sports facilities must look to reduce and remove the practical barriers that prevent women's participation in sport.* Sports facilities can encourage women to become more active. <https://pitchbooking.com/blog/increasing-female-women-activity-levels-sports-facilities> Pitch booking can help make this a reality by streamlining the booking process and bringing online visibility to facilities across the country.

7.41. Social media campaign to drive higher female attendance at organised activities by ‘This Girl Can’ Sport England – good practice example: this is a behaviour change campaign in response to the long-standing sport and physical activity gender gap in England. One key means of mobilising more women to organised activity is to refine the marketing drive and improve the “on the ground” experience. The campaign, which combines social media, a TV commercial and poster advertising, is the brainchild of Sport England, and aims to ‘inspire women to wiggle, jiggle, move and prove that judgement is a barrier that can be overcome’. [This Girl Can](#)

7.42. Good practice example of Live Podcasting - posts to follow Summayas experience and journey re: Asian women learning to swim. Summaya Mughal, a Nottingham born, Leicester Radio presenter and journalist, has too echoed these statements in her latest documentary ‘Brown Gal can’t Swim.’

Summaya’s 6-part, podcast in which she confronts the cultural barriers that many Pakistani Muslim women face when wanting to swim- such as disagreements with family members, risking criticism from their community over breaking social conventions, and worrying about what to wear in the pool that will fall in line with Islamic expectations around female modesty.

The podcast is an intimate view of Summaya’s journey, where she aims to break down misconceptions about swimming, and encourage members of our

South Asian communities to take the plunge and learn to swim. She even gets her dad involved - something she would never have imagined when she was younger.



The link to view the podcast can be found here:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0ctzqft>

"I've spent over 20 years embarrassed about not having a skill it feels like kids have, especially when it's something that could save your life. I'm terrified of the deep-end - so we'll start there."

7.43. Good practice example: Poster and Video 'Leicester Swim' marketing campaign to increase casual swimming:

Leicester City council marketing for adult swimming lessons is mainly through word of mouth with some use of social media. In 2017, the service was awarded a funding grant from Sport England to explore behaviour change marketing techniques in increase casual swimming. The service trialled behaviour change marketing techniques to motivate people to use the service. For example, rather than selling the gym membership we would promote the benefits of being active and how being fitter and healthier can help them play with their children, feel healthier. These techniques have been adopted and now feature in our annual marketing programme.

➤ **Benefits of swimming for female adults: promotion video**

<https://vimeo.com/290929937/603a1614e9>

The swim pilot also taught the service that providing lessons is just part of the journey of adults learning to swim. Similar to the Swim England survey and Summaya's experience.

7.44 BME women swimming good practice example:

New group 'Afro Aquatics', Black women in Leicester getting into Swimming: A competitive swimmer and instructor who recognised the barriers faced by ethnic minorities when it comes to learning how to swim is making waves in Leicester by getting the the **black community** into swimming. As someone who has devoted a majority of her life to the sport, Katrice Rodrigues identified the changes that needed to be made in the black community, and **Afro Aquatics** was born.

The Aquatics group only launched in 2022, but already has had a massive impact. They are currently in their second term meeting weekly at Winstanley School in **Braunstone**. Founder Katrice used her expertise to get the group off the ground. [Swim instructor creates group empowering Black communities to swim - Leicestershire Live \(leicesterm Mercury.co.uk\)](#)

- 7.45. Members of the commission heard evidence relating to Swim England data and Swim Leicester to better understand participation of women from BME backgrounds.**
- 7.46.** Swim England launched a campaign called ‘England Swims’ specifically aimed at finding out barriers that prevent ethnically diverse communities from accessing water-based activities. The survey shows: that there is a clear disparity of swimming abilities when analysing by ethnicity. 14% of White Communities cannot swim 25m, in comparison to 49% of ethnically diverse communities. This disparity is further exemplified by gender differences. Females of all ethnicities are less likely to be able to swim 25m. Muslim women were most likely to view swimming as inaccessible. Modesty, and feeling comfortable in swimwear and feeling comfortable with the changing arrangement were also important points raised.
- 7.47.** Although in Leicester 71% of adults’ swimming lessons are female (approx. 170), and 72% are from ethnically diverse communities (approx.172 out of 240). The highest number of women participates are at the Evington, Spence Street and Cossington centres.
- 7.48. Good practice example for free /low-cost activity session:** *The Let's Get Moving for Less* page includes a range of ideas on how to be active, as well as a whole host of free/low-cost activity sessions taking place within Leicester and Leicestershire, enabling you to still feel the benefits of being active throughout this difficult time. Navigating your way through the page is easy. Simply click on your district name at the top and view all the different opportunities that your locality has to offer. To view all the activities in one place, visit the [Let's Get Moving for Less directory](#).
- #LetsGetMovingLLR for less! More information:** <https://www.active-together.org/letsgetmovingforless>
- 7.49.** Since the pandemic began (with lock down restrictions) many more sports and activity providers diverted to offering more online sessions e.g. dance, exercise, yoga, body fitness etc. There has been a huge increase of women participating in activities with this method preferred as it enables them to participate within their own homes and allows them to manage family, childcare, work and other commitments more easily.
- 7.50.** Task group survey question: asked women if they participate in non-paid activity re: Home workout (online or on your own)
- Responses: those that do home workout online = 47 (out of 169), in comparison to those that do home workout on their own = 135 (out of 179)
- 7.51.** **‘Blazefit’ fitness, Leicester – example of providing live streamed workouts, dance and wellness classes, which has become more popular during the pandemic.** We deliver enjoyable and dynamic online classes right in your home. Increase in the number of women subscribing to join streamed sessions during the pandemic. We use social media to promote

our classes. We offer taster sessions and provide sessions for older women e.g. gentle exercise.

- 7.52. Zfit local fitness, Leicester** – Run by Zee who is currently an Active Together Champion and community ambassador provides Zumba toning, HIIT and boxercise classes throughout venues in Leicester. Ladies only sessions. Fun, friendly party atmosphere for all abilities aged 16-86. Aiming to empower women to be the best version of themselves through fitness.
- 7.53.** *Both of these groups support and promotes Active Together LLR activities and events through their website, which is very positive, as the activities and opportunities offered by Active Together LLR reach a wider audience.*
- 7.54. Good practice example for BME participation: The trail blazer: the rewards of setting up a walking group** - Wanting to stride out into the countryside with like-minded people, our writer established Black Girls Hike in 2019 and has never looked back. “I became a walking group leader by chance. In 2019, I was on a train going through the Peak District, and I watched all these hikers getting on and off. I wanted to do something new for my wellbeing, so I set up a [Black Girls Hike instagram](#) page a few days later. I didn’t want to go by myself and I wanted to feel safe and supported so I set up a group for black women”



<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2022/nov/01/black-girls-hike-rewards-of-walking-group>

- 7.55. Walk Together initiative** - During the pandemic, outdoor walks in local areas and local parks have become more popular as a no-cost exercise activity. Walk Together is a physical activity initiative offering a weekly programme of free, sociable and accessible group walks within Leicestershire led by trained volunteer walk leaders. Walk Together is coordinated, developed and delivered via a partnership of Leicestershire Local Authorities and Active Together. <https://www.active-together.org/sports/walking>
- 7.56.** Task group question asked women: do you participate in non-paid free organised activities re: Parkrun, informal sports groups etc. Responses show that out of 174 women, 140 said they never participate, and 33 said they do participate 1-3 times a week.
- 7.57. Good practice example of Face-to-Face engagement with women: Active Leicester carried out this work with young mums in Wycliffe and Eyres Monsell wards in Leicester**

Good practice examples for Active Leicester re: engaging with young mums in Wycliffe and Eyres Monsell wards

Example interventions

Work with the mums attending an established 'stay and play' sessions in the community of interest. Find out what sorts of physical activities they might like to do during the session with their children. Options could include:

- Training for staff so they can deliver short 10 minute bursts of activity specifically targeted at encouraging the mums to get involved.
- Providing an instructor to join the stay and play session on a regular basis to lead activity sessions for the mums and their children.
- Providing activity cards and resources for activities which mums and children can do together.

Hosting a family fun day in the local park or green space:

- Work with local families to decided what this looks like, e.g. the location, date, time and activities to run.
- Run a variety of sport and physical activities which are: short, instructor-led, of low / medium intensity and in which young mums are activity encouraged to participate in with their children. The activities may even build in intensity from session-to-session.
- Work with other community and health providers to provide advice and information on parenting, health and fitness in to these sessions.

By working with the young mums to develop the activity session, the sessions are more likely to be strong in all the intervention elements.

While mums wanted activities they could do with their children, one of their main motivators for participating in different activities was the chance to socialise with friends and meet other young mums.

That's the biggest thing, and I like to meet, like, the mums that I've made friends with. That's the only time I would see them because I come to the mamas, baby thing sometimes, but it's more, like, getting them up, because otherwise I wouldn't get up because I'm pretty much a homebody. – Wycliffe participant

Practitioners also highlighted the important role that activities can play in building social networks for young mums.

7.58. Communicating the strong links of health and wellbeing to encourage more women to participate

7.59. The nhs.uk website communicates the benefits of exercise with this powerful message that does draw people in and think more seriously about their health:

Step right up! It's the miracle cure we've all been waiting for. It can reduce your risk of major illnesses, such as coronary heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and cancer and low your risk of early death by up to 30%. It's free and easy to take, has an immediate effect and you don't need a GP to get some. ***Its name? Exercise.***

The Department of Health and Social Care website states that ***inactivity is a "silent killer"***.

The NHS website offers tips and advice for low intensity exercises that can be done at home:

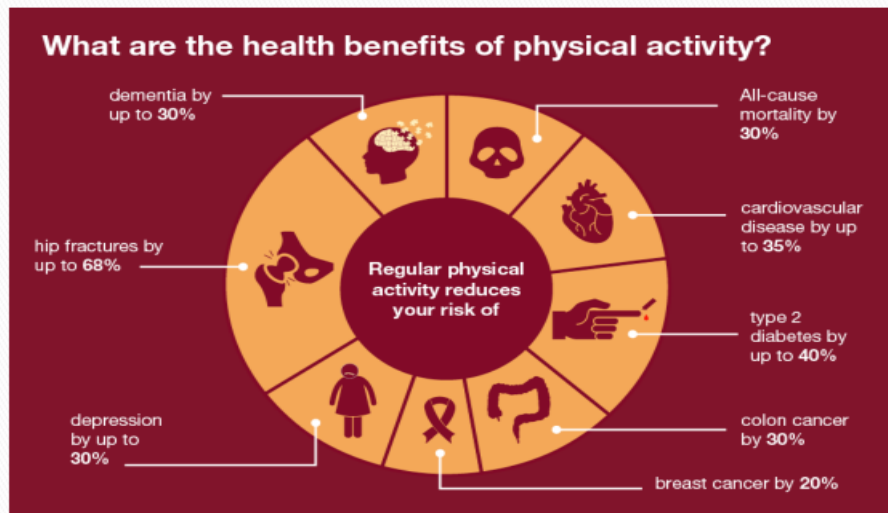
- **Get moving around the home** – advice on ways you can be active without leaving the house *e.g. chair exercises, using the stairs, using tins of beans as weights, dancing to the radio in the kitchen while the pasta is cooking.*

7.60. The NHS website promotes and gives advice on many different ways to keeping active, increasingly like many organisations promoting keeping active using online videos, health apps, online training instructors and classes.

- **'Couch to Fitness – Get Fit For Free'**, promoted as a home-based activity – a free and flexible at-home online exercise plan for beginners. This is a partnership initiative with locals councils and local parks.

7.61. Being active provides numerous physical benefits. Regular exercise can help maintain healthy bone and muscle mass. Exercise also helps people maintain a healthy weight. Being active also has massive mental health and wellbeing benefits, especially when done outdoors, people who are active have a 30% Lower risk of developing depression.

7.62. What are the health benefits of physical activity? – Diagram to show this



- 1) Many women in midlife are missing out on the social psychological and physical health benefits of being active.
- 2) 33% of women aged 41 to 60 are not getting the recommended amount of exercise, e.g. can experience health issues, mood swings, anxiety, depression, poor sleep, embarrassment etc..
- 3) The report on 'Inspiring women to be active during midlife and menopause', by Women in Sport, recommends 5 principles for inactive women, especially those who have fallen out of exercise: 1. endless possibilities, 2. judgement-free zone, 3. support network, 4. expand the image of what sport means, 5. make it relevant.

7.63. 'Fit for the Future: The Health Value of Wellbeing and Leisure Services' – good practice example from Leicestershire and Rutland working in partnership

Re: Overview of Publicly Funded Community Engagement Activities

7.64. Over time, publicly funded leisure services have continued to extend their role in relation to general wellbeing and not just fitness. This has involved diversifying their responsibility within the community and being at the forefront of driving community engagement. The opportunities are manifold and largely reflect expressed local community needs which includes linking up with or leading new community initiatives as part of innovative partnerships with Public Health, CCGs, and Active Partnership with the shared goal of levelling up social inequalities that exists across various regions. Beyond providing access to physical activity infrastructure such as gyms and swimming pools, publicly funded leisure services, working collaboratively with system partners has a far-reaching impact in driving community engagement with a unique advantage of influencing the wider

determinants of health. The examples below highlight some community engagement activities



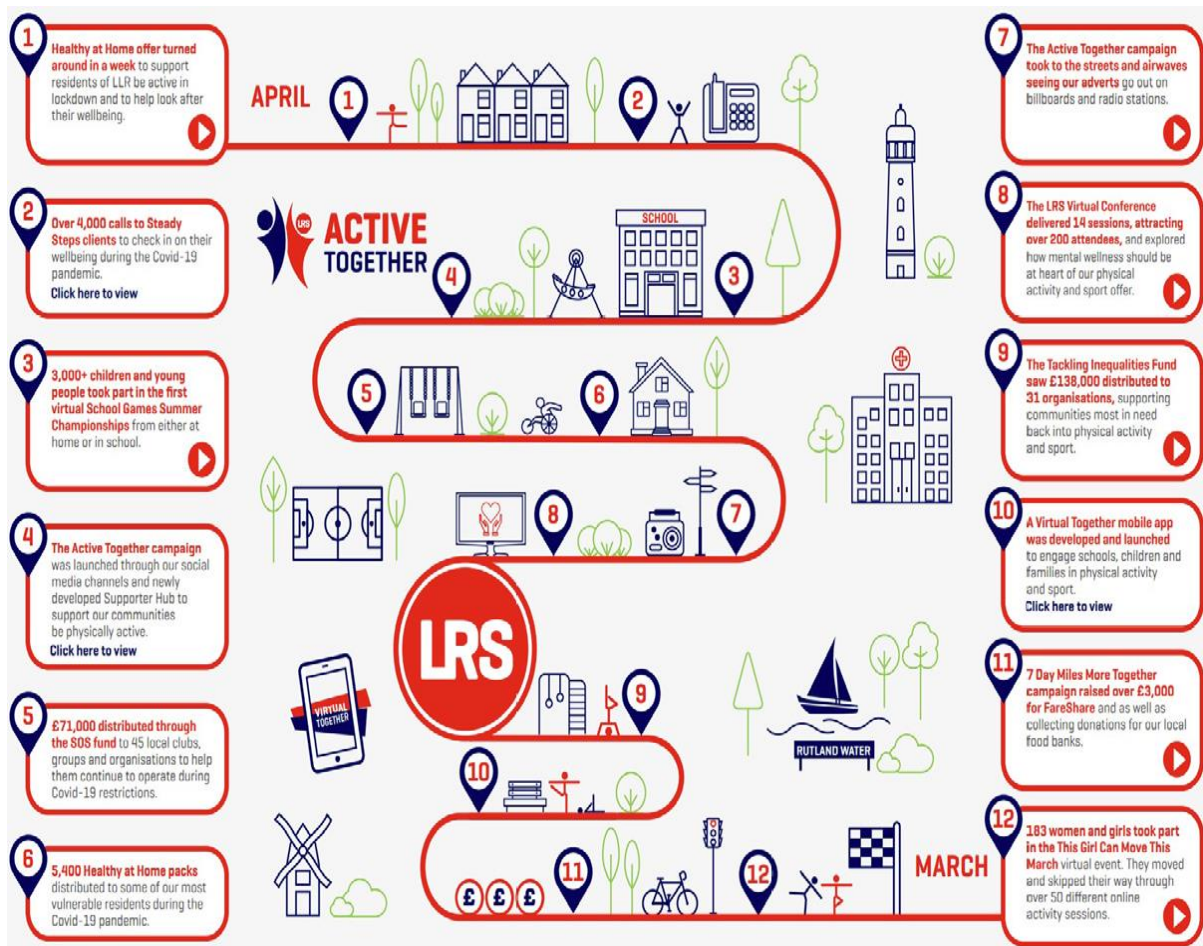
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7.65. The Leicestershire and Rutland⁹ Annual Review 2020/21 on physical activity and sport shows the impact of local authorities working cohesively and collectively with key partners to stimulate innovation and local delivery across its region for a twelve-month period.

Community engagement included activities targeted at young people (i.e., virtual school sport and physical activity), activities for women and girls (i.e., 'Move this March') with its own dedicated hashtag - #Thisgirlcan – with a dedicated Facebook group providing encouragement and support. There was also the launch of the LRS Active Together campaign to raise awareness of physical activity.

7.66.

Diagram showing 12 months of impact across Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland



The infographic above provides a comprehensive picture and highlights key achievements that the local authority working with system partners has helped shape and deliver (see diagram above)

7.77. Public health services provide support and funding to projects in the city to encourage women and girls to participate, some examples:

- a) Leicester City in the Community ran a premier league girls football programme from 2017 that supported over 280 girls to play football.
- b) Public health provides the local schools sports partnership now known as Inspire Together with enhanced funding to ensure a more holistic offer of health, wellbeing and sports is offered to schools in the city. Part of the funding arrangements identifies women and girls as a priority area, particularly secondary age girls who are more likely to drop out of formal sporting opportunities.
- c) Commissioned **'Beat the Street' in 2021, a city-wide game aimed to encourage physical activity amongst families.** The game gave points for distances walked and primary engagement was via primary schools. The children were motivated to gain points for their school to help them win prizes, this results in many children walking, cycling and scooting with their family both to and from school and also in the evenings and weekends. **Over 40,000 people played the 6-week game and saw 68% of inactive adults become active with a 10% increase in children active daily. 54% of participants were female.**

Targeted programmes (Older age, Ethnicity etc)

- d) Whilst Public health do not directly commission or deliver targeted physical activity we do support partners to deliver targeted projects such as Leicester Tigers with their Project Rugby Asian sports foundations project to actively support Asian women into rugby. We did this by supporting the club to directly target health professionals PE/School Sport & PA. Inspire Together also developed a mini-whispa concept to KS2 girls to provide specific provision of non-traditional activities to encourage girls to participate in PE/School Sport and the wider benefits this brings – leadership, employability, develop self-esteem = lifelong participation.

7.78. Public Health services is fully aware of the barriers that many residents face in being physically active and as a result has developed more focus on encouraging people to be active through increased daily activity such as active travel, walking, cycling, scooting to school or work for example.

Previous research in Leicester City 'Physical Activity and Sports Insight: Young Mums' states: *One group of women in Wycliffe had recently participated in a health education class hosted by their local community centre. They stated they were now more conscious about trying to walk quickly to raise their breathing rate as this was important for their health. However, it was difficult to always walk quickly if they had a child with them.*

7.79. Recommendations identified by the task group:

- 1) What is needed across the city (from all sectors) is powerful messaging, education and making it real to connect with women about the health benefits to physical activities and sports. Members felt that we could do more to promote mental health benefits from participating in exercise as part of marketing strategies.
- 2) Most resident would try a fitness tracker or health app if recommended by a health professional. Maybe this can be piloted for women who are interested.

7.80. Activity in parks and open spaces such as play with children and use of outdoor gyms. Gardening has become more prominent as a way of increasing physical activity and more importantly post covid as a way of reducing social isolation and improving mental health.

7.81. By encouraging daily activity that can be incorporated into daily lives is more achievable and sustainable than encouraging structured sport or exercise. Increases in daily activity can often be the gateway into someone participating in formal sport and exercise.

7.82. LOOKING FORWARD: What else can be done in Leicester to increase women's participation that is not currently offered?

'Change the offer to suit women - don't expect women to change to fit sport and exercise' (Sport England).

- a) Active Together Leicestershire working on expanding women's sports area and training more women's coaches and referees.
- b) Supporting women for behaviour change, upskilling and empowering to enable togetherness as this will then help to enable their children.
- c) We all come together in Leicester for sports and partnership working, but 'netball' should be included too.
- d) A facilitator (not a coach) of sports and activities needs to better understand what individuals need and help them to participate.

- e) Women need to be involved in sports governing bodies, and community leaders, to influence decision-making. Women remain less represented in leadership and coaching roles and face continued challenges in terms of equal pay and coverage in media.
- f) Gaps exist around community champions, ambassadors and mentors
- g) Videos and real stories are powerful to empower and influence women. Inspiring women with videos and real stories they can relate to can help to encourage participation.
- h) Increasing use of women role models and also sports women makes it more real, inspiring and interesting and women can relate to this in a positive way.

Good practice example:

*A mural of England women's rugby star, Emily Scarratt MBE, has been painted in Leicester to celebrate her achievements and her role in establishing the England Rugby women's team. **Emily, who was born and raised in Leicester, has gone on to be England's record point scorer and is currently Vice-Captain of the national team; she was awarded an MBE in 2021 for her service to the Rugby union.***

Emily was supported by Active Together's GO GOLD Funding Programme (now Team Leicestershire Talent), for a number of years and has previously expressed her thanks saying "I was extremely fortunate to have been helped during my development through the GO GOLD Funding Programme. It provided valuable funds that enabled me to use the best training facilities and equipment to continue to push on and improve".

- i) How you engage with women is key. Invite women for taster sessions and let them experience the activity. Create an environment where women feel comfortable, safe, valued and involved.
- j) For some women it is about getting away from family and into an activity (escapism). So the activity needs to be enjoyable. Create new ways that focus on health fitness and fun. Create new ways to educate, develop skills and progress women.
- k) For some women it's about socialness and togetherness, so come to an activity to enjoy the experience, for example previous research in Leicester City found:

While mums wanted activities they could do with their children, one of their main motivators for participating in different activities was the chance to socialise with friends and meet other young mums. "That's the biggest thing, and I like to meet,

like, the mums that I've made friends with. That's the only time I would see them because I come to the mamas, baby thing sometimes" - participant from Wycliffe ward, Leicester City.

(Practitioners also highlighted the important role that activities can play in building social networks for young mums).

Together with fitness and activities more attractive and for some women there is also greater safety in numbers. Socialising with friends is rewarding and bonding becomes a strong external motivator.

- Engagement with the local environment we are encouraging people to use our parks, open spaces, leisure centres and waterways to support their mental health and wellbeing, by promoting outdoor gyms and encouraging walking and cycling.
- Increasing the number of residents taking part in physical activity, through initiatives like Active Leicester and by working in partnership with organisations and communities, particularly those who are currently inactive.
- Supporting healthy ageing e.g. support for informal carers to improve their own physical and mental health and wellbeing by using cultural and community resources; and encourage older people to access leisure and cultural spaces in their local communities to overcome social isolation and improve mental and physical health.

7.83. A new five-year strategy is being developed to tackle the high levels of inactivity in the city. The strategy, called 'Turning the Tide on Inactivity' is due to launch in the New Year and will be a step change from previous strategies, as it will focus on the inactive. Women and Girls feature, as a priority group, as we know they participate less than their male counterparts in the city. We hope that the strategy will shine a light on the priority groups and align organisations work themes and resources to where it is most needed.

7.84. Active Leicester will also be piloting an approach in one of its centres to become a health and wellbeing hub. We know that just 26% of city residents utilise a local leisure centre. Therefore, there is far more that the service needs to do to encourage a wider audience to use the service. The learning from this pilot we hope to rollout across the service.

The pilot will focus on the following objectives:

1. Increase physical activity rates and reduce inactivity rates, in and around the pilot location. Location defined as a 20-minute walk to the centre.

2. Better skilled and empathetic workforce, to support behaviour change for inactive residents.
3. Improved reach, systems, processes, and programmes that support a customer's journey to being active.
4. Improve collaboration with internal and external partners.

8. Women in Sport Review – Supporting Research

Active Lives Adult Survey 2020 – 2021 [PowerPoint Presentation \(sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com\)](https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com)

Active Lives Children and Young People Survey 2020 – 2021 [PowerPoint Presentation \(sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com\)](https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com)

This Girl Can Campaign Summary [Campaign-Summary.pdf \(sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com\)](https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com)

Go Where Women Are Insight [PowerPoint Presentation \(sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com\)](https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com)

[PowerPoint Presentation \(sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com\)](https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com) – Barriers

[PowerPoint Presentation \(sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com\)](https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com) - Motivations

LLEP Area Profile [LLEP-Area-Profile-Leicester.pdf](https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com)

Active Together Physical Activity and Wellbeing Resident Survey 2021: Least Active Summary Report [Physical Activity and Wellbeing Resident Survey 2021: Least Active Summary Report | Active Together \(active-together.org\)](https://active-together.org)

Women's Sporting Journeys: How to keep women engaged in sport throughout their lives [Women's Sporting Journeys: How to keep women engaged in sport throughout their lives – London Sport Insight Portal](https://london.sportinsightportal.com) – Will need to be downloaded

Teenage Girls in Lockdown Infographic [WIS TDA33909 Infographic Teenagers-in-Lockdown-003 \(womeninsport.org\)](https://womeninsport.org)

Additional Adjustable Online Data [Active Lives | Results \(sportengland.org\)](https://sportengland.org)

[Physical Activity - Data - PHE](https://sportengland.org)

[Area reports | Sport England](https://sportengland.org)

9. Appendices:

App A.: Task Group Survey responses

App B: Active Leicester: Women in Sport Current Best Practice

App C: Active Leicester: Local Context and Future Vision

10. Contacts

Councillor Elaine Halford,
Chair of the task group
Email: Leicester City Council
<https://www.leicester.gov.uk/>

Anita Patel, Scrutiny Policy Officer
Email: Anita.Patel@leicester.gov.uk

11. Financial, Legal and Other Implications

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Rohit Rughani, Principal Accountant

Legal Implications

There are no direct legal implications arising from these recommendations, but legal advice should be sought if future decisions are to be taken that affect operational practice.

Kevin Carter, Head of Law - Commercial, Property & Planning

Equality Implications

All public bodies must comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) (Equality Act 2010) by paying due regard, when carrying out their functions, to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. In doing so, they must consider the possible impact on those who are likely to be affected by the recommendation and their protected characteristics.

This report highlights several equalities issues particularly related to the protected characteristic of 'sex' in relation to providing sport and physical activities for women in the city. The recommendations in the report may lead to positive outcomes for women and people of all protected characteristics if proposals are developed. There does need to be greater consideration given to the impacts on women that might share some of the other protected characteristics and how they may need to be engaged with differently, for example, women with a disability may not be able to partake in 'conventional' physical exercise and engagement for women of different races and religions may also need to be different to encourage participation.

Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

Kalvaran Sandhu, Equalities Manager, Ext 37 6344

Climate change implications

There are no Climate Emergency implications arising from this report.

'Executive Response to Scrutiny' template

The executive will respond to the next scrutiny meeting after a review report has been presented with the table below updated as part of that response.

Scrutiny Recommendation	Executive Decision	Progress/Action	Timescales