SPORT ENGLAND

1

Place Need Assessment
What you need to know

Also see: **2** **Step by step guide**   **3** **Real-world examples & data**

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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. >
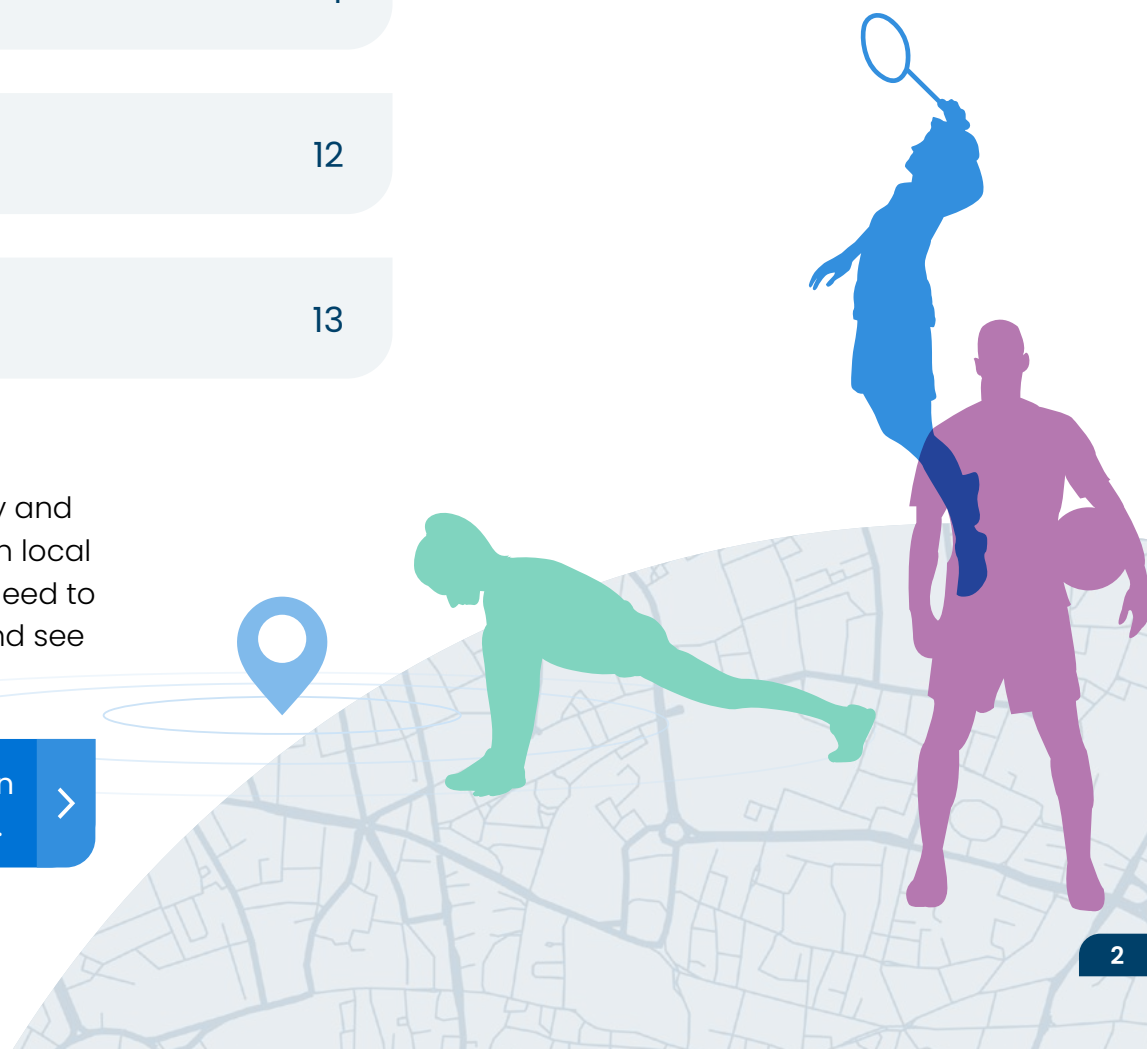
Introduction

We have developed three example place need assessments, to illustrate how our six-step approach can help you understand inequalities and need in place - to pinpoint and tackle inequalities in sport and physical activity.

The following places have been selected to highlight how needs differ, and how tackling inequalities looks different in different places:

Blackburn with Darwen

East Lindsey

Tower Hamlets
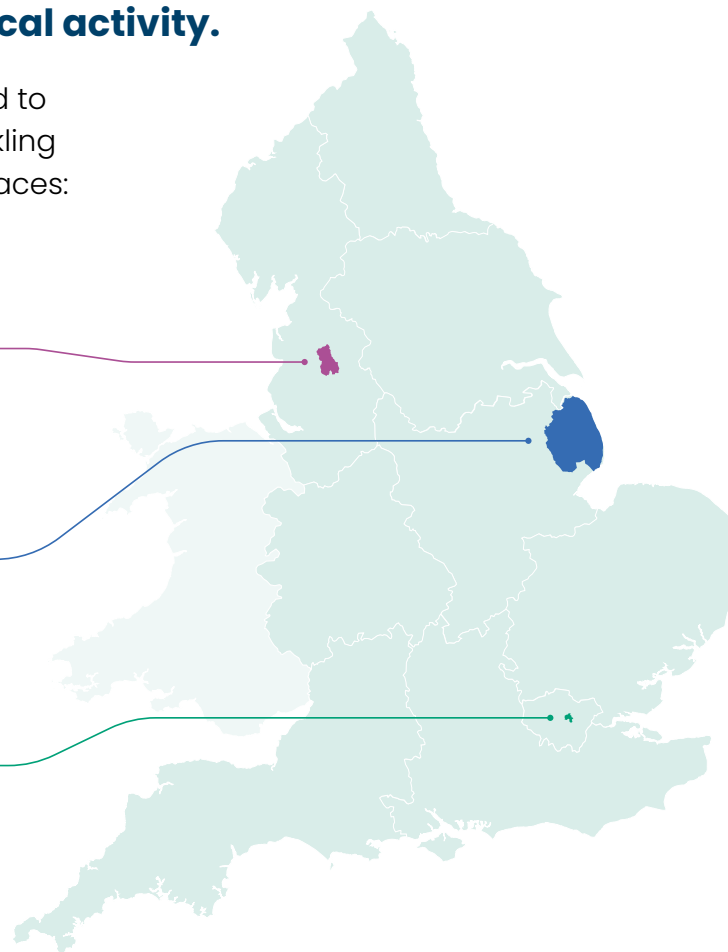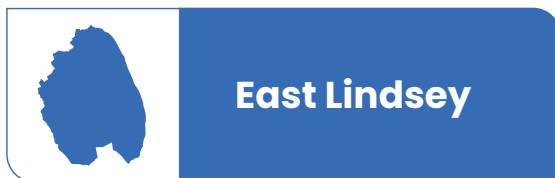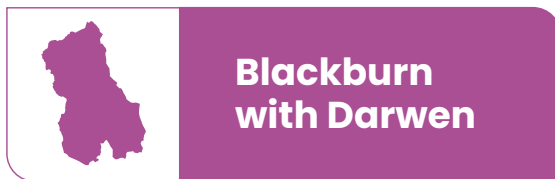
These assessments use our Inequalities Metric and Place Need Classification to highlight where need is most acute alongside wider datasets.

By examining each area's unique demographic, social, and health data, the Inequalities Metric and Place Need Classification show how factors converge to influence how active people are and can be applied to help identify who needs the most support and where the greatest impact can be made.

Ultimately, the need assessments underscore the importance of a comprehensive, data-led approach that recognises the different ways people's lives intersect with social, economic, and cultural factors.

By focusing on the areas, and the people most affected by inequalities, we can ensure our collective efforts have the greatest positive impact on participation in sport and physical activity.

Approach in action

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.

1 Understand your local context

Begin by exploring the broad context of your area.

For example:

- Population demographics, geography, cultural and economic factors.

- Local barriers and enablers to physical activity.

- Local infrastructure, transport accessibility, and available community facilities.

Key takeouts by area

Blackburn with Darwen

Younger, diverse population with higher socioeconomic deprivation.

East Lindsey

Rural, ageing population with higher levels of isolation and transport barriers.

Tower Hamlets

Dense urban borough with higher ethnic diversity and higher child poverty rates.

2 Identify priority groups based on activity levels

Next, evaluate overall activity levels within your local authority, looking at data for both adults and children and young people (CYP) to determine which population groups should be a priority.

- Assess participation rates and determine priority groups using the Place Need Classification.

- Focus on key inequality factors such as age, disability, socioeconomic factors, and ethnicity.

Key takeouts by area

Blackburn with Darwen

Data indicates both adults and children should be prioritised to increase activity levels and reduce inequalities. There are a range of specific demographic groups who, particularly where characteristics combine, should be a focus: Asian adults and children, adults of Muslim faith, adults in NS-SEC 6-8 and children experiencing low family affluence/income deprivation, disabled adults or those with a long-term health condition, girls and secondary-aged children that lack access to a park/field or outdoor sports place.

East Lindsey

Data shows adults, specifically combinations of older adults, those in NS-SEC 6-8 and those with a disability or long-term health condition, would be the priority to increase activity levels and reduce inequalities.

Tower Hamlets

Although there are some specific inequalities in adult activity levels, data indicates addressing activity levels amongst children and young people is a higher priority. A greater focus on girls, Asian and Black children, those experiencing low family affluence / income deprivation, and secondary-aged children that lack access to a park / field or outdoor sports place – particularly those with 2 or more of these characteristics – would be the priority to increase activity levels and reduce inequalities.
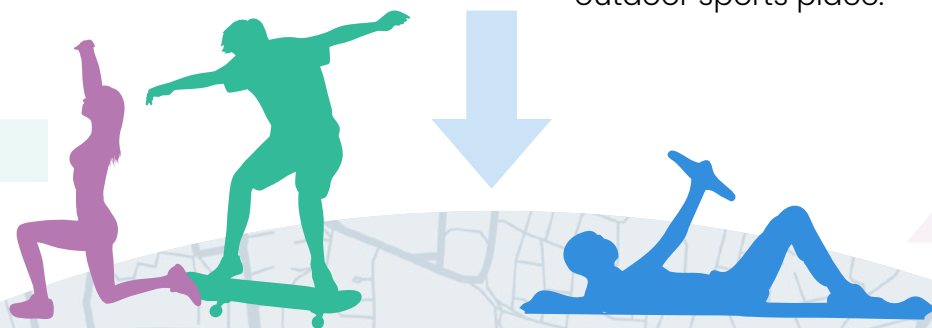
3 Examine smaller areas of sporting need

After establishing the headline picture at local authority level, drill down into physical activity behaviours within smaller geographies.

- Analyse neighbourhood level data to uncover any pockets of significant need that might be masked by averages at the higher level.

- Compare participation rates across different communities to identify where intervention could have the most impact.

- Be aware of caveats around modelled data.

Key takeouts by area

Blackburn with Darwen

The more densely populated urban areas in and around the centre of Blackburn would be the highest priority for increasing physical activity amongst adults and children and young people. However, the need amongst children is more concentrated, while for adults, activity levels are lower than England averages in most areas within this local authority.

East Lindsey

The challenges around adult physical activity levels and inequalities are greatest in the areas in and around the seaside town of Skegness, and the more sparsely populated communities and villages along the North Sea coastline. However, when compared to other areas of England, adult physical activity levels are low, and levels of inequality are high in most areas in East Lindsey so there is also a strong case for local authority-wide approaches in supporting adults to be active.

Tower Hamlets

A local authority-wide approach to increase children and young people's physical activity levels would be suitable as levels of sporting need are high across all MSOAs (Middle layer Super Output Areas).

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 challenges such as income deprivation, poor health outcomes, and weaker social infrastructure.

- Consider how these conditions influence the opportunities people have to be active.

Key takeouts by area

Blackburn with Darwen

There are significant deprivation and health-related challenges, however, Blackburn with Darwen has relatively better social and community infrastructure compared to many other areas of England which can be used to support more active lifestyles.

East Lindsey

High levels of deprivation and weak community infrastructure need to be factored into work to get more people physically active and tackle inequalities in East Lindsey.

Tower Hamlets

One of the most deprived local authority areas in England but strong community networks can be leveraged for efforts to increase levels of physical activity.

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. LSOA).

- Drill down into neighbourhood-level data to identify any pockets of need that might be masked by averages at the higher level.

Key takeouts by area

Blackburn with Darwen

The most severe deprivation and social need is concentrated in and around the urban areas and centre of Blackburn, requiring targeted place-based interventions.

East Lindsey

There are a number of smaller areas, focused around the coast, that are in the most deprived nationally.

Tower Hamlets

Deprivation and social need is more widely spread across Tower Hamlets, rather than existing in smaller, distinct pockets. However, there are some areas where social need is more acute.

6 Identify where sporting and social need intersect

Overlay sporting and social need data at a neighbourhood level.

- Identify areas with high sporting and social need which will have the most to gain from the benefits that being physically active brings.

Key takeouts by area

Blackburn with Darwen

Combined sporting and social need are highest in Little Harwood, Audley, Wensley Fold, Central Blackburn, and Shadsworth and Intack. Targeting resources and efforts in these areas is recommended to help tackle inequalities.

East Lindsey

Targeting Sutton-on-Sea, Ingoldmells and Chapel St Leonards, Mablethorpe, Skegness, and Wainfleet All Saints - where sporting and social need are highest is recommended to help tackle inequalities.

Tower Hamlets

Social and sporting need amongst children and young people is more widely spread across Tower Hamlets and so local authority wide efforts targeted at specific demographic groups is recommended to tackle inequalities. Where required, more targeted efforts should focus on the LSOAs in Tower Hamlets where the social need is greatest (see real-world examples and supporting data for more detail).

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.

However, this data alone is not enough - **a richer picture of inequalities emerges 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.

In addition to following these steps, it is critical to consult community groups to validate findings and explore attitudes and barriers to activity. Local communities and stakeholders should be part of creating solutions to ensure efforts to tackle inequalities are relevant.

> Explore the step-by-step guide for deeper insights into why these steps matter, what actions you can take, and how to implement them effectively.
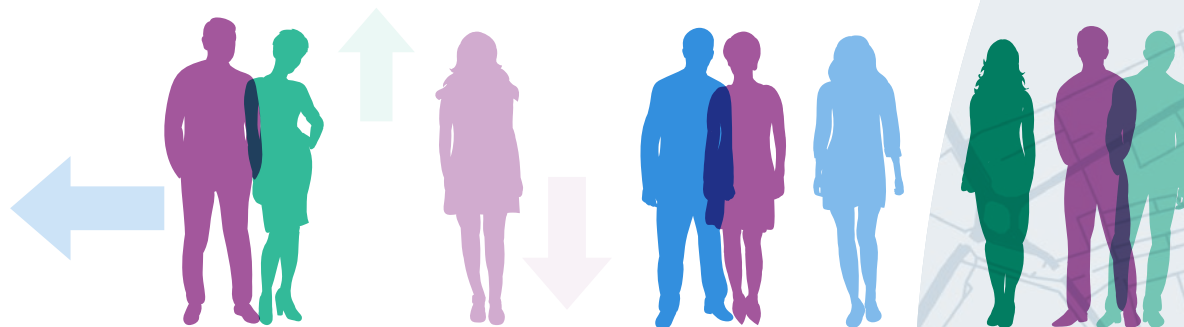
Conclusion - Comparing the three areas

Despite all appearing in the highest need categories, each local authority faces distinct challenges:

Blackburn with Darwen

- A need to address inequalities amongst a variety of specific demographic groups within both the adult and children and young people populations.

- Higher levels of need concentrated in and around the centre of Blackburn.

- Wider context of severe deprivation and poor health outcomes, but relatively strong community infrastructure to draw on.

East Lindsey

- Greater need to address adult activity levels, particularly those who are older, least affluent or with a disability or long-term health condition.

- Efforts to increase activity levels need to respond to local context of higher levels of deprivation and isolation, with transport barriers and weak community infrastructure.

- While there is a need to address adult activity levels across East Lindsey, the greatest opportunity for improved outcomes is in Skegness and other coastline communities.

Tower Hamlets

- Greater need to address activity levels and tackle inequalities amongst children and young people. To maximise impact, target a variety of specific demographic groups but across the whole local authority area.

- Deprivation is widespread, yet strong community networks and civic assets offer an advantage if leveraged effectively.

By focusing resources and interventions where both sporting and social need intersect, these need assessments show how to maximise impact in tackling inequalities in sport and physical activity.

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.
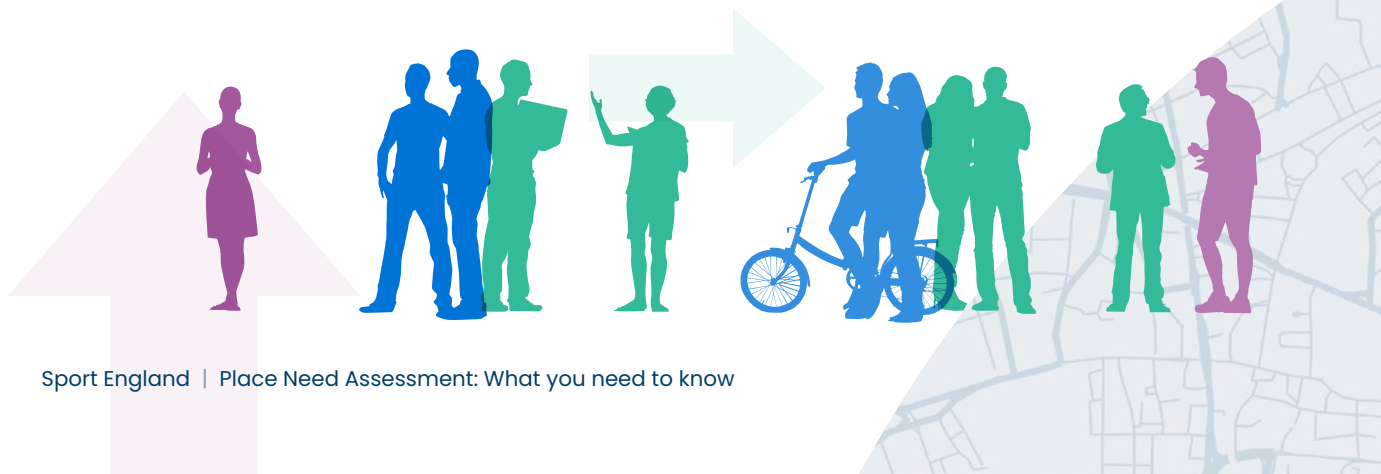
Glossary

- **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.