

London Borough of

Richmond Upon Thames

Community Focus Groups

Leisure and Physical Activity Report

February 2023



LEISURE-NET
SOLUTIONS LTD

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01 Project Background and Cross-Cutting Themes

This report summarises the key findings of community engagement focus groups undertaken for the London Borough of Richmond Upon Thames (LBR), on behalf of Max Associates.

Leisure-net Solutions, the industry leader for Customer Insight and Market Intelligence in the active leisure industry, is delighted to present this report.

The objective of these consultations was to explore attitudes and perceptions towards physical activity generally, and local leisure centre provision. Also to identify the barriers that people face exercising at the LBR centres.

Three online focus groups took place – one for “young people”, one for “inactive adults” and one for Parent Carers of children with disabilities. The groups were conducted by Director Mike Hill, assisted by Business Development Director Julie Allen and Research Analyst Alison Rivers.

Whilst each group was distinctly different in its demographics, a few cross cutting themes emerged across the sessions;

- **Awareness of the importance and benefits of physical activity** and a desire to be more active – if they currently felt inactive
- **The importance of having appropriate staff** to provide support and assistance – where participants needed felt they needed it
- The part that **“being social” plays in encouraging people** to start something new and being motivated to continue this. This is about exercising with friends, families and peers, but also combining the activity with relaxation and refreshments as a group afterwards
- More emphasis was put on **increasing awareness of what is already available, and making current facilities/services better and more accessible**, rather than new facilities/services being required.

02 Executive Summary

Young People Group

The virtual workshop was undertaken on the 6th December at 16.30.
The session was arranged by council officers.

Young Persons Group Methodology;

- Contacted the Richmond Youth Council and 2 people were recruited.
- Youth centres were contacted and 5 people from Ham Youth Centre attended the session.
- The Youth Care Council were also contacted but there no turn out from this group.
- A flyer was produced and distributed to all of the above with the request to distribute to the young people. An incentive was also included for this youth session of a £10 gift voucher.

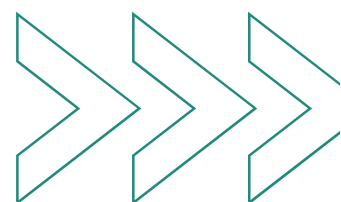
A total of seven young people joined the focus group, with two attendees on separate screens and the other five sharing one screen while attending their youth club.
All attendees were aged between 14 and 16, with a mix of genders.

Detailed notes from the session can be found on page 12 - 14.

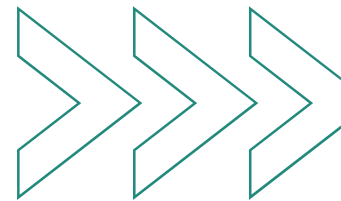
“I don't think my friends who are inactive really know what is available in the area”

The participants attending this group were already generally quite active and engaged in using local facilities and attending locally run activities. So, the conversation focused more on what would encourage them to be more active and what they thought their more inactive friends would like to do.

The session was quite difficult to facilitate as several of the participants were all together in one room sharing a phone, making it difficult to engage with them one to one.



Key Findings – Young People



Please find below the key findings from each of the themes discussed in the group.

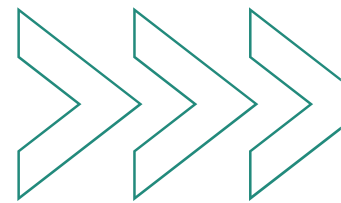
Topic 1: How active are you?

The group of young people were all generally active and all engaged in walking and activity sessions at school, in a gym or at a youth club. They understood the positive benefits of being active, from both a physical and mental health perspective.

Topic 2: Where do you currently do your activity?

Most of the activity that the group undertook was carried out at schools and/or youth clubs. One of the group used a private gym and one member did a lot in the local park. But a majority of the attendees were conducting activity through active travel, walking to and from school/college or just walking everywhere in general.

Key Findings – Young People



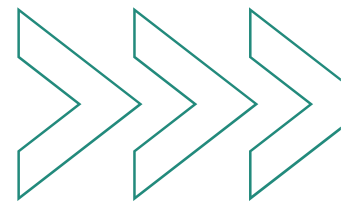
Topic 3: Would you like to be more active? If yes, what would encourage you to do more?

Generally, the group were happy with their current activity levels so it was difficult to drill down into what could encourage them to do more. It was interesting though that even at this age they were conscious of time limitations and fitting in their activity around all of their other (mainly academic) commitments. They did comment that other young people who were less active didn't seem to be aware of what opportunities there were, so more information made available in the right format and through the appropriate channels may encourage them to do more. In particular, the group from the youth centre mentioned that they were so well informed, because most of the activity they took part in was at the youth centre.

Topic 4: Thinking of your local leisure centre, what would encourage you to use it more?

Not many of the group used their local leisure centres as their main place for activity. Some of them hadn't visited for a long time so were unaware of what was on offer and what the facilities were like and the youth club group, said they spent time in the youth centre instead. Some of their comments were based on what friends had said or experienced. But things that would encourage them focused around more awareness of special sessions aimed at their age group, more variety of services generally, and better cleanliness.

Key Findings – Young People



Topic 5: What is your main method of transport to leisure facilities? And do you have any difficulties with active travel such as biking?

Most of the group relied on buses or parents to give them lifts to where they needed to go. It was generally felt that the bus services were good and gave them good access to where they wanted to go. Although whilst not a leisure centre, a lot of the attendees took part in active travel, whether that be the walk to school or their youth club.

A couple of the group used their bike quite a lot to get around, but the majority didn't cycle due to not having one, or not feeling safe on the roads and not having enough bike paths.

Topic 6: What is missing in your area?

Overall, the group, largely those that attended the Ham Youth Club, were pleased with what was available to them in the local area and had to be encouraged to think "outside the box" as to what would encourage not just them, but also their more inactive friends. Themes that emerged then were around less traditional sports provision and more informal ones such as dance, skating and scooters. Both the Youth Council members commented on needing "affordable facilities" - one mentioned that there are no free football pitches available to him, which he would like and another mentioned wanting more affordable badminton court hire.

03

Executive Summary Inactive Adults Group

The virtual workshop was undertaken on the 12th December at 16.30pm.

The session was arranged by council officers who recruited inactive adults who had completed the online community survey.

A total of five adults joined the focus group with a mix of genders and ages, ranging from mid forties to late eighties.

Detailed notes from the session can be found on pages 15-17.

Inactive Group Methodology;

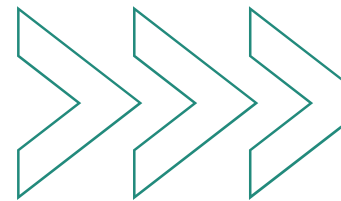
- The people who attended this group were initially recruited from the survey results.
- This was followed up with comms via the councils social media channels to increase attendance numbers. This included advertising the group on Twitter and Facebook.

“We all want slightly different things, but we all want to get fitter”

All participants attending this group really engaged in the discussion and were positive about increasing their current activity levels. They all recognised the importance of being active for their physical and mental health and had clear opinions about the barriers they faced to being more active and what would encourage them to participate more.



Key Findings – Inactive Adults



Please find below the key findings from each of the themes discussed in the group.

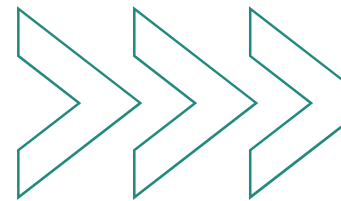
Topic 1: How active are you?

There was a strong desire to be more active for various reasons such as improved health for those with joint/back issues, but the overriding feeling of the group was a desire to be more active/ fitter, but in a social setting where activity was linked to a social interaction (coffee etc). Participants were very vocal on how their active lifestyles differ pre and post Covid. Not returning to being more active has been due to a number of factors such as programming/closure of facilities/behaviour change and need for support/lack of communication and information regarding what is available has had a major impact on this group.

Topic 2: Where would you prefer to do your activity and would you prefer to be active alone or in a group?

There was a mix between indoor and outdoors as a preference, and in groups or by themselves. Most of the group had a preference for outdoors but recognised that certain indoor activities, such as weight training, would encourage them to participate indoors on a regular basis.

Key Findings – Inactive Adults



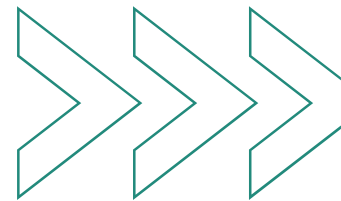
Topic 3: Would you like to be more active? If yes what would encourage you to do more?

Again, there was a very strong desire to be more active with one participant stating “I just want to be fitter than I am now” this sentiment was echoed by all participants who all confirmed they feel significantly less active/fit post Covid. The environment and support from staff had a major impact in terms of being more active.

Topic 4: Thinking of your local leisure centre, what would encourage you to use more?

Participants were not currently using the leisure centres regularly, and they all stressed the importance of staff support and ‘non-sporty’ activities, blended with a social interaction, as being really important to attracting and motivating them. Other encouragement factors included competitive prices, one member - especially if something new was introduced would be saying more orientation sessions for new users on classes, equipment, facilities beneficial and another said that activities that would enable them to exercise with their family and children would encourage them to do more, especially if the child was also inactive.

Key Findings – Inactive Adults



Topic 5: How would attendees like to travel to their local leisure centre?

When asked how attendees would travel to their leisure centre, none said drive, 3 said bus and 3 also said walk/bike. The main reason for not cycling was due to threat of bike theft and purpose-built bike paths.

Topic 6: What is missing in your area?

There was a real mixture of ideas about what was missing currently that would encourage them to be more active, but a common theme was that any new facilities needed to incorporate time and/or facilities to socialise and mix with other people and needed to be available flexibly at different times of the day.

04

Executive Summary

Parent Carers Group

The virtual workshop was undertaken on the 8th February 2023 7.30pm
The session was arranged by council officers.

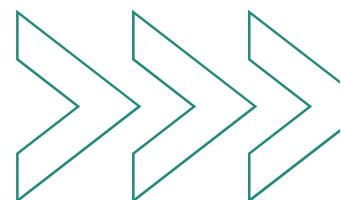
Parent Carers Methodology;

- There were a high number of requests from the Parent Carer Forum to attend this focus group – participants have a voice and wanted to be heard.
- A total of 12 parent carers joined the focus group with two members of the Parent Carer Forum also in attendance.
- All attendees were parent carers of children with various disabilities.

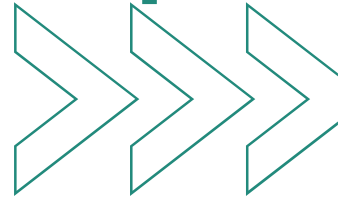
Detailed notes from the session can be found on pages 23-26

“Expectation is vital – what is this experience going to be like for my child, for me, for my family?”

All participants were passionate and committed in providing opportunities for their child(ren) to experience activities without fear of judgement. Attendees of this focus group highlighted that their children need flexibility, improved staff understanding to help manage their expectations when visiting a facility



Key Findings – Parent Carers Group



Please find below the key findings from each of the themes discussed in the group.

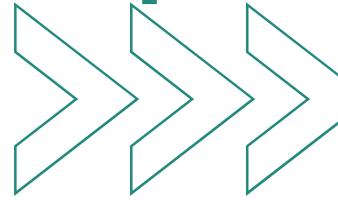
Topic 1: Would you consider yourself active or inactive – think about all activity not just sports etc

There was a strong desire from all attendees for their children to have the opportunity to be active. However, it was immediately clear that there were major obstacles which prevented some parents from exploring options or pursuing certain activities – in particular swimming and the gym.

Topic 2: What currently stops you from participating in physical activity (if inactive) or more (if active)?

The attendees wanted to have a voice and be heard. They were committed in trying to help their child(ren) have the opportunity to be active and socialise but factors including environment (noise / busy), issues with booking and in particular the requirement to train staff to understand and empathise were key concerns which meant parents could not manage expectations of the experience they were expecting to have therefore either stopped looking for opportunities, adapted how their child engaged in activity or withdrew from taking their child to the leisure centre.

Key Findings – Parent Carers Group



Topic 3: What would encourage you to take part in physical activity – for the inactive or encourage you to do more for the active?

What would encourage you to use your local leisure centres more?

Attendees were very clear on what would encourage them to be more active – staff training and understanding was vital alongside improved booking processes and clearer communication of what the session would be like. These were essential components in managing theirs and their child's expectations to help reduce any feelings of anxiety or stress.

The attendees felt strongly that the barriers highlighted in topic 2 needed to be addressed in order for confidence to be restored in attending leisure centres and other community facilities.

Topic 4: If you are looking to start participating/participating more in physical activity, are you likely to use leisure centres or find alternative providers/facilities e.g. community centres, parks/open spaces, your school/college (for young people)?

The attendees would like to see more opportunities within their leisure centres but were equally open to looking at alternative facilities such as schools/hospice etc. Availability is a major issue with one carer explaining that as they are not guaranteed slots at the hydro-pool, they will 'drop everything' when a space becomes available as this is the only form of activity their daughter can participate in.



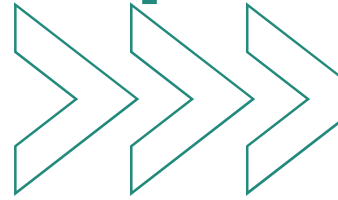
Topic 5: What types of physical activity would you be interested in participating in - for the inactive or for the active – in addition to what you already do?

Parent carers were passionate about being able to offer their child(ren) opportunities to experience new things – to help with confidence and for their child(ren) to realise that they can enjoy other things too.

The attendees offered a variety of activities that they'd be keen to explore with one parent carer saying *"Being able to try something new is so important for child's confidence"*.

Topic 6: How do/would you get to your nearest leisure centre? Walk, cycle, bus, train?

Due to the diverse nature of the children's disabilities, the most common mode of transport was car. Use of public transport could be challenging and add to the overall anxiety and stress of getting to their activity. Quite often parent carers had had a challenging time to get out of the house, so transport needs to be accessible and easy.



Topic 7: Are there any leisure facilities/activities that you think are missing from your area that you would like to use?

Topic 5 covered the types of additional activities the group would be interested in participating in however the group did make the following recommendations to access current facilities:

- Introduce and increase number of 'quiet' swim sessions – calm environment, lighting adjusted, and non-slip matting laid around the pool to minimise risk of slipping. Some of the young children do not understand the danger of the area and will run regardless so perhaps some form of anti-slip cover could be applied.
- Open up use of both pools – not just the learner pool for the quiet sessions.
- Increase number of hoists available and be clear with communication re how staff will assist where needed from getting attendee from the changing room to the pool with dignity and respect.
- Activity for parent carers – some way for carers to access exercise with childcare arranged to enable to them to have time for themselves with the knowledge their child is safe and being cared for.

One attendee stated that 'they knew they were asking the council to go above and beyond' for their children – a sentiment that was echoed by others in the group. The key additional requirements were functional – dedicated changing spaces, increased number of hoists, dedicated quiet times and increased availability.

Acknowledgements

With special thanks to:

- The residents of the London Borough of Richmond Upon Thames for their engagement and contribution to this piece of research.