

PRESS RELEASE

Active Communities Pilot in Birmingham and Solihull awarded £9.72 million* national lottery grant from Sport England

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An innovative partnership involving a range of organisations across Birmingham and Solihull has secured £9.72m* of National Lottery funding from Sport England to deliver Active Communities a new vision to tackle physical inactivity in Birmingham and Solihull, reaching the population of over 450,000 people.

The Active Communities partnership is being jointly led by The Active Well Being Society (TAWS) – a mutual benefit society that works to improve the lives and well-being of residents across the local area and Solihull Council. It aims to work collaboratively with local organisations, volunteers and local people to help improve the quality of life of some of the most vulnerable in the community. The Local Community Action Networks will design and lead on activities such as local festivals, with the support and guidance from a dedicated officer.

Physical inactivity is the fourth leading cause of premature deaths in the UK and costs the country an estimate £7.4 billion a year. The Active Communities pilot in Birmingham and Solihull is one of 12 Sport England National Lottery funded Local Delivery Pilots, an innovative new approach to build healthier, more active communities in England and tackle the barriers in communities that stop people from getting active head on.

By focusing intensively in six areas, The Active Communities team and their local partners are working with residents, looking at what stops them being active and working out ways to deal with these barriers.

The programme will work closely with six Local Community Action Networks (LCAN's), made up of local people and community organisations each supported by a dedicated local community action officer recruited from the area. The first of these community connectors has already been appointed. Dee, a local artist and resident of Handsworth for 30 years is already connecting and supporting her communities to do things for themselves. When asked about her work so far Dee said *"I love being out with my community and getting to know new faces. I am starting to pull people and all the fantastic local organisations and places together who are helping to form the first local action network."*

A further five will be appointed in the next six months, with the first to border both Birmingham and Solihull currently being [advertised](#).

Some other key aspects of the project include;

- **Growing a community 'crowd' of 100,000 people** - to have a collective voice and provide an online platform helping local people to connect, communicate, collaborate and take part in physical activity. Active Communities is encouraging everyone across the subregion to join this social movement by [signing up to the 'crowd'](#). Members of the 'crowd' will be kept up to date with progress in their area, be sent news on free sport, social or civic activities and events, and will get the chance to vote on their priorities and connect with local people and opportunities.
- **Free activities designed and tailored by local people** – for example traffic free events enabling people to be active and come together with friends and neighbours; free activities in parks/open spaces; learn to ride courses and beginner bike rides in the local communities with access to bikes for adults and children, walks and running groups.
- **Social prescribing** – working with local GP's so they can refer patients onto social, civic and sports programmes, such as photography, gardening, and creative arts, with physical activity being introduced slowly and gently to people who aren't used to being active.
- **The Welcome** – giving existing and new staff delivering activities the skills to mentor participants to encourage them to keep coming to sessions, to build friendships and build confidence in groups to identify the next community leaders to make activities sustainable. Employing the right local people to work with communities who people can identify with and trust.
- **Sharing in common** – physical and mobile hubs or centres for the local community to come together, share tools, sports equipment, DIY items, gardening equipment and toys, helping to foster trust.
- **Reclaiming the Wilds** - bringing wild or overrun green spaces back into practical use for the community, for arts, growing, sports or social spaces. Providing people who live

in urban areas with a chance to reconnect with nature on their doorstep and make the space around them more useable instilling a sense of local pride.

- **Festivals** Shaped and organised by local people to celebrate the great work of volunteers and to create a place for communities to come together.

Leader of Birmingham City Council, Cllr Ian Ward said:

“As Birmingham Council we are very proud of this initiative and very pleased that Sport England and National Lottery have both recognised the great progress we had made on this already, as well as see the potential that we can see to make the city and Solihull even better places for people to live and be active in.

We know that the poorer you are, the more likely you are to experience barriers to be active, that’s physically active but also active in your city and local community. In the council we are committed to working differently to change things, to ensure we are working with our communities to change things for the better, rather than continuing to do what has always been done and clearly, in some ways, isn’t working for those in the most need.

This is an exciting initiative and the timing of it, being just before the Commonwealth Games, means that it will help the city prepare to make the most of the Games and the legacy from them.”

Leader of Solihull Council, Cllr Bob Sleight OBE said:

“I am delighted that Sport England has chosen our joint bid with Birmingham as one of the 12 pilot areas. This is very good news, not only for people living in those areas of Solihull, but for the whole borough.

Creating the conditions for communities to thrive is a Council priority. The Active Communities pilot will help us to do this in an innovative way and learn how we can use sport and physical activity to bring people and communities together.

Active Communities moves us from ‘doing for’ to ‘doing with’ communities. That’s a really important shift in the way we work together. And learning from this pilot will help us to deliver our longer term council priorities.”

Chief Executive of Sport England, Tim Hollingsworth said: “As a nation we need to break down the barriers people face in getting active. A major part of this can be bringing local people and organisations together which is critical to the approach of the Local Delivery Pilots. We are delighted to award National Lottery funding to the Active Communities Pilot which aims to empower Birmingham and Solihull residents to lead the change in boosting activity levels.

“Our investment will tackle inactivity head on by working alongside those who know what will work best for their community. We are investing in a range of approaches, some of which build on what we already know is working, and others based on new ‘test and learn’ approaches for increasing activity. We look forward to working closely with the pilot project team and communities on their pioneering approach to get many more people active.”

Anyone interested in getting involved or finding out more should email the team via activecommunities@theaws.org, visit the Active Communities [website](#) and [join the ‘Crowd’](#) or call them on 0121 728 7030.

Ends

For further overall press information, please contact:

Active Communities Team: Beccy Marston, Beccy.marston@theaws.org 0121 728 7030.

Solihull Council: Cassie Simpson, cassie.simpson@solihull.gov.uk 0121 7048474

***NOTES TO EDITORS**

The award of £9.72m includes £7.358m award with a further £2.362m in-principle which is subject to the pilot’s early delivery, learning and emerging impact.

Background to Birmingham and Solihull Local Delivery Pilot (Active Communities)

Stubborn inequalities face many parts of our community across Solihull and Birmingham. Despite significant investment we have struggled to shift the dial in terms of physical activity levels and continue to see sections of our community much less likely to be active than other parts. This pilot seeks to focus on tackling these inequalities through looking and working with the systems around and within these communities through giving a stronger voice and distributing leadership so that our communities take ownership of their future.

“Our vision is to use physical activity, guided by innovation, collaboration and insight, to do the social knitting required to create stronger and more resilient communities.”

The main beneficiaries will include:

- Those in later life aged 60+ for whom social isolation and fear of crime lead to inactivity resulting in greater demands for adult social care, mental health services and acute healthcare.
- Women and young families leading sedentary lifestyles with time and cost constraints, resulting in a need for mental health and social support networks.
- Young people under the age of 15 yrs with sedentary lifestyles and associated self esteem challenges.
- BAME communities where cultural barriers and language issues can detract from opportunities to get involved in physical activity.

Based on evidence and data from The Active Wellbeing Society and Solihull Active Data, six areas were identified as follows:

Area 1: Handsworth, Lozells and Aston, Soho & Jewellery Quarter, Birchfield, Perry Barr, Holly Head & Newtown (Birmingham):

Area 2: Balsall Heath West, Landywood, Nechells, North Edgbaston, Highgate (Birmingham):

Area 3: Kingstanding, Stockland Green, Erdington, Perry Common and Gravelly Hill (Birmingham):

Area 4: Ward End, Alum Rock, Heartlands, Bordesley Green, Sparkbrook & Balsall Heath East, Yardley West & Stechford, Small Heath, Tyseley & Hay Mills and South Yardley (Birmingham):

Area 5: Shard End, Gleb Farm & Tile Cross (Birmingham) Smiths Wood, Kingshurst and Fordbridge, Chelmsley Wood (Solihull)

Area 6: Brandwood, Billesley, Druids Heath and Monyhull, Highter's Heath, LSOAs of Greenhill and Hobs Moat North

Active Communities will build on insight developed by TAWS and through research undertaken locally that highlights the need to:

- Tackle low confidence, stress and anxiety.
- Respond to a lack of finances, debt and poverty.
- Deliver activity opportunities on the "doorstep" with close proximity to infrastructure whilst dealing with issues of personal safety and travel.
- Create sustainable offers as the pressures on public services and budgets grow.
- Build on activity already happening avoiding duplication.
- Make the most of our green spaces, waterways and built facilities that people live near

About Active Communities

The Active Communities programme has a dedicated team of staff within The Active Wellbeing Society and Solihull Active who are delivering in partnership with Birmingham City Council and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council.

The Active Wellbeing Society (TAWS) is an independent community benefit society which works with some of the poorest communities in Birmingham & Solihull to improve people's health and wellbeing through physical activity. Its mission is to: Use physical activity, guided by innovation, collaboration and insight, to do the collaborating and development required to create stronger and more resilient communities

Local anchor organisations and charities collaborating on the pilot:

- The Active Well Being Society TAWS
- Birmingham City Council
- Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
- Birmingham Settlement
- Compass Support
- Three Trees Community Centre
- Accord Housing Association – Bosworth Community Centre
- Colebridge Trust
- Saheli Hub
- Sport Birmingham
- Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Sports Partnership

About Sport England

Sport England is a public body and invests up to £300 million National Lottery and government money each year in projects and programmes that help people get active and play sport.

It wants everyone in England, regardless of age, background, or level of ability, to feel able to engage in sport and physical activity. That's why a lot of its work is specifically focused on helping people who do no, or very little, physical activity and groups who are typically less active - like women, disabled people and people on lower incomes.

Sport England's Local Delivery Pilots

In addition to Birmingham and Solihull, the other pilot areas are in Essex, Exeter and Cranbrook, Redcar & Cleveland and Middlesbrough, Withernsea, Greater Manchester, Pennine Lancashire, Doncaster, Hackney, Calderdale, Southall (London Borough of Ealing) and Bradford.

These pilots are deliberately focused on the *whole system change* - that is the need for strong vision and leadership at the highest level. Collaboration of all stakeholders, at all levels, is key - not just the sporting infrastructure/ projects and interventions.

For Sport England, the pilots will have been a success if they show:

- **More people taking part** – measured by a significant decrease in inactivity (as measured by the Chief Medical Officer guidelines i.e. 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity a week) in a sustainable way
- **Improved inclusivity** in terms of who is taking part – measured by the profile of active people (in terms of demographics) being more representative of the population of the pilot places than when the pilots began
- **Improved outcomes** as a result of the above – with proven contributions to some or all of the [Government's outcomes](#) in pilot places. These are physical and mental wellbeing and individual, community and economic benefit.
- **Replication of success** in *other* places (extra to the local delivery pilots) because of adoption and implementation of learnings from the local delivery pilots. Replication at scale is very important to Sport England.