

Consumer Feedback on the Draft 'Midlothian Physical Activity, Sport and Health Strategy for Increasing Participation and Awareness'

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Abstract

In this research report, a questionnaire was disseminated to the public of Midlothian to receive feedback on the draft strategy created by Midlothian Council to increase physical activity, sport participation and health awareness. The rationale for the research was to replace a gap left by a previous strategy that ended in 2012, also it is designed to recognise the financial constraints facing the council whilst still increasing consumer satisfaction by giving them a say in future development in the local area. A mixed method (quantitative and qualitative) questionnaire was created to gauge, numerically, what factors of the strategy were useful and should be focused/not useful and could be improved. In addition, qualitative comment/recommendation boxes were present for in-depth, descriptive feedback. This technique was extremely useful in gaining a large response rate and in establishing the target groups that the council should focus on to increase participation, as well as the type of facilities that need improved and what needs improved, e.g. affordability, session timing etc. Room for further research is established in addition to the limitations of the carried-out research.

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Introduction

Midlothian Council's sport and leisure services have drafted a strategy consisting of different priorities that aim to make *'Physical activity and sport – a way of life in Midlothian'*, thus research was conducted to get feedback from the local residents/consumers of physical activity and sport on this draft strategy. In 2009, a strategy for sport, physical activity and physical education in Midlothian was set in place, which lasted until 2012 and was effective in providing a framework for much of the work in Midlothian ever since. However, with much change occurring in recent years, a new strategy was required to reflect the evolving physical activity, sporting and social landscape of the country. The research, which was exploratory and evaluative, was a mixed method questionnaire that aimed to provide Midlothian Council with the strengths and weaknesses of the priorities established to achieve the overall goals as well as gave the consumers of sport in the area a say in the organization and management of local facilities. Lastly, it helps future strategy developers as they know the effectiveness of such research, its techniques and further enhances community engagement. After reviewing existing literature, both theoretical and empirical, examining the methods used, conclusions on the feedback of the respondents will be drawn. Any limitations of the research and recommendations for future research will be given.

Literature Review

This literature review will examine theory on some of the standout topics of the research questions (see appendix A) before looking at previous sport development approaches and their usefulness.

A huge part of the strategy (see appendix B) created by Midlothian and the research conducted is age. Firstly, the youth are so important for tackling weight management issues (another key priority), thus instilling the importance of physical activity/sport in them at a young age will keep them involved for life. Coalter (2007) believes it is common-word that physical activity leads to the reduction of obesity and related cardiovascular illnesses. In addition to age and obesity, affordability and deprivation are huge issues in why people don't participate in sport and therefore Midlothian Council want to focus on volunteers as they will enable opportunities to be provided to the less fortunate for free. Turning now to the example given by Karen and Washington (2001:189) on the Williams sisters (African-American working class) whom have succeeded in tennis, a sport that predominantly, through history, was considered for white and upper/middle class people. Critically, this backs up why Midlothian Council's research on how people feel towards the use of volunteers is so important as they can spur on the poorer areas. Theoretically, this backs up why research was taken on how people feel towards the priorities drafted to achieve the goals of increasing physical activity, sport and health awareness in Midlothian. However, now I will review previous sport development strategies for further assurance in the research carried out.

Firstly, Coalter (2007) uses the establishment of Active Sport in 1981 in response to the urban riots, which he states hugely reduced crime in England. His methods to back the claim are purely theoretical as he provides no statistics on the level of crime in England before or after the induction of Active Sport. Secondly, a prior strategy used to increase participation in sport across Scotland was the Scottish Sports Council's (SSC) (1996). SSC (pp6-7) identifies the following issues that a strategic approach would be useful to solve: supporting schools, raising physical activity levels in young people, making clubs more accessible and establishing links with schools, and supporting the recruitment and training of coaches, teachers and leaders. All issues are included in the priorities in Midlothian Council's draft strategy which adds depth to the research as these issues are still present over twenty years later. Moreover, Midlothian Council's Strategic Plan was designed to accommodate for budget cuts and to link to the 'Midlothian Single Plan'. Robson, Simpson and Tucker (2013) suggest that it is the local authorities' willingness to be adaptive in their methodology to meet community expectations, that is often used as an expedient excuse to continue to limit them monetarily, this example is used in comparison with the £480 million funding that Sport Specific development (Sport England) got from lottery funding, emphasising the lack of funding for community development (pp223). This means the research was necessary as the strategy must be community-tailored to satisfy its consumers.

Every council will have its own strategy for physical activity/sport related issues, but it is the previous consultations that provide the argument for the necessity of the research completed. As shown in Figure 1:



Brent Draft Physical Activity Strategy Consultation Questionnaire

Brent Council is undertaking public consultation on its draft Physical Activity Strategy from the 21st September to 13th November 2015.

This draft strategy sets out our proposed approach to improving the health and wellbeing of Brent residents by increasing participation in everyday physical activity. Our aim is to encourage active lifestyles, whether that is at home, through travel, at work or during leisure time.

We want to increase rates of sports participation of residents to improve health - both mental and physical - through Council, community and partnership means. We aim to achieve this at zero-cost to the council to ensure long term sustainability.

We would welcome your views on the draft strategy and the ways in which we plan to achieve its vision and objectives. We would therefore be grateful if you could take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire using the details outlined below and return by no later than the 13th November 2015.

Everyone who takes part in our survey will have a chance of winning a £50 High Street voucher, the winner will be chosen in a random prize draw. To qualify for the prize please ensure you include your contact details when completing the questionnaire

Please send the completed questionnaire to:

Physical Activity Strategy Consultation,

5th Floor, Brent Civic Centre,

Engineers Way, Wembley HA9 0FJ

Or email an electronic copy to: healthyliving@brent.gov.uk

Copies of this survey will be made available in large print on request.

For further information please call the Council's Administration team on 020 8937 5619

or email: healthylifestyles@brent.gov.uk

Section A: Vision and Objectives

The overarching vision of the strategy is **'By 2021 more people in Brent will be more active and there will be improved health and wellbeing throughout the borough. This will be achieved by making physical activity a fundamental and enjoyable part of people's lives'**.

1. To what extent do you agree with the vision?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

2. Please use the space below to provide any additional comments on the vision.

There are the similarities in methodology, which empirically adds confidence to the questionnaire as it has been done in the past. This has been done by Bradford City Council, Calderdale Council and Dorset Council as well. As there is no written evaluation on the success of the research is available, the numerical value pulls through here as it has been used by four separate councils. This literature provides evidence for further research as Brent also carried out focus group (4 workshops total) which were attended by 24 local officials across 4

focus group workshops from all different organisations e.g health care, NHS, clubs, schools etc (Brent Council). Overall, there is plenty literature that backs up the research, in addition highlighting space for further research.

Methodology

The methodology of the research was mixed methods. This was best fitted as it was vital to get, quantitatively, how satisfied respondents were with the proposed strategy and the optional feedback (comments/recommendations) provided the qualitative aspect.

Regarding sampling, the method used for the research was purposive and stratified with a snowball effect. Tongco (2007) notes, purposive sampling is most useful when the researcher needs to study an area that contains knowledgeable experts within. It was also important to create sub groups because a sample was required for many different types including: age, sex, disabled, occupation and so forth. People were asked, when adding a comment to state if they were part of a local organisation. This meant the knowledgeable experts within certain areas could also provide feedback.

A quantitative questionnaire was created because the projected response (and actual response) was too great to analyse if it wasn't numerically divided due to the window for research and analysis being only six weeks. This is also why it was decided to be done via Survey Monkey – an internet surveying website. Although, a portion were handed out to various clubs and centres and manually imputed. This method and distribution is backed up by Gratton and Jones (2009) who say that (quantitative) questionnaires are easily measurable, you can get to a wider range of people quicker and for less costs as it would be to interview the same number of people, postal is cheap but the internet is even more accessible now and easy to use. Conversely, Gratton and Jones do entertain the notion that clarity of the questions can be an issue. In the research carried out with Midlothian Council, some felt that being asked their ethnicity and sexuality etc was irrelevant and there was no option to explain why it was being asked (ethics check) and this is due to the type of questionnaire. Regarding the qualitative aspect, further comments/recommendations for the strategy was optional, giving the option for in depth, more subjective answers. Due to the large responses, samples of qualitative feedback were drawn from anyone who identified themselves as from local clubs/organisations, and for anyone who did not, random sampling was used because of the timescale and quantity of respondents.

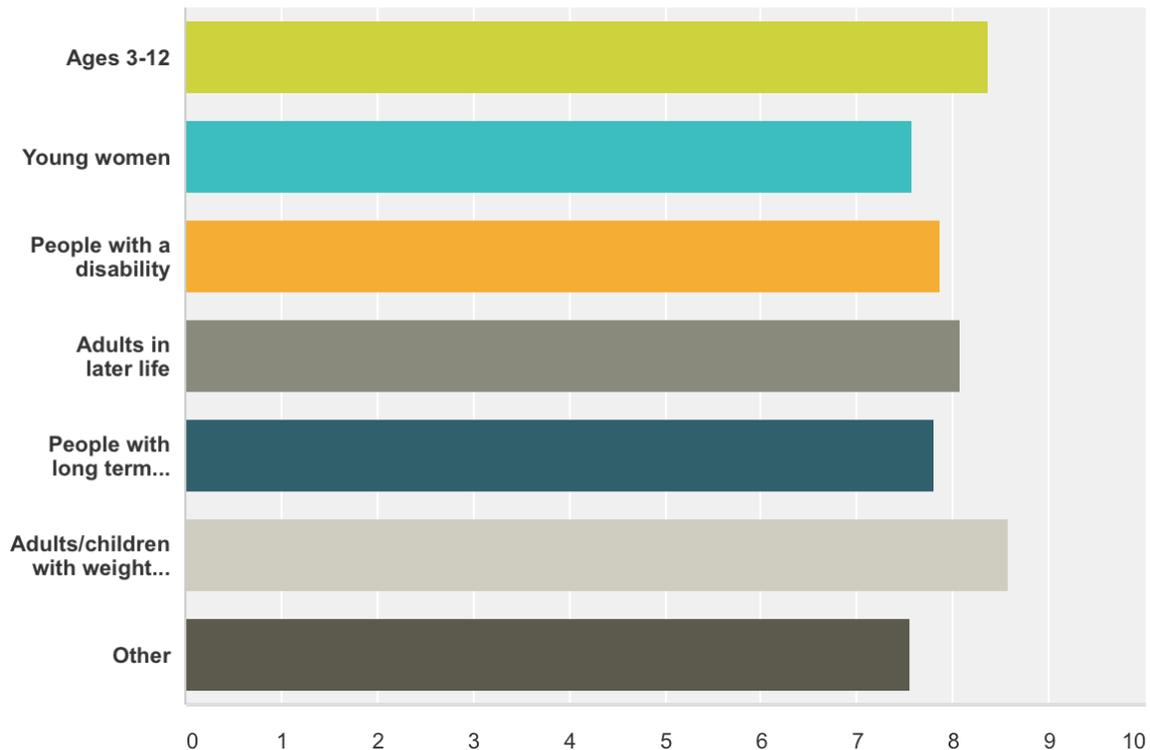
The possible answers in the questionnaire were selected based on the priorities in the strategy outlined by Midlothian Council at prior workshops. They are all desired targets/outcomes etc. Nonetheless, the most important ones must be established because to impact every possible age group, facility, potential partner etc would be an unrealistic goal to achieve.

The methodology was extremely useful in getting enough responses to form a good sample from the different sub groups as well as getting detailed feedback through the qualitative feedback section.

Results and Analysis

As shown in appendix B, the Goals that the priorities (asked about) aim to achieve are separated into 6. The first regarding increasing participation levels. Figure 2:

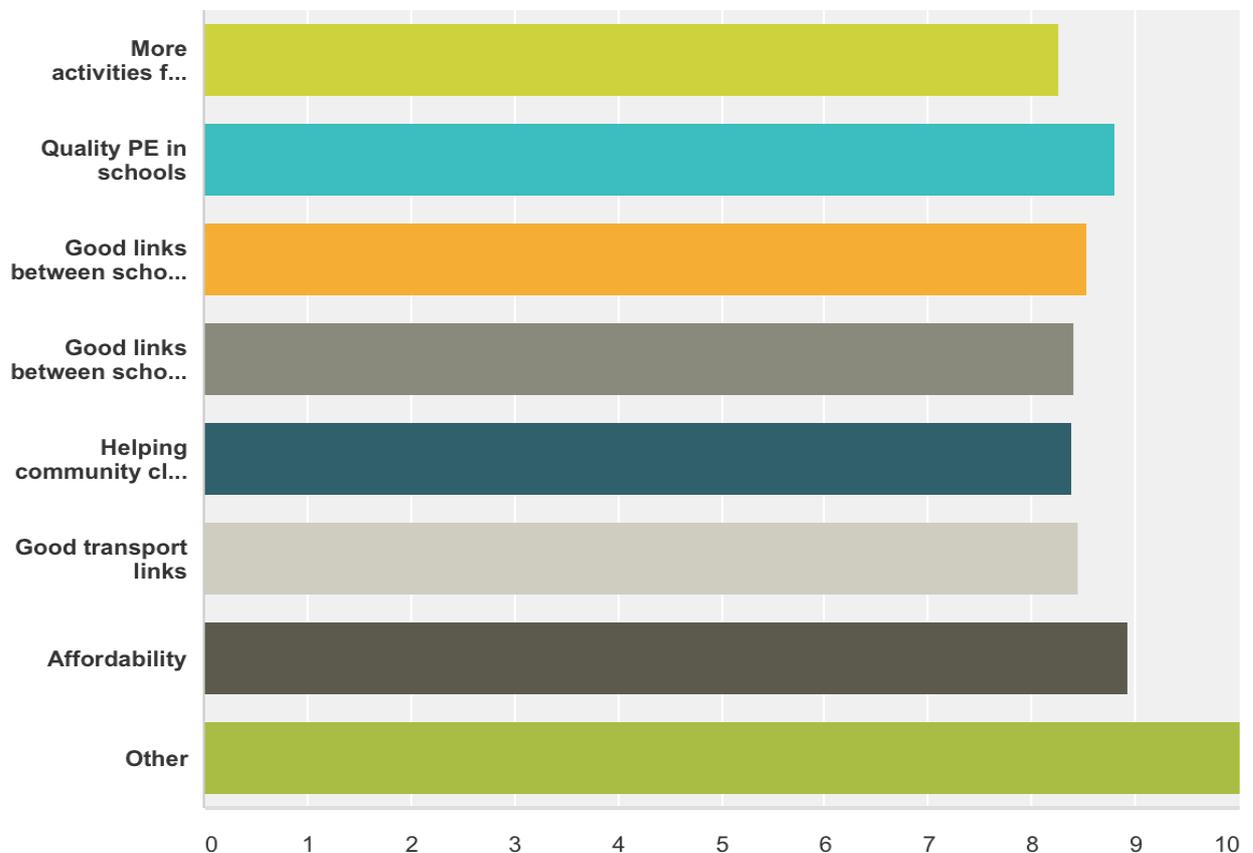
Goal 1 is to increase the number of people participating in physical activity and sport. On a scale of 1 – 10, where 1 is ‘not important’ and 10 ‘very important’ please rate which groups you think we should focus on.



Quantitatively, we can take from this that adults/children with weight management issues scored 8.57, ages 3-12 scored an average of 8.38, and adults in later life scored 8.08. Qualitatively, a walking football official responded, “Adults in later life are often overlooked, but are often embarrassed due to lack of know-how”. This immediately shows potential groups that need targeted by the council to get more involved in physical activity and sport. Linking this to Coalter (2007:115) who believes sport has conventionally been understood to ingrain qualities of “honesty, integrity, trustworthiness” into people as well as “self-discipline” and “commitment to fair-play” which means that if you start at a young age these qualities are more likely to prevent kids becoming obese, and from turning to crime and delinquency in the future.

The next Goal, displayed in Figure 3:

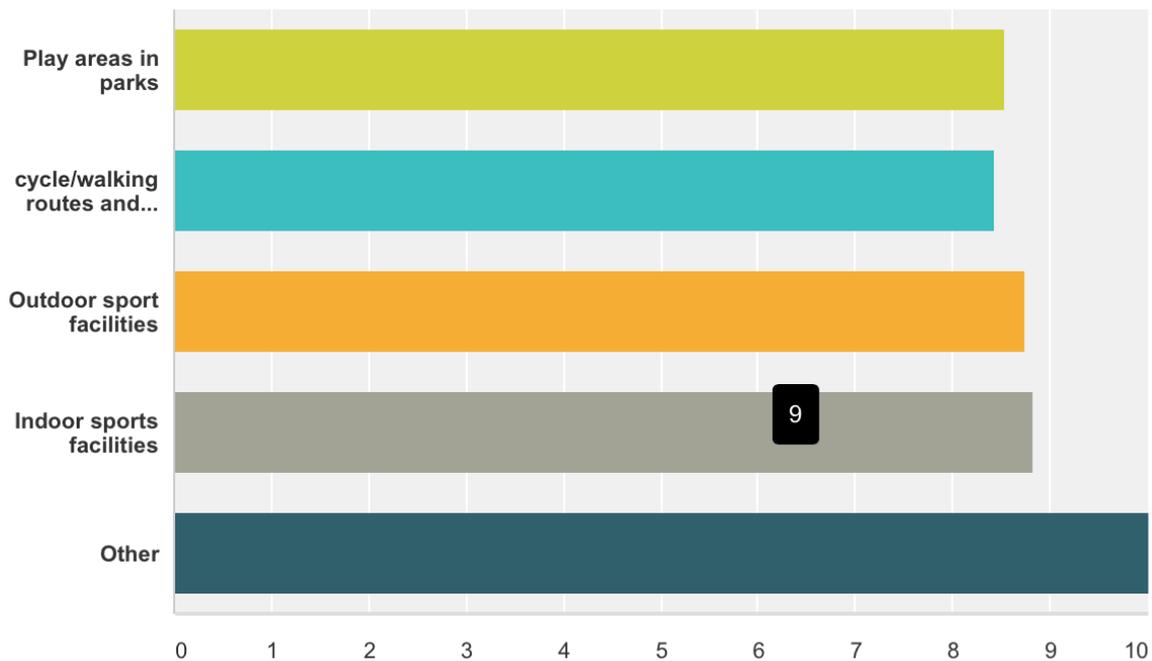
Goal 2 is supporting people to stay involved in sport for their whole life. On a scale of 1 – 10, where 1 is ‘not important’ and 10 ‘very important’ please rate what you think people need.



Overall the results are very close, however the leading answers were affordability, scoring 9 and quality P.E in schools, scoring 8.80. The common qualitative response also associated with affordability - “time friendly sessions”. In addition, the average age groups, who selected the top two answers, were 36-45 and 65+ suggesting that children possibly come before their own personal leisure time, also only 3% of people who gave these two answers a score of 8 or higher were unemployed suggesting work inhibits the availability they have for ‘normal’ session times, “many factors influence people’s leisure choices... the time at their disposal, their job and their income” (Taylor and Torkildsen, 2010:39).

Moreover, Goal 3, regarding facilities, Figure 4:

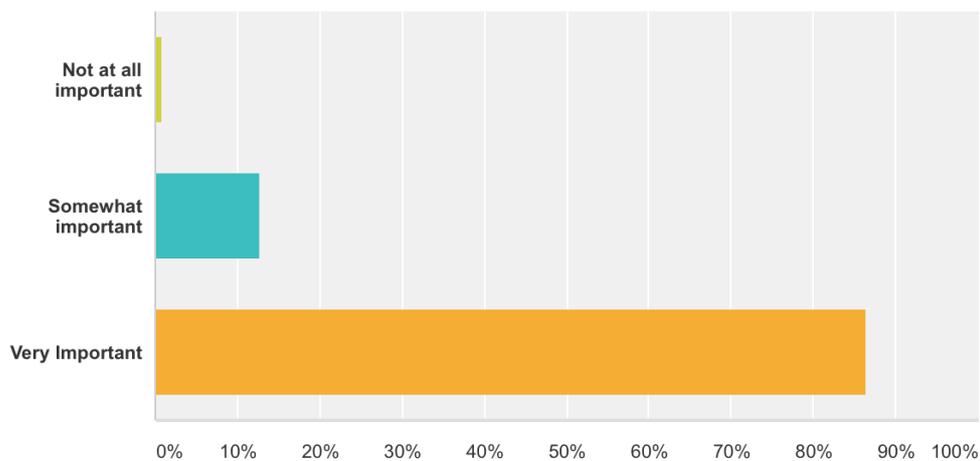
Goal 3 is about the importance of having the right facilities to encourage people to take part in physical activities and sport. On a scale of 1 – 10, where 1 is ‘not important’ and 10 ‘very important’ please rate the importance of the following:



Again, the results are very close: indoor the highest (8.83) and cycle and walk paths/routes the lowest, but still 8.43. The further comments section highlighted that the cycle and walking routes/paths scored lowest because people already like the ‘core paths’ (appendix C) in the area but there is more “promotion needed” so more people are aware of them.

Goal 4 is shown in Figure 5:

Goal 4 is about the people we need to grow and develop physical activity and sports programmes. How important do you think qualified volunteers, coaches and leaders are?

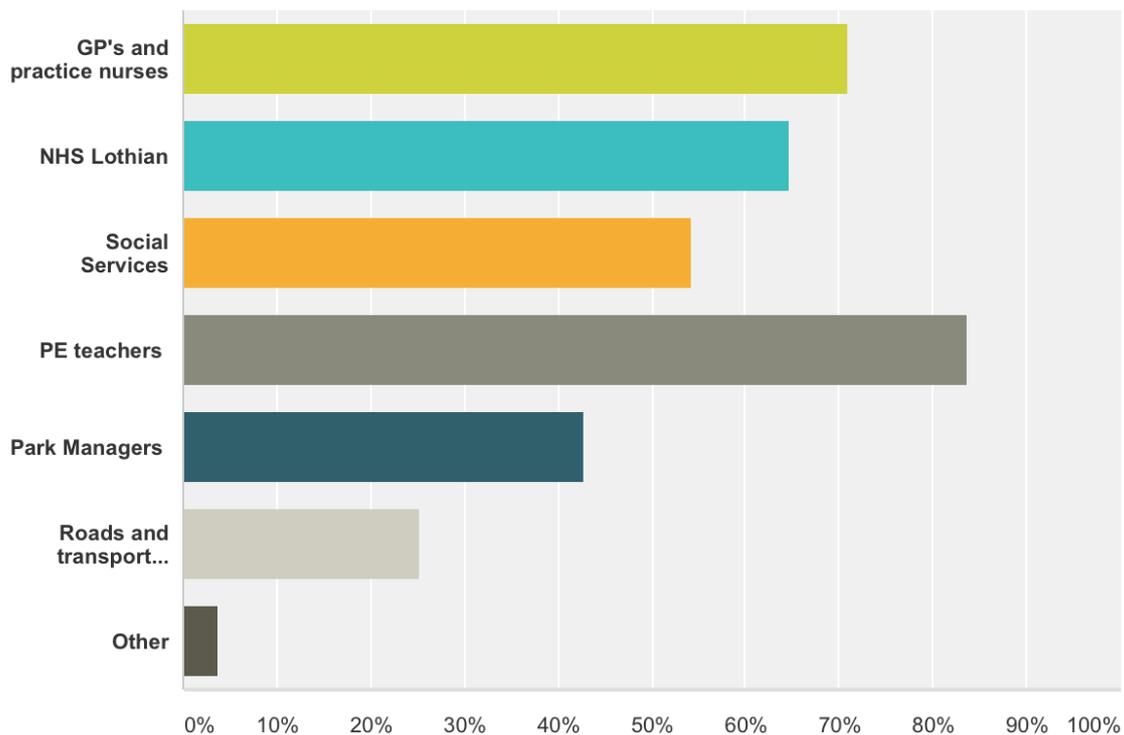


With 86% of people feeling they are very important, and only 13% saying somewhat important it shows the respondents feel that people will have more opportunities available to them if more volunteers are required. The dominant ‘further comment’ was the volunteers

“must be fully trained/first aid trained” and almost everyone who mentioned this answered somewhat important above. As useful as this is, volunteers are expensive in their own way; not all reasons for volunteering include altruistic motives, but financial motives as well (Farmer and Fedor, 2001). This can be as simple as getting free uniforms, food, accommodation, and admission which will all be paid by the employer (Bang and Chelladurai, 2003).

Furthermore, Goal 5 shown in Figure 6:

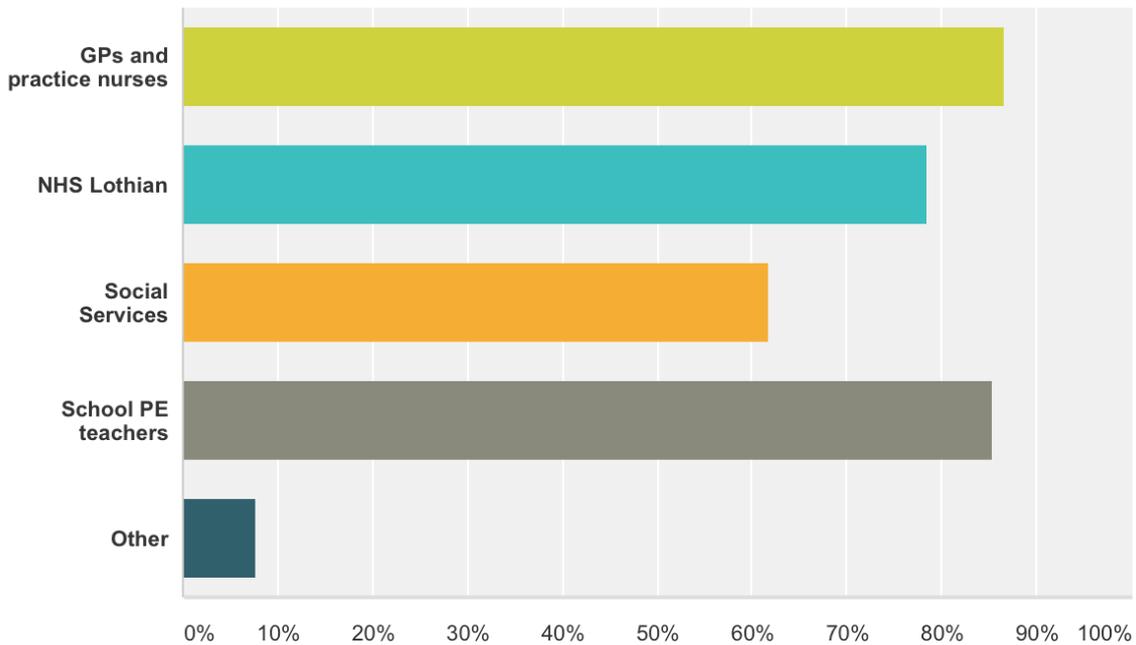
Goal 5 is about working with all kinds of partners to increase the number of people taking part in physical activity and sport. Who do you think should be working with Sport and Leisure Services to reach this goal? Please select those that apply.



Partnerships are pivotal to the work carried out by Midlothian Council and ideally, they would like to work with as many as possible, however what this does is it provides evidence to schools, local GP's and practice nurses and NHS Lothian (highest scoring answers) that the public feel it is necessary that the Council works with these organisations to make more people aware of the health benefits of participating in physical activity and sport. Continuing, a qualitative response received from respondents was “local radio and clubs”. The council were aiming to work with more local clubs to provide more opportunities for people and responses from the public only solidify the argument for more collaborations.

The final Goal, presented in Figure 7:

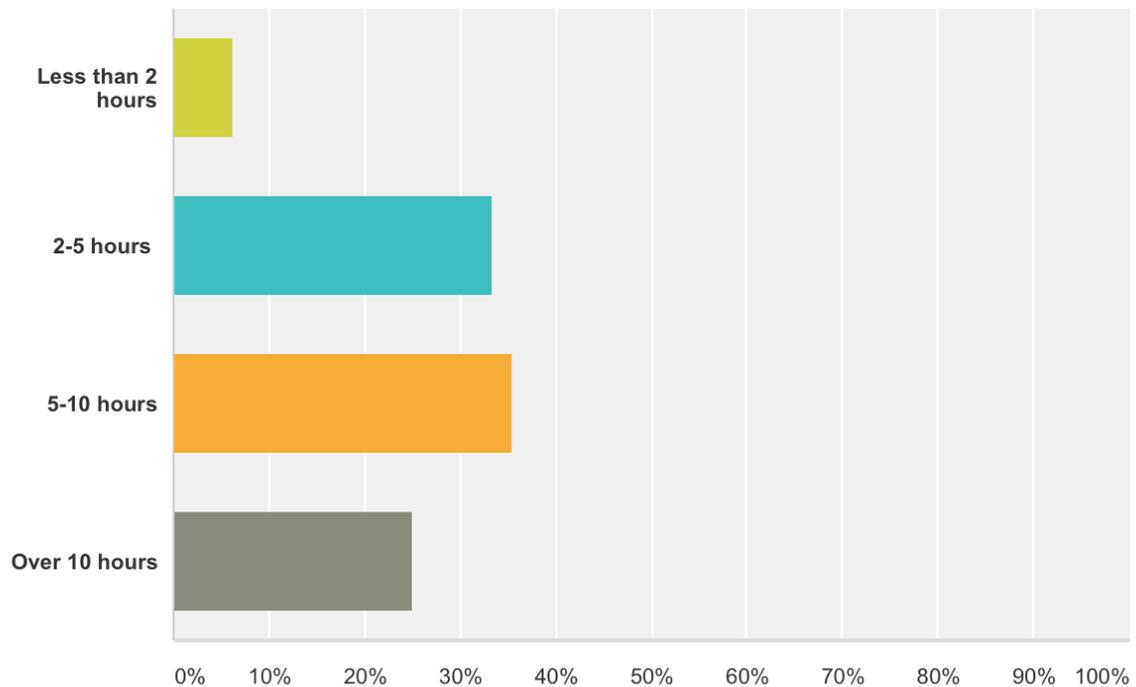
Goal 6 is about raising awareness of the health benefits of being physically active. Who do you think should be involved in getting this message across?



82% of people believe GP’s and practice nurses, 80% believe P.E teachers, 78% of people believe NHS Lothian and only 62% of people feel social services should be doing more to promote health and well-being with Midlothian Council. Although the literature discussed earlier suggested that targeting the economically deprived would be beneficial, social services wasn’t on this occasion and on the previous question (Goal 5) selected nearly as much as the other options. People also felt that social media, libraries and radio (again) would prove useful in spreading the message on the importance of physical activity. All are non-sport related industries that would advertise to an audience who may not be involved in sport. This can be emphasised further by theory from Taylor and Torkildsen (2010:94) who propose “The internet is arguably having the most dramatic technological impact on commercial leisure today”. Not only is this applicable to the response here, but also regarding the qualitative responses on ‘core paths’ and the lack of promotion they receive.

In addition to feelings towards Midlothian Council’s ‘Physical Activity, Sport and Health Strategy for Increasing Participation and Awareness’ other key findings were established. Firstly, the importance of the youth. In the 4 goals/questions that they were directly mentioned, they received the highest or second highest scores every time. Establishing that the age group of under 18’s are a very important target group for the council to get more people involved in physical activity and sport. The importance of youth shown in the respondents’ answers communicates perfectly with aforementioned Coalter’s work. However, it must be mentioned that only 6% of respondents under the age of 18 participate in sport less than 2 hours a week, shown in Figure 8:

Current hours spent (per week) participating in physical activity or sport:



Thus, it begs the question of how much more focus to you put on under 18's? This leads us to another key target group established as important – the elderly. On the same question as shown in Figure 8, the respondents (over the age of 65) that answered less than two hours was 16%, much higher than any other age group, suggesting more of an emphasis should be on them.

Finally, across the six goals and the subsequent priorities identified to achieve such goals, the mean percentage of people who agree with the goals/priorities was 86% which is very high. With a total 484 responses, the findings are fully justified and this links back to the validity of prior questionnaires conducted by other councils. That also suggests that moving forward, group interviews may be useful as Brent Council's attendance was very high and would make a perfect next step.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, the research carried out was useful in gaging a perception of the consumer attitude towards the draft 'Midlothian Physical Activity, Sport and Health Strategy for Increasing Participation and Awareness'. The number of responses meant that generalisations for certain groups in society could be made. With 86% of people on average agreeing with the main points of the strategy, Midlothian Council's sport and leisure department are certainly on the right path! Focus can now be turned to certain groups within society where participation is less than others, the correct developments can be made to the facilities people feel most need and the council finally have the evidence that people want to see them working with more clubs, local and national authorities to push the boundaries of physical activity, sport and health awareness. Further room for research and its techniques have been acknowledged and its now time to put them into place.

The methodology, overall was very good as it made analysing hundreds of responses simpler whilst also getting detailed, subjective feedback. However, there were limitations to the research and this leads to some recommendations for future endeavours. Firstly, it should be explained that the first part of the questionnaire was necessary for an ethics check (appendix D) as respondents that were offended, on occasion, chose not to continue. This is a common issue with quantitative questionnaires; there is no way of explaining the questions, thus clarity is vital as everyone must be able to understand (Gratton and Jones, 2009).

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Appendices

Appendix A – Copy of Questionnaire

Have your say on physical activity and sport in Midlothian and help shape the future plans for your area

1. Your Age:

- Under 18
- 18-25
- 26-35
- 36-45
- 46-55
- 56-64
- 65+

2. Your Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Prefer not to say

3. Your ethnic group:

- White
- Asian
- African American
- Afro-Caribbean
- Mixed/Dual Heritage
- Other
- Prefer not to say

4. Your sexuality:

- Heterosexual/Straight
- Gay/Lesbian
- Bisexual
- Asexual
- Transgender
- Other
- Prefer not to say

Other (please specify)

5. Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

6. Your postcode:

7. Your marital status:

- Single
- Married
- Civil Partnership
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Prefer not to say

8. Your occupation:

- Still in School/College (under 18)
- Student
- Mature Student
- Organisational - for profit
- Organisational - non-profit (social enterprise, charity, volunteer or similar)
- Government (local authority, Scottish Government, forestry commission, police etc)
- Healthcare (NHS, Private, Non-profit)
- Education
- Unemployed
- Retired
- Other

Other (please specify)

9. Current hours spent (per week) participating in physical activity or sport:

- Less than 2 hours
- 2-5 hours
- 5-10 hours
- Over 10 hours

10. From the list of physical activities, how many have you participated in (minimum 2 times) during the last 4 weeks?

- Walking
- Running/Jogging
- Swimming
- Gym
- Cycling
- Football
- Rugby
- Basketball
- Racket sport (Badminton, Tennis etc)
- Yoga/Pilates/Fitness classes
- Ageing well activity/classes
- M.A.C classes
- Other

Other (please specify)

11. Goal 1 is to increase the number of people participating in physical activity and sport. On a scale of 1 - 10, where 1 is 'not important' and 10 'very important' please rate which groups you think we should focus on.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ages 3-12	<input type="radio"/>									
Young women	<input type="radio"/>									
People with a disability	<input type="radio"/>									
Adults in later life	<input type="radio"/>									
People with long term conditions	<input type="radio"/>									
Adults/children with weight management problems	<input type="radio"/>									
Other	<input type="radio"/>									

Other (please specify)

12. Goal 2 is supporting people to stay involved in sport for their whole life. On a scale of 1 - 10, where 1 is 'not important' and 10 'very important' please rate what you think people need.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
More activities for 3-12	<input type="radio"/>									
Quality PE in schools	<input type="radio"/>									
Good links between school sport and community sport	<input type="radio"/>									
Good links between schools and local clubs	<input type="radio"/>									
Helping community clubs with training and planning	<input type="radio"/>									
Good transport links	<input type="radio"/>									
Affordability	<input type="radio"/>									
Other	<input type="radio"/>									

Other (please specify)

13. Goal 3 is about the importance of having the right facilities to encourage people to take part in physical activities and sport. On a scale of 1 - 10, where 1 is 'not important' and 10 'very important' please rate the importance of the following:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Play areas in parks	<input type="radio"/>									
cycle/walking routes and paths	<input type="radio"/>									
Outdoor sport facilities	<input type="radio"/>									
Indoor sports facilities	<input type="radio"/>									
Other	<input type="radio"/>									

Other (please specify)

14. Goal 4 is about the people we need to grow and develop physical activity and sports programmes. How important do you think qualified volunteers, coaches and leaders are?

- Not at all important
- Somewhat important
- Very Important

Further Comments:

15. Goal 5 is about working with all kinds of partners to increase the number of people taking part in physical activity and sport. Who do you think should be working with Sport and Leisure Services to reach this goal? Please select those that apply.

- GP's and practice nurses
- NHS Lothian
- Social Services
- PE teachers
- Park Managers
- Roads and transport Managers
- Other

Other (please specify)

16. Goal 6 is about raising awareness of the health benefits of being physically active. Who do you think should be involved in getting this message across?

GPs and practice nurses

NHS Lothian

Social Services

School PE teachers

Other

Other (please specify)

17. If you would like to be entered in our Prize Draw to win a months Tonezone membership please put your contact details here:

Appendix B – Midlothian Council’s Strategy

Goal 1 Healthy Active Communities - Increase the number of people of all ages participating in physical activity and sport in Midlothian.

PRIORITIES

- 1.1 Provide opportunities for people of all ages to be physically active.
- 1.2 Increase participation amongst under-represented groups including young women, people with a disability, adults in later life and the socio-economic disadvantaged.
- 1.3 Working in partnership with NHS Lothian continue to develop programmes targeting older adults, people with long term conditions and adults and children with weight management problems.
- 1.4 Reduce inequality by removing barriers to participation for the target groups identified in this strategy.
- 1.5 Encourage sustainable active travel.
- 1.6 Support and promote health and well being in the workplace.

Goal 2 School and Community Club Sport - Develop and support opportunities for lifelong participation in physical activity and sport.

PRIORITIES

- 2.1 Provide Opportunities for the early years (3-8 years old) to be physically active.
- 2.2 Ensure that all primary and secondary schools are providing 2 hours/2 periods per week of quality Physical Education (P.E.).
- 2.3 Develop an integrated approach across P.E., physical activity, school sport and sport in the wider community.
- 2.4 Develop strong partnerships between schools and community clubs to encourage lifelong participation in physical activity and sport.
- 2.5 Support physical activity and sports clubs in their planning, education and development.

Goal 3 Active Places - Provide and develop facilities and the natural environment to encourage increased participation in physical activity and sport.

PRIORITIES

- 3.1 Provide a network of sustainable facilities (including pitches) across Midlothian that is accessible and affordable and fit for purpose.
- 3.2 Regularly review customer satisfaction with quality of facilities and services, pricing and programming.
- 3.3 Manage parks and open spaces to encourage physical activity, sport and outdoor learning and where possible incorporate innovative features.
- 3.4 Encourage outdoor play by maintaining and developing existing outdoor play provision and providing new play areas where there is evidence of need.
- 3.5 Increase walking, cycling and horse-riding participation by promoting and raising awareness of the ‘core paths’ network.

Goal 4 People - Grow and develop the physical activity and sport workforce.

PRIORITIES

- 4.1 Implement an annual coach education programme.
- 4.2 Contribute to the employability of senior pupils through work placements and skills development opportunities in leadership, peer consultation and sport coaching.

4.3 Support the growth of volunteers and coaches in partnership with Midlothian Volunteering.

4.4 Recognise, promote and reward the contributions of the coaches and volunteers within the physical activity and sport sector.

Goal 5 Partnerships and Planning - Work together to increase participation in physical activity and sport.

PRIORITIES

5.1 Work with internal and external partners to link the benefits of physical activity and sport to the priority outcomes detailed in the Midlothian Community Plan and Single Outcome Agreement.

5.2 Develop partnership working with neighbouring local authority providers to share best practice.

5.3 Develop and sustain partnerships with Sports Governing Bodies (SGBs) to establish pathways to support talented athletes.

5.4 Implement information systems to monitor and evidence performance, inform decision making, and prioritise resources.

Goal 6 Profile and Communication - Raise the profile and awareness of the importance of physical activity.

PRIORITIES

6.1 Ensure accurate, appropriate and consistent public information about the health benefits of physical activity.

6.2 Promote physical activity and sport as a fun and not necessarily competitive pastime.

6.3 Raise awareness of the wide range of physical activity and sporting opportunities available in Midlothian.

6.4 Inform all stakeholders on the progress of the strategy.

Appendix C – Definition of ‘Core Paths’

Core Path is “...sufficient for the purpose of giving the public reasonable access throughout their area.” (Midlothian Council)