SPORT ENGLAND

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Place Need Assessment

Step by step guide

Also see: 1 What you need to know 3 Real-world examples & data

Contents

This is one of three documents designed to help you identify and understand inequalities in sport and physical activity at both local authority and neighbourhood levels – start with 'What You Need to Know', use the 'Step-by-Step Guide' to apply the process, and see the 'Real-World Examples' to bring it to life.

Explore all three documents and more information on the Inequalities Metric and Place Need Classification.

Introducing the steps

Our aim is to support you in building a stronger understanding of need, helping you deliver the greatest benefit.

This step-by-step approach sets out the practical process we've used to identify and understand inequalities in sport and physical activity at both local authority and neighbourhood levels.

Using Sport England's Inequalities Metric and Place Need Classification, it provides a robust framework for identifying need and prioritising intervention.

It is designed to guide partners and stakeholders through the key stages of gathering and interpreting data, pinpointing priorities, and taking effective action.

Six steps

1. Understand your local context
2. Identify priority groups based on activity levels
3. Examine smaller areas of sporting need
4. Assess social and economic needs
5. Examine smaller areas of social need
6. Identify where sporting and social need intersect

Please bear in mind

- These steps are meant as a guide, not a requirement.
- We have used datasets available to us that enable robust comparisons across different places in England.
- More could be done with this data, for example by considering attitudes to physical activity or outcomes such as life satisfaction.
- You should adapt the steps to incorporate your own local knowledge, datasets and intelligence.
- We recommend working through this approach collaboratively with other organisations locally, as our evidence shows this helps build greater alignment in how you understand your place, prioritise objectives, and plan action – which in turn maximises the combined impact of your work.

Step by step guide

1 Understand your local context

Begin by exploring the broad context of your area.

This means understanding its geography, population and notable cultural or economic traits that may impact physical activity levels.

Why this matters:

Recognising an area's unique identity and the broader context you are working in helps you appreciate the specific barriers and opportunities shaping physical activity behaviour in your specific area.

What you can do:

- Examine the population age profiles, ethnic diversity, employment, economic traits and other population demographics.
- Identify key factors that influence physical activity levels such as local infrastructure, available facilities, transport, and employment sectors.

Data you need:

- Supporting data file - **Population profiles and demographics**.
- **ONS population and household estimates (Census 2021) for median age**.
- **DHSC Fingertips Local Authority Public Health Profiles for life expectancy**.
- Your local plan.
- Other relevant local reports on infrastructure, facilities, transport, environment, etc.

How you can do this:

- Review your local plan to extract key information about your local area context.
- Analyse population and geography characteristics using the data sources listed, and others you have available.
- Carry out further analysis of local demographics using the **online census data tools**.
- Conduct stakeholder interviews to better understand local infrastructure and barriers.

2 Identify priority groups based on activity levels

Next, evaluate overall activity levels within your local authority for both adults and children and young people (CYP) to determine whether adults, CYP, or both should be a priority.

At this stage, use the Inequalities Metric and Place Need Classification (PNC) data to highlight the extent of inequalities - focusing on characteristics such as age, disability, socioeconomic factors, and ethnicity.

Why this matters:

Knowing where activity levels are proportionately lower compared to others areas - and which groups are most affected - allows you to target efforts in a way that has the greatest potential for impact.

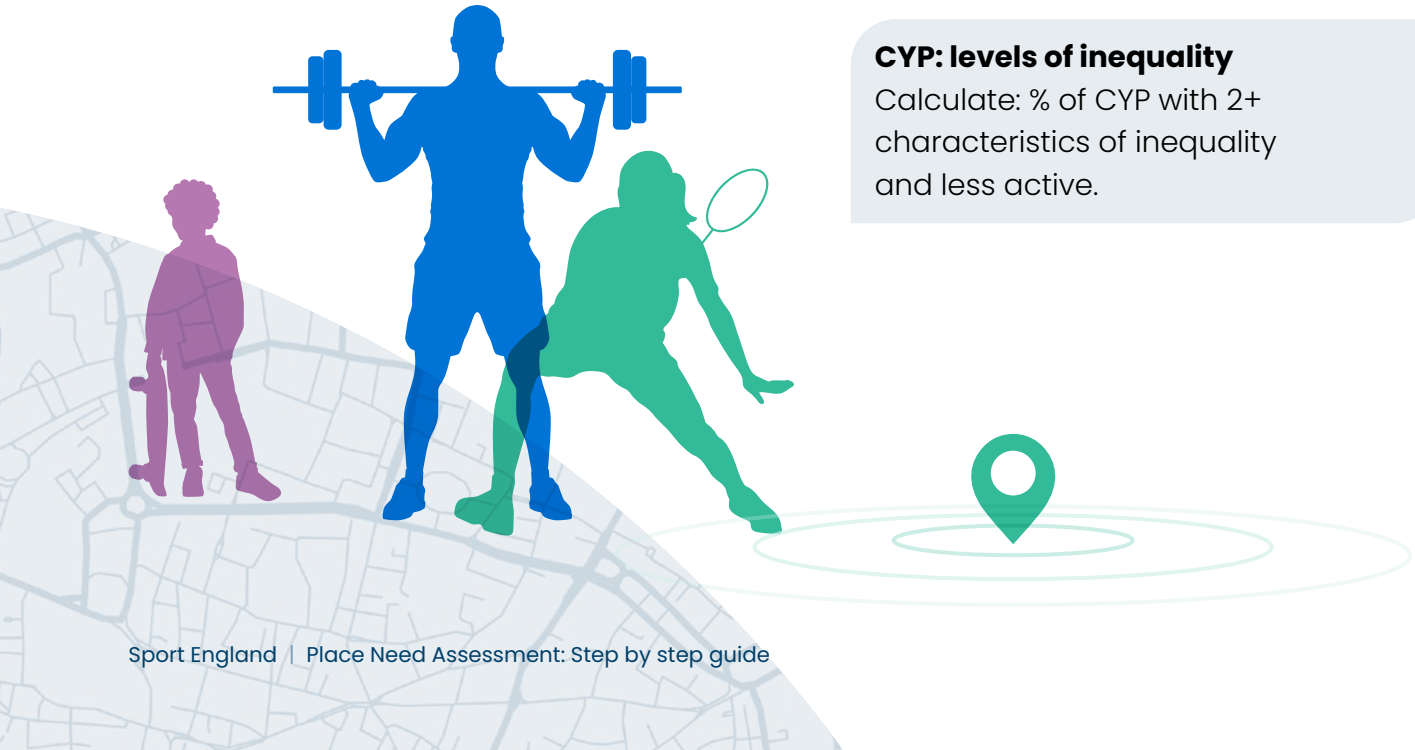
Audiences with 2 or more characteristics from the Inequalities Metric will be experiencing the most profound inequalities in participation and would be the groups to focus on to have the greatest impact on tackling inequalities.

What you can do:

- Assess activity levels among adults and children.
- Identify priority demographics most affected by inequalities.

Data you need:

- Supporting data file – PNC.
- Supporting data file – Population profiles and demographics.



How you can do this:

- Use the PNC data to calculate the following metrics:

Adult: levels of physical activity
Calculate: % active, and the % inactive.

Adult: levels of inequality
Calculate: % of adults with 2+ characteristics of inequality and inactive.

CYP: levels of physical activity
Calculate: % active, and the % less active.

CYP: levels of inequality
Calculate: % of CYP with 2+ characteristics of inequality and less active.

- Determine whether adults, CYP or both should be a priority based on whether either show high levels of inequality or low levels of physical activity (remember, this could be low % 'active' or high % 'inactive/less active').
- Use the population profiles and demographics data file to compare data for your local authority to the national average, and to other areas.
- Identify which of the demographics included within the Inequalities Metric are over-represented in your local population.
- You could also consult community organisations to validate data insights with lived experiences.

3 Examine smaller areas of sporting need

After establishing the headline picture of sporting need at a local authority level, drill down into smaller geographies to see where inequalities in physical activity are most widespread or concentrated.

Modelled estimates of physical activity can help uncover pockets of significant need that might be masked by averages at the higher level.

Why this matters:

Activity patterns can vary immensely within the same local authority, so pinpointing small-area hotspots can help target strategies and resources to reach the places and people most in need of support.

What you can do:

- Identify areas with the highest need using smaller geographic units Middle layer Super Output Areas (MSOAs) and identify priority audiences within these.
- Determine whether activity inequalities are concentrated or widespread.

Data you need:

- Supporting data file – PNC.
- Supporting data file – Population profiles and demographics.
- Mapping and GIS software for visualisation.

This data uses Sport England's Small Area Estimates for physical activity levels. These Small Area Estimates are modelled figures which combine data from the Active Lives surveys with information about the population to create estimates for physical activity levels in smaller areas. This contrasts with the use of direct estimates from Active Lives for the same metrics at a local authority level and is the reason for any discrepancies. Please note the 2022-23 Small Area Estimates for CYP are developmental statistics that are subject to change.

How you can do this:

- Use the key sporting need metrics by MSOA within the PNC data file. Identify how many and which areas are in the deciles of greater need and determine whether need is concentrated in smaller pockets or more widespread.
- Use **GIS mapping software** to visualise and compare activity levels across smaller geographies.
- Use the population profiles and demographics data file to look at the prevalence of inequality metric characteristics in the smaller priority areas to identify the audiences that should be more of a focus in those MSOAs.
- You could also consult with relevant partner organisations to confirm priority areas for intervention.

4 Assess social and economic needs

Alongside sporting need, it's crucial to understand the broader social context in which people live.

Use tools like the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), the Health Index, and the Community Needs Index (CNI) to identify issues such as income deprivation, poor health outcomes, and lacking social infrastructure.

Why this matters:

Sport and physical activity initiatives can have greater impact if they're targeted at populations who have more to gain from being active. In addition, the initiatives are more likely to be effective if they account for wider challenges, like poor health, low income, and limited community assets. Tackling these underlying factors can help remove deeper barriers to active lifestyles.

What you can do:

- Identify broader social, health and community factors affecting physical activity levels.
- Recognise links between improved social outcomes and increased physical activity levels.

Data you need:

- Supporting data file – PNC.
- Supporting data file – Social outcome data.

How you can do this:

- Analyse IMD, Health Index and CNI data within the PNC data file to determine which social and community challenges are greatest in a place.
- Use the supporting data file – Social outcome data to review the detailed domains that make up IMD and the Health Index to further understand local context.
- You could also engage with local public health teams and local councils to validate findings.

5 Examine smaller areas of social need

As with sporting need, repeat the same detailed analysis for social inequalities at smaller-area levels (e.g. LSOAs).

Look for neighbourhoods most affected by multiple forms of deprivation or limited community infrastructure, and consider how these conditions influence the opportunities people have to be active.

Why this matters:

Socioeconomic barriers, social isolation, and lack of local facilities vary from one place to the next. Identifying precisely where conditions are most challenging allows for more targeted and nuanced interventions and enables targeting of the populations who have the most to benefit from being supported to be more active.

What you can do:

- Examine social and community inequalities at a smaller area level to identify which smaller areas are most in need of the benefits physical activity can provide.
- Assess the extent social need is concentrated or spread out across the local authority.

Data you need:

- Supporting data file – **Social outcome data**.
- Supporting data file – **PNC**.
- **CNI data** at LSOA level is available from OCSI.
- Mapping and GIS software for visualisation.
- **Health Index data** is only available at local authority level.

How you can do this:

- Drill down into LSOA-level IMD and MSOA scores to identify neighbourhood disparities.
- You could also examine MSOA and LSOA-level CNI data or conduct community engagement sessions - to understand lived experiences in neighbourhoods with higher need.

6 Identify where sporting and social need intersect

Finally, overlay your findings from Steps 3 and 5 to locate areas that have both high sporting need and high social need.

These overlapping areas typically stand to benefit most from additional support and resources.

Why this matters:

Focusing on places and communities facing multiple disadvantages ensures your efforts are directed where they are likely to have the most profound effect on reducing inequalities in sport and physical activity.

What you can do:

- Overlay findings from Steps 3 and 5 to pinpoint areas requiring targeted intervention.
- Prioritise locations with the greatest disparities and barriers to activity.

Data you need:

- Analysis from steps 3 and 5.
- Supporting data file – **Social outcome data**.
- Supporting data file - **PNC**.
- Mapping and GIS software for visualisation.

How you can do this:

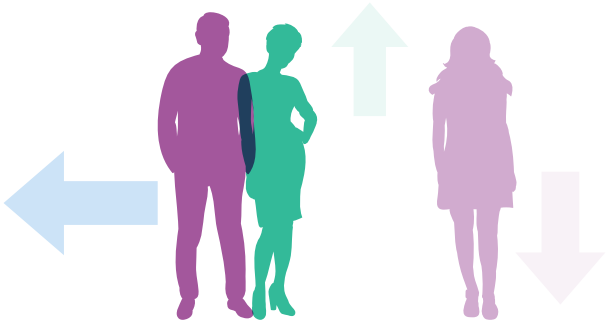
- Consider the extent to which LSOAs or MSOAs with high levels of social need (from IMD and / or CNI analysis) are in, or are the same as, those MSOAs with the highest levels of sporting need.
- Use GIS mapping to visualise the combined sporting need and social need datasets.
- Identify 'hotspot' areas where interventions can be most effective.

Your roadmap for tackling sport and physical activity inequalities

By following these six steps, you can create a clear, evidence-based roadmap for addressing physical activity inequalities.

Together, they form a robust process that pinpoints need, aligns resources effectively, and maximises impact in local communities.

Explore the detailed assessments to see these steps illustrated in practice and understand the analysis we've done.



However, data alone is not enough - **a richer picture of inequalities emerges only when we integrate partner input and the lived experiences of communities**. This approach ensures that solutions are not only informed by evidence but also shaped by the realities of those most affected.

To achieve this:

1. Emphasise lived experience and partner engagement - ensuring diverse voices shape decision-making.
2. Demonstrate where qualitative insights fit into the process - balancing statistics with stories.
3. Involve communities in co-designing interventions - creating locally relevant, meaningful change.

By embedding collaboration and co-creation into each step, this process moves beyond analysis - it drives action that is practical, inclusive, and impactful.

Tools and glossary

Tools

- The Six-Step Approach – Helps you identify, analyse, and address inequalities in sport and physical activity at both local authority and neighbourhood levels.
- Place Need Classification – Provides core data on inequalities in sport and physical activity and social outcomes, at both local authority and small-area levels.
- Sport England, Active Lives Online – Data on participation trends for adults and children.
- Office for National Statistics, Census data – Demographic breakdowns by geography and population characteristics.
- Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) Explorer – Ranks areas based on deprivation across multiple domains.
- Office for National Statistics, Health Index for England – Measures health outcomes and wider determinants.
- Local Trust and Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion (OCSI), Community Needs Index (CNI) – Identifies 'left behind' areas based on civic assets, connectedness and community engagement.

Glossary

- **Deciles** – Data ranked into ten equal groups; decile 1 represents the highest need. We have used deciles and often focused on decile 1 for our analysis. However, depending on the extent you're looking to prioritise, you could flex and focus on a wider set of areas and groups in lower deciles.

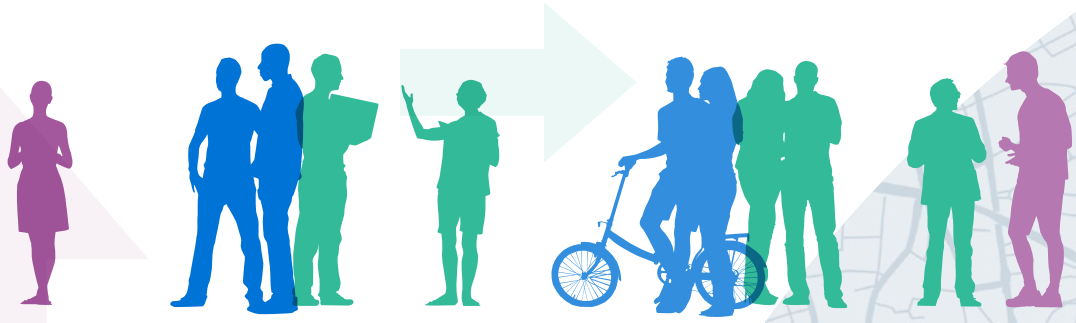
  Using the supporting datafiles, you can also consider alternative cut off points by selecting different decile scores depending on the data for your area and what level of targeting you're aiming for.

- **MSOAs (Middle layer Super Output Areas)** – Geographic units containing ~5,000–15,000 people used for local-level data analysis.

- **LSOAs (Lower layer Super Output Areas)** – Smaller geographic units (~1,000–3,000 people) used for local-level data analysis.

- **Sport and physical activity need** – data that describes the physical activity behaviour we are seeking to change. This data speaks most directly to our mission to increase activity, reduce inactivity and reduce inequalities.

- **Social need** – data that describes places where outcome data is less favourable. On the basis that sport and physical activity can provide a range of benefits, we believe there is the greatest potential for individuals and communities to benefit from increased activity levels where both outcomes and activity levels are lower.



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June 2025