

Northumberland Health & Wellbeing Board

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Title of Report: Northumberland Physical Activity Strategy Update

Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to share an update on the progress of the [Northumberland Physical Activity Strategy](#), which was officially launched at Linden Hall on 22nd January 2020.

This will include a brief overview, providing the context on the need to develop a systems leadership approach to tackle the wider health & wellbeing issues associated with rising physical inactivity levels, which have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 Pandemic. This will reflect a need to follow the established concept of 'proportionate universalism', ensuring a balance between targeted and universal provision appropriate to the level of need.

This report will also showcase examples of the excellent collaborative work that is ongoing in Northumberland to implement this long-term strategy, through co-designed interventions that target some of our most vulnerable groups throughout the county.

The Impact of COVID-19

The past 12 months and the pandemic has shaken things up for everyone and has had an unprecedented impact on our ability to keep active, contributing to the widening health inequalities gap.

Appendix 1 summarises Sport England's Active Lives annual survey results for adults aged 16+ through the pandemic across Northumberland and Tyne & Wear. Some of the key findings include:

- Nationally, men are still more active than women.
- People with a disability or a long-term condition are less likely to be physically active.

- Adults in routine/semi-routine jobs and those who are long-term unemployed or have never worked (NS – SEC 6-8) are least likely to be physically active.

Wider sector intelligence built a picture that clearly evidenced certain elements of our society were suffering more from the impact of the disease, namely:

- People from Lower Socio-Economic Groups;
- Ethnically diverse communities;
- Disabled People; and
- People with Long-Term Health Conditions (LTC)

Northumberland County Council have identified several further ongoing impacts and challenges relating to the pandemic and pandemic recovery, which adds to the complexity associated with addressing physical inactivity. This includes:

- An impact on tourism and hospitality reducing the availability of seasonal employment.
- Increased unemployment due to cessation and wind-down of furlough
- Impacts on community activity / events increasing loneliness and isolation (especially in older adults)
- Rising obesity and alcohol related conditions
- A mental health crisis
- Budget pressures related to the increased cost of covid-response and reduced income to communities.

Impact on Children & Young People

Appendix 2 summarises Sport England's Active Lives data for Children & Young People's (CYP) participation levels during the pandemic for Northumberland and Tyne & Wear. This demonstrates some stark inequalities across the county, showing that whilst an average of 46.6% of children and young people are failing to meet the CMO recommended guidance of being active for an average of 60 minutes per day across Northumberland, in the most deprived communities this figure is in excess of 60%.

Further insight, which impacts on physical health, demonstrates that:

- Since the start of the pandemic, adverse trends in poverty, education and employment for children and young people have been exacerbated ([COVID-19 and the Northern Powerhouse: Tackling Health Inequalities for UK Health and Productivity, 2020](#)).
- Nationally, 71% of young people report that their mental health has declined since the beginning of the pandemic; due to the health

inequalities in the North East this number is expected to be greater (The Health Foundation, 2020).

Implementing the Strategy - Progress Update

Driven through the Northumberland Physical Activity Strategy Group, over the past 18 months, strategic partners have worked collaboratively to begin the task of implementing the strategy, prioritising the following groups:

- People from lower socio-economic groups;
- People with long-term health conditions; and
- Women & girls.

Appendix 3 captures our agreed short, medium and long-term outcomes for the strategy. As a reminder for members, the short-term outcomes to be achieved between 2020-2023 are;

- Developing Active Enablers
- Developing An Active society
- Developing Active People

Highlights on work to date towards achieving these outcomes include:

Developing Active Enablers

- 1. Northumberland Communities Together:** As part of the Northumberland Communities Together strategic approach, physical activity has been embedded into this asset-based approach with the purpose of using physical activity and sport to build local capacity, develop local opportunities and reduce health and social inequalities across the county.

Examples include; Summer Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF), which has provided enrichment activity and food for 11,000 vulnerable children across the county over the summer holidays. As part of this cross-sector emerging model of delivery, over 80 partners have worked together to deliver 36 camps with 40 young leaders supporting delivery. This was largely delivered through a multi-sport offer directed by the interests of the children & young people attending and included archery, bubble sports, dance, roundnet, football, rounders and cycling. This model will now be developed further through support from the National Lottery and North East Child Poverty Trust.

Through the development of the Community Hubs model, physical activity opportunities have been developed for all age groups, including engagement with cycling linked to the [Big Gear Change Northumberland](#) campaign and delivery of family based swimming and clip & climb sessions as part of an extended holiday offer.

- 2. Enhancing our local Social Prescription Offer:** Rise (the Active Partnership for Northumberland and Tyne & Wear) successfully secured 3 years funding in December 2020 from the National Academy for Social Prescribing and Sport England to host a part-time (0.4 FTE) Regional Physical Activity Advisor covering the North East and Yorkshire. As part of a local commitment, additional funding was secured through the Directors of Public Health across the North of Tyne & Gateshead ICP area, and from Rise, to make this a full-time role, with additional capacity for the local authority areas within the ICP.

This additional resource is now being utilised to provide dedicated support to the VCSE sector and to local social prescribing pathways across Northumberland, North Tyneside, Newcastle and Gateshead, in order to support communities experiencing significant health inequalities (particularly as a result of Covid-19) to be more physically active. This is being provided through strengthening social prescribing at a community level, whilst providing a mechanism to embed physical activity by influencing local commissioning strategies and supporting partners through capacity building as they navigate a complex landscape to make the best of, and combine, local resources.

This was established by recruiting a number of local VCSE organisations onto the [National Academy Thriving Communities Learning Together programme](#). This included organisations learning more about how they can engage with social prescribing and learning sets which were specific to their individual needs.

- 3. Developing place-based approaches:** As an example, following extensive consultation between strategic partners in Berwick-upon-Tweed, including Northumberland County Council; Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust; Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne & Wear NHS Foundation Trust; Rise; the Police & Crime Commissioner's Office (PCC) and local VCSE organisations, it quickly became apparent following the first lockdown, that there was a real concern relating to young male suicide rates and their wider mental wellbeing in this area.

To address this concern, a place-based, public health approach was developed, with physical activity embedded as the key driver to achieving shared outcomes. Funding was secured from the PCC to enable Rise to recruit a link worker, who is now deployed through the Berwick Community Trust to lead this approach, helping to support young men in this area.

Developing an Active Society

4. Active Hospitals Pilot: In 2020, Northumbria Trust secured £110k as part of a successful multi-agency bid to pilot a national Active Hospitals programme. The aims of this pilot are to:

- Update the current model of care, embedding physical activity into the culture of secondary prevention.
- Develop an evidenced protocol for embedding physical activity as an adjuvant treatment in secondary care, to improve the clinical and quality of life outcomes of people living with one or more long term condition.
- Identify successful methods of changing the culture of secondary care settings in relation to leadership, policies, strategies, environment, training and pathways.
- Re-design all relevant training resources to upskill secondary care workers to be able to prescribe physical activity as a viable option for outward patient health & wellbeing support programmes.
- Build on the learning and resources designed as part of the initial pilot undertaken in Oxford.

A COM-B model of behaviour change has now been developed and endorsed following wider consultation with hospital staff, patients, and local stakeholders. This is designed to make physical activity the easy choice for staff to have patient-centred conversations about how physical activity fits into their everyday lives, whilst also building activity provision at Trust sites e.g. promoting active travel, use of stairs and prompts to walk.

5. Developing Active Environments: Recognising the highly influential role that the places and spaces we live and work have on how much we move, there is now a commitment to embedding the principles of active design within the new Northumberland Local Plan. This will support the creation of well-designed places and spaces to encourage healthy and active behaviours.

As part of the work around active design and sustainable transport, work has been undertaken through the Strategic Transport Team and The Big Northumberland Gear Change Campaign to create connected and accessible walking and cycling routes which encourage residents to move away from the use of cars and instead utilise active travel as their choice of transport.

Developing Active People

- 6. Opening School Facilities for Community Access:** Following a successful bid in 2019 to develop a pilot working with schools across the North of Tyne area, to understand the barriers faced in trying to open up access to school sites, recognising these as key community assets, Rise secured a further £300k investment from Sport England to utilise the learning from the pilot to support schools across the wider footprint of Northumberland and Tyne & Wear.

Phase 2 of the Opening School Facilities Programme was focussed on those schools with the most economically disadvantaged students and therefore applications were focussed on supporting those schools with a Free School Meal entitlement above the North East regional average of 24%. In Northumberland, ten schools, including primary, secondary and special school settings, are now being supported to deliver extra-curriculum activities and a range of further activities designed to meet the needs of their local communities. This work also includes consultation and engagement with strategic partners, including Northumberland Communities Together and local VCSE groups to ensure the co-design of meaningful, sustainable activities. Examples of funding provided included;

- Berwick Academy were supported to purchase new equipment and costs to establish a varied extra-curricular offer for students, particularly focussed on those young people who wouldn't normally attend extra-curricular sports sessions.
- Dukes Secondary School were supported to buy new equipment & access staff CPD to enable them to expand their extra-curricular offer, particularly targeted at young women.
- Whytrig Middle School were supported to purchase portable floodlights to enable their external football pitches to be used in the dark nights.
- Choppington Primary School were supported to open their facilities for community use, providing funding to deliver a wide range of family-based activities at evenings and weekends.
- Astley High School were supported to purchase portable steps and hoist to increase accessibility to their swimming pool to enable them to extend their swimming offer.

- 7. Tackling Inequalities during the Pandemic:** In response to the pandemic, Rise secured direct investment from Sport England and agreement to redirect further National Lottery funding to support the most vulnerable groups within our communities, those hit hardest by the crisis. By working collaboratively with strategic partners including Northumberland County Council and our local NHS Trusts, this resulted in:

- £51k investment in local VCSE groups and organisations throughout Northumberland to directly help tackle inequalities, especially those who have direct engagement with people hit hardest by Covid-19 i.e. people from lower socio-economic groups; ethnically diverse communities; people with disabilities and people living with long-term health conditions.
- 500 physical activity packs being distributed to 'Children in Need' during the first lockdown, which helped provide meaningful opportunities to support some of our most vulnerable children to keep active in their home settings.
- 1,000 physical activity packs being distributed to older vulnerable adults during the second lockdown, distributed through the local 'Reablement Team' to help target older people who were experiencing high levels of deconditioning since the start of the pandemic. This was designed to improve strength, coordination and balance of those at risk of slips, trips and falls.

8. Prioritising Early Years: Earlier this year, Rise expanded its role to incorporate the early years' agenda, from pregnancy through to the transition to full time school. As part of this work, support is being provided to the early years' sector in Northumberland, including private, voluntary and independent (PVI) settings, childminders and school-based settings, to embed physical activity and active play into their offer to families.

A recent survey conducted with the early years' workforce identified only 24% feel their early years' qualifications provided them with sufficient knowledge and confidence to provide high quality physical activity opportunities. This is concerning, particularly as Active Play and physical activity contribute to a child's development and school readiness.

A collaborative approach working with Northumberland County Council has now been developed to co-design a programme of support for the early years' sector to utilise physical activity and active play to help give every child the best start in life and support school readiness.

Through a further collaborative approach, Northumbria Trust are also redesigning their maternal pathways to embed physical activity, particularly the maternal obesity pathways. Supporting women to be active in pregnancy supports the health of both mother and baby and work is currently underway to develop a video and associated resources to encourage walking in pregnancy.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Health & Wellbeing Board:

- Understand and acknowledge the importance of the physical activity strategy taking a multi-agency approach in tackling the complexities around physical inactivity in the county, and support more public and third sector organisations to connect with the strategy's aspirations and be part of the solution.
- Recognise the complexities associated with tackling inactivity and the excellent ongoing collaborative work with strategic stakeholders to implement our countywide physical activity strategy.
- Note the immediate impact of implementing this strategy, targeting our most vulnerable communities hit hardest by the Covid-19 crisis.
- Note the significant benefits of using a preventative approach to tackle rising physical inactivity levels across the county against the wider health, social, educational and economic priority outcomes. This aims to ensure people are better prepared to live happy and fulfilling lives as members of more sustainable and resilient communities.
- Acknowledge the benefits of developing place-based approaches and the current work ongoing in Berwick, as a tool to reduce inequalities across the county.