



Greater Manchester Place Partnerships 2019–2025: The Journey of Community-Led, System-Enabled Change

What we've learnt, what's changed and where we go next





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Instead of being recipients of national funding for fixed programmes, GMM became partners with Sport England exploring what partnering in a movement for physical activity would look like.

Since 2019 we've moved from knowing physical activity is good, to understanding and practising how it supports health and care and wider outcomes in practice.

Place Partnerships have enabled a shift from transactional funding to shared responsibility... investing not just in programmes, but in the skills, relationships and system conditions needed for long-term change.

Warren Heppolette

Director of the Prevention Demonstrator GMCA

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Executive Summary

Place Partnerships demonstrate that community-led, system-enabled approaches are an effective way to tackle inactivity and inequality.

Since 2019, this approach has delivered deeper, more inclusive and more sustainable outcomes by aligning systems around community-shaped solutions. It has strengthened local trust, improved partnership decision-making and supported long-term impact.

The evidence shows that this way of working delivers outcomes beyond individual programmes, attracts wider investment, enables system change and reduces long-term risk.

As GM enters the next phase, the opportunity is to embed these principles into core systems — ensuring prevention, physical activity and tackling inequality are integral to how the system operates, not time-limited pilots.

Why this report, why now?

This report brings together learning, evidence and lived experience from the Greater Manchester Place Partnerships to show:



How community led, system-enabled investment creates long term impact



What the evidence tells us about what works **and what doesn't**



How partnerships are working differently to deliver sustainable change



The Place Partnerships approach

The challenge? Where you live still shapes how active, healthy and happy you can be



Inactivity and inequality are not evenly distributed.



Place Partnerships are Sport England's response to persistent place-based health and activity inequalities.



The aim: make it easier for people to move, in ways that work locally and reflect lived experience.



What is place-based working?

A place-based approach means **creating solutions that fit the specific needs and strengths of a community**, rather than applying one-size-fits all model.

It focuses on **working with local people and partners to create change** that is rooted in the reality of the place.

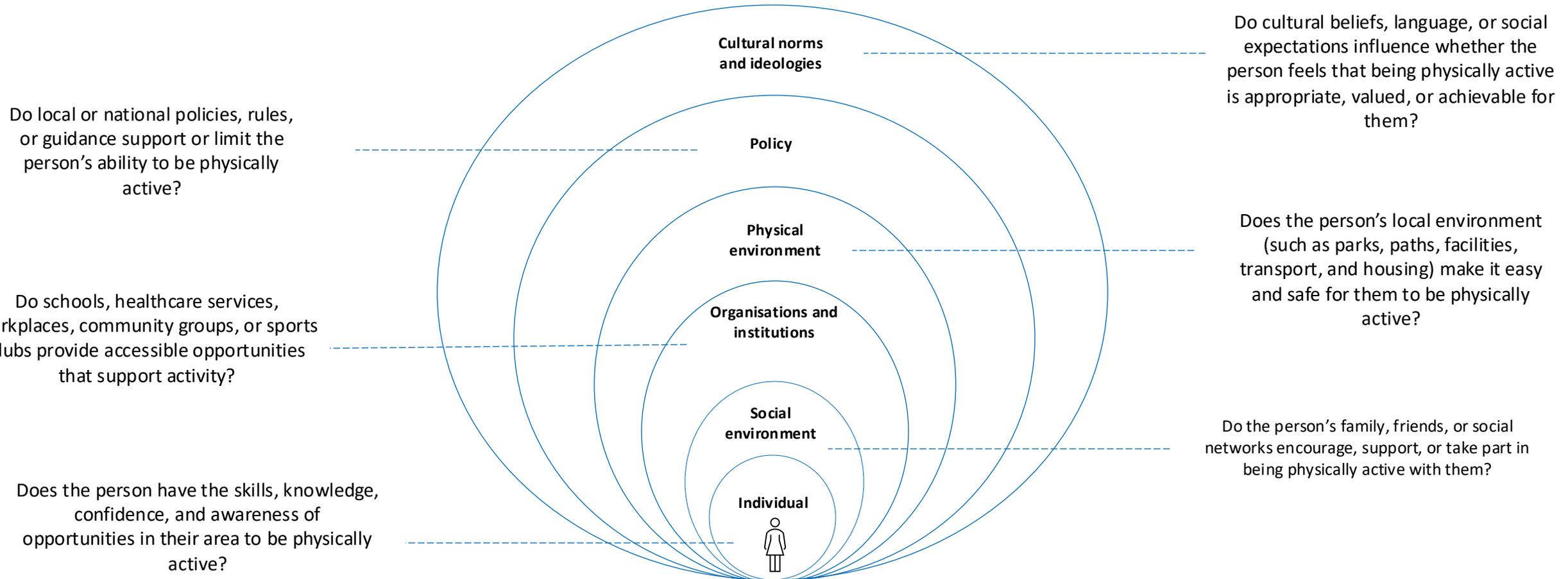


What do we mean by a whole system approach?

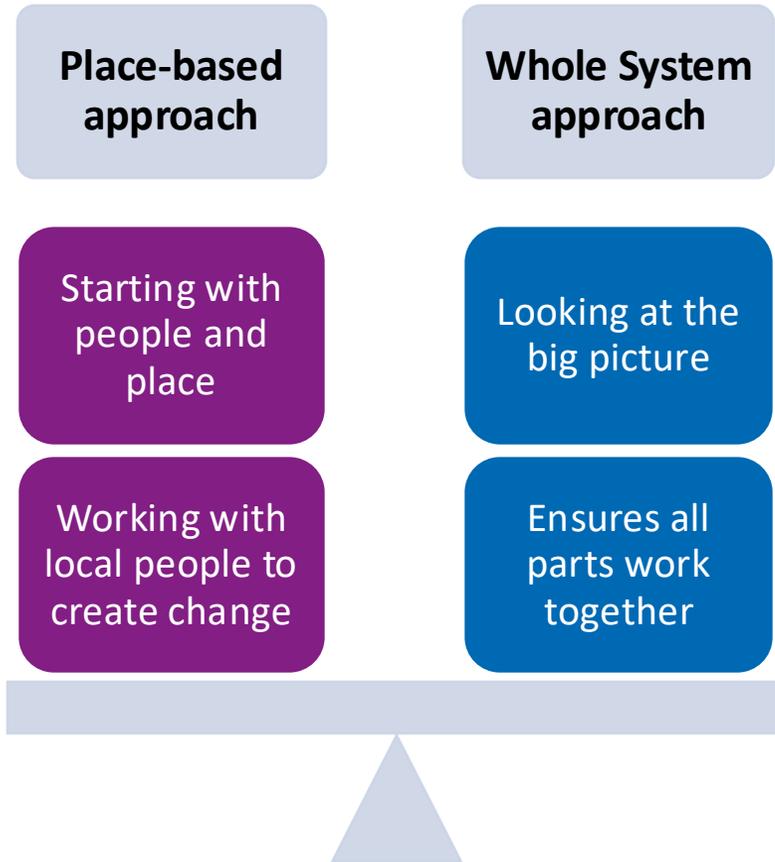


Traditionally we've viewed inactivity through a lens of the individual

A whole system approach looks at all of the things that impact on a person's ability to be active



Place-based + Whole System = long term, sustainable change



Place-based alone: strong local ownership, but limited scale and sustainability.

Whole system alone: strategic alignment, but solutions that don't fit local realities.

Together, they create the conditions for long-term, sustainable change.



Sport England investment secured

This gave us the time and space to test a new way of working focused on **long-term change**, not quick wins.



Learning partners share programme theories as 'if, then, because' statements

We began to understand that **how change happens** matters as much as **what changes**.



Investment principles created

Shared principles created a **common language and set of behaviours** that aligned ten very different boroughs.



Foundational Enablers of Change identified

For the first time, we clearly defined **what needs to be in place to support active lives** — showing that system change can be intentionally grown, not just observed.



Learning partners appointed

Investing in dedicated learning partners, Substance and Sheffield Hallam University, built capacity **and reshaped how partners approached learning and evaluation**.

**Start
2018**

2019



2020



Greater Manchester system maturity survey launched
A shift from measuring activity levels to capturing insights on policy, culture and systems **revealed deeper drivers of inactivity.**



System maturity strengthens despite COVID-19
Partners reported that the ways of working and behaviours created through the place partnership investment was making it easier to support physical activity locally, even during lockdowns.



Enablers of change refined
We had more understanding than ever about what enables and prevents active lives, which enabled more intentional action.

2021



That Counts! Campaign launched
That Counts! was the first locally tailored campaign in GM and demonstrated how inclusive, locally relatable stories can broadened what "being active" means.



Sport England launch 'Uniting the Movement' strategy, 'Greater Manchester Moving in Action' strategy launched
Place-based approaches central to both the Sport England and GM Moving strategies reinforced the value of place-based, whole-system approaches and changing relationships across the sector.



2023



Post-COVID Adults Active Lives recovery outpacing national trends



For the first time, GM records fewer inactive children and young people than the national average

Faster reductions in inactivity than the national average showed cultural and relational work translating into real change.



Local Delivery Pilots refreshed as Place Partnerships

The approach was no longer seen as a pilot but recognised as established and trusted.

2025



Place Partnership 'Deepening' Investment secured to 2028



Phase 4 of the Place Partnership 2025-2028

Sustained improvements across all Enablers of Change (16-22% increases since 2021) show conditions for active lives are strengthening and set a strong foundation for the next phase of the approach.



Localities submit their Place Partnership vision for 2025-2028

Local plans built on six years of insight, with a clear focus on consistency, sustainability and whole-system work at scale.



Place Partnership 'Investment Principles' Refreshed

Refreshed principles are co-designed by places rather than centrally decided. This shifted principles from 'rules for investment' to everyday behaviours that drive system change.

2024



Local Evaluation Ambassador Approach Launched

Local partners took greater ownership of learning and evaluation, normalising reflection, honesty and learning from what didn't work.



The starting point



The idea came from residents, not ‘the system’

In July 2019 community residents with Brinnington Big Local put forward an idea at the local forum: to create a community map for Brinnington. The map would highlight:

The map would highlight:

- Local places of importance
- Community history and identity
- Walking routes people already used or wanted to use

The aim was not just a map, but a way to reclaim local knowledge and encourage everyday walking.

The system’s role



Later in 2019, Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) and other partners became involved. Their role was to:

- Enable conversations across the community
- Help unlock funding and connections
- Remove barriers rather than set agendas

Across 2019–2020, engagement continued and flexible funding for sustainable journeys was secured to support what residents were already shaping

Why this mattered



For Stockport, this work was less about delivering a product and more about testing a different way of working.

Learning objectives included:

- Reaching residents traditionally disengaged from services
- Supporting communities to articulate their own vision
- Shifting behaviours and local culture around movement
- Enabling social connections and collective action
- Linking community-led work to wider place, health and transport systems

What changed?



Through co-production:

- Three permanent maps became community-owned assets
- Walking was framed as a local, everyday choice
- Engagement happened through leaflet drops, conversations and events



What changed?

Outputs included:

- 3 permanent maps installed (community focal point + train station)
- 3,000 household maps delivered
- Annual walking events engaging 400+ residents
- School use of the map for local history and walking lessons
- Ongoing community-led promotion and use

What was different from a traditional approach?

This work represented a shift in how decisions were made and how partners worked together:

- **Decision-making power sat with residents**, including illustrator choice and map locations
- Partners **enabled rather than commissioned** the activity
- Funding was used flexibly to support co-design
- The maps sparked **new community-led initiatives**, such as benches to improve walkability
- Partners began referencing the maps across **transport, health and place-based work**
- Alignment was built around a **shared outcome**

Long term impact

Transforming
governance
and
processes

Over time, this approach has contributed to:

- Stronger local identity and sense of belonging
- Reduced isolation
- Greater awareness of local assets and green space
- Increased walkability and short-journey walking
- Reduced reliance on cars for local trips
- Increased physical activity through everyday movement

This aligns with **Sport England's Uniting the Movement** outcomes, particularly:

- Increasing physical activity
- Reducing inactivity
- Addressing inequalities
- Positive experiences for Children and Young People

These maps are just fantastic. We really hope they will provide something for everyone, whether that's families finding new cycling routes or older adults using them to reminisce and take a walk through some old haunts.

- Brinnington Big Local



How this approach changes systems over time



Community-led, system-enabled working builds confidence, trust and permission changing how organisations think, act and invest.

Over time, Place Partnerships have shifted conditions across the system.

Examples of system behaviour change from across Greater Manchester:

- Health partners embedding physical activity into core services (e.g. GM NHS £2m investment).
- Local authorities aligning regeneration, leisure and health agendas (e.g. Trafford leisure redevelopment).
- Funders backing participatory budgeting and community-led delivery models (e.g. Bolton Live Well).

Why it matters:

These shifts reduce duplication, increase alignment and create conditions for sustainable change beyond individual projects.



Financial and non-financial leverage in practice

Examples from across GM of value created though Place Partnerships:

Type	Place	What was unlocked	Why it matters
Financial	Oldham	Co-funded Activation Role via Strategic Planning, Mayor's Challenge Fund and Place Partnership	Aligns policy, funding and delivery around place priorities
Financial	Bolton	DHSC funding to support long-term unemployed residents via ABCD	Connects prevention, employment and community development
Non-financial	Tameside	Partnerships activated community spaces with Bike Kitchen & City of Trees	Progress delivered even ahead of confirmed funding
Non-financial	Rochdale	Community-led environmental improvements with Groundwork	Builds local ownership and sustainable place-based change

Between August 2024 and 2025 there was an estimated £2.5M of leveraged* investment enabled across the Greater Manchester Place Partnership

*Discounting outliers

System-level change in action

Place Partnership learning is now shaping major system decisions and long-term infrastructure investment.



Examples of wider system decisions influenced by place partnerships:

1. Trafford Leisure Contract

- Partington Sports Village redevelopment supported by Levelling Up Fund investment.
- Upgrades include: Partington Leisure Centre refurbishment, Cross Lane Changing Rooms, Pump Track, Trim Trail, and public realm improvements.
- Demonstrates how proven partnership approaches attract major funding.

2. Bury Wellness Strategy

- Focuses on mental, physical, social, and emotional well-being and tackling local inequalities.
- Strategy implementation helped secure significant funding for Bury in 2024.

What this tells us?

- This approach works and builds impact over time
- This approach changes systems: partners behave differently
- This approach is worth backing – value is created with and without funding

2025–2028: Embedding what works

The next phase is about consistency, sustainability, and scale.

Across GM there are three core ambitions for 2025-2028:



Expand into new hyperlocal places



Embed Place Partnership principles into wider locality ways of working



Shift from “pilots” to core system infrastructure for prevention and tackling inactivity.



I am more hopeful than ever, about where we can go next, and the next phase of our Place Partnership work is mission critical



Hayley Lever
GM Moving CEO

2025–2028: Turning momentum into mainstream change

What We Need From Decision Makers

Strategically we need:

Resources: Plan for mainstreaming roles beyond 2028

Collaboration: Mandate alignment between Place Partnerships, Live Well and wider public service reform

Scaling & Embedding: Embed principles into: Governance, Commissioning, Wider strategies and agendas (including PA as prevention).



Place Partnerships have enabled a shift from transactional funding to shared responsibility.... investing not just in programmes, but in the skills, relationships and system conditions needed for long-term change



Warren Heppollette
Director of the Prevention
Demonstrator GMCA

Conclusion: A proven approach worth backing long-term

Place Partnerships nationally and locally have demonstrated that long-term impact is possible when communities lead and systems enable. This approach has changed not only outcomes, but relationships, behaviours and confidence across the system.

The learning is clear: sustainable change comes from consistent investment in people, places and partnerships — not short-term projects. When communities lead and systems enable, lasting impact follows, delivering value for money and system change.

The opportunity now is to protect and scale what works by embedding this way of working into mainstream systems. With the right leadership, alignment and resourcing, Place Partnerships can move from programme to business as usual — supporting wider place-based initiatives and delivering long-term benefit for communities and the system alike.

Appendix

Appendix 1

Sport England: Uniting the Movement Strategy Outcomes

Sport England: Uniting the Movement Strategy Outcomes

Sport England's Four Strategic Aims	Definition
Increase Physical Activity	Adults: at least 150 minutes per week; children: 60 minutes a day
Decrease Physical Inactivity	Adults: fewer than 30 minutes a week; children: 30 minutes a day
Positive experience for children	Number of positive attitude statements towards sport with which young people "strongly agree"
Reduce inequalities	Narrowing gap in above outcomes that often show long-standing inequalities in certain backgrounds (e.g., less socioeconomically privileged, disabled adults and children, older adults, girls, culturally diverse communities)

[Uniting The Movement](#)

Appendix 2

The following slides provide a blank template for the locality-specific case study relating to 'Community-led, system-enabled in practice'.

The starting point

Add
enabler
image

The idea... What residents wanted and why it mattered

The system's role

Add
enabler
image

How partners enabled rather than led
How the system behaved differently
How this challenged traditional delivery

Why this mattered?

Why did this matter to your place?
What structural inequalities or barriers were contributing?

What happened?

Add
enabler
image

Key moments, steps taken
Who was involved? Why?

Remember: This flow is adaptable — change the content, keep the principles

What changed?

Add
enabler
image

What changed in the system as a result?
Include both outputs (what was delivered) and outcomes (what changed).

Could be:

- Power shifted to residents
- Flexible funding and commissioning
- Cross-system alignment
- Community assets catalysing further action

What was different from a traditional approach?

What did partners stop doing or do differently?

Where did decision-making sit?

How did partners work together towards shared goals?

Remember: This flow is adaptable — change the content, keep the principles

Long term impact

Add
enabler
image

What policies, practices, ways of working or cultural shifts have happened?

What assets or capabilities remain after the project?

Outcomes Over Time

- Belonging and identity
- Increased walking and activity
- Reduced isolation
- Contribution to strategic outcomes (e.g. Uniting the Movement)

Add quotes

Add pictures

Appendix 3

Place Partnerships Introduction Slides.

These slides can be used, as needed, to help set the context and explain what Place-Based, whole-system approaches to Physical Activity are. Use your judgement when presenting.

Greater Manchester
Moving > ^ < v

GM Moving: Place Partnerships

Building healthier, happier, and more active communities — together.

Purpose



Overview of the Place Partnership approach:

- What it is
- Why it matters
- How your role connects to the collective effort

Our mission:

enable active lives for all by tackling inactivity
and addressing health inequalities.

The reality in GM

1 in 3

Doing less than 30 minutes a week

11% Gap

Between most* & least active** borough



*Stockport
**Oldham

The challenge?

Postcode predicts participation

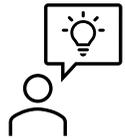
Where you live still shapes how active, healthy and happy you can be.



We needed a new approach



Short-term projects, top-down solutions



Communities wanted to shape the change



We didn't know how or why



What is place-based working?

Start with **lived experience**

Build on **local strengths**

Co-create solutions

No copy & paste



What do we mean by a whole system approach?

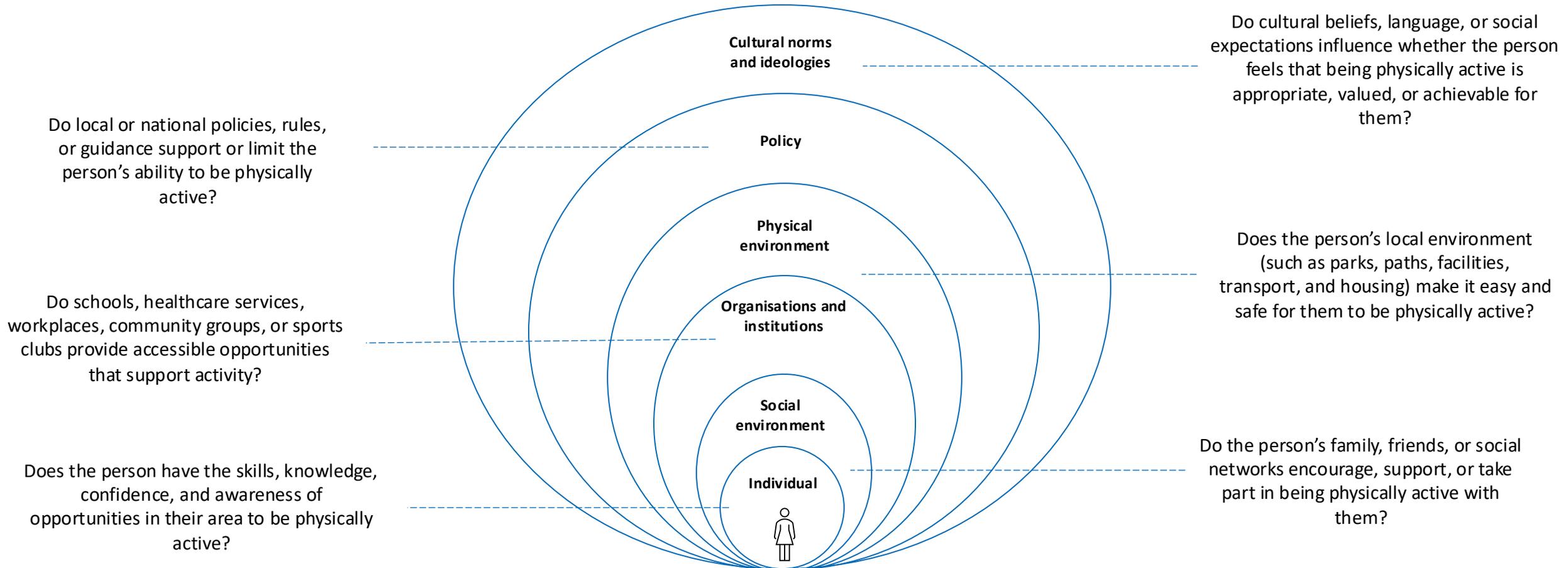
Traditionally we've viewed inactivity view a lens of the individual

Does she have the time, confidence, physical readiness and knowledge of local opportunities that realistically fit around work and caring responsibilities?

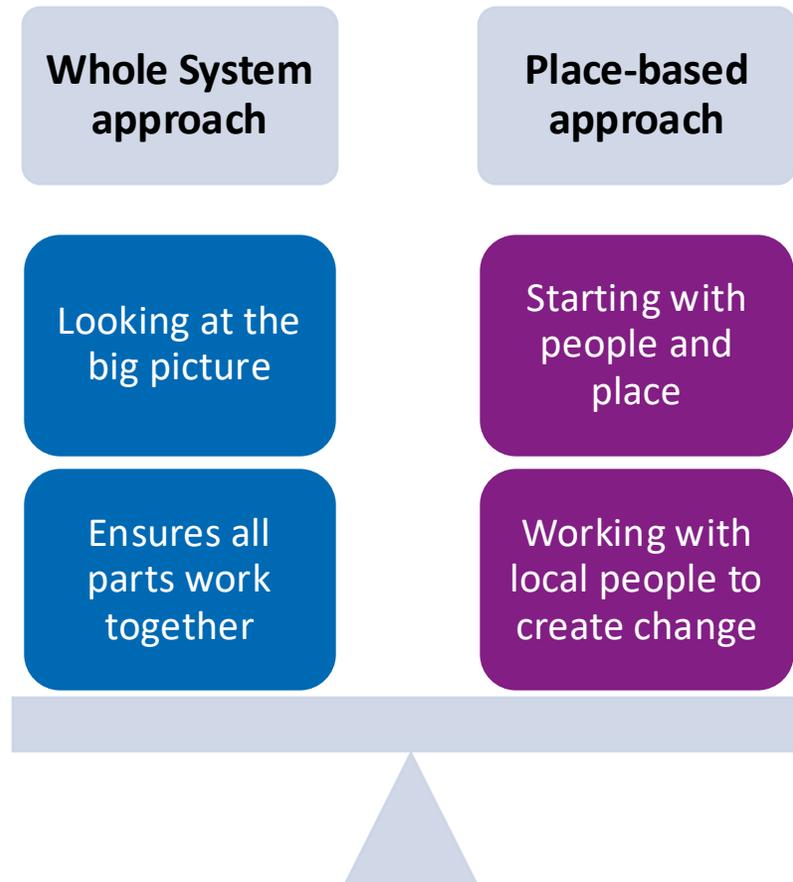


What do we mean by a whole system approach?

Look beyond the individual



Sustainable change requires both



Whole system only
Strategy without relevance

Place only
Energy without sustainability

Together
Lasting change

Place Partnerships



Sport England's national movement to **reduce inequalities.**



Grounded in place. Shaped by communities.



Making it **easier for people to move, in ways that work locally**



Place Partnerships in Greater Manchester

Greater Manchester
Moving > ^ < v



Lead by GM Moving



Place Partnership team in each borough

Collaboration

Community leadership

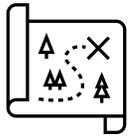
System change



How we make things happen, is as important as what we do.



GM Moving: Our role



Lead the strategic direction



Support local implementation



Connect learning across places



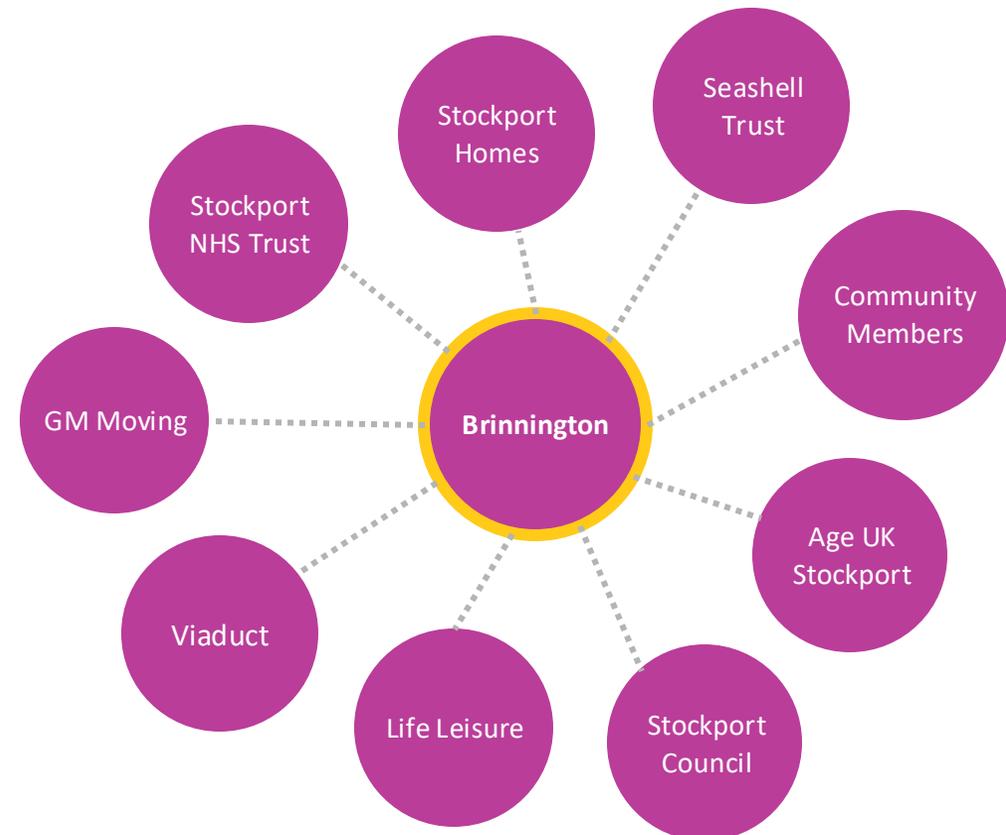
What does this look like in our places?

Who?

Residents
Organisations
Leaders

How?

Sharing insight
Influence
Resources



We measure impact through the Five Enablers of Change.

Joining up efforts across health, transport, education, housing, and other sectors to make activity everyone's business.

Building on local strengths and working with communities to shape change together.

Leaders setting the vision and creating space for everyone to lead and act together.

Changing policies and processes to make it easier to be active.

Trying things out, learning what works, and improving as we go.



Greater Manchester Place Evaluation & Learning Approaches

Metaphors for the tools that support our place based journey

Theory of Change

Like a... Map

How we create an idea for change

Mapping out our long-term vision, and the **steps, actions and strategy** that will lead us to the **desired outcomes**



Systems Maturity Matrix

Like a... Compass

How we can monitor our progress

A way to **track our direction of travel** by monitoring the growth development & presence of **healthy system behaviours** e.g. NELP 9 conditions of change



Reflections

Like a... Journal

How we reflect and learn

Looking back on our work to **understand what worked, why** and help us plan what next



CCA

Like a... Itinerary

How we see the pathway to change

National evaluation that help us **understand the patterns and conditions** that support and block change



Counts & Measures

Like a... Fitness tracker

How we count and measure things

A place to capture the **breadth of our work** and capture the important numbers that contribute to place based working



Community of Practice

Like a... Campfire

How we connect, share and learn

Gathering together to work through our collective challenges and share our learnings



Process Evaluations

Like... Jigsaw puzzle

How we unpack what works and why

Everyone holds a **different piece of the picture**, (data, stories, challenges). The process evaluation fits these pieces together so the **full picture** of how change happens becomes clear.



Locality examples: Confidence walks

- Brinnington Leisure Centre (Stockport)
- From disengaged community to thriving community hub
- **Decreasing inactivity:** walks, swims and pipeline into other activities in community
- **Tackling inequalities:** most inactive reached, social connection, low/no cost
- **System change:** 'confidence' brand now extended to swimming, cycling and gym – inclusion and adaptation embedded in organisational approach



Locality examples: Stoneyfield Park

- Seasonal use of waterlogged pocket park
- Community led, system enabled
- **Decreasing inactivity:** Playzone installed, refurbished play area, figure-8 path, walking groups, community cricket, year-round use
- **Connecting communities:** community events, community orchard & allotment, 'friends of' established
- **System change:** council role shifts to enabling, supporting, and trusting local leadership – now being replicated in other green space projects. Everyday movement is embedded into the local environment.

From



To



Locality examples: Deane & Derby

- Great Lever (Bolton)
- Cricket club moved from seasonal use to community hub
- **Decreasing inactivity:** women's fitness classes, walking cricket, community walks, learn to ride
- **Connecting communities:** food pantry, warm spaces, embroidery classes, litter picking, community garden, job fairs
- **System change:** skills, leadership, and confidence now sit locally. Multiple outcomes delivered through one place.

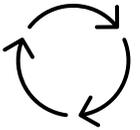


Your role in the movement

How You Can Contribute to the Place Partnership



Embed the principles in how you work



Reflect and learn to build the evidence base



Connect and share to strengthen the movement



Appendix 4

GM Moving Enablers of Change – to be used alongside case story template

Greater Manchester Moving: Enablers of Change



Appendix 5

Common evaluation and learning questions which have helped to shape the 'What next' section

Common E&L questions

In recognition that...

Appears to be a sticking point where relationships are not converted into productive partnerships. Possibly because organisational structures are not designed for co-ownership, so holding siloed working in place, there is an opportunity for designed approaches

(Collaboration- practice within and across sectors)

IF

Collaboration opportunity with Live Well, greater alignment of investment and commitment across the different spatial levels across GM, as the large public institutions see the value and impact of the approach, relationships with PCNs/ GPs

BY

Bury- work with PCN to reduce pressure on GPs for health interventions

Oldham- working with local partners in each district (VCFSE, PCNs, Leisure, and Culture for example) to reach a wider audience and prioritise wellbeing

Salford- raise the profile and importance of physical activity, by engaging and influencing key stakeholders in the target areas with a big focus on GP Practices/Health and Care Sector partners, housing providers and both primary and secondary schools

Wigan- build stronger relationships with PCN around Pivot work

Tameside- Connect Be Well and Live Well agendas

THEN

we will find new, effective, and efficient ways to enable PA

BECAUSE

Meaningfully centred in strategy and governance beyond 2028- mainstreaming roles, principles embedded in governance, PA in wider strategies and agendas. system-wide processes make it easy (easier) to do so.



Common E&L questions

In recognition that...

There is a need for deepening the approach to facilitate community leadership (not just engagement) and for it to be meaningfully centred in strategy and governance

(Community led action-supported community led initiatives)

IF

Collaboration with VCSFE to build community capacity, health, resilience and grow community led action



BY

Bolton- empower and upskill community groups and champions to guide direction of work

Bury- Neighbourhood teams co-design and deliver interventions for local people, build community health and resilience

Manchester- strengthen VCSE sector capacity

Rochdale- co-create opportunities to be active with communities, building an understanding of what sustainability looks like

Salford- investment into VCSE organisations to enable community power and delivery of physical activity opportunities

Tameside- explore sustainability models with community groups

Wigan- build resilience of VCFSE – share learnings from Westleigh CHB, continue Community Heath Building (CHB) in Westleigh

THEN

we can provide more equitable and sustainable conditions for people to be active in ways that they value

BECAUSE

Meaningfully centred in strategy and governance beyond 2028- mainstreaming roles, principles embedded in governance, PA in wider strategies and agendas. system-wide processes make it easy (easier) to do so.



Common E&L questions

In recognition that...

Without action on the structures and processes in place, people are not always enabled to act autonomously or test & learn

(Distributed leadership- people at all levels take on roles/ responsibility and can act autonomously)

IF

Taking learning or principles from initial hyperlocal areas into more hyperlocal areas, whilst adopting or embedding principles wider across locality in ways of working

BY

Trafford- support the creation, infrastructure, knowledge, and capacity of the move more partnership in each of the 7 areas

Stockport- apply place-based learning from Brinnington to other areas

Oldham- replicate the Community partnership approach in each of our 5 districts to meet the local need

Manchester- Build on learnings around successful community engagement from place based work such as Heart & Soul, Seeds of Joy and Place Partner 15 priority wards

THEN

we will create new processes which support joined-up working AND/OR distribute leadership/ power/ resources

BECAUSE

Meaningfully centred in strategy and governance beyond 2028- mainstreaming roles, principles embedded in governance, PA in wider strategies and agendas. system-wide processes make it easy (easier) to do so.

