

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 impact of the place-based leadership programme on Blackpool's Place Partnership, summarising outcomes observed so far and outlining plans for future development of a systems approach in the area.

Blackpool Place Partnership

Blackpool is one of Sport England's Place Expansion Partnerships, a programme aimed at tackling inactivity and inequalities, making physical activity accessible to all. Central to this in Blackpool is the implementation of a systems approach, delivered through the initiative [Move Together Blackpool](#). This is a collaboration between Blackpool Council, Active Lancashire and a range of local community organisations.

Prior to participating in the place-based leadership programme, members of the Blackpool Place Partnership had been involved in a range of projects aimed at increasing residents' physical activity levels – such as Get Out, Get Active and Couch to 5k. Whilst taking part was valuable, project activities were largely delivered in siloes, with limited collaboration between local organisations. The local environment was described as competitive rather than cooperative.

The two-day training was co-designed by the Blackpool place lead, the lead training facilitator and representatives from local organisations, including the Blackpool Football Club Community Trust and the Integrated Care Board. The training was attended by both operational and leadership staff from a wide range of local organisations, such as Blackpool Council, local charities and the Jobcentre, spanning sectors including public health, transport, environmental health, leisure and education. The Blackpool Place Partnership had a number of priorities they wanted to focus on by engaging in the place-based leadership programme:



Increased collaboration between local organisations by introducing systems approaches to their work.



Engaging more effectively with young people to increase their physical activity levels.



Implementing more innovative ways of tackling physical inactivity amongst the local population.

Outcomes and impacts

The place-based leadership programme **deepened participants' understanding of systems leadership**, particularly in addressing physical inactivity and inequality. Attendees also **gained confidence and knowledge to lead change in their organisation**.





Although systemic changes will take many years to yield results, participants had **started to make some initial changes within their own teams and organisations**. For example, one attendee introduced walking meetings and using outdoor spaces to boost staff physical activity levels.

The programme also helped **secure commitment from senior leaders** at Blackpool Council to adopt systems approaches and training across the area. This has led to greater investment of human and financial resources into training across local organisations and the Place Partnership.



“Senior leadership are brought into it... One of our CEOs said they've changed their whole management because of the systems leadership training.” – **Youth Service Manager, Blackpool Council**



The training **encouraged partners to develop new and stronger relationships with local organisations** to explore new approaches to tackling physical inactivity and commit to action. One attendee described how the training shifted their mindset from being competitive to prioritising collective success, even if it meant sacrifices for his own organisation. This has improved the relationships they now hold with other organisations.

“I now have the best relationships I've had with several other organisations because of the leadership programme.” – **CEO, Empowerment Charity**

The introduction of Happy Gyms through new partnerships

The youth service manager in collaboration with a leisure service manager launched an initiative called Happy Gyms, aimed at supporting young people who were perceived as anti-social by others in gym settings across Blackpool. Having both completed the training, they **felt equipped to try a new and innovative approach**. They explored reported issues by customers, assessed the environment and considered what makes a positive gym culture. Over the eight-month project, complaints about young people's behaviour dropped significantly – by 80% in the first two months, and there have been no complaints over the last six months.

Other impacts that were identified included:

- Professional training and learning becoming more important to individuals and organisations.
- Local organisations aligning their strategies to deliver greater benefits for the community.

Future intentions



Following the local leadership training, the Blackpool place lead and their team recognised an opportunity to expand the systems training offer to young people aged 16-24. The aim is to equip them with the knowledge to drive change and improve physical activity and wellbeing in their communities.

Additionally, Blackpool's Place Partnership's goal is to **ensure that all staff in the local authority working to address physical inactivity and inequalities are trained in systems approaches**. They want to encourage cross-sector collaboration and encourage others to introduce innovative ways to tackle inactivity.

“We will continue our systems approach journey, and I probably won't stop until systems leadership is part of an induction process when you join Blackpool Council.” –
Place Lead, Move Together Blackpool

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

