




Office for Health  
Improvement  
& Disparities



ADPH  
North East



# North East: Physical Activity Whole System Approach Learning Report



**RISE.**



TEES VALLEY  
**SPORT**



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March 2025

## Executive Summary

The Association of Directors of Public Health (ADPH) North East Physical Activity and Healthy Weight network collaborated with strategic partners to better understand the physical activity landscape in the North-East. The collaboration included the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID), Active Partnerships, Sport England and with representation from local authorities. The group agreed upon a sector led improvement approach (SLI) to physical activity using the International Society for Physical Activity and Health (ISPAH) Eight Investments That Work for Physical Activity (EITWFPA) as the framework for a 'whole system approach'.

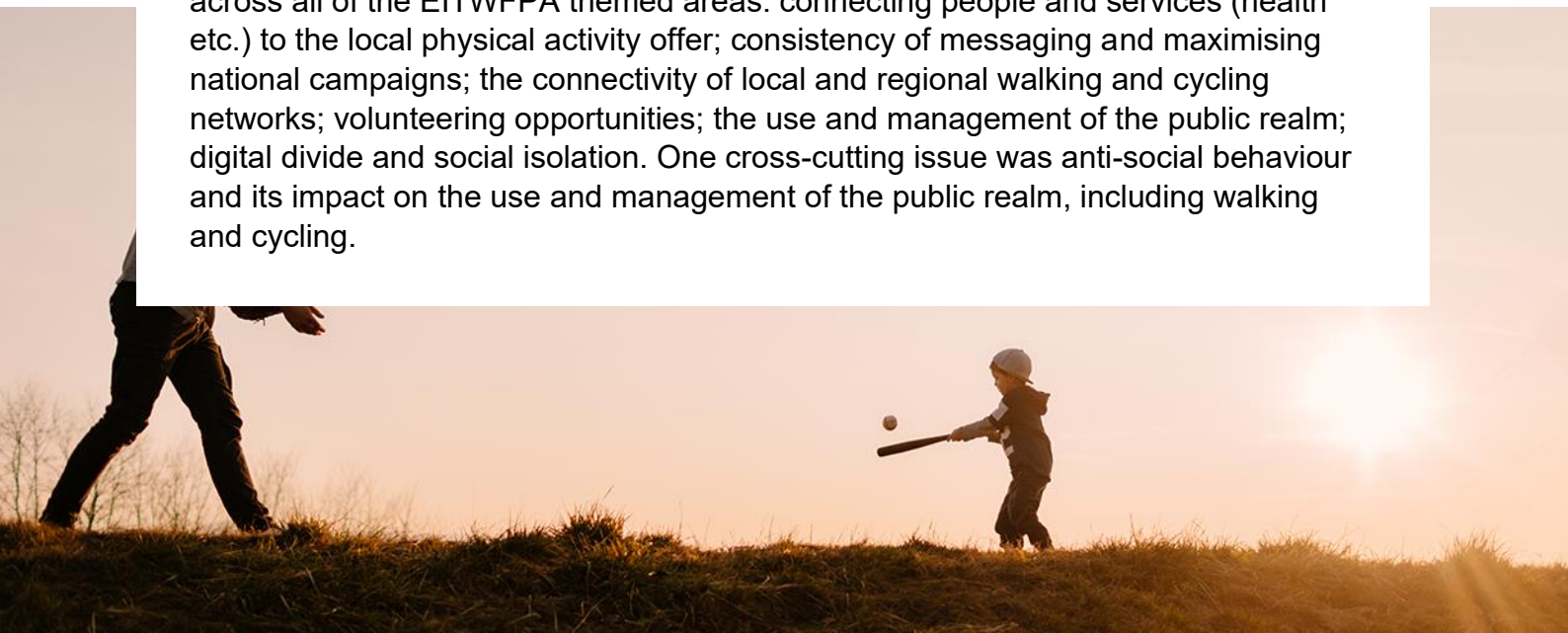
A "whole system approach" to physical activity means addressing the complex factors influencing people's activity levels by considering and working across various interconnected systems like the environment, policies, communities, schools, workplaces, and healthcare, with the goal of making physical activity the norm by creating supportive environments for everyone to be active, rather than solely focusing on individual behaviour change alone.

The project was conducted between November 2022 and December 2024 in two phases.

- Phase 1 (Nov 2022 – February 2023) – SLI PA framework development and pilot
- Phase 2 (March 2023 – December 2024) SLI PA tool roll out to North East local authorities

Following Phase 1 the SLI methodology was adapted to enable sessions to be held in person and online as participating local authorities were keen to build collaboration with new and existing stakeholders. In total, there were 21 online sessions and 18 in person session held in the North East with an estimated 900 stakeholders involved.

Recommendations were developed for each participating local authority based on the EITWFPA framework and recommendations were also produced for the North East Region. A number of issues were also evident across most local authorities. These included: lack of consistency of physical activity offer in schools and with early years (0-5); varying approaches to community and engagement and co-design across all of the EITWFPA themed areas: connecting people and services (health etc.) to the local physical activity offer; consistency of messaging and maximising national campaigns; the connectivity of local and regional walking and cycling networks; volunteering opportunities; the use and management of the public realm; digital divide and social isolation. One cross-cutting issue was anti-social behaviour and its impact on the use and management of the public realm, including walking and cycling.



It is important to highlight that in parallel to the SLI work, there have been a number of significant developments in Sport England's place landscape (which were not fully understood at the time of the pilot), which will have implications on the SLI work at both a regional and local/place level going forwards.

- Sport England have announced that they will be investing £250 million over the next five years (upto March 2028), to extend their Place Partnerships work. This includes significant coverage of the North East landscape.
- The emergence of the conceptual model and Systems Maturity Matrix (SMM) supporting places in developing whole systems approaches to tackling inactivity and participation inequalities.
- The development of a clear evaluation approach to Sport England funded Place-based approaches
- The evolution of the North-East Place Cluster

As the context of Sport England's Place work continues to evolve, there is an increasing recognition from all partners of the need/opportunity to improve connection and alignment, and develop a shared understanding of, the relationship between:

- The SLI Tool and the Systems Maturity Matrix
- The SLI Leadership Group and the North-East Cluster

It is therefore recommended that SLI Leadership Group and North-East Place Cluster work together to:

- Co-design shared comms/messaging, guidance and toolkits to support places in *understanding the relationship between* and *practical application of* the SLI Tool and Systems Maturity Matrix.
- Develop a shared understanding of regional priorities, roles and functions in order to identify opportunities for connection and collaboration and avoid duplication of efforts.



## Contents

Executive Summary.....	2
Glossary.....	5
North East Sector Led Improvement Approach to Physical Activity.....	6
Aims and objectives .....	8
Method .....	9
Phase 1 SLI Framework and pilot.....	9
Phase 2 SLI PA roll out to local authorities .....	11
Findings and learning .....	13
Local Authority Level.....	13
North East Region .....	15
Selected LA Case Studies.....	16
Feedback from Local Authority Leads.....	18
Local Authority experiences of being involved.....	18
How to improve the SLI Approach .....	19
How has the SLI work influenced local authority approach .....	20
Other comments from Local Authorities .....	20
Reflective Learning.....	21
Wider Emerging Context.....	23
Recommendations .....	24
Discussion.....	27
SLI PA Approach .....	27
Findings .....	28
North East SLI Programme Cycle and SLI supporting assets.....	28
Next steps .....	30



## Glossary

**APs** – Active Partnerships

**BHAW** – Better Health at Work Award

**CAs** – Combined Authorities

**CPD** – Continuing Professional Development

**CYP** – Children and Young People

**DWP** – Department of Work and Pensions

**EITWFPA** – (ISPAH) Eight investments That Work for Physical Activity

**EQIA** – Equality Impact Assessment

**EY** – Early Years

**EYFS** – Early Years Foundation Stage

**HIA** – Health Impact Assessment

**ICB** – Integrated Care Board

**ISPAH** - International Society for Physical Activity and Health

**JSNA** – Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

**LA** – Local Authority

**LIOs** – Local Infrastructure Organisations

**MS** - Microsoft

**NE** – North East

**ADPH NE** – Association of Directors of Public Health North East

**NECA** – North East Combined Authority

**OHID** – Office for Health Improvements and Disparities

**PA** – Physical Activity

**PCN** – Primary Care Networks

**PH** – Public Health

**SEND** – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

**SLI** – Sector Led Improvement

**TVCA** – Tees Valley Combined Authority

**VCSFE** – Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise

**VONNE** – Voluntary Organisations' Network North East

## North East Sector Led Improvement Approach to Physical Activity

It is widely acknowledged that being physically active can help in the prevention and management of a range of health conditions, but more than this regular physical activity also contributes to a range of wider social, environmental and economic benefits for individuals, communities and society more generally.<sup>1</sup>

There have been some very recent challenges that have had an impact, the COVID-19 pandemic and cost of living crises have led to difficult choices for many people. Evidence from Sport England in 2021 showed that people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, those living in the most deprived areas and people with a disability and / or health condition were likely to agree the cost-of-living has had a 'significant negative' impact on their ability to be active. In 2023/24 in the North East, 24.9% of adults were inactive compared to 22% in England (Active Lives Adult Survey, Sport England).

The pandemic also had an unprecedented impact on physical activity levels throughout England, but was most acutely felt across disadvantaged groups and in areas of high deprivation. Existing inequalities have widened, with some groups hit much harder by the pandemic than others. This is the case for: women; young people aged 16-34; over 75s; disabled people and people with long-term health conditions; and those from Black, Asian and other minority ethnic backgrounds. Those living in deprived areas and also those in urban areas found it harder to be active. Added to this we are also starting to see the impact that the cost of living crises has on the choices people make and the likely impact on provision of services which will further exacerbate health inequalities with many of the groups above.<sup>2</sup>

The ADPH North East Healthy Weight and Physical Activity network brings together the 12 local authorities in the North East to share best practice, provide opportunities for CPD and deliver programmes of work at scale across the north east. The network identified a whole system approach to physical activity as one of its key priorities.

In 2022 a senior leadership group for physical activity was established in the North East with the explicit aim of looking at how to develop an approach to get the inactive (i.e. those participating in less than 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity per week) to become more active. The group is made up of ADPH NE, OHID NE, the (then 3, now 2) Active Partnerships in the region, and Sport England.

The network were keen to have a process to systematically share good practice around physical activity and identify opportunities to work collaboratively at scale across the region around physical activity. Given the breadth of work across the life course in relation to physical activity it was agreed that a SLI approach would be used to provide a structure for identifying and sharing best practice but also identifying gaps and opportunities for delivering work at scale across the region.

Sector Led Improvement (SLI) is the term used by local government for a self-assessment and peer-review approach to service improvement that is independent of formal external

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-physical-activity/health-matters-physical-activity-prevention-and-management-of-long-term-conditions>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sportengland.org/research-and-data/research/coronavirus>

inspections. It presents an opportunity to improve practice and outcomes whilst demonstrating transparency and accountability to internal and external stakeholders.<sup>3</sup>

In August 2015, the Association of Directors of Public Health UK published a framework highlighting the key points:<sup>4</sup>

- The purpose of SLI is to provide confidence to both internal and external stakeholders and the public in demonstrating continuous improvement in public health practice
- It should provide demonstrable evaluation, challenge and measurement of improvement
- Increased learning and knowledge

This SLI PA system work received the backing of the North East Regional Directors of Public Health group.

A systems-based approach unites the expertise and enthusiasm from across all components of the system, from individual, community, societal and political layers, to develop a shared understanding about the complexity of a problem (i.e., physical inactivity), map key players, and identify points to disrupt the system. The system will include people, communities, organisations, resources (knowledge, money, time), physical and social environments, built infrastructure, and the economy more broadly. The critical aspect of a systems-based approach is not expecting interventions to work in isolation and moving away from this somewhat traditional approach.

As part of our approach to this work it was the intention to develop an assessment tool for physical activity. The assessment tool would be developed from the International Society for Physical Activity and Health (ISPAH) publication, Eight Investments That Work for Physical Activity.<sup>5</sup>

Eight Investments That Work for Physical Activity (EITWFPA) was launched in November 2020 and provided a summary of eight areas for action; all are evidence based and have worldwide applicability. The eight areas are represented in Diagram 1.

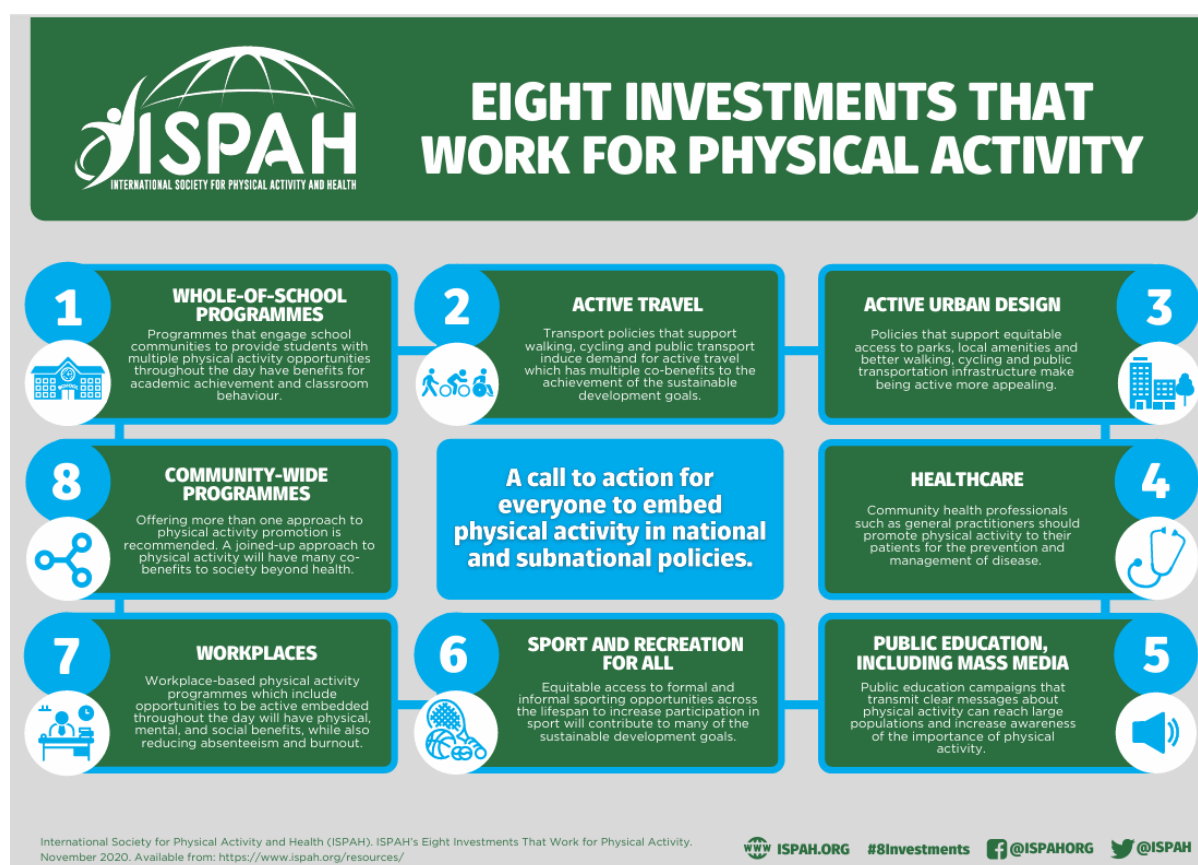
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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.local.gov.uk/what-sector-led-improvement-0>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.adph.org.uk/what-we-do/improving-public-health-practice/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://ispah.org/resources/key-resources/8-investments/>

**Diagram 1: ISPAH Eight Investments That Work For Physical Activity**



## Aims and objectives

### The aims were to:

- Understand the current physical activity landscape across the North East region, including developing a better understanding of the impact of inequalities
- Identify local and regional priorities for physical activity across the physical activity 'system' and identify any gaps
- To help shape the future of physical activity in the North East and ensure that we learn from each other and develop a culture of continuous improvement and learning

### The objectives were to:

- To develop and pilot a self-assessment tool for physical activity based on the Eight Investments that Work for Physical Activity.
- Develop a stakeholder briefing document and slide deck and any other resources to support LAs to engage system wide partners in the SLI process.
- Support the SLI self-assessment process in each pilot site (supporting workshops etc).
- Write up a process evaluation of the pilot (what has worked well, challenges, enablers etc) to support roll-out across the region.
- Refine the SLI self-assessment tool following learning from the pilot.
- Extend the SLI PA approach to all interested local authorities in the North East.
- Garner feedback from local authority leads.

## Method

The project was conducted between November 2022 and December 2024 in two phases.

- Phase 1 (Nov 2022 – February 2023) – SLI PA framework development and pilot
- Phase 2 (March 2023 – December 2024) SLI PA tool roll out to North East local authorities

### Phase 1 SLI Framework and pilot

This phase consisted of the following:

- Interviews conducted with the NE region physical activity steering group membership
- Undertook a desk based review of ISPA PA resources and other UK wide PA evidence
- Developed a slide set to introduce the SLI PA approach and concept across the region
- Produced a stakeholder briefing that could be used to inform and engage with stakeholders – that could also be adapted locally
- Developed the SLI PA assessment tool

Following a review of ISPAH resources and wider PA evidence it was decided that the best way to design the tool was to keep the themes of EITWFPA and supplement these themes with questions generated from wider evidence. As a result, each themed area had a number of questions/statements that provided a systematic approach to work through for each theme.

The SLI PA tool was intended as a desk-based tool and it was suggested that to complete the tool, local authority areas considered the following:

- identify a small task group who can progress the work
- strategic support from local leadership is important. Areas should agree the approach to securing buy in with key partners as soon as possible
- agree the appropriate partnership forum that will govern of the process
- populate the assessment using a combination of desk top research and stakeholder engagement activity. Workshops to discuss the assessment and agree key elements have generated high levels of buy in. However, assurance of the data used is also vital and is limited if based solely on the views of those present in workshops
- Collaborate to agree priorities, ensuring that activity and outcomes are considered together
- Suggested partners are listed at the start of each section

The first pilot site in the North East was Durham. Durham were in the process of updating their physical activity strategy post-Covid and had already started some significant work on stakeholder engagement. Durham were keen to run online sessions to try and foster a greater sense of partnership and collaboration around physical activity strategy and opted to run eight online sessions.

At the first online workshop an attempt was made to utilise the SLI PA assessment tool but there were limitations in using the tool in a workshop environment and it was agreed that it would be better to develop supplementary open questions based on the tool as this would

encourage more discussion in a workshop or group session. The remaining seven online workshops were conducted using an adapted set of questions of each themed area.

In summary, the Durham pilot comprised of the following:

- Eight 90-minute online MS Teams workshops held over a period of 5 days (between 6th-15th February 2023). A workshop on each of the EITWFPA areas
- Following testing prior to first workshop issues were identified with local authority IT permissions for MS Teams that prevented the use of MS Whiteboard so it was decided to capture notes from the group discussion on [Padlet](#) and use the MS Teams chat function for additional comments
- At the debrief session following the delivery of the first workshop (6<sup>th</sup> Feb Workplaces) it was agreed to adapt the SLI PA tool questions to more open questions that would elicit greater discussion. These questions were presented on PowerPoint slides and Padlet boards were also set up to capture views of participants
- This format was used for the remaining seven workshops and participants were offered the opportunity to add any additional thoughts/info to the Padlet boards for several days after the workshop and an email address was provided for anyone that wished to email any further comment
- Each workshop included a 15 minute introduction on the Durham PA context, the purpose of the regional SLI PA work and instructions for the session
- The workshops were well attended and generated significant discussion and information

The following key learning was identified from the pilot to help inform the next phase of the project:

- The workshop sessions were well attended and clearly significant effort had gone in to develop the relationships with a range of stakeholders beforehand
- Key to explain local context for PA and whole system approach
- If conducting workshops spread out the sessions over a few days and have a debrief after each session (if possible). Also ensure that the questions are simplified to encourage wider discussion and try to ensure that individuals don't dominate discussion
- Padlet worked well during online sessions and also allowed participants to revisit at a later point to add further thoughts
- Key to be clear on roles and responsibilities of those involved in running the workshops. The sessions benefited from having a designated local lead, facilitator for discussion and note taker/scribe
- Online sessions – there are obvious benefits with reach and attendance online offers but it was evident that it was a challenge to use the SLI PA tool in its current format in that setting. The tool lends itself more to being completed as a collaborative desk-based activity over a set period of time.
- It is clearly important that each area retains their local context & any strategies developed whilst informed by the ISPAH work adopt an approach and style that fits locally
- Set up a Microsoft Teams channel to store all information

## **Phase 2 SLI PA roll out to local authorities**

Following development of the SLI PA Tool and pilot in phase 1, the aim of Phase 2 was roll out the SLI approach to all other local authorities in the north east region. Individual discussions took place with all local authorities with seven further local authorities participating in the SLI process.

It was essential at the beginning phase of 2 that local authorities were involved at the outset in helping shape the approach locally, given their understanding of the local context for physical activity and knowledge of local stakeholders. In addition, there were a range of other factors to consider, such as timelines (or time pressures) for launching new PA strategies, local authority involvement in Sport England Placed Based initiatives (including Sport England Maturity Matrix work) or other locally driven consultation work which had an element of crossover with one or more of the EITWFPA themed areas. It was also important to note that with a number of local authorities owing to the timing of the SLI PA work or other local capacity limited issues, there was limited opportunity to be fully involved, but this was certainly not down to any lack of interest or support in the project.

During scoping discussions with local authorities the experiences of preceding local authorities, in particular Durham, were highlighted to talk through the pros and cons of the various approaches. There was a universal desire to hold workshops either online, in-person or through a combination of both. The key driver for this was largely down to a perceived disconnect that had occurred post-Covid where there was a belief that relationships with stakeholders had weakened during this time and there was an appetite to use the SLI PA Approach to reconnect stakeholders through the physical activity system work.

Table 1 below provides a summary of local authority participation and method of approach used, timescales of workshops and how the SLI tool would be utilised locally (including pilot site Durham)

**Table 1: SLI PA Approach by each Local Authority**

Local Authority	Approach	EITWFPA Themes								Timescales	Proposed use of SLI
		1. Whole Schools	2. Active Travel	3. Urban Design	4. Healthcare	5. Public & Media	6. Sport and Rec	7. Workplaces	8. Community Wide		
Durham	Online workshops	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	6th Feb 23 – 21st Feb 23	PA Strategy
South Tyneside	Online workshops	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	1st Mar 23 – 4th Nov 2023	PA strategy & Sport England Places
Darlington	In-person workshops		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	13th June 23 – 26th Jan 24	PA Action Plan/Strategy
Gateshead	In-person workshops	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	23rd May 23 – 13th Dec 24	PA Strategy
Newcastle	In-person workshops	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	8th Nov 23 – 13th Dec 24	Sport England Maturity Matrix
Stockton	In-person & Online workshops	x	x	x	x		x	x		8th Nov 23 – 21st Nov 24	Support SE Place based partnership work
South Tees	In-person & Online workshops	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	8th Nov 23 – 13th Dec 24	PA Strategy/Priorities
North Tyneside	In-person & Online workshops	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	8th Nov 23 – 16th Nov 24	PA Strategy
Northumberland	In-person & online workshops		X		X	X	X	X	X	Started end 2023, ongoing	To refresh PA Strategy
Hartlepool	In the process of setting up governance structures with meeting of new Healthy Weight Steering Group (which includes PA) set to meet in Spring 2025. PA SLI will be considered through this group										
Sunderland	Currently launching new PA Strategy and will look to potentially utilise the PA SLI as method of reviewing impact of strategy										

The online and in-person sessions were organised by the local authority lead contacts and colleagues. They were also supported by local Active Partnerships.

The workshop sessions involved:

- Finding suitable dates for sessions (LA)
- Identifying and inviting stakeholders (LA and Active Partnerships)
- Organising venues for in-person sessions (LA)
- Organising table facilitators for in person sessions (LA and Active Partnerships)
- Hosting online sessions on Microsoft Teams (LA)
- Setting the local scene, including any data/evidence at the start of each workshop (LA)
- Online sessions used Padlet boards to capture information
- In-person sessions used flip charts and post-it notes with all outputs photographed at the end of the session

- The workshops used the SLI PA open questions that were adapted from the SLI PA tool
- The workshops included a section on opportunities (both local and regional) and in some local authorities stakeholders were asked to make pledges to support the work going forward
- A number of local authorities also decided to hold large scale in-person events running EITWFPA themes in parallel and repeating them so stakeholders could attend multiple themed discussions.

In addition to the workshops, several local authorities circulated copies of the SLI PA tool with stakeholders and this provided some additional information, usually for one or two of the EITWFPA themed areas as opposed to the entire eight themes.

In total, there were **21 online sessions and 18 in person sessions** held over the course of the project in the North East with an **estimated 900 stakeholders involved**.

## Findings and learning

### Local Authority Level

Following completion of the SLI PA work in each local authority area analysis of the outputs were reviewed and assessed using the SLI PA tool as a framework for the analysis. This included a mix of reviewing padlets, photos of flipcharts, transcription of MS Teams sessions and partially completed SLI PA tools. A set of local authority specific recommendations were developed for each theme covered in the sessions and also identified whether these recommendations were short, medium or longer term. These recommendations are too detailed to cover within this report but some of the key cross-cutting local issues (or opportunities to focus on) are summarised in Table 2 (below). This also sets out where action is required at a local, regional or national level and also includes local examples to potentially learn or build from.

**Table 2 – Summary of key cross cutting opportunities across participating local authorities**

EITWFPA Theme	Key Issue	Action/s	Local Examples/Learning Opps
1. Whole Schools	I. Structured and unstructured activity across the school day and breadth of the offer	Local	Stockton Active Schools Pilot
	II. More focus required on early years (0-5)	Local/regional	Active Start & Active Outdoors
	III. CYP engagement and co-design approaches lack consistency & diversity	Local/regional	Gateshead SEND Toolkit
	IV. More co-ordinated active travel offer – addressing both infrastructure and activation	Local/regional	South Tees Living Streets
2. Active Travel	I. Making the case for active travel, campaigning and increasing uptake	Local/regional	Tees Valley Combined Authority
	II. The role businesses and anchor institutions have on influencing employees and service users	Local/regional	Moving Together in County Durham
	III. Understanding barriers to active travel in areas of deprivation and in low income households	Local/regional	North Tyneside
3. Active Urban Design	I. Community engagement that is pro-active, representative and exerts more influence over design of public realm	Local/regional	North Tyneside EQIA policy
	II. Community safety and ‘management’ of public spaces	Local/regional	
	III. Ensuring evidence is being used to influence the built environment	Local	Newcastle Planning & Health Checklist
4. Healthcare	I. Consistency and uptake of training and links to local physical activity offer	Local/regional/national	South Tyneside
	II. Maximising role of PA in prevention and management within care pathways (at scale)	Local/regional/national	South Tees – Active Hospitals
5. Public Education & Mass Media	I. Consistency and co-ordinating of messaging across a number of channels	Local/regional	Moving Together in County Durham
	II. Maximising national, regional and local campaigns at local level	Local/regional/national	Gateshead – Our Gateshead
	III. Building greater representation into media messaging and campaigns	Local	North Tyneside – Bump, Baby and Birth
6. Sport and Rec for All	I. Mapping of community assets and place-based focus	Local	
	II. Volunteering and volunteering pathways	Local	Darlington Volunteering Pathway
	III. Family and cross-generational activities	Local	Active North Tyneside
7. Workplaces	I. ‘Lighter’ version of work awards schemes	Local/regional	Stockton small and micro business work
8. Community Wide	I. Tackling the digital divide and social isolation	Local/regional	
	II. Greater role for VCSFE	Local	
	III. Place based and ‘on the doorstep’ activities	Local	South Tyneside - Plinth

## North East Region

Throughout the workshops with local authorities, participants were asked to consider opportunities at both local authority and regional level. At a regional level this was with a particular view as to where things could be done at scale. Whilst most participants tended to identify and prioritise more local level opportunities some of the key regional opportunities are highlighted in Table 3 below:

**Table 3: Opportunities at North East Regional Level**

EITWFPA THEME	Key Issues
Whole Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore a CYP strategy across the region that looks to bring consistency to the PA offer and addresses some of the issues around anti-social behaviour</li> </ul>
Active Travel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Play a greater role in walking and cycling infrastructure connectivity across the region &amp; a role in awareness raising and campaigns. This includes, sharing learning, developing consistent messaging and campaigns &amp; working with LAs to shape infrastructure</li> </ul>
Active Urban Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Co-ordinate sharing learning across local authorities and helping develop a regional evidence base that can support local authorities across the region</li> <li>A regional forum</li> <li>Work with LAs to develop more spatial focused JSNAs</li> </ul>
Healthcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Co-ordinate a regional approach that links LAs to health sector and packages up training and resources to bring some consistency</li> </ul>
Public Education, including Mass Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A greater regional role in influencing and facilitating national campaigns, with a North East perspective. This also should consider where local campaign resources could be pulled to co-ordinate more regional campaigns on issues which are often cross borough e.g. Active Travel &amp; Transport, Health, Urban Design</li> </ul>
Sport and Rec For All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure that regional and national large scale events are maximised at regional and local level</li> </ul>
Workplaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A forum to co-ordinate best practice and to also link to large scale regional employers</li> </ul>
Community Wide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Volunteering often goes beyond local authority boundaries and there is an opportunity to explore a volunteering plan for the North East that identifies regional volunteering opportunities and provide a pathway for people to broaden their volunteering experience</li> <li>Co-ordinating funding opportunities across the region to ensure the resources can be targeted to areas of greatest need</li> </ul>

## Selected LA Case Studies

Diagram 2 below includes case studies of 8 participating local authorities who adopted varying approaches to the workshop sessions.

### Diagram 2 Local Authority Case Studies

Gateshead	Durham	Darlington	Stockton
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Objective:</b> To help support development of Physical Activity Strategy and Sport England Place Based work</li> <li>• <b>Lead:</b> Public Health Programme Lead, Gateshead</li> <li>• <b>Background:</b> Gateshead were keen to re-engage with the wider sector post-covid to help progress the existing PA strategy. Gateshead had support from their Health and Wellbeing Board and were keen to maximise engagement across a wide range of stakeholders</li> <li>• <b>SLI approach:</b> In-person workshops and surveys with stakeholders from schools and workplaces.</li> <li>• <b>Pros/cons:</b> well attended in person sessions running multiple themed sessions with support from active partnership and colleagues representing the various themes. Challenges with several themes and had to adapt methodology to ensure representation</li> <li>• <b>SLI outputs:</b> Developed recommendations for each of eight themed areas based on short, medium and long term</li> <li>• <b>Local Authority outputs:</b> As of March 2025 next steps currently being considered</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Objective:</b> To help support development of Physical Activity Strategy 2023-2028</li> <li>• <b>Lead:</b> Public Health Advanced Practitioner, Durham</li> <li>• <b>Background:</b> Durham were keen to develop a physical activity strategy Post-Covid and also following on from extensive work on the healthy weight agenda. They had already done significant awareness raising and development with stakeholder engagement so had a particularly strong contribution from the VCSFE sector</li> <li>• <b>SLI approach:</b> eight online workshops over a two week period in February 2023.</li> <li>• <b>Pros/cons:</b> tight deadline to publish strategy so workshops had to be conducted over short time frame; excellent engagement from across the local authority, community sector and other stakeholder groups as evidenced by participation in online workshop sessions</li> <li>• <b>SLI outputs:</b> Developed recommendations for each of eight themed areas based on short, medium and long term</li> <li>• <b>Local Authority outputs:</b> PA strategy published in 2023 Moving Together in County Durham - Our Physical Activity Strategy 2023-28</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Objective:</b> To develop a local action plan leading to publication of PA strategy in Spring 2025</li> <li>• <b>Lead:</b> Public Health Portfolio Lead, Darlington</li> <li>• <b>Background:</b> Darlington were keen to work towards developing a new physical activity strategy and were keen to develop an initial action plan to further test the approach. They were keen to run in-person sessions as an opportunity to bring stakeholders together and worked in tandem with head of leisure to maximise stakeholder engagement.</li> <li>• <b>SLI Approach:</b> In-person workshops October/November 2023</li> <li>• <b>Pros/cons:</b> recorded a SLI introductory video which was shared across local authority channels and raised profile of the work; weather impacted attendance on first day workshops were held; excellent engagement from range of stakeholders especially sports and community clubs</li> <li>• <b>SLI outputs:</b> Developed recommendations for each themed area based on short, medium and long term</li> <li>• <b>Local Authority Outputs:</b> PA Strategy due to be published in Spring 2025</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Objective:</b> inform PA strategy development and Sport England place based work</li> <li>• <b>Lead:</b> Public Health Practitioner, Stockton</li> <li>• <b>Background:</b> Stockton were keen to evolve their whole system approach to physical activity and use the SLI approach to help identify priority areas for their physical activity strategy. Stockton already had extensive community engagement work happening in parallel with the SLI work so the approach was tailored to reflect this. Stockton had also been successful in securing support from Sport England Place based-approach and had entered into a development phase of that work which the SLI approach was going to help contribute towards that evidence.</li> <li>• <b>SLI Approach:</b> In person workshops held in September/October 2024 and online session in November 2024</li> <li>• <b>Pros/cons:</b> excellent engagement from local authority colleagues; in-person sessions developed extensive output; strong session on active travel and urban design with input from planners and transport colleagues;</li> <li>• <b>SLI Outputs:</b> developed local recommendations based on themes covered</li> <li>• <b>Local Authority Outputs:</b> Still in development</li> </ul>

## North Tyneside

- Objective:** The help with development phase of new PA strategy
- Lead:** Deputy Director of Public Health, North Tyneside
- Background:** North Tyneside were keen to re-engage with stakeholders post-covid and to and to broaden out the scope of the physical activity strategy
- SLI approach:** In-person workshops and online session for health stakeholders August 24 - Sept 24
- Pros/cons:** well attended in person sessions running selected themes in parallel and a number of opportunities identified and individual pledges from participants. Excluded workplace as other work was already taking place in that area
- SLI outputs:** Developed recommendations for each of seven themed areas based on short, medium and long term
- Local Authority outputs:** As of March 2025 next steps currently being considered

## South Tyneside

- Objective:** To help support development of Physical Activity Strategy and inform Sport England Place Based work
- Lead:** Senior Public Health Advanced Practitioner, South Tyneside
- Background:** South Tyneside were keen to develop a physical activity strategy and engage with a wider range of stakeholders with findings required by end of financial year. Also looking to utilise the findings to inform the work in places selected for Sport England focus
- SLI approach:** eight online workshops over June 23 - December 23.
- Pros/cons** Held an introductory online SLI session which was open to all stakeholders across South Tyneside. Online sessions well attended with a range of stakeholders.
- SLI outputs:** Developed recommendations for each of eight themed areas based on short, medium and long term
- Local Authority outputs:** PA Strategy and help shape the Sport England Place based work

## South Tees

- Objective:** To help inform PA strategy and identify local priorities for PA
- Lead:** Sports and Leisure Contract and Development Manager, South Tees
- Background:** South Tees were keen to better understand challenges and opportunities in specific themed areas including, sport and recreation for all and public education and mass media and involving the key stakeholders in this.
- SLI Approach:** In-person workshops and online sessions for selected themes - Sept 24 - Jan 25
- Pros/cons** Prioritised in person session with key stakeholders but also covered other themes through online and desk based SLI tool completion. Very well co-ordinated locally with support from active partnership and other PA stakeholders
- SLI outputs:** Developed recommendations for each themed area based on short, medium and long term
- Local Authority Outputs:** As of March 2025, still considering recommendations and how best to take forward

## Newcastle

- Objective:** Support Sport England Core Cities workstream one, including the Maturity Matrix assessment.
- Lead:** Public Health Practitioner, Newcastle
- Background:** Newcastle were at early stage of the Sport England Maturity Matrix work and keen to use the PA SLI approach in parallel to help shape the approach to their Core Cities programme.
- SLI Approach:** In person workshops held March 24 - April 24
- Pros/cons:** held session with PH department excellent engagement from local authority colleagues; in-person sessions developed extensive output; strong session on active travel and urban design with input from planners and transport colleagues. Challenge to run in parallel with SE maturity matrix work
- SLI Outputs:** PH Practitioner developed findings from sessions.
- Local Authority Outputs:** Still progressing with Sport England Core Cities and Place work, with a Physical Activity strategy to be developed by Autumn 2025.

## Feedback from Local Authority Leads

Following completion of the SLI work across the region a short survey was undertaken with the local authority leads who had been the main project contact within the local authority area. This consisted of four open questions administered through Microsoft Forms and responses were anonymous.

The questions were as follows:

1. Please describe your experience of participating in the North East Physical Activity Sector Led Improvement work?
2. Please tell us what could be done to improve the North East Physical Activity Sector Led Improvement Approach?
3. How did participation in the North East Sector Led Improvement work influence your local authority approach?
4. Any other comments?

The survey had six responses from the eight participating local authorities. The main findings of the Local Authority Leads survey were:

- LA Leads' found the experience positive and valuable
- Conducting online and in-person sessions fostered a sense of being part of something and fostered collaboration amongst stakeholders old and new
- Having an independent consultant (external) helped within the local context and also with having knowledge of what was happening with other areas
- The SLI work had influenced local strategies and work with Sport England (some respondents were at an earlier stage of the process so the extent of this impact had not yet been determined)
- The approach had enabled whole system thinking and forced new connections
- Some limitations on capturing complexity of information in the workshops
- More staggered approach to undertaking the SLI work.

Further details of the survey responses can be found below.

### Local Authority experiences of being involved

*'Overall a really positive experience. A huge pro was the support of independent consultant to help support and navigate the best approach with partners to SLI - some partners hadn't heard or been involved in this approach. As an area we found it easiest to use the questions to guide partners and support responses rather than the matrix tool. This was felt too complex when introducing many partners to SLI. A range of approaches and settings were needed dependent upon the target audience - face to face, online and joint topic/single topic focused sessions. The recommendations produced to date are useful and allow us to report back to senior leaders. Concerns - re: future work and resource needed to continue the impetus of this work with partners- don't want it to get lost' (Local Authority Lead)*

*'Independent Consultant was incredibly helpful and supportive! They really helped South Tyneside understand how we can draft a PA strategy to help us increase engagement and activity levels' (Local Authority Lead)*

*'It's been positive. I think the SLI tools have provided participants in workshops with the confidence that they are being asked the right questions. Furthermore, the structured manner in which the questions have been presented has provided confidence that responses be properly and fully considered leading to impact on future strategic direction. To date we have only delivered face to face workshops, these have provided a breadth of feedback. I think the challenge moving forwards is interpreting and apply meaning accurately to this feedback thereby enhancing its value to strategic planning. The role of the independent consultant has been greatly valued, this has brought added credibility to the project and buy in from local partners' (Local Authority Lead)*

*'We have found it very valuable. Having an external consultant to lead the initial process was very useful and gathering the learnings from other LA's. I also think having a consultant involved as an external at the workshops was a nice touch, having a specialist in the room, to almost reinforce the importance of the work' (Local Authority Lead)*

*'Excellent experience. At the start of this work - We had collaborated via local population surveys and gathered partners insights and input across the system. The 8 focused briefings helped us identify any gaps as well as broaden and strengthen partnership relationships - this work informed our county wide strategy. We created slides and held 8 online sessions, I have shared the slides with NE LAs. There is merit in holding an in person session depending on the size of the area or less online sessions as although we are happy with our approach it involved a lot of time and capacity to arrange and collate findings. The independent consultant was critical for us in supporting the conversations with partners, extra capacity and bringing the findings together' (Local Authority Lead)*

*'A really helpful process, useful to give a purpose for bringing people together from a broader range of roles / organisations than we would have opportunity to speak with on a regular basis. Helpful that there is an evidence base to support it. I think the timing of it is really important though. For us this has worked really well as we are also embarking on our Sport England place partnership work. As a result we have more opportunity to take things forward and maintain momentum from the workshops. I think if that hadn't been the case we would have struggled to maintain the momentum given it is such a wide range of topic areas. Having recommendations from the independent consultant has been really helpful, and I think will support further conversations, as its not "us" saying these things' (Local Authority Lead)*

## **How to improve the SLI Approach**

*'Not an improvement- but senior leads in LA need to be aware of the time and resource the process took and the LA needs to be clear on the next steps after completing the SLI process. (Local Authority Lead)*

*'I think some thought needs to be given to how we can capture the complexity and context of the feedback provided. Some of feedback we have captured is represented by one or two words without any context. The addition of the context I think adds significant value to the feedback for use moving forwards' (Local Authority Lead)*

*'It has been extremely positive for us and keeping the support as provided by the consultant is what we often do not get in other WS programmes. I cannot name an improvement...*

*Other than the addition of the case studies in supporting LAs going forward which I am sure can now happen' (Local Authority Lead)*

*'Possibly a bit more focus/support on when the right time is to do it? Maybe an option to stagger the approach - e.g. an initial screening to understand which areas may need more focus, and then focussing on one or two areas, rather than trying to do everything at once' (Local Authority Lead)*

### **How has the SLI work influenced local authority approach**

*'It made us think what value the SLI process would bring to the LA and how the key recommendations could support the PA Strategy implementation and action plan and ensure ownership by partners across the sector. The process allowed us to raise the profile of Physical Activity in the LA as part of the SLI process. The expectations and outcomes of the SLI process had to be managed in the LA - the process isn't going to solve all the problems. Renewed enthusiasm for a PA group with partners' (Local Authority Lead)*

*'It's going to help inform Sport England funding planning as well as the development of the new PA strategy' (Local Authority Lead)*

*'As yet is hasn't (we possibly started the process slightly later than other LA's), however, we are planning to bring leaders together to cluster responses from workshops around themes with a view to identifying key areas of focus for us' (Local Authority Lead)*

*'It has really helped to encourage that whole systems approach. The workshops almost forced us to make connections across the town. This has been a really valuable outcome, as it also highlighted who will be involved in the PA network locally going forward. It has made people talk about Physical Activity who likely wouldn't of before. By using the SLI approach is has instigated further work, in multiple departments within the council and other local organisations around physical activity. We are also looking at Sport England Place based funding, and this process and the associate work has given us a base to work from and a helpful insight to the local picture' (Local Authority Lead)*

*'Informed the development of our County wide strategy, actions and collaborations' (Local Authority Lead)*

*'Helping support our Sport England place partnership work, but I also see that it is starting some broader conversations around where there could be better collaboration. But only received our recommendations recently, so more time needed to really see the impact' (Local Authority Lead)*

### **Other comments from Local Authorities**

*'A lengthy but valuable piece of work. Full Council sign up needed to demonstrate where the work fits into wider Council plans and intentions going forward- can't sit in isolation' (Local Authority Lead)*

*'Thank again to the independent consultant for your help' (Local Authority Lead)*

‘Just to note how easy our consultant has made working through this process. They have been really supportive and great to work with’ (**Local Authority Lead**)

‘We are grateful to have had support for this process. I think its really special to be aligning as a NE region and taking same approach to writing our strategies but then localising them’ (**Local Authority Lead**)

‘The SLI approach has been a fantastic experience for us’ (**Local Authority Lead**)

‘Really appreciate the support received, the independent consultant has been great’ (**Local Authority Lead**)

## Reflective Learning

At the outset of the project it was also agreed that a reflective learning approach would be adopted to try and ensure we were capturing learning as we progressed through the SLI process.

A summary of the key reflective learning points are below:

- **Creating a movement** - created a ‘movement’ locally around the SLI work that fostered collaboration, connections and trust. There were numerous workshops where connections made led to greater collaborations or agreeing to an approach, independently of the SLI work. Part of this stemmed from the fact that stakeholders were often meeting counterparts for the first time brought together as a result of the SLI work.
- **Demands on local authorities** - as a result of taking a more online/in-person workshop approach to the SLI work it placed demands on local authorities to co-ordinate local stakeholders, organise venues, additional costs etc. While there were clearly benefits to this approach it meant more time was taken to organise sessions which also meant the project ran over a longer period than expected. This perhaps could have been mitigated for at the planning stage.
- **SLI PA Assessment tool** - the shift in approach to online/in-person workshops had a material difference on the piloting and assessment of the SLI Tool that was developed and the functionality and practicality of the tool wasn’t perhaps tested as well as it should have been, especially with regard to the role inequalities plays in physical activity. Whilst there is a place for the tool going forward it became evident earlier on that a stakeholder/relationship building phase was needed to progress this work. This in part may be down to the breadth of the physical activity system and the challenges in identifying what holds aspects of it together. It was felt that other benefits of taking the on-line/in-person approach outweighed those of sticking rigorously to using the desk-based tool.
- **Information quality** – there were obvious challenges around the quality of information collected through use of post-it notes, flipcharts and Padlet. The approach very much puts pressure on participants and group facilitators to capture often complex points in a short sentence or bullet point. This issue was raised in the first pilot site when an attempt was made to use the SLI PA assessment tool online ‘live’ and it was evident that it wasn’t suitable to a more qualitative type format.

- **Complexity** – there were also added complexities with a number of other parallel activities taking place, especially Sport England Place Based work and Maturity Matrix activity. Having reflected on discussions with local authorities and strategic partners it was felt that in the workshops of 1 hour 30mins/ 2 hours we needed to keep session as simple and as focused as possible. So, in some instances the Sport England work was referenced without necessarily going into detail.
- **Single point of contact locally** – the project was greatly aided by having a designated lead within local authorities. This ensured that arrangements and session planning were clear and the local context was factored in to all decision making.
- **The role of independent consultant** – the role brought some neutrality to discussions owing to being external. This helped with facilitation of sessions and ensuring stakeholder engagement across a range of partners. Knowledge of physical activity system work and wider determinants of health were essential to this. Though knowledge gaps on local priorities and activity obviously presented some limitations.
- **Cross-borough/peer to peer collaboration** – very little of this took place though many LAs had discussions with neighbouring LAs to hear more on the approach they were adopting. Greater collaboration between LAs in North East would be beneficial and is suggested in the recommendations.
- **Online v in-person** – as sessions were conducted it become clear there were pros and cons to both of these approaches. Online improved reach to certain stakeholders, whilst -in-person seemed develop much more interaction between stakeholders which often resulted in agreement to collaborate on a range of PA related issues. Ideally, a hybrid option of these based on themes and requirements of stakeholders should be considered.

## Wider Emerging Context

It is important to highlight that in parallel to the SLI work, there have been a number of significant developments in Sport England's place landscape (which were not fully understood at the time of the pilot), which will have implications on the SLI work at both a regional and local/place level going forwards.

***Sport England have announced that they will be investing £250 million up to March 2028, to extend their Place Partnerships work.***

Through a place based, whole systems approach, the investment will seek to support the delivery of population level impact against four key outcomes:

- Increasing Activity
- Decreasing Inactivity
- Tackling Inequality
- Providing positive experiences for children and young people

The breakdown of the £250m investment includes:

- **£130m into an additional 80 places which have greatest need** - Sport England have already announced 53 additional places they will be investing in as part of the initial phase, including 4 new Place Partnerships in the North-East (Gateshead, South Tyneside, Stockton-on Tees, Darlington). Potential for additional North-East Place Partnerships to be confirmed in the second phase.
- **£35m to strengthen work with their existing place partnerships** - Within the North-East, this includes South Tees Place Partnership (You've Got this).
- **£60m to support community assets/capital infrastructure across the above network of places.**
- **£25m to create a Place Universal Offer** – ensuring every area of England can access support, tools and resources to tackle physical activity inequalities through a whole systems and place based approach and the procurement of an evaluation partner at a national level.

### ***The emergence of Sport England's Place Evaluation & Learning Approach.***

Through their National Evaluation & Learning Partner (NELP), Sport England have developed the conceptual model for the evaluation of Sport England funded Place-based approaches. A key component of this is the Systems Maturity Matrix (SMM), which all Sport England Place Partnerships will be required to use (as well as being available to all places via the place universal offer) as a tool to consider and reflect on progress of their place based work.

### ***Sport England's Place Cluster Approach***

As part of their Place Expansion approach, Sport England is working alongside local partners to establish a network of eight geographical 'Clusters' to provide dedicated space and time for Place Partners, Active Partnerships, Sport England and other local and national organisations to connect, learn and collaborate meaningfully, within a place-based context. The North-East Cluster incorporates the Tees Valley Combined Authority and North-East Combined Authority footprints. The Cluster has identified four overarching roles/functions which will form the basis of it's collective action:

- **Connection:** Ensure that the Cluster is well connected between partners and to appropriate regional and national stakeholders.
- **Sharing & Learning:** Ensure that there is a shared understanding of the various practical approaches, (tools and resources, evidence, intelligence, insight, knowledge and expertise) that are available for place-based, whole systems working, and how these can be adapted and translated for specific places.
- **Advocacy and influence:** Ensure that local, regional and national stakeholders value a place-based, whole systems approach to tackling inactivity and inequalities, can see their place within the work, and how they can contribute or adapt their approach.
- **People development:** Support the building of capacity and capability for place-based systemic working, through collective action in relation to the development and delivery of learning programmes.

As the context of Sport England's Place work continues to evolve, there is an increasing recognition from all partners of the need/opportunity to improve connection and alignment, and develop a shared understanding of the relationship between:

- The SLI Tool and the Systems Maturity Matrix
- The SLI Leadership Group and the North-East Cluster

## Recommendations

Local recommendations have been shared with each local authority area and some of the overarching issues have been summarised in Table 2.

Table 4 below sets out recommendations to be considered at the regional level in partnership with local authorities. These recommendations include general points about SLI work and approach and potential opportunities to collaborate across the EITWFPA themes at a regional level.

During the SLI work the Sport England place evaluation and learning approach has emerged. As a result the following additional recommendations are also relevant:

SLI Leadership Group and North-East Cluster to work together to:

- Co-design shared comms/messaging, guidance and toolkits to support places in *understand the relationship between* and *practical application* of the SLI Tool and Systems Maturity Matrix.
- Develop a shared understanding of regional priorities, roles and functions in order to identify opportunities for connection and collaboration and avoid duplication of efforts.

Table 4 – Regional Recommendations		
Area/Theme	Recommendation	To consider
General	I. Hold event/network meeting with LAs that participated in the SLI PA work. Update on SLI recommendations, next steps and agree on reporting progress and the use of SLI as process of review mechanism (including details and timescales for each stage)	Involving local authority leads, Active Partnership and Sport England reps. Potential link with NE Cluster ensuring connection with relevant regional stakeholders (connection) & also seek to involve regional academic stakeholders in work (sharing and learning).
	II. Consider a summit/event on Anti-social behaviour and its impact in the public realm and being active	Potential links with Sport England place based work and local/regional police forces. Would suggest taking soundings from individual local authorities on value and participation as likely to be a politically sensitive issue.
Whole Schools	III. Consider a review of early years (0-5) services across the region to identify good practice and to develop some principles around incorporating physical activity	<p>Consider <u>Early Years PA Guidance</u>. Various PA tools are in operation across the region (e.g. Active Start, Step Outdoors) and Early Years Conferences. NECA funding Rise EY work in the context of poverty reduction, and the first 1000 days agenda and CYP training also developed.</p> <p>Review should also consider whether it needs to specifically focus on certain aspects: PA into EYFS frameworks; workforce training; and where the need is for consistency. Consider a regional mapping exercise to identify gaps and opportunities. Potential for Active Partnerships to support on this.</p> <p>Also opportunity to link early years work with Physical Literacy Consensus Statement and therefore link with NE cluster work (advocacy and influence).</p>
	IV. Work with local authorities to help develop a consistent approach to structured and unstructured physical activity in school and education settings, including developing principles on representative co-design and to develop PA case studies	<p>This might look to consider the: active travel offer; active schools (LEAP &amp; others) opening schools facilities (learning from existing work from APs); and linking with sustained activity with community/sports clubs. Need to also consider the terms 'structured' and 'unstructured' to ensure a clear understanding of this in relation to curricular and extracurricular activity &amp; representative co-design (Youth Voice principles)</p> <p>Increasing no of schools are outside of LA control so this will need to be considered as part of the review and subsequent approach.</p>
Active Travel	V. Look to take a strategic influence on walking and cycling infrastructure connectivity across the region & a role in awareness raising/making the case and campaigns.	<p>Prior work needs undertaken to better understand the barriers to active travel and behaviour change in areas of deprivation and with specific groups (see Newcastle Core Cities programme work). Also potential links with NECA &amp; TVCA transport plans and opportunity to include Healthy Streets pilot</p> <p>Opportunity to connect with Active Travel England (NE Regional Manager).</p>
Active Urban Design	VI. A network/forum across the region that help develop the evidence base around the built environment and takes a role in developing shared resources i.e. North East planning for health tool/checklist that can bring a	<p>Look at the role of JSNA in developing a more 'spatial approach' to highlighting need. Also potential link with Sport England Active Design 3. Further consideration given to membership of the forum and scope. Government targets on housebuilding, this is a significant area of both opportunity and risk.</p>

Table 4 – Regional Recommendations		
Area/Theme	Recommendation	To consider
	consistent approach to planning and built environment at local level	Potential connection with housebuilders (private as well as Social Housing providers)
Healthcare	VII. Work with regional/cross local authority health sector partners to ensure that physical activity is embedded in care pathways, PA training is co-ordinated and health sector takes a greater role in encouraging active travel for both staff and patients	Consider a group/partnership (could link with or build on Active Hospital work) to oversee engaging with the health sector that focuses on training, co-design of PA with patients, embedding PA in existing pathways and linking to the local PA offer. A longer-term piece of work which will require top down (ICB level) and bottom up (PCN level / Local Neighbourhood Teams) input and support, so a pilot in a few LAs would be advised (as local SLI recommendations)
Public Education, Mass Media & Sport And Rec	VIII. Develop a plan for national and regional campaigns/events, including opportunities in Active Travel, Transport, Health and Urban Design	Requires buy-in from local authorities but could extend reach at cross-local authority given the experience of living and working in North East . Develop local case studies (as local SLI recommendations) Regional campaigns will require budgetary support from other regional stakeholders (e.g. ICB and CAs).
Workplace	IX. Consider a forum for workplace health at regional level and a lighter version of Better Health at Work that offers links with local lifestyle and physical programmes	Potentially links to either Active Travel or Healthcare recommendation above. Need to consider how any forum dovetails with BHAW and the work of the combined authorities and also the ICB and DWP work and health programmes. Might be a case of trying to get PA/PH representation on existing forum. NECA region this will also likely impact on BHAW. Need to align with, rather than compete with, these existing programmes as not space in the market for competing options.
Community Wide	X. Explore developing a volunteer strategy/approach that links up local and regional volunteering opportunities	Consider a network that brings together community orgs, sports clubs and other stakeholders to share good practice potentially with community event/conference to promote. VONNE and all the LIOs are important here as they already operate in this space and should be utilised to ensure PA opportunities are included.

## Discussion

### SLI PA Approach

The North East Region decision to take a sector led improvement approach to physical activity proved to be very timely with many local authorities in the North East re-assessing their approach to physical activity in the post-covid period and also with Sport England expansion of its place based working. The SLI PA approach initially set out to utilise the SLI PA Assessment Tool that was developed in Stage 1 of the project but after the initial pilot with Durham and subsequent discussions with individual local authorities it was evident that LAs felt that the SLI needed to help forge relationships with new and existing stakeholders. As a result, the approach taken very much prioritised bringing stakeholders together through both in-person and online workshops. This very much altered the approach and timescales for the project, which extended longer than originally intended. It could be argued that this led to a number of unintended benefits of the approach.

This adapted approach meant that the SLI assessment tool wasn't used how originally planned and a series of open questions were developed based on those in the tool that were more appropriate for workshops or in group session format. The online sessions and in-person sessions had pros and cons. The online sessions enabled the SLI work to reach a range of stakeholders that perhaps have been more difficult to engage with, such as health, planning, transport and community groups, partly as people have also become more accustomed to online consultations or meetings and also by the fact being able to drop in virtually for a ninety minute session is easier than travelling to and from a venue. This likely helped with attendance in online sessions.

The in-person sessions were in the main well attended but some sessions had limited numbers for a variety of reasons. The in-person sessions certainly engendered much more interaction and engagement and led to collaboration between stakeholders both beyond and in connection with the SLI work. These 'softer' outcomes should not be underestimated within the overall impact of the SLI work. The in-person sessions obviously required significant input from local authorities in terms of organising venues and local knowledge of stakeholders and likely preferences to attend. The onus required of local authority colleagues was mentioned in the Local Authority Leads' evaluation feedback.

Both the in-person and online session presented challenges around data collection through the use of flip charts, post-it notes and Padlet for online sessions. Capturing information as bullet points or in short sentences obviously has some limitations in terms of the level of detail of information but in some cases this was also supplemented by facilitators' notes and with Microsoft Teams online meeting transcriptions.

As was highlighted in Local Authority Leads evaluation, local authority colleagues were very positive about the experience of using online and in-person workshops and if this approach was being replicated in the North East or in another areas a hybrid approach of online and in-person would be recommended, based on the stakeholders requirements. The positive experience of local authorities very much backs this up.

## Findings

Whilst the findings and recommendations produced for each local authority were individual to them, there were a number of issues which were consistent across the local authorities. These included but were not limited to: lack of consistency of PA offer in schools and with early years (0-5); varying approaches to community and engagement and co-design across all of the EITWFPA themed areas: connecting people and services (health etc.) to the local physical activity offer; consistency of messaging and maximising national campaigns; the connectivity of local and regional walking and cycling networks; volunteering opportunities; the use and management of the public realm; digital divide and social isolation. One cross-cutting issue that arose across all local authorities and several of the EITWFPA themes was anti-social behaviour and its impact on use and management of the public realm, including walking and cycling. Even if in some cases this is an issue of perception, it merits further consideration as to how this might be addressed and perhaps something that could be looked at across the North East region.

As mentioned, local authorities were provided with tailored recommendations to try and address these challenges but we also have to be realistic about what is achievable and clearly resources will be required to solve many of these challenges. Potentially, this is where Sport England place based work might be able to further some of the effort to achieve this. Local authorities would also be advised to look at other funding opportunities and use where possible some of the connections and partnerships made during the SLI PA work itself.

In addition to the local authority recommendations, recommendations were also made for the North East as highlighted in Table 4. Again, these are very much subject to resources but they dovetail with the local authority recommendations and also look at where there are opportunities to do things at scale and bring some consistency to approaches across the region. Active Partnerships and Sport England in particular will also have a role to play in supporting these regional opportunities.

## North East SLI Programme Cycle and SLI supporting assets

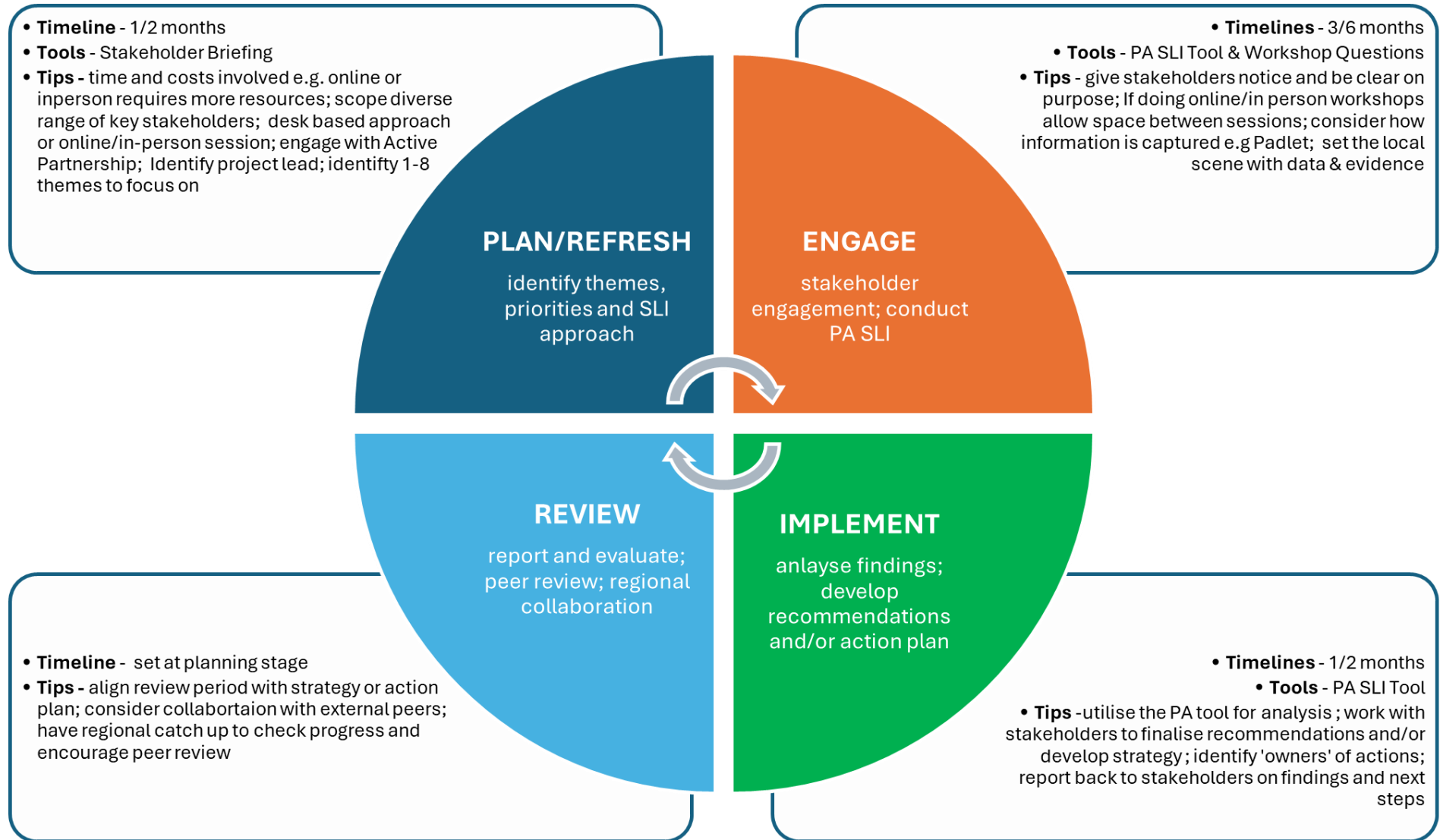
Part of the scope of this project was to develop assets to support on future implementation of the PA SLI work within the North East and beyond.

The following assets were developed:

- [SLI PA stakeholder briefing template](#) – A draft template that provides information on engaging with stakeholders
- [SLI PA ASSESSMENT TOOL](#) – covers each of the EITWFPA areas and is completed as a desk based tool. The tool contains instructions on how to complete the tool.
- [SLI PA Workshop Questions](#) – A set of questions adapted from the SLI PA tool that can be used in online or in-person workshops
- [SLI PA SLIDE SET TEMPLATE](#) – An introductory slide set that provides background and context on the SLI work

In addition, to help understand the various stages of the PA SLI a Programme Cycle was developed that goes through each stage of the programme (see Diagram 3 below).

Diagram 3: North East PA SLI Cycle



## Next steps

The next steps for the approach and recommendations will be overseen by the North East Physical Activity Leadership Group.

The agreed next steps are:

- Draft finding will be presented to ADPH North East Network (March 2025)
- SLI report and supporting assets approved (March 2025)
- Local authorities provided with local PA SLI recommendations will be taking these forward locally (ongoing)
- North East Physical Activity Leadership Group will meet to discuss prioritisation of regional recommendations (May 2025)
- North East PA Summit/Partnership Event, including launch of position statement (Oct/Nov 2025).
- Alignment between SLI work and emerging Sport England place evaluation and learning approach.

For Further information please contact: -

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