Overall, the majority of external respondents thought that reducing reporting frequency to annual would be an appropriate frequency in terms of both accountability and informing decision making.

Respondents showed a slight preference towards retaining the mid-May to mid-May period which is reported in October. However, those partners that make a financial contribution to the survey, wished to retain the mid-November to mid-November period as this aligns with their own reporting periods and work programmes. We have therefore decided to stop reporting results for the mid-May to mid-May period which were reported in October each year.

Most respondents thought that the change should take place ‘as soon as possible’, although a number thought that waiting until the pandemic was over was a better option. As Covid-19 moves from a pandemic to an endemic virus, the restrictions placed on people’s activities (including sport and physical activity) have eased. The latest set of results cover the period to the end of the roadmap for lifting lockdown. Since then, Plan B measures in response to the Omicron variant were introduced in
December 2021 and lifted in January 2022. Given Plan B was in place for a relatively short period and the restrictions imposed were relatively minor (compared to previous restrictions), our assessment of the period from November 2021 till the end of April 2022 is one of relative stability and lower levels of restriction. During this period, we have also continued our Covid tracker survey and have launched our Activity Check-In to ensure we have useful data between Active Lives releases. As such, we feel it is reasonable to make the change to annual reporting now.

Respondents showed strong support for any future analysis to focus on local intelligence and audience insight. Issues were raised about the extent to which data can be reported and analysed at a local level. There was also a desire for data at more granular geographies such as MSOA and LSOA. There was a call for a review into sample sizes and for any cost savings from reducing the frequency of reporting to be used in this area. Although valid points, this is ultimately a separate consideration to reducing reporting frequency so will form part of future consultation on the Active Lives surveys and subsequent analysis proposals. Furthermore, expectations need to be managed given the cost savings of reduced reporting frequency will be modest compared to the cost of increasing the survey sample.

The timeliness of reporting and making the data available was also mentioned. It was hoped that by reducing frequency, this would allow there to be less of a lag. We will look into this but, again, expectations need to be carefully managed. The Active Lives Surveys are large and complex datasets and each release is wide ranging in its content. We will avoid anything that in speeding up the reporting process would increase the risk of reporting errors that undermine the credibility of the surveys or compromise the depth of data required to properly understand a set of results.

Views were also expressed about making the data more accessible – through “opening” it up and / or by ensuring that users could interrogate the datasets without the need for SPSS.

It seemed that those consulted saw the value that the extra capacity would bring from reducing reporting frequency. Given the ambitions of users of Active Lives statistics, further consultation and careful
consideration will be needed to ensure that any extra capacity is used in the most appropriate and valuable way to support those that use the Active Lives data.

We will therefore consult further on views and potential solutions and anticipate this leading to:

- A review of the current survey sample design and boosting
- Improved and more timely provision of results, updating of the online analysis tool, and the production of modelled small areas estimates (e.g. MSOA and LSOA level)
- Making more analysis available based on 24-month datasets to increase sample sizes (as successfully used in the Sport For All? report to look at race and ethnicity in sport and physical activity in more depth)
- Providing data and analysis broken down by a wider range of geographical / place variables (e.g. IMD decile, ONS area classification, etc.)

2) Background

An internal consultation to find out what colleagues thought of a potential reduction in the frequency of Active Lives adult reporting from biannual to annual took place during August – September 2021.

An external consultation then took place. This ran for 10 weeks from 15 November 2021 to 28 January 2022. 84 responses were received.

3) Accountability and rate of change

The external consultation asked about the frequency of reporting in terms of the accountability of Sport England and key stakeholders, and decision making.

**Accountability**

To ensure the accountability of Sport England and other key stakeholders, the majority of external respondents (88%) thought that reporting of the Active Lives adult survey results once a year would be an appropriate frequency.
11% of respondents disagreed saying that once a year would not be frequent enough.

To ensure the accountability of Sport England and other key stakeholders across the community sport sector, reporting Active Lives Adult Survey results once a year would...

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Be an appropriate frequency</td>
<td>88%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>1%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Not be frequent enough</td>
<td>11%</td>
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**Decision making**

85% of external respondents said that when it came to informing policy, investment and operational decisions, annual reporting was an appropriate frequency with 11% disagreeing and saying that it would not be frequent enough.

In order to inform the policy, investment and operational decisions I need to make, reporting Active Lives Adult Survey results once a year would...

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<th>Colour</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Be an appropriate frequency</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Not be frequent enough</td>
<td>11%</td>
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4) Benefits and opportunities

Respondents were asked their view on whether the current level of future and strategic focused analysis produced by Sport England met their requirements.

Over half of external respondents (58%) said that it met their basic requirements with a further 10% saying it met all their requirements. At the opposite end, just under a quarter (24%) said that it did not meet their basic requirements.

In order to inform the policy, investment and operational decisions I need to make, the amount of strategic and future focused analysis currently produced by Sport England...

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<th>Frequency</th>
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<tr>
<td>■</td>
<td>Does not meet my basic requirements</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ ■</td>
<td>Meets my basic requirements</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ ■ ■</td>
<td>Meets all my requirements</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ ■ ■ ■</td>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>8%</td>
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The external consultation asked about which areas, they would like analysis to focus on if there was capacity, the top two areas chosen were ‘local intelligence’ (26% of responses) and ‘audience insight’ (24% of responses). These two areas received considerably more votes than the other options with respondents able to select as many areas as they wished.
If there were more capacity to undertake strategic and future focused analysis, I would like it to focus on…

(tick all that apply)

- **Local intelligence**: 26%
- **Audience insight**: 24%
- **Supporting achievement of the Big Issues and Catalysts**: 14%
- **Consumer insight**: 12%
- **Forecasting and futures work**: 11%
- **Market and sector insight**: 10%
- **Other**: 3%

Under ‘Other’, the topics mentioned were quite specific and included:

- Increasing sample sizes
- Local learning in relation to grant distribution
- Econometrics
- Revisiting previous modelling in relation to health and social costs
- More detailed analysis of specific populations to include both quantitative and qualitative research
- Understanding the volunteer workforce in relation to specific sports

Some of these topics were reiterated in the next question which gave respondents another opportunity to share their views on how additional capacity could be used. 35 respondents chose to provide their thoughts which overall were quite wide ranging.

The overarching request however was for an increased sample size which would subsequently allow data to be reported at lower level than local authority.

The comments received covered the following topics:
- **A need for increased sample size** –
  - “Larger sample sizes would help make the data more statistically relevant at a place-based level.”
  - “Through local authroity (sic) mergers we have far more unitary councils which has meant our sample size has more than halved in the last two years meaning AL has lost its usefulness…”

- **A request for small area local data and analysis** –
  - “Localised data also best supports local conversations, so anything at LA/MSOA level is the ideal.”
  - “Data needs to be supplied at a smaller level below local authority…”
  - “If this local intelligence included small area (MSOA) estimates of activity levels, then we would thoroughly welcome this.”

- **Greater local level intelligence** –
  - “…. then additional capacity could focus more on the local analysis…”
  - “More in-depth analysis for each local authority”
  - “Without this local level analysis, we are missing a huge trick to make Active Lives more operationally relevant to the sector.”

- **A request for tools / more self-serve options** –
  - “Investment in tools / software to allow the interrogation of data at MSOA / LSOA / local place level (small area estimates)”
  - “Downloadable local authority reports from the Active Lives Online tool would be extremely beneficial”

- **Consideration of the type of geographical reporting** –
  - “…the next best thing would be to study differences between urban, suburban, and rural.”

Comments were also received on the data itself and the timeliness of it:

- **Need to make the data more accessible** –
  - “make the data open source and accessible by API to make it more accessible…”
“At the moment the data is quite inaccessible because it is spread across multiple spreadsheets that have to be downloaded from the Sport England website.”

- **Request for more timely access to the data** –
  - “If there is additional capacity can Sport England commit to reducing the time from the end of data collection and release of the data.”
  - “It would be great if the SPSS data set was released at the same time as the headlines…”
  - “...there is a significant lag post the release of headline results to us getting the more detailed local analysis.” – note that the more detailed local analysis referred to here is commissioned by the respondent but relies on access to the dataset.

- **Transparency on timescales** –
  - “Published timescales on data release, portal update and SPSS release would then enable us to communicate when localised data might reasonably be available.”
  - “Could the dates and time scales for release of headlines, updating of the diagnostic tool and release of the SPSS data set also be published and promoted well in advance to enable partners to plan their time to analyse, interpret and share.”

Some respondents requested **more sport specific data** (“More/easier access to single sport-related data” and “Reports looking at seasonal sports would be useful to ourselves and more understandable to our stakeholders”), **more demographic specific data** (“More insight about specific demog groups”) and **greater choice in reporting period** (“More focus on analysis by season or quarter rather than full-year”).

Others asked for **more collaboration with Sport England** (“We often get asked for things at a local level and then have to replicate some of the work that has already been done nationally. A more collaborative approach on these things would be great.”) and **increased support from Sport England** for those unable to do analysis themselves (“Support for NGBs (and other partners!) that do not have the capacity to delve into the analysis...”).
Mention was also made of the importance of understanding inactivity (“We need to work a way through of broadening the insight and intelligence so we have a better picture of inactivity”) and the need to understand special educational needs and disability (“Develop a survey for those with SEND”).

5) Risks and timing

The external consultation asked respondents when a reduction in frequency should be introduced if this was to occur, and any preferences over which reporting period to keep.

Timing of reducing frequency

Over two thirds (69%) of respondents to the external consultation said that the change should be implemented ‘as soon as possible’.

19% of external consultation respondents said that it should come into force after the pandemic is over.

6% of external consultation respondents said that the change should never happen or should not take place at the current time.

If the frequency of Adult Survey reporting was reduced to annual, when do you think this change should be introduced?

- As soon as possible: 69%
- When the pandemic is over: 19%
- Never / Not at this current time: 6%
- Other (please state Q7 below): 6%

Nine free text ‘Other’ responses were given. These varied:

- **Specific time periods** – “2022” and “Start a fresh after ALS10 has been issued recently.”
• **Immediately** – “If the covid-19 tracker has and is used as it should be, for immediate understanding of the pandemic...then there is no reason that an immediate change to annual isn't appropriate” and “…change now and align to the new strategy quicker…”

• **After understanding implications for previous data** – “Any shift would need to ensure this happens first and then provide as much advance notice as possible”

**Reporting period**

There was a slight preference for retaining the mid-May to mid-May period which is reported in October with 38% of respondents choosing this option. 28% of respondents preferred the mid-November to mid-November period which is reported in April. A third had no preference.

![Graph showing reporting period preferences]

Some respondents provided more detail about their preferences and the following themes arose:

• **Budget setting and financial planning** –
  o In support of **mid-May to mid-May**: “Results published in October allow sufficient planning & resource allocation lead times” and “It would support the timeframes aligned to budget planning for the next financial year if we were able to see information in October”
• In support of **mid-November to mid-November**: “It needs to coincide with budget setting”.

• **Maximising the use of data** – “We’d prefer to retain the Nov – Nov period, for a couple of reasons, including that this period provides the base data.”

Respondents also wanted the following to be considered:

• **Earlier reporting of the mid-November to mid-November data** –
  o “it would be ideal for the Nov-Nov data to be made available earlier (late January/February) to inform planning for the following year.”
  o “Having a published report and available data in January would really support our planning process / cycle for the next financial year.”

• **Alternative reporting periods** –
  o “April to April would make more sense in line with the financial year”
  o “I could see benefits of the survey being aligned with the children and young people surveys, in terms of being surveyed at a similar time of year and the reporting being in synch.”
  o “I find the time frames over complicated & think these could be simplified with a Jan-Dec or by financial year dates.”

Partners who contribute to the cost of the survey had a clear preference for retaining the mid-November to mid-November release as it aligns with their own reporting periods/outputs.

**6) Conclusions**

Respondents were asked whether overall they were supportive of a reduction in the frequency of reporting to increase capacity for more strategic, future focused analysis to take place. They were also given the opportunity to share their views on the Active Lives surveys and Sport England’s research and analysis priorities.
The majority of respondents (89%) strongly agreed or agreed that the reporting frequency should be reduced to annual with half of respondents strongly agreeing.

There were still some concerns over the reasoning behind the potential reduction with one external respondent stating “I only strongly agree if annual reporting does create capacity for better focussed analysis. Would not agree if this is purely a cost cutting exercise.”

4% of respondents to the external consultation either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the proposals.

On balance, should the frequency of reporting Active Lives Adult Survey change from twice a year to once a year to create capacity for more strategic, future focussed analysis?

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>3%</td>
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Comments on Active Lives surveys

The comments received focussed on sample size and a need for these to be larger in order to be able to fully utilise the data at a local level as well as the timeliness of outputs:

- **Consideration of sample size and response rate** –
  - “The current approach to collecting Adult Active Lives sample doesn’t work for everyone which means that some of parts of
our community, that we desperately need data for, often have smaller samples.”
  o “We need larger local sample sizes. Current sample sizes are currently too small to provide valid local insights into different demographic groups.”
  o “We are keen and wish if anything, for the number of survey responses to increase, from existing levels, to allow for greater local intelligence and analysis to be gained and delivered by Sport England.”

- **Alternative options for data collection to support Active Lives**
  o “Tackling this ‘sampling challenge’ nationally would likely be prohibitively expensive but is there an opportunity to look at how it could be tackled more locally?….Thinking more creatively about how this could be financed and carried out locally within a national framework that helps align the data with the national sample. There is space here for more creative solutions…”

- **The need to balance sample size with the benefits of extra analysis**
  o “Our county is geographically very large and varied and the worry is that we wouldn’t benefit from any of the extra ‘focus’ as the sample sizes wouldn’t be large enough for us to have confidence in the data.”

- **Timeliness of outputs is vital**
  o “Our request would be that if we move to once a year reporting (which we support) we would like the raw data to be provided on a timely basis. Waiting a couple of months post-publication means some of the data we are getting would be almost 2 years old.”
  o “A quicker timeline is needed between the data being collected and it being available on the Active Lives Online tool; the same for updating of the Small Area Estimates as they are often left behind so reporting datasets for different geographies isn’t always identical.”

- **The potential of using short active lives**
  o “Is there a place for increasing the take up of the short active lives survey…”


• **Widening the survey content** –
  o “Is there the opportunity to collect CYP and family based questions through this survey?”

**Comments on our research and analysis priorities**

From the comments, the following two themes came up for future work:

• **Need to continue consulting** –
  o “…it’s really important that the consultation continues beyond these few questions. This will ensure that different elements of the sector (e.g. local authorities, NGB’s, Sport for Development organisations) can benefit from insight programme that will be deliverable from the repurposing of SE insight resource.”

• **The why** –
  o “Understanding the why behind the trends being shown could form a part of the work”
  o “If the survey reduced to once a year, we would welcome the additional focus on analysis from SE that would help us to tease out the stories and narratives from the data.”
  o “We would like to see more in-depth analysis done on this unique dataset, which has untapped potential.”

Some specific requests were also raised regarding:

- **Gardening** - “With the growing importance of gardening to the population’s activity levels during the pandemic, is now the time to simplify things and start talking about activity levels including gardening?”
- **Pregnancy** - “There is nothing in the Active Lives Survey asking if people are or have been pregnant… Could this be considered?”
- **Activity location** - “Within the raw data set, you provide the location of activities such as ‘Outdoor setting: Creative or artistic dance: Leisure, fitness or sport centre’. It would be useful if you could aggregate all minutes done per location type.”
Stakeholder suggestions for the future

Several stakeholders provided suggestions for how the extra capacity could be used in the future:

- Working together to define and undertake other analysis work, such as that which focuses on specific health inequalities.
- More “so what” analysis.
- Setting physical activity data in a wider economic, environmental and health context,
- Tools to help interpretation of data by increasingly stretched council officers,
- Opportunities to join datasets up to provide richer insights,
- Visualising data, particularly in ways that support advocacy of sport and physical activity.
- Inequalities being a real focus in future work.
- The use of other data, such as big data, to enable more local proxies for Active Lives, as well as how the data could be used for better forecasting.
- Real time data, providing better local intelligence
- More conversations between the Insight team at Sport England and partners to develop working together.
- Deeper analysis of disability particularly those with complex or multiple impairments, consideration of trends prior to Covid, and creating a richer commentary through links to other relevant data sources.