

Physical Activity for the fifty five plus age group –  
draft task group report

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## **A report of the Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel, Chaired by Cllr Logie Lohendran**

*Foreword by the task group Chairman.*

The transfer of Public Health to the local authority has presented us with a unique opportunity to increase the focus on promoting health and wellbeing across all council services. The mortality rate between the East and West is getting wider, and is a big concern within the borough and a key feature in our health and wellbeing strategy. We know that poor diet and lack of physical activity contribute to obesity and coronary heart disease; these seem to fall heavily on those deprived areas. Many of these issues have been clearly identified by this task group which looked at that Sport and Fitness for the fifty five Plus age group.

The task group identified a number of barriers which prevented older people participating in sports and physical activities including the cost of attending sports and exercise classes, for some women the result of having neither female only changing rooms nor female only activities inhibits them for cultural and religious reasons. We found that there here needs to be more information about where activities are held, and what is specifically available to 55 plus age group. We received evidence from Pro Active South London, using the Sport England Market segmentation tool which confirmed what we already knew that the east of the Borough is the worst affected area of groups which lacked physical activities. We made a number of recommendations to address these barriers.

We need to use the evidence and recommendations within this report to work collectively develop the understanding of how to increase physical activity within Merton Communities. I hope that this report will encourage every ward Councilor to ask themselves 'What have we done to progress this important agenda.

**Councillor Logie Lohendran**

**Draft recommendations:**

1. That public health teams and the Leisure and Culture Development Team make better use of the communications channels that we know of and direct people to Merton-i and Get Active London link
2. GP's to signpost and refer people to sports groups, and make use of Merton-I and LiveWell behaviour change programme.
3. The Council's Cultural and Sports Framework to include ways and means of developing specific and measurable targets to improve outcomes, including those for the fifty five plus age group.
4. Run a ward pilot, using the market segmentation tool to identify and target services for this group
5. The council to host workshops for sports clubs and others interested in sport and physical activity delivery in Merton on using the market segmentation tool
6. Private sponsorship – explore the possibility for sponsors, which compliment the councils public health responsibilities, to support local sporting activities

## Introduction

1. This report will focus on increasing opportunities for residents who are aged fifty five plus to become more physically active. It should be noted that playing sport, using a leisure centre, walking/cycling, group dance classes and outdoor activities such as gardening all count as physical activity and are all as important as each other .
2. The evidence of health gain from an active lifestyle is now well established and the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) has highlighted significant health benefits including reducing the risk of many chronic conditions, including coronary heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, cancer, obesity, mental health problems and musculoskeletal conditions. Regular exercise reduces the risk of early death and developing disease by 20-30%.
3. Further guidance from the CMO recommends that adults should aim to be active daily and over a week activity should add up to 150 minutes in bouts of ten minutes or more. Older adults should also undertake physical activity to improve muscle strength on at least two days a week
4. As with previous reviews conducted by this Panel, this work has strong links with the prevention agenda particularly now that LBM has a responsibility to improve the health of its residents through its public health function. The relatively new Public Health team in the council has a vision over the next five years to stem the increase in the significant inequalities in health outcomes between the East and West of Merton, providing more equal opportunities for all residents of Merton to be healthy.,

## Activity levels in Merton

5. Data from the Active People Survey (APS6) shows that in Merton only 7% of people in our target age group do enough physical activity to benefit their health. The results of the Health Survey for England highlighted that approximately 39% of men and 29% of women meet the minimum recommendations for physical activity. Activity levels of both men and women generally decreased with age and the higher the BMI the less likely to meet the standard. Encouragingly, the Active People's Survey shows that 60% of people are keen to be more active.
6. While the health of Merton residents is generally better than the national average, many chronic conditions are predicted to be on the increase, therefore improving participation in sport and exercise in some of our most vulnerable groups can help to combat this.
7. There are a number of other pressures which highlight the importance of this review. A report to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission in November 2013 highlighted significant demographic changes in Merton which will impact on service provision from 2017. Drawing upon recent census data it shows that

there will be an increasing proportion of older people; an 11% increase in the over sixty five age group and 25% in those over ninety. As a result of this increase demand for adult social care is likely to increase as well as a general increase in diseases for those over forty five. This increased pressure on resources comes at a time of declining financial resources for councils and individuals who have faced the impact of rising food and energy costs and the impact of welfare reform.

Who the task group spoke to:

- Barry Causer, Public Health Commissioning Manager
- Charmaine Sainsbury, Chief Executive, Age Concern Merton
- Christine Parsloe, Merton Leisure and Culture Development Manager
- Richard Nash, Marketing and Communications Officer, Pro- Active South London
- Conducted a survey amongst Merton Seniors Forum membership

Scope of the review:

- To review services that engages the 55 plus residents in sport and physical activity.
- To speak to local residents and ensure that services are being developed to meet their needs.
- To look at the differences in services and physical activity levels between the East and West of the Borough.

The findings and deliberations of the task group:

#### **What services are available already?**

8. We found that there are a wide range of activities for the fifty five plus age group run by the council and other local organisations including; Age UK, Wimbledon Guild , Merton Council for the Voluntary Sector with activities ranging from seated exercise to senior get fit classes and chair based Zumba.
9. The Leisure and Culture Development Manager told us that there are three leisure centres operating in Merton; Wimbledon, Morden and Canon's providing a wide range of services some of which are dedicated to the fifty five plus age group. We were told that the gyms now run integrated sessions and all age groups are encouraged to use the facilities at the same time. Prices vary according to the activity and for some concessionary prices are available for the sixty five plus age group.

10. Merton's parks and open spaces are also used for physical activity with activities including walking, cycling, cricket and football. There are also outdoor sports courts including those for tennis and netball. There are six outdoor gyms and two private golf facilities at Wimbledon and Mitcham Commons as well as crazy golf, pitch and putt and golf driving range all in the borough.
11. We were told about a wide range of activities spread across the borough specifically aimed at our target age group. However participation in some groups is low, for example; a new BMX track opened in 2012, currently only ten people who are fifty five plus participate.
12. The Leisure and Culture Development Manager told us that if more resources were available they could work with partners to generate increased participation in many of the activities.
13. We were also concerned about providing opportunities for people in care homes to participate in activities. The Leisure and Culture Development Manager told us that a project has started in the Woodland House care home which will work with residents to improve their physical and mental wellbeing, programmes include art, story-telling, music and movement. The leisure team are training activity co-ordinators within care homes do so some similar work.
14. We also think that this work has important links to the loneliness agenda. Older people are more likely to be vulnerable and isolated. Encouraging people to get involved in sport and physical activity can alleviate this; however they may be more likely to lack the confidence to join groups on their own. We know that the council's Public health team are developing a network of health champions to support people to get involved in the local community and they will play an important role in helping people to increase their activity levels.

### **Barriers to older people participating in sport and physical activity**

15. Since we are aware that only a small proportion of older people participate in sport and physical activity, the task group sought to identify the barriers this group face and how they can be overcome. Based on their professional experiences a number of suggestions were put forward by our witnesses:
16. The cost of sport and exercise classes was highlighted as a big issue. For example the celebrating age festival is held once a year and involves a wide range of sport and activities, this is a very popular and well attended. There is a significant drop in participation rates at the end of the festival highlighting that many people are keen to get involved but cannot afford the costs involved.

17. The Chief Executive of Age UK told us that many activities are branded for the 'over 50s'. This is a very wide age band and can mean the younger and older people within that spectrum may feel it is not suitable for them.
18. Cultural stereotypes and low expectations of older people need to be challenged. We need to discard the myth that at a certain age people cannot be active anymore. We need to ensure that services for older people are not sedentary which encourages a format in which people sit down and are served and not encouraged to participate.
19. There are also cultural/ religious issues for example; some Muslim women do not participate in mixed gender swimming sessions. Some leisure centres have stopped running 'female only' sessions; therefore these women feel inhibited from participating.
20. Some people find sports clubs elitist and are not confident to go on their own. Clubs need to promote inclusivity for everyone not just those considered to be good at sports. Coaching for sports can often focus on performance with not enough emphasis on sport participation for general well-being.
21. Some older people would be put off from joining walking clubs if there are not adequate public toilets in parks. This highlights the need for a joined up approach to providing services for this group.
22. Sometimes the idea of sport can deter people. We need to promote the importance of physical activity which can be more informal such as walking rather than taking the bus or car. Task Group members challenged some of the results of the Active Peoples Survey as it only emphasised sport. The Public Health Commissioning Manager agreed that it does not take account of activities of daily living and that these activities are just as, if not more important than sport.

### **Disseminating Information**

23. We know there is a good range of sport and physical activities for the fifty plus age group across the borough, however this information is not disseminated widely and many people do not know what services exist. This became apparent through our snapshot survey amongst the membership of Merton Seniors Forum.
24. We asked the Leisure and Cultural Development Manager for her thoughts on mapping existing services and making them available in a single location, The Leisure and Cultural Development Manager told us she agreed that we need to make the information available for people to access. However it is

important not to re-invent the wheel. We need to utilise what we have already such as Merton-I, an information portal available on the Merton Council website and Get Active London Link, which is a London wide website on Sport activity. individuals and Sports Clubs are able to upload their own information directly to the Get Active London Link.

25. We accepted this view and recognise that it is important that in these stringent times, we need all local partners to play an active role in sharing information that will contribute to this important agenda. We considered which central locations the fifty five plus are most likely to be likely to congregate and could collect information about sport and fitness. Libraries would be a central location as would GP Surgeries. Our snap shot survey found community halls, and adverts in local newspapers are where people access information.

26. We want GP's to play a bigger role in this agenda; they provide a critical link to highlight the importance of physical activity and its overall contribution to wellbeing. A significant number of people are in contact with their GP's and it can be a good central source of information. We believe that GP's should be signposting people to exercise and sharing key messages about its benefits. LiveWell, the council's health improvement support programme, would be an excellent service to support this target group to increase their activity levels.

27. The Leisure and Cultural Development Manager told us that a new Culture and Sport Framework is being developed. There is recognition that there is less money for sport. The priorities within the framework include looking at ways to increase physical activity and how to improve health outcomes for local people. There are specific strands that would relate to activity for the fifty plus age group. We would like to see measurable outcomes attached to these.

### **Recommendations**

1. That public health teams and the Leisure and Culture Development Team make better use of the communications channels that we know of and direct people to Merton-i and Get Active London link
2. GP's to signpost and refer people to sports groups, and make use of Merton-I and LiveWell behaviour change programme.
3. The Council's Cultural and Sports Framework to include ways and means of developing specific and measurable targets to improve outcomes, including those for the fifty five plus age group.

### **Targeting Services**



28. We met with the Marketing and Communications Manager from PRO-Active South London. They use Sport England's market segmentation tool to determine where the target groups live and the type of sport they are likely to participate in. We were provided with a report on the Merton profile. The report found that there are 43,407 people living in Merton who are over 55. This equates to nearly 25% of the total population in the borough.
29. The market segmentation tool creates nineteen characters drawing on information on their behaviour profile to build a portrait of each character. This information provides details on the type of activity that target groups are likely to prefer. The data shows that indoor sport, individual sport, water and sport/leisure hall activities have the highest demand across the 55+ population. Although there are ward variations so other sports could be successful.
30. The Marketing and Communications Manager from PRO-Active South London said that targeting messages to each ward has a big impact as many people do not know what is happening locally. Also the location of services has a big impact on whether people will attend.
31. A number of wards have significantly higher proportions of people from the 55 plus age group. The data also highlights those wards which have significantly low numbers of people from this group and therefore is useful to determine if any services are placed in this ward are best placed for this group.
32. The data shows a higher level of inactivity amongst the 55-64 age range in Merton compared with the national average. Similarly, 78.2% of over 65 years olds in Merton are completely inactive compared with 74.8% nationally. Overall the data shows that almost 70% of the 55+ residents are not currently participating in sport or physical activity.
33. Ravensbury, Pollards Hill, Cricket Green, Lavender Fields, Longthorton, Figge's Marsh and St Helier wards have significantly greater numbers of the fifty five plus populations than the London average and would be ideal for fifty five plus activities.
34. We believe the market segmentation tool can be a very useful way of targeting services to meet the need of the fifty five plus age group. It can help to identify if services are located in the right place, identify gaps and if messages of communication are appropriate to encourage people to participate. We would like the Leisure and Culture Development Team to make use of this free tool. We recommend that they identify a ward with a high population of the fifty plus residents and review services to see that our target group has access to appropriate sporting activities and that relevant messages are targeted to this

group and they are able to access information and find out what is available.

35. We also think that local community groups and sports clubs would benefit from using the market segmentation tool. We believe the council should host a workshop run by Pro-active South London on how to make use of the market segmentation tool. This will help groups to identify and target services to the right groups.

36. With diminishing resources available for sports, we considered if there could be opportunities for private sponsorship, we need to identify organisations who would be willing to invest in the local community and could perhaps help to advertise activities such as walking groups. We would like the possibilities for private sponsorship to be explored.

### **Recommendations**

4. Run a ward pilot, using the market segmentation tool to identify and target services for this group

5. The council to host workshops for sports clubs and others interested in sport and physical activity delivery in Merton on using the market segmentation tool

6. Private sponsorship – explore the possibility for sponsors, which compliment the councils public health responsibilities, to support local sporting activities

### **Conclusion**

37. The recent changes in demographics, predicted increases in chronic conditions, the financial outlook for local authorities' highlight that services need to need to work very differently in order to support local communities. In this review we have suggested some useful ideas such as looking into private sponsorship and using the market segmentation tool. We have also identified opportunities for improving the use of existing resources through using Merton-I and Get Active London link to promote services. We believe that once these recommendations are agreed and implemented it will have a positive impact on participation in sport and fitness for the fifty five plus age group, which can be measured through the Cultural and Sports Framework.

38. The arrival of Public Health in the Council provides opportunities to improve the links with Leisure and other relevant Council services to improve use of the evidence base and embed prevention.

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