



## **Mission Statement:**

**“The North West Health and Physical Activity Forum is a voluntary organisation established to promote best practice in the area of physical activity and health”**

## **Summary**

The NWHPA Forum is the first and largest network of its kind in the UK. It was driven totally as a ‘bottom up’ model since it was brought about by a few practitioners meeting ad hoc to discuss problems and to this day remains the Voice for Practitioners in the region – representing their views to the funding and policy drivers across the UK.

There is no statutory support for the organisation and as such it remains totally independent of any national, regional or local organisations (an independence that is valued by its membership).

Membership continues to grow year on year demonstrating the need and the effectiveness of the network yet at the same time placing tremendous pressure on the purely voluntary steering group. Despite this, services continue to expand and improve. The Forum are now increasingly involved in supporting the development of other regional physical activity networks across the UK (most recently in the West Midlands and the Welsh Regional Assembly) and are committed to develop a more formal network between regions in order to provide a voice for practitioners.

## **Background**

The Northwest Health and Physical Activity Forum has existed at varying levels since 1996 when a very small group of 6 like minded individuals came together on an ad hoc basis share experiences, frustrations and opportunities in the field of physical activity. At this time, Physical Activity Development was a new concept within the UK playing second fiddle to a well established Sports Development Structure. The main focus for physical activity and health development at this time was centred on GP Exercise Referral and the majority of funding for it came from local Health Authorities or isolated pockets of short term regeneration funding and was directed into local authority leisure services departments.

Through a plethora of research evidence (mainly from the US) and the publication of several key national and regional policies released in the late 1990’s, physical activity development shot up the agenda of NHS and local authority organisations resulting in a more significant investment and a more diverse range of physical activity related programmes and a much larger body of individuals working in the development field.

This dramatic growth was then reflected in a growing interest and demand for Services than it was perceived the North West Health and Physical Activity Forum could deliver. Moves were therefore made to formalise the group, making it the first and largest formal physical activity network in the UK.

By 1998 the group organised a successful NW conference on 'physical activity development' and a practitioners workshop followed from this, aiming to establish a commitment to make the Forum 'official' and to outline what the Forum should 'Deliver On'. A core group of volunteers from different sectors agreed to take this forward and the following aims and objectives for the Forum were agreed.

### **Aims**

1. To share good practice in the area of physical activity and to liaise and inform relevant groups where appropriate
2. To promote a networking opportunity for those working within health and physical activity
3. To be a regional body influencing regional strategies and activities and develop strong links with regional and national agencies and organisations (e.g. DH, DCMS, BHF, RDA, ISRM, ILAM, HDS, DFES, BASES, CLOA, SOLACE, etc.,)

### **Objectives**

1. To organise and deliver a minimum of two full NWHPA Forum events per year encouraging member and delegate Continued Professional Development.
2. To establish and promote new and continued Forum membership
3. To develop an official communication strategy/network, internally and externally, enabling information exchange to take place on a formal basis.

### **Management and Operational Structure**

The daily work of the Forum is managed purely voluntarily by an elected committee containing 14 members and several co-opted members, all involved professionally in the strategic delivery of physical activity programmes. The committee is chaired by an elected member and supported by a vice chair and secretary, all working on a voluntary basis. This group formally meets a minimum of 6 times a year to promote the links with health and physical activity and develop relationships/partnerships with national agencies and organisations. This is supported by a plethora of smaller less formal meetings to drive the development of the network forward.

The work of the Forum is governed by its official constitution which includes a commitment to an Annual General Meeting for all members. The work of the Forum is currently funded purely through membership fees and non-member delegate fees for attending Forum events.

Externally, the positioning of the Forum ensures it is now regularly consulted on all things physical activity by a host of national organisations including the Department of

Health, Central Government, Sport England, ILAM, National Obesity Forum and the British Heart Foundation. Additionally the Forum hold key positions on the new North West Physical Activity Task Force (linked in to Government Office North West and the North West Sports Board), and the NICE/Health Development Agency's Collaborating Centre.

Due purely to the dedication of the steering group, the Forum feature in such regional documentation as the new Investment for Health Plan and Sport England's North West Plan for Sport and play a key role in much of what is going on regionally and nationally (including ongoing work with the regional physical activity post and the north west sports board) – enabling forum members to keep abreast of developments within this rapidly changing field.

With a growing public, private and voluntary sector membership from across the country, the Forum expanded their services in 2004.

## **Existing Position**

### **Executive Committee (Voluntary)**

Managed by 14 Volunteers who develop all Forum Services outside of their normal working environment – through a desire to develop and enhance physical activity provision across the UK

### **Membership**

Total Forum membership is now approximately 150 individuals from across the PCT's/NHS, Local Authority, Private and Voluntary sectors. Over 70 different organisations responsible for developing physical activity opportunity are represented.

Although core membership is from across the NW region the Forum also has members from several other parts of the UK

## **Current Delivery Mechanisms**

- All Members receive free delegate place at 1 annual conference that focuses on best practice and networking. The conference for the past few years has attracted up to 250 delegates. Our conferences and workshops attract the very highest calibre of international speakers and delegates from a diverse background within Health, Leisure, Education, Environment, Technical Services and the Private Sector.
  - The steering group develop a minimum of 2 members workshops each year on topics requested by the membership.
  - Members receive a weekly email update that includes sharing of best practice, national regional and local strategies and policies, latest research and job vacancies for example.
  - The Forum acts as a link between members for example a learning and advise network
  - Members are asked to contribute to national and regional consultations and activities giving a massive voice for practitioners.
  - Members can now access a new North West Health and Physical Activity Forum website (currently being updated) and receive a new weekly email service (allowing members to share best practice, communicate and seek advice from other members).
- Forum members now have the facility to circulate job vacancies and promote conferences and training opportunities and get reduced rates at many conferences and workshops across the country

## **Budget**

The Forum has no paid support and exists and delivers all services listed above using purely membership fees. The average annual Income and Expenditure for the Forum is approximately £10,000 – £13,000, proving how much can be achieved with such a small amount of funding.

## **Future Developments**

In January 2006 the NWHPAF Steering group attended a facilitated visioning day to review the work of the Forum and plan for future growth and positioning. The Steering Group organised this 'Visioning day' in recognition that the environment in which the Forum was working had evolved rapidly since its conception as outlined previously and that it was now time to address the question 'Did the NWHPAF need to evolve to meet these changes?'

Key insights that resulted from the day included that:

- The group acknowledged that it had evolved from a small committed group of enthusiastic members with a passion for physical activity and health, into a force that was now internationally regarded as a significant voice for the sector.
- National and International Government involvement in the health 'arena' over the last five years has now attracted many new initiatives and organisations, with often competing 'remits.' It was thus imperative that the Forum becomes clear about its own role within this dynamic and changing landscape.

The outcome from the day highlighted two key areas of development, Advocacy and Membership.

### **Development of Advocacy Services to include:**

- Mechanisms for members to feed into regional organisations.
- Proactive approaches to current and emerging government initiatives
- Membership on key committees
- Approaches to policy makers on behalf of forum
- A mechanism for Unified Voice to inform task force.
- Agreed two way communication between forum and regulatory authorities e.g. Sport England

### **Development of Membership Services to include:**

- A systematic way of canvassing and identifying needs of membership
    - A web discussion board/Forum
    - Improved email service
    - Network meetings
  - Support tools/resources, for local project, delivery
  - Support and develop routes for better networking
  - Membership profile: Encourage members from more diverse backgrounds
  - Mentoring of potential new group members, both informal and formal.
- In order to drive this forward agreement was reached to carry out a SWOT analysis of current and past members and relevant partner organisations. This has now been

completed. From this feedback the group would develop a new 3-year business plan and marketing strategy focused on the above and released in April '06.