

# Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee Challenge Session

**How the Council and its partners can increase women and girls access and participation in sports provision and physical activities in the borough**

09/02/23



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## Foreword

I am pleased to present this report which considers how the Council and its partners can increase women and girls participation in sports provision and physical activities in the borough.

I know that participation in physical activity and with sport provision can be influenced by social factors such as social groupings, family and friends, in addition to personal factors such as age, gender, disability, ethnicity and disposable income. I know from recent history that there is a shift in direction and that women in sport can defy gender stereotypes and social norms, becoming the inspiring role models and showing men and women as equals.

The United Nations Women<sup>1</sup> understand the role that sport plays and the power it has to change lives and suggests its influence can drive gender equality teaching women and girls teamwork, self-reliance, resilience and confidence. Sport inspires and creates meaningful change so that all women and girls have fair access to physical activity and sporting opportunities, whilst helping to unlock some of the challenges in their lives.

This report seeks to consider and understand the barriers and low take up for accessing sports provision and physical activities by women and girls in the borough. It examines the gaps to consider if current supply of sports provision and physical activities in the borough are equitable and meets the demand for women and girls access and considers the strategy and policy context in amplifying the women and girls voice and feed into the Council's strategic goal for supporting improved sports provision and physical activities in the borough. The report further seeks to understand the key challenges that the Council and its partners face in increasing women and girls access to sports provision/ physical activities in the borough, and the policy solutions needed to address the challenge and have a positive impact.

This challenge session provided the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee an opportunity to scrutinise the current state and picture of access to sports provision and physical activities for female residents. It provided scope to hear from a range of witnesses and robust evidence informing the Sub-Committee that the Council and its delivery partners need to collaborate and do more to support increasing the access and participation from women and girl residents in the borough.

The Sub-Committee has made six recommendation and hopes that the Mayor and Cabinet take forward these recommendations and work with Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee to ensure that the Council and its partners offer a sustainable and robust policy approach that contributes to the overall health of the borough's population.

Finally, I would like to thank all the members, officers and external partners who attended and supported the discussion, provided valuable insights and shaped the recommendations of this report.

**Cllr Bodrul Choudhury**  
**Chair of Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee**



## Summary of Recommendations

### Recommendation 1

#### Community engagement

Using the co-design framework, the Council's Sports and Physical Activity Service (CSPAS) will set up a steering group to engage women and girls on their needs for accessing sport provision and physical activities in the borough.

<sup>1</sup> [Women and girls in sport | UN Women – Headquarters](#)

Recommendation 2

**Affordability**

CSPAS should work in partnership with the borough’s sport delivery partners, Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and grass root sports to ensure that access and participation in sports provision and physical activities is both affordable and is actively encouraged to women and girls.

Recommendation 3

**Campaigns and publicity**

CSPAS should consult the Council’s Corporate Communication Service alongside partners’ comms services to positively promote women’s sport provisions and physical activities borough wide.

Recommendation 4

**Female friendly infrastructure**

CSPAS will collaborate with key partners to develop dedicated female friendly infrastructure and includes location, timetable of facilities, build in competitions and develop scope for employment and training pathways for female to work in the fitness sector.

Recommendation 5

**Quality monitoring, intelligence capture and audit**

CSPAS will develop robust systems to capture and measure key diversity, equality and usage performance information across all provisions for women and girls. Monitoring should also include, policy reviews, mystery shopping and pulse audits to ensure that the sports provision is relevant, and sustainable.

Recommendation 6

**Women and girls safe routes to sports provision and physical activities**

CSPAS will use the feedback from women and girl (on safe routes to sport venues) and engage and work with key partners such as Transport for London, public realm and regeneration to ensure that any policy or access redesign takes on board and reflects the views women and girls.

## Reason for Enquiry

1.1. The Mayor’s priority to boost culture, business and leisure identified the following pledges on women’s sports and physical activities:

i	Promote women’s sports and increase availability of women’s gym and swimming sessions; and
ii	Make sure all of our sports facilities and facilities of our partners are women friendly and meet the cultural needs of our diverse communities.

1.2. In its role as a critical friend, the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee identified through its annual work programme 2022-23 the need to:

- understand the barriers and low take up for accessing sports provision and physical activities by women and girls in the borough;
- examine the gaps to consider if current supply of sports provision and physical activities in the borough are equitable and meet the demand for women and girls access; and
- consider the strategy and policy context in amplifying the residents (women and girls) voice and feed into the Council’s strategic goal for supporting improved sports provision and physical activities for women and girls in the borough.

## Methodology

2.1. This challenge session was chaired by Cllr Bodrul Choudhury, Chair of Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee and took place on Monday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2022.

2.2. The Sub-Committee heard from a range of witnesses including the Cabinet Member for Culture and Recreation, Youth Cabinet Members, Youth Sports Trust, Women in Sport, Women Inclusive Team, Fitness Reborn, Voluntary Sector Children and Youth Forum Co-ordinator, Schools Games Organiser and Council officers.

2.3. The scope of the challenge session sets out the following key questions:

1	What are the are key barriers that’s preventing women and girls from taking up or sustaining their access to sports provision/ physical activities in the borough?
2	What are the key challenges that the Council and its partners face in increasing women and girls access to sports provision/ physical activities in the borough?
3	What are the policy solutions needed to address the challenge and have a positive impact? Who needs to be involved? How do we need to approach this?

### 2.4. Members in attendance

Cllr Bodrul Choudhury	Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee(CESSC) Chair
Cllr Musthak Ahmed	Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chair
Cllr Mohammed Abdul Wahid Ali	CESSC Member
Cllr Ahmodur Kabir	CESSC Member
Cllr Sabina Khan	Scrutiny Lead for Finance and Resources
Cllr Abdul Malik	Scrutiny Lead for Environment and Community Safety
Cllr Iqbal Hossain	Cabinet Member for Culture and Recreation
Halima Islam	Co-opted Member
Jahid Ahmed	Co-opted Member

### Evidence heard from witnesses

Ablah Chazhiyattri	Youth Cabinet Member for Environment
Intisar Alam	Youth Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing
Ashley Hosier, Naomi Bolton and Wendy Taylor	Youth Sports Trust
Liz Prinz	Women In Sport

Safia Jama	Women Inclusive Team
Nazia Khatun	Fitness Reborn UK
Alex Nelson	Voluntary Sector Children and Youth Forum Co-ordinator
Steve Dolben	School Games Organiser
James Thomas	Corporate Director for Children and Culture
Matthew Eady	Director for Commissioning and Culture
Lisa Pottinger	Head of Sports and Physical Activity

Challenge Session supported by

Filuck Miah	Senior Strategy and Policy Officer
Zaid Ul Islam	National Management Trainee

## Key Findings

### Recommendation 1 **Community engagement**

Using the co-design framework, the Council’s Sports and Physical Activity Service (CSPAS) will set up a steering group to engage women and girls on their needs for accessing sport provision and physical activities in the borough.

- 3.1. The Sub-Committee heard evidence from a range of witnesses on the importance of ensuring that women and girls have the opportunity to be actively involved in the re-design of sports and physical activities in the borough. Female youth cabinet members informed the Sub-Committee that they, and their female peers, felt that their experience of sport in schools is not inclusive and that girls can only take part at certain times in the day and week and emphasised that schools really need to create more girls only sessions.
- 3.2. The Sub-Committee considered evidence from Women in Sport (WiS) whose research indicated that girls and women can be influenced by their personal fears of judgement, often starting from the age of 5-11 and feeling pressure to get things right at the first time. The Youth Sports Trust (YTS) also provided evidence and cited their research from the ‘Girls Active’ project with schools in Tower Hamlets which identified that understanding girls motivation is an important factor and that taking a long-term approach is needed to engage girls in sports and physical activities. Their research also suggests that teachers must change their thinking that girls lack of engagement means girls are the problem. Teachers need to encourage girls to be at the centre of the conversation and engage them in dialogue to understand the types of challenges girls face and establish the changes they would like to see in sports and physical activities in their school. YTS added that girls need to be empowered and involved in the process to design, delivery of services and influence opportunities on what is available to them. WiS research supported this and emphasised that the providers of sports should ensure that girls voices is reflected at the heart of everything being done.
- 3.3. The Sub-Committee also heard evidence from the Chief Executive of Women Inclusive Team (WiT) who raised the issue of being on the menu but not being around the table, and felt that services often lack the right representation. Communities must be represented when considering funding and designing services. The Sub-Committee enquired the best way to engage women so as to understand their physical activity needs and reasons that prevent them for participating. WiT also informed the Sub-Committee that establishing an environment in which cultural family structures (that includes all women of the family group) can discuss their sports and physical activities needs, is missing and needed. CSPAS conceded there was a gap which required a platform to co-ordinate female voices and articulate their needs. The Sub-Committee also heard evidence from Fitness Reborn (Tower Hamlets based fitness coach) who cited the benefits of sports for women and girls and felt that it gave them a voice and identity. They also reflected on

their experience of the challenges they faced coming from a south Asian family and moving away from traditional careers lacking parental support and being not excited in them becoming a fitness coach.

- 3.4. Representation from the voluntary sector informed the Sub-Committee that some of the sector's organisations have fed back on the barriers that women and girls face in sports. Whilst there is a lot of information on various platforms, it could be made easier to find things that suit when individuals are available
- 3.5. On hearing the evidence, the Sub-Committee concluded that it was important to ensure the voice and views of women and girls on this issue is captured and reflected in any policy development for sports provision and physical activities. The Sub-Committee also felt that it would be useful for the CSPAS to seek the advice and expertise of the Council's Communities Service.

<b>Recommendation 2 <i>Affordability</i></b>
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CSPAS should work in partnership with the borough's sport delivery partners, Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and grass root sports to ensure that access and participation in sports provision and physical activities is both affordable and is actively encouraged to women and girls.
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- 4.1. The Sub-CommitteeSub-Sub-Committeeconsidered some of wider economic challenges such as the cost-of-living crisis that impacted on women and girls ability to afford and take up physical activities and sport provisions in the borough. The youth cabinet members highlighted boxing as an example of being unaffordable and too expensive to take up after school. They also highlighted that timetabling is a significant issue and whilst it might be offered free once a week, girls often have limited capacity as they need to prioritise their education and feel additional sessions are too costly.
- 4.2. CSPAS reiterated that cost is often a barrier for lower socio-economic groups, especially at a time where households face a cost-of-living crisis. The youth cabinet members added that parents would often default and say it is too expensive. The youth cabinet members feel that it is important that more days of free sessions are offered,particularly as girls might be unsure about what sports they enjoy and may need to try out and establish if they are truly interested in taking it up as a hobby.
- 4.3. The voluntary sector representative also commented that accessing different sports provision through technology such as booking onto the course can become a barrier if girls do not have the necessary technology and the cost of things become the primary issue. The school games organiser informed the Sub-Committee that cost is a barrier such as buying sports equipment, girls often receiving limited parental support and girls facing the challenge of being able to get to different locations to participate in competitions. Equally, clothing and equipment for sports is expensive and this is compounded by images of sports people promoting the idea that unless you are dressed in particular way for sports you will look out of place. Cultural and religious norms can also set strict requirements about appropriate dress code and this is visible within the Black, Asian and Multi Ethnic groups, thus limiting their participation. Therefore its important to allow alternative dress code as this will help to reduce religious and cultural discrimination.
- 4.4. The Sub-Committee queried CSPAS about how much funding is used for girls sports and if this is ring fenced. CSPAS informed that funding is not specifically allocated to female sports but measured using key performance indicator i.e. the London youth games requires 50% specific female targets and is a key priority. The Sub-Committee also asked witnesses, what impact the current cost-of-living crisis will have on participation and if there are alternative options that can help to improve women and girls participation. WiS acknowledge that it will impact women who are likely scale back their own fitness activities so that their children can continue to take part. The Sub-Committee asked if CSPAS can help with the funding to increase more sports activities



for women and girls such as partnering with local gyms or help with the cost of kits. The Sub-Committee were informed that the Council has to operate within the budget that has been set and allocated. However, the Sub-Committee felt that there might be opportunities for developing offers such two for one or group discounts to encourage greater take up and participation. The Sub-Committee felt that there might be opportunities consider different payment options and be as flexible as possible. Pay as you play rather than long contracts.

- 4.5. The Sub-Committee understood that using free introductions may be useful as women are unlikely to sign-up for long periods of time if they are not confident about an activity or sport. To collaborate and partner up with sports delivery providers pooling resources and spreading the risk but also seeking funding options through corporate social responsibility avenues and the wider corporate benefits of obtaining good public health. WiT informed the Sub-Committee that community centres across the borough are also able to offer up the spaces to hold physical activity sessions. They have a strong rapport, connection and based in the community for example London Muslim Centre offer keep fit sessions with a female only gym and most girls could go because it is a trusted location that meets the religious requirements and is easily accessible.
- 4.6. A number of the witnesses highlighted the ongoing challenge of childcare costs as women may have less leisure time than men, often taking on the greater load of responsibility for housework, childcare and care of the elderly. Some women may therefore be reluctant to commit to provisions over a longer period of time. The Women and Sports Fitness Foundation (WSFF) suggests that crèche facilities or even classes for toddlers and children would be needed to encourage participation, so that women can bring their children along when they go to exercise and providers need to be as flexible as possible when considering length of sign-up periods.
- 4.7. CSPAS recognised that there is need to join up the requirements of the service users to facilitate equality of provision, for example grant funding has historically focussed on male sport and male sports clubs. WSFF suggested that funding at most levels, for women attract less funding than men. At community sports level, girls teams tend to attract less sponsorship from local businesses because they do not have a large support base. These inequalities of funding can often result in poor facilities, equipment and kit as well as less sponsorship for female athletes. The Sub-Committee recognised that cost could create inequalities so it was important to also review existing practices, allocation and take action to address the inequality, ensuring where possible application of equal funds for female sports provision. The Sub-Committee also recognised that sports and facilities need to be local, available and affordable, that sensible pricing is needed to participate such as reduced charges for certain groups, for example the unemployed and providing low cost thresholds for equipment hire could help improve access and participation.
- 4.8. YTS informed the Sub-Committee that it was important to use partnership and collaboration to offset some of the cost-of-living challenges that women and girls face on affordability and therefore limiting their take up of sports provision in the borough. WiS advised the Sub-Committee that the CSPAS should work with the sport providers to allow women to bring their daughters together and highlighted that family togetherness time enabled a reason to take part.

<b>Recommendation 3 Campaigns and publicity</b>
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CSPAS should consult the Council's Corporate Communication Service alongside partners' comms services to positively promote women's sports provision and physical activities borough wide.
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- 5.1. Media plays a central role in informing people's knowledge, opinions and attitudes about women and sport, which, in turn, influence participation levels. Women working in a sector where they are in the minority can give women the sense that they don't belong in the world of sport. Some women and girls are turned off 'sport' altogether because they see it as a male-dominated



activity. It is just not seen as feminine or 'girly' to be interested in sport and, for many girls, being sporty is felt to be at odds with being feminine.

- 5.2. CSPAS informed the Sub-Committee that cultural attitudes to female sports and physical activity participation remains a challenge. It accepted that sports provision and delivery partners must communicate better, be timelier and able to raise awareness so that it translates to greater take up and participation. CSPAS also accepted that this needs greater collaboration with non-traditional partners such as the equalities hub, housing associations and support for an ongoing borough wide campaign to improve the behaviour culture.
- 5.3. The voluntary sector representative highlighted a need to educate others as some young women and girls were not allowed to participate by their family members, and organisations have reported that they have to provide reassurance or persuade the member of the family that it is safe and women only. WiT also highlighted that it was important to change the mindset of some of the male groups within the community, particularly in cultures where protecting the family can also limit and create barriers to participation. Developing an honest conversation, one which brings together faith and culture in an open discussion, and includes celebrating women in sports who are connected to their faith and culture, may help to change the narrative and views held in the community.
- 5.4. YTS outlined that making physical education relevant to girls in their lives is critical, as often the reality is not enough girls see the importance of being active to their own lives. The youth cabinet members added that training the culture and changing the role models they are supposed to have alongside, improving the communication style in which girls are spoken to, may encourage participation and also help to deal with challenges such as anger and self-confidence. The Sub-Committee heard that culture has a big impact on communities and the perception is that sport facilities for young girls and women are limited; with wider media and societal issues, parents want their children to be safe, they need have confidence about timings and who is involved. The youth cabinet members outlined that young girls also have the cultural challenges and behaviour such as it is not modest or limited on religious grounds. WiS commented, that the youth cabinet evidence demonstrated that the the message was not replicated across the board from parents, schools, clubs in that sports is for girls just as much as boys. Whilst there is pockets of good practice, the Sub-Committee recognised that a borough wide campaign is needed that really emphasises to girls that sport is for them and getting the message right will resolve some of the issues.
- 5.5. Both Fitness Reborn (FR) and WiT informed the Sub-Committee that representation was also key to improving participation amongst female groups. FR outlined that having a role model with sub-cultures helps the relatability factor whilst having an appreciation of the dynamics of being an Asian, Muslim women and dealing with family and community pressures to fit the mould and look in a certain way. WiT informed, that representation, communication and having positive role models is important, not just personnel but also in the form of assets and community languages used.
- 5.6. The Sub-Committee heard from a number of witnesses on the importance of utilising media and publicity. The use of press release and good relations with other community media will be important to widen the reach and promote girls and women's sport achievements. Therefore increasing media coverage of women's sports, ethnic minority sports, increasing representation of more role models from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women, challenging stereotypes, improving advertising of local provision and offers will be key to improving participation amongst these groups.
- 6.1. CSPAS informed the Sub-Committee that Tower Hamlets is behind and has a deficiency in sport facilities for its population (based on Sport England guidance) which may further compound the challenge that women and girls face in accessing sports provision in the borough. CSPAS

outlined that inaccessibility and limited access of culturally appropriate community sport venues, especially schools, was a challenge. More broadly, that there was a lack of female sport clubs or women sections in existing clubs which limited safe, culturally appropriate places for female sport.

**Recommendation 4 Female friendly infrastructure**

CSPAS will collaborate with key partners to develop dedicated female friendly infrastructure and includes location, timetable of facilities, build in competitions and develop scope for employment and training pathways for female to work in the fitness sector.

- 6.2. The Sub-Committee recognised that access to facilities can sometimes be the cause of barriers. Women and girls cannot play sport if they cannot get access to facilities at suitable times. WSFF adds that too often, sport halls prioritise male sports that men get facilities at the preferred times whilst women have to make do with less convenient times, so reviewing the allocation of facilities and pitch time would help to ensure equitable access during peak times for women's sports. The Sub-Committee raised concerns about provision timings and that it may not be suitable or fair for women's access for example swimming available on Sundays only at 4-5pm being too busy and thus reducing capacity as well as having male lifeguards during female swimming session only, can culturally put women and girls off.
- 6.3. The Sub-Committee considered if more small-scale outreach work at different venues and sites would help increase participation and engagement from seldom heard women and girl groups. WiT informed that bringing services to the community is important and that some of the issues are down to people not trusting or understanding provision or just not being able to access the provision. Therefore developing thinking outside the traditional approach is crucial and bringing services and sessions into the community, developed and led by the community for the community, will ultimately help to engage women and girls and increase participation with sports and physical activity.
- 6.4. The Sub-Committee considered if there are other barriers or sports that girls find hard to engage with. The youth cabinet members informed that often competitive sport is geared towards boys and even boxing or basketball is mainly boys and girls often feel uncomfortable playing in mixed sports. That there was no parity in terms of training sessions for girls when compared to boys and that mixed teams outside of schools did not have a good take up from girls as they felt uncomfortable with their team mates. Girls who did take part in competitions did so outside of the borough and the youth cabinet feel strongly that everyone including girls should be able to play competitive sports in their own borough. The youth cabinet expanded that equally there was not enough competitive school sports for girls and that there needs to be more sport tournaments for girls. YTS girls active research<sup>2</sup> also suggested that girls did not wish to be grouped with boys during physical education and that having girls only sessions has a huge impact on confidence.
- 6.5. WiS informed the Sub-Committee that at an elite level there is a beginning of a shift for women and girls, for example England women's European football championship victory, however it is not reflected across vertical channels of women and girls sport and there is no ecosystem parity or it doesn't exist for girls. Using football as an example, we can see that at an early age when comparing girls to boys, they are seeing male footballers placed on a stage and considered idols in the broader society, that dads are watching football on TV and are also taking boys for kickabouts in the park, so from a young age the national sport is heavily featured in the boys lives.
- 6.6. The youth cabinet members informed the Sub-Committee that they took part in gym facilities offered by the school (before school commenced) and provided just for one day which was

<sup>2</sup> [National - Girls Active Pre-Intervention - Girls report \(youthsporttrust.org\)](#)

inadequate and added that many of the sport facilities at school have restricted time and days. These restrictions make it more difficult for young girls to take part resulting in low take up. The Sub-Committee also heard that girls go to swimming concession mainly because there is a lack of competitive sports available for them. The Sub-Committee recognised that schools tend to have more provisions for boys and that currently, girls facilities and timetable are not flexible and therefore reduces their ability to participate. The Sub-Committee also heard that both culture and religion can limit on how much girls engage within physical activities and that they do feel more conscious and uncomfortable when they are in mixed groups or gyms.

6.7. The Sub-Committee noted that the youth cabinet members expressed that they wanted to see more provision for women and girls, and a better timetable and a dedicated facilities for only women and girls including having female staff, role models, coaches, organisers and managers that represents them. That young females should be encouraged to take up jobs within the sports and fitness sector helping to increase their self-confidence and supporting the development of a female friendly infrastructure. The Sub-Committee felt that it would be useful for the CSPAS to seek the expertise, advice and steer from the Council's strategy and transformation service on service redesign issues. YTS informed the Sub-Committee that both workforce and having strong role models can positively influence change in schools. The school games organiser informed the Sub-Committee that 2021-22 season, a girls only netball competition was held where the environment was closed off at a private venue was deemed hugely successful.

6.8. The Sub-Committee recognised that improving local provision, developing scope for more physical education in the national curriculum in schools, increasing the level of women and minority sports as well as carefully planning the timing of sessions to target certain groups, for example for women with young children put on mid-morning sessions after the school run, provide activities that families can take part in together and offer facilities that are easy to get to and can cater for the community needs will help drive participation. The Sub-Committee noted that tailoring to the Asian community based on faith and gender can be replicated to support the Somali community women and girls sports and physical activity needs whilst helping to make best use of resources.

**Recommendation 5 Quality monitoring, intelligence capture and audit**

CSPAS will develop robust systems to capture and measure key diversity, equality and usage performance information across all provisions for women and girls. Monitoring should also include, policy reviews, mystery shopping and pulse audits to ensure that the sports provision is relevant, and sustainable.

- 7.1. YTS research<sup>3</sup> informed the Sub-Committee that childhood obesity (nationally) in 2020-21 had seen the biggest rise with 1-4 age group and Year 6 pupils being obese. They concluded that inactivity needs to be also a national concern. Sedentary behaviour amongst young people led to poor physical and mental health with increased numbers being unhappy at school settings.
- 7.2. CSPAS provided the Sub-Committee with some comparative data between male and female gender groups, membership, timetable and female and leisure centre provision to provide some context to Tower Hamlets. CSPAS informed the Sub-Committee that level of participation have decreased as a result of socio-economic groups and ethnicity but also the demographic intersectionality was a further factor. They advised the Sub-Committee that female participation is lower than male in both team and individual sports. Whilst the Sub-Committee welcomed data between Black, Asian and Multi Ethnic (BAME) and non BAME, the Sub-Committee felt that this did not provide a detailed enough breakdown of the different ethnicities or age groups or different sports participation levels. The Sub-Committee needed to understand the breakdown of women and girls from the minority ethnic groups in terms of facilities, age and usage to get a

<sup>3</sup> [Girls Active - Youth Sport Trust](#)

sense of the picture. The Sub-Committee felt that whilst membership of a club or leisure centre provided some numbers it did not reflect or answer the question on how and when that provision was being used.

- 7.3. The Sub-Committee queried the data behind the number of activities for women and by having no usage data made it difficult for the Sub-Committee to understand if the provisions are working effectively in terms of participation. The Sub-Committee considered if the current conditions and levels of service provision that is being provided for female residents is not satisfactory as a result of political will or resource or both. CSPAS acknowledged that resourcing was a challenge but informed the Sub-Committee that it was ultimately tasked to provide a balanced provision. For example the 47% represents overall participation trends with provisions such as Mile End Leisure Centre the pitches are used by men but women may tend to use indoor facilities for fitness classes thus balancing provision use.
- 7.4. The Sub-Committee raised concerns about the first come first policy and queried when this was last reviewed. The Sub-Committee felt that this was a significant barrier to girl and women's participation and one which needed to be reviewed urgently. The Sub-Committee also recognised the importance of having an ongoing dialogue with women and girls and using mystery shopping audits to help measure the performance of sport providers and service level it offers to women and girls. The Sub-Committee was not satisfied with the current level of data used to assess or plan service provisions and requested reassurance that better systems would be in place to improve the level of intelligence captured, with a more detailed breakdown of different women and girl groups, age, usage etc. The Sub-Committee also felt that it would be useful for CSPAS to seek expert advice and steer from the Council's Strategy and Improvement service on how best to develop systems to capture key performance information on diversity, equality and usage of provisions that the Sub-Committee has requested.

**Recommendation 6 Women and girls safe routes to sports provision and physical activities**

CSPAS will use the feedback from women and girl (on safe routes to sport venues) and engage and work with key partners such as Transport for London public realm and regeneration, to ensure that any policy or access redesign takes on board and reflects the views women and girls.

- 8.1. Personal safety on the streets, on public transport and in and around sports and community venues can be a challenge for women and girls. Some groups are more vulnerable, for example Black, Asian and Multi Ethnic women and girls can become targets of racist behaviour. People with disabilities can also become targets of bullying and abuse. Therefore travelling to and from sport locations can present particular barriers for these groups. There are also cultural considerations for families limiting travel for girls after dark as a form of protection. This challenge has been heightened with the recent media reports of women's safety and more generally the public perception of safety has intensified, often requiring assurances from families before they agree with their girls participation. WiT also informed that Sub-Committee about the role and importance of developing key partnerships with transport providers, police and other authorities and taking a collaborative approach on safety in a public setting.
- 8.2. The Sub-Committee heard from a number of witnesses highlighting some of the concerns around women and girls safety in public spaces becoming a barrier to their participation with sports. The Sub-Committee enquired on the issues that women and girls faced with barriers to participation. CSPAS informed the Sub-Committee that there was a perception that sporting places were unsafe for women and girls for example local parks during winter. The point was also supported and reiterated by the school games organiser who outlined that environmental factors such as the days getting dark, with poor visibility in some areas can affect young girls not feeling safe to move around for sports.

- 8.3. WiS research in the parks<sup>4</sup> added, that non gendered provision becomes gendered because boys dominate the pitches and the cages or actively keep girls out of those spaces through judging them on a very harsh standard. The Sub-Committee heard that girls are not only being judged on their sporting performance but they are also being judged in public spaces and often girls may also feel unsafe emotionally because of comments about their appearances or being made to feel uncomfortable by boys asking for their numbers. It is important to also consider the emotional safety alongside the physical safety for girls and providing them with a safe space.
- 8.4. The Sub-Committee examined if resourcing local transport would help to improve safety and the take up by women and girls in sport provisions and physical activities as lack of safe routes to venues is often a concern for women and girls. The voluntary sector representative informed the Sub-Committee that buddying with an appropriate adult is more cost effective than setting up and managing a volunteering programme of support. They also advised that some schools are arranging safe transport or safe ways getting home although its not replicated across the borough.
- 8.5. The Sub-Committee considered the pivotal role that being safe played on increasing women and girls participation and access to sport provisions in the borough. The Sub-Committee understood that more safety assessments would be required of venues taking into account the safety of the area, street lighting, transport links. It acknowledged that it was important to capture the views of women and girls about their experiences and views of personal safety in those areas and ensure activities are offered in locations or facilities that are safe and appropriate for women and girls.

## Conclusion

- 9.1 This challenge session provided scrutiny a chance to examine the current picture on women and girls access and participation with sports provision in the borough. It provided an opportunity for the Sub-Committee to hear robust evidence from a range of witnesses drawing out some of the barriers that women and girls faced with access. It is clear from the evidence heard that the Council and its delivery partners have a role to play and one that needs to consider strategies to improve participation including promotion, provision and access. The Sub-Committee has made six recommendations and hopes that the Mayor and Cabinet take forward these recommendations and work with Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee to ensure that the Council and its sport delivery partners offer a sustainable and robust policy approach to the borough's population health and fitness.

<sup>4</sup> [Our Publications - Women In Sport](#)