

**‘Start moving and stay moving in County Durham’**  
**A five-year physical activity strategy for County Durham**  
**2022 – 2027**

**Vision** - County Durham residents will be more active, enabling them to live longer, healthier and happier lives.

**Mission:** Bring people and organisations together with a shared purpose of helping everyone in County Durham to move more

The strategy is underpinned by County Durham’s Approach to Wellbeing, with people and place at its heart. The strategy adopts a partnership approach, involving communities in decisions that affect them to ensure that people of all ages across County Durham are motivated to move more, and have access to inclusive opportunities to be more active.

A key focus of this strategy is to work with our partners to help those they work with and engage with to move more. This is very important as we recognise this is not the sole responsibility of a single organisations, leaders or groups, but a joint effort where everyone has a role to play.

This countywide strategy sets out the following core principles that will guide individual and organisational action, to enable and support County Durham residents to move more:



To develop this strategy, we have engaged with a number of individuals, communities and organisations so that we can benefit from their thoughts, opinions and insight to better understand the challenges, priorities and shared vision. This will enable us all to work together and increase movement and physical activity in County Durham people and their communities.

*For the purposes of this strategy, **activity** or simply **movement** are used to refer to all kinds of physical activity, including active living (e.g. stair climbing) sport, planned structured exercise and informal, incidental activity.*

## Section 1 - Introduction

County Durham is one of the biggest counties in England covering over 862 square miles. The infographic below provides an overview of the county;



## Assets

County Durham has a vibrant physical activity culture. People from our communities regularly engage in active pursuits, and partners and organisations currently provide many opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to move more. This strategy not only builds on the positive work that is already happening, but explores the potential for further collaboration between partners to provide more opportunities for people to live active lives.

Across County Durham, there are a huge range of assets that are essential to maximising our current and future physical activity environment. These assets support, encourage and help our residents to build activity and movement into their daily lives. Furthermore, they will support a whole systems approach to making regular movement a normal part of the daily lives of those who live, work and play in County Durham. Our residents have access to:



## Why is movement important?

*'Some is good, more is better'*

Regular movement provides a range of physical and mental health, and social benefits, many of which are increasingly important issues for our people and communities. It can also contribute to a range of wider social, environmental and economic benefits for individuals, communities and the county, such as reducing air pollution, increasing productivity and promoting social and community togetherness.

## Moderate or strong evidence for health benefit

Children	Adults	Older Adults
Bone Health Cognitive function CV fitness Muscle fitness Weight status Depression	All-cause mortality Stroke and heart disease Hypertension Type 2 diabetes 8 cancers Depression Cognitive function Dementia Quality of life Sleep Anxiety/depression Weight status	Falls Frailty Physical function

Whilst it is acknowledged that movement is good for all, some of the greatest benefits will be achieved by supporting those who are currently inactive to take part in more movement of any nature. Regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, economic status or ability, all residents of County Durham should have accessible, safe and convenient choices to help them move more. This strategy supports everyone to be active, whilst recognising that some barriers to increased activity may not be within an individual's own control.

There is no minimum amount of movement required to achieve health benefits. Even 5-10 minutes of movement at a time can be effective as a long-term goal for people starting from low levels of movement. In today's society, where people's lives are busy with many competing priorities, even small amounts or bursts of movement throughout the day will be of benefit. For example, taking the stairs instead of the lift or walking to the local shop instead of driving.

Whilst increased activity brings obvious health benefits, regular movement can also directly or indirectly contribute to:



### Learning from and living safely with Covid -19

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is now more than ever important for people all ages to be active. Throughout the pandemic a key message communicated to the public was that regular movement supports both physical health, and mental health and wellbeing. Partners and organisations provided communities with innovative ways to get moving, adapting physical activity offers to ensure all communities could engage in some form of movement each day.

Some of our most vulnerable communities were disproportionately affected by Covid-19, and in some areas we have seen health inequalities widen. Regular movement can, however, help to reduce both health inequalities and risk factors associated with lack of activity. We know that the pandemic has also had a major impact on the local economy. Health and the economy are very much linked, and the health-enhancing role of movement has perhaps never been more important.

We recognise that enabling everyone in County Durham to live healthy, active lives is an important part of County Durham's recovery. Supporting our local communities to move more will not only support not economic recovery, but also contribute towards increasing community resilience, productivity, and help to create a more inclusive and prosperous County Durham.

### Community Centred

*Created with County Durham communities and partners*

Our people and communities are County Durham's biggest assets. We will work with our communities and partners to understand and recognise different needs, and to identify those local assets that will help our people be more active. We will work to ensure that local environments support people to move more – whether that is where they live, work or play - as well as supporting communities to become more connected to better enable this to happen.

The strategy adopts a whole systems approach to help maximise our many community assets here in County Durham. Recognising, identifying and maximising these local assets can help develop the existing strengths within our communities. This, in turn, will support a community-centred approach to reducing health inequalities that involves local communities, and in particular those in greatest need. Not only will this contribute to our mission to help people be more active, but it will also directly contribute to the County Durham Vision 2035 – *to make County Durham a place where our communities are well connected and supportive.*

Using local data, insight from our communities, and evidence-based approaches will help us to focus efforts where the need is greatest, supporting those who move least to move more. Building on consultation and coproduction of this strategy, we will expand on the good work already taking place across our communities to encourage people to become more active.

### **What does this strategy mean to me?**

The strategy encourages individuals, organisations, community groups, clubs, and wider partners to collaborate by creating a cohesive, aligned plan that will help more people in County Durham to be active. This is why we have developed a strategy with some key core principles to help focus and support individual and organisational action.

We have also identified key priority areas that as a network, we will focus upon. They have been informed by local evidence and feedback from partners from across the system. These priority areas will help to coordinate and align approaches of all of key stakeholders.

Every organisation and individual has a role to play in working together to create a strong and active network. We will move away from a focus on individual action to one of positive system change through close working and collaboration.

## **Section 2 - Start moving and stay moving: core principles**

### ***Enabling and supporting County Durham residents to move more***

A number of core principles have been developed to support communities to move more, and they underpin this strategy. They are based on feedback from many local stakeholders who have been engaged in the strategy development. These principles are connected, as all are invariably required to achieve the overall vision of the

strategy. The principles set out why and how organisations and communities can adopt new ways of thinking about movement with the goal of supporting people to move more, to be healthier and to be more connected.

Let's take a look at these in more detail

### **Principle One: Person / Community Centred**

***Our people and communities are County Durham's biggest asset. We will work with communities to support and empower our most disadvantaged and vulnerable, helping them to live healthier, longer more active lives. We will help people develop the motivation, confidence, knowledge and capacity to move more, and explore why regular movement is important.***

Working with our communities is a central driver to the success of the strategy. What drives this work is building on community strengths and empowering people to understand what matters to them in the context of increasing activity levels. Communities have been involved in developing the principles of the strategy through consultation, and we will coproduce the action plan to agree how change will be achieved (see section 4 for further information).

We will build on the existing vibrant physical activity culture across the county, through both universal and targeted approaches, to ensure our residents have access to local opportunities that are based on their needs and wishes.

The key is a bottom up approach with the emphasis on 'people, organisations, community groups, and clubs working together'. Close work and engagement with local communities will add to our existing knowledge, so that we can develop new insight on the issues and barriers people face in relation to moving more. We will coproduce solutions with local people and partners so that we can create meaningful ways to help people move more and increase their activity levels.

Sport England's Sport Outcomes Evidence Review (2017) demonstrated the impact of building stronger communities by bringing people from different backgrounds together via participating, volunteering and spectating, improving community links, levels of cohesion, and social capital. Improving residents' sense of belonging, increasing levels of social trust, and feeling more connected to neighbourhoods and communities are also recognised as important factors in building a strong sense of community.

*'Building on what's strong'*

#### **How can communities/organisations embed this principle:**

The key is a 'bottom up approach' with the emphasis on 'people, organisations, community groups, and clubs working together' to achieve improved outcomes with our communities.

## **Principle Two: Whole systems working and collaboration with partners**

***Key to creating system change is a focus on people and local communities, supported by close collaboration and shared decision-making with County Durham organisations.***

County Durham will adopt and continually develop a whole systems approach to increasing movement and physical activity. This will help our people and communities work with local organisations to share their understanding and ideas. Partnership working will help identify where the need is greatest, identify opportunities for change that will support regular movement, and build upon the existing vibrant physical activity culture across the county.

The strategy encourages partners from all sectors to work as a network, so that they can use their experience and expertise to make progress and achieve long-term, positive and sustainable change.

This strategy will encourage people of all ages to move more. This 'life course approach' acknowledges that people have different levels of movement throughout different stages of their lives, and that these stages can be influenced by many internal and external factors. We want to work with partners, communities and organisations to help people overcome any such barriers and make positive lifestyle changes.

### **How can communities/organisations embed this principle:**

Connect with others, build and strengthen relationships to ensure a coordinated and meaningful approach to increasing movement and reducing inactivity.

## **Principle Three: Focusing action where the need is greatest**

***Encourage and support those within our communities who are least active to move more to help address the inequalities that currently exist***

Everyone in County Durham should have the opportunity to live in good health. We know that life chances and health are largely determined by the conditions which a person is born, grows, lives, works and ages. These are known as the wider social determinants of health. Social and physical environments are known to directly influence the opportunity to move more and do more physical activity, and inequalities in factors such as employment, housing and transport are known barriers to uptake.

Safe transport environments, for example, influence how children integrate walking and cycling into their daily routines, whilst safe transport systems enable older aged adults to maintain their autonomy. So, without such systems, the opportunity for active travel could be much more limited.



Although everyone, regardless of age, gender, language, ethnicity, economic status or ability, should have accessible, safe, convenient opportunities to be active we know this isn't always the case. Evidence suggests that there are several demographic groups that are physically inactive or under-represented such as those lower socio-economic groups, women, older adults and those with long term conditions. We will focus efforts where the need is greatest to reduce those inequalities that impact upon activity and health. Our data tells us that some of our communities' experience worse health outcomes than others and we want to support all residents to live more active, healthier lives.

Health inequalities data:





This strategy will play a role in empowering those who move less to move more, by ensuring equitable and accessible to county-wide opportunities.

In the long term, supporting our residents to move more can help us tackle some of the health impacts of economic disadvantage (for example, poor mental health), and regular movement can contribute to reducing the gap in healthy life years between affluent and economically disadvantaged communities. Evidence tells us that active individuals and communities help to create stronger, more connected and healthier communities, and this is associated with improvements in areas such as educational behaviour and attainment, and productivity.

#### **How can communities/organisations embed this principle:**

Use local knowledge and evidence (such as Durham Insight), prioritise improving the health of those who are most disadvantaged, and tailor approaches to the specific needs of different communities to address inequalities – for example, those with long-term conditions, older aged adults, girls and women, and Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities.

#### **Principle Four: Engaging individuals and organisations with the strategy - What can I do?**

***There is no single answer or solution to help all ages move more across County Durham. In order to increase movement and promote physical activity, partners need a shared sense of purpose and an alignment of resources so they can work together.***

There are many ways to become involved with the implementation of this strategy so that you can maximise its impact:

- Share it with the organisations, groups, clubs and people you work or collaborate with
- Adopt and embrace its key principles
- Help others to move more. Ask someone else (a neighbour, family, colleague, friend, patient) what matters to them, how they would like to get moving more, and find out how you can best support them
- Be an advocate or role model for change – help to grow the momentum of this strategy and build regular movement into your day
- Consider how regular movement features into your organisation's policies, and put it on the agenda in your work or community
- Connect with partners – whether in person, virtually or through social media to access resources and share information

## **Principle Five: Continued learning and evaluation**

### ***Using evidence supported by local conversations***

Capturing what is working well across the county, and learning from elsewhere, is very important. We must focus on positive change – no matter how big or small, and always consider where such change is possible. We want this strategy to help identify and celebrate progress and success, and inspire others to join in and take action.

Creating long term change takes time. A combination of data (such as the number of people active) and local engagement will help us to measure the impact of this strategy. However, learning about the experiences of our people and our network of partners will also help us to monitor progress. A combination of data, case studies and practical examples from communities across the county will be key to continually improving and maximising our current physical activity offers.

This strategy will be monitored and reviewed through the creation of a strong network across County Durham, We will capture and share learning so that we can best understand what motivates our communities and helps our people to become more active. We will focus our efforts on working together to create the best possible environment that will help people to move more.

Partners and communities are encouraged to regularly share case studies to highlight success and learning. A partnership approach to evaluation will involve celebrating and sharing when things go well, and learning and trying again when things aren't so successful. We only fail when we quit, everything else is experience!

### How can communities/organisations embed this principle:

Prioritise reflection and make time for learning so that we can understand what has worked or what hasn't. Evaluation of our efforts or interventions shouldn't be seen as 'additional work' and needs to be a central part of the approach.

**Let's make movement everyone's business!**

## Section 3 – How Will Change Happen?

By working collaboratively with our communities and partners, we will achieve a shared purpose and build on what works well across County Durham to encourage and support residents to move more. We will create a county where regular movement is the norm.

Based on partner feedback, the following long and short-term priority areas for action have been identified. We will coproduce the action plan to address these priority areas *with* our communities to ensure they are meaningful and achievable.

Coproduction process to take place from June 2022 onwards (schedule pending) to allow for true coproduction and to provide all communities with the opportunity to be involved (biteable video is in development to highlight the vision, mission and principles of what we hope to achieve and a call to action for communities and partners to coproduce action plan)

### Short term

- Mental health
- Workplace
- Active travel
- Current system mapping and sharing best practice
- Children and young people particularly around supporting mental health, and in education/school
- Promotion of movement linked Social Prescribing

### Long Term

- Build stronger active communities- including improved facilities and infrastructure to help make regular movement the best option
- Embed regular movement into all health and social care pathways with better connections to support services e.g. drug and alcohol services, gambling, stop-smoking
- Canvas our people and communities to obtain their opinions
- Evaluate our approach and share good practice and evidence
- Influence national policy and lobby for change

## Section 4 - Continued learning from evaluations and the evidence-base to help understand what is supporting people to move more

- Case Study examples – to be included once collated

## Section 5 – Next Steps

The key to building momentum is to broaden and strengthen relationships within our networks, people and communities, and ensure ongoing conversations which turn plans into action across the system.

This will be supported by:

- Soft launch of high-level summary and biteable video
- Coproduction of the [name to be provided] strategy action plan with our communities and partners to identify address short and long-term priority areas (July – December 2022)
- Launch of strategy and coproduced action plan
- Develop a bank of case studies to understand what works well and celebrate progress
- Hold network and partner events to share both learning and examples of success for priority action areas
- Review the strategy periodically to monitor and evaluate its progress and impact, including an refresh of the action plan when required