



Expressions of Interest

Understanding and enabling the role of grassroots sports clubs in Greater Manchester as community assets

Grassroots sports clubs can be powerful community assets. They bring people together, create belonging and support wellbeing, contributing to stronger, healthier, more connected communities. Across Greater Manchester, clubs contribute to community life in different ways, shaped by their capacity, culture, relationships, facilities, resources and the wider systems around them.

Through this partnership, we want to understand what enables grassroots sports clubs to thrive as sustainable and inclusive community assets, what gets in the way, and how clubs, communities and partners can work together to create the conditions for success.

The research will generate practical learning that helps clubs and partners across Greater Manchester strengthen this role, while recognising that every club, community and place is different.

Key information	Details
Published	11 September 2026
Deadline	16 October 2026
Contact	Holly Grimes, Strategic Lead for Sport Partnerships
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GM Moving in Action

GM Moving is a leading Greater Manchester charity. Across our city region, we play a strategic leadership role in support of GM Moving in Action, Greater Manchester's whole system strategy for physical activity.

Nationally, we are one of 42 Active Partnerships. Together, we work to create the conditions for an active nation. We work closely with Sport England to support the local implementation of the Uniting the Movement Strategy.

Our purpose: GM Moving exists to change lives through movement, physical activity and sport.

Our vision: Thriving communities that are happier, healthier and more active.

Our mission: We lead, support and connect a Greater Manchester system that creates the conditions to enable **Active Lives for All**.

Read more about our [GM Moving in Action Strategy](#)

Please complete our [Consultancy Support Register](#) if you are interested in working with us, but don't feel like this is the right opportunity at this time.

Our Ways of Working



Research Brief

1. Research context and opportunity

Grassroots sports clubs form an essential part of the social infrastructure of many neighbourhoods. Their value is not only in what they deliver, but in the relationships, networks, and spaces they hold within their communities. As community-led organisations, they can create opportunities for people to connect, contribute, and shape what happens locally, with their value extending beyond their sporting offer.

Across Greater Manchester, clubs provide walking groups, mental health support, coffee mornings, family and youth activities, food banks and community pantries, and health outreach and advice. Often, these activities make use of club facilities and create more formal opportunities for people to meet and take part in community activities. In other clubs, this contribution may be less formal; providing a trusted place to meet, connecting people to wider opportunities, or building relationships that help people feel more connected to their community.

In some neighbourhoods, a sports club may be one of a small number of established community organisations or physical spaces. This makes their role particularly important in supporting good lives, health and wellbeing, aligning with Greater Manchester's [Live Well](#) ambition and its focus on everyday support in every neighbourhood. System partners, including National Governing Bodies, local authorities, leisure operators and VCFSE infrastructure organisations, are also increasingly recognising the wider contribution clubs make through volunteering, skills, community cohesion, opportunities for young people and local investment.

Despite the opportunity to strengthen the role of sports clubs as important community assets, we do not yet have a sufficiently clear understanding of what enables clubs to develop and sustain this wider community role, or how they can do so in ways that are shaped with and by their communities. Clubs themselves vary considerably in their capacity, leadership, culture, facilities, resources and relationships, while the local context in which they operate also matters, including how local priorities and voices influence activity. Partners may therefore need greater clarity about how they can enable and support clubs, without creating additional or unrealistic expectations for volunteers and organisations.

For the purposes of this research, we are interested in clubs as community assets where their facilities, relationships, capabilities, and activities contribute to wider community life and wellbeing, alongside their core sporting purpose. We are particularly interested in sports clubs that own or lease a physical facility or asset, reflecting their established presence in place and the potential to provide welcoming spaces for connection and activity. This is a deliberate boundary to keep the research focused and proportionate.

2. Rationale for this research

Existing research (e.g. [Access Sport & Bath University](#), *Building Stronger Communities*) demonstrates the contribution grassroots sports clubs make to mental and physical wellbeing, community cohesion and belonging ([Belong Network](#), *The State of Us*). It also highlights some of the current pressures facing clubs and their volunteers, including funding constraints, cost-of-living pressures, and the challenge of supporting the wellbeing of members and volunteers ([Sported Community Pulse Survey](#)). There are also existing and emerging approaches which seek to support clubs as community-focused assets - including the Rugby Football League's

[Community Wellbeing Hubs](#) approach, and the Football Association's [Thriving Community Clubs](#) ambition. Across Greater Manchester, many grassroots clubs are already engaging beyond their core membership and contributing to wider community outcomes.

However, we know less about *how* this role develops and is sustained in practice, and what conditions enable clubs to create value with their communities across different local contexts.

This raises questions such as:

- What enables clubs to build strong, reciprocal relationships with their communities?
- How do local people influence and shape what clubs do?
- What organisational, cultural and local conditions help clubs become welcoming and inclusive community spaces?
- How do these conditions vary across different sports, neighbourhoods and population groups?
- What knowledge, skills, relationships and support do clubs need to develop this role sustainably?
- How can system partners best support and enable this role without placing unsustainable expectations on volunteers and clubs?

The aim is not for every club to provide the same services, become a community hub or move away from its sporting purpose. It is to understand how clubs that want to deepen their community role can be supported in ways that are locally relevant, sustainable and inclusive.

A useful lens for this research is the relationship between **community-led action and system-enabled conditions**. We are interested in how clubs and communities can build on the assets, relationships, and capabilities already present locally, including opportunities for local people to influence and shape what happens. At the same time, we want to understand what the wider system needs to do differently - through funding, relationships, policy, commissioning, access to resources and other forms of support - to enable this. The research should therefore explore both what enables clubs and communities to act, and what enables the system around them to support that action.

3. Purpose & Research Aims

The purpose of this research is to understand what enables grassroots sports clubs to operate as sustainable and inclusive community assets, and how system partners can strengthen this role.

Core research question: What enables grassroots sports clubs to operate as sustainable and inclusive community assets, what gets in the way, and how can clubs, communities, and system partners create the conditions for success?

This research aims to:

- Build a shared understanding of the organisational, community and system-level factors that enable or constrain clubs in their role as community assets
- Explore how clubs work alongside communities, and how local people influence and shape the role clubs play in community life
- Understand how these factors vary across different sports, places and population groups, particularly those experiencing the greatest inequalities

- Identify the knowledge, skills, relationships, resources and support that clubs and volunteers need to develop this role sustainably
- Understand how key system partners – such as NGBs, local authorities, VCFSE infrastructure organisations, and GM Moving – can best support and enable clubs
- Identify implications and practical recommendations for support, investment, workforce and volunteer development, and partnership working across Greater Manchester

4. Research Scope

- **Geographic focus:** Greater Manchester, with learning drawn from multiple boroughs and neighbourhood contexts
- **Clubs:** Grassroots sports clubs whose primary purpose is sport, and which own or lease a facility or physical asset. The sample should include a range of sports, club sizes and operating models, with different levels and forms of wider community engagement
- **System partners:** GM Moving, National Governing Bodies, Local Authorities, VCFSE infrastructure organisations, Leisure operators, GMCA and other relevant partners
- **Equity & Inclusion:** Consideration of how experiences, opportunities and barriers may differ across places, communities and population groups, with particular attention to people experiencing the greatest inequalities

The research should consider the interaction between:

- **Club-level factors**, such as leadership, governance, culture, capacity, finance, facilities, workforce and volunteer development.
- **Community-level factors**, such as local relationships, trust, social connections, participation, belonging, community priorities and opportunities for influence.
- **Place and system-level factors**, such as funding, policy, commissioning, networks, partnership behaviours and the support available to clubs.

The research should recognise that there is no single model of a successful community club. These factors will vary across different places, communities and population groups; the purpose is to identify transferable principles and enablers.

5. Methodology

We welcome proposals for a clear, proportionate, and creative methodology that can generate robust insight within the available budget. We are open to a range of qualitative and mixed methods approaches.

We recognise that the available budget will require a focused approach. We are more interested in methodologies that prioritise depth of learning, practical insight and opportunities for action, rather than large-scale data collection.

At minimum, the approach should enable the supplier to:

- Gather insight directly from a varied sample of grassroots sports clubs
- Include perspectives from key system partners who support or influence sports clubs, such as NGBs, VCFSE Infrastructure Organisations, local authorities, and GM Moving

- Capture both depth (e.g., interviews, focus groups, case studies), and, where proportionate and useful, breadth (e.g., survey or other scalable method)
- Explore club, community and system-level factors that help or hinder clubs in their role as community assets, including how communities influence and shape what clubs do
- Identify implications for future workforce and volunteer development
- Create opportunities to test and refine emerging findings with clubs, communities and partners

We are particularly interested in participatory and strengths-based approaches that value the knowledge and experience of clubs and communities. Proposals should explain how participants will help shape the research and sense-making process, rather than only contribute data to it.

6. Intended outcomes and outputs

The research should generate practical insight into what enables or constrains clubs as community assets, and actionable learning for clubs, partners and the wider system. It should also consider how these factors may differ across communities, places and population groups, particularly where inequalities exist.

Outcomes

- A clearer understanding of how grassroots sports clubs can maximise their role as community assets, including how they can better connect to local needs and opportunities, and contribute to outcomes relating to physical activity, prevention, social cohesion, volunteering, and reducing inequalities.
- A stronger understanding of the conditions, support and partnerships clubs need to thrive in this role, including from key system partners.
- Practical recommendations for clubs and key system partners to strengthen the role of clubs as community assets.
- Increased understanding of how support for clubs can align with and contribute to Greater Manchester's ambitions for active lives, community-led health & wellbeing, and stronger, more connected communities.
- Actionable learning that informs future workforce development, investment, partnership working and policy development across the system.

Outputs

We welcome proposals for the most useful and accessible combination of outputs. Depending on the proposed approach, these might include:

- A concise research report and executive summary, plus a short presentable format e.g. a slide deck.
- Practical recommendations tailored to clubs and different system partners.
- A set of case studies illustrating different contexts, journeys and models.
- Accessible learning resources for clubs, volunteers and paid staff.

- Facilitated learning sessions with clubs, communities and partners across Greater Manchester.
- A practical framework or set of principles describing the conditions that enable clubs to thrive as community assets, where this is supported by the findings.
- An action framework identifying potential next steps, responsible partners and opportunities for collaboration.

Outputs should be accessible and useful to people working in different roles, including club volunteers who may have limited time to engage with a detailed report.

7. Partnership requirements

We are looking for a learning partner, rather than a traditional research delivery organisation. We welcome proposals from individual organisations or collaborative partnerships with relevant experience in research, community sport, place-based working, systems change, community development, or related fields.

We are particularly interested in organisations or partnerships that:

- Have a strong track record, established relationships and an active contribution to this agenda in Greater Manchester
- Bring relevant knowledge, expertise and networks
- Share our commitment to learning, collaboration, and systems change
- Can translate research into practical action and learning
- Can demonstrate how this opportunity aligns with and adds value to their wider priorities and ambitions

Collaborative proposals are welcomed where partners bring complementary strengths and have clear roles.

How we'd like to work together:

We are looking for an approach that:

- Builds on existing activity, relationships and strengths within Greater Manchester
- Creates opportunities for shared learning, influence and action, rather than simply delivering a research commission.
- Mobilises collective skills, expertise and networks to support change
- Embeds learning across the wider system and generates practical insights

Role of GM Moving:

GM Moving will work alongside the research partner to provide strategic context, relationships and connections, support engagement and recruitment, and help test, communicate and apply the learning. This includes:

- Connecting the partner with relevant networks across sport, physical activity, health and VCFSE systems.
- Supporting engagement with clubs and system partners, including participant recruitment and communications.

- Contributing existing evidence, strategic context and insight.
- Participating in shared learning and sense-making.
- Helping convene opportunities to test findings and support action.
- Supporting communication and implementation of learning across Greater Manchester.

8. Criteria:

If you are interested in collaborating with GM Moving, please submit a proposal including the following:

Organisation: An introduction to your organisation, including relevant background and expertise	1 page
Contribution: A summary of what you would bring to the opportunity, including any relevant existing data and insight held, and how this would help to achieve the intended outcomes	1 page
Approach: Your proposed approach, including costs and timescales	1 page
Learning and Impact: How you will capture, share and support the use of learning	1 page

Contract period: November 2026 to May 2027

Budget available:

We anticipate that the full scope of work outlined in this brief can be delivered within a budget of **£15,000 + VAT**, and proposals should be based on this assumption.

There is potential to increase the available budget to **up to £20,000 + VAT** for proposals that can demonstrate clear additional value beyond the core requirements. This is intended to support enhancements that would strengthen the quality, impact, reach, or legacy of the research, rather than an increase in cost for delivering the same scope.

Suppliers are invited to:

- Submit a proposal for delivering the core scope within the £15,000 + VAT budget.
- **Optionally** identify any additional elements that could be delivered through an increased budget, up to £20,000 + VAT.
- Clearly articulate the benefits these enhancements would bring, how they would maximise the value and impact of the research, and why they represent additional activity beyond the core requirements.

Examples might include deeper stakeholder engagement, additional case study development, enhanced analysis, supplementary outputs, dissemination activities, or other innovations that would increase the usefulness and influence of the research.

9. Timeline:

Activity	Timing
Brief issued	Friday 11 September 2026
Deadline for expressions of interest	Friday 16 October 2026, 5pm
Shortlisting and decision making	19-29 October 2026
Organisations informed of decision	Fri 30 October 2026
Organisation appointed	Monday 2 November 2026
Development and delivery	November 2026 to April 2027
Initial Contract End	May 2027

How will submissions be assessed?

- Each submission will be scored against the criteria specified in the brief
- Shortlisting and decision making will take place with internal and external partners
- All applicants will be notified of the outcome and offered constructive feedback.

10. Useful Resources & Case Studies

- [GM Live Well](#)
- [Wigan St Judes ARLFC | Buddle](#)
- [10GM and GM Moving Test & Learn – Connecting Communities \(Wigan\)](#)
- [System conditions for change](#)
- [Moving Communities platform](#)
- [Belong | The State of Us: Community strength and cohesion in the UK - Belong](#)

11. Further enquiries:

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