Health Equalities Group

“Are you onside?”

Bystander intervention training for the sport and physical activity sector in Liverpool City Region (LCR)

A co-produced insight and design report for programme development and implementation

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Project overview

Project name:	***"Are you onside?"*** Bystander intervention training for the sport and physical activity sector in Liverpool City Region (LCR)	
Commissioner	MSP	
Delivery partner:	Health Equalities Group (HEG)	
About HEG:	Health Equalities Group or HEG, is a public health charity working to improve the wellbeing of communities across the UK. We're an independent voice for preventative public health in the North-West and beyond. We believe everyone deserves to live a long, healthy, and happy life. But right now, not everyone gets that opportunity. That's why we collaborate with local authorities, charities, the NHS, and central government to help improve the conditions that hold back so many of our communities. Together, we can create a fairer, healthier society. **www.heg.org.uk**	
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Executive summary

The *"Are you onside?"* programme is a bystander intervention training initiative developed by Health Equalities Group (HEG) to address harmful behaviours and cultures within sport and physical activity settings. Funded by Merseyside Sports Partnership (MSP), the programme aims to support the prevention of violence against women and girls (VAWG) by enabling individuals and organisations to recognise and challenge harmful behaviours, including sexism, misogyny, and harassment.

In February 2026, a Place Partners workshop was convened with over 50 stakeholders from across Liverpool City Region (LCR), including representatives from local authorities, sport and physical activity organisations, and community partners. The workshop was designed to inform the next phase of programme delivery through a co-productive approach, exploring how harmful behaviours are experienced, what prevents people from speaking up, and what is required to support effective local delivery.

Key findings

The findings show that harmful behaviour in sport is widely understood as part of everyday culture, rather than isolated incidents. These behaviours are sustained not only through normalisation, but through a combination of ambiguity, social risk, and contestation.

Delegates highlighted that there is not a shared or stable understanding of what constitutes harmful behaviour. Boundaries between acceptable behaviour and harm are often blurred and context-dependent, making it difficult for individuals to recognise when intervention is required.

At the same time, silence is not simply a failure to act, but a rational response to risk and uncertainty. Participants described concerns about conflict, reputational damage, and lack of organisational backing, alongside uncertainty about whether it is their role to intervene. In this context, individuals are more likely to act when they feel supported by their organisation and confident that their actions will be taken seriously.

Importantly, the findings also indicate that harmful behaviour is not always universally recognised as such. Delegates described instances where behaviours are minimised, reframed, or resisted, for example through humour, social norms, or competing perspectives. This means individuals are often navigating environments where harm itself is socially negotiated, rather than consistently understood.

While women and girls were identified as those most affected, delegates also recognised wider impacts across the system, including how harmful norms are reinforced among boys, men, and within organisations.

Participants did not view bystander intervention as a simple act of speaking up. Instead, it is understood as a context-dependent practice, requiring individuals to assess situations, navigate power dynamics, and select appropriate responses. This highlights the need for training that focuses on practical application, situational judgement, and decision-making, rather than awareness alone.

The workshop also identified a strong foundation of local assets to support delivery, including established networks, trusted organisations, and experienced workforces across sport and

community settings. However, barriers remain, including limited capacity, competing priorities, and challenges engaging organisations and participants. These challenges reflect wider system dynamics, including cultural resistance, uncertainty, and variable organisational support.

Implications for delivery

The findings support the proposed phased, place-based approach to delivery across Liverpool City Region, beginning in St Helens and Knowsley. A structured train-the-trainer model, supported by co-delivery and ongoing quality assurance, will be central to building local capacity and ensuring consistency.

Training will need to move beyond awareness-raising to focus on practical application, supporting participants to navigate ambiguity, assess risk, and respond appropriately in real-world situations. Alongside this, engagement with organisational leaders will be critical to ensure that bystander intervention is clearly supported through policy, culture, and practice.

Ongoing support, including a community of practice, will be important to reinforce learning, build confidence, and maintain consistency across the system. Delivery will be coordinated through existing networks and partnerships, ensuring the programme is embedded within trusted local settings and aligned with wider system priorities.

Introduction

This report presents findings from a co-produced stakeholder workshop designed to inform the next phase of the *"Are you onside?"* programme. It combines qualitative insight into system conditions and behaviours, strategic design considerations for programme refinement and delivery, and learning drawn from previous programme evaluation. As such, it should be understood as a translational document, bridging evidence, practitioner insight, and implementation planning.

The *"Are you onside?"* programme is a bystander intervention training initiative developed and delivered by Health Equalities Group (HEG), designed to address harmful behaviours and cultures within sport and physical activity settings. Previously funded through the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP), the programme has engaged community sport organisations across Liverpool City Region (LCR) to build awareness, confidence, and capability to recognise and challenge behaviours associated with violence against women and girls (VAWG), including sexism, misogyny, harassment, and abuse.

The programme is grounded in a public health approach to prevention, recognising sport as both a site of significant benefit and a setting in which harmful norms can be reproduced. Evidence highlighted through the workshop indicates that gender-based harms in sport are often embedded within everyday practices, language, and social dynamics. Early intervention, particularly at the level of attitudes and behaviours, is therefore critical to preventing escalation. Bystander intervention is positioned as a form of primary prevention, enabling individuals to challenge harmful behaviour, shift perceived norms, and contribute to safer and more inclusive environments.

This work aligns with national and regional priorities to address VAWG and improve population health outcomes, including the UK Government's commitments set out in *Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls* (2021) and *Freedom from Violence and Abuse* (2025), alongside Sport England's *Uniting the Movement* strategy. At a regional level, it supports Liverpool City Region's wider ambitions to address inequalities and promote safe, inclusive participation in sport and physical activity.

To inform the next phase of development of a newly commissioned piece of work supported by MSP – the Active Partnership for Liverpool City Region – a workshop was delivered as part of a Place Partners meeting in February 2026. The session brought together over 50 stakeholders from across LCR, including representatives from local authorities, sport and physical activity organisations, community partners, and wider system stakeholders.

The workshop was designed as a co-productive session to:

- explore how harmful behaviours and norms manifest within local sporting contexts
- identify barriers and enablers to bystander intervention
- map existing assets and delivery challenges across places
- inform the refinement of the *"Are you onside?"* delivery model

Methods

Design and approach

This report draws on qualitative data generated through a co-produced stakeholder workshop held in February 2026. The workshop was designed as a structured, facilitated session to elicit collective insight into harmful behaviours in sport, barriers to bystander intervention, and the practical conditions required to support programme delivery across Liverpool City Region (LCR).

The approach is informed by principles of participatory and practice-based inquiry, recognising participants as holders of contextual and experiential knowledge. The purpose of the analysis is therefore interpretive and applied.

Participants and data collection

The workshop brought together over 50 stakeholders from across LCR, including representatives from local authorities, sport and physical activity organisations, community and voluntary sector partners, and wider system stakeholders. Participants were introduced to key concepts underpinning the programme, including the bystander effect, false consensus, and the "pyramid of harms", before taking part in three structured activities:

- **Activity 1:** Exploring where harmful behaviours occur, who is affected, what prevents action, and where positive behaviours are already evident
- **Activity 2:** Mapping behaviours onto a continuum of harm to identify opportunities for intervention and challenges in responding
- **Activity 3:** Assessing local delivery conditions, including existing assets, barriers, and the support required to deliver training confidently

Data were captured through facilitated discussion, written responses, and facilitator notes across all activities. These data reflect collective perspectives generated within a group setting and provide insight into how stakeholders across the system understand harmful behaviours, barriers to intervention, and the practical conditions required for implementation.

The workshop forms a critical component of a co-productive approach to programme development. The analysis that follows moves beyond description to identify patterns of shared meaning and understanding, providing an evidence-informed basis for programme refinement and implementation across Liverpool City Region.

Analytical approach

Data were analysed using an inductive, interpretive thematic approach. The analysis focused on identifying patterns of shared meaning across workshop activities and synthesising these into themes that reflect system-level dynamics and implications for programme delivery. The analysis focused on identifying patterns in how participants understood harmful behaviour, barriers and enablers to intervention, and the organisational and system-level conditions

shaping action; these patterns were then iteratively synthesised into themes, refined for coherence and distinction, and interpreted in relation to programme design and system readiness

Limitations

This analysis is based on data generated within a single workshop and reflects the perspectives of those in attendance. As such:

- Findings are not intended to be generalisable
- Group dynamics may have influenced the expression of views
- Data capture prioritised breadth of insight over depth of individual accounts

However, the consistency of themes across activities and alignment with existing evaluation findings provide confidence in the relevance of the insights for programme development.

Key findings

This section presents a thematic analysis of insights generated through the Place Partners workshop, drawing on data collected across all three activities. Activities 1 and 2 explored how harmful behaviours are understood, experienced, and challenged within sport and physical activity settings. Activity 3 focused on the practical conditions required to support the delivery of bystander intervention training across Liverpool City Region, including local assets, barriers, and support needs.

Rather than reporting responses descriptively, the analysis identifies patterns of meaning across the dataset, with a focus on how participants understand the nature of harm, the conditions under which individuals do or do not intervene, and the wider organisational and system-level factors that shape behaviour and delivery. The themes presented therefore capture not only what delegates said, but what these perspectives reveal about the current state of the system and its readiness for change.

Taken together, the findings present a coherent picture of a system in which harmful behaviours are widely recognised, but where action is shaped by ambiguity, social risk, and the strength of organisational support. They also highlight both the opportunities and the practical requirements for embedding bystander intervention within sport and physical activity across Liverpool City Region.

Activity 1 & 2: Thematic analysis

Theme 1: Harmful behaviour is widespread in sporting environments and may be normalised if left unchallenged.

Across the data collected, delegates consistently locate harmful behaviours not as isolated events, but as part of the routine social fabric of sport and physical activity. These behaviours are situated across a wide range of settings including but not limited to changing rooms, gyms, sidelines, clubhouses, WhatsApp groups, schools, trains and buses to and from facilities, and stadia, and are reproduced through everyday interactions, language, humour, and institutional culture. Participants also connect these behaviours to broader structural conditions, including male-dominated leadership, unequal access to facilities and funding, and media narratives that reinforce gendered hierarchies.

However, the second dataset sharpens this interpretation by introducing a critical layer – ambiguity. Delegates are not only describing the presence of harmful norms, but also the difficulty of clearly identifying and classifying them. Boundaries between “banter”, “acceptable behaviour”, and harm are often blurred, and this ambiguity allows harmful practices to persist without being named or challenged.

This suggests that harmful culture is sustained not only through normalisation, but also because the boundaries are context-sensitive, shifting according to who is present, what occurs, where and when it takes place, why it is justified, and how it happens. Delegates recognised that sport operates within a continuum of behaviours (aligned with the pyramid-of-harms model presented), but they also reveal that individuals do not always have a shared or stable understanding of where that continuum shifts from acceptable to unacceptable. Participants therefore discussed not just situation specific harms, but socially negotiated

accounts of harm, in which meaning incidents themselves are contested and unstable. This has direct implications for intervention, as ambiguity becomes a mechanism through which harm can be reproduced.

Theme 2: Silence is a rational response to risk, uncertainty, and contested norms.

Delegates provided a rich account of why individuals do not speak up. Fear is pervasive: fear of conflict, retaliation, escalation, judgement, exclusion, reputational damage, and harm to relationships. These risks are not abstract; they are grounded in the realities of closely networked sporting environments, where belonging, reputation, and hierarchy are important. Delegates also highlight gendered dimensions of risk, noting that women may face additional vulnerability when challenging male behaviour.

The second dataset extends this analysis by showing that silence is not only driven by fear, but by uncertainty and contestation. Participants describe not knowing whether they "should" intervene, whether it is "their place", or whether the behaviour in question warrants action at all. In this sense, silence emerges not as avoidance, but as a decision under conditions of ambiguity.

This moves the analysis beyond individual-level explanations (e.g., lack of confidence) toward a more complex account of socially structured inaction. Delegates are describing a context in which:

- the costs of intervention are high and visible
- the benefits are uncertain or diffuse
- the legitimacy of intervention is not guaranteed

In such conditions, silence becomes a rational and, in some cases, a socially reinforced choice. Importantly, the data also reflect elements of the bystander effect, with participants explicitly noting assumptions that "someone else will address the issue". However, this is not simple diffusion of responsibility; it is compounded by uncertainty about norms and lack of institutional backing.

This suggests that training interventions must address not only confidence and capability, but also to clarify norms (that intervening is normal and socially acceptable), role legitimacy (that intervening is valued and valuable), and collective responsibility (that everyone within an organisation or network has a part to play). Without these, silence will continue to be reproduced.

Theme 3: Harm is experienced collectively but structured through unequal and gendered distributions of power.

Delegates consistently identify women and girls as those most acutely affected by harmful behaviours in sport, including female athletes, young women, and women attempting to access gyms or physical activity spaces. Experiences such as harassment, exclusion, and objectification are clearly gendered and linked to broader patterns of inequality. Several

participants noted that females on the sidelines of grassroots sport are often victims of verbal abuse on the sidelines.

At the same time, the data demonstrate a broader systems understanding of impact. Participants note that harmful norms also affect:

- boys and young men, particularly in shaping understandings of masculinity
- coaches, volunteers, and staff, who operate within and reproduce these cultures
- parents and spectators, who contribute to and are influenced by norms
- individuals who are vulnerable, isolated, or navigating identity

Several responses explicitly frame harm at a population level, suggesting that "everyone" is affected because tolerated behaviours establish the boundaries of what is considered acceptable.

While there is strong recognition of gendered harm, there are also indications of resistance or ambivalence, including suggestions that certain responses to sexism (e.g., "feminist attitudes") may provoke backlash or exacerbate behaviour. This should not be dismissed as outliers; rather, it suggests that participants are likely to be operating within environments with competing narratives some informed by both mis- and disinformation.

In simple terms, this means that harmful behaviour in sport is shaped by relationships and power dynamics, particularly around gender, and people do not all see these issues in the same way. Some may recognise certain behaviours as harmful, while others may see them as normal or acceptable.

Because of this, there isn't a shared understanding across everyone involved. This matters when trying to address the issue, as it means we cannot assume people are starting from the same place. Instead, efforts to tackle harmful behaviour will need to establish what is and isn't acceptable, and challenge resistance with evidence.

Theme 4: Bystander intervention is understood as a context-dependent practice rather than a fixed behaviour.

Across both datasets, delegates do not conceptualise bystander intervention as a straightforward act of speaking up. Instead, intervention is framed as:

- situational
- relational
- strategic

Participants describe assessing multiple factors in real time, including power dynamics, setting (public vs private), severity of behaviour, potential consequences, and availability of support. The second dataset particularly emphasises the contextual judgement involved, with individuals navigating uncertainty about both the situation and their role within it.

This represents an important shift away from simplified behaviour change models. Intervention is not treated as a binary (intervene vs do nothing), but as a spectrum of possible actions, including direct challenge, indirect strategies, peer reinforcement, reporting, and post-event support. Analytically, this suggests that effective bystander intervention is best understood as a social practice, requiring:

- interpretive skills (recognising harm)
- relational awareness (understanding dynamics)
- strategic choice (selecting an appropriate response)

Training programmes that focus narrowly on confidence or scripted responses risk oversimplifying the complexity of real-world situations. Instead, there is a need to develop situational competence, enabling individuals to navigate ambiguity and act appropriately across different contexts.

Theme 5: People are more likely to act when organisations clearly support them.

A consistent and cross-cutting finding is that individual willingness to intervene is heavily dependent on perceptions of organisational support and legitimacy. Delegates repeatedly emphasised that people are far more likely to act when there are clear policies and reporting pathways, visible leadership commitment, and consistent responses to harmful behaviour. Just as importantly, they highlighted the need for cultures that actively support and protect those who speak up.

In the absence of these conditions, intervention is perceived as risky, unsupported, and potentially futile. Participants described concerns about not being backed up, not being listened to, or facing negative consequences without institutional protection. Even where individuals recognise harmful behaviour and feel a responsibility to act, they may still choose not to intervene if they are unsure how their organisation will respond.

This suggests that bystander intervention is not simply a matter of individual confidence or capability. It is shaped by whether people feel that intervention is legitimate, safe, and worthwhile within their organisation. In practice, individuals are more likely to act when they believe that:

- speaking up is expected and encouraged
- they will be supported by colleagues and leadership
- action will lead to a meaningful response

Where these conditions are absent, silence becomes more likely, reinforcing the patterns identified in earlier themes.

Delegates also pointed to examples of positive practice, including supportive coaching, peer accountability, and the use of safeguarding processes. However, these were typically described as dependent on local leadership, team culture, or individual champions, rather than

being consistently embedded across organisations. This reinforces the view that while progress is evident, it is not yet system wide.

Taken together, the findings indicate that organisational context is a critical determinant of whether bystander intervention occurs in practice. Training alone is unlikely to be effective unless it is supported by clear expectations, consistent messaging, and visible leadership. In this context, organisations play a central role in shaping both the perceived risks of speaking up and the likelihood that individuals will act.

Strengthening organisational support—through policy, leadership, and culture—will therefore be essential to enabling consistent and confident bystander intervention across sport and physical activity settings.

Theme 6: Harm is contested and, at times, actively minimised or resisted

While harmful behaviours were widely recognised across workshop activities, the data also indicate that harm is not uniformly understood or accepted as such. Instead, participants described how behaviours are often contested, minimised, or reframed, particularly within social environments where norms around humour, masculinity, and group belonging are strongly embedded.

A recurring pattern across responses is the trivialisation of harmful behaviour through the language of "banter". Participants highlighted that individuals may avoid intervening for fear of being perceived as overreacting or unable to "take a joke", with those who challenge behaviour at risk of being labelled as a "killjoy" or dismissed through comments such as "oh behave lad". This framing operates to normalise behaviour while simultaneously discouraging critical reflection or challenge.

The data also point to the social sanctioning of intervention itself. Participants described how individuals who speak up may be subject to ridicule or criticism, including being "called names", labelled as "too woke", or characterised using gendered terms such as "Karen". These responses function to delegitimise intervention and reinforce group norms, particularly within male-dominated environments where conformity and cohesion are valued.

In some instances, participants alluded to more explicit forms of resistance, including the perception that efforts to address sexism or promote gender equity may themselves be problematic or divisive (e.g. "feminist attitudes potentially harming/worsening male behaviour"). References to wider political and cultural narratives further suggest that attitudes towards gender and equality are shaped by broader societal discourses, which may conflict with the aims of bystander intervention.

Taken together, these findings suggest that barriers to intervention are not solely driven by uncertainty or lack of confidence, but also by active processes of meaning-making in which harm is negotiated, downplayed, or resisted. This has important implications for programme design. Interventions must not only build confidence and skills, but also directly engage with the ways in which harmful behaviours are justified, minimised, or contested within sporting cultures.

Activity 3: Implementation conditions

The data generated through Activity 3 were analysed thematically to understand the practical conditions required to support the rollout of bystander intervention training across Liverpool City Region. Unlike earlier activities, which focused on behaviours and norms, this analysis centres on system readiness for delivery, drawing together insights on existing strengths, anticipated challenges, and required support.

The findings can be understood across three interrelated domains: local assets, structural and cultural barriers, and system-level support requirements.

Exploring local assets to effectively deliver the training

Delegates identified a wide range of existing assets that could support local implementation, including:

- established relationships between organisations
- trusted networks across sport, local authorities, and community settings
- experienced staff and volunteers with safeguarding and engagement expertise
- access to facilities and delivery infrastructure

A more detailed breakdown of participant responses is featured in Box 1.

Taken together, these responses suggest that Liverpool City Region already has a well-developed delivery ecosystem, with significant potential to support a place-based rollout. Importantly, many of these assets are relational rather than purely structural, highlighting the value of existing partnerships, trust, and local knowledge in enabling implementation.

This indicates that the challenge is not one of starting from scratch, but of mobilising and aligning existing capacity.

Box 1.

Workshop participants identified a wide range of local assets to support the delivery of bystander training across sport and physical activity settings. These included established organisations and networks such as Knowsley Family and Community Education (F.A.C.E), Halton Voluntary and Community Action (including Halton's VAWG community of practice), and Community and Voluntary Services (CVS) networks, which were recognised as trusted and accessible entry points for delivery. Schools, leisure centres, sports clubs, adventure playgrounds, faith-based institutions, MSP, and Liverpool City Region place-partnerships were also highlighted for their existing infrastructure and reach.

Participants emphasised the strength of the local workforce and delivery networks, including Liverpool County FA affiliated staff and coaches, LFC Foundation, and Everton in the Community, alongside StreetGames networks of tutors, training academies, and community leaders. These were seen as particularly valuable due to their established relationships,

communication channels, and access to venues. There was also recognition that delivery could extend beyond traditional sport settings into family hubs, workplaces, voluntary organisations, and transport networks.

Community-led delivery was identified as a key enabler, particularly where it involves trusted individuals, lived experience, and facilitators from diverse backgrounds. Existing programmes (e.g. FA bystander training) and safeguarding frameworks (e.g. University of Liverpool) were also noted, suggesting opportunities to align and complement current provision. Finally, participants highlighted the role of the LCR Combined Authority, active travel networks, and neighbourhood connectors in supporting widespread, place-based delivery.

Key concerns about barriers to delivering training

Delegates identified several barriers that may limit the ability of local clubs and providers to engage with or deliver bystander training. These barriers can be broadly grouped into three areas:

- **Practical constraints**: limited time, workforce capacity, competing priorities, and resource pressures
- **Cultural barriers**: resistance to change, normalisation of harmful behaviours, and discomfort discussing topics such as sexism or VAWG
- **Confidence and capability gaps**: uncertainty about how to deliver training, respond to disclosures, or manage challenging situations

These findings align closely with earlier themes, particularly around ambiguity, risk, and organisational support. However, Activity 3 adds an important layer by demonstrating how these issues translate into real-world delivery challenges. Further information can be found in Box 2.

This suggests that barriers are not simply individual, but are embedded within organisational pressures and cultural norms, reinforcing the need for a whole-system approach.

Box 2.

A key challenge identified through the workshop was uncertainty around the target audience and how best to engage them. Participants highlighted the need to identify appropriate cohorts within different settings and tailor delivery to local contexts to ensure the training is relevant and effective. Engaging networks consistently was seen as a particular challenge, especially where participation is voluntary or where the relevance of bystander training is not immediately recognised.

Practical constraints were also significant, including limited staff time, competing organisational priorities, and resource pressures such as funding for venues and staff backfill. In some cases, participants suggested that organisations may not yet fully recognise the value of bystander training, or may be hesitant to engage, with organisational culture and

awareness influencing uptake. The role of internal champions and leadership buy-in was therefore emphasised as critical to successful delivery.

The format of delivery was also identified as a key consideration. While online sessions may increase reach, participants felt they are less effective for facilitating sensitive discussions, with in-person delivery more likely to support authentic engagement. There was also a strong emphasis on the need for inclusive approaches, including consideration of language, age, intersectionality, and cultural relevance.

Finally, confidence was identified as a challenge for both participants and facilitators. Individuals may feel uncomfortable engaging with sensitive topics or speaking in front of peers, while facilitators may lack confidence in managing challenging conversations or responding to unexpected questions.

How HEG can support meaningful training delivery

Delegates were clear about what would be required from HEG and partners to enable confident local delivery. Key areas of support included:

- **Clear and accessible training materials**, including practical tools and guidance
- **Ongoing support and quality assurance**, such as co-delivery, mentoring, or observation
- **Strong and consistent messaging**, to establish shared expectations and norms
- **Visible leadership and endorsement**, to legitimise the work locally

There was also an implicit emphasis on the need for confidence-building, not only in delivering content, but in managing the complexities associated with bystander intervention.

This reinforces the conclusion that effective implementation depends on more than training provision alone. It requires a supportive infrastructure that builds legitimacy, capability, and consistency across the system.

Box 3.

The workshop highlighted several ways HEG could support effective and sustainable delivery. A key theme was the value of a train-the-trainer model, including co-delivery, to build local capacity and support early implementation. Participants emphasised the need for facilitators to be equipped with comprehensive training, practical resources (e.g. slides, handouts, and communications materials), and guidance on managing challenging conversations, responding to difficult questions, and navigating conflict, drawing on learning from previous delivery.

Ongoing support and quality assurance were also seen as essential. This includes peer networks, opportunities for shared learning and reflection, and a focus on facilitator

wellbeing, particularly given the sensitive nature of VAWG discussions. Participants highlighted the importance of ensuring delivery is inclusive and accessible, with consideration for disabled participants and culturally diverse communities. Flexibility in delivery – such as offering sessions at different times and providing follow-up opportunities – was also identified as important in addressing engagement barriers.

Practical and financial support was raised as a key requirement, including funding for venues, refreshments, and staff backfill, alongside guidance on accessing funding. At a strategic level, participants emphasised the role of HEG in securing leadership buy-in and working with place leads, MSPs, and system partners to champion delivery. This includes acting as a connector across the system, linking strategic leadership with delivery organisations, and supporting coordination to extend reach and ensure long-term sustainability.

Synthesis: What this means for the project

The findings from across all three activities provide a clear and consistent picture of both the nature of harmful behaviour in sport and physical activity settings, and the conditions required to address it effectively.

Delegates understood harmful behaviour not as isolated incidents, but as part of the everyday culture of sport. These behaviours are reproduced through routine interactions, language, humour, and institutional practices across a wide range of settings. However, they are sustained not only through normalisation, but through a more complex set of system dynamics.

Three interrelated factors emerge as central to understanding why harmful behaviours persist and why intervention does not consistently occur:

1. **Ambiguity:**
   There is not a shared or stable understanding of what constitutes harmful behaviour. Boundaries between "banter", acceptable conduct, and harm are often blurred and context dependent. This makes it difficult for individuals to confidently recognise when intervention is warranted.
2. **Social risk:**
   Delegates consistently described the personal, relational, and professional risks associated with speaking up. These include fear of conflict, exclusion, reputational damage, and lack of support, particularly within tightly networked sporting environments. In this context, silence should not be interpreted as indifference, but as a rational response to perceived risk.
3. **Contestation:**
   Importantly, there is not universal agreement that certain behaviours are harmful. The data highlight instances where behaviours are minimised, reframed, or resisted, for example through appeals to humour, accusations of overreaction, or broader ideological narratives. This means that individuals are not only navigating uncertainty but also operating within environments where harm itself is socially negotiated and not consistently recognised.

Taken together, these dynamics create conditions in which:

- harmful behaviour can persist without being clearly named
- individuals are uncertain about whether and how to act
- those who do act may face social sanction or lack of support

This has significant implications for how bystander intervention is understood. Delegates do not view intervention as a simple or automatic behaviour, but as a context-dependent social practice, requiring individuals to interpret situations, assess risk, and select appropriate responses in real time. This reinforces that effective intervention depends not only on individual confidence, but on shared norms, role clarity, and organisational support.

The findings also highlight that harm is both collectively experienced and unevenly distributed. While women and girls are most acutely affected, participants recognised wider impacts across the system, including on boys and young men, coaches, parents, and organisations. At the same time, differing perspectives and levels of understanding indicate that stakeholders are not starting from a common baseline. This reinforces the need for approaches that both build awareness and actively engage with misconceptions and resistance.

Insights from Activity 3 demonstrate how these dynamics translate directly into delivery considerations. Liverpool City Region benefits from a strong foundation of local assets, including established networks, trusted organisations, and experienced workforces. However, these assets are largely relational and require coordination to be effectively mobilised. Barriers to delivery, including limited capacity, competing priorities, and cultural resistance, reflect the same underlying dynamics identified in earlier themes.

Delegates were clear that successful implementation will depend on more than training provision alone. It will require:

- clear and consistent messaging about what constitutes harmful behaviour and why it matters
- visible leadership and organisational endorsement to legitimise intervention
- practical tools and support to enable confident and context-appropriate responses
- ongoing infrastructure, including mentoring and peer support, to reinforce learning over time

Taken together, three key conclusions emerge. First, ambiguity, risk, and contestation operate together as core barriers to both recognising and addressing harmful behaviour. Second, bystander intervention is best understood as a relational behaviour, shaped by organisational culture, shared norms, and leadership, rather than individual confidence alone. Third, while there is clear readiness and a strong foundation for delivery across Liverpool City Region, this is not yet consistently embedded and will require coordinated, place-based implementation.

These findings have direct implications for the future development of the *"Are you onside?"* programme. Implementation must prioritise organisational alignment, ensuring that individuals are supported, expectations are clear, and intervention is both legitimate and reinforced in practice.

This points to the importance of a structured, place-based delivery model that builds local capacity while maintaining consistency and quality. By combining training with organisational engagement, leadership support, and ongoing infrastructure, the programme can move from isolated delivery toward sustained cultural change.

These findings should be interpreted with appropriate caution. The data were generated within a workshop setting and reflect collective, co-produced perspectives shaped by group discussion. While they do not capture the full depth of individual lived experience, they provide an understanding of the issue at place level.

Overall, the workshop demonstrates that there is both recognition of the issue and a strong foundation for action across Liverpool City Region. The challenge now is to translate this into

consistent, supported, and system-wide delivery that enables individuals and organisations to play an active role in creating safer and more inclusive sporting environments.

Considerations for delivery in Liverpool City Region

The workshop findings indicate that effective rollout of the *"Are you onside?"* programme across Liverpool City Region will depend on more than the availability of training alone. Delivery will need to respond directly to the core barriers identified through the workshop: ambiguity about harmful behaviour, the perceived social and organisational risks of intervention, and inconsistent levels of support across settings. The considerations below translate these findings into practical requirements for implementation.

1. Phased and supported rollout model

The proposed phased, place-based rollout is strongly supported by the workshop findings. This approach is well aligned with the need to build confidence, consistency, and shared learning before wider implementation.

Initial delivery in early adopter areas, with supported rollout in priority places, reflects the variation in readiness identified across the system. This phased approach will enable the model to be tested, refined, and strengthened in practice before expansion across Liverpool City Region, ensuring that early learning informs subsequent delivery.

2. Train-the-trainer and quality assurance model

The proposed train-the-trainer model is reinforced by the findings as a central mechanism for delivery. The emphasis on co-delivery, observation, and clear guidance on core content and facilitation standards directly responds to the need for confidence, consistency, and credibility identified by participants.

The findings also highlight the importance of supporting facilitators to manage sensitive discussions, respond to challenging situations, and navigate uncertainty. This confirms that the planned model, which combines structured training with ongoing support, is well suited to the complexity of the subject matter and the realities of delivery.

3. Leadership buy-in and organisational alignment

The planned focus on leadership engagement is strongly supported by the findings. Participants consistently indicated that intervention is more likely where there is clear organisational backing, visible leadership commitment, and confidence that concerns will be taken seriously.

Engagement with senior leaders and key stakeholders across each place will therefore be critical to implementation. Aligning the programme with existing safeguarding, equality, and inclusion priorities will help to establish legitimacy, clarify expectations, and create the conditions in which individuals feel supported to act.

4. Emphasis on practical application

The proposed shift towards practical, scenario-based training is directly supported by the findings. Participants did not view bystander intervention as a simple or automatic behaviour, but as a context-dependent practice requiring judgement, interpretation, and appropriate response.

The planned focus on real-world situations, decision-making, and navigating "grey areas" is therefore well aligned with the needs identified through the workshop. This approach will help ensure that participants are equipped not only with awareness, but with the practical skills required to act in complex and uncertain situations.

5. Building on existing local assets and relationships

The proposed place-based delivery model is further strengthened by the significant local assets identified across Liverpool City Region. Established networks, trusted organisations, and experienced workforces provide a strong foundation for implementation.

The findings suggest that effective delivery will depend on mobilising and coordinating these existing assets, rather than creating new structures. The emphasis within the proposal on working through established partnerships and local delivery systems is therefore appropriate and well aligned with the current system context.

6. Ongoing support, shared learning, and accessible implementation

The inclusion of ongoing support mechanisms within the proposed model is strongly reinforced by the findings. Participants highlighted the importance of continued engagement beyond initial training, including opportunities for shared learning, peer support, and reinforcement over time.

The planned community of practice, alongside light-touch quality assurance and continued facilitator support, responds directly to these needs. Similarly, the emphasis on flexible and accessible delivery reflects the practical constraints identified by participants, including time, capacity, and resource pressures.

Maintaining a consistent core model, while allowing for adaptation to local contexts, is therefore both necessary and appropriate to ensure relevance, engagement, and sustainability across different settings.

HEG's role in delivery and system support

The workshop findings reinforce the importance of clear coordination, consistency, and ongoing support to enable effective implementation. Within the proposed delivery model, HEG will play a central role in supporting system-wide rollout across Liverpool City Region.

HEG's role can be understood across four key functions:

- **Training provider and capacity builder:** Designing and delivering the train-the-trainer programme, supporting facilitators through co-delivery and early implementation, and building confidence and capability within local systems.
- **Quality assurer:** Providing guidance, resources, and light-touch quality assurance to support consistent delivery across places. This includes observation, feedback, and maintaining fidelity to core programme principles while allowing for local adaptation.
- **Monitoring and evaluation partner:** Leading the collection and analysis of data across delivery, including pre-, post-, and follow-up measures, to assess changes in knowledge, confidence, and practice. This includes identifying patterns in delivery, engagement, and outcomes to inform ongoing programme refinement and demonstrate impact.
- **Knowledge broker and learning partner:** Drawing together learning from delivery, evaluation, and practice to inform ongoing programme refinement. This includes facilitating shared learning through communities of practice and supporting continuous improvement across the system.

This role reflects HEG's position as both a delivery partner and a system-level organisation, supporting not only the provision of training, but the conditions required for sustainable cultural change.