

Impact case study: place-based leadership programme



About the place-based leadership programme

From April 2024 to March 2025, the Local Government Association (LGA), in partnership with Sport England, coordinated a pilot place-based leadership programme. During this period, 26 two-day courses were delivered in new [Sport England Place Expansion Partnership areas](#).

Insight, learning and feedback from this pilot year have all shaped the ongoing design of this programme, which will now be delivered across all 80 Place Expansion Partnership areas.

Since April 2025, the place-based leadership programme has been fully embedded within Sport England's wider Leading the Movement work, ensuring its long-term integration and impact.

This case study highlights the experience of Northamptonshire's Place Partnership, including the outcomes and impacts of the place-based leadership programme on local organisations and their approaches to tackling physical inactivity.

Northamptonshire Place Partnership

The Northamptonshire Place Partnership was part of the first phase of new Place Partnerships funded by Sport England. They have been working closely with leaders, policymakers, organisations and community members to identify barriers and develop solutions for tackling inequalities in physical activity for the last six years.

The Place Partnership Team is a collaboration between Northamptonshire Sport, West Northamptonshire Council, North Northamptonshire Council, the Integrated

Care System and the Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise sector. Using a range of data sources, Northamptonshire aims to target resources in four 'priority places' areas with the highest levels of inactivity, to ensure the maximum impact. A key aim of the work is to create sustainable, long-standing change that improves people's health and life outcomes.

One of the key priorities for Northamptonshire was to bring together the different partners across the place, away from their own context, to enable a shift in perspective from achieving short term outcomes to creating long term system change. The LGA and place-based leadership programme was the opportunity to bring different partners together to have those open discussions and develop actions for moving forward.

“The importance of having different partners on the programme was to show how systems leadership is multi-layered, it isn't just about the top management. It's about everyone working together through the system and for the system.” – **Strategic Lead for Inequalities, Northamptonshire Sport**

Northamptonshire Sport and an LGA appointed facilitator worked together to curate a programme that addressed their needs as a place. In collaboration they decided to deliver a one-day session first, after which they could **reflect on the learning** and use that to determine content for the second day, which took place one month later. This approach also helped to **connect the theory with the ongoing work**, with less distinction between the two.

The key aims for Northamptonshire when engaging with the place-based leadership programme were to:



Improve the level of knowledge and understanding of systems leadership amongst partners and identify any gaps.



Identify the blockages that prevent systems leadership and discuss ways to overcome them.



Identify existing connections between partners and the impacts they have or can have on tackling inequalities in physical activity.

Outcomes and impacts

The leadership programme gave attendees **the tools and the knowledge about how the system works and how it connects**. This then supported attendees to build new relationships and connections during the training. For example, key connections were made between two previously disparate teams, the local community team and the sports development team who were based in different towns. They are now in discussions about how they can work together to access funding for shared outcomes, bringing together their knowledge around health, sport and physical activity. **This greater connectivity and relationship building stemmed from having the right people in the room together, facilitated by a successful ripple effect mapping exercise.** As a result of the programme the Strategic Lead for Inequalities at Northamptonshire Sport has been working with these local authority teams on ways **to be more innovative around accessing funding and grants**, for example bringing in the business sector as a possible conduit for accessing innovation funding, not automatically a usual first port of call.



The relationship building and networking element of the training led to attendees having a **clearer understanding of their place in the system**. It was also the opportunity to stand back and look at what the whole system looks like. It further clarified that **all have a**

part to play in tackling physical inactivity, even if that is not something they immediately see as within their domain.

“It springboarded better relationships, having two days to sit down with people was beneficial. It’s all learning, people are asking ‘why am I in the room if it’s about physical activity?’ But it’s not just for those who work in sport and physical activity, it’s for everybody in the system.” – **Connect Northamptonshire, working on behalf of the voluntary and community sector**

After the training Northamptonshire Sport were able to share their learning from their own data gathering work and this generated a set of actions for the partners to **develop their own data gathering methods to inform decision making** around key priorities. In addition, discussions over the two-day programme created the opportunity for partners to think about **ideas for how as a system, they can effectively tell the story of the place, to share information and learning** with other partners in the system.

Starting to tackle barriers to physical activity

Following discussions about barriers to inactivity and community engagement within the programme North Northants Council have initiated a set of engagement activities with partners to tackle barriers to physical activity in key areas. This has started with a family community event, bringing in local clubs and societies to deliver different physical activities to residents in the community to try and encourage them to take part. They have also set up a Health Day for all the health professionals in their locality, including social prescribers to build networks and create opportunities for physical activity. In addition, they have developed a new relationship with a Business Manager at one of the GP super practices in the area who contributed to the development of the North Northamptonshire Active Communities Strategy, a North Northants Council framework designed to increase physical activity, leisure and sport opportunities for residents, aiming to improve health and wellbeing. They are also in discussions with health providers to develop a community hub approach to engage with residents who are currently inactive.

Future intentions

As a result of seeing the value and impact of systems working and relationship building there has been an **increase in levels of confidence to take the first steps towards enacting change** – and partners are starting to do this in their areas. Since the two days 30 original participants have been brought together again to continue the learning process facilitated by the same deliverers.

In July 2025, **the Northamptonshire Place Partnership delivered a 1-day system leadership session to 25 new participants from across the local system**, including Local Authority, Health, VCSE, and Sporting Community. This leads into a programme of work to explore the conditions in places necessary to tackle inequalities in physical activity, bringing together partners from across the system to further work on system leadership and support efforts in developing a narrative for local place-based work through this Place Partnership and across the local system.

The next session is planned for the original cohort in September, which has now evolved into a **Community of Practice**. This provides **dedicated time for leaders to connect in person, reflect collectively, and deepen their understanding of the system and the conditions required for meaningful change**. There are also planned **sessions on storytelling to influence change, fearless leadership – leading systems with courage and empathy** and a session bringing together the participants from all the system leadership work to create a larger movement of system change.

For further information about Sport England's Leading the Movement place-based and national programmes and online support resources, visit leadingthemovement.org.

