



WLGA Consultation

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Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations
Committee

Participation in sport in disadvantage areas

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Welsh Local Government Association - The Voice of Welsh Councils

We are The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA); a politically led cross-party organisation that seeks to give local government a strong voice at a national level. We represent the interests of local government and promote local democracy in Wales.

The 22 councils in Wales are our members and the 3 fire and rescue authorities and 3 national park authorities are associate members.

We believe that the ideas that change people's lives, happen locally.

Communities are at their best when they feel connected to their council through local democracy. By championing, facilitating, and achieving these connections, we can build a vibrant local democracy that allows communities to thrive.

Our ultimate goal is to promote, protect, support, and develop democratic local government and the interests of councils in Wales.

We'll achieve our vision by

- Promoting the role and prominence of councillors and council leaders
- Ensuring maximum local discretion in legislation or statutory guidance
- Championing and securing long-term and sustainable funding for councils
- Promoting sector-led improvement
- Encouraging a vibrant local democracy, promoting greater diversity
- Supporting councils to effectively manage their workforce

"Mae'r ddogfen yma ar gael yn Gymraeg. This document is available in Welsh."



Introduction

This is a WLGA briefing and has also received input from the members of the Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers in Wales Group.

What are the main barriers to participation in sport in disadvantaged areas?

How do these intersect with other factors including:

- Age,
- Sex and gender,
- Socioeconomic status,
- Geography,
- Disability,
- Ethnicity?

Cost – It is important to consider all the costs incurred with participation for example, boots, kit, etc. that are needed to take part are just one element. Consideration needs to be given to the cost of membership fees with some areas experiencing sporadic attendance at clubs as families can sometimes afford to come and sometimes can't. Consideration needs to be given also to transport costs, multiple siblings, etc. as these add to the cost significantly and have a negative impact on families and the clubs.

Value / impact of sport – Linked to the above. The value placed on sport by a family / individual has a big impact on where they may spend their limited disposable income. If the wider benefits of participating are not understood or communicated well, money can be redirected elsewhere. The same can be said for organisations. Funding support can often be made available for key things (free school meals, etc.), but opportunities for health interventions for families and individuals are often not funded.

Limited scope of grant funding – Sports clubs can apply for grants to support with funding, but personal equipment, clothing, boots, are often not eligible. Consideration for some flexibility for clubs to apply for kit reserves could support greater participation by those in need

Language / how to communicate – This is more linked to clubs applying for grant funding. Previous experience has shown that clubs struggle to articulate what they want to do and why. A lot of time is spent supporting clubs with this to ensure an



application can be successful. We have found that clubs from deprived areas need more support with this.

Geography of opportunity – Dependant on the area, suitable facilities or providers will not always be available, meaning a lack of opportunity in the immediate location. This means that people must travel to participate. Individual circumstance such as transport availability, childcare, work, are all contributing factors to cost.

Transport / public services – In more rural and deprived areas the public transport network can often be not as readily available. If someone doesn't drive but lives in an area where public transport is infrequent this can impact people's ability to attend opportunities

Facilities –Facilities that are not maintained, repaired, or looked after can quickly fall into disrepair. Lack of funding can lead to the facilities being unusable which can result in people being reliant on a smaller number of facilities they may not be able to access as they are not local. The spread of investment and where facilities are placed can also impact, creating a vicious circle. Facilities are often put where the greatest footfall will be, but this widens the gap for those that can't access it. Also, bigger companies / facilities that may often be placed near to deprived areas but attract outside custom, sometimes lead to less engagement with its local communities, meaning a disconnect between local people and opportunities.

Awareness / digital exclusion – More often than not, it is online that new opportunities are advertised. Where communities or individuals are not accessing this platform then targeting participants becomes more difficult

Family / support network – When it comes to young children, they are reliant on being taken to opportunities. Single parent families, young carers, and other circumstances where that support doesn't exist can limit participation.

Skills / confidence – This relates to both the participant themselves and / or family care givers. We found this often during lockdown, with parents not confident or knowledgeable in how to access opportunities or keep their children active. In some areas, online and family engagement offers proved successful as it showed families activities they could access and how they could engage.

Local champions – Often in close knit communities it is the people that attract participation rather than the opportunity itself and sports clubs are reliant on volunteers to work. Where this workforce doesn't exist, this has a knock-on affect to the opportunities are available.

Motivation – In disadvantaged areas there can often be other pressures or factors that influence day to day decisions. If the family or individual has other influences, engagement in sport or community opportunities can often suffer.



Wider partner influence – Families or individuals in disadvantaged areas can often be engaged with other organisations. These organisations can have a role to play in engaging people into sport, but this role is not utilised well enough yet.

Disability / accessibility – Often those with disabilities may need extra support to engage – modified equipment, additional human support etc. These things all cost money. Whilst local clubs work hard to provide these things capacity can often be limited. If families are from disadvantaged backgrounds, they may struggle to engage in the first place, let alone then having to provide additional support. Accessibility of facilities can also prove to be an issue, with funding often harder to come by for accessibility issues that may impact smaller numbers of people.

How clear a picture do we have of current participation levels in disadvantaged areas? Does the current data enable policy interventions to be effective?

Data such as the national survey for Wales and school sport survey etc will provide a certain picture, and NGB's will hold membership numbers of clubs but all of this will be very top level, be an often-small sample and will focus on who is taking part and who isn't. What isn't necessarily there is a deeper dive into the reasons behind this data and some more qualitative information that reinforces findings. What impacts participation in one area won't have the same impact in another. For example, the adult surveys in that past have collected a sample of 10% of the population and this has been done at random, rather than targeting certain communities.

At a 'young person' level, councils can have a good picture from the school sport survey. Some have also engaged with 4Global on mapping, and this gives great datasets too. However, on school sport survey, this has not been undertaken since 2018 so data is 4 years out of date. It is to be repeated shortly and councils will have data at the end on 2022. There is data within public health observatory, wellbeing assessments, etc. but from a sport perspective the challenge is often the 'churning' and interpretation of the data. It's not necessarily an area of expertise and we would benefit from support in this area, e.g. via Sport Wales insights team or the WHIPAS group.

How should public funding be used to increase participation in disadvantaged areas?

There needs to be support for more localised research and analysis to be undertaken. National online surveys online or over the phone surveys often don't get the buy in needed. Support is need for councils to undertake their own local processes and gather robust local information that will provide far more useful data. However, resources and funding are needed to allow capacity for this.

Linked to this, there is a need for the flexibility for councils to bid for funding that meets the needs of the local area, to replace the past fairly rigid funding criteria.



In summary, each council has its different issues, and flexibility and support need to be in place to allow for localised analysis and approaches, rather than national set programmes.

The data that is available, shows the gulf in participation and general health measures of people in disadvantaged areas versus more affluent areas. Aside from the social responsibility to address this on an equality level, failing to address this will cost dearly latter on. i.e. Higher levels of poor health as generations get older will cost the public sector in primary and secondary care interventions. Population level prevention would be more effective and efficient. Shifting public money is a challenge, assuming there is not additional funding. However, the magnitude of the budgets should be looked at, where a small change to a large health budget would make a big different to a small sport/activity budget. The challenge to population level deliverers/facilitators is to target areas of deprivation, where often a balanced delivery/funding model is in place. e.g. councils sports development teams, and facility offers. These often provide what is deemed as an 'equal' offer across councils, but that means there is no greater resource targeted at areas of greatest needs, e.g. where deprivation is prevalent.

How effective are current interventions at increasing participation in disadvantaged areas?

This is difficult to answer as there is such a wide scope of interventions. In some councils for example, the Free Swim programme is currently being redeveloped to have a more targeted approach, with greater involvement from partners dealing with families and individuals. It's too early to see outcomes from this approach but consultation with partners so far suggest there is a need for a shift to this type of delivery.

Again, holiday hunger programmes like Fit and Fed, and SHEP and other programmes that include an element of physical activity have come some way to addressing issues but are still relatively blanket approaches within set parameters not aimed more specifically at sport. A bigger fund that allows for bespoke regional approaches to be supported could have a bigger impact.

It's difficult with the short term (and often late notice) funding that is made available which enables councils to direct/increase resource to increase opportunities. Longer term funding would give greater ability to commit to long term partnerships and interventions and have longer term thinking around transformation. That said, with good reputation and connections, councils can quickly mobilise when required to have greatest impact in the circumstances. The other factor here is interventions are often 'seed-funded' so there is often a longer-term cost to participation. Social pricing policies are key here, as are partnerships with community teams (e.g. health & social care, PHW, education, housing, 3rd sector, blue-light services, etc) for holistic and



long term support. Where this has been the case, participation in interventions has been very successful, and sustainability has resulted.

Has the pandemic caused any persistent changes to participation levels in disadvantaged areas?

Probably too early to tell at this point as there is limited data on this. It will be interesting to see surveys at the end of this year. What we have seen is that some people have fallen out of sport due to a change in lifestyle which they have become used to (e.g., not wanting to go back to committing time to training and playing every weekend) and the drive to more recreational opportunities seem to be growing. Also, some local sessions or activities have not returned post covid or are struggling to deal with demand. We know there is a real shortage of swimming instructors locally and nationally for example, where these people have moved into other employment. So, in disadvantaged areas where it is hard to engage some communities already, this has exacerbated the issues.

Some participants have also been slower to return than others, for example those who are more vulnerable. Given the barrier already faced by these participants to engage, anxiety over personal health creates an extra hurdle.

Covid impacted the ability for some providers to cater effectively for participants during periods of restrictions, for example when additional facility hire was needed to engage members when not all could be in one venue. This has left some clubs struggling to get by and they are just working their way back to some level of normality.

How effectively do different sectors (e.g., education and health) collaborate to improve participation in sport in disadvantaged areas?

In short, not well enough. However, we would say it is an improving picture. A key difficulty is the reliance on awareness and relationships to ensure collaboration, which is a lottery in big organisations such as health and local authorities. In some councils, they have made wellbeing the key focus for Actif Sport & Leisure, with a strategy that clear aligns to health & education with specific objectives relating to deprivation. They have naturally found themselves talking to the right people in the same language as a result, with collaborative work following. This has taken the form of funding applications/awards, joint projects, etc. and bodes well for future working.

A further hurdle is alignment of priorities. For example, health boards often focus on clinical issues. For example, in Hywel Dda this may be obesity and frailty; for SBUHB this may be cancer. The argument that disadvantaged areas have poorer health outcomes may be secondary.



Also, Education delegate much of their funding to schools making it more difficult to strategically connect and bring about action.

Are there examples of best practice, both within Wales and internationally, that Wales should learn from to increase participation in sport in disadvantaged areas?

Councils have been looking for an evidence-based intervention for quite some time, closely following the 'Beat the Street' initiative. This has been embraced widely elsewhere in the UK and we will implement a programme in 2022-23. This 'gamifies' a geographical area, being particularly effective in deprived areas, relying on the establishment of a collaboration of leisure, health and education as a minimum to create a step change in health-related outcome and physical activity levels that lasts far beyond the intervention. Sport Wales are supporting councils with the investment into this intervention and will be putting monitoring in place to consider its effectiveness and wider potential.

Appropriate links which may be helpful:

- [Levelling the playing field](#) – Newport example of Positive Futures - sport in disadvantaged areas, using sport as a tool, linking to education, youth justice, etc.
- [Is sport the key to reducing the number of young people ending up in the criminal justice system? | ITV News Wales](#)
- [Alliance of Sport in Criminal Justice](#)
- [Active Communities Network](#)