

Local voices

Life during coronavirus

(April-May 2020)



What we did

Through our wide range of trusted relationships with people working in different parts of the 'system' in many places across the country, we've been able to have frank and insightful conversations about the current situation. We used a tool developed by Collaborate CIC to make sense of what we were hearing, develop a set of themes and explore the detail which lay underneath them.

Time has also been spent proactively sourcing information, anecdotes and stories which exemplify what we've discovered. Extracts from some of these are included here using their original and authentic language; elsewhere we've summarised what we've heard. We'll make available those sources and stories for colleagues and partners who wish to explore further.

Why we did it

To give a voice to local communities and places reflecting their current experiences of living with coronavirus (Covid-19) that can be shared within us and partners in order to gain insight about how we respond. This can be built upon as the situation changes and experiences, plans and responses evolve .



What we asked

What are the big issues currently affecting individuals, organisations and communities?

What are the emerging needs?

What are the main priorities of local/place leaders at this time?

What patterns or trends have you detected that are starting to emerge?

Where does 'keeping active' fit into the above? What have you detected locally about what is happening here?

Are there wider inequalities emerging/surfacing?

What can we do more/less of?

How are you feeling about the future? Any emerging thoughts or issues about how the future should look like/the 'new normal'?

Who we spoke to



We ran a series of discussion, reflection and storytelling sessions with those identified above. In addition, bespoke conversations were held with our key places on a regularly basis

Themes

Below are the key themes that emerged from our intelligence gathering, this is not a linear list and themes are inter-related.

1 Widening inequalities and Impact on wellbeing

2 Common purpose

3 Making connectivity and trust count

4 Community and place matters

5 Daily life

6 Clarity of message

7 Digital divide

8 Financial sustainability

9 What does recovery mean?

Widening inequalities and impact on wellbeing



- This was the most commonly raised issue and area of concern that emerged from conversations. The situation of the lockdown is universal, everyone is impacted, but the **impact is disproportionate** on certain groups. We're particularly hearing that people are being **adversely affected** by poor **mental health**, access to **education**, **financial hardship** and increased risk of experiencing **domestic violence**.
- Alongside this inequality of experience is the disparity between the **reality on the ground** and the debate/rhetoric particularly at national level, for example the opportunity to 'learn a new skill', the ability to 'get out in the garden' and the practicalities of 'don't use public transport'.
- Access to a garden or local green space; housing type and access to information are **contributing factors to people's ability to be active** during this time.
- There is some concern about a recession **hitting least resilient people the hardest** and the feeling that this'll be 'austerity upon austerity'.
- Adversity is bringing people together at a concentrated community level, often within a few streets. There's been a **strengthening of existing community structures** and an increased sharing economy such as food, skills, toys and equipment.

Widening inequalities and impact on wellbeing

A summary from a leadership essentials discussion including local authorities, local trusts and Active Partnerships, highlighted that:

This is the time to explore deep inequalities, they're big complex issues and if we don't explore them now, we risk reverting back to old behaviours. Decision makers are seeing inequality as a priority but it seems they're responding reactively and focusing on surface solutions. To create lasting change, we need to explore the challenge and solutions with people and organisations to sustain behaviours that aim to meet shared outcomes.

Widening inequalities and impact on wellbeing

Emerging question

1. Will this current sense of crisis galvanise local systems to focus on inequalities in a new or different way once the immediate lockdown has eased?

We heard from local delivery pilots and local authorities that:

- *Closing the gap has just got a lot harder*
- *Lockdown is viewed through the eyes of privilege*
- *It's taking our target audiences further away.*

Common purpose – energy, passion, kindness and humanity

- The crisis has brought about common purpose and **everyone has a part to play**. People in places matter. Lives matter. Helping people matters. The importance of these values is creating common purpose and endeavour which is **breaking down siloed or sectoral ways of thinking**.
- There is a move via empathy to **being human**. The stories that resonate are about being human, whether that's the positivity of the **'can do' attitude** of colleagues in the system, the **nimbleness**, pace of response and **resilience** of the community or the concern for the inequalities that might be widening and how that impacts on communities and the most vulnerable.
- The **local system is coming together** before our eyes at a fast pace to respond to the crisis and protect people's lives but how do we ensure this is not lost when the immediacy is over?

Common purpose – energy, passion, kindness and humanity

There's been a 'people and place' focus with a shared purpose. The LDP has been part of the emergency action plan and this has enabled the local authority to reach people that it has struggled to reach. If it wasn't for the work of the LDP, they wouldn't have got that many organisations around the table. There's been a silent army of people who've been pointed in the right direction and street-based leadership has responded to local need. Hierarchies have been put aside and people empowered.

- *Read Pennine Lancashire's full coronavirus story on our website.*

Emerging questions

1. How do we build on this way of working and guard against reverting to previous behaviours as we move into recovery?
2. How do we move from thinking as a sector to behaving as part of an ecosystem?

Making connectivity and trust count



- The **agility** of the LDPs to work **flexibly** and adjust quickly and effectively to local need has come to the fore during the crisis. Many LDPs have been seen as the **'go to' partnership** to support activation of the community response, often as a result of established trust and in-depth community relationships that've been developed.
- In other areas where there has been a deliberate focus on a place-based approach, experiences have been similar with the ability to **quickly reach communities in need**. Being a trusted partner with the right relationships e.g. an Active Partnership or a local trust provider, has helped others connect to communities.
- New relationships have opened up; the barriers are down, and the **red tape has been cut**. There are, however, still examples of places where there is a return to silos.
- It's not just about being better connected but sharing power. There's been **distributed leadership** with a feeling that, for some, hierarchies had been dropped and organisations and people empowered. The redeployment of staff has also contributed to the formation of new relationships and **blurring of sectoral boundaries**.
- Relationships are at the bedrock of everything – creating buy-in, change and impact. **Trusted status** is a valuable currency that we need to cherish and enhance.

This is system change!

Making connectivity and trust count

A number of local authorities reported strengthening relationships with social care. In one authority social care was increasingly concerned about major increases in falls by older people at home and asking how physical activity could help both in the short and medium term.

An Active Partnership who's been working in a small and very deprived area of a city had developed a closer working relationship with the clinical commissioning group (CCG). As a direct result of this connection they were asked to help with the work of the coronavirus community hub for the area.

Through being able to provide immediate practical support, it's hoped more strategic work between the Active Partnership and CCG will develop for the areas as it feels more than ever that solutions are at a community level.

Making connectivity and trust count

Emerging questions

1. The LDP approach is showing its dividends and in other places there too is the start of a systems approach. How can we realistically take this even further across the country, given our resource constraints?

We heard from one local delivery pilot that they have staff members who live locally and are now well connected through the pilot's work. They've been able to respond quickly as part of a newly formed community action group. And while other statutory or local partners – the 'badged people' – were slow to mobilise and are now expecting to lead, it's creating a healthy tension and debate which really exposes silos and system disconnect.

Community and place matter

- Strong connectivity has positively brought communities together. Local leaders have come to the fore, **harnessing community energy and creating support systems.**
- The world has just got smaller, hyper-local thinking is critical now and into the foreseeable future. People have been **discovering what's on their doorstep** and continuing to make best use of very local and accessible assets seems more important than ever .
- The **importance of feeling safe** has reinforced some communities' need to stay local, people are concerned and worried about their families' ongoing safety and staying virus free. This is particularly significant for vulnerable and poorer communities where existing health conditions are prevalent.
- People are increasingly identifying their 'place' as their immediate streets or neighbourhood, rather than the town or city in which they live. **Communities are noticing place more,** and there's a greater need for hyper-local working to find solutions to issues such as mental health and active travel.

Community and place matter

Emerging questions

1. How might these changing notions of place influence physical activity habits in the immediate future and beyond?
2. In order to really reach people, how do we continue to work at this level?
3. How do we embrace and support communities to retain their ways of working together in the way they've responded to the crisis, whilst also recognising that there's volunteer fatigue and burnout?

We heard from one local authority that people are appreciating the parks and outdoor spaces on their doorstep and wanting to treat them better, with an increased feeling of safety in places people wouldn't usually go to. So how can we continue to make roads and outdoor spaces even safer by collaborating with others in the system?

Daily life

- **People are valuing** time spent with children and partners discovering new shared activities or responsibilities. This includes being active and often exercise has joined households together.
- The positive messages and drivers for exercise are becoming more important in terms of the relief of anxiety, helping people de-stress and take some control/routine. There seems to be a lot **more 'obvious' evidence of the linkages between physical activity and mental wellbeing**; it's important to make the most of this message.
- Some people are walking and cycling more, using their commute time differently as well as valuing the difference clean air and safe spaces bring.
- Consistently across place there is **escalating prevalence** of **mental health** issues and concerns about **domestic violence**.
- Our coronavirus ComRes survey has shown that certain groups are finding it harder to be active. It's important to have local data and evidence to understand **behaviours and motivations** during this time, building on activity level data.
- The same survey has also shown continued growth in walking (65%) and cycling (16%) rates, this supports local feedback on the **importance of active travel** and the need for reduced reliance on public transport.

Emerging questions

1. It's unclear how the pandemic will impact on people's future behaviours, particularly in disadvantaged communities. We're understanding that people are worried, scared and don't feel safe - how will this play out?
2. Are people who previously didn't exercise really doing more (cycling/walking)? If so, why? And will they continue?

One local authority within an LDP area recounted that there's an appreciation of the outdoors and parks and people finding and valuing the 'hidden gems' on their doorstep which has led to volunteers helping to keep the local park maintained and doing litter picking.

Clarity of message

- The importance of physical activity and sport as part of the **national crisis messaging is being valued.**
- Although there is **simplicity of the 'daily exercise' message**, which some have valued, there has, at times, been a **lack of clarity as to how and where it can be done** – which has caused confusion among both individuals and local organisations. This'll potentially increase as we move into the phased removal of the lockdown.
- Information overload along with **conflicting guidance and messaging** from multiple sources has also created mistrust and anxiety among communities.

Clarity of message

Emerging questions

1. How do we optimise the current profile of the physical activity messaging and take that through to the next phase of messaging?
2. Can we find opportunities in our work to collaboratively tackle mixed messaging about exercise?

One LDP recounted that messages are coming from lots of different directions, there's misinformation, and mistrust with people not knowing what messages to believe.

Digital divide

- Lack of access to modern information and communications technology has created a digital divide, this has been **amplified by the increased current need to live life digitally.**
- **Digital poverty is a significant concern** for places working with the vulnerable, disabled people and disadvantaged; yet it's also opened up new connections and enabled some places to reach new audiences.
- Not everyone can or will want to respond to digital messaging and **a multi-channel approach is essential** to reach all communities within a place. There are several examples of printed resources and activity packs that've been produced and distributed to the most vulnerable.
- Despite more people turning to online exercise many don't have access to technology. If we adapt the new normal to include more digital, we must remember **access is not universal.**

Digital divide

Emerging questions

1. Do we fully understand the implications of digital divide? And what're the real barriers or issues here?
2. How important is the role of digital in supporting people to lead active lives? And has this changed since coronavirus?

In response to the crisis there were many digital resources available to support people to stay active at home but there was little for those who don't use the internet. Like others, Move More Sheffield created an 'Active At Home' booklet to support older and vulnerable people in the community to stay active at home. These were distributed through community volunteer efforts.

Financial sustainability

- Local authorities are expressing concern about the funding gaps emerging. Nationally the LGA indicate a **gap of extra costs of coronavirus to grant allocated by government of £6 billion**. A further £2bn is likely to be needed to cover costs of responding to the pandemic, with an extra £4bn required to deal with the impact of lost income from sources including council tax, business rates and sales, fees and charges. Some councils are reporting ranges of three weeks to three months of funding remaining to support local services.
- Councils are working hard to keep supporting leisure providers during the coronavirus crisis but the huge pressure on council funding has meant it's **not easy for them to meet the needs of the leisure trusts**. In some places, trusts and councils were coming together to have transparent discussions about current issues and recovery, an example given in a county, but not happening everywhere.
- Councils and trusts want to **explore what service redesign will look like as well as future operating models** and how they can be developed collaboratively.

Financial sustainability

Emerging questions

1. How do we support places to be strategic with financial planning over different time periods with an uncertain future?
2. How can we continue to connect to common purpose, ensuring a balance between economic drivers, wellbeing and equality as we move towards recovery?

Some leisure trusts felt the first response from the local authority had been really good, but the critical bit will be when the lockdown starts to be lifted. That's their next challenge.

What does recovery mean?

- In recent weeks the conversation has turned to recovery. Building an increased sense of common purpose, people are seeing this is the **time to make a major shift in how we think and how we live our lives**. We have the opportunity to change healthy or unsustainable behaviours and live a better life based around the call to action to change.
- Organisations are seeing this as a time of opportunity to **'do things differently'** and many LDPs and local places are **ready to move from crisis management** and look forward to what is next. Some organisations, however, require headspace and time to explore what recovery and the future looks like.
- **We shouldn't assume that people will revert back to previous behaviours** such as using leisure centres or gyms in the numbers that they did. The role of online has also been a key feature of the response, however conversations indicate that the novelty factor may be dropping off.
- A concern is that we revert to **previous behaviours and ways of working**, even if they weren't working

What does recovery mean?

Emerging questions

1. How do we continue to reframe the sport and physical activity message/offer where there have been greater opportunities as active environments/climate change; mental health and what does that mean for Sport England and its focus?
2. How do we support local scenario planning for the future that's focussed on designing and rebuilding for the next phase of the future, rather than preserving what we had?
3. What happens if there is a second spike?

It was heard at 'leadership essential' discussions that people want to shape the future they want, and not be shaped by it.

It was important to rethink what they're here to do.

Behaviours that support change

As part of this reflective process we've identified how people are connecting and working, and the emerging behaviours that are helping them build trust and reach out to others.

When thinking about how we need to act and lead we should consider the following;

1. how comfortable are we with living and working in the grey and with emergence; nothing fixed, or stable or certain – this is the so called 'new normal' and we have to get better at working with this as leaders?
2. how can we develop high levels of personal resilience and help others to develop theirs?
3. how do we distribute leadership – local leaders from communities have come to the fore, how are they enabled to develop their role?
4. how do we retain the good collaborative behaviours that the crisis has encouraged locally and not revert to previous siloed behaviours?

Reflections summary

Recovery presents places with opportunities and a set of tensions where the urgent present can override finding the headspace to think about the important future. To help us do this, these are the questions we think are important to consider now:

- where does physical activity fit in the inevitable re-setting of local priorities?
- how do we work collaboratively with communities to retain the positive physical activity messages and opportunities to be active in new ways?
- how do we think about recovery rather than repair?
- what will the impact of a recession look like locally?
- how can we continue to connect to common purpose, ensuring a balance between economic drivers, wellbeing and equality as we move towards recovery?
- will this current sense of crisis galvanise local systems to focus on inequalities in a new or different way once the immediate lockdown has eased?

Thank you

We welcome your feedback

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