

Disabled Londoners' participation in sport and physical activity

Update report
March 2012



Approximately 1.5 million people in London, 20 per cent of the population, have an impairment or long-term illness that limits their activity. This report sets out the findings of an Economy, Culture and Sport Committee review of their participation in sport and physical activity.

Disabled people can lead active and healthy lives if the right support is available to them. However, despite the efforts of successive Mayors and others in recent years, and the creation of new opportunities, participation rates among disabled people have remained disappointingly low. Just 10.8 per cent of disabled Londoners meet recommended levels of activity, and this number has changed very little in several years.

The Committee's review followed up a previous report on this topic published in 2006. We have also examined the progress of the subsequent *Inclusive and Active* strategy first published by the previous Mayor in 2007, and updated by the current Mayor in 2010.

Our key finding is that schools and leisure services need to improve the way they support disabled people to be active. While many new opportunities for participation have been created in recent years, staff and volunteers need the skills to ensure that disabled people can take part, and that they see being active as both fun and a viable part of their lifestyle.

The Committee's work

The Committee published a report on the provision of sport and physical activity for disabled people in 2006. The report highlighted a number of barriers to participation among disabled Londoners, such as a lack of skills among sports coaches and teachers in mainstream schools, inadequate information about opportunities, and inaccessible public transport.¹

As a result of the Committee's report, the previous Mayor introduced a strategy in 2007, *Inclusive and Active*, aimed at increasing participation.² The strategy was produced and delivered in partnership with NHS London and Interactive, the strategic body promoting disabled sport in London.³

In 2010, the current Mayor updated the strategy, and published *Inclusive and Active 2*.⁴ There are two main strands of the new strategy, the latter being emphasised much more than in the previous version:

- Supporting providers and decision-makers to ensure more opportunities exist for disabled people to participate in sport and physical activity; and

¹ *A sporting legacy for people with disabilities*, London Assembly, September 2006. The report is available at: <http://www.london.gov.uk/who-runs-london/the-london-assembly/publications/2012-games/sporting-legacy-people-disabilities>

² *Inclusive and Active: A sport and physical activity action plan for disabled people in London 2007-2012*, Greater London Authority, 2007

³ Interactive gives practical guidance to organisations to help them include disabled participants. It produces an *Inclusive and Active 2* club resource pack, available here: <http://www.interactive.uk.net/page.asp?section=0001000100050001§ionTitle=Club+Resource+Pack>

⁴ *Inclusive and Active 2: A sport and physical activity strategy for disabled people in London 2010-2015*, Greater London Authority, 2010. Available at: <http://www.london.gov.uk/publication/inclusive-and-active-2>

- Supporting those who work directly with disabled people to advocate being active as a viable lifestyle choice.

The Economy, Culture and Sport Committee decided to examine progress in boosting participation among disabled Londoners, considering the impact of the Mayoral strategy and the implementation of our previous recommendations. We invited written submissions from stakeholders, and in January 2012 held a meeting with leading experts and practitioners in this field.

Taking part counts

The recommended level of physical activity for adults is at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity, three times per week. When the first *Inclusive and Active* strategy was published in 2007, it set a target to raise the proportion of disabled Londoners meeting this level of participation from nine per cent to 14 per cent by 2012.

This target has been missed by some distance. The latest figures from Sport England, which conducts the regular Active People surveys, indicate that 10.8 per cent of disabled Londoners participate in recommended levels of activity.⁵ Participation among non-disabled people is 21.2 per cent; this rate in itself is much lower than we should expect, but is still significantly higher than the rate for disabled people.⁶ Although there has been some increase in participation rates, the 2007 target seems a long way off. London is not unique though in struggling to change this situation and deal with the complex issues involved: these figures reflect the national average.

Supply and demand

Many new opportunities for disabled people to take part in sport and physical activity have been created in recent years, with new programmes and facilities established. A number of these have come about through the Mayor's sports legacy fund, through which groups like Panathlon – which provides coaching, equipment and competitions for disabled people – have been supported.⁷ All organisations receiving GLA funding must also be fully inclusive of disabled participants, meeting the requirements of the Mayor's strategy. Some facilities have closed, however, such as the gymnastics space at Camberwell Leisure Centre, which has been closed for refurbishment since 2009 with no confirmed date for re-opening.

Despite the investment, there has not been a significant impact on participation rates. This reveals the complexity of this issue; we cannot assume that spending money and building facilities is sufficient to guarantee progress. The Committee has heard that as well as new opportunities, stimulating demand among disabled people for sport and physical activity must

⁵ Written submission from Sport England, February 2012. Results from the Active People surveys are available at: http://www.sportengland.org/research/active_people_survey.aspx. Copies of written submissions are available via <http://www.london.gov.uk/who-runs-london/the-london-assembly/publications/health> or from the London Assembly secretariat

⁶ The Office for Disability Issues has conducted survey research into barriers to sport participation. See *Life Opportunities Survey: Wave one results, 2009/11*, Office for Disability Issues, 2011. Available at: http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/los/los_wave_one_200911.pdf

⁷ See *A sporting legacy for London?*, London Assembly, February 2011

also be a priority. For instance, the Royal London Society for Blind People (RLSB) told the Committee in a submission:

*The challenge that we face is no longer about access to properly equipped facilities. We know that these exist. What we have not yet done is to persuade disabled people to change their lifestyles. Our experience suggests that this will require more than the creation of opportunities and signposting.*⁸

The view across many organisations consulted by the Committee is that changing disabled people's perception of sport and physical activity is necessary to increase demand. As the chief executive of Interactive, Stewart Lucas, argued in his submission:

*...we need to look at how we advocate being active as a viable lifestyle choice for disabled people and how we dispel the assumptions across the disability sector that sport and physical activity is not for them and that there are not the opportunities on offer.*⁹

Lessons learned

The skills and attitudes of those working with disabled people are vital in encouraging people to become active and stimulating demand for opportunities. As Isabelle Clement, manager of the disabled cycling charity Wheels for Wellbeing, told the Committee:

*All of these people really are the key often in disabled people's lives in either being enablers and door openers or door shutters and real barriers. We see the need for health professionals, teachers and social care workers to be really trained into believing in the fact that disabled people can participate in sports and physical activity because if they do not there are real barriers in people's way.*¹⁰

This is a particular problem for disabled children being taught in mainstream schools.¹¹ The Committee heard that teachers often do not have the skills to help disabled children take part in physical activity. As Andy Dalby-Welsh, director of programmes at charity Cricket for Change, suggested in his submission:

*We still hear too many stories about how young people with a disability are sent to a library to do academic work whilst a physical education lesson takes place because the ability to include the young person with a disability doesn't exist within the school. This is a training and resource issue within schools...*¹²

⁸ Written submission from Royal London Society for Blind People, January 2012, page 1

⁹ Written submission from Interactive, March 2011, page 4

¹⁰ Transcript of the Economy, Culture and Sport Committee meeting, 19 January 2012, page 5. Minutes and transcripts of Committee meetings are available from the London Assembly secretariat or via <http://www.london.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeed=233>

¹¹ The Youth Sport Trust promotes inclusion for disabled people in school sport. For more information see: <http://inclusion.youthsporttrust.org/page/mainstream-pe-videos/index.html>

¹² Written submission from Cricket for Change, January 2012, page 2

The Committee recommended in our 2006 report that teachers should have the skills to help disabled pupils participate. We were concerned that in a one-year teacher training course, no time was spent instructing teachers in how to include disabled pupils in sport, or any information given about what help and specialist facilities are available. Subsequently, this action was included in the first *Inclusive and Active* strategy.

However, we have seen little evidence that progress has been made. This type of training remains something that mainstream teachers undertake voluntarily in their own time, meaning that it does not reach enough people to make a significant difference.¹³ Stewart Lucas of Interactive told the Committee that it was very difficult for London policy-makers to bring about change in this area because teacher training and school sport are national responsibilities, under the Department for Education.¹⁴

Beyond schools, the Committee has heard that skilled volunteers could help engage disabled people to become physically active. As the RLSB told the Committee:

*...we want to train more volunteers to engage with visually impaired people and provide friendly informal support for participation in sports activities and other kinds of physical exercise. They will provide practical assistance in locating venues and arranging travel, provide encouragement to build enthusiasm and introductions to staff who can offer specialist disability training in various physical activities.*¹⁵

Many Londoners are involved in volunteering, and the Mayor is seeking to increase the numbers through his Team London initiative.¹⁶ The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games will also bring thousands of people into volunteering, as official Games Makers and through the Mayor's own London Ambassadors scheme.¹⁷ There may be an opportunity for the Mayor to encourage people to keep volunteering in this sector beyond the Games, perhaps by working with Interactive to ensure Games volunteers can access the information and training they would need to do this.

Getting there

One supply-side factor that does limit participation to some extent is transport. We know that London's transport system is more inclusive than many other cities, reflecting the investment in this area by Transport for London (TfL), particularly on step-free stations and on the bus network. However, it remains the case that only 63 out of 270 London Underground stations have step-free access from street to platform level. More accessible and convenient transport is needed for some disabled people to take advantage of new opportunities.

¹³ Michelle Weltman, London Swimming, Transcript of the Economy, Culture and Sport Committee meeting, 19 January 2012, page 21

¹⁴ Transcript of the Economy, Culture and Sport Committee meeting, 19 January 2012, page 21

¹⁵ Written submission from Royal London Society for Blind People, January 2012, page 2

¹⁶ For more information about Team London see: <http://www.london.gov.uk/teamlondon>

¹⁷ For more information about London Ambassadors see: <http://www.londonambassadors.org.uk>. For Games Makers see: <http://www.london2012.com/get-involved/volunteer/london-2012-games-makers>

This makes a real difference to people's lives. The Committee heard for example about a disabled person volunteering at sport events at the London Youth Games (LYG), whose allowances for taxi travel ran out, leaving him unable to continue volunteering. As Russell Findlay, chief executive of the LYG, told the Committee:

*...we got to the point where we, as a small charity, had the decision of do we fund his expenses, i.e. a taxi journey at £50 per day to get him enabled to volunteer at our event, or do we find somebody else to volunteer at our event and, in that sense, he would be excluded? When looking at how we engage disabled people across all formats of sport, whether it is as participants or volunteers, we need to be conscious of how their different allowances and transport enablement will help them take part...*¹⁸

The Assembly has investigated this issue over a number of years. The Transport Committee has expressed particular concerns about door-to-door transport services, which many disabled people that cannot use public transport rely on to get around. Its 2010 investigation found that services run or funded by TfL, such as Dial-a-Ride and Taxicard, lacked coordination and could be unreliable.¹⁹

Using active travel methods like walking and cycling is one way for disabled people to stay physically active, if they have the right support to do this. Transport for London (TfL) has promoted these options to Londoners in recent years, although arguably more could be done to support active travel for disabled people. For instance, the Mayor's Cycle Hire scheme is available to most Londoners. TfL could consider promoting providers of disabled cycling equipment alongside Cycle Hire, to help ensure that disabled cyclists have the same opportunities as everyone else.²⁰

Conclusion

London simply has to do better at encouraging disabled people to become active. That would be true regardless of whether the Olympic and Paralympic Games were being staged here, but this does add a further incentive. It would be a terrible legacy to see the world's best disabled athletes competing in this city without taking the opportunity to inspire our own population to become more active.

This is a complex problem that cannot be solved overnight, however. We believe that in their *Inclusive and Active* strategy, the Mayor and his partners have the right approach overall. In our follow-up work we have identified a number of other improvements that could help ensure progress is made. The Committee has written to the Mayor and the Secretary of State for Education to share these conclusions:

- Disabled peoples being taught in mainstream schools are still at risk of being excluded from physical activity. Teachers need the skills to help disabled pupils to participate, and to

¹⁸ Transcript of the Economy, Culture and Sport Committee meeting, 19 January 2012, page 16

¹⁹ *Door to door transport services*, London Assembly, June 2010

²⁰ Isabelle Clement, *Wheels for Wellbeing*, Transcript of the Economy, Culture and Sport Committee meeting, 19 January 2012, pages 15-16

know what specialist equipment and services are available and where they can turn for help. The government needs to consider how teacher training can be enhanced to deliver this.

- Accessible transport is vital for disabled people to take advantage of opportunities. For clubs and groups to provide their own transport to disabled participants is very difficult because of the expense involved. A majority of Tube stations are inaccessible, while door-to-door services need to be improved. While addressing these, TfL could take a further positive step if it better promoted active transport options for disabled people.
- Thousands of Londoners will be volunteering during the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. This may provide a new opportunity after the Games to boost volunteering among those groups supporting disabled people to stay physically active. Working with Interactive, the Mayor could help people get the information and skills they need to volunteer in this sector.

The Economy, Culture and Sport Committee

Dee Doocey (Chair)	Liberal Democrat
Len Duvall (Deputy Chair)	Labour
Tony Arbour	Conservative
John Biggs	Labour
Andrew Boff	Conservative
Victoria Borwick	Conservative

Views and information

The Committee met the following guests on 19 January 2012:

- Isabelle Clement, Wheels for Wellbeing
- Simon Cooper, Greater London Authority
- Andy Dalby-Welsh, Cricket for Change
- Russell Findlay, London Youth Games
- Stewart Lucas, Interactive
- Michelle Weltman, London Swimming and LB Newham

The transcript of the discussion is available at:

<http://www.london.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=233&MId=4408&Ver=4>

The Committee also received written submissions from British Cycling, British Fencing, Cricket for Change, Dame Kelly Holmes Legacy Trust, England Athletics, Inclusion London, Interactive, Kids Company, LB Hackney, London Youth Games, Panathlon, Skills Active, Royal London Society for the Blind, Sport England, Tower Hamlets Youth Sport Foundation, and the University of East London.

Copies of written submissions are available via:

<http://www.london.gov.uk/who-runs-london/the-london-assembly/publications/health>

Committee contacts

For further information about this report, to order a copy, or for media enquiries please contact:

Richard Berry, Scrutiny Manager richard.berry@london.gov.uk 020 7983 4199	Alastair Cowan, Communications Officer alastair.cowan@london.gov.uk 020 7983 4504
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Online

You can find further information about the Committee and access reports at:

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Cover photograph by Richard Sarson (courtesy of Wheels for Wellbeing)

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