

Newham Physical Activity Health Needs Assessment

London Borough of Newham, Public Health



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Date of publication: March 2026

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Contents

Executive summary.....	2
Purpose and scope	4
Introduction	4
Local context.....	5
Aim and objectives	6
Methods	6
Local need	8
Newham population overview.....	8
Newham physical activity in comparison.....	10
Inequities in physical activity.....	13
Local picture	16
1. Active systems	16
Where we are now	16
Gaps and opportunities.....	18
2. Active environments	19
Where are we now	19
Gaps and opportunities.....	24
3. Active people	24
Where we are now	25
Gaps and opportunities.....	32
4. Active society	33
Where we are now	33
Gaps and opportunities.....	35
What next for physical activity in Newham?	36
Context and inequalities	36
Findings and recommendations.....	36
1. Active systems	36
2. Active environments	37
3. Active people	38
4. Active society	40
Acknowledgements.....	42
References	43
Appendix 1: Table of recommendations	45

Executive summary

Physical activity is one of the most powerful levers for improving population health and reducing inequalities in Newham. Yet inactivity levels remain consistently higher than London and England averages, with persistent disparities by gender, ethnicity, age, disability and socioeconomic status. This Health Needs Assessment (HNA) brings together quantitative evidence, qualitative insight and system-wide engagement to understand who is least active, why, and what an effective multi-sector response requires. Using the WHO Global Action Plan on Physical Activity (GAPPA) framework, it assesses the local system across four domains: Active Systems, Active Environments, Active People and Active Society.

Key inequalities

Inactivity in Newham is shaped by deep, intersecting inequalities. Girls, Asian women, Disabled residents, people with long-term conditions and those in lower-income households are consistently less active. Children and young people are less active than their peers nationally, and older adults face barriers linked to cost, confidence, safety, disability and cultural relevance. These patterns are reinforced by Newham's wider context: a young and highly diverse population, rising long-term conditions, high deprivation, limited access to high-quality green and play space, and high residential churn.

Summary of findings

1. Active systems

Newham benefits from strong strategic alignment across planning, transport, public health, leisure and environment. However, leadership and governance for physical activity are dispersed, and there is no single mechanism for coordinated decision-making. Monitoring and evaluation are inconsistent, particularly in children and young people's settings, where limited equalities data restricts the borough's ability to track impact or identify variation. Community organisations and schools face tension between low-barrier access and collecting meaningful data, leading to fragmented insight.

2. Active environments

The borough has made significant progress on Healthy Streets, including impactful Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, expanded School Streets, 20mph coverage, and improved cycling infrastructure. However, walking and cycling routes remain fragmented, with safety and continuity concerns affecting residents' confidence. Publicly accessible green and play space is far below national benchmark standards and unevenly distributed, with the lowest quality concentrated in more deprived neighbourhoods. Leisure and sports facilities are operating at or above capacity, with expected population growth placing additional pressure on these facilities. School estates offer extensive physical-activity assets but remain under-used outside school hours.

3. Active people

Newham has a broad and vibrant offer across early years, schools, youth settings, leisure centres, community venues and clinical pathways. However, there are persistent inequalities

for girls, Black residents, South Asian women, and Disabled residents. Monitoring of physical activity provision within schools and youth settings is inconsistent, limiting understanding of participation, inclusion and progression. Pathways from taster sessions to sustained activity are often weak, and community-led provision remains financially fragile due to reliance on short-term funding. Residents with long-term conditions may lack access to personalised behaviour-change support outside of referral schemes.

4. Active society

Social norms, messaging and trusted messengers play a crucial role in enabling residents to try activity and sustain participation. Currently, information about the local offer is fragmented and inconsistently promoted, and trusted community figures often lack up-to-date tools to support signposting. Mass-participation events, while impactful, rely on volunteer capacity that is insufficient to sustain regular provision. Digital behaviour-change tools such as BetterPoints and Live Better show strong potential but may widen inequalities without targeted and culturally relevant outreach.

Recommendations

Drawing together the evidence on local need, inequalities and system gaps, this HNA identifies a set of opportunities to reduce inactivity and narrow inequalities across Newham. The high-level priorities are summarised below:

- **Active Systems:** Establish shared cross-sector leadership and stronger equalities-focused data to drive coordinated action.
- **Active Environments:** Expand safe, connected active-travel routes and increase access to high-quality green and play spaces in areas of greatest need.
- **Active People:** Grow inclusive, culturally relevant, low-cost opportunities with clear pathways that help residents progress from first steps into sustained activity.
- **Active Society:** Deliver consistent, culturally relevant messaging and equip trusted community messengers to guide residents towards local opportunities.

These priorities are supported by detailed, domain-specific recommendations in the full report.

Conclusion

Newham has strong foundations for addressing inequalities in physical activity: strategic alignment, a diverse and growing range of community and leisure offers, and major improvements to Healthy Streets and school-run safety. The borough is also entering a new phase of partnership through Sport England's Place Expansion Programme, offering a unique opportunity to align priorities, develop shared governance, and invest in long-term change. However, persistent structural barriers, including the uneven distribution of green and play space, fragmented data systems, variable provision across settings, and limited progression pathways, continue to shape who is able to be active. By pairing coordinated system leadership with targeted investment, stronger insight, and culturally relevant, community-led provision, Newham can create the conditions for all residents to move more as part of daily life, especially those who are currently the least active.

Purpose and scope

Introduction

Physical activity is one of the most powerful, and underused, tools available to improve health and narrow inequalities. There is consistent and compelling evidence that regular, small amounts of exercise support the prevention and management of over 30 different chronic conditions, including cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, Type 2 diabetes, mild to moderate depression and some cancers. Exercise also supports healthier ageing, improves sleep, helps maintain a healthy weight, reduces stress, and improves quality of life. Conversely, physical inactivity and being sedentary increases risk of ill health. The greatest benefits from exercise are seen in those people who move from very low activity to doing any activity¹².

The World Health Organization (WHO) describes physical activity as movement that can be built into everyday life – at home, in communities, at school, at work, and while travelling. In practice, this includes formal exercise and organised sport, but also walking or wheeling to the shops, active travel to school or work, dance, play, fitness classes, and “getting moving” as part of daily routines – all of which can contribute to better health³.

The **UK Chief Medical Officers** (CMOs) advise adults to aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity per week (or 75 minutes vigorous, or a combination), plus strength-building activity on at least two days per week, while minimising and breaking up sedentary time. For children and young people, the CMO guideline is an average of 60 minutes per day of moderate-to-vigorous activity across the week, supported by varied activity that develops movement skills and builds strength⁴.

Sport England’s most recent adult **Active Lives Survey** (Nov 2023–Nov 2024, published April 2025)⁵ estimates 64% of adults in England are “active” (≥150 minutes/week), while 25% are “inactive” (<30 minutes/week). Among children and young people⁶ (academic year 2024–25, published Dec 2025), 49% meet the 60-minutes-a-day guideline, and 28% average less than 30 minutes per day. These figures matter not only because of the scale of preventable ill-health they imply, but because inactivity follows, and reinforces, existing inequalities. For adults, activity is patterned by factors such as deprivation, disability/long-term conditions, sex and ethnicity, with the least affluent groups substantially less likely to be active. For children, gaps persist by gender, family affluence and ethnicity, with notably lower activity among some minority ethnic groups and those from the least affluent families. In Newham – a borough with high levels of diversity and marked inequality – increasing physical activity levels is an effective route to improve the population’s physical and mental health, especially for residents facing the greatest obstacles to being active.

¹ Lee, I.-M., et al. (2012). [Effect of physical inactivity on major non-communicable diseases worldwide](#). The Lancet.

² WHO. (2020). [WHO guidelines on physical activity & sedentary behaviour](#).

³ WHO. (2024) [Physical activity fact sheet](#).

⁴ UK Chief Medical Officers. (2019). [UK Chief Medical Officers’ physical activity guidelines](#).

⁵ Sport England. (2025). [Active Lives Adult Survey: November 2023–24 Report](#). Sport England.

⁶ Sport England. (2025). [Active Lives Children and Young People Survey: Academic Year 2024–25 Report](#). Sport England.

There is an increasing awareness that there are many interacting influences on how active a person is, including whether neighbourhoods enable walking, cycling and play; social norms and safety; local opportunities to be active; individual health and confidence; and time and cost pressures. The **WHO's Global Action Plan on Physical Activity (GAPPA)**⁷ suggests that whole system approaches are required to address these complex interactions. The GAPPA describes four connected “levers” for change: Active Societies (norms, attitudes and motivation), Active Environments (safe, equitable spaces and places), Active People (programmes and opportunities across settings), and Active Systems (leadership, partnerships, workforce and data). This Health Needs Assessment (HNA) uses this framework to understand not only who is least active, but why, and what a credible, equitable response requires.

Local context

This HNA is an important opportunity to strengthen how the whole system supports Newham residents to be more active, and to align local priorities, investment and partnerships behind a shared ambition for a more active and equitable borough.

In 2023, Newham council approved a new 10-year leisure management contract with Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL), commencing April 2024, with a clear mandate to increase physical activity levels, improve satisfaction, and support broader health-equity objectives. Alongside this, the borough has recently completed two major evidence bases: the **Built Leisure Needs Assessment (BLNA)** (2024)⁸, which provides a detailed picture of current and future indoor leisure needs, and the **Playing Pitch & Outdoor Sport Strategy (PPOSS)** (2024)⁹, which guides provision and improvement of outdoor sport facilities. These studies provide the most comprehensive understanding to date of Newham's physical activity-related infrastructure, creating a strong platform for this HNA to identify gaps, inequalities and opportunity at a system level.

Alongside sport and leisure, Newham council has made significant recent investment in the wider environments that enable everyday physical activity, reflecting health equity and sustainable transport as corporate priorities. The borough has expanded its **active-travel infrastructure**, including new and extended Low-Traffic Neighbourhoods, an enlarged network of Healthy School Streets, and improvements to walking and cycling routes, aligning closely with WHO GAPPA's emphasis on active environments. Work to improve green and open spaces has progressed through the **Green and Water Infrastructure Strategy** and major projects such as the **Beckton Parks Masterplan**. Newham council has also invested in play and worked proactively with partners to secure external funding – such as the National Governing Bodies including the LTA and Football Association, and emerging opportunities through Playzones – to improve access to safe, high-quality places for children and families. These environmental improvements, alongside targeted programming, demonstrate a borough-wide commitment to creating the conditions for residents to be active as part of daily life.

⁷ World Health Organization. (2018). [Global action plan on physical activity 2018–2030](#).

⁸ London Borough of Newham. (2024). [Built Leisure Needs Assessment 2022–2038](#).

⁹ London Borough of Newham. (2024). [Playing Pitch & Outdoor Sport Strategy \(PPOSS\): Strategy & Action Plan](#).

Newham has also been selected as a partner for **Sport England's Place Expansion Programme** in 2026¹⁰, bringing targeted investment to areas with the highest levels of inactivity and health inequality. This provides new capacity for collaborative working across public health, leisure, transport, environment, NHS and voluntary/community partners, alongside greater emphasis on resident voice, lived experience and long-term system change.

Newham has some of the most acute health and structural inequalities in England, and physical activity levels remain below national averages. The convergence of a refreshed leisure operating model, new cross-borough investment, comprehensive new evidence bases and renewed appetite for strategic alignment across sectors creates a timely opportunity to shift towards a coordinated, whole-system approach.

Aim and objectives

This HNA aims to bring together evidence, local insight and system priorities to shape a shared set of recommendations to increase physical activity levels across the population, and reduce inequalities in physical activity.

Specifically, this HNA will:

- **Provide up-to-date data and insight** on physical activity in Newham, drawing on the latest Sport England Active Lives data and local evidence sources.
- **Explore inequalities and identify groups facing the most significant barriers** to establish a clear picture of who is least active across the borough.
- **Consolidate system physical activity priorities** from relevant policies, strategies and recommendations across public health, leisure, planning, and transport.
- **Map current services, programmes and assets**, identifying gaps and strengths within the local ecosystem.
- **Identify opportunities to increase activity levels and reduce inequalities**, focusing on system levers across the four WHO GAPP domains.
- **Review evidence and best practice** from comparable populations and places to identify approaches likely to be effective in Newham.
- **Co-develop actionable recommendations with stakeholders**, to inform future strategic planning, commissioning, investment and the next phase of Newham's Sport England Place Partnership.

Methods

This HNA draws on a mixed-methods approach to build a comprehensive, system-wide picture of physical activity in Newham. Guided by the aims and objectives listed above, the methodology combines quantitative analysis, qualitative insight, and structured stakeholder engagement to understand activity levels, inequalities and opportunities across the borough.

¹⁰ Sport England. 2025. [Place expansion: 27 new partnerships](#).

Quantitative data sources and analysis

The primary numeric dataset used in this HNA is the Sport England Active Lives Survey (ALS) for adults, and children and young people. The ALS groups physical activity levels into three categories, in line with CMO guidelines.

For adults, this is:

- **Active** – achieving 150 minutes or more of activity per week
- **Fairly active** – doing 30–149 minutes of activity per week
- **Inactive** – doing fewer than 30 minutes of activity per week

For children and young people, the ALS uses the following categories:

- **Active** – averaging 60 minutes or more per day across the week
- **Fairly active** – averaging 30–59 minutes per day across the week
- **Less active** – averaging under 30 minutes per day across the week

This HNA places particular emphasis on inactive adults and less active children and young people, where the greatest potential health gains can be achieved by helping those who are currently least active to move more.

The ALS provides the most robust, nationally comparable measure of physical activity in England. However, ALS data has important limitations, including small local sample sizes (approximately 500 adults in Newham take part each year), and annual variability. As a result, the data must be interpreted with caution, particularly when analysing differences between subgroups or trends over time. In contrast to the adult survey, the children and young people's Active Lives Survey is delivered through schools. This method brings similar limitations: the local sample size is small (around 300 responses per local authority), and participation varies year-to-year, with some schools not submitting data at all. As a result, the dataset is more vulnerable to bias. For example, year-to-year results can shift simply because different people responded, meaning the results may change noticeably even if the true population behaviour hasn't changed. Where local sample sizes were too small to support meaningful analysis, regional or England-level data was used instead.

Qualitative data sources and insight review

To complement data from the ALS, and provide important context for the assessment of the local picture in Newham, qualitative insight (non-numerical, descriptive information that captures attitudes, preferences and lived experiences) into key enablers and barriers to physical activity were synthesised from:

- Outputs from local resident engagement on physical activity, including local qualitative research and feedback from community engagement activities undertaken by the council and partners.
- Peer-reviewed and grey literature on barriers and enablers to physical activity, with particular attention to research relevant to diverse and deprived populations.

Stakeholder engagement

A structured stakeholder engagement process was used to ensure the HNA reflects local expertise, service realities and community context.

- **Stakeholder scoping meetings** were held at project initiation to refine the scope, identify priority questions and map key partners across health, leisure, transport, community and voluntary sectors.
- **Fourteen semi-structured stakeholder interviews** were conducted with colleagues from across the council, leisure service providers, and local NHS. These interviews focused on mapping the local picture, identifying system gaps and strengths, and exploring opportunities for collaboration.
- A **stakeholder workshop** was convened to co-develop recommendations. This session tested interim findings, enabled collective prioritisation and ensured that proposed actions were feasible, system-aligned and responsive to local needs.

Analytical framework

To bring together the quantitative, qualitative and stakeholder evidence, this HNA applies the WHO GAPP as its organising analytical framework. The four domains – Active Societies, Active Environments, Active People, and Active Systems – were used to structure the synthesis of best practice, assess how current provision in Newham aligns with WHO recommendations, and identify strengths, gaps and opportunities across the local system. This framework enabled a consistent, system-wide analysis of the factors shaping activity levels in Newham and supported the development of targeted, actionable recommendations.

Local need

This section summarises the key demographic, social, environmental and health factors shaping physical activity needs in Newham. It brings together population trends, levels of activity and inactivity, and resident-reported barriers and enablers. Understanding these patterns is essential for developing an equitable and effective approach to increasing physical activity across our population.

Newham population overview

Newham is a young, growing, and diverse borough. In 2023, Newham had an estimated 373,000 residents, 45% of whom were under 30¹¹. This creates an opportunity to establish lifelong physical activity habits early and to embed prevention-focused approaches across communities.

Population growth will increase demand for physical activity infrastructure, with the fastest growth predicted among residents aged 70+, highlighting the importance of strength, mobility and falls-prevention programmes for older residents. By 2050 Newham is forecast to have the largest number of residents aged 50+ in North East London¹².

Newham is one of the most **ethnically diverse** places in the country. In 2023, over 7 in 10 residents were from Black, Asian or other minority ethnic groups¹³. This diversity means that physical activity provision must be culturally relevant, and sensitive to differing preferences and requirements.

¹¹ London Borough of Newham. (2025). [Newham Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2025](#).

¹² Greater London Authority. (2024). [Population and Household Projections](#) (Housing-Led Model).

¹³ London Borough of Newham. (2025). [Newham Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2025](#).

The map below shows increasing **deprivation** in Newham between 2019¹⁴ and 2025¹⁵, with the borough now ranked the 7th most deprived local authority in England, and the most deprived in London. The change in deprivation was uneven across the borough, with areas in the northeast of Newham becoming more deprived, but areas around Stratford, Canning Town, and Custom House seeing improvements. For physical activity, this pattern highlights the importance of localised approaches, targeting investment and activities to the areas experiencing worsening deprivation, where cost barriers, safety concerns, limited access to green/play space are likely to be more significant barriers to being active.

Figure 1: Change in IMD between 2019 and 2025 in Newham



Source: 2019 and 2025 English indices of deprivation

Newham is also a highly **transient** borough, with one of the highest population turnover rates in London¹⁶. Recent estimates show a churn rate of 21.5%, meaning that around one in five residents either moved into or out of the borough within a single year. This level of movement has implications for physical activity: services must continually rebuild awareness, adapt to changing community needs, and design high-reach, hyper-local offers that remain accessible to residents who may relocate frequently or have unstable housing.

Long-term conditions in Newham remain highly prevalent and strongly patterned by deprivation, age and ethnicity¹⁷. Hypertension, diabetes, obesity, depression and asthma have all shown stable or rising prevalence over recent years, largely reflecting population growth, ageing, and high levels of chronic disease risk. Diabetes and obesity are significantly more common in Newham than London and England averages, with the highest prevalence among South Asian, Black African and Black Caribbean communities, and in the most deprived neighbourhoods. Hypertension is more common in older adults and in some minority ethnic groups, while asthma shows notable variation by ethnicity and is elevated in areas with poorer housing and air quality. Depression prevalence has increased over the last

¹⁴ Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government. (2019, September 26). [English indices of deprivation 2019](#).

¹⁵ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. (2025, October 30). [English indices of deprivation 2025: Statistical release](#)

¹⁶ London Borough of Newham. (2020). [Newham Facts and Figures – Population Estimates and Migration](#) (Churn Rate).

¹⁷ London Borough of Newham. (2025). [Newham Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2025](#).

five years, with higher recorded rates among women, older adults, and White British residents, though under-diagnosis is likely in some communities. Together, these conditions cluster most intensely in the most deprived deciles, contributing to multimorbidity at younger ages and driving a substantial proportion of preventable illness in Newham's population

Newham also has a higher proportion of **Disabled** people than London as a whole¹⁸, further emphasising the need for inclusive and accessible physical activity opportunities.

Together, these demographic, social and health factors create a landscape where the need for accessible, culturally appropriate and preventative physical activity programmes is both immediate and growing.

Implications for physical activity in Newham

- A young population means opportunity for early-life prevention and building lifelong habits.
- High ethnic diversity means physical activity offers must be culturally relevant and community-led.
- High levels of deprivation mean that structural barriers (cost, safety, green space access) must be addressed at a system level.
- A high rate of population turnover means that services must continually rebuild awareness and adapt to changing community needs.
- The high burden of LTCs emphasises the role of physical activity in prevention and management of these conditions.
- A growing and ageing population increases demand for physical activity infrastructure, active travel routes, and strength/balance programmes.

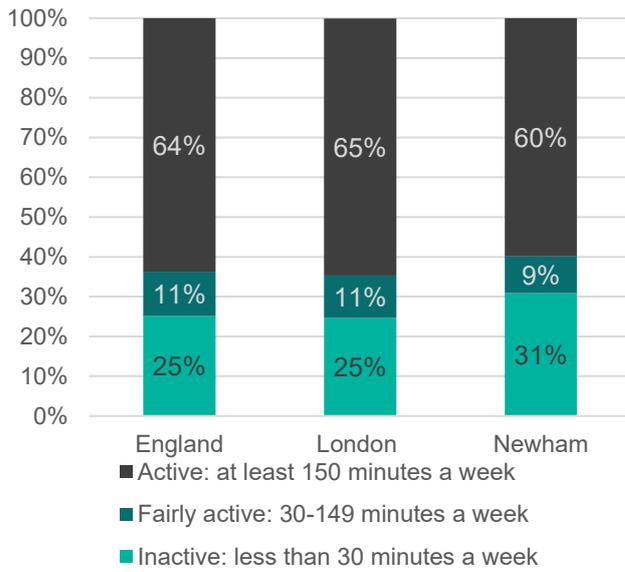
Newham physical activity in comparison

Understanding Newham's position relative to London, England, statistical neighbours and NEL boroughs helps identify whether local activity patterns reflect wider trends or require specific targeted action.

A higher proportion of residents in Newham are inactive (do less than 30 minutes of activity per week) relative to London and England averages. In 2024-25, an estimated 31% of adults were inactive, compared with 25% across London and nationally.

¹⁸ London Borough of Newham. (2025). [Newham Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2025](#).

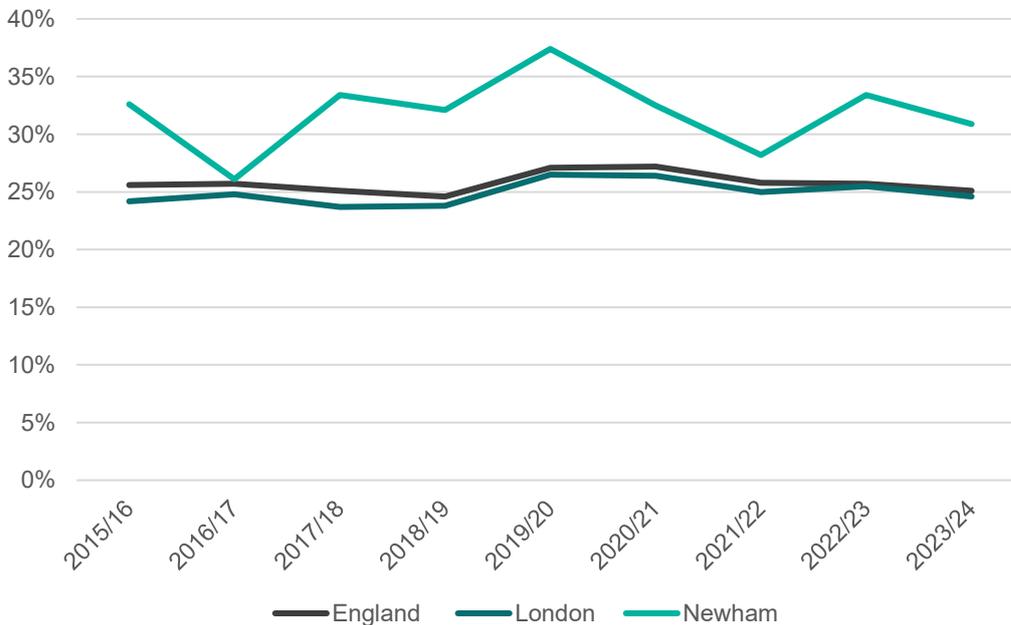
Figure 2: Activity levels in adults, 2023/24



Source: Sport England, Active Lives Adults Survey

Levels of inactivity in Newham have been higher than the London and England averages for the last 10 years. The fluctuations reflect small sample sizes, but the overall pattern is one of stable but elevated inactivity, rather than a worsening trend.

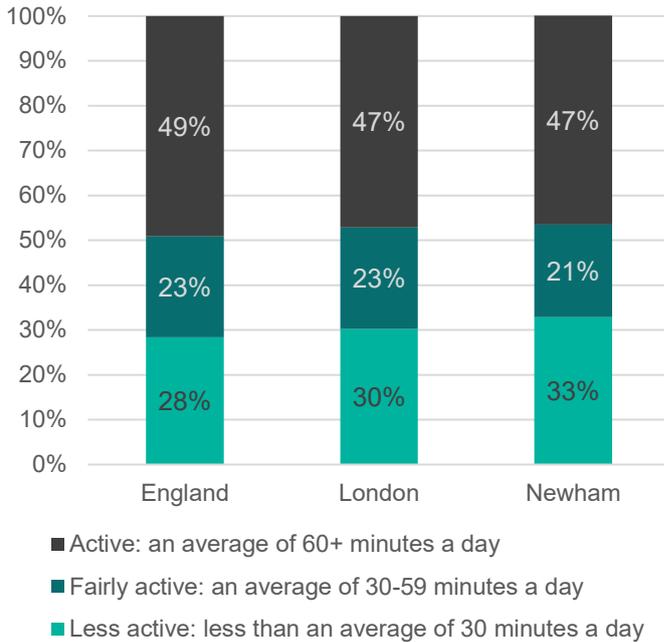
Figure 3: Proportion of physically inactive adults (<30 min/week)



Source: Sport England, Active Lives Adults Survey

When looking at children and young people, in the 2024-2025 academic year, 33% of CYP in Newham were less active (do less than 30 minutes of activity per day) compared to 30% in London and 28% in England.

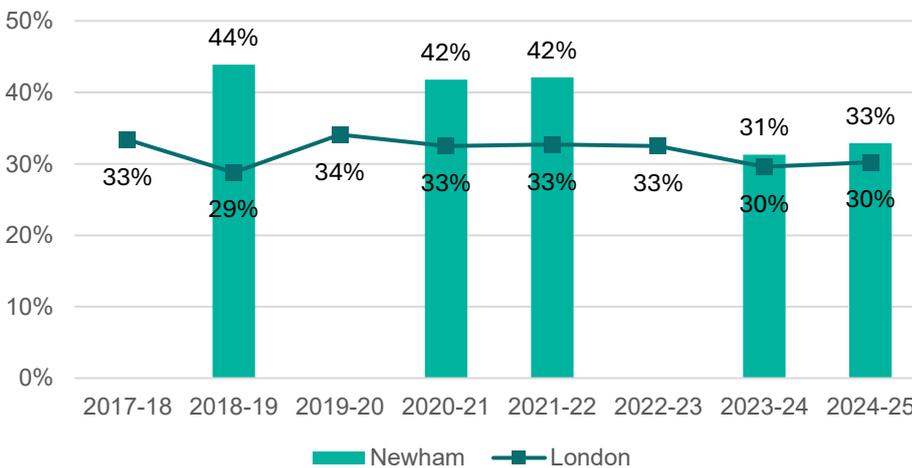
Figure 4: Activity levels in children and young people, 2024/25



Source: Sport England, Active Lives Children and Young People Survey

Newham shows a long-term pattern of CYP inactivity above London averages, but also a trend towards lower levels of inactivity, from 44% in 2018-19, to 33% in 2024-25.

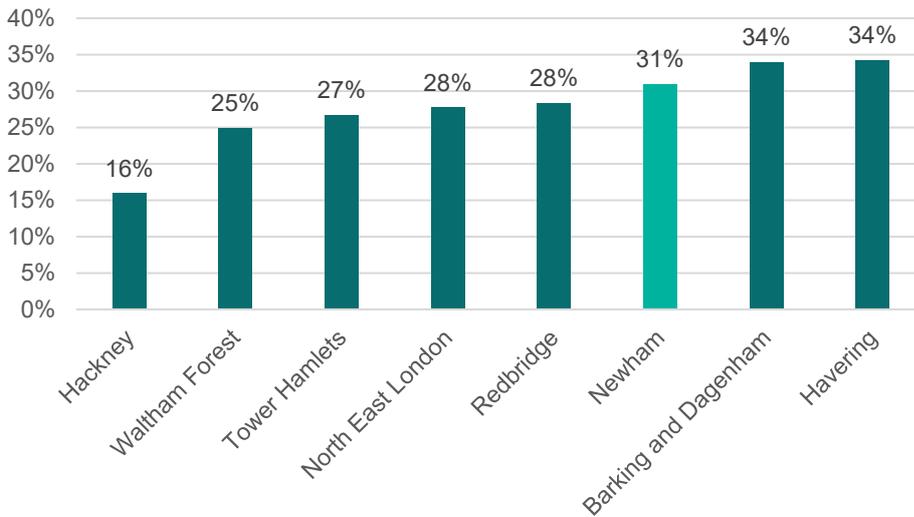
Figure 5: Proportion of less active children and young people (<30 min/day)



Source: Sport England, Active Lives Children and Young People Survey

Newham has relatively high rates of inactivity compared to its statistical neighbours – London boroughs with similar demographic and socioeconomic profiles – which range from 20% (Haringey) to 34% (Brent), and compared to other NEL boroughs, where the average is 28%. This could indicate that Newham’s higher inactivity levels cannot be explained by deprivation alone, and points to place-specific barriers, such as low green/play space provision, and gaps in active-travel infrastructure.

Figure 6: Proportion of physically inactive adults in NEL boroughs, 2023-24



Source: Sport England, Active Lives Adults Survey

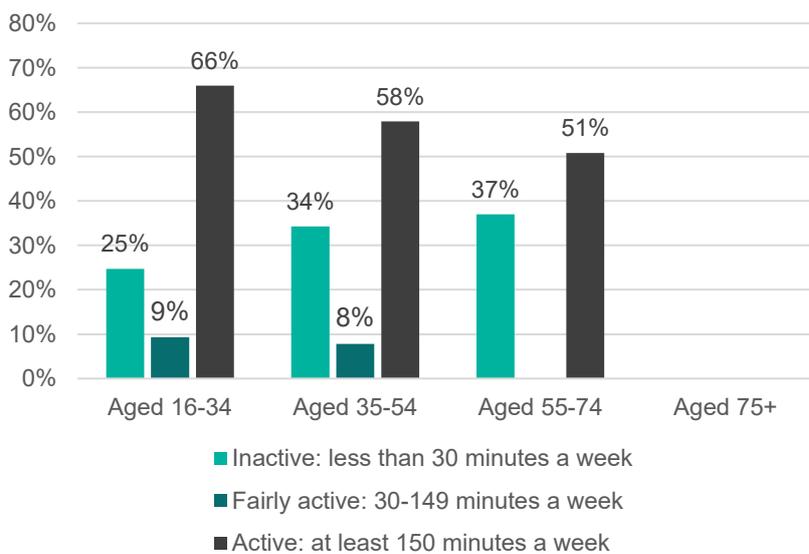
Inequities in physical activity

Understanding how levels of inactivity vary by sociodemographic characteristics is important for highlighting where there are inequities (systematic, unfair, and avoidable differences between population groups) in levels of activity in Newham, and therefore where we should be targeting resources and support for people to become more active.

Age differences

Activity declines with age in Newham, consistent with national patterns. In 2023-24, there were higher levels of inactivity in people aged 55–74 compared to younger age groups, indicating the need for mid-life activity promotion, strength-and-balance programmes, and accessible low-impact options in the community.

Figure 7: Activity levels in Newham by age, 2023-24

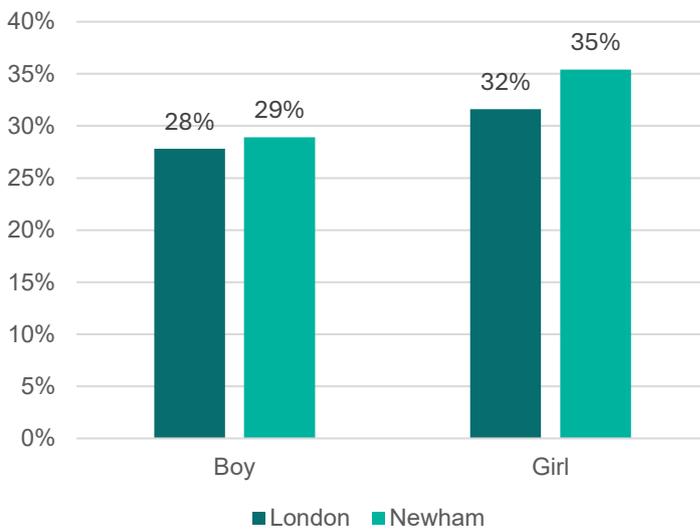


Source: Sport England, Active Lives Adults Survey

Gender differences

In Newham, in 2024-25, 31% women were inactive compared to 30% men. This is a slightly less pronounced difference than is seen at a North East London level (26% compared to 29%), which could imply that the small sample size is obscuring more significant gender differences. Gender differences appear to be starker in Newham CYP – in 2024-25, 35% of girls were less active, compared with 29% of boys. The gender gap is slightly wider than the London average and aligns with known barriers identified in local engagement, including confidence, mixed-gender environments, lack of culturally appropriate options, and limited female-led provision. This highlights the need for women- and girls-only pathways, female coaches, and targeted programming in safe, familiar settings.

Figure 8: Proportion of less active children and young people (<30 min/day), 2024-25

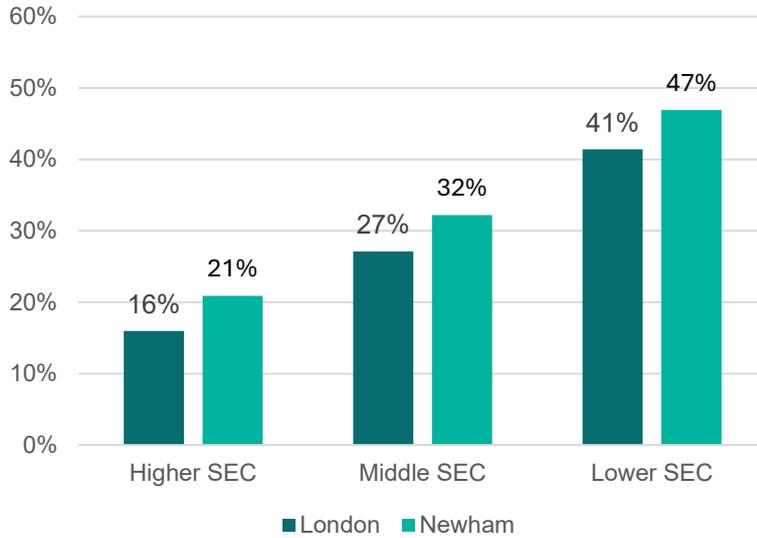


Source: Sport England, Active Lives Children and Young People Survey

Socioeconomic inequality

Socioeconomic inequality is a major driver of inactivity. In 2023-24, almost half (47%) of adults living in lower-income households were inactive – more than twice as high as those with higher incomes (21%). This likely reflects the combined effects of cost barriers, time pressures, and limited access to safe and appealing places to be active.

Figure 9: Proportion of inactive adults (<30 min/week) by socio-economic classification (SEC), 2023-24

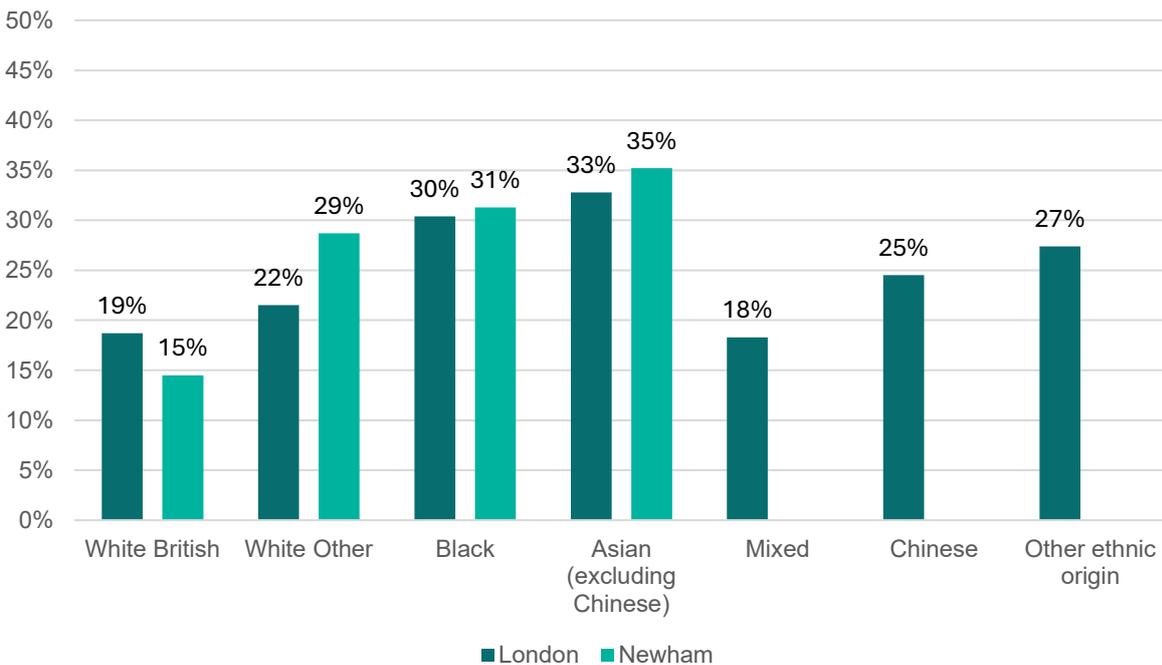


Source: Sport England, Active Lives Adults Survey

Ethnicity differences

In 2023-24, inactivity was highest among Asian adults (35%), and particularly among Asian women, whose inactivity levels were 40%. These disparities are likely shaped by intersecting barriers relating to income, alongside varying norms and limited availability of culturally appropriate physical activity opportunities. The ALS uses broad ethnicity categories, which limits granularity of the data and insight.

Figure 10: Proportion of inactive adults (<30 min/week) by ethnicity, 2023-24



Source: Sport England, Active Lives Adults Survey

Disability

In Newham, in 2023-24, adults with a disability or health condition were more likely to be inactive than those without a disability or health condition (34% compared to 29%).

These intersecting inequalities reveal that inactivity in Newham is not evenly distributed, and that targeted approaches, shaped by community insight and sensitive to cultural, gendered and socioeconomic realities, are essential for closing the gaps.

Local picture

This section describes the local physical activity landscape in Newham and assesses the extent to which current provision meets population need, and aligns with the evidence base and best practice. It is structured around the four domains of the WHO GAPP framework (Active Systems, Active Environments, Active People, and Active Society) to provide a comprehensive view of local strengths, challenges and opportunities.

1. Active systems

Key takeaways

- Newham council has strong strategic alignment around physical activity across public health, leisure, transport, planning and environment.
- Leadership and ownership for physical activity within the council and across the wider system are distributed, creating opportunities to strengthen alignment and accountability.
- Sport England's Place Expansion Programme in Newham presents opportunities to grow system collaboration infrastructure and shared governance.
- Insight collection is strong in pockets but not coordinated; equalities monitoring is inconsistent across settings, where a tension exists between frictionless, inclusive participation and collecting meaningful demographic data.

Within the WHO GAPP, the Active Systems domain focuses on the governance, leadership and data infrastructure that shape how effectively a whole place can enable physical activity. It emphasises the system conditions that make it possible for programmes, environments and campaigns to achieve population-level impact: shared direction, cross-sector collaboration, investment, accountability and evaluation.

Where we are now

Leadership, strategy and governance for physical activity

Newham council has a broad set of **strategies** that recognise physical activity as a priority for health, wellbeing and equity. Strategies across planning, transport, leisure and public health – such as the Local Plan, Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and Sustainable Transport Strategy – create a strong basis for whole-system action. Funding constraints remain a challenge to implementing recommendations from these strategies. One innovative response to this challenge from Newham council's Leisure team is to form strategic partnerships with National Governing Bodies (NGBs) for sports that Newham residents care

about. Partnerships with NGBs to date include the LTA, the Football Association, and Table Tennis England.

Leadership for physical activity is shared across Newham council, including from the Mayor and Cabinet members, and senior council officers across sectors, including public health, children and young people, environment, transport and leisure. The opportunity going forward will be to build on this dispersed leadership model, and strengthen alignment by ensuring these leaders are coming together regularly to focus on physical activity as a shared priority.

Sport England's Place Expansion programme¹⁹ in Newham adds a further opportunity to strengthen wider system collaboration and capacity. From April 2026, the 15-month Development Award phase will bring together partners within and outside of the council, including public health, leisure, the NHS, transport, environment, housing, education and the VCSE sector to form a "Newham Place Partnership". The partnership will jointly commission and deliver collaborative approaches to addressing inequalities in physical activity in Newham. Early steps will include developing a shared governance approach, a local theory of change, system and asset mapping, and monitoring and evaluation processes.

This work aligns closely with the WHO GAPP Active Systems domain by strengthening stewardship, coordination and governance. It also provides a platform for partners to identify shared priorities and, over time, consider whether Newham would benefit from a broader, place-wide physical activity strategy beyond the Sport England programme.

Data, monitoring and evaluation

Newham council is committed to **involving residents** in design and decision-making. Across a range of directorates, targeted engagement has generated valuable insight into cultural norms, safety concerns, gendered barriers, affordability, disability inclusion and local preferences in relation to leisure facilities, physical activity programming, green spaces, and active travel infrastructure. These approaches strongly align with NICE recommendations to involve local people in shaping physical activity priorities and to embed lived experience in design and evaluation.

There is an opportunity to build on these examples of strong, programme-specific engagement, collating resident insight around key priorities and questions. For example, a shared qualitative insight library or annual synthesis process could support shared learning across the system.

Monitoring is strong within commissioned leisure services. For example, GLL's participation dashboard provides regular data on access to leisure centre facilities and activities by age, gender and broad ethnicity categories. The [BetterPoints App](#) also collects demographic information about App users, which allows targeted programming to reach parts of the community we know are least active. All services under the Healthier Lives Dynamic Purchasing Vehicle (a procurement framework aimed at supporting residents to stop smoking, lose weight, increase physical activity and improve their overall well-being) provide robust monitoring data. Monitoring is more variable in community-led and community-based programmes, where the emphasis on creating inclusive and accessible activities can be in tension with data collection practices. These initiatives are often time-limited, grant-funded

¹⁹ Sport England. 2025. [Place expansion: 27 new partnerships](#).

and delivered by organisations with varying capacity for data collection, analysis and reporting, which can limit the extent to which learning is captured or shared across the system. This is a tension that also exists in monitoring active travel projects, where there is a trade-off between enabling maximum participation by reducing friction, and collecting detailed monitoring data, including demographic information to monitor equalities and representation.

There is currently limited capacity within the system to compare impact across different models (e.g., women-only sessions, community-led delivery, leisure-based activities, active-travel interventions) or to understand which types of provision are most effective for different demographic groups.

At **population level**, we rely heavily on Sport England's [Active Lives Surveys](#). While it provides robust, nationally comparable data, local insights are constrained by small sample sizes, year-to-year variation, broad ethnicity categories and limited local school participation in the children and young people's survey. These limitations make it difficult to identify local trends with confidence or to assess the impact of specific programmes. Similar challenges are evident in active travel datasets, which share many of the same limitations. The borough's primary data source for travel behaviour is the Transport for London (TfL) London Travel Demand Survey (LTDS)²⁰, which collects data from approximately **300 households per year**, averaged across a rolling three-year period, producing only borough-level estimates – it cannot identify inequalities by ethnicity, disability, gender, income or neighbourhood.

There is no systematic approach to collecting **physical activity data in schools** in Newham, despite evidence showing large inequalities among girls, children with SEND and pupils from some ethnic minority groups. Establishing a light-touch, school-owned data standard (e.g., minutes of PE, extracurricular participation, targeted support) could significantly strengthen local understanding.

School travel data shows similar constraints. We rely on voluntary 'hands-up' surveys submitted by schools via the [TfL Travel for Life accreditation programme](#), covering both pupil and staff travel behaviours. While this provides useful directional insight, data quality and completeness vary significantly by school, and crucially, no equalities data is collected, making it impossible to identify disparities in active travel participation among different ethnic, socioeconomic or SEND groups.

Strengthening the alignment between strategic prioritisation, engagement, monitoring and evaluation would support better decision-making, stronger accountability, and more effective system learning, aligning with WHO GAPPAs call for mature, evidence-led Active Systems.

Gaps and opportunities

Overall, Newham demonstrates many of the essential foundations of an effective Active System, including strong cross-sector policy alignment, emerging place-based governance through the Sport England Place Expansion programme, improving service-level monitoring, and well-developed capacity for resident engagement and co-production. However, these

²⁰ Transport for London. (2025). [Travel in London 2025: The travel behaviour of London residents based on the LTDS](#) [Annual report].

strengths are not yet fully translated into a coherent, system-wide approach to leadership, evaluation and accountability for physical activity. Key opportunities include:

- Build on Sport England Place Expansion Programme to develop long-term, cross-sector governance.
- Clarify key forum for leaders from across different parts of the council and wider system to align on priorities, share learning and identify opportunities for collaboration.
- A borough-wide equalities data standard across physical activity, active travel and school travel
- Shared monitoring and evaluation expectations across commissioned and community-led provision and/or strengthening evaluation capability through simple tools, training and templates.
- Explore potential for creation of a shared insight synthesis process, or local evidence library.
- Develop a shared set of priority groups and outcomes to improve coordination of activity and decision-making.
- Explore ways to increase CYP insight, including improved ALS school participation.

2. Active environments

Key takeaways

- Newham has made tangible progress on Healthy Streets and school-run safety; walking is strong, but cycling remains low due to gaps in continuous, protected routes and junction safety.
- Publicly accessible green and play space per resident is low and unevenly distributed across the borough, with quality concerns concentrated in more deprived neighbourhoods.
- Safety concerns (lighting, ASB, park visibility) are a critical barrier to accessing outdoor spaces.
- Leisure and sports facilities are heavily used; demand already outstrips supply in several areas. School facilities could represent major untapped infrastructure. Growing population pressures will intensify deficits.

Within the WHO GAPP, the Active Environments domain highlights how infrastructure and urban design enable movement as part of daily life. Connected footways, protected cycle lanes, inviting parks and quality facilities support active travel and other forms of physical activity across the life course.

Where are we now

Active travel

Active travel is especially important for reducing inequalities in Newham, as it is the most accessible, low-cost and achievable way for residents, including those facing financial, cultural or confidence barriers, to build movement into daily routines. Walking, wheeling and cycling also deliver wider health and environmental benefits, which are particularly relevant in a borough with high deprivation, poor air quality and high rates of long-term conditions.

Walking is the dominant mode of active travel in Newham, making up 38% of all trips in 2023/24-2024/25, compared to an inner London average of 46%. **Cycling** remains low at 2% of trips, compared to 5% across inner London²¹. Active Lives data reflects this picture²²: 37% of residents aged 20+ achieve at least 20 minutes of active travel per day – the second highest among statistical neighbours. Walking levels align with the NEL average, but cycling remains lower, with only 8% cycling for travel in the past 28 days (vs. 11% across NEL). These patterns show clear potential to grow cycling.

The **Healthy Streets Scorecard** ranks boroughs on delivery of key measures: Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (also known as ‘People Friendly Streets’ in Newham), 20mph limits, protected cycle lanes, School Streets, sustainable mode share and active travel rates. These are among the most effective actions councils can take to increase active travel, improve safety, reduce air pollution and boost active lifestyles. Newham has made substantial progress, rising from 13th to 8th place between 2024 and 2025. Major improvements include expanding 20mph coverage from 41% to 99% of borough-managed roads and slightly increasing Low Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN) coverage²³.

Schools also play a central role in shaping active-travel habits. Newham has made significant progress in delivering **Healthy School Streets**, an important component of the borough’s active-travel environment. As of March 2026, there are 37 Healthy School Street zones, covering 51 schools (44% Newham schools)²⁴, with additional schemes planned. This represents a doubling in the proportion of schools with zones that restrict traffic at school drop-off and pick-up times, improving safety, air quality and walkability around schools, and supporting modal shift for families. Feedback from schools indicates that these schemes contribute to increased walking and scooting, reduce idling and congestion, and help create safer and more welcoming environments for children and young people to travel actively. Forty-five schools in Newham currently hold **TfL Travel for Life** accreditation (Bronze, Silver or Gold) for promoting active, safe and sustainable travel. Accreditation reflects work such as promoting walking and cycling, running scooter or cycle training, improving bike storage, and embedding road-safety education. Strengthening links between these school-led efforts and borough-wide Healthy Streets interventions offers opportunities for greater impact, particularly in areas of high deprivation and limited access to high-quality active-travel routes.

LTNs reduce through-traffic, creating safer, quieter environments that encourage walking and cycling. Monitoring from one Newham LTN in West Ham Park showed significant reductions in traffic volumes, an 18% increase in cycling and a 36% increase in walking²⁵. Residents value improved safety and air quality, though concerns remain about traffic displacement and accessibility for specific groups²⁶. Overall, LTNs support a shift towards active travel and complement wider work to reduce car dependency.

²¹ Transport for London. (2025). [Travel in London 2025: The travel behaviour of London residents based on the LTDS](#) [Annual report].

²² Sport England. (2025). [Active Lives Adult Survey: November 2023–24 Report](#). Sport England.

²³ Healthy Streets Scorecard Coalition. (2025) [Newham: Borough results](#).

²⁴ Healthy Streets Scorecard Coalition. (2025) [Newham: Borough results](#).

²⁵ London Borough of Newham. (2025) [West Ham Park TMO OKD Report](#).

²⁶ London Borough of Newham. (2025) [Appendix C: Engagement Report](#).

These gains – particularly expanded speed limits, traffic-calming measures and School Streets – show that Newham is building the infrastructure to support active travel and laying foundations for safer everyday movement.

However, significant barriers remain, including poor air quality, broken walking/cycling routes, unsafe crossings, limited secure bike parking at key destinations, and uneven active travel infrastructure (which is strong in the South and West, but lacking in the northeast of the borough). Newham council's **Sustainable Transport Strategy**²⁷ aims to increase the proportion of trips made by walking, cycling and public transport (sustainable mode share) from the current level of 70%, to 80% by 2041 by creating connected, safe, and inclusive streets that support active lifestyles and reduce car dependency. Key actions from the strategy build on recent improvements, and include:

- Completing a strategic network of segregated cycle lanes, including linking underserved wards.
- Junction upgrades with protected turns and clearer priority for people walking, wheeling and cycling.
- Improvements to walking routes using Healthy Streets principles.
- Extending LTNs and Healthy School Streets.
- Promoting dockless bike hire, increasing secure parking, providing maintenance hubs (e.g., Dr Bike), and expanding training, especially in deprived areas.

Community safety

Community safety is a key influence on physical activity. Residents often feel unsafe in streets, parks and public spaces, particularly after dark, due to poor lighting, drug use, street drinking, congregation, harassment, and anti-social behaviour. Women and girls frequently report intimidation, and transport hubs and underpasses are common hotspots. These concerns deter walking, cycling and park use, limiting opportunities for everyday movement. Residents consistently call for better lighting, CCTV, visible patrols and well-maintained public spaces²⁸. Addressing safety is essential for reducing health inequalities, as fear of crime disproportionately affects women, older adults and residents in deprived areas.

The Community Safety team works with parks and highways services to apply *design out crime* principles through improved lighting, visibility and cleanliness. Regular *days of action*, enforcement and visual environmental audits target locations of concern. Work with the Police, Licensing and Youth Empowerment also helps reduce anti-social behaviour and make public spaces feel safer. This collaborative approach is essential for ensuring our parks, open space and streets support active travel and outdoor activity for all residents.

Open space

The overall provision of publicly accessible green space in Newham is low, with a rate of just 0.72 hectares per 1,000 residents, far below neighbouring boroughs, and the Accessible Greenspace Standard of 3 hectares per 1,000 residents. Green space is also unevenly distributed across the borough. Beckton, for example, is relatively well served with publicly accessible green space, with a rate of 2.15 hectares per 1,000 residents, significantly above

²⁷ London Borough of Newham. (2024). [Newham Sustainable Transport Strategy](#).

²⁸ London Borough of Newham. (2025). [Crime & Public Space Safety Consultation Results](#): September 2025. Newham Council.

the borough average. In contrast, Canning Town South has a rate of just 0.20 hectares per 1,000 residents²⁹.

The **Green and Water Infrastructure Strategy** points to practical, high-impact actions, including accessible entrances and paths, inclusive seating and toilets, lighting, step-free links to high streets and transport, and stronger greenway connections. Activation of green spaces through the provision of walking groups, family activities and low-cost events make improvements visible and increase use by residents³⁰.

Play space

Play is the most common and developmentally important form of activity for children. Yet Newham has very limited play and informal recreation space, with only 85 public playgrounds (0.024 hectares per 1,000 residents, far below the 0.25-hectare recommendation), and provision will fall further as the population grows. Around 85% of existing playgrounds are rated fair to very poor, with the poorest quality concentrated in the most deprived areas³¹. Improving existing sites and creating new play opportunities within both new developments and existing communities is essential to addressing inequalities.

The emerging **Play Vision** aims to address these gaps through:

- Inclusive design: sensory elements, SEND-friendly equipment, accessible surfacing.
- Safety by design: lighting, sightlines, natural surveillance from paths and homes.
- “Play on the way”: small playful features on routes to school and shops to embed movement in daily life – building on existing examples of implementing small play features into a number of recent local schemes (stepping stones at Keogh Road modal filter and Royal Docks Corridor, and outdoor gym equipment in our upgrade to the Beckton Corridor).
- Targeted programming: For example, family play hours, girls-only sessions, or school-park links can boost use and begin to close gender gaps visible in CYP data.

Sport and leisure facilities

The **Built Leisure Needs Assessment (BLNA)** identifies a wide network of indoor and outdoor facilities, including sports halls, activity halls, swimming pools, gyms, artificial pitches, and multi-use games areas (MUGAs), which together form the backbone of the borough’s formal physical activity offer³². These facilities serve a young and rapidly growing population and are particularly important for residents who face barriers to being active at home or outdoors due to limited private space or concerns about safety. Facilities like sports halls and activity halls play an important role in enabling community pay-and-play access, while swimming pools and leisure centres expand opportunities for family activity, active ageing, rehabilitation and lower-impact exercise. The BLNA highlights that Newham’s three main council leisure centres – Atherton, East Ham, and Newham Leisure Centre – are major hubs for participation.

²⁹ London Borough of Newham. (2025). [Green and Water Infrastructure Strategy: Section 5 – Baseline and Needs Assessment](#).

³⁰ London Borough of Newham. (2025). [Green and Water Infrastructure Strategy: Section 7 – Proposals and Recommendations](#).

³¹ London Borough of Newham. (2025). [Green and Water Infrastructure Strategy: Section 5 – Baseline and Needs Assessment](#).

³² London Borough of Newham. (2024). [Built Leisure Needs Assessment 2022–2038](#).

The BLNA shows that Newham's built leisure estate is already operating at or beyond capacity. For sports halls, demand in 2022 already exceeded supply, with all sports halls running at 100% capacity at peak times and around 10% of sports hall capacity unavailable for community use, as they are on school sites. By 2038, demand is projected to rise creating a deficit of around eight sports halls, with Canning Town alone lacking nearly five halls. Swimming pools show a similar pattern. Although supply marginally exceeded demand in 2022 by just 51 m², this buffer disappears rapidly: by 2038 demand is expected to increase by 22%. Planned new pools still leave a deficit of 222 m², equivalent to a four-lane 25m pool.

The **Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sport Strategy** assesses Newham's provision of natural turf pitches, 3G artificial grass pitches, cricket wickets, rugby pitches, tennis courts and MUGAs. The strategy identified playing pitch deficits for football, cricket, rugby union and tennis, and established that these shortfalls can be met by better utilising current provision through prioritising investment in poor or overplayed sites, upgrades to ancillary facilities, and targeted improvements in growth areas such as Beckton, Stratford, and Canning Town. However, funding constraints risk delaying upgrades³³.

The pressures highlighted in both strategies are driven by rapid population growth (a projected to rise by 27% by 2038) including over 90% growth in Stratford and Beckton – areas where unmet demand will be most acute. Protecting, upgrading and expanding indoor and outdoor facilities will therefore be essential for enabling equitable physical activity across the borough.

The Beckton Parks Masterplan³⁴ will transform 36 hectares of green space into an inclusive hub for physical activity, tackling health inequalities by prioritising safe, accessible routes and facilities for residents of Beckton and Custom House. Plans include new walking and cycling paths, nature and exercise trails, and upgraded sports and play areas, designed to engage groups who are least active, such as women, older adults, and families. Together, these measures embed movement into daily life and support equitable access to healthy environments.

Schools are one of the borough's most significant physical activity assets, offering high-quality indoor and outdoor spaces including sports halls, activity halls, pitches, multi-use games areas, courts and playgrounds. For children and young people, schools often provide the most familiar, safe and accessible environments for physical activity – particularly for girls, children with SEND, and pupils living in areas with limited green or play space. However, school facilities remain an under-used asset during evenings, weekends and school holidays, with limited community access due to staffing, supervision costs, safeguarding requirements and variable governance arrangements (especially among academies). This contributes to inequalities in access during school holidays, when CYP activity levels typically fall and disparities widen.

There is an opportunity to strengthen school-community partnerships, increasing safe out-of-hours access through Community Use Agreements, targeted activation, or links with holiday-period programmes. Bringing schools explicitly into the active-environment picture

³³ London Borough of Newham. (2024). [Playing Pitch & Outdoor Sport Strategy \(PPOSS\): Strategy & Action Plan](#).

³⁴ London Borough of Newham. (2024). [Beckton Parks Masterplan – Overview and Key Components](#).

ensures they are recognised as part of the borough’s network of movement-enabling places – not only as educational settings.

Gaps and opportunities

Whilst Newham has made meaningful progress in developing active environments, including through major Healthy Streets improvements, significant gaps remain when compared with best-practice standards such as WHO GAPP, Natural England’s Accessible Greenspace Standard³⁵ and Fields in Trust³⁶. Key opportunities include:

- Complete a connected cycling network with protected junctions and secure parking at key destinations, along with increased access to cycle hire, and incentives to provide a competitive advantage to active travel for local trips compared to driving.
- Target green/play investment to low-provision, high-deprivation areas with inclusive, safe design as standard.
- Activate green and open spaces so improvements translate to increased use.
- Relieve leisure and sport facility pressure via refurbishment, school estate activation, smarter programming and National Governing Body partnerships

3. Active people

Key takeaways

- Newham has a broad physical-activity offer across early years, schools, youth settings, leisure centres, community venues and health pathways, but quality and inclusivity vary significantly by setting and neighbourhood.
- Women and girls, Disabled residents/SEND families, South Asian women and people living with long-term conditions face the most persistent and well-documented barriers to participation.
- Culturally relevant, community-led offers and warm first experiences (welcoming staff, familiar settings, appropriate timing) are critical for engagement and retention.
- Clearer progression pathways (taster → beginner → mainstream), better signposting, and light, shared metrics would improve reach, equity and continuity across settings.
- School-holiday periods widen inequalities; the HAF programme helps mitigate this but cannot fully compensate for gaps in term-time provision or limited access to school estates.
- The reach of community provision is strong, but unsustainable funding models risk programme loss.
- Youth provision has specific gender gaps, requiring women-/girl-only design, trusted female staff, and timing aligned with cultural and family routines.

³⁵ Natural England. (2020). [Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard \(ANGSt\)](#).

³⁶ Fields in Trust. (2022). [Guidance for Outdoor Sport and Play](#).

The biggest health gains from physical activity come from supporting the least active into some activity, so inclusivity is central to impact. Within the WHO GAPP, the Active People domain focuses on ensuring physical activity programmes and opportunities are visible, safe, close to home, and culturally relevant. In Newham, the offer spans early years, schools, youth provision, leisure centres, social prescribing pathways and community-led initiatives. There is a range of universal offers (open to all), targeted offers (tailored to under-represented groups or specific barriers) and specialist offers (structured support for residents with additional needs or clinical risk).

Where we are now

Early years (0–5)

Early years providers draw on a small but practical set of resources, including [Keeping Active in the Early Years](#) and [Delivering the Daily Mile](#) online training provided by the Early Start Nutrition Team, available to nurseries, childminders and children centres/family hubs. Activity tends to be woven through free play, short outdoor sessions and simple games that develop balance and coordination. Provision looks different across nurseries, childminders and Family Hubs, largely because space, equipment and outdoor access vary. Physical activity is not yet a defined area of expertise in most settings, so confidence and consistency are mixed. A simple Continuing Professional Development (CPD) offer for early years staff (short, practical sessions focused on play-based movement, indoor/outdoor set-up and risk/benefit play) could improve confidence. A short, termly checklist (“what we tried, what worked, any barriers”) could create a borough-wide view without burdening providers.

Some **Family Hubs** host parent-child sessions that encourage active play at home, and libraries and community venues run some movement-focused story or music sessions. Where these exist, they work best when delivered by familiar staff, scheduled around naps and mealtimes, and clearly signposted through channels parents already use.

Additional research and engagement is needed to understand the provision of specialist support for children with additional needs in mainstream early years settings, and the role that SEND-specific voluntary organisations or leisure-based offers play in providing adapted activities.

School-aged children

Based on [Healthy Schools](#) Bronze Award applications over the last five years, it appears that most **primary schools** offer two hours of curriculum Physical Education (PE) each week, typically delivered as two one-hour lessons. **Secondary school** provision ranges more widely, usually between one and two hours. Swimming is commonly offered in Key Stage 2, often in weekly blocks or short intensives. Many schools benefit from specialist PE teachers or coaches and make good use of external partners, including local sports foundations and the Newham School Sports partnership.

Forty-eight primary schools and six early years settings in Newham are currently registered as participating in [The Daily Mile](#), a free, non-competitive initiative from London Marathon, providing 15 minutes of outdoor movement each day. This reflects strong local engagement with simple, whole-school approaches to building activity into the school day. London Marathon noted that some schools registered several years ago, and a relaunch of the Daily

Mile website in early 2026 will allow schools to re-register, providing a more accurate and up-to-date picture of participation. This will offer an opportunity to refresh engagement and target support where uptake has declined.

Schools describe a range of offers for groups who face barriers to participation: girls-only sessions, adapted PE for pupils with SEND, and wellbeing-focused activities that emphasise confidence and enjoyment. Several schools use sports leader approaches, where trained pupils help run games and warm-ups, which tends to increase daily movement across whole classes. There isn't sufficient data to understand what structured support is provided for pupils with more complex needs.

Where a staff member **champions** physical activity, schools tend to report broader and more inclusive provision, better use of lunch and after-school time, and stronger partner links. However, progress can stall when that person leaves, which may indicate a need for simple, school-wide systems rather than reliance on a single enthusiastic member of staff.

A new partnership with the **National Tennis Association** will provide free tennis taster sessions to 10 primary schools during 2026. The programme aims to introduce children to racket sports, support physical literacy, and create pathways into affordable community park tennis programmes. As this is an emerging offer, monitoring early engagement and progression into community sessions will be important for maximising impact.

The **Holiday Activity and Food (HAF)** programme provides free holiday-period activity and food provision for children and young people eligible for benefits-related free school meals, as well as those considered vulnerable. HAF plays a role in reducing holiday-related inactivity gaps, particularly among lower-income families, by providing accessible and engaging activity in familiar school and community venues. In 2024-2025, 8,455 children attended HAF provision across the Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays. The programme delivered a broad offer of physical activities including swimming, football, basketball, dance, gymnastics, cycling, water sports and multi-sports, alongside creative and enrichment activities. Engagement was particularly strong when HAF programmes were hosted in schools, indicating that familiar, trusted environments play an important role in supporting CYP participation³⁷.

The school picture is based mainly on self-reported narrative from award applications, so it isn't possible to make comparisons across the borough. A light, shared data standard (minutes of PE, participation in extracurricular activity, targeted offers and basic workforce/CPD indicators) could allow schools to keep ownership while also providing insight into equity of provision, and variation across the borough. In the meantime, based on available information, it appears that there is room to strengthen girls' participation, support for SEND and swimming continuity into early secondary years.

The **Healthy Schools Social Welfare Alliance** provides an ongoing opportunity for regular CPD focused on physical activity, wellbeing and inclusive practice for school and early years staff. This aligns with local priorities to strengthen staff confidence, reduce variability in provision, and embed movement into the school day. Leveraging this alliance could support consistent quality and help schools meet daily activity expectations.

³⁷ London Borough of Newham. (2025). Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme: Annual Report 2024–2025.

To ensure consistent and equitable provision, many boroughs now encourage every school to adopt a whole-school **physical activity policy**³⁸. Such a policy can articulate daily activity expectations, outline inclusive approaches for girls and pupils with SEND, set out commitments to active travel and break-time activity, and ensure alignment across PE, extracurricular sport and wider wellbeing initiatives. Including this expectation within Newham's system recommendations would help underpin and sustain whole-school approaches to activity.

Youth Empowerment

As part of Newham council's Youth Empowerment service, **Youth Zones** offer informal, drop-in opportunities for physical activity, with football, basketball and non-contact boxing being the most popular, though mainly with boys and young men. Sessions are social, free, and close to home, which lowers the barrier to taking part.

Girls' participation is low in several Youth Zones (sometimes under one in five attendees). This is something the Youth Empowerment service are looking to address. For sport- and movement-based activities, mixed-gender environments, cultural preferences and confidence are known barriers to girls and women, indicating a need for women- and girls-only sessions in familiar venues, delivered by trusted staff and timed around school, faith and family commitments.

Youth Workers are not required to hold physical-activity qualifications, which limits their ability to offer structured programmes beyond informal games. Where partnerships provide that capability, the picture improves, as described in the earlier spotlight on the calisthenics project in Stratford. CPD for Youth Workers could help them to integrate safe, engaging activity into existing sessions. Short girls-only pilots, co-designed with young women, linked to positive role models and held in familiar spaces, could test what works before scaling. A simple shared attendance template (gender, age, persistence over time) would show whether changes are sticking.

GLL provision

Newham's three major council-commissioned **leisure centres**, run by GLL – Atherton, East Ham and Newham – provide multi-purpose spaces with gyms, studios, pools and sports halls. Recent investment has coincided with strong growth in memberships and visits, alongside a marked increase in female participation, suggesting that improvements to the environment and programme mix are resonating.

Live Better is GLL's digital health and wellbeing platform, offering on-demand workouts, healthy habits coaching, and virtual health advice through the Better UK app. It is designed for existing Better members and non-members alike, particularly benefiting people who prefer or require flexible, at-home activity options, including residents who face physical, social, or economic barriers to activity, or need to fit in activity around caring and shift work, and people who don't live near a Better leisure centre or struggle to attend in person.

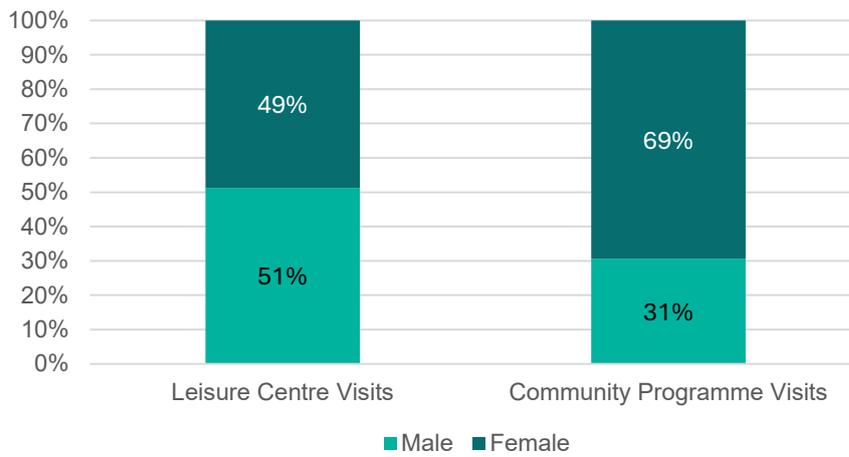
Cost and confidence are key barriers for many residents, especially older adults, women returning to activity, and those on lower incomes. Free swims for over-60s and under-16s reduce cost pressures, while GLL's **Active Communities** model extends inclusive sessions into parks, care homes, sheltered accommodation and community venues so that

³⁸ Royal Society for Public Health. (2023). [Playground rules: Promoting physical activity in schools](#).

opportunities are visible and close to home. Small-grant funding through the Active Communities **Physical Activity Inclusion Fund** (PAIF) enables hyper-local, culturally relevant programmes run by trusted groups. Examples include monthly SEND family sessions at leisure centres, women’s wellness and exercise sessions designed with and for under-represented women, and youth basketball and football rooted in faith settings. These offers help people start safely, build routines and, where appropriate, progress into mainstream sessions.

In 2025, leisure centre use was relatively balanced by gender (49% women; 51% men), which aligns with Active Lives data. In the same year, community programmes showed

Figure 11: Proportion of male and female visitors between Jan and Dec 2025



Source: GLL Newham Client Dashboard

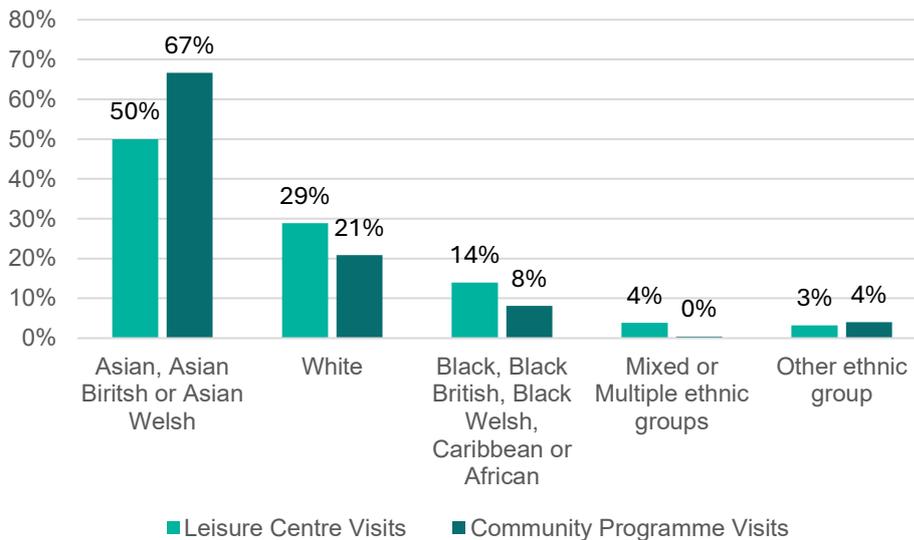
much more engagement by women (69%) compared to men (31%)³⁹. This implies that the Active Community Programme is a particularly effective entry point for women, and bridging pathways from community settings into the leisure-centre offer could help close the gender gap seen for Asian women in ALS data.

GLL data shows Asian residents accounted for 50% of leisure-centre visits and 67% of community-programme visits in 2025. In Active Lives Survey data, Asian adults (especially Asian women) have the highest inactivity locally, indicating that the community model is reaching groups with the greatest need. This pattern aligns with resident insight that women-only, culturally tailored sessions in trusted local venues reduce barriers to participation. Black residents were under-represented in both leisure centres (14%) and community programmes (8%), relative to borough population estimates, indicating a potential gap in targeted provision for these residents. In this context, lower participation by White residents in targeted community programmes is not inherently problematic, as White British adults have the lowest inactivity rates locally. The priority is to maintain inclusive universal access while targeting support to those facing the most significant barriers. Ethnicity is recorded in broad categories by GLL, and within the community programme, due to the fact that residents can drop in to sessions rather than signing up in advance, there are challenges with consistent demographic data collection, meaning we should interpret this data with caution.

³⁹ GLL. (2025). Newham Client Dashboard 2025 [Internal performance report].

Resident engagement activities undertaken between 2021 and 2023 indicated that awareness of the full offer was inconsistent. Clearer signposting at front-of-house and through community channels could help residents navigate options. For women and girls, women-only sessions, female instructors and modest dress options remain important in some settings. For older adults, convenient daytime scheduling, friendly first contact and progression pathways from community venues into leisure centres help sustain participation.

Figure 12: Ethnicity of visitors between Jan and Dec 2025



Source: GLL Newham Client Dashboard

GLL is commissioning an external audit of its entire leisure offer in Spring 2026, to independently review and strengthen the quality, inclusivity and community impact of its leisure offer. [Quest assessments](#) of each leisure centre and the Active Communities Programme will help evidence what is working well, identify areas for improvement, and demonstrate how GLL’s leisure and community programmes support wider system priorities such as health improvement, equity and social value.

Long term conditions

For residents with long-term conditions or additional needs, GLL also offers [Live Well Newham](#): a set of structured programmes requiring professional- or self-referral. Programmes include **Adult Weight Management**, **Xplore Children and Young Person Weight Management** (combining age tailored education sessions and physical activity), **Better Balance Falls Prevention Programme** (a weekly exercise group for people aged 50+ aimed to improve balance and strength and reduce falls and fear of falling), and **Physical Activity on Referral (PARS)** which provides a structured, 12-week pathway for adults with stable long-term conditions who would benefit from personalised activity plans and supervised sessions. However, many inactive residents who lack a qualifying health condition may fall outside strict referral criteria. Short “taster to starter” bridges (such as gentle, low-cost community sessions that prepare people for mainstream classes) can fill this gap and reduce drop-off when formal programmes end.

In Newham, [Bikeworks](#) run All Ability Cycling Clubs in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and Central Park, explicitly designed for people with physical, sensory and learning

disabilities, people with LTCs, and their carers/companions. These clubs offer a safe, friendly and social environment, and give participants access to a wide range of adapted cycles, and support from experienced cycle instructors.

People living with long-term conditions often need sustained, **personalised behaviour-change support** to help them become and remain physically active, due to a range of barriers including fluctuating health, specific symptoms, and low confidence. Evidence shows that while physical activity can improve function and quality of life for people with LTCs, maintaining participation typically requires goal-setting, continued feedback, motivation and social support beyond initial referral⁴⁰. Ensuring residents with long-term conditions can access this kind of tailored, ongoing support would help more people build physical activity into daily life and sustain it over time, and could help extend impact and reduce drop-off in programmes such as Live Well Newham, PARS and community-based activity offers.

Cost continues to be one of the most commonly reported barriers to activity for residents referred from primary care. Even with reduced rates for specific groups, many residents request free gym or leisure centre membership, including people with long-term conditions, carers, people on low incomes and those experiencing housing insecurity. Transport costs compound this barrier: residents report being unable or unwilling to travel beyond walking distance, particularly where they have mobility limitations, chronic conditions, safety concerns or need someone to accompany them. For these residents, community-based offers within very local geographies, such as park walks, estate-based programming, often represent the only realistic starting point for building movement into daily routines.

GP practices also report challenges supporting residents who are registered in Newham but temporarily housed in other boroughs, such as Barking & Dagenham or Waltham Forest, often due to eviction or homelessness. Primary care teams frequently lack information about **referral pathways and funded programmes in neighbouring boroughs**, making it difficult to signpost displaced residents to accessible physical activity options while they are living outside Newham. When these residents return to Newham, many have dropped out of any healthy-living or physical activity programmes they previously started, creating additional inequity for people already facing significant social and economic vulnerability. Stronger cross-borough collaboration, shared referral information and partnership pathways would help maintain continuity of support for this group.

Community-led delivery

Local **sports clubs** are an integral and longstanding part of Newham's physical activity ecosystem, delivering opportunities across a broad range of sports including basketball, cheerleading, gymnastics, fencing, football and many others. Clubs play a crucial role in supporting children, young people and adults to build skills, confidence and social connection, and often provide structured progression pathways from informal activity into more sustained participation. Historically, the council's leisure team undertook extensive club development work, including maintaining a club directory, supporting clubs with funding applications, coordinating volunteer and coach development, helping identify suitable

⁴⁰ Gavin, J. P. et al. (2025). [Maintaining physical activity in people with long-term conditions following engagement in physical activity referral schemes: Barriers, enablers, and intervention strategies.](#) International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity.

venues, and commissioning clubs to deliver sessions in schools and community settings. Much of this support has reduced over the past decade, in part due to resource constraints. As part of the new GLL contract, some elements of this club-development function will transition to GLL, providing an opportunity to rebuild infrastructure around club governance, safeguarding, coach development and workforce pipelines. Parks and green-space teams also maintain regular contact with clubs who book pitches and outdoor space, meaning there are opportunities to strengthen cross-council collaboration on club engagement.

Community organisations are essential for reaching residents who are less likely to visit formal sport settings. They offer familiar spaces, peer support and programming shaped by community insight. Community provision in Newham is substantial, with 140 physical activity listings among the 500-plus activities captured on the Well Newham Directory of Services. These offers are geographically widespread, with notable concentrations around Beckton and the Royal Docks, where activities include walking groups, cycling clubs, water sports and football. There also appears to be strong provision across Stratford, East Ham, Plaistow and Canning Town, where community centres, libraries, parks and leisure sites act as programme hubs.

Activities cater to a broad range of residents, including older adults (e.g., chair-based yoga, walking football), children and young people (e.g., SEND multisport, youth clubs), and some women-only sessions, and inclusive or culturally specific offers delivered by community organisations. However, there appears to be a gap in activities targeted towards South Asian women specifically. A small number also specifically support people with long-term conditions, including Parkinson's and those seeking gentle movement options. Several organisations emerge as especially active providers in this space, notably the West Ham United Foundation, and a range of library-led Get Active Get Healthy sessions, alongside community-based partners such as Rosetta Arts, The Line, and Bonny Downs Community Association delivering walking, movement and mixed-ability activities across the borough.

Financial sustainability of community-led delivery remains a substantial challenge. Historically, Newham council has maintained a largely free physical activity programme delivered through council and community partners (excluding leisure centre memberships). While this approach has successfully removed cost barriers for many residents, it has become increasingly difficult to sustain in the current financial climate. Stakeholders report that when external grant funding ends, even introducing a small nominal fee can be challenging, despite strong demand for the activities.

Local sports clubs and community organisations consistently highlight that a significant proportion of participants cannot afford membership or session fees. This undermines the financial stability of providers, limiting their ability to pay for facility hire, maintain equipment or retain workforce capacity. For example, an organisation that works with young refugees and asylum seekers relies on access to leisure centre spaces but faces difficulties covering facility costs because their service users cannot pay. Similarly, innovative initiatives such as the Equipment Locker pilot, which has provided free equipment to residents across 15 locations, have demonstrated clear value in removing cost barriers, but remain vulnerable to ending once short-term funding periods conclude unless longer-term resource or support from partners is secured. These pressures highlight the need for sustainable funding models, supported access to facilities, and long-term commissioning arrangements that

reduce financial precarity for providers while maintaining affordability for residents most affected by deprivation.

Gaps and opportunities

Newham has a strong and diverse physical activity offer across leisure centres, community venues, schools, youth settings and specialist pathways. However, participation patterns from GLL data, combined with Active Lives and resident insight, highlight several persistent gaps and opportunities to strengthen equity, access and progression.

- Strengthening inclusive offers for girls/young women, Black residents, South Asian women, Disabled residents/SEND families and people with LTCs.
- Improving the visibility and navigation of the local offer through front-of-house scripts, clear “where to start” boards in key locations, and Well Newham listings.
- Strengthen school-to-community and community-to-leisure pathways with visible progression maps at key sites, “what next?” prompts at events, buddying between community groups and leisure sites, and ensure offers tailored to beginners are visible to those not eligible for referral pathways.
- Adopt light shared metrics in schools/youth/community settings to strengthen evidence of reach.
- Address the sustainability challenge created by reliance on short-term or external funding, and explore models (e.g. subsidised hire, long-term commissioning, pooled system funding) that allow providers to maintain low- or no-cost participation for priority groups.
- Strengthen support for local sports clubs through governance advice, club development, volunteer pathways, and subsidised access to facilities, recognising their critical role in delivering community sport.
- Explore sustainable models for low-cost access to equipment (learning from the Equipment Locker pilot) to help reduce financial barriers for families, young people and newly arrived communities.
- Address gap in provision of behaviour change support for residents with Long Term Conditions.

4. Active society

Key takeaways

- Social norms, trusted messengers and practical messages determine whether residents try something for the first time, and whether they come back.
- Communications are improving but are still fragmented. Representation, language accessibility and consistent “next steps” are not yet consistently applied across all messaging.
- High-reach channels (Well Newham, Health Champions, partner newsletters, BetterPoints, festivals) can support a year-round, audience-led approach.
- Volunteer capacity is a limiting factor in sustaining community-led activity (e.g., Parkrun closure).
- Digital interventions (BetterPoints, Live Better app) offer opportunities but may widen inequalities without targeted inclusion work.

Within the WHO GAPP, the Active Society domain focuses on shaping positive social norms and attitudes towards physical activity. This includes the messages people see and hear, who delivers them, and whether advice and guidance feels relevant and achievable to target audiences. In Newham, work in this domain includes local health promotion and outreach, partner communications, active-travel incentives, and mass-participation events – creating multiple touchpoints that normalise physical activity for people of all ages and from diverse communities.

Where we are now

Local social norms and attitudes

Attitudes to movement in Newham are shaped by culture, social networks, family roles, work patterns, safety perceptions and the places where people spend time. Residents tell us confidence, cost, time, caring responsibilities and safety get in the way; they also tell us that familiar venues, welcoming staff, clear information and culturally relevant options help to overcome these barriers. Parents, peers, faith leaders, teachers, youth workers and Health Champions are the most **credible messengers** for many residents.

Communications and engagement

Best practice is clear: keep messages **practical, positive and specific** to the audience, and then repeat them consistently across trusted channels⁴¹. In Newham, this means:

- **Content:** show “what counts” (walking to the bus, carrying shopping, dancing at home), demystify sessions (“what to wear, can I bring a child, is there a women-only area, how much does it cost?”), always include a clear next step (“try this free session near you today”), include clear accessibility information (venue accessibility features, reassurance that beginners are welcome, and the option to bring a carer or family member).

⁴¹ Williamson, C., et al. (2021). [The Physical Activity Messaging Framework](#). International Journal of Behavioural Nutrition and Physical Activity

- **Representation and language:** imagery and wording that reflect Newham’s diverse communities; translations where useful; accessible formats; plain English.
- **Channels:** Well Newham’s [Keeping Active](#) pages and [YouTube](#) page; Health Champions and community connectors; WhatsApp groups; the Public Health Team’s Resident newsletter and 50 Steps Newsletter; Faith/community newsletters; notice boards in GP and maternity settings, libraries, leisure front-of-house and schools.
- **Feedback loop:** short pulse polls, QR codes and quick “what helped/what didn’t” forms to refine messages in-cycle.

Promoting active travel

Communications that encourage walking, wheeling and cycling are most effective when they coincide with visible improvements to routes, crossings and lighting, and when they are anchored to local purpose, such as the school run, shopping, commuting or faith journeys⁴².

BetterPoints is a digital behaviour-change app that rewards everyday movement, offering points for walking, wheeling, cycling and leisure visits. Launched in Newham in March 2024, it automatically records activity and awards one point per active minute up to 150 minutes a week, with points redeemable for shopping vouchers or charitable donations. By January 2026, the programme had 2,900 users, broadly reflecting Newham’s diversity. Women (especially teenage girls and women aged 35–45), and Disabled residents were well represented, while participation was lower among Other White, Black African and Bangladeshi groups⁴³. Insights from the first year are shaping 2025/26 priorities, including targeted outreach to under-represented communities, a new Travel for Worship in-App challenge, and work to reach residents with long-term conditions such as diabetes.

Mass-participation and community events

Mass-participation events can help reset local norms, showing that movement is social, fun and open to all. In Newham, **parkrun, Big Football Day⁴⁴ and local festivals** provide low-pressure entry points.

Parkrun participation remains an important entry point into regular physical activity, but Newham’s provision is currently limited. The Thames Barrier parkrun has recently ceased operating due to a shortage of volunteers, leaving [Beckton parkrun](#) as the only remaining local event. A junior parkrun is still in development, though progress reflects the wider challenge of sustaining volunteer-led models, which require a stable core team to operate safely and consistently. Neighbouring boroughs such as Barking and Dagenham benefit from a well-established parkrun volunteer community, but replicating this in Newham has been difficult. Engagement also varies by community. In a parkrun focus group in Tower Hamlets⁴⁵, women from Bangladeshi, Somali and Black African/Caribbean backgrounds described barriers including early-morning timing, mixed-gender environments, and

⁴² Larrington-Spencer, H., & Sherriff, G. (2025). [Agree to Disagree? Insights into community views and sources of division in relation to Low Traffic Neighbourhoods in Greater Manchester](#). Active Travel Studies.

⁴³ BetterPoints Ltd. & London Borough of Newham. (2025). BetterPoints Newham: Evaluation Report, 1 March 2024 – 28 February 2025

⁴⁴ Essex County Football Association. (2025). [Hundreds enjoy huge ‘Big Football Day’ festival in East Ham](#).

⁴⁵ Public Health, Tower Hamlets Council. (2025). [Health Needs Assessment: Physical Activity in Tower Hamlets](#)

concerns about dogs and park safety – factors likely to be relevant in Newham. Addressing these issues may involve offering single-sex walking or jogging waves, improving visible reassurance around safety, and recruiting volunteer champions from under-represented communities. Clear signposting on the day – for example, “our women-only walking group meets here next week” – can help convert first-time attendance into ongoing participation.

Workforce capability and trusted messengers

Staff and volunteers across health, youth, leisure, early years, schools and community organisations should feel confident explaining the benefits of activity and offering safe, inclusive starting points⁴⁶. Short, practical CPD has been shown to work best⁴⁷: how to give brief advice; how to welcome first-timers; how to adapt sessions for different needs; and how to link residents to local options. In maternity and long-term condition pathways, routine prompts plus a simple “first step” handout work well⁴⁸. Outside clinical settings, youth workers, faith leaders and community organisers are often the most credible messengers for their audiences; equipping them with simple tools and up-to-date local signposting could increase impact and expand reach⁴⁹.

Gaps and opportunities

There is a strong foundation for promoting an active society in Newham, with high-reach channels, including the Well Newham website, Health Champions, partner newsletters, BetterPoints, and community festivals. However, communications remain fragmented, with limited dedicated comms capacity and a reliance on opportunistic outreach, resulting in inconsistent awareness of the full local offer. Key opportunities include:

- Prioritise a communications plan that is audience-led, and sequences messages with the calendar (religious festivals, return-to-school, summer parks, flu season).
- Strengthen representation, language accessibility and cultural relevance across all collateral.
- Equip trusted messengers (Health Champions, faith/youth leaders, clinical staff) with practical tools, including scripts and signposting information.
- Tie broader campaigns to infrastructure improvements (e.g., launch community bike rides when a new protected path opens).
- Convert events to habits with on-the-day “what next?” pathways and buddying options.

⁴⁶ Kettle, V.E., et al. (2022). [Effectiveness of physical activity interventions delivered or prompted by health professionals](#). BMJ.

⁴⁷ Hall, L.H., et al. (2022). [Delivering brief physical activity interventions in primary care: a systematic review](#). British Journal of General Practice.

⁴⁸ Mitra, M., et al. (2026). [Experiences of healthcare professionals providing physical activity advice in maternity care: qualitative systematic review](#). BMJ Open Sport & Exercise Medicine.

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What next for physical activity in Newham?

Context and inequalities

Physical activity is a powerful determinant of health. In Newham, inactivity levels remain above national averages, and inequalities persist across the population:

- **Ethnicity:** Inactivity is highest among Asian adults (36%), particularly Asian women (40%), and remains elevated among Black communities.
- **Gender:** Girls are substantially less active than boys (35% vs 29%).
- **Socioeconomic status:** Adults in lower-income households experience more than double the inactivity of higher-income groups (47% vs 21%).
- **Disability and long-term conditions:** Disabled residents are significantly less active (34%) and face intersecting physical, environmental and social barriers.
- **Age:** Activity declines sharply from mid-life onwards, with older adults identifying cost, confidence and health as key challenges.

These patterns are shaped by Newham's wider context: high and increasing deprivation, limited and unevenly distributed green and play space, and a high burden of long-term conditions, alongside resident-reported barriers such as cost, safety, cultural relevance, confidence, time pressures and caring responsibilities. However, these same challenges also highlight where the greatest opportunities for impact lie, as we know the greatest health gains can be achieved by helping those who are currently least active to move more. The borough has the right strategic foundations, emerging partnerships, and community assets to meaningfully increase activity levels and reduce inequities.

Findings and recommendations

This section summarises the key findings across each WHO GAPP domain and sets out a series of coordinated, equity-focused recommendations. Together, these actions aim to increase physical activity levels, reduce inequalities, and strengthen the conditions that enable residents - particularly those who are currently least active - to move more as part of daily life

1. Active systems

Summary of findings

Newham benefits from a council with strong strategic alignment, with physical activity embedded in key strategies across planning, transport, leisure, environment and public health, and health equity as a clear corporate priority. The emerging Sport England Newham Place Partnership offers a major opportunity to embed shared governance, a unified theory of change and the potential for future investment.

However, monitoring and evaluation capacity is variable, and population-level insight (particularly for children and young people) is limited due to small ALS samples, both of which limit system learning. There is an opportunity to build on existing successes to strengthen shared insight, evaluation and governance.

Priority: Establish shared cross-sector leadership and stronger equalities-focused data to drive coordinated action.

Recommendations

Findings	Recommendations
Leadership and governance for physical activity are distributed across multiple teams, resulting in strong policy alignment but no single coordinated mechanism for shared priority-setting, accountability, or system-wide decision-making.	<p>1a. Establish coordinated system governance for physical activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Build on the Sport England Place Partnership working group and HNA stakeholder group to bring cross-sector leaders together around physical activity priorities. - Ensure priorities and inequalities identified through this HNA are embedded in in the Sport England Place Partnership and any future planning and strategy development. - Ensure cross-sector governance established as part of Sport England Development Award is sustained in a useful format for the borough beyond the length of the funding.
Monitoring, evaluation and equalities data are inconsistent across the system, particularly for CYP, limiting Newham’s ability to understand who is being reached, where inequalities persist, and which approaches are most effective.	<p>1b. Strengthen monitoring, evaluation and shared learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop shared equalities monitoring metrics across physical activity, active travel and school travel. - Develop simple, shared evaluation metrics for commissioned and community programmes (equity focus, first timer retention, progression). - Create a local insight library or annual resident voice synthesis process to consolidate resident feedback, community research and programme learning from across the system. - Explore ways of improving school level physical activity data for CYP, which could include increasing ALS school participation; and/or testing light-touch data collection in schools’ offers (e.g., minutes of PE, extracurricular participation, targeted offers).
Community and school settings face tension between ease of participation and meaningful data collection, leading to gaps in insight around equity, progression and outcomes.	

2. Active environments

Summary of findings

There has been meaningful progress on the built environment: Newham climbed significantly in the Healthy Streets Scorecard, and has rapidly expanded School Streets, 20mph coverage, and elements of a strategic cycling network. Major long-term opportunities are emerging through Beckton Parks Masterplan, the Green & Water Infrastructure Strategy, and sustained investment in healthy streets and active travel. These improvements are laying the groundwork for more residents to walk, wheel and cycle routinely.

However, cycling remains low; infrastructure is fragmented; and publicly accessible green and play space is significantly below benchmark standards and unevenly distributed. Leisure and sport facilities are heavily used, and demand exceeds supply across multiple facility types. Newham council’s new Play Vision, targeted upgrades and strong community appetite for activation present powerful opportunities to ensure more public space is safe and inclusive, and enables activity, especially for underserved groups.

Priority: Expand safe, connected active-travel routes and increase access to high-quality green and play spaces in areas of greatest need.

Recommendations

Findings	Recommendations
Newham has made substantial progress on Healthy Streets, but cycling levels remain low due to gaps in continuous, safe and well-connected infrastructure, and junction safety and lighting concerns persist.	<p>2a. Complete a connected, safe and equitable active travel network</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Address gaps in continuous cycling routes, especially in the northeast. - Improve junctions, crossings and step-free connections. - Increase secure cycle parking at stations, town centres, estates and community hubs. - Integrate safety measures (lighting, surveillance, cleaning) into core active-travel upgrades. - Expand Healthy School Streets, prioritising areas with high deprivation or high road danger. - Explore options for targeted support for schools with low active-travel rates, based on TfL Travel for Life accreditation data.
Publicly accessible green and play space is significantly below benchmark standards and unevenly distributed, with the lowest quality and provision concentrated in the most deprived neighbourhoods.	<p>2b. Address inequalities in green and play space access</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Target investment to neighbourhoods with lowest quality provision and highest deprivation. - Embed inclusive design, including accessible surfacing, sensory play, SEND friendly equipment, lighting and natural surveillance. - Expand “play on the way” interventions through transport corridors and school routes. - Co-design low-cost activation (walking groups, family activity hours, outdoor classes, seasonal events) to ensure improvements translate into increased use.
Leisure and sports facilities are operating at or beyond capacity, with projected population growth expected to widen deficits in sports halls, swimming pools and playing pitches.	<p>2c. Enhance quality and capacity of leisure and sports facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prioritise refurbishment of ageing facilities and expand capacity where population growth demands. - Strengthen community use of school estates through agreements and targeted activation. - Use NGB partnerships to improve pitch and court quality and reduce deficits identified in BLNA and PPOSS. - Optimise programming (e.g., women only swim slots; off peak community access; entry level classes) to ensure those who are currently least active benefit from existing provision.

3. Active people

Summary of findings

Newham has a diverse and vibrant local offer, spanning early years, schools, youth settings, leisure centres, community organisations, faith groups and specialist health pathways. GLL’s data shows encouraging trends, with women’s participation rising, particularly through the Active Communities model.

Despite this, key groups remain under-served: girls and young women, Black residents, Disabled residents and SEND families, and people with long-term conditions who do not qualify for referral schemes. Improving monitoring of school-based offer, strengthening progression pathways and increasing visibility of programmes and activities will help to achieve broader and more sustained impact.

Priority: Grow inclusive, culturally relevant, low-cost opportunities with clear pathways that help residents progress from first steps into sustained activity.

Recommendations

Findings	Recommendations
Women/girls, Black residents, Asian women, Disabled people, and residents with LTCs face persistent and specific set of barriers	<p>3a. Strengthen inclusive and targeted offers for priority groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Build on existing provision of low-cost, gentle “starter” classes in settings that are more appealing and accessible to priority groups, such as parks and libraries. - Review and ensure consistency and visibility of free and low-cost activities for priority groups, including population groups prioritised by the council in other areas, such as carers. - Expand women-only and culturally tailored sessions (particularly for Asian and Black women).
Progression pathways between taster sessions, community provision and mainstream leisure are weak, potentially leading to drop-off and low continuity.	<p>3b. Strengthen visibility and connection between different parts of the local offer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expand the Physical Activity map with accessibility information, e.g., “where to start” pathways and/or filters for women-only, beginner, family-friendly, SEND-inclusive. - Identify appropriate progression pathways (from taster to beginner, from beginner to mainstream) following on from key programmes. - Review levels of access to behaviour-change support for people with long-term conditions. - Pair community events (festivals, park runs, seasonal activities) with clear follow-up pathways (“join this group next week”), and use buddying or ambassador models to support first-timers.
Provision across early years, schools and youth settings is broad but highly variable, with persistent inequalities for girls, CYP with SEND, and lower-income families. There is limited monitoring or consistent data on what is delivered, inclusion is inconsistent, progression pathways are unclear, and staff	<p>3b. Increase consistency of early years, schools and youth provision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explore appetite and feasibility for Newham schools to develop or adopt whole school physical activity policies, setting out expectations for daily activity, inclusive provision, and active travel. - Review swimming offer across the life course for Newham residents, including within schools, to identify opportunities to strengthen swimming continuity. - Use the Healthy Schools Social Welfare Alliance to deliver regular CPD on inclusive, practical physical activity approaches for school, early years, and youth empowerment staff.

confidence varies across settings.	- Pilot girls only youth sessions co designed with young women.
Community-led provision is high-reach but financially fragile, with many organisations unable to sustain free/low-cost sessions once short-term funding ends.	3d. Support community providers to grow and sustain local offers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assess effectiveness of club development function (now within GLL contract), including governance support, workforce and volunteer development, and coordination of club directories and communications. - Explore additional routes to build capacity and sustainability within local sports clubs and community organisations delivering physical activity programmes. - Explore opportunities to align grant programmes with the findings and priority groups identified within this HNA.

4. Active society

Summary of findings

Newham already has high-reach communication channels (Well Newham website, newsletters, Health Champions, libraries, faith networks, BetterPoints) and a core set of mass-participation opportunities. The borough's existing trusted messengers, including youth workers, teachers, and faith leaders, represent a powerful, scalable route for effective signposting and reframing norms around movement.

However, current communications and outreach around physical activity remains fragmented, relies on limited specialist capacity, and lacks consistent representation, accessibility and clear "next steps". Consolidating and coordinating assets will enable a stronger, more consistent "active society" narrative across the borough.

Priority: Deliver consistent, culturally relevant messaging and equip trusted community messengers to guide residents towards local opportunities.

Recommendations

Findings	Recommendations
Information about physical activity opportunities is fragmented and inconsistently promoted, making it hard for residents facing cultural, confidence or cost barriers to find and navigate options.	4a. Deliver a coordinated, audience-led communications plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sequence campaigns around the local calendar (Ramadan, summer, back-to-school) and planned infrastructure improvements. - Ensure consistent representation (women, Disabled residents, Asian and Black communities, older adults). - Use plain language, accessibility features, translations where appropriate, and clear next steps.
Trusted messengers (e.g., faith leaders, youth workers, Health Champions, primary care staff) often lack up-to-date tools and signposting, limiting their ability to	4b. Equip trusted messengers with practical, behaviourally informed tools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide short scripts, flyers, and signposting for Health Champions, faith leaders, youth workers, carers and clinical staff.

<p>guide residents effectively.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure primary care staff have the information, tools and training to refer residents appropriately into relevant programmes, particularly those with LTCs. - Introduce “movement brief advice” into frontline touchpoints: maternity, LTC reviews, youth services, libraries.
<p>Volunteer capacity limits the sustainability of mass-participation events, including Parkrun, reducing accessible entry points into activity.</p>	<p>4c. Strengthen volunteer capacity and community leadership to sustain inclusive mass-participation events.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work with GLL to explore opportunity for a borough-wide volunteer pathway for physical activity, including recruitment, training and retention of community volunteers to support events and community programmes. - Work with VCSE partners, Youth Empowerment and faith/community leaders to co-design volunteer roles that feel accessible and culturally relevant, including women-only and family-friendly volunteer opportunities.
<p>Digital behaviour-change tools (BetterPoints, Live Better) show promise but may widen inequalities without targeted outreach to under-represented groups.</p>	<p>4d. Ensure digital behaviour-change tools are inclusive and accessible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Monitor uptake by key demographic groups and ensure alternative, non-digital provision in place for those who are digitally excluded. - Focus outreach on under-represented groups and offer assisted sign-up in trusted community settings. - Continue to use representative, culturally relevant messaging and develop tailored in-app challenges.

Acknowledgements

Claire Greszczuk, Interim Director of Public Health, and Carly Clarke, Head of Leisure and Sport, were generous and engaged co-sponsors of this project. Their leadership helped ensure the HNA was grounded in robust public health principles, informed by existing local insight, and oriented towards practical action and decision-making. They consistently stewarded the work, connecting the project with the right people at the right time and providing thoughtful, detailed feedback throughout.

Ben Bezuidenhout, Senior Analyst for Public Health Intelligence, provided expert guidance on the quantitative components of the HNA. His support was invaluable in shaping a rigorous, proportionate, and methodologically sound analytical approach.

Daniel Leggett, Development Manager at London Sport, was an important collaborator, welcoming the HNA as both a process and an output to support the development of the Sport England Place Partnership in Newham.

This work also benefited greatly from the time, expertise, and commitment of key stakeholders across and beyond the council. Their contributions, whether through workshops, sharing insight, or providing feedback, were central to refining the HNA's findings and shaping its recommendations. Thank you to:

- Nicole Napier, Commissioning Manager, Leisure and Sport, London Borough of Newham
- Louise Wilcox, Head of Parks and Green Assets, London Borough of Newham
- Gemma Tully, Public Health Officer, Play and Parks, London Borough of Newham
- Olajumoke Azeez, Health Promotion Assistant, London Borough of Newham
- Amy Hayfield, Healthy Schools Programme Lead, London Borough of Newham
- Richard Wadey, Head of Transport Policies and Programmes, London Borough of Newham
- Su Guy, Sustainable Transport Officer, London Borough of Newham
- Danni Sewell, Sustainable Transport Support Officer, London Borough of Newham
- Hamza Shaikh, Traffic Management & Road Safety Engineer, London Borough of Newham
- Naomi Pomfret, Principal Policy Planner, London Borough of Newham
- Madalina Pop, Commissioner – Public Health, London Borough of Newham
- Esther Baker, Interim Head of Service for Youth Empowerment, London Borough of Newham
- Allison Sherwood, Assistant Director – Community Safety Enforcement, London Borough of Newham
- Cliff McMahon-Docherty, Social Prescribing Link Worker, Central One PCN
- Tony Brown, Area Community Manager, GLL
- Sophia Blake, Partnership Marketing Programme Owner, GLL

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Appendix 1: Table of recommendations

Recommendations
1. Active systems
<p>1a. Establish coordinated system governance for physical activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Build on the Sport England Place Partnership working group and HNA stakeholder group to bring cross-sector leaders together around physical activity priorities. - Ensure priorities and inequalities identified through this HNA are embedded in the Sport England Place Partnership and any future planning and strategy development. - Ensure cross-sector governance established as part of Sport England Development Award is sustained in a useful format for the borough beyond the length of the funding.
<p>1b. Strengthen monitoring, evaluation and shared learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop shared equalities monitoring metrics across physical activity, active travel and school travel. - Develop simple, shared evaluation metrics for commissioned and community programmes (equity focus, first timer retention, progression). - Create a local insight library or annual resident voice synthesis process to consolidate resident feedback, community research and programme learning from across the system. - Explore ways of improving school level physical activity data for CYP, which could include increasing ALS school participation; and/or testing light-touch data collection in schools' offers (e.g., minutes of PE, extracurricular participation, targeted offers).
2. Active environments
<p>2a. Complete a connected, safe and equitable active travel network</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Address gaps in continuous cycling routes, especially in the northeast. - Improve junctions, crossings and step-free connections. - Increase secure cycle parking at stations, town centres, estates and community hubs. - Integrate safety measures (lighting, surveillance, cleaning) into core active-travel upgrades. - Expand Healthy School Streets, prioritising areas with high deprivation or high road danger. - Explore options for targeted support for schools with low active-travel rates, based on TfL Travel for Life accreditation data.
<p>2b. Address inequalities in green and play space access</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Target investment to neighbourhoods with lowest quality provision and highest deprivation. - Embed inclusive design, including accessible surfacing, sensory play, SEND friendly equipment, lighting and natural surveillance. - Expand "play on the way" interventions through transport corridors and school routes. - Co-design low-cost activation (walking groups, family activity hours, outdoor classes, seasonal events) to ensure improvements translate into increased use.
<p>2c. Enhance quality and capacity of leisure and sports facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prioritise refurbishment of ageing facilities and expand capacity where population growth demands. - Strengthen community use of school estates through agreements and targeted activation. - Use NGB partnerships to improve pitch and court quality and reduce deficits identified in BLNA and PPOSS.

Recommendations

- Optimise programming (e.g., women only swim slots; off peak community access; entry level classes) to ensure those who are currently least active benefit from existing provision.

3. Active people

3a. Strengthen inclusive and targeted offers for priority groups

- Build on existing provision of low-cost, gentle “starter” classes in settings that are more appealing and accessible to priority groups, such as parks and libraries.
- Review and ensure consistency and visibility of free and low-cost activities for priority groups, including population groups prioritised by the council in other areas, such as carers.
- Expand women-only and culturally tailored sessions (particularly for Asian and Black women).

3b. Strengthen visibility and connection between different parts of the local offer

- Expand the Physical Activity map with accessibility information, e.g., “where to start” pathways and/or filters for women-only, beginner, family-friendly, SEND-inclusive.
- Identify appropriate progression pathways (from taster to beginner, from beginner to mainstream) following on from key programmes.
- Review levels of access to behaviour-change support for people with long-term conditions.
- Pair community events (festivals, park runs, seasonal activities) with clear follow-up pathways (“join this group next week”), and use buddying or ambassador models to support first-timers.

3b. Increase consistency of early years, schools and youth provision

- Explore appetite and feasibility for Newham schools to develop or adopt whole school physical activity policies, setting out expectations for daily activity, inclusive provision, and active travel.
- Review swimming offer across the life course for Newham residents, including within schools, to identify opportunities to strengthen swimming continuity.
- Use the Healthy Schools Social Welfare Alliance to deliver regular CPD on inclusive, practical physical activity approaches for school, early years, and youth empowerment staff.
- Pilot girls only youth sessions co designed with young women.

3d. Support community providers to grow and sustain local offers

- Assess effectiveness of club development function (now within GLL contract), including governance support, workforce and volunteer development, and coordination of club directories and communications.
- Explore additional routes to build capacity and sustainability within local sports clubs and community organisations delivering physical activity programmes.
- Explore opportunities to align grant programmes with the findings and priority groups identified within this HNA.

4. Active society

4a. Deliver a coordinated, audience-led communications plan

- Sequence campaigns around the local calendar (Ramadan, summer, back-to-school) and planned infrastructure improvements.
- Ensure consistent representation (women, Disabled residents, Asian and Black communities, older adults).
- Use plain language, accessibility features, translations where appropriate, and clear next steps.

4b. Equip trusted messengers with practical, behaviourally informed tools

Recommendations

- Provide short scripts, flyers, and signposting for Health Champions, faith leaders, youth workers, carers and clinical staff.
- Ensure primary care staff have the information, tools and training to refer residents appropriately into relevant programmes, particularly those with LTCs.
- Introduce “movement brief advice” into frontline touchpoints: maternity, LTC reviews, youth services, libraries.

4c. Strengthen volunteer capacity and community leadership to sustain inclusive mass-participation events.

- Work with GLL to explore opportunity for a borough-wide volunteer pathway for physical activity, including recruitment, training and retention of community volunteers to support events and community programmes.
- Work with VCSE partners, Youth Empowerment and faith/community leaders to co-design volunteer roles that feel accessible and culturally relevant, including women-only and family-friendly volunteer opportunities.

4d. Ensure digital behaviour-change tools are inclusive and accessible.

- Monitor uptake by key demographic groups and ensure alternative, non-digital provision in place for those who are digitally excluded.
- Focus outreach on under-represented groups and offer assisted sign-up in trusted community settings.
- Continue to use representative, culturally relevant messaging and develop tailored in-app challenges.