

REPORT TITLE: Increasing physical activity in North Kirklees

Meeting:	Cabinet
Date:	21 October 2025
Cabinet Member (if applicable)	Councillor Carole Pattison
Key Decision Eligible for Call In	No Yes
<p>Purpose of Report</p> <p>To provide an update to Cabinet following the 5th November 2024 report entitled ‘The Future of Dewsbury Sports Centre’. More specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To update Cabinet on their approval to commission an independent report on the key barriers and enablers to physical activity with particular focus on Batley and Dewsbury in order to add to the existing knowledge base and to help inform next steps. To provide Cabinet with a series of recommendations based on the findings of the independent report carried out by Brightsparks (Summer 2025). 	
<p>Recommendations</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> That Cabinet consider and note that the main finding from the report was the community desire for a new sport and leisure facility to serve the communities of Dewsbury and Batley and which provides a safe and welcoming space and opportunities for social connections. That Cabinet therefore agree to take the next steps towards developing a new sport and leisure facility which meets the needs of the communities living in the Dewsbury and Batley areas of Kirklees. That Cabinet agree to the commissioning of an external options appraisal followed by a feasibility study to determine: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What should be prioritised as part of any new sport and leisure facility, including facilities, co-location of services Potential site options, including the availability of sites; the capacity and suitability of sites to accommodate new provision; and the accessibility of sites mindful of proposed future housing growth The viability of options to be delivered within new capital budgets additional to the existing capital plan That Cabinet note the proposed immediate work which will be undertaken and which will use the insight from the Brightsparks report to develop targeted opportunities to complement existing provision and support people across North Kirklees to be physically active. 	

5. That Cabinet note that many factors affect physical activity and agree to keep working with partners to tackle the broader issues that make it harder for people to be active.
6. That, subject to Cabinet approving the above recommendations, Scrutiny be engaged ahead of, and throughout the next steps of the process.
7. That subject to approving the above recommendations, Cabinet authorise the Service Director Legal, Governance and Commissioning to execute any documents or instruments in relation to the recommendations in this report.

Reasons for Recommendations

- It is recognised that significant inequalities exist in levels of physical activity between demographic groups and areas, with Heckmondwike, Batley (East and West), and Dewsbury (East, South and West) wards being amongst the least active wards in Kirklees. Additionally, data shows lower physical activity levels for people of Asian ethnicity; those with a disability; females; and people living in the most deprived areas. It is important that people in the highlighted areas and demographic groups are supported to be more physically active, to address these inequalities.
- Following comprehensive research by Brightsparks on physical activity enablers and barriers in North Kirklees, the key report recommendation was for a new sport and leisure facility to be built in Dewsbury.
- The research has also clearly highlighted the community desire for the sport and leisure facility to be a safe and welcoming place which provides opportunities for social connections – both through the physical design of the building but also through the opportunities and activities available.
- This new facility should work in conjunction with Batley Sports and Tennis Centre and Spen Valley Leisure Centre, to meet the needs of the surrounding communities and adds value to the local assets which are already in place.
- It is considered that the economic, building safety and logistical reasons behind the decision to permanently close Dewsbury Sports Centre (as per the November 2024 Cabinet report) remain valid.
- Alongside the findings of this public engagement research, current national, regional and local developments relating to the NHS and local health services place a greater emphasis on community support and prevention of health conditions. The development of a new, purpose-built, bespoke facility, to meet the current and future needs of the residents of Dewsbury and surrounding communities, aligns with the strategic direction of health and community service delivery.
- Other important factors identified by the research that should be considered as part of the work towards increasing physical activity levels in North Kirklees include the impact of safety, civic pride, social connectivity, accessibility, convenience (including co-location of services), value for money and affordability.
- In order to support the above point, Kirklees Active Leisure, who are a key partner for the delivery of physical activity opportunities across Kirklees will be funded to pilot a place-based community offer for the residents of Dewsbury and Batley. This will provide a mechanism to provide a variety of physical activity opportunities to different groups of people.
- As proposed in the 2024/25 Director of Public Health Report, and building on the World Health Organisation's Global Action Plan for Physical Activity, addressing barriers to physical activity is complex, and requires a 'whole systems approach' involving action from myriad partners across multiple systems. The next steps outlined in this report continue to offer a vital supporting mechanism for increasing physical activity levels across the whole of Kirklees.

Resource Implications:

- Resource to commission an options appraisal and subsequent feasibility study - c.£100K which will need to be identified from the existing capital plan.
- Any new sport and leisure facility will be subject to new capital budget being available, and the capital programme will need to be revised through the budget setting process. At this stage, until the outcome of the options appraisal and feasibility study are understood, the amount of capital required cannot be defined. There is an expectation that some external funding may be available to support the capital costs and work will commence to identify this. This will help to mitigate the corporate borrowing requirements needed to fund the capital project.
- It is imperative that the ongoing operational costs of the new facility are identified and factored into the Medium-Term Financial Plan when appropriate. This work will be part of the feasibility study.
- Utilise existing council officer capacity to continue to work alongside services and partners to address the wider barriers and issues impacting physical activity.
- Utilise existing council officer capacity to work alongside potential partners regarding the possible co-location of services.
- Re-purpose existing Public Health resource to pilot an approach to developing work to understand and address a range of place-based health inequalities across Dewsbury.
- Revenue funding will be made available to Kirklees Active Leisure for a pilot of a community based physical offer for the communities of Dewsbury and Batley. The value of this will be identified once the work has been fully scoped.

Date signed off by Executive Director & name

Rachel Spencer Henshall – Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director for Public Health and Corporate – 09 October 2025

Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Finance?

John Bartlett (on behalf of Kevin Mulvaney – Service Director for Finance / Section 151 Officer) – 10 October 2025

Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Legal Governance and Commissioning (Monitoring Officer)?

Samantha Lawton – Service Director for Legal and Commissioning (Monitoring Officer) – 10 October 2025

Electoral wards affected:

All Wards

Ward councillors consulted:

Councillors across North Kirklees were invited to give views on the approach and advise on potential groups to consult with, which helped to shape the Brightsparks engagement.

Public or private:

Public

Has GDPR been considered? Yes – the engagement process was carried out under strict Information Governance guidelines, with a DPIA in place.

1. Executive Summary

Dewsbury Sports Centre (DSC) closed in September 2023 due to health and safety concerns owing to the discovery of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC). In November 2024, Cabinet confirmed the permanent closure of Dewsbury Sports Centre. That decision was based on several critical factors including financial constraints; the significant cost of refurbishing the existing facilities; and the available alternative physical activity provisions in the area.

When taking the decision to permanently close Dewsbury Sports Centre, Cabinet recognised that physical activity levels in North Kirklees, particularly Dewsbury and Batley were lower than in many other parts of the district. This pattern has long existed, and therefore suggests that whilst important to many, the provision of a leisure centre alone was not meeting the needs of the whole community.

Cabinet also requested that officers develop a better understanding of the complexities of community needs and to develop a longer-term strategic approach to address the physical activity needs of the Dewsbury and North Kirklees community. Cabinet approved the commissioning of an independent report to explore approaches to effectively address the health, well-being and social needs of the Dewsbury population.

As a result of this decision Brightsparks Agency were commissioned to produce an independent report on the key barriers and enablers to physical activity with particular focus on Batley and Dewsbury, to add to the existing knowledge base and to help inform next steps.

The engagement research carried out by Brightsparks took place in Summer 2025, and saw 998 people complete a survey, with 74% of respondents being resident in North Kirklees (37% from Dewsbury, 16% from Batley). Additionally, focus group sessions (59 people in total) and other face-to-face engagement (69 people) took place in Batley and Dewsbury only. The robust research methodology combined high-level quantitative data from a large cross-section of the local population with more detailed qualitative insight from a smaller subset of the population, through focus groups and other engagement activity. The detailed report provides valuable new insight that gives a greater understanding of our local population, including current behaviours and personal capability, opportunity and motivation to be physically active.

The strongest message was the continued dissatisfaction with the loss of facilities, in particular Dewsbury Sports Centre, with the loss of access to a swimming pool being especially highlighted. The research also showed that the facility alone was not the only factor affecting people's ability to be active; a range of wider influences also contributes to people's capability, opportunity and motivation to be physically active.

A copy of the full research report from Brightsparks is included with this Cabinet paper in Appendix 1 Brightsparks – Kirklees Physical Activity and Movement Report 2025; and Appendix 2 Brightsparks - Technical Report: Physical Activity and Movement in North Kirklees.

This research forms part of the next steps described in the 2024/25 Director of Public Health Annual Report ([Director of public health annual report 2024/25: Physical activity matters | Kirklees Council](#)), and will support future work leading towards the development of a new physical activity strategy for Kirklees.

Considering this new information alongside existing knowledge, officers considered the following options:

Option 1 – Continue to work with existing sport and leisure provision across the Dewsbury and Batley communities to support people to be physically active and work with existing and new partners to address the wider influences of physical activity.

Option 2 – Commission an options appraisal and feasibility study in order to develop a new sport and leisure facility to serve Dewsbury and Batley communities and also work with existing and new partners to address the wider influences of physical activity, alongside other existing physical activity work.

Officers recommend that Cabinet support Option 2 and approve the following next steps:

- That Cabinet consider and note that the main finding from the report was the community desire for a new sport and leisure facility to serve the communities of Dewsbury and Batley.
- That Cabinet therefore agree to take the next steps towards developing a new sport and leisure facility which meets the needs of the communities living in the Dewsbury and Batley areas of Kirklees.
- That Cabinet agree to the commissioning of an independent options appraisal followed by a feasibility study to determine:
 - What should be prioritised as part of any new sport and leisure facility
 - Potential site options to include availability of sites; the capacity and suitability of sites to accommodate new provision; and the accessibility of sites mindful of proposed future housing growth
 - Viability of options to be delivered within available capital budgets additional to the existing capital plan
- That Cabinet note the proposed additional work, which will use the insight from the Brightsparks report to develop targeted opportunities to complement existing provision and support for people across North Kirklees to be physically active,
- That Cabinet agree for ‘whole systems’ work to continue alongside a range of partners to address some of the wider issues which impact on people’s ability to be physically active.
- That, subject to Cabinet approving the above recommendations, Scrutiny be engaged ahead of, and throughout the next steps of the process.
- That subject to approving the above recommendations, Cabinet authorise the Service director Legal, governance and Commissioning to execute any documents or instruments in relation to the recommendations in this report.

Further detail on these recommendations can be found in Section 6 of this Cabinet report.

2. Information required to take a decision

2.1 Contextual information

Dewsbury Sports Centre (DSC) closed in September 2023 due to health and safety concerns owing to the discovery of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC). Prior to its closure, the centre had been loss making, (c £1.113m per annum, the largest loss of any of the Kirklees Active Leisure (KAL) operated leisure centres prior to the Leisure Centre consultation in Autumn 2023) and required significant investment for repairs. The decision to permanently close the facility was confirmed by Cabinet in November 2024.

In making that decision, Cabinet approved the commissioning of an independent report to explore approaches to effectively address the health, well-being and social needs of the Dewsbury population.

The 2021 Current Living in Kirklees (CLiK) survey identified the following areas as the ten wards with the lowest proportion of adults meeting recommended physical activity guidance levels:

Ward	Meeting physical activity guidelines
Heckmondwike	32.2%
Dewsbury West	34.1%
Batley East	35.7%
Dewsbury South	41.6%
Batley West	43.9%
Crosland Moor and Netherton	45.4%
Greenhead	45.9%
Dewsbury East	47.6%
Golcar	48.6%
Dalton	49.5%

The top five wards are all in North Kirklees and include both Batley wards and two out of three Dewsbury wards (with Dewsbury East also in the top ten).

The 2021 CLiK survey also shows that rates of inactivity (less than 30 minutes of physical activity per week) are:

- Three times higher for people out of work (versus those in work)
- 2.5 times higher for ages 75+ (versus ages 19-74)
- Twice as high for people with a disability (versus those without)
- Three times higher for those in most deprived areas (versus least deprived areas)
- Significantly higher for people of Pakistani ethnicity compared with those of White British or Indian ethnicity.

2.2 Research findings

Brightsparks were commissioned to carry out independent research to better understand the barriers and enablers to physical activity with particular emphasis on Batley and Dewsbury. This engagement was carried out over the summer of 2025, adopting a mixed-methods approach of survey questionnaire and in-person focus groups and face to face engagement for more qualitative detail.

The survey was open to all Kirklees residents aged 18+, recognising that people may travel between different parts of Kirklees (for example, to access green space or leisure facilities) and to gain a broader population view of the barriers and enablers to being physically active, which may support a system-wide approach beyond place-specific factors. However, a targeted communications campaign and engagement with local community organisations ensured the majority of survey responses came from North Kirklees. The survey sample included responses across all age groups and the most common ethnicity categories in North Kirklees, although there was some under-representation of younger adults, males, and people of Pakistani ethnicity. Further information about the survey sample can be found in the research report. All focus group and engagement activity took place in Batley and Dewsbury to ensure views from residents in these towns could be explored in greater detail.

The strongest message was the continued dissatisfaction with the loss of facilities, in particular Dewsbury Sports Centre, with the loss of access to a swimming pool being especially highlighted.

The research also showed that the facility alone was not the only factor affecting people's ability to be active. Thematic analysis produced nine cross-cutting themes, overlapping but distinct:

- 1. Current Movement Habits:** The majority of respondents reported regular physical activity, with 68% walking several times weekly. Only 12% reported no physical activity in the previous seven days. Preferences for activity skewed toward low-cost, everyday movement.
- 2. Environmental & Infrastructure Factors:** Poor maintenance, safety concerns, and leisure facility closures limit access and erode community pride.
- 3. Accessibility & Inclusion:** Barriers to participation include cost, transport, disability, digital exclusion, and limited women-only provision.
- 4. Safety & Trust:** Antisocial behaviour, poor lighting, and neglected environments deter participation, especially among women, older adults, and carers.
- 5. Motivation & Social Connection:** Social activities, community hubs, and peer support strongly motivate participation.
- 6. Cultural Relevance & Representation:** Faith, gender, and intergenerational needs shape engagement and trust.
- 7. Wellbeing & Confidence:** Mental health, self-esteem, and intergenerational connectedness are deeply tied to activity levels.
- 8. Affordability & Value:** Cost barriers remain the strongest constraint; residents called for inclusive, low-cost provision.
- 9. Communication & Awareness:** Gaps in knowledge persist; preferred channels include WhatsApp, Facebook, GP referrals, and newsletters.

Research findings highlight:

- People want to be active - Walking and informal movement show there is motivation, especially for health and wellbeing. Current choices are limited by affordability, access to facilities, and safety concerns.
- The environment matters - When pavements are broken, lighting is poor, or parks feel unsafe, people choose not to use them. Where facilities close, whole communities feel the loss of reliable, trusted spaces.
- Inclusion is decisive - If opportunities are not affordable, accessible to people with disabilities, or sensitive to cultural and gender needs, then opportunities for participation are reduced. Choices are heavily shaped by whether provision feels welcoming and usable.
- Social connection sustains activity - People are more likely to remain active when it is fun, social, and part of community life. Without that, motivation drops.
- Wellbeing and confidence are intertwined - Activity boosts mental health and self-esteem, but when opportunities are disrupted, wellbeing suffers, making it even harder for people to re-engage.
- Information gaps reduce choice - Many people miss out simply because they don't know what's available. Without clear, accessible communication channels, especially offline, opportunities are invisible to those who could benefit most.

A copy of the full research report from Brightsparks is included with this Cabinet paper in Appendix 1 Brightsparks – Kirklees Physical Activity and Movement Report 2025; and Appendix 2 Brightsparks - Technical Report: Physical Activity and Movement in North Kirklees.

This research provides a robust, community-driven evidence base that captures how people in Batley, Dewsbury, and the wider Kirklees area engage with physical activity and movement.

Rooted in the lived experiences of residents, the research report offers valuable insights that system partners can use to shape targeted interventions, inform strategic investment, and guide equitable policy decision making. The research adds to existing knowledge identified in the 2024 Cabinet report by highlighting new themes and providing a more detailed understanding of a wide range of intersecting factors that motivate or prevent people from being physically active.

2.3 Research methodology limitations

While surveys, focus groups and community workshops are valuable tools for generating both broad and in-depth insights, each method has inherent limitations. Survey responses may lack depth, and surveys can unintentionally exclude digitally marginalised groups or individuals with lower literacy levels, thereby reducing representativeness. Focus groups are similarly affected by certain limitations, such as the influence of dominant voices, social desirability bias, and limited scalability, all of which can constrain the diversity and authenticity of feedback.

To mitigate the above risks, Brightsparks adopted a mixed-methods approach to triangulate findings and enhance both robustness and representativeness. Surveys were offered in digital and paper formats, designed with clear, accessible language, and monitored to maintain demographic balance. Focus groups were facilitated by trained, trauma-informed researchers who created inclusive and supportive environments. Strategies were employed to promote equitable participation, with sessions adapted to meet the varied needs of participants from diverse backgrounds.

Engagement was further supported by collaboration with trusted community partners and by offering multiple participation formats, including in-person, online, and translated materials, to ensure broad and equitable access. Clear communication around the project's purpose, process, and use of findings helped manage expectations and build trust.

As the research was conducted in the summer months, the results may reflect seasonal patterns and may not fully represent behaviour at other times of the year. Further research at different time points should be considered.

Further information about the survey methodology can be found in Appendix 2 Brightsparks - Technical Report: Physical Activity and Movement in North Kirklees.

3. Implications for the Council

3.1 Council Plan

This work supports the following aspects of the Council Plan:

- Getting the basics right - a balanced budget and a modern organisation
- Protecting the vulnerable and achieving inclusion
- Thriving people and communities - now and over the longer-term
- Local economic growth, working with regional and national partners

3.2 Financial Implications

- Resource to commission an options appraisal and subsequent feasibility study - c.£100K which will need to be identified from the existing capital plan.
- Any new sport and leisure facility will be subject to capital budget being available, and the capital programme will need to be revised through the budget setting process. At this stage, until the outcome of the options appraisal and feasibility study are understood, the

amount of capital required cannot be defined. There is an expectation that some external funding may be available to support the capital costs and work will commence to identify this. This will help to mitigate the corporate borrowing requirements needed to fund the capital project.

- It is imperative that the ongoing operational costs of the new facility are identified and factored into the Medium Term Financial Plan when appropriate. This work will be part of the feasibility study.
- Utilise existing council officer capacity to continue to work alongside services and partners to address the wider barriers and issues impacting physical activity.
- Utilise existing council officer capacity to work alongside potential partners regarding the possible co-location of services.
- Re-purpose existing Public Health resource to pilot an approach to developing work to understand and address a range of place-based health inequalities across Dewsbury.
- Revenue funding will be made available to Kirklees Active Leisure for a pilot of a community based physical offer for the communities of Dewsbury and Batley. The value of this will be identified once the work has been fully scoped.

3.3 Legal Implications

The Council has a discretionary power to provide recreational facilities within its area under Section 19 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 and all other enabling powers to develop a new leisure centre. This is not a statutory duty.

The council has a statutory duty under section 12 of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 (Section 2B of the NHS Act 2006 - duties as to improvement of Public Health) to take appropriate steps for improving the health of the people (which includes children) in its area. The steps include amongst other things:

- Providing information and advice
- Provision of services or facilities for the prevention, diagnosis or the treatment of illness
- Providing financial incentive to encourage individuals to adopt healthier lifestyles
- Providing assistance to help individuals to minimise any risk to health arising from their accommodation or environment
- Making available the services of any person or facilities.

The council has a duty of Best Value under section 3 of the Local government Act 1999 to secure continuous improvement in the way its functions are carried out having regard to a combination of economy , efficiency and effectiveness .

The Council has a fiduciary duty to taxpayers to ensure revenue funding and capital costs are prudent ,affordable and sustainable in the context of the need for a balanced budget .

Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 sets out the Public Sector Equality Duty replacing the previous duties in relation to race, sex and disability and extending the duty to all the protected characteristics i.e. race, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, pregnancy or maternity and gender reassignment. The Public Sector Equality Duty mandates public authorities to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under this Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it; and

- Foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it, which involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to - (a) tackle prejudice and (b) promote understanding.

Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to:

- remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- Undertake measures to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it, including, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities;
- Encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

3.4 Climate Change and Air Quality

This will be considered further as part of an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) for any new facility.

3.5 Risk, Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) or Human Resources

Dewsbury faces significant health challenges and inequalities being one of the most deprived areas in Kirklees and England. The life expectancy at birth for both males and females in Dewsbury is lower than the national average with these wards having some of the lowest levels in Kirklees. Some of the major health issues affecting Dewsbury are obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, mental health problems and respiratory diseases. The wider determinants of health will contribute to poor health outcomes.

Data from the 2021 census indicates that Dewsbury has relatively high proportions of individuals who have no qualifications and people who have never worked or are long-term unemployed. Dewsbury also has a higher proportion of households where English is not the primary language (up to 15% of households in some parts of Dewsbury).

Any form of bodily movement contributes to physical activity and there are myriad ways and places in which people can be physically active, which is important for a variety of reasons. It enhances physical and mental health & wellbeing, positively influencing health conditions such as coronary heart disease, obesity & type 2 diabetes, mental health problems and social isolation. It also contributes to supporting community identity; development and place building; and community cohesion. Physical Activity can also encompass diversionary activities to address anti-social behaviour and provide pathways and opportunities for active travel or people to achieve personal goals.

It is recognised that seven LSOAs in Kirklees fall within the top 10% priority areas for physical inactivity and social need nationally, two of which are situated within the three Dewsbury wards. Furthermore, the CLiK Survey 2021 found that 48% of respondents in Dewsbury East, 42% in Dewsbury South and only 34% in Dewsbury West met the guidelines for physical activity. These longstanding inequalities indicate that the historical provision at Dewsbury Sports Centre, while valued by many, also did not adequately address the needs of many residents. Any future solution, therefore, needs to both ensure that any new facility meets the broadest range of people's needs possible, whilst also supporting provision and access to alternative settings or

means of being physically active. In both instances, taking accompanying action to remove or reduce other barriers is crucial.

As a result, promoting and supporting people to be physically active is complex and cannot be wholly achieved in isolation. The World Health Organisation in their Global Action Plan for Physical Activity highlights the need for a 'whole systems approach' across a range of sectors, systems and agencies, which includes addressing the wider social determinants of health, such as employment, community safety, poverty, cohesion, access to services and housing.

This is particularly important due to the acknowledged lack in physical activity levels across various populations and cohorts, both on a national and local scale. These disparities are particularly evident among women and girls; individuals with long-term health conditions or disabilities; certain ethnic groups; and residents of more deprived areas.

If the recommendations to explore a new facility are accepted, then an Integrated Impact Assessment will be developed as the options appraisal and feasibility study emerge to ensure any decisions meet our statutory obligations and are also as well informed as possible.

4. Consultation

The Leisure Centre Review Consultation at the end of 2023 and more detail can be found in the previous Cabinet paper 'The Future of Dewsbury Sports Centre'. Appendix 6 of the November 2024 Cabinet paper summarises the consultation across all parts of Kirklees, and Appendix 4 provides more detail on the insight gathered in Dewsbury. Consultation respondents advocated strongly for their local site to remain open, and Dewsbury residents highlighted the potential impact the closure of Dewsbury Sports Centre would have on their physical and mental health.

Brightsparks Agency's engagement took place in Summer 2025, and saw 998 people complete a survey, with 74% of respondents being resident in North Kirklees (37% from Dewsbury, 16% from Batley). Additionally, focus group sessions (59 people in total) and other face-to-face engagement (69 people) took place in Batley and Dewsbury only.

The work from Brightsparks builds on the prior Leisure Centre Review Consultation and explored in more detail some of the major barriers and issues which impact on the capability, opportunity or motivation to be more physically active, with a particular emphasis on the communities of Batley and Dewsbury.

5. Engagement

The robust research methodology combined high-level quantitative data from a large cross-section of the local population with more detailed qualitative insight from a smaller subset of the population, through focus groups and other engagement activity.

Despite all adults in Batley and Dewsbury being encouraged to take part in the survey and focus group research, engagement with children and young people was much more limited. The voices of young people are therefore underrepresented in the report, although adults with caring responsibilities shared their perspectives.

Young people's perspectives are available through other sources. For example, in September 2025, Kirklees Council's Our Voice team gathered views from over 100 young people aged 13-19 (or aged 13-25 for young people with SEND) on the activities, places and spaces they attend in their free time (including organised activities or things they do independently). Key recommendations to improve the provision of activities for young people included: increase knowledge about available provision; consider widening partnerships to enhance the after-

school offer; find ways to sustain and increase established provision; make use of detached and outreach provision for young people with financial, social or emotional barriers; ensure parks and open spaces are well maintained, clean, well-lit and accessible; consider Special Educational Needs or Disability focused engagement; consider how to promote and grow the 'arts' offer. Some of these themes align with the findings of the Brightsparks report and reinforce the importance of addressing wider community access beyond a new facility.

6. Options

6.1 Options considered

Option 1 – Continue to work with existing sport and leisure provision across the Dewsbury and Batley communities to support people to be physically active and work with existing and new partners to address the wider influences of physical activity.

Option 2 – Commission an options appraisal and feasibility study in order to develop a new sport and leisure facility to serve Dewsbury and Batley communities and also work with existing and new partners to address the wider influences of physical activity, alongside other existing physical activity work.

Officers recommend that Cabinet support Option 2 and approve the following next steps:

- That Cabinet consider and note that the main finding from the report was the community desire for a new sport and leisure facility to serve the communities of Dewsbury and Batley and which provides a safe and welcoming space and opportunities for social connections.
- That Cabinet therefore agree to take the next steps towards developing a new sport and leisure facility which meets the needs of the communities living in the Dewsbury and Batley areas of Kirklees.
- That Cabinet agree to the commissioning of an independent options appraisal followed by a feasibility study to determine:
 - What should be prioritised as part of any new sport and leisure facility provision
 - Potential site options to include availability of sites; the capacity and suitability of sites to accommodate new provision; and the accessibility of sites mindful of proposed future housing growth
 - Viability of options to be delivered within new capital budgets additional to the existing capital plan
- That Cabinet note the proposed additional work which will use the insight from the Brightsparks report to develop targeted opportunities to complement existing provision and support for people across North Kirklees to be physically active.
- That Cabinet agree for 'whole systems' work to continue alongside a range of partners to address some of the wider issues which impact on people's ability to be physically active.
- That, subject to Cabinet approving the above recommendations, Scrutiny be engaged ahead of, and throughout the next steps of the process.
- That subject to approving the above recommendations, Cabinet authorise the Service director Legal, governance and Commissioning to execute any documents or instruments in relation to the recommendations in this report.

6.2 Reasons for recommended option

Engagement has identified that lack of a leisure facility, particularly in Dewsbury and especially for swimming, is a key barrier to being physically active. Following comprehensive research by Brightsparks on physical activity enablers and barriers in North Kirklees, the key report recommendation was for a new leisure facility to be built in Dewsbury. This is consistent with existing data that showed that Dewsbury Sports Centre was not meeting the needs of many local residents in its existing guise.

Providing a quality new sport and leisure facility which meets the needs of local people, and which complements the existing leisure offer in North Kirklees would address this issue. This should work in conjunction with Batley Sports and Tennis Centre and Spen Valley Leisure Centre, to meet the needs of the surrounding communities and adds value to the local assets which are already in place.

It is also clear that there are a range of other factors that impact on people's ability to be active that would also need to be addressed, and systemic barriers that need to be removed. Working with partners to tackle some of these wider factors will not only help people across Kirklees to be more active generally, but it will also help ensure that any new sport and leisure facility provision, as well as the various other places and opportunities to be active which exist across Dewsbury, Batley and North Kirklees, are well used and accessible by the whole of the community.

Further detail on these recommendations is as follows:

New sport and leisure facility:

The November 2024 Cabinet report evidenced that even with the presence of Dewsbury Sports Centre, physical activity levels in North Kirklees, including the Dewsbury Wards, were lower than across other parts of the district. This suggests that in its current function, it was not providing an equitable space to enable physical activity across local communities. The Brightsparks report highlights that the absence of a sport and leisure facility for Dewsbury is a key barrier to physical activity and recommends a new sport and leisure facility is built. It is vital that this new facility is able to adequately meet the needs of Dewsbury and Batley communities in order to improve access to physical activity.

To assist in developing this new alternative sport and leisure facility, an options appraisal should seek to identify what priority elements are required in order to complement and enhance the existing leisure centre offer for North Kirklees of Batley Sports and Tennis Centre and Spen Valley Leisure Centre. This should include a consideration of; a wet site, an internal dry site, external sports provision, and broader partnership opportunities.

The options appraisal should be developed with continued community input and involvement to ensure the new facility incorporates suitable programmes and opportunities to meet the diverse needs and aspirations of the whole community.

The options appraisal should also consider the potential for the co-location of other community services or amenities (both private and public) in any new sport and leisure facility.

Once the priorities for the new sport and leisure facility are fully understood, alongside potential site options, then a feasibility study should determine the viability of delivering any new provision within available capital budgets. There is an expectation that this should include identification of potential sources of external capital funding.

Immediate work to complement existing provision:

It is also recognised that immediate work should be undertaken in Dewsbury and Batley in order to deliver short term gains and support longer term plans. Kirklees Active Leisure, who are a key partner for the delivery of physical activity opportunities across Kirklees will therefore work in partnership with Kirklees Council to pilot a place-based community offer for the residents of Dewsbury and Batley.

It is also vital that the Council and partners to continue to work with organisations and local assets who are already supporting local people to be physically active. (Appendix 3 of the November 2024 Cabinet Report gives an outline of the range of community opportunities which exist, whilst the Director of Public Health Report 'Physical Activity Matters' has highlighted the range of assets available, from public open spaces, to schools and the community sector).

Furthermore, Public Health will pilot an approach of dedicating officer resource to explore approaches to understand and address a range of place-based health inequalities across Dewsbury.

Whole Systems Approach to address Wider Factors:

The Brightsparks report also reinforces the independent Director of Public Health annual report: Physical Activity Matters regarding the need to address a range of other 'wider factors' that impact on people's ability to be physically active. It will therefore be necessary for the Council to work alongside other partners, stakeholders and communities to embed a 'whole systems approach' to increasing physical activity across North Kirklees, to address other issues which have been highlighted in the independent report including:

- Public safety in parks, open spaces and the town centre
- People's concerns about civic pride and presentation of place
- Availability of free or affordable activities
- Access to provision, including culturally sensitive / demographically appropriate provision
- Lack of awareness about available opportunities across Dewsbury and North Kirklees.

This will require a commitment to continue to develop the recommendations from the independent Director of Public Health annual report: Physical Activity Matters. Working across systems and with a range of partners – both internally and externally – is necessary if we seek to remove some of the barriers which limit people, both in North Kirklees but often across the whole of the district.

It also provides opportunities to work differently with partners and stakeholders to incorporate change in how things are done, For example, we might work with planners and developers to ensure that any major developments and / or regeneration projects in Kirklees reflect active design principles, and thereby support people to be more physically active as part of their everyday living.

7. Next steps and timelines

Commission an options appraisal followed by a feasibility study to look at options for a new sport and leisure facility to serve the communities of Dewsbury and Batley. The intention is for this work to be completed no later than Q4 of 2026.

More immediately, work will commence with Kirklees Active Leisure to pilot a place-based, targeted community offer for the residents of Dewsbury and Batley, based on insight from the Brightsparks report, and complementing existing local provision; whilst Public Health will also be piloting a new place-based approach to addressing health inequalities in Dewsbury.

Alongside this specific place-based work, Public Health will continue to work with system partners to look at developing a whole systems approach to addressing some of the wider influences of physical activity identified in the Director of Public Health Report: Physical Activity Matters. Addressing the wider barriers that impact physical activity levels across will have benefits in Batley and Dewsbury, but also across all Kirklees. This will include working alongside partners on specific initiatives including:

Place Partnership Development

Kirklees Council and partner organisations are currently working with Sport England on their Place Partnership Expansion Programme. This work will act as a catalyst to develop and embed a whole systems approach to movement and physical activity in Kirklees. This will involve looking at specific challenges some of our least active cohorts and communities experience, and understanding what systemic level change may be effective in reducing barriers to activity in a sustained manner.

Kirklees Physical Activity Strategy

In combination, this work will be used to help inform and develop a new physical activity strategy for Kirklees, supported by the Everybody Active Advisory Group and other key partners. The aim of this strategy will be to provide a clear steer to the Kirklees system on ways in which individuals, communities and organisations from across Kirklees can enable more people to access and participate in physical activity. Whilst recognising the universal importance of physical activity across the life course, national and local data makes it clear that our strategy needs to have a specific emphasis on helping inactive people to become more active, and on reducing the inequalities in physical activity levels that are experienced by some groups.

8. Contact officer

Martin Gonzalez – Public Health Manager
Owen Richardson – Data and Insight Enablement Lead
Lucy Wearmouth Head of Improving Population Health

9. Background Papers and History of Decisions

Cabinet: 26 September 2023 - [Kirklees Active Leisure Centre Offer 2024/25 - Consultation](#)

Cabinet: 12 December 2023 – [Leisure Centre Offer 2024/25](#)

Cabinet: 5 November 2024 – [The Future of Dewsbury Sports Centre](#)

10. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Brightsparks – Kirklees Physical Activity and Movement Report 2025;
Appendix 2 - Brightsparks - Technical Report: Physical Activity and Movement in North Kirklees
<https://www.kirklees.gov.uk/involve/entry.aspx?id=1206>

11. Service Director responsible

