

Greater Manchester

Introduction

Eve: Welcome to series two of the GM Moving Podcast where we share with you our place-based approach to enable people to get moving. I'm Eve, Strategic Director at Greater Sport; leading, supporting, and connecting GM Moving, Greater Manchester's movement for movement. Supported by investment from Sport England, Greater Manchester partners have been taking a whole system place-based approach to embed physical activity into everything for happier, healthier, more connected communities and active lives for all.

In each episode we share stories of what this looks like in action in each of the ten boroughs of Greater Manchester, and you'll hear different people's experiences. So in this episode, the first of this series, I speak with Richard, a Strategic Director at Greater Sport, leading on the Local Pilot and place-based work across the whole of Greater Manchester.

Greater Manchester as a city region is made up of ten local authorities with a total population of 2.8 million. The makeup of the population differs across each of the ten boroughs. Each has its own unique identity and personality as you'll hear throughout this series. So let's find out more about the Local Pilot starting with Richard and why he is so passionate about this approach...

Conversation

Eve: Let's dig in Richard to this conversation we are sat here. It's a gorgeous sunny day on Deansgate. We are at the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce with these lovely big high ceilings, and we are in the Communication Room. So hopefully that bodes well for our conversation! So if you weren't in this room today and you were outside and doing the sunshine, how would you be moving today?

Richard: In terms of my activity levels, they're quite varied and obviously they've changed over time. So as a youngster, many many decades ago, I was more into the athletics and it's always been competitive sport for me. And that really hasn't changed. I've probably gone more into gyms and that's just cause I don't like the cold as much so over the winter months, it's quite nice to be in a warm gym. But as the sun comes out and the summer starts it'll be back to being outdoors, cycling, walking, and golf.

Eve: Still haven't had a chance to compete with you, Richard. I look forward to that moment maybe. That doesn't tend to be my motivator but anyway really we'd like to hear a bit you and your role and why this matters to you?

Richard: Why am I in this role? It's always been a passion of mine sport, physical activity, and in my career, both at local authority and at national level I've seen how sport and physical activity can improve someone and change someone's life. And give them the confidence to go off and do other things. So it hasn't necessarily got been a sporting environment, but they can go off and become what they want to be in other ways and what this approach allows us to do is actually ask the question of what would it take to help you become more active? How would you want to move more in your place in your community? And be more positive about the conversation and not be saying why can't you, but more around how could you?

And this role allows me and the team, and it's a really good, strong team within that I include the localities to ask those pertinent questions and then to work alongside our residents and our system partners to put in place the opportunities for people to become more active and then lead those healthier, happier, more active lives.

Eve: So you've told us a little bit about obviously the Local Pilot. Can you just give a little bit more information as to how it came about?

Richard: The Local Pilot itself is really about trying to create the space to do things differently. It's funded by Sport England. We are one of 12 in the country and we are the biggest, they range from population sizes of five thousand to Manchester, which is 2.8 million. And I always describe the way the Local Pilot works as like a Russian doll. So we have a doll within a doll, within a doll.

We have the regional level, which is working with organisations such as TFGM or the Health and Social Care partnership, or Greater Manchester Combined Authority. Then we have the local authorities in our localities and/ or voluntary community sector organisations. And then we have residents and then we have families within the residents. So they're dolls, within dolls, within dolls. And we are the biggest doll and we're part of GM Moving.

So we're a strand of the overarching GM Moving framework. And with a test and learn, we're the things that when things go wrong, we don't get told off for it. We are praised for it as long as we learn and we reflect and we go back and we try something different again.

There's been this legacy of investment into communities and into place, but that legacy of investment is probably for all the right reasons come from the wrong place. I suppose that the idea that people who are in the work know best and therefore can just put a product into a community. Here's a product, it will go in the community and everyone will turn up.

Let's take football for example, everyone likes playing football. It's a known fact as one of the biggest participatory sports in the country. So if you had to run a football session in a community well naturally, everyone's gonna turn up to that. And actually what we found is that wasn't the truth that actually people aren't like me and competitive, but actually they want to do something slightly different. So what we're doing with the Local Pilot within Greater Manchester was around those activity levels. We knew that the activity levels weren't where we wanted them to be, and we didn't really understand why. We were doing the same as everyone else. We were putting in place solutions when we didn't really understand the problem.

So what the Local Pilot allows us to do is have those conversations to really walk in the shoes of those people who perhaps for various reasons aren't active. And it's not there's this perception that people aren't active cause they're lazy. Well, that's not true there's other things that surround individuals, both from their family life, their social life, where they live, the economic factors, the environmental factors, which prevents or dissuades people from being active.

For example, if you're in a community where there's no street lighting, why would you want to go out walking late at night? The perception is there's a threat there. So can we have the conversation with the local authority about the street lighting and make it more of a lighter more secure perception that people then will go walking. So that's really where the pilot has come from understanding in a place, what are the things which are preventing or stopping people from fulfilling their active want. And then once we understand that we can begin the conversation, the connections with other organisations to begin to change some of those factors.

Eve: So that all sounds great, and at a very simple level, something about just asking people what matters to them, which we talk about all the time don't we across the piece really in Greater Manchester, in terms of really thinking about, start with people and individuals that matters to them and recognise the multiple influences on somebody, whether they live an active life or do other things in their life.

Richard: The example that sticks in my mind is probably the first one when we started this work was when Stockport went into Brinnington. And they were beginning to talk about how people would travel around their community and what they've done with that community and with the help of TFGM. And I guess that's the other part is whilst we are also working with residents, there's a piece around the relationship with those organisations.

Eve: For any listeners who aren't in Greater Manchester and don't know what TFGM is, that's Transport for Greater Manchester.

Richard: So whilst there's an approach and there's key principles within the pilot about how we work. We also want to try and work with our partners within the system and our stakeholders in the system to embed some of those principles of the way they work as well. And Brinnington was another really good example where TFGM worked with the residents to design maps of their place. And those maps were of things of interest to the residents, not things of interest to either Stockport local authority or TFGM.

And where we've got to now it's taken two years, but that's a really good use of two years. And as I said, we're about creating the space to do things differently and two years is a great space. So people can quite clearly see what is in their local asset, either things that are of interest to them and how they can navigate around them and how they can walk around them, and some of the safe places to walk. They're fully accessible, they've been owned and designed by the residents. And we're beginning to see those residents out on those streets, in those places, in those parks walking around. It's a really small example, but it's that example, which we can now utilise and use in other spaces across both Stockport and the other localities within greater Manchester.

Eve: So you referred to a number of key principles. Can you just talk about some of the other key principles that guide you in the work?

Richard: Now you're testing! They would be ensuring that we have the data and insight. So any decision or any route we take with the way we work we would like it to be informed by some data and insight.

Whether that's hard data, either facts and figures from the active lives survey, for example, which is the Sport England national survey for physical activity and sport, or whether that's local insight from any surveys or conversations that are had by local authority. We want it to be a conversation with residents that's positive. We would in Greater Manchester call that an asset-based conversation or a person-centered conversation. So you are not talking about what can't you

do. You're talking more about what can you do? What do you want to do? We'd want it to have a really strong message behind that.

So we've done a lot of work with an organisation called the Frameworks Institute where we've looked at how we frame our conversations. How we frame our campaigns and messaging in and around Greater Manchester and come up with like the three key messages that we'd want to talk about around that area. It's gotta be felt by the local people. So it's gotta have imagery and we want to hard wire, whatever we're doing. And by hard wire, that for me, that means we want it built into strategy and policy.

So that notion of moving more is in a local strategy. It hasn't got to be a physical activity strategy. It hasn't gotta be a sport strategy, but in those broader wider strategies that are in place would be a fantastic positive for the work that we are doing.

The big thing for us and the one which we are really striving to achieve is to create this community of learning and sharing. So to be able to ensure that whatever's being learned in any locality, in any conversation with any resident, with any organisation, both the good and the bad. And it's important to say that this hasn't always been a positive experience. And in fact, we've learned probably more from the things that haven't worked as we have from the things that have worked. How do we reflect on those things? Where do we share that information? And again, that's a real change to how things have been done previously. Previously investment would've come with a load of key performance indicators. So it would've been, okay, we're gonna give you some investment, but for that investment, how many people are gonna be active? What's their postcode?

We have been given the freedom, Sport England have allowed us the freedom to not have to do that. And that's been a big step forward from Sport England, and it's freed up the creativity in each individual place and in each individual working in this way to think well, actually if we don't need the KPI it doesn't matter if 10 people or 20 people turn up. If one person turns up, at least we can talk to that one person, understand why they've turned up and what we can do moving forwards.

Eve: I guess the first question is all those principles you described that I'm sure everyone listening, no-one would disagree they sound great, sound great on paper! Why wouldn't you want to do that? But putting them into practice is tricky. So what have you found the hardest?

What have been the biggest challenges?

Richard: I think the, the hardest thing, and it's something we were discussing actually this week. So we have a monthly forum with each and all of the localities has been around that community of learning that reflective practice. We are trained both when we start in the career of Sport for development or Sports Development as it was, to monitor through KPIs, some would say easy. When you remove that comfort blanket of KPIs you get into a space of so how do we know we're doing a good job? What we've been asking for is around understand the why and the how. And that takes a lot of thought and takes a lot of time.

And as the Local Pilot, we've almost described what we've created thus far as a bubble. So those within the bubble of the Local Pilot can talk the Local Pilot language and they can feel comfortable in the space where we can talk about the why and how.

But as you leave that bubble and you go back into your organisation and we are not immune from it ourselves, you must fall back into your pattern of where's the numbers? How do I know this is working? And that's been the biggest challenge and it continues to be a challenge cause we're having to change not only the mindset of the people in the bubble, but we're having to think about how do we support them when they're back into their, I suppose home organisations. And when they're speaking to potential board members or trustees or council members about this work, what are the things that they can be saying which resonate but doesn't move away from the principles of that community learning, that reflective practice.

I think the other one that I'd probably point to is just the engagement and getting people to think that this isn't a programme or project. Let's be clear it has got a time span to it because every investment that comes in from any organisation has a life limit to it. But actually thinking about this is we want this to continue beyond, so therefore the approach has to be hardwired.

And for it to be hardwired we need the buy-in support of our strategic leaders in an organisation, whether it be the Chief Exec or a Strategic Director, we need the trustees to understand why we're doing what we're doing. And just trying to tell the story of the Local Pilot isn't easy when you haven't got those big showy activities, but you've got incremental change. So it's trying to tell the story of incremental change that leads to a big impact.

Eve: And it feels like a common theme doesn't it? I'd say of change really and reform in Greater Manchester, around measurement and around the need and space for that reflection and that being really valued and to tell those stories and that narrative. And I guess I hear those same conversations in other rooms where it's not about moving, it's about other aspects of how do you enable people to live a good life in Greater Manchester. And recognising that we're working in this really complex system, and we've got these really wicked problems that we are addressing. And that those old ways are setting a KPI, having a programme or project that just parachutes into a place doesn't work, it's shown not to work.

So it's real opportunity for this shared learning, and you're leading on across both, in terms of GM Moving across GM and within place think has helps other aspects as well of our work.

Richard: The principle around data and insight can be paralysing, especially when you're a test and learn space. So you need to have that space from your strategic lead or your strategic director or your line manager to say 'It's fine, go and test.'

So again as part of my role and part of the team's role is to support the leads and the localities and the residents, just to be a bit braver in pushing the envelope and the dial in terms of the test and learn. So really going well we know we know this is gonna work, we know this is what the residents want. Let's do it, let's just go with it.

And again, it's been a bit like Brewster's Millions. That's an eighties reference for those that are listening. For those with the investment, because historically investment would just go a whole scattergun of activity. Well, because we're being a bit more forensic, I guess, in the conversation that investment has been a bit of a millstone around some necks, but we don't wanna spend it.

And it's been really interesting to see how that's been utilised in different places. And what challenges the investment itself has brought to conversation and relationships.

Eve: So the phrase hold your nerve and having that courage, I know comes up a lot. And I guess what I've seen as part of your role is being that protector really, an illuminator, which we talk about in really helping to share in simple terms the stats and the stories, the names and the numbers.

Richard: Yeah. It depends on the audience. So there's head, heart, hands is how we would describe it. And we know there's people in and around Greater Manchester in the organisations that we want to talk to, who always want the stats first. So we need to have that information that's really important, but the information on its own doesn't provide any the, the heart, the story, the impact on a resident or on a family or on a community or a neighborhood. And equally without the data there's no context to why we're doing what we're doing.

So we work really hard with our marketing comms team, our data and insight team. To make sure that we've got a good balance of all of that, that then is backed up with our evaluation because that then allows us to reflect on the way we've worked. And to channel the good and the bad back into the thinking going forwards.

Eve: One of the key enablers as such that's come out of this has been that need to involve local people and grow local assets. And to come back to the point you're making about comms the importance of then imagery that is relevant to people, that resonates to people, that it's about 'me'. And that's all been particularly key hasn't it? We are now really focused on how we address those inequalities, that we know then drive in activity for certain people in certain communities.

Richard: We always had three key audiences within the Local Pilot. So from the very beginning we identified that children and young people aged five to eighteen outside of school was a key audience. We identified people with long-health conditions, aged forty to sixty was a key audience. And we identified that people at risk of worklessness or out of work are a key audience.

So when we initially started the approach, those were the areas we focused on and not surprisingly where the localities then focused their efforts. And their time in their neighborhoods all the data was leading them to those areas where there was low educational attainment, high cultural diversity, low income.

So naturally the work that we've been doing and continue to do will be in those areas where there is significant inequality, and it's not inequality that I would say, yes they're inactive, but there's other things, social inequalities, which are leading to inactivity.

So all the way through, we have been focused in on those spaces and those residents in those communities, actually again it comes down to language we started saying areas of deprivation, but those people living in those areas, don't

see it as deprived. They see it as their home. They see it as their community. So again, it's the language we use with residents to engage and to talk.

If you look at what's happening in Manchester they did a session with British Cycling to get more Muslim women cycling. And the way they did that was they actually worked with British Cycling to change the way the course was run and I think that was really important. They took the feedback from the women to say well we don't wanna do an eight hour course. And we don't feel confident doing it in this way. And they changed the course and now we've got more women coming through.

And I think what we're seeing in particular is the social inclusion and inequality piece is there are, facets of the work where we can now draw some real good conclusions and learning that's being shared across all the other localities. And that will continue to work within the GM Moving space as well more broadly on the city region footprint. So we have created a disability forum where those conversations around accessibility are being had in much more depth.

Eve: So there's a real focus isn't there on going to people in all ways, both in terms of their place and emotionally? And then back to that point of what matters to them and taking that strength based approach that you talk about about actually pride in place and people pride in their family and their community, and starting from that perspective of rather than from what's wrong or what's missing.

So we've heard a bit about the challenges, I guess has there been a particular highlight in the last couple of years, anything in particular you'd want to illuminate that's really brought you joy in the work?

Richard: The way that the work happens I don't think I could point to one thing. I think it's been an accumulation of lots of little things, which have shown that this approach is moving in the right direction. So at the very beginning we had some very honest and open conversations with localities and it was really refreshing to hear their voice about what was working and what wasn't working and really challenging us about our approach in the work, and I guess, why would that be a positive?

Well, because we'd given them the freedom to do that. Whereas previously it'd be much more top down. It would be 'no, you will do it this way, and this is the way you're gonna do it, and how this is how it's gonna work.' But actually we said to them well no, if this is gonna be a true open relationship that we want to

create here with you and a trusting relationship, then we want to hear the good and the bad, and they weren't scared to tell us the bad, which was refreshing.

So we do what we call the six month reflection sessions. So we get all the localities in a room and they talk about their stories of change and the successes they've had. Those are always the best times for us to listen and to hear, but just to hear about how their stories have changed, how they're articulating their understanding what's happening in their place, their increased knowledge about their residence. It's far removed from where we started.

And I think some of the individual development we've seen in some of the local leads about the confidence that they now have in terms of speaking in rooms and being part of that national network. In a few weeks time we've got two of our localities talking in a national workshop, and I'm not sure they'd been able to do that previously or articulate what they were doing in that way.

And I suppose in a more city region footprint the relationships we're building with our colleagues in the social prescribing space with Transport for Greater Manchester, the fact that we're being asked to attend more meetings and asked for our input into conversations, perhaps previously those doors would've been closed.

I think all of that shows to me that it's going in the right direction. And that's happening, not because we've had investment, but that's because of the way that we are approaching the work. And I think that gives me the greatest joy or pleasure in terms of how we're moving the Local Pilot forwards.

Eve: I always love to hear about the joy of the journey, Richard, so thank-you for that.

So there's lots there around again, that honesty that you've managed to create. Which I guess I've seen and felt in some of those rooms, that's created a space again for people to challenge and to really build those genuine relationships as opposed to far more transactional approach.

So that all sounds great, provide space, freedom, creativity, confidence, and great things happen. So what does the future look like?

Richard: We talk a lot about legacy and sustainability in what we do. And when you've got an investment, which is an approach which is time related you have to then begin to think about well what comes on beyond that. And I think the next part of this is how do we ensure that the approach is built into

organisational, which isn't an easy thing to do. And that's why we need those strategic leaders and all spaces and levels with and pulling all the levers they can within their organisation to enable that to happen. I think we need to continue to build that bank of good stories, that bank of why and how to illustrate why the approach is so beneficial.

One of the things I'd like to see potentially as a legacy, and this isn't just a GM one, but probably nationally as well is the change in which we educate the future sport for development professionals into this space, or anybody working in this space. So when I started it was all about get your coaching qualification and you can go in and do the work. Well I think now it's much more about community development. It's around being able to have those conversations and be able to listen and understand, being able to tell the stories, being able to reflect.

I'd like to think that from all the work that all the Pilots are doing that creates a sea change in terms of the people coming into this work and going into the communities. If we are truly talking about sustainability in communities then we need to be working closer with our communities to allow them to take ownership of this approach and of their place.

We saw it through the pandemic where communities took much more ownership of their place and of their neighbours, and looking out for each other. I want to build that within a physical activity, sport and movement frame as well. So can we get communities looking out for each other in terms of their activity? Can they become the spark plugs, the pied pipers for activity. Walking, cycling, how do we support them if they want to do something which is slightly different to the norm? How do we ensure that they wanna run a football session they can safely, but not have to go through a full coaching qualification or badge or something of that ilk.

So it's now looking at what's sustainable sustainability? What's the legacy? What's the hardwire of the Local Pilot approach in our communities and in our organisations to ensure that this continues as a way of working as opposed to just oh well, that was nice. And we go back and we fall back into the pattern that's always been there.

Eve: So great. You do all of that what does that mean, then what happens?

Richard: That means I'm out of a job, that's what it means! It means I've made myself retired.

I think if we manage to do that and again I don't think you're ever gonna see a huge jump in like a year of activity. And if we're measuring this purely in Active Lives data, I wouldn't expect the Local Pilot in of its own to create a 10%, 20% shift in Active Lives data.

What I would hope is that because we've pulled the levers in the system and because there's a greater awareness of what residents want or need and what could go into an environment to help people be more active. Again it's to help people create opportunities for more activity. You'll see more spaces where people are walking, are cycling, perhaps there's a greater leveling-up around that happy, healthy space. That parks are being populated by families, generational families, we often see tennis courts empty until Wimbledon, and then for two weeks of Wimbledon, they're packed and then they're empty again.

But actually can we create the spaces where it's the norm just to go and do something, whatever that might be. So I think that's what I wanna see. Those new spaces designed in a way that enable people to be active, that they don't have narrow paths, that there's not just the 'car is King'. I'd want to see it go so on a sunny day as we have today in Manchester, there are more people active. There are more people outside. Walking meetings, having conversations not being indoors because they feel they can't, or haven't got the confidence to be outside. There has to be a balance.

We can't just be evangelical about this I don't think. But there's a balance back towards designing activity back into people's lives rather than trying to, and effectively designing it out of people's lives.

Eve: You use that word leveling-up, dare I repeat it, so this really does meet a number of different agendas, doesn't it? So that happier, healthier, more connected. It's about social economic inclusion. It's about personal development and it's about sustainability of our planets and our places and people's lives.

So I know our audacious goal I suppose as GM Moving is active lives for all which as you said you might hope that we can get there that might feel like a long way away and hard to attribute any particular contribution towards achieving that.

But I guess just as a final note, it is more than a hope, isn't it? Because before the pandemic what we saw that this approach was seemingly contributing towards a significant shift in terms of activity levels. So the data was suggesting that in Greater Manchester activity levels were increasing at two and a half times faster than they were in other parts of the country. And we can't pinpoint

that to any one particular intervention or contribution, but it certainly gave us another indicator alongside all the ones that you've pointed to. That actually it's more than a hope. This will help lead a change.

So are you optimistic that we can and will shift the dial?

Richard: Yes, we'll shift the dial. It's the amount that you shift, but there's definitely a change, there's momentum building again.

So up to the pandemic I think that we were at a tipping point in terms of activating more in localities and obviously the pandemic slowed some of that didn't stop it, but it definitely slowed it. I think we're back at that point. So actually we built quite a lot of resilience in the system to allow people to get back into activity a lot quicker than perhaps they were previously.

But absolutely there should be a shift in the way that people are perceiving activity and their own active levels and active lives. I'm definitely hopeful that the work that we're doing, the approach that we're taking with the Local Pilot and the way which we're sharing that learning through GM Moving more broadly will create the change that we want to see and it's about long term change. So I'm not talking about, oh, well it might change for a one result or it might change for two results...

And Manchester, Greater Manchester will reap the benefits of that going forwards.

Eve: And everyone's got a role to play in that haven't they? And I'm sure people listening, whether it's in their own personal lives with their family, with their friends or in their professional roles are all contributing to helping more people be active.

Well thanks Richard, I think that was a great conversation. Lots of food for thought and lots of joy in the mix.

Outro

Eve: We've heard how moving matters to everybody and how we can all play a role to design moving back into everyday life. Now we'd love to hear how you keep moving, and the ways you are supporting others to live an active life. You contact us on our socials. We are on Facebook and Twitter, just search Greater Sport, and don't forget the #GMMovingInAction.

Please do share this episode to people and organisations who will find it useful and join the movement for movement.

A big thank-you to everyone who's investing in this work and playing their part to test, to learn and to make this happen.

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