

Gateshead Place Based Expansion

Quarterly insights pack (February 2026)

What is in this pack?

- This pack outlines the insights we have gathered as part of the Sport England Place Based Expansion Development Award as of Gateshead 2026.
- This project aims to take a 'place-based' approach to tackle inequalities and make healthier living and an active life in Gateshead more accessible. A place-based approach is community focused and led by the insights of the people who live and work in Gateshead.
- By working with key place partners (the Local Authority, health, Violence Reduction Unit, and the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) and leisure sectors) we aim to develop a shared understanding of the barriers residents in Gateshead face to becoming more physically active.

What is in this pack?

The areas in Gateshead that Sport England have identified as priority localities for this project are:

Dunston and Teams

Felling

Beacon Lough and Wrekenton

What is in this pack?



The key themes relating to local physical activity barriers and enablers identified between November 2025 and February 2026.

A recap of the recurring themes identified between February – October 2025.

A summary of **learning about the wider physical activity ecosystem** in Gateshead and steps to develop it.

How have we gathered these insights?



One-to-one conversations, network meetings and community consultations with individuals representing Gateshead Council, the NHS and other statutory services, and local VCFSE organisations.



In-depth reflection and evaluation sessions with key stakeholders from across Gateshead.



Research findings from work carried out by local organisations.

Key themes

November 2025 – February 2026

Built and natural environment



Accessibility – uneven pavements and paths are unsuitable for wheelchair users.

'Gym-timidation' – some residents put off joining a gym because they lack someone to accompany and induct them. The cost of sessions and memberships excludes some residents who are experiencing financial hardship.

We plan to work with our place partners to understand better the lived experience of migrant communities.

Trans youth are often disengaged from physical activity by secondary school age due to bullying and feeling excluded and unsafe.



Safety – both young and older people report feeling unsafe at night due to perceived antisocial behaviour from young people and adults.

Examples of behaviour that some residents report as making them feel unsafe include: the use of motorbikes on riverside paths, people letting off fireworks, and public drug and alcohol use.

We plan to work in conjunction with Community Development Officer, High Rises to gather further insight from residents in the Beacon Lough high rises in Spring.



Indoor and outdoor activity spaces – VCFSE groups organising football sessions for children and young people report that there is a lack of free indoor spaces to book during the winter months.

Parks lack play/sporting equipment that is suitable for teenagers. Some young people are deterred from using parks due to perceived antisocial behaviour taking place there.

Health



Men's mental health – suicide rates have risen over the last decade in line with regional and national trends. Local VCFSE organisations are aware of five men dying by suicide in Dunston and Teams in the last six months.

Men's groups in Dunston and Teams support men from a range of backgrounds with their mental wellbeing and include riverside walks among their activities.

We plan to meet with social prescribers and trusted VCFSE organisations to explore opportunities for insight gathering into men's mental health.



Drug and alcohol – drug and alcohol service users cite several barriers to being more active in gym/leisure settings, including: lack of motivation, anxiety, travel, cost of sessions/memberships, being unfamiliar with gyms and their dress codes, fear of judgement, fear of being a lone woman, embarrassment.

Children and young people



Children – childhood obesity rates in Gateshead remain higher than the national average.

A Gateshead Council survey of Year 4 and Year 6 pupils found that 26% of boys ate fast food or takeaways most days.

We plan to work with trusted local schools to gather insight from children in Years 2, 5 and 6.



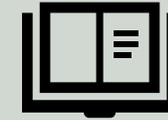
Young people – a Gateshead Council survey of Year 8 and Year 10 pupils found that pupils in ethnic minority groups were more likely to say they don't have enough time to do as much sport or exercise as they would like.

The same survey found that time and confidence were the most common barriers to being more active.



Deaf and Hard of Hearing children – a local community football club runs a group for Deaf and hard of hearing children.

We plan to gather insight from the wider community of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing children in Gateshead.



Jewish community– safety concerns are a barrier to physical activity within the Jewish community, and secure school grounds are perceived as the safest place for children and young people to be active.

Younger pupils are accompanied by adults on their walks to and from school for security reasons.

Recurring themes

February – October 2025.

Cost of living.

- Low-income residents excluded by gym costs.
- Increase in referrals for weight management due to the cost of weight loss medications.
- Local foodbanks use social events to promote physical activity.
- Community football clubs are providing some financial assistance to members where possible.

Antisocial behaviour.

- Motorbike use on bridle paths and green spaces deters some residents from using them.
- Families and children deterred from using local parks due to vandalism, damage and the presence of drug paraphernalia.
- Public drug and alcohol use and drug dealing intimidates some residents.

Accessibility and inclusion.

- Few opportunities for older people within walking distance.
- Digital exclusion.
- Wheelchair users travelling out of the borough for exercise classes.
- Water temperature of public pools too cold for some disabled swimmers.
- Migrant community parents unaware of free afterschool opportunities for children.

Communication and trust

- Digital exclusion means some residents not always aware of free events and activities across Gateshead.
- Public health awareness campaigns do not always reach target communities.
- Residents may be sceptical of consultation exercises when they have previously given feedback but not perceived this to have led to meaningful change.

Children and young people.

- Opportunities that require parent attendance are barriers to participation.
- Caring responsibilities are impacting on children's school attendance.
- Lack of provision for young people leads to them congregating in the streets which in turn can intimidate other residents.

Built and natural environment

- Busy main road with only one crossing prevents younger children getting to Tyne Derwent Way on their own.
- Safety concerns around subway crossing in evenings.
- Lack of free outdoor space to play football.
- Recent street audit identified the need for dropped kerbs.

Local collaboration and capacity.

- Smaller VCFSE organisations have to compete for funding rather than collaborate.
- Breakdown in relationships between community groups leads to missed opportunities for collaboration.
- Where Council/VCFSE sector has capacity to undertake 1-2-1 outreach work to support individuals, this can improve engagement and participation in activities.

Learning about the wider physical activity ecosystem

How have learned about the wider system?

- This learning is underpinned by the Sport England National Evaluation and Learning Partnership's [conceptual model for tackling inequalities in physical inactivity](#).
- Between July – October 2025, place partners met to evaluate the current capacity and potential within the Gateshead physical activity ecosystem to bring about positive change.
- This work found that some of the features that are needed for positive change in Gateshead are only just beginning to emerge, while other features are more developed and embedded system-wide.
- As part of our learning, we have also developed a 'theory of change' for Gateshead (see Appendix 1), which outlines what we want the physical activity ecosystem to look like and what actions we think are needed to bring about change, as well as an interactive map of physical activity assets in Gateshead (Appendix 2).

Where are the strengths in the system?

Work is being done across Gateshead to build the capacity and capability of local people to define and act on the key factors impacting their lives.

To build on this, we need to widen participation in our steering group and identify other ways to empower local people to influence and make decisions about their communities.

There is an increasing number of VCFSE organisations in Gateshead that recognise how physical activity aligns with their aims. Some of these organisations are integrating it into their everyday work.

To build on this, we need to identify more ways to pool resources, align policies and co-produce physical activity opportunities.

What features do we need to develop and embed?

Widespread buy-in from senior leaders to promote place-based working.

Wider visible leadership across Gateshead will likely be required to achieve our long-term aims around collaboration, co-design, trust, and alignment of policy.

How can we encourage leaders to support honest public reflections on what approaches to tackling physical inactivity have and haven't worked?

Investment in local capacity to work in a place-based way

We have isolated examples where we are investing resources in capacity and capability building for place-based systemic working. However, this is not yet consistent across Gateshead.

To develop this, we will use our 'Test and Learn' budget to support capacity building within trusted local VCFSE organisations.

What do we need to develop and embed?

Policies, processes and resources which enable power sharing with disadvantaged groups and communities.

To develop this, we plan to share learning from isolated examples of where this is happening locally.

Action to address the structural inequalities reflected in living environments.

Some actions are being planned or undertaken in Gateshead to improve the condition or safety of the built environment and infrastructure where disadvantaged people live.

We need to work with residents in these communities to understand how we build on these improvements to increase people's ability to move more.

What do we need to develop and embed?

A local learning culture in Gateshead that helps us capture, share and evaluate data and insight.

To develop this, we will support trusted local organisations to carry out their own insight gathering and continue to share our learning through quarterly insight packs and 6-monthly reporting.

When undertaking the annual evaluation of the physical activity ecosystem in the summer of 2026, we plan to engage with a wider range local voices and perspectives.

A consistent understanding of how social, cultural, and economic factors affect physical activity.

There are isolated examples in Gateshead of people in positions of responsibility beginning to recognise that policies and practices should consider and explore power dynamics and stereotypes.

To develop this, we will support community insight gathering to better understand the local diversity of attitudes towards physical activity.

Contacts

If you have any questions about the content of this pack, or would like to work with us to gather insight and deepen our shared understanding of physical inactivity in Gateshead, please contact:

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Appendix 1 – Theory of Change for Gateshead

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES	IMPACTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Place partnership steering group. ○ Leadership programme attendees. ○ Local area networks (Felling, Dunston and Teams, Beacon Lough and Wrekenton). ○ Sport England investment. ○ Existing physical activity programmes and services. ○ Community assets. ○ Community organisations (VCFSE sector). ○ Residents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Branding/comms project. ○ Developing a theory of change. ○ Evaluating system maturity. ○ Producing 6-monthly evaluation and learning reports. ○ Compiling quarterly insight packs. ○ Stakeholder mapping to widen the steering group. ○ Research to identify groups in target areas from non-engagement communities. ○ Micro commissioning project. ○ Asset mapping. ○ Data sharing between organisations. ○ Establish accountability structures for physical activity decision making. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Brand identity for project. ○ Theory of change diagram and narrative. ○ System maturity packs and rankings. ○ 6-monthly evaluation and learning reports. ○ Quarterly insight packs. ○ Stakeholder map. ○ Asset map. ○ Insight into groups in target areas. ○ Micro commissioning process. ○ Data sharing agreement/process. ○ Accountability structures. 	<p>SHORT-TERM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increased participation in project and steering group from residents and communities. ○ Improved relationships across project. ○ Improved understanding of local diversity of attitudes towards physical activity. ○ Improved communications (i.e. more accessible, inclusive and relevant language). ○ Greater reach into communities. <p>MEDIUM-TERM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Pooled resources and learning. ○ Co-production of physical activity interventions. ○ Physical activity behaviour change embedded in NHS support for weight loss. ○ Engagement of less 'obvious' sectors in promoting physical activity, i.e. heritage and arts. <p>LONG-TERM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Improved communication and trust across all sectors. ○ Alignment of health and physical activity policies. ○ Accessible provision in a variety of spaces. ○ Affordable and needs-led opportunities to be physically active where and when people want. 	<p>HEALTH AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Residents live healthier and more active lives. ○ Inequalities in physical activity are reduced. ○ Children and young people are supported to be physically active. ○ Children and young people live longer and healthier lives. <p>CULTURAL/SOCIAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Residents live more connected and fulfilling lives. ○ Residents feel safe to be active in the spaces around them. ○ Residents are empowered to participate in shared decision making. ○ Increased representation of diverse and marginalised voices in local decision making. <p>ENVIRONMENTAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ More appropriate and affordable opportunities for residents to be active in the spaces around them.

Appendix 2 – Gateshead asset map

- Access the Gateshead physical activity asset map via [this link](#).
- The map is a tool to support our understanding of the local physical activity ecosystem, rather than a public directory. We interpret ‘asset’ in a broad sense so that it encompasses things like community organisations as well as gyms and green spaces.
- To view the map, choose 'Custom areas' from the sidebar, then, under 'Rise Place-Based Expansion Work - Gateshead and South Tyneside', check 'Gateshead– Middle Layer Super Output Areas (MSOAs)'. To then add the assets to the map, choose 'Services' from the sidebar, then 'select all' and then 'view'.
- The map is an evolving tool and is by no means comprehensive. If you spot any gaps or errors, please contact us.