

MOVING ROTHERHAM

Physical Activity & Sport Strategy for Rotherham

2026-2031



Rotherham working together to
enable everyone to be active.



FOREWORD

I am excited to share with you Rotherham's new 5-year physical activity and sport strategy. It sets out our shared approach to enabling people across the borough to move more.

This strategy:

- Sets out the Moving Rotherham vision, showing how physical activity and sport can support healthier, happier and more connected communities;
- Brings people together around a shared purpose, strengthening collaboration across partners and sectors;
- Outlines guiding principles and clear priorities to align action and support collective impact.

Creating a more active Rotherham must be inclusive and reach everyone. To inform this strategy, we have heard from thousands of different Rotherham people about what helps and hinders them from being active. Those voices have helped us create this set of priorities.

This strategy is for everyone who lives or works in the borough. Individuals, groups and organisations all have a role in shaping the physical and social environment in Rotherham. To support everyone to be more active we need to work together with partners who have the reach, influence, and trusted relationships with the people and communities who will benefit the most from being more active.

This is a call to action; we need you to join us to together achieve our vision so:
“the conditions exist where everyone in Rotherham is able to move more, in ways that feel enjoyable and meaningful, to improve health, happiness and quality of life.”



Emily Parry-Harries
Director of Public Health for Rotherham

A note on language:

The terms 'physical activity' and 'movement' are used throughout this strategy to describe all forms of being active. This includes sport and non-competitive physical activity or exercise, as well as the informal and incidental activity that is part of everyday life.

The term 'system' is used to describe the broad range of factors that influence physical activity, including people, places, policies, environments, services and organisations. It is only by working with all these different factors that we can enable people to be more active.

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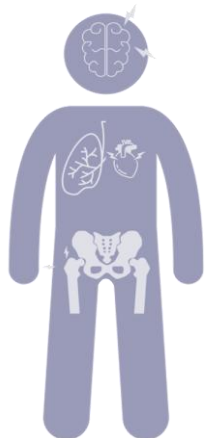
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»»» CONTEXT

The national Chief Medical Officer’s guidelines recommend that **everyone should move regularly, every day**. This includes activities that raise our heart rates and how fast we are breathing, as well as activities that build strength and balance. Being active is a **proven way to protect and improve physical and mental health**.

Why be active?

BENEFITS FOR INDIVIDUALS



It **reduces the risk of long-term conditions** such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, cancer, obesity, dementia and musculoskeletal problems, and it can also help to **stop some conditions from worsening**. It supports better coordination, flexibility, and energy levels, enabling people to carry out everyday tasks more effectively.

Being active can have a powerful impact on mental wellbeing by reducing stress, anxiety, and symptoms of depression through the release of endorphins, often referred to as ‘feel good’ hormones. It can boost self-esteem and confidence as individuals develop skills, achieve goals, and experience a sense of accomplishment. It can provide opportunities for social interaction and teamwork, helping to build relationships, reduce feelings of isolation, and improve overall mood.

BENEFITS FOR THE ECONOMY



The health and happiness that physical activity can promote can help keep us **fit for work**. The many ways to be active can **generate jobs** and support the leisure sector to thrive. By staying healthier, we can **live independently** for longer and rely less on health and care services.

BENEFITS FOR COMMUNITIES



Being active is often something we do together or in shared public spaces. By coming together to enjoy and take part in physical activity or sport, **communities are strengthened** and more connected. Sport and physical activity can support diverse communities to come together in inclusive ways through a shared common purpose. Rotherham people have talked about how being active in the outdoors is a way they love to spend time with **friends and family**.

Building on what's strong

Rotherham benefits from an abundance of **natural assets**. The borough has award-winning public parks, Country Parks, a higher-than-average proportion of green space, as well as rivers, lakes, canals and trails that provide everyday opportunities for walking, cycling and other recreation.

The borough also has a **proud sporting heritage**, with facilities such as the AESSEAL New York Stadium, which hosted matches during the UEFA Women's European Championships 2022, and Herringthorpe Stadium, home of Olympic champion Peter Elliott. Rotherham has successfully hosted other events including the Tour of Britain, National Open Water Swimming events at our country parks, and British Cycling regional BMX events, and local events such as Uplift Festival and the School Baton Relay as part of Rotherham's Children's Capital of Culture Festival Year 2025.



As well as green and blue spaces and high-quality leisure facilities, Rotherham also has a **well-embedded and trusted network of local partners**, including community and voluntary organisations, physical activity providers, sports clubs, community groups and larger organisations.

Rotherham benefits from strong partnerships beyond its boundaries, working closely with the Active Partnership Yorkshire Sport Foundation and with other experts such as the National Centre for Sport and Exercise Medicine (NCSEM) in Sheffield. Through its **Place Expansion partnership with Sport England**, the borough works collaboratively to apply evidence-led approaches and maximise the role of physical activity in addressing health and wellbeing priorities.

The challenges

However, there are many features of modern life which reduce opportunities to move routinely. Sedentary jobs, car-dependent travel, screen-based entertainment and more complex lives and time pressures have all contributed to lower levels of daily movement. Data shows that a significant proportion of Rotherham people do not meet the recommended physical activity levels necessary to improve health, with **1 in 3 adults in Rotherham inactive** (doing less than 30 minutes activity a week)* which is below the national average.

Evidence shows that **opportunities to be physically active are not equally distributed** across Rotherham. For some people, being active is far more difficult due to factors such as income, geography, poor health, disability, age, social circumstances, design and safety of neighbourhoods, and access to facilities. These barriers are not about motivation or personal choice, but about the environments and conditions people live in.

To address this, **everyday movement needs to be designed back into daily life in Rotherham**. This includes making it easier to walk, wheel or cycle to local shops and services, accessible and inclusive participation in organised sport or exercise, and increased opportunities for informal movement such as spending leisure time and playing in local parks and public spaces.

The scale of this challenge is significant. It will require considerable focus of time, resource, capacity and strategic intent, to influence the relevant levers to improve the conditions which will make being active possible and appealing to everyone.



*The latest Sport England Active Lives Adult Survey, (covering Nov 2024 to Nov 2025, published April 2026), provides the most up-to-date picture of physical activity levels in Rotherham. In Rotherham, only 60-62% of adults are classed as active, meeting the recommended at least 150 minutes of activity per week. A further 8-10% are fairly active, completing between 30 and 149 minutes each week. However, around 30-33% of adults are inactive, doing less than 30 minutes of activity per week. When compared to the national picture, Rotherham performs below average. Across England, 64.6% of adults are active and only around 22-23% are inactive. This means Rotherham has approximately 8-10 percentage points more inactive adults than the national average.

»» HOW CHANGE WILL HAPPEN

This strategy is underpinned by a set of shared core principles that reflect how partners across Rotherham believe change should happen. They represent what is most important in creating a borough that is healthier, happier and more connected through sport, physical activity and movement. They describe how partners will work together through providing a common approach and set of expectations. These principles are not prescriptive or restrictive. Instead, they offer a flexible, practical framework to guide decision making, align collective action and support collaboration across different organisations, communities and sectors.

We have together committed to:

Join things up

- Developing and communicating a shared narrative
- Connecting the 'system' to more of itself – connecting people and organisations together across sectors and specialties
- Collaborating across organisations in equally mutually beneficial ways

Start with people

- Involving communities in thinking, decision making and delivery of change
- Developing the confidence, capacity and capability of our workforce and communities
- Inspire strategic leaders to help leverage change
- Engage and include those facing inequality and who are least active

Explore and be brave

- Be brave and take risks in trying new and bold things
- Do things differently but keep doing things that have worked well
- Learn and iterate as we go
- Build aspirations and a vision for the way change can happen

Build for the long term

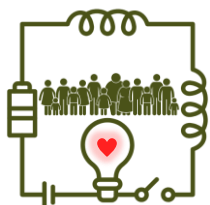
- Think about how our work becomes sustainable
- Build on local assets and strengths of our place and communities
- Embed physical activity into every part of 'system'

Embed equity, diversity and inclusion

- Consider the factors that influence and impact on capability, opportunity and motivation for physical activity
- Ensure activity opportunities are appropriate, varied, motivate and appeal to our diverse communities
- Strive for inclusivity, reaching those who are least active and most excluded, and including those with lived experience in our design and planning

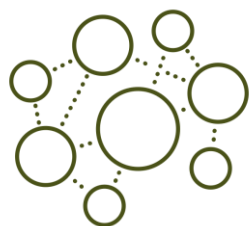
»» HOW WE WILL WORK TOGETHER

Working collaboratively across communities, partners and sectors is essential to achieving meaningful change across the borough. No single organisation can do this alone; we must unite around a shared purpose to create a strong and sustained movement for change.



Each partner is one part of a complex, interconnected system. By aligning our efforts, we can influence **process, practice and policy**, ensuring that physical activity is embedded throughout the system. Central to this approach is a commitment to placing **people and communities at the heart of everything we do**, enabling joined-up action that delivers lasting impact.

Change will be driven through **collective action and shared leadership** across Rotherham. By working together through the Moving Rotherham Partnership and governance structures, partners will align behind a single borough-wide vision and strategy to influence the system levers that influence physical activity outcomes.



At the heart of Moving Rotherham is a **'Big Active' network** of people and organisations from across the borough who act as a catalyst for change. This network spans a wide range of sectors, roles and communities, with different amounts of time, influence and capacity. The Moving Rotherham structure is intentionally designed to be inclusive, ensuring that organisations and individuals can engage in ways that reflect their role, expertise and reach.

Within this network are other networks with a specific focus, including the **Inclusive Activity network**, a range of **sports networks**, and groups working together on communications and other priorities or projects.



A strategic partnership group of **'System Leaders'** meet regularly to work together to drive and monitor delivery of planned activity and to share insight, learning and evaluation. Oversight and governance is provided by the **Moving Rotherham Board** who report into the **Rotherham Health and Wellbeing Board** and **Cultural Partnership Board**.

Aligned to our priorities and through delivering this strategy, we seek to expand our networks and engagement with the wider Rotherham community so that everyone is aware of or inspired by Moving Rotherham.



»»» OUR PRIORITIES

We have together identified **3 priority audiences** that align with Sport England’s Uniting the Movement strategy:



CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE



PEOPLE WITH LONG TERM HEALTH CONDITIONS AND/OR DISABILITIES



COMMUNITIES WHERE ACTIVITY LEVELS ARE LOWEST

To ensure we work effectively with these audiences, we are also prioritising **3 enabling themes** of:



COMMUNICATION



INCLUSION



PLACE MAKING & SYSTEM CHANGE

As we are working using a systems approach, there will obviously be overlap between these priorities and themes.

We are mindful, that whilst we have focused on getting the least active people more active, we will not completely remove our focus from supporting those people who are **currently active to stay active**. There are thousands of people in Rotherham active every week through a range of sport, leisure or informal activity. For them to stay active, we need to continue to ensure facilities are suitable, a skilled workforce or volunteer network is available, and activities remain accessible.

PRIORITY 1: CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE



Children and young people are a key priority for Rotherham. They are at a formative stage of life, developing habits and behaviours that will shape their **long-term health, wellbeing and life expectancy**. What happens in childhood and adolescence can set the trajectory for the rest of life.

<p>Builds strong bones and muscles</p>  <p>Regular activity strengthens muscles and builds bone density, which is vital for healthy growth.</p>	<p>Promotes a healthy weight</p>  <p>Physical activity helps children maintain a healthy weight and reduces the risk of obesity.</p>	<p>Boosts cardiovascular health</p>  <p>It strengthens the heart and lungs, improving endurance and circulation.</p>
<p>Improves motor skills</p>  <p>It enhances coordination, balance, posture, and flexibility.</p>	<p>Reduces risk of chronic diseases</p>  <p>Staying active can lower the risk of developing conditions like type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure later in life.</p>	<p>Boosts mood and mental health</p>  <p>Exercise releases endorphins, which can help reduce stress, anxiety, and depression.</p>
<p>Increases self-esteem</p>  <p>Achieving physical goals and improving skills can lead to higher self-confidence and self-esteem.</p>	<p>Develops social skills</p>  <p>Participating in team activities or group games helps children learn teamwork, cooperation, and communication.</p>	<p>Fosters healthy habits</p>  <p>Kids who are active are more likely to become active adults, maintaining healthy habits throughout their lives.</p>
<p>Improves brain function</p>  <p>Exercise increases blood flow to the brain, which can improve focus, concentration, and memory.</p>	<p>Enhances academic performance</p>  <p>Improved concentration and cognitive function often lead to better academic outcomes.</p>	<p>Improves sleep patterns</p>  <p>Physical activity can lead to better and more restful sleep.</p>

Investing early in positive physical activity and sport experiences can have a profound and lasting impact, setting habits with the potential to improve both quality of life and healthy life expectancy. Schools, early years settings, families, community organisations and local environments all play a critical role in shaping opportunities for children and young people to move more. Children’s earliest physical activity is through play and developing the basic skills of movement. There is joy and benefits to be had through active play continuing throughout the life course.

By creating supportive environments and positive experiences, and by strengthening the connections between schools, families and communities, Rotherham can help children and young people build confidence, resilience and a lifelong relationship with movement. These early interventions do not just benefit individuals but contribute to healthier communities and a stronger future for the whole borough.





Rotherham has a comparatively high number of people living with **one or more long term health condition**, often developing earlier in life than in other areas. This is reflected in the level of support provided through adult social care, with higher levels of care packages for working age adults compared to many neighbouring places. Long term conditions can affect every aspect of daily life, including employment, relationships, independence, hobbies and family life.



Physical activity plays a critical role in **preventing, managing and living well** with long term health conditions. Increasing activity levels can help people live more years in good health, reduce pain and symptoms, and support better physical and mental wellbeing. For those already living with long term conditions, regular movement can improve confidence, function and overall quality of life.

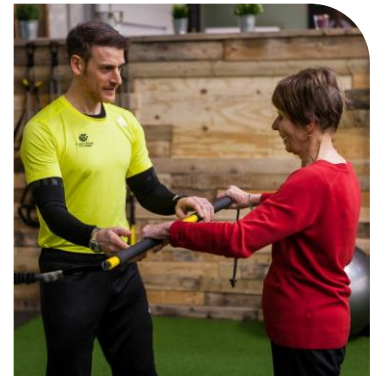
People experience many **touchpoints with health and social care services** throughout their lives. These interactions represent key opportunities to support and influence positive behaviour change. By working across the system, we aim to strengthen these touchpoints and increase **training and development for the workforce**, ensuring that every opportunity to encourage and support physical activity is maximised. The ambition is for physical activity to be fully **embedded within health and care pathways**, supported by the right structures, processes and ways of working so that movement is considered a core part of everyday practice as prevention and treatment.



The Moving Rotherham ambition is that **everyone in Rotherham can experience the benefits of physical activity in ways that work for them**, supporting the development of healthier and happier communities across the borough. Communities are not defined solely by geography; they can also be shaped by shared identity, heritage, culture, faith, interests, employment, or lived experience.



Communities are at the heart of Rotherham and central to this strategy. Health is shaped in the places where people **live, work, learn and play**, and through the relationships, behaviours and social connections that develop over time. Strong communities play a vital role in increasing physical activity levels and supporting long term health and wellbeing. Community life, social connection and having a voice in local decisions are all key influences on positive health outcomes.



Many communities with the lowest levels of physical activity also experience the greatest challenges, including **poor health, disability and wider inequalities**. Some neighbourhoods are more likely to experience poverty and lower incomes, and these also face barriers such as poorer access to green space. The interplay of the various factors of inequality can mean being active is difficult for many people. In our work we set out to make an extra effort to support those who need it most.



Involvement in physical activity and sport has the power to help rebalance these inequalities by bringing people together, reducing antisocial behaviour, strengthening social cohesion and supporting positive mental health. The building blocks for change already exist within communities, including local knowledge, skills, social networks and trusted community organisations and settings. The most sustainable and successful change happens when **communities themselves are supported to lead and take action**.



We have heard from communities how transport and access to opportunities and feelings about their environment, can negatively influence their ability to take part in physical activity. Together we will support more people to **walk, wheel and cycle for short journeys** across Rotherham. To achieve this, walking and cycling must be made **accessible, safe and convenient**, becoming an enjoyable, normal and realistic choice for everyday travel close to home. Public transport also plays a vital role, whilst sedentary car use for short daily journeys should be a last option for those who are able to walk, wheel or cycle.

THEME 1: COMMUNICATION



Effective communication and consistent messaging are essential to the success of this strategy. Behaviour change is significantly more powerful when messages are **shared, reinforced and amplified collectively**, rather than delivered in isolation. Creating the right platforms and conditions for connection is therefore critical to enabling change at scale. We know not everyone is aware of all the opportunities to be active that already exist in our borough and we want to make it easier for them to find out.

Our ambition is to provide and support **inclusive channels for communication**, working closely with communities and partners to share learning, celebrate success and build momentum. By communicating in a clear, joined up and accessible way, we can strengthen connection, grow a shared movement and support lasting behaviour change across Rotherham.

THEME 2: INCLUSION



There are deep and persistent inequalities within our communities, with those who are excluded often experiencing significantly poorer outcomes. For people who face barriers to inclusion, **quality of life and healthy life expectancy can be up to 20 years lower** than for those who are more advantaged.

Inclusive practice is therefore essential across Rotherham. Too many people are marginalised due to a wide range of factors, including disability, long term health conditions, poverty, culture, language, age, gender, caring responsibilities and social isolation. The barriers faced inter-relate and are complex, far reaching and often compounded over time.

As a borough, we must work collectively to **identify and remove these barriers**, while providing the right support, adaptations and enabling environments to ensure everyone can participate. By embedding inclusion into everything we do, Rotherham can become a fairer and more equitable borough, where everyone has the opportunity to experience the benefits of physical activity, connection and a good quality of life.





Place-making and system change is the enabling theme that pulls together ways of working to influence levers of change. It is about support across the borough to influence and change physical environments, service interactions, facilities and opportunities that support a more physically active way of life across the borough.

Without the right skills, knowledge and confidence, meaningful and sustainable change cannot take place. Developing a strong, informed and capable workforce and community is essential if physical activity is to become the norm rather than the exception, and if progress is to be maintained for future generations. Education and training for individuals, organisations and sectors are therefore key components to our collective ability to communicate effectively. Investing in, and amplifying, education, training and workforce development focused on the benefits of physical activity and sport is a key catalyst for behaviour change. To sustain and build on our already active population, we must ensure that the coaching, officiating, and the volunteer workforce is effectively supported so that opportunities for our residents can continue and grow.



There are many organisations and policies that influence physical activity opportunities directly or indirectly without intention. This theme is about bringing a focus of intention to decisions and plans to facilitate active ways of life, such as influencing local green and blue space, public realm, housing developments, regeneration plans, delivery of local services such as libraries or health care, so that these **promote and facilitate physical activity and reduce barriers to access and opportunity.**

Last and not least, we need to keep adapting to our **changing world.** We will need to find ways of being resilient to our changing weather and must be mindful of the impact of our activities on climate change and nature recovery, so that we can sustainably enjoy being active in our local environment and leave a legacy of a healthy active world for the generations that follow.

»» UNDERSTANDING OUR PROGRESS

We want to be able to demonstrate progress against our **vision** so:

“the conditions exist where everyone in Rotherham is able to move more, in ways that feel enjoyable and meaningful, to improve health, happiness and quality of life”.

Creating a more active borough within a constantly changing context is a significant and long-term challenge. To achieve this ambition, it is essential that we focus on **creating the conditions that enable sustainable change**, rather than short term activity alone. This requires strategic leadership, shared commitment and collective action to deliver the mission of enabling everyone in Rotherham to be physically active.

STORIES OF CHANGE

Stories of change and success are powerful motivators. They help to inspire others to get involved, take action and believe that change is possible.

In Rotherham, we are working to develop the **online platforms, community networks and human connections** needed to share and amplify these stories. We need the support of communities, organisations, partners and individuals to help grow the message and extend its reach. By sharing success and lived experience, we aim to create a borough wide movement for change and develop champions of physical activity and sport across Rotherham.

DATA & INTELLIGENCE

Sustainable change takes time. Building confidence, commitment and belief in the impact of this work requires strong **data, evidence and insight**. Monitoring progress and measuring change are essential to understanding what is working and where further action is needed.

Moving Rotherham works closely with partners, both local and national, to capture change through collecting and evaluating data and insight. This shared evidence base supports learning, improvement and the development of both small scale and large- scale funding opportunities for partners.

We will continue to produce an **annual report** that reflects progress, learning and stories from across the borough. This report will be a key tool to celebrate success, share impact and continue to build momentum.

WHOLE SYSTEM APPROACH

Across the borough wide network, it is important to understand what is working well, where gaps exist and where opportunities for greater impact can be realised. System change is complex and involves many stakeholders, but meaningful progress depends on **working together with shared purpose**. We will continue to support, facilitate and track progress through the **System Maturity Matrix**, in partnership with Sport England and the National Evaluation and Learning Partnership (NELP). This approach will help ensure consistent learning, accountability and system wide development.

»»» WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Success depends on the collective efforts of organisations both large and small, leaders, groups and individuals all playing their part.

We will develop an action plan to capture core activities and projects that contribute to the delivery of the strategy. These will be monitored and reviewed, with progress reported as described in the governance processes in this strategy.

Get involved or keep informed:



BE PART OF
MOVING ROTHERHAM
THROUGH WORKING
TOGETHER WITH US
TO ACHIEVE
OUR VISION



SHARE YOUR
THOUGHTS AND
MESSAGES THROUGH
YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA
PLATFORMS



CONNECT AND
RECEIVE UPDATES
THROUGH THE
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