Review of the allocation of the Active Lives Adult Survey sample across local authority areas

May – July 2023

Background
High quality data, insight and learning that’s used to drive action is one of the catalysts for change identified in our strategy, Uniting the Movement. The aim of the catalyst is to create a shared understanding of the opportunities and challenges we face in getting the nation moving.

To deliver on the ambitions of Uniting the Movement we all need access to a wider range of high-quality data, and we need the capacity, skills and confidence to apply it in the form of insight and learning.

The Active Lives Surveys are a major investment for Sport England and continue to be foundational to our data, insight and learning work. However, as we continue to implement Uniting the Movement, there are aspects of the surveys we want to review and improve.

A central element of the Active Lives Adult Survey design is that it provides robust estimates of activity levels for all English local authority areas. For most local authority areas, we set a target of 500 responses each year but there are a number of areas where we boost the sample (typically to 1,000 or 2,000 responses per year). This broad approach has always been used to ensure robust estimates are produced for all local authority areas.

The proposal
We’d like to hear the views of users of Active Lives Adult Survey statistics about a proposal to update our approach to local area sample allocation. This is to ensure it best reflects priorities for local data.

Why change?
We believe the time is right to review this approach based on feedback received from users of Active Lives statistics and recognition that there has not been a comprehensive review of the sample allocation to local areas since the survey began in 2015/16. During that time, we have seen considerable local government reorganisation (typically district authorities combining to form new, larger unitary authorities), meaning that the amount of data collected has reduced in areas where local authorities have merged.
We are therefore consulting users of Active Lives statistics on an alternative approach to the future allocation of survey sample across local areas. We have outlined the key considerations below and would like to gather views to ensure a future approach that best meets the needs of both Sport England and users of Active Lives statistics.

**Key considerations: A different sampling strategy**

Please note, there is no budget available to increase the overall sample size of the survey. So, the options considered are for the reallocation of the existing sample to best reflect priorities for local data.

There are three main options we want users of Active Lives statistics to consider:

1. **The minimum sample size required to support robust and useful estimates for all local areas**
   
   With the exception of the Isles of Scilly and City of London (which are too small to support an annual sample of 500 responses), the minimum annual sample allocation for a local area is currently 500 responses. This level of data collection means a typical local authority estimate has a confidence interval of +/- 4.3% (e.g. the range within which we can be confident the reported activity level actually falls).

   Reducing the minimum allocation would mean a wider confidence interval (less precision) for estimates in those local areas allocated smaller samples. However, depending on the option, the impact on the precision of specific estimates would be relatively small, and it will remain possible to understand trends over time. Reducing the minimum sample size would then create the scope to allocate (boost) samples in other places on the basis of greatest need and/or population size (further detail provided in the sections below). For example, with a minimum local authority sample size of 400, there will be 58,400 responses to re-allocate.

   Below is a comparison for a minimum sample allocation of 300, 400 and 500 responses per local area based on a national sample allocation of 176,450.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minimum number of respondents:</th>
<th>500</th>
<th>400</th>
<th>300</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Typical 95% confidence interval (single)</td>
<td>+/- 4.3 ppts</td>
<td>+/- 4.8 ppts</td>
<td>+/- 5.5 ppts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available sample for boosting (Number of responses)</td>
<td>29,000</td>
<td>58,400</td>
<td>87,800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. **Whether an element of sample should be allocated to those areas of greatest need**

   One of the Guiding Principles in Uniting the Movement directly relates to our goal of tackling inequalities, ‘investing most in those that need it most’. This means balancing targeted and universal provision in a way that is proportionate to the level of need.
In response to this and as part of Sport England’s wider place expansion work, we are developing a more systematic approach to identifying areas of greatest need / opportunity. As such, it might be justified to enhance our data collection and measurement in areas that are known to have both:

- Low levels of activity, high levels of inactivity, and /or high levels of inequality in sport and physical activity.
- Poor outcomes as measured by the Health Index for England, Indices of Multiple Deprivation and / or Community Needs Index.

3. **Whether an element of sample should be allocated to areas with the largest population sizes**

The current approach to sample allocation takes no account of the size of the local population, for example, a large unitary authority typically receives the same sample as a small district authority. One of the options is to allocate some additional sample to local areas based on the size of their population, with the largest populations receiving more sample.

**Benefits and drawbacks of boosting samples**

It is important to note that any future approach that leads to an increased sample size for a local area, has a range of reporting benefits. This includes greater precision of estimates, and greater granularity of demographic data. The reverse is also true, whereby a local area that has smaller sample sizes, will have less precise estimates. Below is a summary of the likely level of precision and level of demographic reporting possible for different numbers of respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>300</th>
<th>500</th>
<th>1,000</th>
<th>2,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of precision:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typical 95% confidence interval (single)</td>
<td>+/- 5.5%</td>
<td>+/- 4.3%</td>
<td>+/- 3.0%</td>
<td>+/- 2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demographic detail:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (Male, Female, other)</td>
<td>Male, Female</td>
<td>Male, Female</td>
<td>Male, Female</td>
<td>Male, Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability (Long term limiting illness / disability, no long term limiting illness / disability)</td>
<td>No disability</td>
<td>No disability, disability</td>
<td>No disability, disability</td>
<td>No disability, disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSSEC (NSSEC1–2, NSSEC3–5, NSSEC 6–8, NSSEC9)</td>
<td>1–2, 3–5, 6–8</td>
<td>1–2, 3–5, 6–8</td>
<td>1–2, 3–5, 6–8, 9</td>
<td>1–2, 3–5, 6–8, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (white British, white other, Asian (exc. Chinese), Black, Mixed, Chinese, Other)</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>White British</td>
<td>White British, White Other, Asian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With three connected considerations, we are seeking views on the best balanced approach. To help understand the potential sampling changes for each local authority area, Appendix 1 sets out different scenarios based on the options within the proposal.

We recognise that any new approach is likely to mean some local areas will receive a smaller allocation than they previously did, whilst others will receive a greater allocation. We are striving to make the process transparent and fair, but we do understand that some users of Active Lives statistics may be disappointed by the outcome. Please note that retaining the current approach is one of the options set out in the consultation, however, this would still mean the default minimum sample of 500 would be applied where there is recent / future local government reorganisation.

For areas who would like to increase their future sample allocation further, we continue to provide the opportunity to purchase additional samples. As a guide, an additional 100 responses per local authority area will cost approximately £1,250 (excluding VAT).

**How to respond**
The online consultation opens on Friday 5th May and will run for 12 weeks, closing at midnight on Sunday 30th July 2023. To respond, please complete the online form available here: [https://forms.office.com/e/nbWaAM4404](https://forms.office.com/e/nbWaAM4404). If you’re unable to complete the online survey, please send your responses to the questions below to: activelives@sportengland.org

**Questions**
When completing the online form, users of Active Lives statistics will be asked to share their responses to the following questions.

**Minimum number of local authority responses**
If the minimum local authority sample size is reduced from the current 500 allocation, there will be more sample to allocate to areas with greatest need and / or areas with the largest populations. For example, reducing the minimum allocation to 400 responses per local authority area, frees up 58,400 responses and if this was reduced to 300 responses it frees up 87,800 responses.

*Please note that we do not expect the minimum sample size to be reduced below 300 for each local authority area to ensure the basic, robustness of the data for local authority area reporting.*
1. **How important is it to…?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Somewhat important</th>
<th>Not important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Maintain the minimum local authority sample at 500</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Allocate the biggest possible proportion of sample based on greatest need</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Allocate the biggest possible proportion of sample based on population size</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. **What do you feel is the appropriate minimum number of responses to collect in each local authority area?**
   a. 300 responses (enables more sample for allocation based on need / population) *(please now go to question 4)*
   b. 400 responses (enables more sample for allocation based on need / population) *(please now go to question 4)*
   c. Keep the current 500 responses (sample will remain the same)
   d. No strong opinion *(please now go to question 4)*
   e. Other, please specify: *(please now go to question 4)*

3. **Please share your reasons for wanting to keep the current 500 responses and anything else you think is important for us to consider.** *(Please now go to question 9)*

4. **Please share anything you think is important for us to consider when reviewing the minimum number of local authority responses.**

   **Increasing samples based on greatest need and / or population size**
   If we reduce the minimum number of responses in each local authority area, we are proposing this would be reallocated to areas of greatest need and / or areas with the largest population.

   When answering these questions, we recommend reviewing the ‘benefits and drawbacks of boosting samples’ table within the proposal and Appendix 1 to see how this could impact on your relevant local area(s).

5. **Do you think a proportion, all, or none of the additional available samples should be allocated based on greatest need and / or population size?**
   Please tick one option per row and ensure that your selection across the two rows total to a full allocation or 100% allocation.
6. Please share with us why you have chosen this particular allocation.

7. Please share anything you think is important for us to consider when we review increasing samples based on areas of greatest need.

8. Please share anything else you think is important for us to consider when we review increasing samples based on areas with the largest populations.

Any other considerations?

9. Please share any other comments or suggestions you have about the Active Lives Adult Survey.

10. To the best of your knowledge, do you represent a place or places that have...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Not applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Low activity levels / high inactivity levels compared to national levels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Poor health and deprivation outcomes compared to national levels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. A population size of more than 200,000 residents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. Please tell us the type of organisation you represent:
   a. Unitary local authority
   b. District local authority
   c. Active Partnership
   d. Academic / researcher
   e. Other, please specify:

**After the consultation**

This consultation will close at midnight on Sunday 30th July 2023. We’ll then review all the responses and use these to inform our final recommendations on the future allocation of survey sample. These recommendations will be presented to our Executive Leadership Team and discussed with policy and statistics leads within the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, and the Department for Transport.
Following this, we will publish a response to the consultation, and our plans for the next steps. If the consultation indicates a change should be made, implementation will take place from the start of the next Adult Survey fieldwork in mid-November 2023 (year 9 survey).

**Getting in touch**

If you have any queries or comments about the consultation process, please contact Andrew Spiers (Strategic Lead – Research and Analysis) via email at andrew.spiers@sportengland.org

**Confidentiality and data protection**

As someone who is interested in our statistics, we welcome your views. To promote greater transparency, all responses to the consultation will be published in the form of summary tables and verbatim comments where available for each question (but not individual responses). We plan to summarise and share responses in ways that retain the anonymity of respondents. However, in the event that we may want to attribute some comments to the person providing them, we'll first ask their permission to do so and only do so where permission is given.