



Process Learning Report: October 2025

Thanet and Gravesham

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Executive Summary

The Place Expansion Programme, funded by Sport England and led by Active Kent & Medway (AKM), is a strategic initiative aimed at tackling entrenched inequalities in physical activity across Kent, with a particular focus on Thanet and Gravesham. These areas were selected due to their high levels of deprivation, health inequality, and physical inactivity. The programme adopts a place-based, community-led approach, grounded in social constructivist and Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPR) methodologies, to ensure that local voices and lived experiences shape both the design and delivery of interventions.

In Thanet, the programme has focused on activating underutilised public spaces through inclusive, youth-centred programming. The Street Sport Sessions, delivered over the summer, were designed to address physical inactivity and anti-social behaviour among children and young people. These sessions were co-developed with a Youth Advisory Group, comprised of young leaders aged 11–15, who played a central role in shaping the evaluation tools and supporting delivery. The initiative employed creative and participatory methods such as sticker boards, youth-led interviews, and informal conversations to gather insights. These methods not only facilitated data collection but also empowered participants and fostered a sense of ownership.

The approach demonstrated the transformative potential of relational engagement, trust-building, and adaptive learning. Facilitators, many of whom shared lived experiences with participants, created safe and welcoming environments that encouraged consistent participation. The sessions revealed common experiences around safety, belonging, and agency, while also highlighting structural challenges such as poor infrastructure, dispersal orders, and underrepresentation of certain groups. Despite these barriers, the initiative succeeded in fostering community cohesion and relational trust, laying the groundwork for future system change.

In Gravesham, the approach has emphasised inclusive governance, with a governance sub-group actively shaping the strategic direction of the work. The ongoing needs assessment will be instrumental in identifying local challenges, assets, and priorities, and will inform the development of two forthcoming Test and Learn projects in Westcourt and Northfleet North. Stakeholders from local government, public health, leisure services, and the voluntary sector have been engaged in co-developing a Theory of Change and planning Systems Leadership Training, scheduled for December 2025.

Gravesham’s partnership landscape is currently more heavily weighted toward statutory organisations, but there is a growing recognition of the need to engage a broader range of sectors. The recruitment of a Community Connector, hosted by The Grand Healthy Living Centre, marks a

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significant step in building local capacity. This role is designed to bridge strategic intent with community-level impact, ensuring that interventions are culturally competent and locally relevant. Both Thanet and Gravesham have embraced the principles of co-design, equity, and relational accountability, but their approaches have differed in emphasis and execution. Thanet has prioritised direct delivery and youth engagement through participatory programming, while Gravesham has focused on strategic planning, governance development, and stakeholder alignment. These differences reflect the unique contexts and readiness levels of each area and offer valuable insights for future work.

The commitment to constructivist and CBPR methodologies across both Thanet and Gravesham has enabled a nuanced understanding of place-based systems and the lived realities of residents. By centring marginalised voices and fostering co-learning, the initiative has begun to shift power dynamics and build more inclusive, responsive systems. The insights generated through participatory evaluation and stakeholder engagement will inform the next phase of the programme, which will focus on embedding learnings, strengthening local capacity, and formalising governance structures.

As the Place Expansion work progresses, targeted training and professional development will be prioritised to support facilitators and delivery partners. Identified needs include trauma-informed care, conflict de-escalation, and cultural competence. Investment in these areas will ensure that the programme remains responsive to evolving community needs and capable of sustaining long-term impact.

In summary, the Place Expansion Programme represents a bold and innovative approach to tackling physical inactivity and health inequality in Kent. Through collaborative governance, community-led recruitment, and participatory evaluation, the programme is laying the foundation for sustainable system change. The distinct approaches in Thanet and Gravesham offer complementary models of engagement, each contributing valuable lessons that will shape the future of place-based working in Kent.

Our Place: Background and Scope

The Sport England-funded Place Expansion Programme is currently being developed in Kent through a broad partnership spanning multiple organisations and sectors, with a particular focus on Gravesham (specifically Westcourt and North Northfleet) and Thanet. While Active Kent & Medway, the local Active Partnership, is named as the lead applicant, the programme has embraced a collaborative, cross-sector approach from the outset ensuring that local voices and expertise shape the work. Targeting areas with the highest levels of inactivity, deprivation and health inequality, the aim is to tackle local inequalities in physical activity.

The programme is centred on building place-based systems that respond to local priorities and reflect the needs of the community. In both districts, partnerships will work directly with residents to co-design solutions that address and remove barriers to participation. This collective effort is aligned with, and underpinned by, the countywide strategy, Move Together, which aims to create inclusive, accessible opportunities for all residents to be more active, more often, regardless of their background or circumstances. This process report showcases and reflects on the learnings from our progress to date, considers how and why some of the changes might have come about and outlines future plans and emerging opportunities to build on the work going forward.

Our Places Areas

Thanet

Place-based working in Thanet is rooted in fostering collaborative system change and seeks to address the complex socio-economic and health challenges facing the area. Thanet, encompassing the coastal towns of Margate, Ramsgate, and Broadstairs, is marked by stark disparities in health, employment, and social mobility. It ranks amongst the most deprived districts nationally and exhibits some of the poorest health indicators in Kent. Notably, over half of children and young people in the area do not meet recommended physical activity levels, and the district has the highest prevalence of depression in the county. These issues are compounded by high rates of unemployment, obesity, and preventable mortality, particularly in wards such as Cliftonville West, Margate Central, Dane Valley, Central Harbour, Beacon Road, and Newington.

This partnership is underpinned by a need to strengthen partnership networks and commit to a shared direction for work in the area. Active Kent & Medway has engaged with Thanet’s voluntary and community sector, as well as threading the links between local authorities and public health organisations. There is a recognition that quantifiable data alone cannot fully capture the lived experiences of the local communities, thus occurring alongside the establishment of governance

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structure, Test and Learn projects aim to demonstrate the deep need for collaboration through emergent learnings.

The key to this partnership will be the formation of trust, strengthening local capacity and embedding collaborative practices across the system.

Gravesham

There is a positive appetite for strategic and collaborative work to focus on entrenched health and social inequalities. Situated in North-West Kent, Gravesham has a high prevalence of children and young people and adults who are overweight or obese. Residents face daily challenges around cost-of-living, health inequalities, anti-social behaviour and access to services, jobs and skills. Westcourt and North Northfleet have been identified as priority areas, with both MSOAs demonstrating significant deprivation indicators and persistently low levels of physical activity among residents.

Active Kent & Medway has engaged a diverse coalition of stakeholders, including local government bodies, health trusts, faith organizations, leisure providers, and voluntary sector representatives. This group has demonstrated a strong commitment to co-developing a Theory of Change and sustainable system change. The collaborative ethos is clearly evident in early consultative work, which has laid the groundwork for a shared vision, governance establishment, and guiding vision. This place partnership closely aligns with Gravesham Borough Council’s strategic objectives, particularly its commitment to fostering a “Happier and Healthier Gravesham” through inclusive, sustainable, and health-promoting interventions.

The rationale for focusing on Westcourt and North Northfleet is grounded in compelling evidence. Both areas exhibit disproportionately high levels of income deprivation, child poverty, unemployment, and health-related morbidity. Physical inactivity is prevalent with over 40% of adults and nearly half of children failing to meet national guidelines. Further, the cultural diversity of these communities adds a layer of complexity and opportunity. With significant proportions of residents from non-white backgrounds and many facing language barriers, there is a pressing need for culturally sensitive and inclusive engagement strategies.

The importance of working in Westcourt and North Northfleet lies in the urgent need to address systemic health and social disparities through a coordinated, inclusive, and evidence-based approach.

Our Place Methodology

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In alignment with Sport England’s Place Strategy, aimed at reducing inequalities in physical activity through long-term community-led partnerships; Active Kent & Medway has adopted a social constructivist approach to our work. Grounded in the principle that “*place matters*”, the social, cultural, and environmental conditions of a locality shape people’s opportunities to be active. It provides a robust framework for understanding the relational, situated, and systemic nature of place-based work.

This approach enables the exploration of how diverse stakeholders understand and navigate the barriers and enablers to physical activity in their communities. Adopting this approach is critical to Active Kent & Medway’s insight and evaluation strategy as it allows the delineation of subjective experiences within these systems, revealing how structural inequalities manifest in everyday life. We are committed to prioritising local narratives and meaning-making, enabling a more nuanced understanding of what ‘being active’ means.

Rationale for Social Constructivism

Constructivist methodologies encourage reflexivity, both in participants and evaluators. This has been particularly important in our place-based work, where historical relationships, institutional trust, and larger politics shape engagement. Further, this approach has enabled us to centre marginalised voices and explore how local knowledge can inform policy and practice. Constructivist approaches are inherently flexible, allowing evaluators to adapt their approaches in response to emerging insights and shifting community priorities. This approach enables marginalised groups to articulate their own understanding of problems and solutions, fostering empowerment and more equitable outcomes.

Embracing a social constructivist approach in our place-based insight and evaluation necessitates methodological choices that reflect its knowledge-based commitments. Qualitative methods such as narrative interviews, peer-led interviews and reflections, arts-based methods, participatory mapping, storytelling and ethnographic observation have been used to capture the richness of local experience and meaning-making in Thanet and Gravesham.

Methods

The following section will outline the approaches undertaken to gather data specific to each Place. Each section will discuss methods used, rationale, and challenges/limitations.

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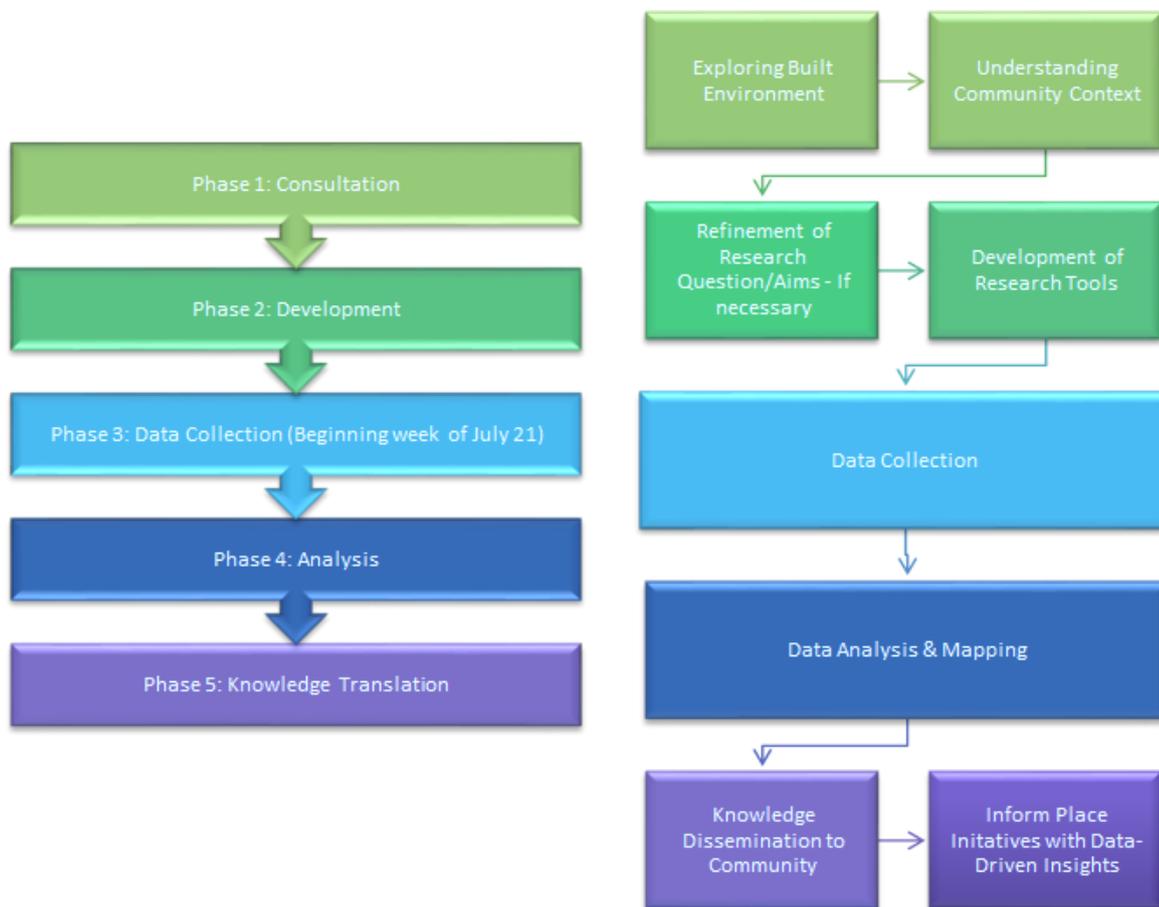
Thanet

Our first Test and Learn project, delivered over the six-week summer holiday this year represented a strategic intervention designed to address entrenched inequalities in youth engagement within Thanet. The Street Sport Sessions, aimed to respond to the disproportionate levels of physical inactivity and anti-social behaviour among children and young people in Thanet. In particular, the Street Sport Sessions aimed to activate underutilised public spaces through inclusive, youth-centred programming that fostered physical activity, social cohesion, and community ownership. Building on the success of a pilot programme delivered in Summer 2024, the Street Sports Sessions extended into three additional high-need areas – Dane Valley, Boundary Road, and Newington Green. This expansion was not a mere replication, rather a strategic experiment in adaptive learning and system change. The project sought to determine whether the core components of the previous project (i.e. free access, informal drop-in format, age relevant activities, and trusted adult presence) could be effectively scaled and tailored to distinct community contexts. The initiative emphasised co-design and community empowerment, recognising that sustainable change requires local ownership. Specific outcomes of the Street Sport Sessions are reflected upon in sections to follow.

To operationalise our constructivist approach to Place-based working, this Test and Learn employed Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPR) to guide its design, implementation, and evaluation process. While social constructivism provides the foundation for understanding how knowledge is socially produced, CBPR offers practical tools and processes for engaging communities in the production of knowledge. Together, they enable a methodology that is both theoretically robust and practically transformative (Andes, 2024). CBPR is rooted in the principles of co-learning, mutual respect, and shared ownership that are evidence informed, contextually grounded, and socially just. CBPR challenges traditional research dichotomy by positioning community members as co-researchers and co-creators of knowledge. This shift is particularly important in areas like Boundary Road, Dane Valley, and Newington Green, where community consultation revealed significant distrust in local council and authority organisations.

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The insight and evaluation process was structured into five distinct phases.



The first phase, Consultation and Contextual Understanding, laid the groundwork for a place-based intervention rooted in local knowledge and lived experience. Site visits were conducted across the three park locations – as well as Dane Park, a nearby green space central to regional dynamics. These visits were not merely observational but dialogic, involving community walks and informal conversation with local residents, youth, and relevant stakeholders. This approach facilitated an understanding of the built environment, accessibility challenges, and opportunities for intergenerational engagement. Phase Two focused on Co-Development and the formation of a Youth Advisory Group, reinforcing the participatory ethos of the project. Insight tools and evaluation aims were co-developed with delivery partners, the local authority, but most importantly the Youth Advisory Group. This group was comprised of seven young leaders aged eleven to fifteen. The group contributed to refining the data collection strategies and supported programme delivery, embodying CBPR’s emphasis on youth-led culturally relevant research. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and GDPR compliance, were rigorously upheld through parental engagement and documentation.

Qualitative data collection extended beyond the sticker boards to include audio-recorded Youth Advisory Group meetings, informal conversations during sessions, and youth-led interviews. Youth Advisory Group members acted as “on-pitch” reporters at times, engaging peers in discussions about their experiences and suggestions for improvement. Conversations with parents, representatives from local council and authority organisations, and community members were similarly captured, resulting in over 500 minutes of transcribed recorded dialogue. This participatory approach is directly aligned with CBPR literature which advocates for arts-based and informal techniques to engage marginalised communities and youth. Data analysis for this project employed a deductive thematic analysis grounded in the *NELP Conceptual Model and Conditions for Tackling Inequalities in Physical Activity*.

Central to CBPR and our approach to this project was reflexivity. As a AKM team we had a shared journal style document to share reflections, observations, and questions related to the Test and Learn. This served as a vehicle for continuous and participatory learning and evaluation. Our reflexive journal and regular internal meetings have provided us with a clear documentation of the process. This iterative approach ensured that the insight and evaluation process remained responsive and accountable to community needs.

Gravesham

In Gravesham, we have adopted a different approach beginning with a needs assessment while actively working toward the establishment of a robust governance structure to support place-based working in Gravesham. A needs assessment is a foundational element in the development of effective, equitable, and sustainable interventions. It enables the identification of specific local challenges, assets, and priorities, ensuring that programmes are tailored to the realities of the communities they serve. A needs assessment emphasises hyperlocal, system-informed approaches. For our purposes the needs assessment is not a one-off diagnostic tool, rather an iterative and relational process. It involves engaging with diverse stakeholders in Gravesham; beginning with key members of the governance sub-group to surface insights from past initiatives and programmes and identify where synergistic opportunities lie. The needs assessment is currently ongoing and will be a key tool in shaping the delivery and design of two Test and Learn projects in Westcourt and Northfleet North.

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Participants

This Process and Learning Report has been developed through a collaborative and participatory process involving a range of individuals, teams, and partner organisations across Thanet and Gravesham. Active Kent & Medway has prepared and written this submission, however, has engaged the following organisations and teams in the present work.

Thanet	Gravesham
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thanet District Council (TDC) • Kent County Council Public Health • Thanet Health Alliance • Active Thanet (TDC) • Social Enterprise Kent • East Kent Health Care Partnership • Thanet Girls Can • East Kent VCSE • Your Leisure • Sports Connect • YO Street Zone • IQ Sports • Orbit Housing • Age UK 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gravesham Borough Council (GBC) • Kent County Council Public Health • The Grand Healthy Living Centre • Sport On Your Doorstep • Sports 4 Change • Natural England • Cascades Leisure Centre • Cyclopark • Kent FA (To Join Leadership Training) • LTA (To Join Leadership Training) • Swim England • CVS Network • Safer Communities Alliance

In Thanet, the Youth Advisory Group and delivery partners were instrumental in co-developing the evaluation tools and supporting programme delivery. These young people contributed meaningfully to the refinement of data collection strategies and acted as facilitators during sessions, embodying the principles of youth-led, culturally relevant research. Delivery partners and representatives from the local authority were also actively involved, particularly in the co-development of insight tools and ensuring ethical compliance, including GDPR and informed consent procedures. Community members, including parents, residents, and representatives from the local council and authority organisations, participated in consultations, informal conversations, and site visits, providing valuable lived experience insights that shaped the intervention.

In Gravesham, the process has begun with a needs assessment, which is still ongoing. This assessment has involved key members of the governance sub-group, who contributed insights from previous initiatives and helped identify opportunities for future interventions. Their engagement is shaping the design and delivery of two forthcoming Test and Learn projects in Westcourt and Northfleet North.

This submission is reflective of diverse array of voices. It includes place partners such as local authorities and delivery organisations, community groups and residents from high-need areas including Dane Valley, Boundary Road, and Newington Green in Thanet, as well as emerging

representation from Westcourt and Northfleet North in Gravesham. Young people are prominently represented through the Youth Advisory Group and session participants, while parents and caregivers have been engaged through informal dialogue. Additionally, local council and authority representatives contributed through consultations and site visits.

Despite the strong commitment to participatory and inclusive methodologies, some voices may still be underrepresented. Within the youth population, there are gaps in representation across dimensions such as age, ability, and cultural background. Residents who did not participate in sessions or consultations may also hold perspectives that are not captured in the current data. In Gravesham, the ongoing nature of the needs assessment means that full representation from the target communities is still in development.

Future insight and evaluation efforts will aim to address these gaps by expanding outreach to marginalised subgroups and non-participating community members. Employing arts-based and informal techniques, as advocated by social constructivist and CBPR literature, may enhance engagement with these groups.

Working Together in Thanet

This section reflects specifically on the learnings from the Thanet Summer Test and Learn, followed by Our Way Forward.

Value of Support Provided

The Thanet Street Sport Sessions exemplify the transformative potential of collaborative, community-based interventions in addressing inequalities in physical activity. Central to the success of this initiative was the value of support provided by a diverse network of stakeholders, including local authorities, delivery partners, youth advisory groups, and community champions. This multi-sectoral collaboration enabled the project to move beyond traditional service delivery models and embrace a participatory ethos rooted in co-design, mutual respect, and shared ownership.

Support was not limited to logistical or financial contributions; it extended to relational and emotional support that fostered trust and engagement among young participants. This was reflective in youth participants seeking opportunities to gain experience and support their community.

“I joined this group because apart from the fact that I enjoy sports, I would like to help out and gain experience.” — Youth participant

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“I want to kind of make that change... there isn’t much to do... this kind of makes change for everyone.” — Youth participant

Facilitators played a pivotal role in creating safe and welcoming environments, often going beyond their formal responsibilities to ensure that youth felt seen, heard, and valued. Their consistent presence, empathetic engagement, and responsiveness to feedback were instrumental in building rapport and sustaining participation. The involvement of local coaches and youth workers; many of whom shared lived experiences with the participants; further enhanced the authenticity and relevance of the sessions. In an email, local delivery partner reflected the following:

“I hope we see promising results from the test-and-learn initiative – Thanet and its people need as much support into movement as possible and I believe this can really help while building positive relationships. [...] Personally, this project has helped me build more positive relationships within the community. Some parents and children have greeted me and stopped for chats in other settings, which has increased my own sense of belonging.” - Deliverer

Moreover, the integration of Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPR) methodology underscored the value of support in knowledge production and programme evaluation. By positioning community members as co-researchers, the project democratised the insight process and validated lived experience as a legitimate form of evidence. This approach not only enriched the data collected but also empowered youth and other delivery partners to take ownership of their environments and advocate for change, while also providing the opportunity to learn about monitoring and evaluation strategies.

In sum, the value of support provided in the Street Sport Sessions was multifaceted, encompassing practical, emotional, and epistemic dimensions. It demonstrated that meaningful engagement requires more than resources—it demands relationships, responsiveness, and a commitment to equity.

Impact of Place Partnerships

The impact of these place partnerships was evident in the project's ability to tailor its design and delivery to the unique needs of three high-need areas: Dane Valley, Boundary Road Park, and Newington Green. This facilitated a nuanced understanding of local dynamics, enabling the project to adapt its programming and insight and evaluation strategies to reflect the socio-economic, cultural, and infrastructural realities of each site. For instance, Dane Valley’s proximity to a Family Hub and Age UK facility offered opportunities for intergenerational engagement, while Boundary Road’s lack of amenities posed accessibility challenges that informed logistical planning. These insights were made possible through site visits, community walks, and informal conversations.

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The collaborative nature of this project fostered cross-sectoral learning and capacity building. Delivery partners such as Sport IQ, Thanet District Council, and Scorcha Skate School contributed not only expertise but also institutional knowledge that enriched the intervention. The formation of a Youth Advisory Group further exemplified the power of place partnerships in amplifying youth voice and ensuring cultural relevance. By involving young leaders in shaping the research agenda and programme delivery, the project cultivated a sense of ownership and agency among participants. One parent shared:

“Place-based approach is definitely the way forward... it’s all in pride as well, where you live. And these children, for the first time, maybe have played in this park.” Deliverer

Importantly, this Test and Learn determined the feasibility of replicating the Cliftonville pilot across diverse contexts. Rather than assuming uniform replication, the initiative embraced adaptive learning to explore what worked, for whom, and under what conditions. This approach aligns with contemporary literature on place-based interventions, which emphasises the importance of fidelity to core principles alongside flexibility in delivery.

“We’re using this test to learn to then build in the future... a movement... the community’s going to come up with the name.” — AKM team member

Common Experiences and Biggest Challenges

Across the three sites, several common experiences emerged that illuminate the lived realities of young people in Thanet and the relational dynamics that shaped their engagement with the Street Sport Sessions. These experiences coalesced around themes of safety, belonging, trust, and agency.

One of the most salient common experiences was the perception of public spaces as both opportunity and risk. While parks and recreation grounds offered venues for socialisation and physical activity, they were also sites of exclusion, surveillance, and infrastructural neglect. Youth participants consistently cited poor lighting, broken equipment, and intimidating individuals as barriers to feeling safe. These concerns were compounded by the presence of dispersal orders and police interventions, which, though intended to deter anti-social behaviour, often undermined the sense of safety and autonomy among participants. These reflections are highlighted in the following comments:

“The major problem here is spacing... some parents don’t like the fact that anytime the ball goes there, the child has to run into the road.” — Youth Facilitator

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“I think it’s kind of like the same... you don’t want people to think that you’re doing something wrong... but then at the same time you’re like, well, I don’t want to do anything wrong.” — Youth participant discussing dispersal rules

Despite these challenges, the sessions fostered a strong sense of community and relational connection. Youth repeatedly emphasised the importance of social interaction, with many attending sessions to make friends and connect with peers outside of school.

“If you were to go to the park, you’d have to do it on your own... it’s good to actually make friends outside of school.” — Youth participant

Facilitators played a crucial role in nurturing these relationships, demonstrating empathy, consistency, and cultural competence. Their efforts created a relational ecosystem where trust was not assumed but earned, and where youth felt empowered to participate, provide feedback, and take on leadership roles. The creative and inclusive data collection methods—such as sticker boards and informal conversations—also contributed to common experiences of engagement and empowerment. These tools reduced hesitancy, increased participation, and facilitated meaningful dialogue between youth and facilitators. In essence, the common experiences across sites reflected both the challenges and possibilities of community-based physical activity interventions. They underscored the importance of relational trust, participatory design, and structural responsiveness in fostering equitable engagement.

While the Street Sport Sessions achieved notable successes, several challenges emerged that highlight the complexities of working collaboratively in underserved communities. These challenges were structural, relational, and operational in nature, and offer critical insights for future practice.

One of the most significant challenges was the tension between programme goals and policing practices. The use of dispersal orders to manage youth gatherings contradicted the initiative’s aim of activating public spaces and fostering community cohesion. Facilitators reported that police interventions often escalated tensions and deterred participation, particularly among older youth. This disconnect underscores the need for integrated approaches that align law enforcement strategies with community development goals.

Another challenge was the limited duration of the programme. The six-week timeframe constrained the project’s ability to address long-term structural barriers such as food insecurity, transport limitations, and inadequate infrastructure. Facilitators expressed concern about the sustainability of the intervention and the potential loss of momentum once sessions ended.

Representation gaps also posed challenges, particularly in engaging teenage girls and older youth. Despite efforts to promote inclusivity, certain groups remained underrepresented, suggesting the

need for deeper consultation and targeted outreach. Time constraints surrounding programme rollout further limited pre-engagement and community mobilisation, affecting participation and diversity.

Facilitators also identified a need for professional development in areas such as trauma-informed care, conflict de-escalation, and cultural competence. A Street Sport Sessions Delivery Partner reflected:

“Some girls had been involved in some serious bullying and that’s why everything had gone sideways... I think it’s important that the facilitators and coaches know how to handle those situations.” — Team member

While their relational skills were instrumental in building trust, complex situations involving bullying and anti-social behaviour revealed gaps in training and support. Addressing these needs is essential for ensuring that facilitators are equipped to manage diverse and dynamic community contexts.

Finally, the lack of cross-sector coordination emerged as a persistent barrier. While the project identified needs related to food, transport, and infrastructure, it lacked the partnerships or resources to address them comprehensively. This fragmentation limits the potential for holistic, place-based solutions and underscores the importance of multi-sectoral collaboration.

Working Together in Gravesham

This section reflects specifically on the learnings from collaborative working, recruitment and governance establishment in Gravesham, followed by Our Way Forward. The Gravesham Place Partnership has demonstrated a strong commitment to collaborative working, inclusive governance, and community-led capacity building.

Inclusive Governance for a Stronger Gravesham

Inclusive governance has been a cornerstone of the Gravesham approach, with early efforts focused on embedding diverse voices into the decision-making structure. Gravesham has shown a clear appetite for strategic collaboration, actively involving stakeholders from local government, public health, leisure services and the voluntary sector in shaping the governance framework. The formation of a governance sub-group has enabled the surfacing of insights from previous initiatives and created space for shared learning and alignment.

This governance work has been relational in nature. The process has prioritised transparency, contextual relevance, and sustainability, ensuring that governance models reflect the lived realities

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of Westcourt and North Northfleet. Importantly, Gravesham stakeholders have been instrumental in co-designing the Systems Leadership Training, scheduled for December 2025.

Strengthening Partnerships for Collective Impact

Gravesham’s partnership landscape is evolving to reflect a more collaborative and cross-sectoral ethos. While the current sub-group is representative of more local government and public health, there is a growing recognition of the need to engage a broader range of sectors to ensure a truly place-based approach, including faith groups, community organisations, and leisure providers. The ongoing needs assessment has served as a relational tool to deepen engagement and identify synergistic opportunities. It will aide in facilitating conversations that focus on shared priorities, gaps in provisions, and opportunities for co-design.

The alignment with Gravesham Borough Council’s strategic objectives; particularly its vision for a “Happier and Healthier Gravesham”; has provided a strong anchor for the work. This alignment has helped to mobilise resources, foster trust, and create a shared sense of purpose among stakeholders.

There is strong consensus that a new forthcoming Health Alliance is well aligned with, and complementary to, the ambitions of the Place programme. Discussions are ongoing to shape the detail and ensure strategic coherence between the two.

Growing Capacity Through Community-Led Recruitment

A key strategy for embedding sustainability and local ownership in Gravesham has been the recruitment of a Community Connector. This role, hosted by The Grand Healthy Living Centre, is designed to bridge the gap between strategic intent and community-level impact. Local recruitment ensures the Community Connector brings lived experience, cultural competence, and relational knowledge to the role.

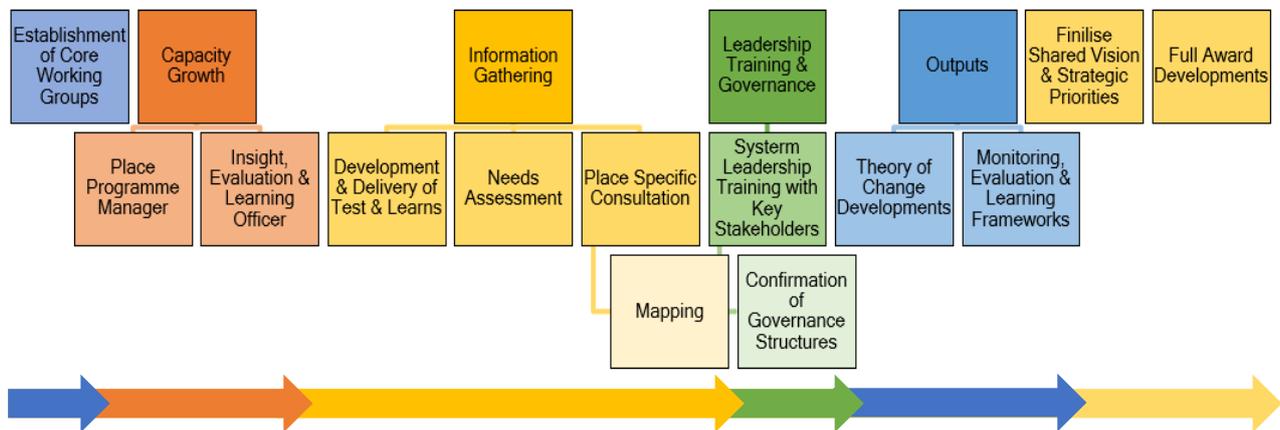
The Community Connector will play a pivotal role in amplifying underrepresented voices, facilitating co-creation, and embedding local narratives into programme delivery. Their presence will support the design and implementation of the Test and Learn projects, ensuring that interventions are responsive to community needs and grounded in local realities.

Our Way Forward

As the Place Expansion work in Thanet and Gravesham progresses into its next phase, the strategic focus will centre on embedding current learnings into future projects, strengthening local capacity,

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and formalising governance structures to ensure long-term sustainability and impact. The insights generated through participatory evaluation, stakeholder engagement, and collaborative delivery have laid a robust foundation for system change in both Thanet and Gravesham. The below graphic illustrates a general approach to our way forward.



Building Capacity Through Recruitment, Targeted Training and Professional Development

The successful recruitment of the Place Programme Manager and Insight, Evaluation and Learning Officer mark a significant milestone in enhancing the programme’s delivery and evaluative capacity. These appointments have enabled more structured coordination across sites and facilitated the development of a coherent insight and learning framework. In parallel, recruitment is underway for Community Connector roles in Thanet and Gravesham. These roles are pivotal in bridging the gap between strategic intent and community-level impact. Hosted by trusted local organisations—Social Enterprise Kent (Thanet) and The Grand (Gravesham), the Community Connectors will play a critical role in enabling meaningful local co-creation, amplifying underrepresented voices, and embedding lived experience into programme delivery.

Further, to ensure the sustainability and quality of future delivery, targeted training and professional development will be a central focus. Following feedback from facilitators and delivery partners from the Street Sports Test and Learn, a suite of training opportunities through Next Level Coaching has been identified to enhance the competencies of local facilitators and delivery partners: Topics include:

- Managing Challenging Behaviour: Equipping facilitators with trauma-informed strategies to navigate complex interpersonal dynamics

- Multi-Sport Coaching Awards: Providing formal accreditation and skill development across a range of physical activity domains.
- Parks Activator Course: Supporting facilitators in activating underutilised public spaces through inclusive and community lead programming.

Targeted training and facilitator development identified during the Thanet Street Sports Test and Learn, will seek to support operational challenges across the Thanet and Gravesham Place Expansion work including conflict de-escalation, cultural competence, and inclusive engagement. Investment in training and professional development fosters the establishment of a resilient and responsive system capable of adapting to evolving community needs.

Deepening Stakeholder Engagement and Collaborative Governance

The core stakeholder groups in Thanet and Gravesham continues to meet regularly, providing a consistent forum for strategic alignment, cross-sectoral learning, and collaborative decision making. These engagements have been instrumental in surfacing local priorities, identifying gaps in provision, and co-developing place specific priorities. Governance structure is currently in development, with a range of models being explored in each place, supported by the Place Programme Manager. These models are being reviewed in consultation with key stakeholders to ensure contextual relevance, transparency, and sustainability.

Leadership Development and System Change

Intimately related to collaborative governance has been the establishment of sub-groups to support the design and delivery of the Systems Leadership Training. Sessions are provisionally scheduled for early December in Gravesham and January in Thanet. Learnings captured from other Active Partnerships have identified political representation as a critical success factor to and it is a priority to continue working closely with local council officers to secure engagement from elected officials. Additionally, efforts are being made to ensure the involvement of National Governing Bodies (NGBs) and other key sector partners. Upon completion of the training, participants will contribute to the selection and implementation of governance models, thereby reinforcing the programme’s commitment to locally led system change.

Capital Investment and Infrastructure Development

Conversations are ongoing regarding the capital contributions included within the development awards. Notably, via a separate process, £2 million has been awarded by Sport England to Gravesham Borough Council for the redevelopment of Cascades. This investment represents a

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Conclusion

The Place Expansion work has revealed important distinctions in how Thanet and Gravesham have approached place-based working, each shaped by their unique contexts, stakeholder landscapes, and readiness for intervention.

In Thanet, the emphasis has been on direct delivery and youth engagement. The Street Sport Sessions exemplified a hands-on, participatory model that prioritised immediate activation of public spaces and relational engagement with young people. Thanet’s approach was characterised by adaptive learning, with interventions tailored to the socio-economic and infrastructural realities of each site. The formation of a Youth Advisory Group and the integration of creative insight tools demonstrated a commitment to culturally relevant and inclusive practice.

In contrast, Gravesham has taken a more strategic and governance-focused approach. The work began with a comprehensive needs assessment, aimed at identifying systemic challenges and opportunities for alignment. Stakeholder engagement has centred on the development of governance structures, co-design of a Theory of Change, and planning for Systems Leadership Training. While direct delivery is yet to commence, the groundwork laid through strategic planning and stakeholder alignment positions Gravesham for sustainable system change. The recruitment of a Community Connector reflects a commitment to embedding lived experience into programme delivery and bridging the gap between strategy and community impact.

These differing approaches reflect the developmental stage of each place. Thanet, with its history of youth-focused programming and existing community networks, was ready for immediate intervention, with the intention to use the learnings to foster collaboration in the area. Gravesham’s foundational approach to align priorities and establish governance has involved collaborative working from the beginning.

This Process and Learning Report highlights the importance of contextual responsiveness in place-based working. There is no one-size-fits-all model; rather, success depends on tailoring strategies to local conditions, capacities, and relationships. Thanet’s emphasis on relational engagement and participatory delivery offers a model for rapid activation and youth empowerment. Gravesham’s focus on governance and strategic alignment provides a blueprint for sustainable system change and cross-sector collaboration. Moving forward, this work seeks to integrate the strengths of both approaches. This cross-pollination of insights will enable the development of a hybrid model that balances immediate impact with long-term sustainability.

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