

“WE WANT TO SHAPE THE FUTURE WE WANT, NOT BE SHAPED BY IT”

SPORT ENGLAND & LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION (LGA) LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME COVID 19 REFLECTIONS

BY MARIA READER: LOCAL LEARNING & IMPROVEMENT, SPORT ENGLAND AND
SAMANTHA RAMANAH, ADVISER, CULTURE, TOURISM & SPORT, LGA

As we bumped elbows and liberally used hand sanitiser at the tenth Sport England /LGA leadership programme, for councils, trusts and Active Partnerships, we are not sure any of us could have foreseen what was about to unfold two weeks before lockdown – the pandemic bringing about unbelievable change to everyone’s lives, as well as major systemic change.

For the programme’s participants the last few months has brought physical and emotional change and challenge including: redeployment to food banks, giving support to crisis hubs, providing connections to wider networks, supporting those being shielded and having to furlough staff. To provide further support to the leadership programme’s participants, who we have been working with over the last two years, we’ve held a series of online discussions talking about the ‘here and now’ and exploring what we all want for the future.

Based on their experiences we heard a real sense of optimism and desire not just to do things differently but to do them fundamentally differently. They talked about:

The value of physical activity and sport being recognised and promoted both nationally and locally for its relationship to mental health and overall wellbeing. How playing pivotal roles in their communities, linking up with food banks, PPE distributors, and a host of voluntary and community organisations, has brought new relationships. That they have experienced a real ‘can-do’ and positive attitude across public services, charities and communities interconnecting and coming together so that, in the words of one participant, there was “collective effort for collective impact”.

However, they also expressed strong fears for inequalities and wellbeing. Fears of entrenching social inequalities – one participant asked if we’d been seeing “Lockdown through the eyes of privilege?” There are also concerns about a digital divide and in light of the local government funding situation there are questions about how difficult it will be to find sustainable financial solutions which do not widen equality gaps.

The programme’s participants believe now is the time to reconfigure how we all connect, to position the idea, and role, of physical activity in society before the old patterns of thinking and working become re-established.

They are clear that leadership skills are a vital ingredient in helping them not only make decisions day to day but also to build a sustainable future, helping all partners re-imagine their part in the future.

The visual attached gives an overview of the discussions that took place.

LOCAL LEADERSHIP

Our leadership programme participants spoke about how they have found themselves in the middle of major systems change – continually challenging their behaviours and leadership skills as well as those of the organisations around them. At the same time, they have seen the true value of emerging leadership capabilities in local communities which they want to nurture.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

“We need to build our personal and collective resilience; we need to work to build the space to envisage the future and close the gap between aspiration and reality.”

The LGA and Sport England are focusing on how new participants can access the leadership programme by taking it online in the autumn.

Sport England LGA Leadership Essentials

May 2020

Over the past month, during the Covid 19 pandemic, previous participants from the leadership essentials programme have engaged in discussions navigating the 'here and now' and sharing learning to explore what we want for the future. This document frames a collective conversation that will continue to grow and change as we work together into the future, and we work toward **systems change through systems leadership**.

At **every level** of our work, from our system leadership behaviours to our common purpose, how can we ensure we are investing in the necessary mutual relationships (both new and existing) to do this work?



Staff Teams



Individuals and Communities



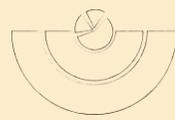
Partners and Stakeholders



Political and Corporate Decision Makers

What might we need to help us do this work?

- Safe space
- Thinking time
- Sharing Learning
- New Techniques
- Challenges
- Advice
- Action Learning Sets
- Mentoring
- Partners



The [1] **System Leadership Behaviours** that we want to sustain and amplify will begin to shape the [2] **Future Nature of the System** we are working in, which therefore allows us to explore multiple shared [3] **System Challenges**, and this exploration hopefully brings us closer to, and expands our understanding of, our [4] **Common Purpose**.

