Naomi: Welcome to the Place Changemakers podcast series brought to you by Sport England. In this series, we dive into the world of place based approaches to tackle physical inactivity. Join us as we explore personal journeys, skills, mindset and behaviours crucial for driving change across local systems.

Discover practical examples, challenges faced and transformative experiences of those at the heart of this work. Tuning for insight, inspiration for your own journey towards positive change.

Kath Lord-Green: Hello and welcome to the Place Change Makers podcast. I’m Kath Lord-Green, your host. This is episode six, Workforce Matters. Today, we discuss innovative methods and approaches to recruitment. We explore hosting arrangements, the importance of building team cohesion and sustainability. Exploring what does good look like, and how can capacity demands be absorbed within the wider system, or not.

Our guests today are Jamie and El, and as always, I’ll let them introduce themselves.

Jamie Waugh: My name is Jamie Waugh, I’m the creative lead for Together An Active Future, that we like to call TaAF. And that is the Pennine Lancashire Place partner. I’ve been part of TaAF from the very start when I was the programme manager.

So I’ll be casting my mind back a little bit to how we created a team from the start. zero background in physical activity or leisure. My background is pubs, shops, factory work. And then eventually a partner of mine decided I needed a more determined career path and encouraged me to join the NHS.

So in the NHS I’ve done administration work into finance and then into business development and bid writing, etc. And then found myself being connected into the expression of interest for Sport England at the start. A bit of context to Pennine Lancashire, if that’s okay to do that too. we’re situated in the North West.

Pennine Lancashire is about six districts, a population of about 550,000 people, quite diverse. And we’re all about enabling sustainable change in approaches to physical activity, and how we influence change in system partners. Interestingly, our team started with about four people, meeting in a dark room upstairs at a town hall once every two weeks.
And now we’ve got an army of about 50 people. A lot of them are part of our shared role model, which I’m going to hope to talk a bit more about. And that’s me.

**El Wilkinson-Cunningham:** Hi, I’m El Wilkinson-Cunningham. I am a senior public health officer focusing on systems and evaluation at East Riding Council, and I’m the lead for the evaluation at Active Withernsea.

Similar to Jamie. My background is not in sport or leisure, but I have been around behaviour change. I kind of started around looking at doing psychology at uni. Moved into, like, working in substant misuse, to different sites, and then from there got into, kind of, doing research and evaluation, which led me to being involved in the Active Withernsea pilot.

I started around 2021. Some of the stuff I was talking about will be predating me. I have plenty to talk about around from recruitment from 21 onwards, because we’ve had a lot of change with our team. A bit of background for Active Withernsea. So we are on the Yorkshire coast. Withernsea is the smallest pilot within the original LDPs.

We only have a population of around 6,000. We’re working at a very hyper localised area. Small rural coastal seaside town that is very kind of isolated, around 40 minutes away from Hull, like if you’ve got a car. Now on transport, it’s very, very different to a lot of the other places. But we have quite a dedicated team of around 10 members.

So we’re working on that and mark to happier, healthier, Withernsea through an increase in physical activity.

**Kath Lord-Green:** What do you think is important when recruiting capacity to do place based systemic work?

**El Wilkinson-Cunningham:** I think the thing we’ve learned Active Withernsea is around kind of getting people with the right skills coming in.

But also with some of that local knowledge of where we’re working, but particularly kind of being aware of the kind of people we’re working with, what the environment is of the town that we’re working in. And that’s kind of been a bit of a challenge for some time, we’re trying to get them to kind of come together.

In the past, we’ve kind of, did start with that being a localised area, hiring from within the town, and we felt like we were moving forward, but as the pilot has
developed and changed, we thought, actually, this maybe hasn’t worked quite well. Then we looked a little bit further a field to see, like, who have got the right skills and help the people that we’ve kind of hired from within and continue to develop so we can then support that area as best as possible.

**Jamie Waugh:** I’m fascinated actually today to understand how, where me and El share similarities and differences between a population of 6,000 and a population of 550,000. But I’m gonna guess there’s gonna be quite a lot of core and consistent things at the heart of it, I imagine, I think, building on that, for us, obviously covering quite a large geographical area, what’s really important is that we were recruiting teams that were representative of their places.

It would have been really easy to create a core team who sat in one particular place in Pennine Lancashire and assumed that we could be the team to deliver the work, but actually quite early on we were happy enough to admit that we were too far removed, and so what we wanted to do was, Create teams who could represent a place who had the knowledge of that place, passion for that place, understood the people, and to a degree already had those relationships that existed already, which would make it far easier for us to do what we want.

I’ll add one more thought if I can, and get your view on this as well El, I suppose it’s, somebody likes to say to me that people work with people and they generally mean by that is you should always try and recruit, the people that you need, as in with the relationship skills, and then try to then work out the skills and development needs they may have to do the job you need to.

As opposed to recruiting the skills and thinking you can develop the person to become that. Because I think we’ve probably got examples of both and I know which way around. Has been more successful for us. El I don’t know if you’ve got any kind of views on that.

**El Wilkinson-Cunningham:** We kind of definitely looked at that thing of hiring people with skills, like people with relationships and people with knowledge of that area.

I mean, yeah, they kind of, they can teach them them skills. And I don’t know how well that did work across the board. And then we kind of did more looking at that opposite way. And they kind of kind of highlight them skills, when maybe we need to move this pilot forward. And then integrate them to those that have already got some of them relationships there. And then kind of all that, that mix of both.
Jamie Waugh: And, and as I’m thinking now, and actually coming back to something that you said in your opening now, I’m thinking another thing that feels important, but I’m, I’m, I’m interested to be either challenged on this view, at least how test the logic of this is.

Feels important when recruiting capacity, you’re doing all you can to try and maintain and sustain, a core team. And as much as, because a lot of the kind of system place based work is built on relationships and connectivity between people. The risk that you associate with that is if you get quite a transient team, then you’re always at risk of going back two paces each time somebody moves on or does something different.

One thing we’ve always tried to do is invest in people in as much as when we’ve attracted people, try to show them that actually staying a part of this team for a foreseeable future is going to be good for their own personal development. It’s going to be good for their own CVs. It’s going to give them some interesting challenges that they can stay connected to.

And do what we can to retain a really strong core, consistent team. Like I said, ultimately, because all of, a lot of the success is based on the fact that people work with people. And so I think that trying to really invest in people’s personal development and show them that actually the opportunities and the challenges they need in their lives are in this role now, not in the next role they might be looking at.

Kath Lord-Green: Thinking back to creating your teams early on, how did you find people then? And where they it the right people?

Jamie Waugh: I almost want to challenge that word, the right people then. But I suppose, best people is probably, is probably language I’m more comfortable with. In as much as the best people for the job. In the understanding that you understand what job it is that you need to be done.

The danger is that you think about the right person, just somebody who can just be really happy and energetic and flap their hands like Jamie does when he talks. But actually, you know, if you want to do work with a madrasa, for example, like we are in Together An Active Future, in TaAF. Jamie’s hand flapping has no kind of value in that space.

What you need to think about, who is the best person to be able to influence and to work alongside people in that space. So I think, Firstly, being clear on what it is
that you are trying to achieve in any particular environment or with a particular group. And being, authentic enough to actually ask the question.

What is it that we absolutely need in that? And do we have the current skills and capability to do it? And if not, where do we find it? So that’s almost step one. Is almost being super clear about what it is you need. To make sure when you do try and find somebody, you’re actually finding them on the right kind of criteria.

El Wilkinson-Cunningham: I think what we identified quite early on, I think, like, was that, the criteria, was that the local people not parachuting people into the place, I think one of the big areas we identified, as within our area, that the people, the population felt they had already been done to. I always had people kind of, like, dropped in.

One of the big things we want here is to create authenticity in there. so you kind of, you’ve got people from the town that have got them relationships and got that trust already. And I think, I probably would challenge the word right people, I think its about the right people at the right time to get that kind of initial bit of work moving through. To get people from the town to think oh, we’ve got somebody else from East Riding who knows nothing about Withernsea coming in. We’ve got actually local people here. I know that person. I know this person. I can start to link with this bit of work because of them relationships. And the focus a lot on what’s at that point was less about skills and more about that authenticity of getting that, building that trust and that, developing that, trust with the local population.

Jamie Waugh: And the danger is that if you go too far about making it all about relationships, what you end up with is a team of almost zero different types of capabilities and skills that are just amazing at building relationships. Which is great until you really need to execute or get things done. Or until you need to start to think strategically about how you can do something differently.

I think that’s why it comes back to almost the best person for the job that you need to be done. in Together an Active Future, in TaAF, we, we’ve done something in the past called Clifton Strengths, which people may or may not know, or may have variations of this. To basically try and understand the profile of the things that are natural to the teams that we’ve got, which was, and, and to be honest, we’re very strong in the relationship building domain.

What it does is it shines a light on some of the areas that you might need to think about this going forwards because maybe where you’re not as naturally strong as
this particular area, for example, maybe an influencing system change. And so I think the, 100 percent right, relationships are key in this type of work.

but it’s really important that you understand. That this work isn’t just relationship building. It’s strategic, systematic change, you know, it’s influencing people. It’s getting things done, and that takes a very diverse mix of people.

**El Wilkinson-Cunningham:** Yeah, I’d probably completely kind of agree with that. When we first started, we looked at that kind of recruiting from within.

Within the town, obviously we didn’t have any role like this in anywhere else in our local authority. So we had to very much like create these roles. So we didn’t definitely know what we were looking out for massively at that time, what the skill would be. But I think as we move forward and learn a little bit more about what this kind of work looks like and learn more like, let’s do that systemic approach and strategic.

Are the right people in the right places? At this time do we need to look at how we restructure the team and what and have a more focused on getting them skills in as well?

**Jamie Waugh:** I really like that. At periods of time evaluating if the team we’ve got right now, the team we need for the next 6 to 12 months and almost recognize there might be something to do on that.

It’s easy to get comfy, isn’t it? Well you like being part of this team, we’ll just stay shall we and carry on. If I can talk about when you asked the question about how would you kind of the right/better people. I want to bring up one, a model that TaAF has used. Merely because I’m not sure if it’ll come up.

If it doesn’t, I’ll get strung up for not talking about this, but, one of the things that, TaAF did really early on, we really wanted to keep the people that have been part of that, the expression of interest connected to the work, but those people were really senior like strategic needs. And so we knew we couldn’t, A, afford, and B, have an organisation’s backing for these people to come and work on TaAF.

What we thought we could do was potentially explore whether these people could come and work for TaAF for one or two days a week, whilst retaining their existing role in their organisations. And that became the basis for now the majority of our improvement for the past three years, which we call the shared role model.
The shared role model is kind of different from a secondment. In as much a secondment, you’ll usually come away from where you work and come and work for a place for a certain amount of time and then go back. Whereas the shared role model for TaAF is we explore with partners and organizations whether they would be up for providing somebody for TaAF for two or three days a week or whatever the agreement is to retain their role in their organization, and also coming with part of TaAF.

And there was a whole amount of reasons for doing this. And some of that first, it was about not taking great talent away from partners who really needed it there. Because that’s a good way of making partners not want to work with you going forward. and it was also a way of us, coming back to a point I made earlier, having a better chance of finding a team who are close to the place.

Because we could approach a partner or a leisure trust in Burnley, for example, and say, would you be up for being part of this? Because we really value your part. And so it gave us a lot of what we needed in terms of a connection into a key partner who we wanted to try and work with and maybe even influence the change.

Gave us, if you like, a little bit of a shortcut. We didn’t have to go and build the relationships because the teams had them already. But what it also gave to the individuals and those employers was it gave people a chance to come and step into something new and quite exciting. Something maybe with a bit of a different challenge, something that could develop their skills in a new way.

And the ideal being that they could then take that back into their host organization. So I’m not sure whether unique is the right word in terms of a team building approach, but I think it’s something that’s a little bit different to how quite a few have approached it.

El Wilkinson-Cunningham: I really like that idea, not to completely take someone out of their role, but kind of developing them, but having that kind of relationship with a system partner and team. If you think about that system way of working and think about all those early adopters, that we kind of talk about the system, You’re doing that, you’re getting people in, doing that kind of early adoption kind of work within yourself and that’s going then back out into the system and take, almost taking that way of, working to widen, have that wider impact in the system, which sounds like really, really valuable.
Jamie Waugh: Well, it’s, it’s just that thing, you know, if I put a name to it, we’ve got lots of names, but so Claire Ramwell is our strategic leader. And, in reality, what it means is that we’ve got a person who works within side one of our district councils, who is always there trying to share more of TaAF’s approaches and messages and, and helping TaAF understand the challenges that they got and how we might need to think about the work we do with them.

It’s just so different to trying to do it almost like on a meeting a partner to understand the basis. and so yeah, it has been it’s certainly been something that has opened up opportunities that we wouldn’t have had, I don’t think, had we gone down a bit more of a recruiting side.

Kath Lord-Green: What are the challenges of doing things differently?

When structures and HR processes aren’t necessarily designed for whole systems working.

El Wilkinson-Cunningham: We’ve tried looking at different ways of recruiting, you know, in the early days. We, we had some apprenticeships that were there available for people to come in and they wanted to look at doing it like, like a little bit differently and find different ways for people getting into that.

Especially for people that were young people that kind of used that kind of language and they wanted to, to look at kind of holding almost like a meet the team or meet the apprentice kind of day working or be assistant there where people can come and talk about bit the work they have done, that they do. Help with support with kind of like maybe some of the application form and we’ll get to know them more on like almost like one to one personal level rather than just being automatically doing that application form and sending that in kind of thing.

It’s something that they looked at and they’ve been looking to do for quite a while but we’ve all been within a local authority and the kind of the procedures, the red tape that comes with that, is that they couldn’t get past that recruitment team. So it couldn’t be actually, you trying to do that different way, but even though I spent months and months talking to him, it ended up, not necessarily not happening. And not be able to do because it couldn’t kind of line up with some of them recruitment role when recruitment processes.

Jamie Waugh: So I’m really keen that what this doesn’t become is a local authority bashing because some of, some of the challenge I’m going to talk about will also
be that. However, in reality, that’s because they have processes that exist, that understandably have to exist.

And, and so it’s just a case of, you know, how you kind of work with that. So I think some of the challenges that we’ve, we’ve found, I think some are a little bit more kind of standard and some might be specific to the shared role model bit. So I’ll kind of allude to that. I think, I agree with the local authority, so I’m not from a local authority, but I’ve learned that it’s really helpful if you’re able to know exactly what you want many months in advance, because it’s many months of a process that generally does exist.

And so we’ve fallen foul a little bit of not recognizing the skills and talent that we needed soon enough. And then by the time we realized it, we knew we were four or five months away from being able to bring somebody in. And that’s no fault of the local authority process. That’s down to us not knowing and thinking early enough, who do we feel that we need, because we knew what the process was.

And so a couple of times we’ve not had the skills and talent that we needed for quite some time, just because we hadn’t kind of thought about it soon enough. One thing I think has been an interesting challenge, and I don’t actually, El I’ll be, I’ll be interested to understand how you found this. I generally, I don’t know the answer and what’s a better solution.

I generally struggle with the idea of applications and interviews being the right way to find really great people, or at least it’s limited in as much as what it kind of tells you or can tell you. And we’ve tried all manner of different stuff. We’ve tried everything from your standard kind of interview presentation questions through to a full day where you rotate between a presentation and a panel and a getting to know you activity. That terrifies the participants.

And ultimately, it’s almost like kind of bid writing, people who are able to articulate themselves best on the day, are the people that you pick, which isn’t the same as necessarily being the people that you needed. I’m not sure we’ve actually found a better way. I think what has helped is the more that we’ve, the longer we’ve existed, the more people have known us and have generally approached us beforehand to say, I’m really interested.

And so you kind of understand and know people better. In advance then of people coming for interviews and stuff, and to a degree you kind of have a bit of a feel for them before the interviews. And so I think almost that the true, the literal selection process and the culture of how you do it is a, I don’t know a better way.
I’m sure there is one, so I’m hoping after this people will start emailing on Jamie Numpty, here’s a miles better way of doing it. Which would be helpful. Particularly in terms of our shared role model. I think for quite some time, because TAF was a little bit in the background, we didn’t really kind of put ourselves out there.

It was like a deliberate remote kind of supporting partners in the background. And so it was really difficult for us to articulate to people who we were and what we were. And so we struggled to attract people to apply. and I think a lot of this type of work, maybe, maybe less so now, but probably in the past few years, because it is a little bit different, it’s a little bit harder to articulate in a succinct way that actually, how do you put that into a two paragraph advert that you want people to come and apply for?

And so I think just, we, we, some of our lessons learned, but made it harder is almost the. The literal system setup where you do an advert, it’s quite hard to articulate what this opportunity is all about, what people are going to get from this. And so, those are a few of the challenges that we’ve encountered.

**El Wilkinson-Cunningham:** I think, I agree, referring to that last point though Jamie, I think, over here and generally, in east Riding we struggle, to recruit people and retain staff, kind of just because of the nature of how big East Riding is, and some of the areas are really rural, and really kind of isolated, like, say, Withernsea.

But having that kind of difficulty to kind of recruit anyway, it’s hard. I remember when I first looked, applied for the job, and looked at it, I’m like, I don’t really know what I’m necessarily applying for here if I’m completely honest. Because it was so new, and so different, and it’s like, seems exciting, but I need to get my head around it.

And I think, kind of, all that kind of, what’s really scary and makes it harder for people to think is if they’re looking at, looking for a job and they don’t know what it is, they’re not even sure about the language and we always struggle with recruiting and then they also see it’s in Withernsea which is miles away like I don’t even know where Withernsea is.

It’s kind of that thing about how do you get people, how do we get people in then? How do we get people to be bought in and understand what we’re doing with it? It’s that balance of getting the language right to kind of bring people in and support people with that.
Jamie Waugh: I’d be fascinated to come back to this point if we have the opportunity El. Which is, when we talked about the differences between Pennine Lancashire and Withernsea. Like I said, I’d never really considered the reality of attracting people into this place if they don’t already live there.

And then how you keep them. Because by its nature, correct me if I’m wrong, there’s just less opportunities because there’s less things because there’s less people. Where in Pennine Lancashire just in those alone, we have six different districts. Do you know what I mean? From the Ribble Valley right up to an urban place, you could literally, I’ll just go next door from my next job, it’s down the road and you’re still kind of part of the system.

I think you’re 100 percent right. We can even tell ourselves that we’re better at not creating our own language. And yeah, I always say to people, would you describe that to your mates in a pub and they get it? The answer is no. Even if you think you’ve simplified it to the point of simplification, you still wouldn’t, because you’re still using words you just don’t recognize.

I learned really early on, because I, I write in the way I talk. Excitable, I like to kind of be creative, I want to enthuse you. And then when people weren’t applying, we understood that actually the time to try and get this across and enthuse people is not in the end. It’s when you’ve managed to recruit them and impart of something.

Because, so actually to a degree, we almost took a step back and went down a more, kind of a bit more traditional language to kind of attract people. Because like you say, They’re using keywords to search types of roles. And so at the end, I almost reined it in a little bit to knock people off. But what’s this thing?

It sounds like an absolute nonsense. It’s not really going to work. Knowing that actually getting them is the first bit. And then from then on, you’re then building that excitement and creativity.

Kath Lord-Green: You touched on it a little bit. Once you’ve got the, in your words, the best person for the job, how do you keep that?

How are you retaining your staff?

Jamie Waugh: So I’m going to ask El to lead on this one, because I’m, I get the sense already that there’s been some, some challenges in that space.
El Wilkinson-Cunningham: Yeah, there have. We’ve had a big staff turnover. Real big staff turnover. The team that I initially started with, you know, was completely different to the team that we have now.

Within like the first couple of months of personally moving and starting. We had a couple of people leaving. So, if you look at how many people we’ve had. You’re looking at them like, double figures, you know what I mean? Like, you’re looking like, ten, eleven people just going.

So, almost, at one point, like, every six months, you’re getting somebody new, or somebody leaving. And that’s not necessarily just leaving to go do some job, but it’s also kind of people who are going on to, going on maternity leave, for example, it’s kind of like, there’d be that difficulty kind of changing that.

And then, every time someone leaves, you’d go out and have somebody new come in. It’s that kind of onboarding process again. I’m getting people understanding now how it needs to go, what the work is, what systems mean, what kind of bid bit working means, working that out, working all that out.

I think people kind of developing as a team, well, it takes so long to kind of develop, and it took a long time to get to that almost performing point, because we were like, kind of, constantly kind of going back. I don’t want to say the same thing we’ve got, we’ve, I don’t know how when i say we’ve cracked that, but kind of, develop how we keep retaining staff.

A lot of the work we’re trying to do is how, and if you go back to Jamies’s work and it’s helped to upskill them, trying to say some kind of this or that kind of that. Here’s how you can develop, this is kind of where you’re, we’d feel that you would be good at. Like kind of matching people, to what their interests are, what their passions are as well, like with some of the projects, some of the work that people are doing, how can you got a real interest or you go really passionate about working with young people and what kind of giving them that, role to kind of explore it and run with it and to really own it, to take it on and I found, I think over the last couple of years, that’s what we’ve found has helped kind of get people investigate and wanting to stay.

Moving on, we have got one member of staff that has been here right from day dot. I mean she definitely committed by way throughout, but that there’s been a lot of others that have moved on and changed. But I guess on the flip side of that is a lot of, some of them have also gone into different aspects, different places in the system.
So going, going back to what Jamie was talking about kind where you’d be getting people in from other parts of the system and then you’re taking back, they’re taking them skills back into the other parts of the system. That’s how more we see it, if like we’ve got people coming in and working for us and learning about system change and learning around place-based working and thinking that more different way of working on what we’re trying to do, and then taking that out into that system to allow the bigger system change. Within East Riding Council or even East Riding as a whole, kind of, to get people working more in this same way, working more collaboratively. So like our leader, has recently gone, which is a big loss for us, because she’s been here a long time, she’s great, but she’s gone to go work in the ICB.

So that’s like a really good strong system partner. Also working the same way, taking that way, working into the ICB and helping we then work together to kind of continue to support developing a project, developing Withernsea, developing that wider system.

**Jamie Waugh:** You could almost imagine, and you probably couldn’t do this, but maybe you could think about how to do this.

Like almost either on the recruitment or even on the application almost. We want you to see Withernsea as a place that you want to live and work for life. What would we need to build into this job for you to feel like that’s an opportunity you could actually, you know what I mean? There’s an interesting thing there to almost get them to give you the nuggets that you need.

So, I think, because the interesting bit is, the stuff that we do, I imagine, is no different to what EI and the team at Withernsea have done. And so, to a degree, I’m fascinated by the fact that sometimes, just the environment is the thing that may determine whether people stay or go, I don’t know. I’d actually say we’ve had very little turnover, even to the, even with the size of the team we’ve got. So I said before, a team of about 50, which is about right now, bear in mind, that’s a team of 50. Some do two days, some do three days, you know, full time equivalent, maybe it’s 25, but, but actually it’s, it’s, it’s been very, very consistent for us from day one.

And so I’ll share some thoughts on why that may be the case. So again, we’re big, we’re big on investing in people and we do that in a few ways. So, so one is. We love to give people the freedom and license to really put their own stamp and mark them. And so in each of our districts, if you go and speak to them, it’s their version of TaAF, with their plans, with their approaches, with what were they decided was the right things to do with their people.
It’s not a Jamie directed or design one or a Claire Ramwell directed one. So there’s that bit of giving people something that’s theirs, I think that they can own. And to create that sense of ownership and commitment to it. Like we’ve done a lot on skills development. so, so generally. Because the nature of the shared role model means that you don’t really in TaAF have a job progression.

And by its nature you also don’t really have salary progression in that way. And so our view is that if what we’re doing is investing in people’s skills and development and giving them lots of opportunity and exposing them to new ways of thinking with new people who would never get normally, that’s as good as salary increases because you’re building up their kind of career for the future, if you like.

And so We have done countless skills development sessions in all things from creative engagement, storytelling, facilitation, critical thinking, all sorts of things. We generally ask our teams what they’d like skills development on next. I think we’ve got one coming up, something about how can Artificial Intelligence help leisure or something like that, you know, because that’s something they were really keen to get into and explore.

And so I think keeping interest levels and keeping that sense of personal development, I think helps. Although then I will say we’ve done that as well. And maybe so, so to a degree, who knows, maybe environment matters the most. And I think because of the shared role model, to a degree, people have natural variety in their roles.

When it works well, what they’ve got are two jobs that infuse and excite them, that are different, but have a connectivity between them that works really well. And so maybe that’s also easier for us, the people, not to feel like I need a new challenge, because it is actually quite challenging being part of the shared model.

**El Wilkinson-Cunningham:** We’ve done a lot of kind of, wow, kind of speed, like, work feeding in to the team lots of kind of, we’ve put, early days in a lot of investment into how we form a team, how we work as a team, how we kind of fit with, stick with kind of some of that uncomfortableness, what you kind of consult and sort of basically around around systems thinking, system change, how, what you can be able to consult and looking at things on like, adult development around kind of being able to like be more conscious and be more present in spaces and doing all that kind of work to develop, the team in that sense.

And yeah, we’ve put a lot of effort into that, a lot of team, a lot of work into that especially in them early days. but now there’s probably only a couple of teams
that are still here now that kind of done that actually did them, initial, sessions a lot of them teams have gone so he kind of we did a lot of that kind of putting stuff in but yeah people still kind of had different opportunities they want to move on to or just in nature of like said recruiting and retaining staff within our system and East Riding as a whole, never mind just Withernsea, it's a difficult kind of thing that we do, we do experience.

Jamie Waugh: So I can sit here now and say our team are really engaged and really connected and that's why they're staying and stuff. And I've written a question of how did you know? Mainly because recently we committed to doing I'll say a staff engagement survey for want of a better term. So we've done quite a bit of work with Gallup, because we've done Cliffs and Strengths as I've talked about. And Gallup as you may know do a Q12 engagement survey that I think is pretty international. So we committed to doing the Q12 with our teams at the end of last year’s very start of this year, almost as a sense check that says, so don't just assume that your team are engaged. Don't just assume your team are getting what they need.

Because that's a really good way of setting yourself up for a fall. Be brave enough to put it out there and ask people. And then understand that when you get that back, you're gonna have to act on what's in there. But we've done that recently and we've got a team away day coming up soon. Where we're literally gonna get the results out.

And we're gonna, I mean generally you know, there was, there's a lot of positives in there and there was some stuff to work on, but I suppose the question that posed to everybody really is. What are you doing to sense check with your team in a way that they can be free to share with you how engaged and connected they are right now?

El Wilkinson-Cunningham: Yeah, I think that's a really interesting question. I think probably completely honest, probably could do more to be more, explicit about it maybe. I think we kind, we quite often a lot about what we do, our pilot kind of being reflective, providing spaces in team meetings where we kind of might all bring up challenges that we might be experiencing and also celebrate some of the successes we might be experiencing.

Kind of linking in opportunities for training or conferences that might, might come up. And we do that in meetings every week. So we kind of constantly kind of have that as an agenda point where people are able to be reflective and share some of
the issues that may be coming up. We also do kind of team days where we might just put out a day to look at what’s going on, what, what, where, where we like, maybe explore some of them challenges or celebrate some of those successes and then, kind of the bonding. But why are you getting everything that you kind of need to have on this job to make you happy to kind of want to continue outside of just like informal kind of conversation you have with your colleagues. A lot of places could probably take away and think about how do we do that a little bit more and direct that.

**Kath Lord-Green:** How did your team react to the Gallup questions, Jamie? Eli’s talking about, capacity, retention of staff and you not having those issues. You’ve kind of got the capacities to do that at the moment, haven’t you? And what did they feel about it, getting asked those questions? And did they respond openly and honestly?

And were you able to act upon that?

**Jamie Waugh:** Like most things in TaAF, we approached it from the genuine perspective of, this will help us get better, as opposed to anything else. So, Heath, the guy in our team who kind of co-ordinated it all, he did a magnificent job. In doing loads of, warm up calls, videos, so people totally understood what, what it was, how it would look when it came out, how long it would take, how, how much we genuinely wanted open feedback with no filters and no reservations, because this was all about us understanding where we’re great and where we can be better.

So, so there were generally, everybody was on board with it. I mean, Heath got a 100 percent response rate, which I don’t think the people at Gallup had ever kind of seen before, out of 50 people. Obviously not going to share the results too much live now, I think what there was is a really good balance of some things that made us feel like we’ve done some good work here in connecting, in keeping a team who work in disparate districts well connected.

And there are some things that when, there are some things that are going to give us the opportunity to come together and say, how would we take that from a 4 to a 5? Do you know what I mean? Because that’s the nature of kind of the work is. You get your results and you look at your results and maybe you pick the ones lower end and say, how do we get that from that score to that score?

What would we need to do differently to do that? And so, because all of it is based on a genuine desire to want to be the best version of our team that we can be.
and we always encourage in TaAF, no filter, you know, share a doubt, share a concern, never leave with anything unsaid, and the fact that it’s entirely anonymous, is also just a very helpful thing for people to say.

So, I think the results were to a degree pleasing and importantly gave us some things that we can work on.

Kath Lord-Green: Has doing these polls with Gallup and finding out what people really feel, has that helped in any way towards, retention so you don’t have to recruit more?

Jamie Waugh: It’s early, so we’re not gonna kind of know that yet.

The working hypothesis is, if you’re constantly iterating to become the best version of your team, and you’re doing so based on the insight that they have given you, and you’re working out the solutions together, you’ve done as much as you could do to retain, people outside of naturally, people who’ve wanted different challenges eventually.

And as I say, for reasons I’ve never considered before until I’ve heard El speak today, because of the breadth of the opportunity in Penine Lancashire, we just don’t have similar kind of challenges I think that we can see often. So that’s, that’s a really bonus for us. And whether it’s personal lives or business lives, there is so much of a breadth of stuff to do where we are, which is magnificent.

So actually, happily, our recruitment is only ever generally because we’re developing and growing. And so new work will come online and then that’s the when we get a chance to test out recruitment so it’s a really nice reason to recruit. So we’re doing some work called active Madrasas Which is ultimately about working with the people at the heart of Madrasas to try and introduce Physical activity into the children’s kind of daily Madrasa lives.

And it’s a really tiny group of people doing magnificent work. And happily now they’re able to bring in more capacity to really start to expand the Madrasa. But the key to that is the capacity they’re bringing in has been found from the people that have built relationships in the past year, who are people who work in Madrasas, who have said, I would love the opportunity to own something like this for myself, for my Madrasa.

And so the recruitment to a degree still goes through a proper process and interviews, et cetera, but it’s kind of been built up over time of developing
relationships with people at the heart of this work. And so what you ended up doing is in a really happy position, you’re choosing from people who really desperately want to come and join this thing, as opposed to trying your best to attract people in.

so because our recruitment now is more. Based on the fact that people want something to expand and grow, it’s, it’s a very happy place for us.

Kath Lord-Green: Reflecting back, El, is there anything that you’d do differently?

El Wilkinson-Cunningham: I think it’d be difficult for us to be able to say that, because I think at the time, like I say, we really felt that getting in the right people meant getting people from the town, getting in people from the place.

And I think, even looking back on it now, it probably was the right thing to do to kind of get that initial buy in. But I think almost that, whether or not they understood the way of working, or had the skills to do it, maybe they’d end up putting us back a little bit. But I think it’s that idea of, yeah, keeping it local, but kind of getting them skills, and maybe looking a bit, a bit more, a bit more kind of selective on the people based on skills rather than just being that localized area. One thing we did do a couple years ago when we had someone else leave the team, I was looking for another, a new community development officer. Rather than putting back out to ad again, like we would normally and saying like, there’s an advert out there now, people can just apply from wherever you are, you see it, you apply like you normally would.

We looked at more like the common role of both of our system partners and said, look, this is the kind of person we’re wanting, these are skills we’ve got that we want within the, within the team, within that role, this is kind of the work they’ll be doing. Have you got anybody that will be suited to that?

So we put out to a number of our system partners that do kind of community work in that same way. And they identified, who is now our, pilot lead. So she was identified to come on, and that’s like on a secondment role, to cover someone on maternity leave for nine months. She had them skills, we knew she had them skills, from kind of her being hand picked, and she came in and just kind of flew with it.

Then she then developed on being with the community development officer, to being our, pilot lead.
Jamie Waugh: It’s, it’s funny, isn’t it, how it’s, it would be easy to default to place first as a criteria. And then if you go, okay, let’s explore that for Withernsea. 6,000 population. How many of them are of an age were this many?

How many of them are actively already in work this many? And by the end of it, you’re like, well, we’ve got a pool of 20. It’s just, it’s really easy to think in those terms. You know, it’s about the place. Well, yeah, it is. But. The actual pool of people who are actively looking or exploring working in Withernsea, is far different to anywhere else.

El Wilkinson-Cunningham: Absolutely that, and it is that.

Our first couple of people that came through were seconded from other areas within East Riding Council because they were already invested in and work in Withernsea. So I was like, and they had a bit of interest in physical activity and sport already, so it’s like, okay, maybe we do fit.

But again, just because people have got an interest in physical activity or doing physical activities doesn’t mean that they understand system working or place based working. And there are kind of the small differences between that from the other kinds of community work, and then it’s that, I think that’s kind of always where we fell so short.

Like, oh yeah, we bring these people in, they know the community, they have these skills, or some of these people have it, but then when, we didn’t necessarily fully understand, this work ourself, but it was, we were looking for, they weren’t the right skills, and that, what impact did that have?

Jamie Waugh: Fascinated to work out, what is the one perfect criteria for this?

Because actually, it’s not place, necessarily, because, Withernsea point. It’s not being passionate about physical activity, because I’m not, but I am passionate about something being the best it can be and supporting people to grow and become the best, you know what I mean, so there’s all, there’s an interest, I bet there’s one criteria that’s perfect, that we just solve it all. In terms of the lessons learned, I think I’ve alluded to a couple, and I think, El just mention one then, put in, put in the requisite amount of effort, in to articulate with clarity what this thing is and to not be clever about it. And to agree, except that that might mean that sometimes your advert reads a bit more boring than the work actually is, because you need to attract people to place. But it’s, and so don’t be, don’t be a smart ass like Jamie has tried to be in the past.
I think that was, yeah, that was a lesson. I think we would have probably done our staff engagement stuff soon. So we didn’t really think to do it until most of our team were three, four years into it by now. And it would have been nice to have been able to show, baseline and then progress and improvement over time.

We can still do that to a degree, but we’ve just got less time to do it, so then that would have been a kind of cool thing to do. Whilst the Shared World Model is the heart of what we do, it’s not all that we do because one thing that we did learn is that for certain types of roles, the shared role model doesn’t work, and so actually when we needed, to recruit a finance and insurance person, we actually didn’t see the value of influencing system partner change in a finance environment because to a degree, no, no, I’m, my background is finance, I’m allowed to say this, finance is finance.

They’re not going to go and change the way the finance institutions and infrastructures work. And so we’ve also, where we’ve needed to just recruit people direct and happily Blackburn Council have been willing to do that for us.

**Kath Lord-Green:** Do you think that would be your advice to others when they’re considering how and where to embed core capacity then to finish off?

**Jamie Waugh:** Yeah, I think. I think there is that, well, is it advice or is it just something that you learn as you go? I don’t know, there is just something in, so our advice actually is almost always, take a little bit more time than you have so far, in thinking. Now, I appreciate there’s a, there’s an inertia, you know, you can eventually get bogged down in thinking too much, but particularly when it comes to people, really, really think carefully about the roles that you need, and the roles that you will need in that role in six months time.

And then, articulate that out. Get people’s perspectives and thoughts on it. And don’t rush out to recruitment. Because once you’ve committed to recruitment, you’re going to be six months in, really. And then if you get the person you think, if we’d have just done this, because then you’ve got another six month process, you’ve also got a person there.

**El Wilkinson-Cunningham:** I think I very much agree with Jamie with that. I mean, kind of, I mean, across the board with this kind of work, it’s about taking your time, and kind of almost sticking to your guns a little bit. And I think, almost, you need to, you do need to understand. What it is you need, what kind of person it is, what kind of skills it is that you’re going to have with that.
And I think if you do rush into it and end up getting that kind of wrong person, it will kind of set you back. It can develop, it can ruin that trust, it can ruin that kind of understanding and stop you being able to maybe progress forward in a way that the pilot or your project kind of want you to, what you need to be able to do and the population that you’re working for, kind of, is looking for you to do.

I think kind of getting them, understanding them skills, understanding what it is exactly you, you want within that role and that job, is kind of more important than just saying, getting the person into it.

**Jamie Waugh:** There’s a culture bit here as well, it’s, What are you doing to make your team feel like, I don’t ever want to leave this team?

You know, and there’s really simple things that people can do, that I think they’re generally surprised when they know that we do it in TaAF, because it’s tiny little stuff, but it makes a massive difference. So, things like, doing something for each other’s birthdays, even if that’s just a little group signed card that gets given, even if you’ve got a team of 18 people.

Because that shows that you care about those people and you want those people in your team. Doing little shout outs on WhatsApp that recognize really great stuff. Whatever it would be that just says to people, this is the place for you. You know, if you’re not having lunches together, ask stop yourselves, go and have lunch together, go and sit in another room, go away from your laptops and talk as human beings who are part of the same team, because this is all of the stuff that says, this is the team that we want to be and so this stuff matters.

**Naomi:** Thanks for joining us for this episode of place change makers. Remember the conversation doesn’t end here. Check out other episodes and take a look at our online resources at www.sportengland.org. You can also join our community of learning where we’ll keep you connected to the latest learning and thinking being surfaced by places.

So until next time, stay curious and keep exploring.