

Healthy Communities Monthly Report - APR 26

Cotswolds & Gloucester

Local highlights: Open Days, Events & Projects

HEART OF THE GAME



The first quarterly qualitative NHS report highlights strong early impact and engagement through the Heart of the Game project, successfully delivering **over 80 blood pressure tests** across community sport settings including Gloucester City AFC and Blackbridge Community and Sports Hub.

The project demonstrated the effectiveness of using football and leisure environments to engage people in preventative health conversations in familiar and accessible settings, with particularly encouraging engagement from younger participants and families.

Key learning identified the importance of informal delivery approaches, with **wrist blood pressure monitors and non-clinical environments helping to reduce anxiety and improve participation**. The project also highlighted behavioural insights around long-term cardiovascular risk awareness, treatment adherence, and the influence of family and social dynamics on engagement with health checks.

Alongside health delivery, significant progress was made in **marketing, partnership working, and community visibility through branded promotional materials, media coverage, and social media campaigns** involving local partners, sports clubs, and stakeholders.

These activities strengthened awareness of Healthy Communities initiatives, increased programme credibility, and supported wider outreach opportunities as the campaign continues to expand across Gloucester.

The first quarter NHS quantitative data for Heart of the Game shows strong engagement and clear clinical impact across community sport settings.

- A total of **200 individuals were reached, with 120 blood pressure checks offered and 84 completed (42% conversion rate)**, demonstrating solid uptake in informal outreach environments.
- From completed checks, **12 participants (14.3%) recorded high blood pressure readings**, with no very high or low readings identified.
- This led to appropriate clinical and preventative follow-up, including signposting to community pharmacy (14 people), GP services (routine and urgent appointments for 14.3% and 2.4% respectively), NHS 111 (2.4%), and 7-day home monitoring pathways (8.3%).
- A further **20 individuals (23.8%)** were directed into healthy lifestyle and behaviour change support, highlighting strong preventative intervention impact.

Overall, the data demonstrates effective identification of cardiovascular risk, appropriate escalation pathways, and meaningful integration of prevention and early intervention within community sport-based delivery.

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The **Heart of the Game Blood Pressure testing activation at the Oxstalls Sports Park Open Weekend** provided a valuable opportunity to engage the local community in cardiovascular health awareness within a leisure and sport setting. Attendance was predominantly made up of families, younger adults, and regular leisure centre users, many of whom already demonstrated good awareness of preventative health measures and routine blood pressure monitoring through NHS Health Checks and pharmacy services.

Engagement with the testing offer was positive, with the informal and welcoming environment helping to normalise blood pressure checks and encourage conversations around cardiovascular health. A particularly successful element of the activation was the involvement of **young volunteers supporting leaflet distribution and participant engagement**. Their presence helped reduce perceived clinical barriers, creating a relaxed atmosphere that increased willingness to participate and reinforced how simple and accessible blood pressure testing can be. This also prompted several attendees to express interest in home monitoring and self-management of their health.

Overall, the activation successfully reinforced positive health behaviours and promoted cardiovascular awareness within an already health-conscious community. It also provided useful insight into the importance of balancing delivery in high-engagement leisure environments with targeted outreach into underserved communities, where preventative health engagement and access to routine checks may be lower.



A case study from Freedom Leisure Oxstalls Sports Park highlights the personal impact of the Heart of the Game project on staff health awareness and behaviour change. Iain, the Operations Manager (aged 51) with a known history of hypertension, recorded a significantly high blood pressure reading of approximately 170/110 during an internal project briefing.

Although he had been regularly monitoring his blood pressure via an app, he admitted he had not taken previous high readings seriously, attributing them to work-related stress due to feeling well. Through discussion and explanation of the associated risks, he recognised the importance of taking proactive action and not dismissing elevated readings, even when symptoms are not present.

Following advice to seek medical support and increase focus on self-management, Iain has since made positive changes. A follow-up reading showed improvement to a slightly elevated level, and he continues to monitor his blood pressure more consistently, demonstrating increased awareness and commitment to managing his health.

Blood pressure testing delivered alongside Walking Football at Blackbridge Community and Sports Hub has played an important role in embedding health awareness and preventative health support within the programme.

Regular testing sessions provided reassurance for participants with normal readings, while also enabling appropriate advice and signposting for those requiring further medical follow-up.

The initiative demonstrated the value of integrating health interventions within community sport settings and created positive engagement around cardiovascular health in an accessible and informal environment.



Following the success of the programme, there is now an opportunity to expand Heart of the Game blood pressure testing more strategically across other sports activities and external hirer programmes at Freedom Leisure sites including GLI and Oxstalls.

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OXSTALLS OPEN WEEKEND

Oxstalls Sports Park recently hosted a successful Open Weekend as part of ongoing investment and improvement works delivered in partnership between [Freedom Leisure](https://www.freedomleisure.co.uk/) and Gloucester City Council.

The event, held across 25–26 April, showcased newly refurbished facilities and provided opportunities for the local community to engage with a wide range of activities.

The weekend included:

- Adult and junior tennis taster sessions
- Family tennis activities
- Children's entertainment, including soft play and inflatables
- Opportunities for residents and community groups to explore the upgraded venue

The Open Weekend formed part of a wider programme of investment aimed at improving community leisure provision, increasing accessibility, and creating welcoming spaces for people of all ages to be active and socially connected.

Local leaders highlighted the importance of Oxstalls as a community hub that supports physical activity, wellbeing, volunteering, coaching, and social interaction across Gloucester.



RUGBY FOR HEROS AT BCSH

The launch of the Rugby for Heroes partnership at Blackbridge Community and Sports Hub represents a significant step in using sport as a tool for health, wellbeing, and social impact within the community.

Rugby for Heroes is a charity that supports serving personnel, veterans, and service leavers as they transition into civilian life. It uses rugby as a vehicle to build confidence, teamwork, discipline, and resilience, while also providing structured pathways into training, qualifications, and employment

opportunities. Its “Transition Through Rugby” programme helps participants reconnect with community life through physical activity and peer support.

From a Healthy Communities perspective, the partnership demonstrates how local sport and community facilities can support wider wellbeing outcomes, particularly for individuals facing major life transitions or risk of isolation.

By embedding the programme at Blackbridge, the initiative strengthens the hub's role as an inclusive community asset that promotes physical activity, mental wellbeing, skills development, and social connection across Gloucester.



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GLI Recruitment Fayre

The GLI Recruitment Fayre was a highly successful community-focused event, attracting **approximately 80 visitors and generating strong engagement** across a wide range of employment and development opportunities within Freedom Leisure and partner organisations.

A total of 56 attendee details were captured for follow-up, with outcomes including 8 immediate approvals for onboarding, 10 candidates identified for interview or referral, 4 requiring further information, and 23 not progressing at this stage.

Feedback from partners highlighted the value of the event in connecting with individuals actively exploring employment, with particular emphasis on the breadth of roles available across the organisation, including Lifeguards, Gymnastics Coaches, Cleaning Team Members, and Front of House roles, alongside both full-time and part-time opportunities.

Specific partner feedback from organisations such as the **Department for Work and Pensions, Gloucestershire Employment and Skills Hub, the University of Gloucestershire, and Young Gloucestershire** reinforced the strong community impact of the event.

A key insight was that a significant proportion of attendees were currently unskilled or seeking entry-level pathways, with many expressing interest in confidence building, training, and progression opportunities rather than immediate employment alone. The presence of NHS-linked and priority partners supporting service users further highlighted the importance of accessible, supported entry routes into work.

Overall, the GLI Recruitment Fayre demonstrated strong partnership working, high community engagement, and clear potential to develop a more structured entry-level workforce pipeline through work experience and supported pathways into employment.



Blackbridge Community & Sports Hub One Year Anniversary

The first anniversary celebration of Blackbridge Community and Sports Hub marked an important milestone for a community-led facility in Podsmead, developed and governed by the Blackbridge Charitable Community Benefit Society in partnership with local stakeholders, residents, sport, health, and voluntary organisations.

The hub was created through long-term community-led regeneration work, building on the legacy of Podsmead Big Local and supported by a wide range of partners including local authorities, Sport England, and community organisations to improve health, wellbeing, and opportunity in the area.

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The anniversary event brought together residents, users, and partners to celebrate the hub's first year of delivery, showcasing its role in providing accessible sport, youth work, fitness, and community activities. It highlighted strong engagement from local residents and the hub's growing position as a key community anchor in Podsmead.

As the hub develops, the Healthy Communities function must work closely alongside the commercial and operational teams to ensure a

genuinely balanced model. Income generation and enterprise activity are important for long-term sustainability, but they must actively support - rather than outweigh - the core social mission of the hub.



This integrated approach is essential to maintaining Blackbridge Community and Sports Hub as a truly community-led asset, where success is measured not just by usage or revenue, but by meaningful impact on health, wellbeing, and inclusion across Podsmead.

RECRUITMENT OF COMMUNITY CONNECTOR

A successful recruitment has been made for a Community Connector role supporting activity at Blackbridge Community and Sports Hub, strengthening the hub's capacity to engage local residents and improve access to community-based health and wellbeing opportunities.

The role focuses on working directly with residents in Podsmead to reduce barriers to participation, build trusted relationships, and support people into local activities and services. This includes working closely with partners such as housing providers and community organisations, strengthening referral pathways into Blackbridge and wider Healthy Communities provision, and ensuring residents are supported through their first steps into activity.

A significant portion of the post is funded by Active Gloucestershire (£20K) and the NHS Blood Pressure Grant (£5K) and is supported by the Blackbridge Community Charitable Benefit Society, reflecting a strong partnership approach to embedding community development within the hub.

The role plays a key part in bridging the gap between local need and service delivery, helping to improve engagement, inclusion, and sustained participation in physical activity and wellbeing opportunities across the community.

GLOUCESTER BIKE PROJECT

A conversation has begun regarding a new Gloucester Bike Project to be launched in partnership with the Blackbridge Community & Sports Hub, alongside other community partners including Friendship Café.

The proposal includes a £3,000 fee for each community partner, which would fund approximately two hours per week of dedicated capacity for an individual at Blackbridge to lead on project logistics. This role would focus on coordinating the local delivery aspects of the project, including administration and liaison with the Gloucester Bike Project to ensure effective local support.

It is anticipated that from the planned launch around June through to the autumn, the role may require increased hours, with a reduction in time commitment during the winter months. In addition, a community connector will work closely with the appointed lead to help identify and engage local residents, strengthening community involvement and participation.

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The next step is for partners, including Blackbridge and Paula, to identify an appropriate individual with the capacity to take on this coordination role. Paula is also due to attend a planning meeting on 5th May to progress discussions further.

Overall, the initiative has been positively received, with strong enthusiasm for the partnership and the opportunity to deliver the project collaboratively across Gloucester communities.

MY LIFE – GLI HEALTH HUB

The second cohort of the MyLife programme has launched successfully at the GLI Health Hub, supported by Exercise on Referral Instructor David, with an excellent turnout at the recent taster session.

Building on the current group of 10 participants already engaged with the MyLife membership, a further 10 potential new participants attended, demonstrating encouraging growth in engagement among individuals living with Severe Mental Illness (SMI).

A key development for this cohort is the introduction of a wider variety of physical activity opportunities, supported and delivered in partnership with the Area Healthy Communities Manager. Feedback from participants consistently highlights variety as an important factor in maintaining motivation and engagement. The programme will initially include a weekly functional exercise circuit, progressing into synergy circuit training and ultimately individualised training plans with David. Additional activities being explored include group exercise classes, yoga, tai chi, aqua sessions, racket sports, bowls, walking sports, and team-based activities, helping to create a more inclusive and enjoyable pathway into regular physical activity.

Early outcomes continue to show positive progress, with participants consistently improving and reporting meaningful benefits to their health and wellbeing. Attendance outside of scheduled programme sessions has also improved significantly, supported by David's tailored training plans and ongoing encouragement. All outcomes achieved continue to reflect the strong partnership working between the MyLife programme and Freedom Leisure.

Healthy Communities is continuing to strengthen collaborative working with GLI-based Personal Trainer Gemma Freeman (NAPTP) to further develop opportunities that support mental wellbeing through physical activity. Gemma's approach strongly aligns with Freedom Leisure's mission to improve lives through leisure, particularly through creating inclusive, supportive environments that help break down barriers to exercise participation.

Recent engagement with initiatives such as MHEC Fest has demonstrated the value of community-focused, low-barrier wellbeing events that support individuals experiencing challenges around confidence, cost, childcare, mental health, and knowing where to begin their fitness journey. The event highlighted the positive impact that accessible exercise opportunities can have on both physical and mental wellbeing.

Alongside her personal training support within GLI, Gemma also delivers a dedicated group fitness session tailored specifically for MY Life members, providing adapted, supportive activity opportunities for individuals with additional mental health needs. This work complements Healthy Communities objectives around reducing inequalities in access to physical activity and improving social connectedness and wellbeing outcomes.

Healthy Communities will continue exploring opportunities to work alongside Gemma and similar community-led initiatives to expand preventative health and wellbeing provision across Freedom Leisure sites, supporting healthier, happier, and more inclusive communities.



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April in numbers: Cotswolds

	Sport and Active Recreation 	Community Wellbeing 	Health 
Participation	1625	96	188

Free Swims 	Concession Memberships 	Health Referrals 	Health Memberships 	Funding confirmed 	FLAIR Members 	Volunteers 
1455	1847	17	93 + 1 Xyla	£3k (Bike project)	2	3

April in numbers: Gloucester

	Sport and Active Recreation 	Community Wellbeing 	Health 
Participation	1297 (not incl Ox)	80	365

Free Swims 	Concession Memberships 	Health Referrals 	Health Memberships 	Funding confirmed 	FLAIR Members 	Volunteers 
n/a	426	1	My Life – 13 HAF – 4 Junior – 105 Xyla – 1	£5k Women's Only Gym refurb	8	16

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Local Updates:

- **We are currently in discussions with The Churn Project, Bromford Housing, and Active Cotswolds around developing Age Friendly Communities initiatives across the Cotswolds.**

The discussions are focused on creating accessible, community-based supported outreach exercise sessions for older adults, particularly within social housing and local community venues, with the aim of improving physical wellbeing, reducing isolation, and increasing participation among underserved groups.

We are exploring collaborative delivery models, sustainable funding approaches, shared partnership working, and ways to measure both health and social impact as part of a long-term, scalable community wellbeing programme.

- **Engagement has been initiated with a Clinical Specialist Falls Physiotherapist from Gloucestershire Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust, reflecting growing interest in strengthening referral pathways into community-based strength and balance provision.**

The clinician has requested a meeting at Cirencester Leisure Centre to better understand available options for older adults, including Exercise Referral pathways, Healthy Communities programmes, eligibility criteria, costs, and levels of commitment required. There is particular interest in identifying accessible options for individuals who may face financial barriers to participation.

An opportunity has also been identified for the clinician to observe a strength and balance class in action, supporting deeper understanding of delivery models and potential referral suitability for patients within the Falls Assessment and Education Service.

This engagement presents a strong opportunity to improve clarity and accessibility of referral routes, strengthen integration between NHS falls services and leisure provision, and further develop inclusive, preventative physical activity pathways for older adults across the South Cotswolds.

- **Discussions have taken place between Cirencester Leisure Centre and Cirencester Signpost regarding the development of a supported community hygiene access pathway for vulnerable individuals requiring access to shower and changing facilities.**

The proposed model would provide free-of-charge access to designated accessible shower facilities within the leisure centre, delivered through a fully supervised partnership approach. All individuals would be accompanied by Signpost staff or approved support workers to ensure safeguarding, appropriate use of facilities, and positive engagement throughout visits.

The proposal has been developed collaboratively with site operations management to ensure organisational compliance, operational safety, dignity for users, and minimal disruption to core services. Accessible self-contained shower facilities would be utilised to maintain privacy and support effective management of the programme.

The initiative reflects Freedom Leisure's wider Healthy Communities approach, using leisure facilities as supportive community assets to address health inequalities, wellbeing needs, and social vulnerability through strong partnership working with local support agencies.

Subject to agreement and final risk assessment processes, the pathway has the potential to become an ongoing community support offer aligned with both organisations' safeguarding and wellbeing objectives.

Cirencester Signpost and Healthy Communities have worked together to organise grant funding for eligible individuals to access memberships at the Centre.

SEE IMPACT STATEMENTS AT THE END OF THIS REPORT.

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- **The introduction of the new modified entry-level Total Gym Super Circuit sessions has created a welcoming and supportive pathway into exercise for seniors, individuals managing health conditions, and anyone seeking a lower-intensity fitness experience.**

These sessions have been intentionally designed to prioritise confidence, safety, and accessibility, ensuring participants of all ages and fitness backgrounds can take part comfortably and successfully. By keeping movements simple, resistance levels manageable, and the overall pace supportive, the programme has already built a small but consistent community of engaged participants, **including members in their 70s.**

The flexible structure also allows more experienced participants to work at their own level without affecting the inclusive atmosphere of the class, helping create a positive environment where everyone feels accommodated and encouraged. Consistent attendance and returning participants demonstrate the value of providing a gentler, community-focused fitness option that supports both physical wellbeing and confidence-building.

Overall, these new sessions are proving to be an important addition to the programme, widening accessibility to fitness and creating an encouraging space for people who may previously have felt intimidated or excluded from traditional gym-based exercise classes.

- **Healthy Communities and Aquatics – Perinatal Water Wellbeing Pilot & Partnership Development Report**

The perinatal aquatic wellbeing pilot, delivered in partnership with the Gloucestershire Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust Perinatal Physiotherapy and Mental Health Teams, has launched successfully with strong early engagement and clear evidence of demand for this type of specialist provision.

The first session welcomed 10 mums and babies, with a further 4 participants placed on a waiting list due to capacity, demonstrating immediate uptake and unmet need within the pathway. Feedback from participants has been very positive, with individuals presenting both cautious and excited - reflecting the sensitivity and importance of this stage of recovery and wellbeing support.

A key operational learning from early delivery has been the importance of enhanced accessibility planning. One participant with significant mobility needs required specific equipment and environmental adjustments. While appropriate support was provided on site, this highlighted the need for stronger pre-session coordination to ensure all accessibility requirements are fully identified and prepared in advance. This is essential to reducing anxiety, maintaining dignity, and ensuring safe and independent access for participants with additional needs, particularly where fatigue and mobility limitations are a factor.

The pilot demonstrates strong and effective collaborative working between NHS specialist perinatal services and Freedom Leisure's Healthy Communities approach, combining clinical expertise with community-based leisure delivery. The programme supports physical recovery, pelvic health, mobility, confidence-building, and mental wellbeing through safe aquatic activity in an inclusive and supportive environment.

Alongside this pilot, Freedom Leisure is actively developing a series of potential future delivery models to support continuation and scaling of provision. These include a simple Supported Partner Delivery Model, alongside stepped progression options designed to evolve the programme from pilot delivery into a longer-term Healthy Communities pathway.

The Supported Partner Delivery Model would maintain NHS clinical leadership, with Freedom Leisure providing facility access, operational support, and optional aquatic activity input. This approach is designed to minimise governance complexity while enabling safe, scalable, and sustainable delivery.

Further partnership development discussions are planned following the upcoming celebration session on 22nd, with a more formal planning session to follow. This will focus on aligning future delivery, capacity, staffing requirements, accessibility processes, and financial modelling.

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Early insight from both the pilot and wider engagement indicates strong demand and significant potential for long-term development as part of a preventative, community-based perinatal wellbeing pathway. Continued refinement of accessibility planning and collaborative delivery models will be key to ensuring the programme remains inclusive, safe, and impactful as it develops.

- **A partnership between Gloucester City Homes and Freedom Leisure through Healthy Communities at Blackbridge Community and Sports Hub is focused on improving engagement with residents in Podsmead, particularly those in supported and independent living schemes such as Badger Vale Court.**

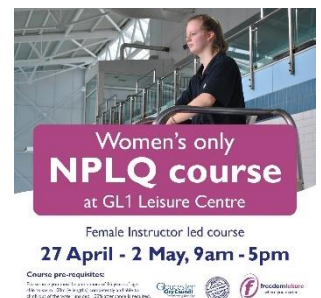
The approach centres on delivering simple, confidence-building activity within housing schemes first (e.g. chair-based exercise, mobility and wellbeing sessions), before supporting residents into guided visits and participation at Blackbridge Community and Sports Hub.

A key feature is a clear referral and support pathway led by housing teams and community connectors, helping residents feel safe and confident to access local activity opportunities. The programme aligns with shared priorities around reducing isolation, supporting independence, preventing falls, and improving overall wellbeing.

Overall, the partnership demonstrates a joined-up Healthy Communities approach that starts in residents' homes and builds a supported transition into sustained community activity at Blackbridge.

- **The Women's Only National Pool Lifeguard Qualification (NPLQ) course at GL1 Leisure Centre was postponed due to insufficient recruitment to form a viable cohort.**

While the course aimed to create a more inclusive pathway into lifeguarding for women, uptake did not meet the minimum numbers required to run it safely and effectively. A key learning is that timing and flexibility are essential, particularly to accommodate work, education, and caring responsibilities (a course of 4 Saturdays, for instance).



From a Healthy Communities perspective, there is the suggestion that we could move towards a more demand-led approach - working with priority partners to gather expressions of interest first, and only scheduling delivery once a committed cohort is confirmed; as well as more representative marketing assets.

Feedback also suggested that women from culturally diverse communities were concerned that taking on a lifeguarding role would mean they could no longer participate in swimming sessions themselves, as they would be supervising rather than joining in. To address this, we would need to proactively challenge and clarify this misconception so that participants understand lifeguarding opportunities can sit alongside continued participation in activities.

Ways we could address this in practice include:

- Clearly communicating that becoming a lifeguard does not prevent continued participation in swimming or other sessions.
- Exploring rotas or shared responsibilities that allow lifeguards opportunities to still take part in activities at different times.
- Offering dedicated recreational or women-only swim sessions separate from lifeguarding duties.
- Using existing lifeguards or role models from similar cultural backgrounds to share their experiences of balancing both participation and employment.
- Including clear messaging in promotional materials and community engagement sessions to explain the flexibility and benefits of the role.
- Working with community organisations and trusted local groups to help reinforce that lifeguarding can enhance engagement with the centre, rather than limit it.

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This ensures provision is shaped by community need rather than planned in advance without guaranteed attendance, improving accessibility and uptake. And it reinforces a shift towards co-designed, partner-led delivery models, where community insight and referral pathways drive programme planning, ensuring opportunities are both accessible and realistically achievable for those they are intended to support.

- Senior leadership from Freedom Leisure, including the General Manager and Healthy Communities Manager, were invited to participate in a feature on **Cirencester Radio - “Penny’s Picks” segment**, providing an opportunity to promote Freedom Leisure’s health, fitness, and community wellbeing services across the Cotswolds. The feature supported wider visibility of programmes and strengthened local engagement through community radio promotion.

In addition, Freedom Leisure was invited to take part in a local **Community Awards Ceremony** and associated marketplace event. The event includes networking opportunities with local organisations, charities, and businesses, alongside an awards evening celebrating community achievement. Although attendance was not possible this year, the invitation included opportunities for future participation such as a marketplace stall, promotional display, and engagement with attendees, providing a valuable platform to showcase services and strengthen community links.

- **The meeting agreed to develop a stronger partnership between the School Games Organiser (SGO) network and Blackbridge Community & Sports Hub, moving beyond event hosting to creating a clear pathway from school sport into ongoing community participation.**

Key priorities include positioning Blackbridge as the next step after School Games activity, offering inclusive competitions and SEND-focused events, and encouraging progression into regular sessions like junior sport and gym programmes. The partnership will also engage families, support teacher CPD and school workforce development, and target priority groups such as less active children and low-income families through subsidised routes.

Joint flagship events (including transition festivals and an annual School Games event) will strengthen visibility, while impact will be measured through participation conversion, retention, and engagement data.

Overall, the aim is to connect school sport more directly with sustained activity at Blackbridge, creating a joined-up and inclusive community sport pathway.

- **Engagement with Gloucestershire Gateway Trust has identified strong interest from a group of approximately 20 parents in accessing family-based physical activity through the Healthy Communities programme.**

Participants expressed enthusiasm for a range of inclusive activities, including family swimming, gym sessions with partners and children, and group exercise classes such as yoga and general fitness. There is clear demand for flexible delivery options, with families keen to attend together and begin sessions as soon as provision is available.

The group includes a mix of individuals, some of whom would require subsidised access due to financial barriers, alongside others who are in employment but interested in affordable, family-focused opportunities.

Overall, this engagement highlights a strong emerging partnership opportunity to develop accessible, family-centred activity provision that supports wellbeing, reduces financial barriers, and encourages sustained participation in physical activity.

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Healthy Communities & Partnerships Update

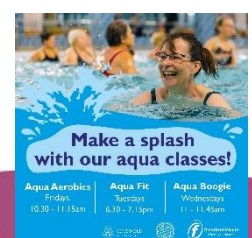
There continues to be strong momentum across Healthy Communities activity, partnerships and strategic engagement throughout the Cotswolds and Gloucester.

- **Nationally, Age UK's Act Now, Age Better campaign** is continuing to highlight the importance of movement, physical activity and social connection in supporting healthier later life. The campaign encourages adults aged 50–65 to “move more now” to improve long-term health, independence and wellbeing, with research showing that around 2.8 million people aged 50–64 are currently physically inactive. This aligns closely with the Healthy Communities approach across Freedom Leisure sites, where community-based physical activity opportunities continue to support prevention, wellbeing and active ageing.
- There has also been encouraging new interest in the **Freedom Leisure Athlete Investment and Recognition Scheme**, with applications beginning to increase as awareness of the programme grows. The scheme continues to provide an important opportunity to recognise and support talented local athletes representing their communities across a wide range of sports.
- **Preparations are continuing for the upcoming Quest assessment at Cirencester**, with teams across the site working collaboratively to evidence continuous improvement, customer experience, operational quality and community impact.
- **At Corinium Museum, the Movement at the Museum** programme continues to grow and evolve positively. The partnership remains an excellent example of creative collaboration between culture, health and physical activity, helping to engage wider audiences in movement and wellbeing in an accessible and welcoming environment.
- The Area Healthy Communities Manager has also been invited to join the **We Can Move System Leadership programme delivered through Active Gloucestershire**, with the first workshop recently attended alongside strategic leaders from across the county. The programme focuses on systems leadership, collaboration and reducing inequalities through physical activity and movement. Following this, the Area Healthy Communities Manager has additionally been invited to co-present a workshop on community engagement at the upcoming **We Can Move event in June**, showcasing local partnership work and approaches to engaging communities through leisure and wellbeing initiatives.
- **Aquatic HAF provision across Gloucester and the Cotswolds** has also been delivered successfully in partnership with Venture Community Hub and World Jungle, helping provide inclusive and engaging holiday opportunities for children and young people. Discussions are continuing around future development opportunities, including the potential incorporation of junior gym offers to further strengthen pathways into long-term physical activity participation. **Further data, analysis and outcomes on participation demographics and being planned for future cohorts.**
- Ongoing discussions with **Fitness Managers across the Cotswolds and Gloucester** are also helping refine and strengthen health and wellbeing provision across sites. Current areas of focus include activity opportunities for **women and girls, junior participation, Level 1 and introductory activity sessions, provision for people living with long-term health conditions, chair-based activity, mental health focused activity and continued development of opportunities for older adults and seniors.**



Healthy Communities support has also contributed towards continued inclusive growth in provision at:

- Bourton and Chipping Campden, including the expansion and **development of yoga and aqua-based activity sessions**, helping ensure a wider range of accessible opportunities are available for local communities.



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- Planning is also well underway for **May half-term activities across the Cotswolds**, with teams developing a wide range of family-friendly opportunities designed to encourage children, young people and families to stay active, connected and engaged throughout the holiday period. Activities are being designed to support participation across a broad range of ages and abilities while also helping create welcoming community spaces during the school break. Specific SEND provision will continue to expand.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- **Healthy Communities subscriptions are helping to break down financial barriers to physical activity, ensuring more people can access the health and wellbeing support they need.**

Recently, a Gloucester member supported through **Macmillan** was able to continue accessing affordable activity options through the Healthy Communities programme, with discounted gym and swimming access helping them stay active during recovery and beyond.

By working closely with partners including the NHS, Health Hub and community organisations, Healthy Communities memberships provide tailored, low-cost opportunities for people who may otherwise struggle to participate due to financial circumstances or ongoing health conditions.

This collaborative approach ensures that more residents can improve their physical and mental wellbeing through accessible, supportive leisure services.

- **We are continuing to strengthen partnerships with organisations including Active Gloucestershire and My Head Space to support young people experiencing mental health challenges through physical activity and community connection.**

Through funded Healthy Communities memberships, young people are being given free access to leisure facilities, helping them build confidence, improve wellbeing and establish positive routines in a safe and supportive environment.

Working collaboratively with tutors, carers and support workers from My Head Space, Freedom Leisure has also ensured that young people can attend with appropriate supervision and encouragement where needed, removing additional barriers to participation and creating a more inclusive experience.

This partnership approach highlights the important role leisure services can play in supporting mental wellbeing, reducing isolation and helping young people access opportunities they may otherwise be unable to afford.

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EXERCISE ON REFERRAL REVIEW

Cirencester (very high demand)

Exercise on Referral Programme – Summary

A temporary increase in instructor capacity (from 12 to 17 hours per week) was introduced over 3-4 months to address high demand and reduce backlog pressures within the referral programme. Prior to intervention, waiting lists exceeded 100 referrals with waiting times of 4–5 months, later stabilising at around 40 referrals with 6-8 week waits.

The additional 25 hours of delivery capacity enabled a significant reduction in backlog and improved service responsiveness. This shift supported faster onboarding, more consistent review scheduling, and a move from reactive management to proactive participant support.

A structured additional appointment was introduced, improving participant engagement, motivation, and accountability. It also supported earlier identification of barriers, more tailored programme adjustments, and stronger behaviour change outcomes.

Key outcomes included improved retention at 6- and 12-week reviews, reduced drop-off rates, increased confidence and independence in facility use, and stronger long-term adherence to exercise.

The exit pathway was strengthened through a formalised transition into mainstream membership, including handover to Fitness Crew and involvement of the sales team to reduce barriers to continuation. This created a clearer progression route from referral to sustained membership.

Overall, the programme is now more efficient, better structured, and more integrated within the wider leisure and health pathway, delivering improved participant outcomes and stronger conversion potential.

Estimated Additional Income Generated

Based on improved conversion and retention, the intervention is estimated to generate significant **additional membership income over the initial retention period** and beyond.

Bourton on the Water

Exercise on Referral (EOR) & CanRehab / Pulmonary Rehab

Exercise on Referral and CanRehab/Breathe Better classes are currently experiencing low uptake and under-occupancy, resulting in financial underperformance. To address this, formal targets will be introduced alongside a stronger focus on improving engagement and increasing participation levels.

To improve performance, a more proactive approach is required, including enhanced communication with referral partners, increased outreach activity, and more active promotion of available classes within the health and wellbeing pathway.



A proposed development is the **introduction of an “Active & Able” class**, designed as a functional, circuit-based session for individuals with mild to moderate health conditions, reduced mobility, or low confidence returning to exercise. The class also acts as a step-down from Exercise on Referral and rehabilitation programmes, supporting longer-term maintenance of physical activity.

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The session focuses on strength, mobility, balance, and confidence-building in a supportive and adaptable environment, with an emphasis on progression into mainstream activity where appropriate. It would operate with a maximum capacity of 12–15 participants and be delivered through referral routes and/or self-referral, depending on pathway design.

Overall, improved promotion, stronger partner engagement, and clearer pathway communication are required to increase uptake, improve occupancy, and reduce ongoing financial loss.

Gloucester GLI

Exercise Referral (EOR) – Payment Model & Uptake Improvement Summary

A review of the current Exercise Referral (EOR) membership model identified that the direct debit requirement can act as a barrier to participation, with some individuals withdrawing due to financial stress or reluctance to commit to ongoing payments.

To improve uptake and retention, a more **flexible payment option** has been introduced and trialled with approval from the Area Manager. This **includes a pay-as-you-go, upfront monthly payment model** as an alternative to direct debit for EOR participants. The approach is structured and time-limited, allowing a maximum of three consecutive monthly payments to cover the standard 12-week programme duration.

Following completion of the referral period, participants are supported to transition onto a mainstream concessionary membership to encourage continued engagement and longer-term activity.

Alongside this change, increased promotion of the EOR scheme will be implemented to improve awareness and referral flow. Cost is recognised as a key barrier to participation, reinforcing the need for more accessible entry routes into the programme.

Overall, the approved changes aim to reduce barriers, improve uptake and retention, and strengthen progression into sustained physical activity and membership pathways.

Sarcopenia/Frailty and Obesity/Diabetes Management Pathways to Provision

We are looking to introduce a new specialist gym-floor Exercise on Referral (EOR) circuit offer at GLI, delivered by an EOR-qualified instructor, designed to align with NHS priorities around prevention, long-term condition management, and functional health outcomes.

The provision would take the form of structured 45-minute circuit classes, delivered in a small-group environment using accessible gym-floor equipment (e.g. CV machines, resistance bands, bodyweight and functional training tools). Sessions would be tailored to key clinical cohorts, **including falls prevention / sarcopenia and obesity / Type 2 diabetes management, with scalable progressions to meet individual ability levels.**

The design focuses on safe, functional movement patterns that improve strength, balance, cardiovascular health and independence, with an emphasis on low-barrier participation and behaviour change rather than performance-based fitness. This makes the offer suitable for both referred patients and wider community participants, including non-members.

Key benefits include:

- Direct alignment with NHS prevention and long-term condition strategies
- Improved functional health outcomes (strength, balance, mobility, metabolic health)
- Reduced falls risk and support for independent living



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- Accessible entry point into physical activity for inactive populations
- Clear pathway from referral into ongoing community and gym participation
- Enhanced utilisation of gym floor space through structured, health-led programming
- Strengthening GLI's role as a local community health and wellbeing hub

Overall, this provision positions GLI as a more integrated health and fitness environment, bridging clinical referral, community wellbeing, and mainstream activity through structured, evidence-informed exercise delivery.

Health Referral & Outreach Programme – Summary of Review Activity (Cotswolds & Gloucester)

- **A full review of health referral and outreach provision is being undertaken to strengthen governance, improve consistency, and ensure financial and operational sustainability across all programmes.**
- This includes the implementation of a formal **outreach policy** covering key operational areas such as GDPR, health and safety, cash handling, and session delivery standards, alongside improved reporting requirements for attendance, income tracking, and participant engagement.
- The review has identified inconsistencies in workforce tracking, annual leave recording, and contract alignment across health referral and outreach instructors. **Work is underway to ensure all contracted hours, associated entitlements, and staffing costs are accurately reflected and consistently monitored.**
- A detailed **cost-income analysis** of current outreach and specialist health referral sessions highlights that a number of programmes are not generating surplus. This reinforces the need to assess contractual commitments, improve efficiency, and ensure alignment with organisational objectives.
- Alongside financial review, there is a clear focus on **increasing participation and improving sustainability through enhanced marketing, stronger promotion of sessions, and more proactive engagement with referral partners and the wider community.** Development of self-referral routes and expanded outreach messaging is also being considered to increase uptake.
- **Further work is also being driven around outcome measurement, including the collection of case studies, participant feedback, and impact data to support reporting requirements, demonstrate value, and strengthen future funding applications.**
- Overall, this review aims to improve transparency, ensure financial sustainability, enhance data quality, and increase the reach and impact of health referral and outreach provision.

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Case Studies and Success Stories:



A huge welcome back to Fin for his 2nd year on the Freedom Leisure Athlete Investment & Recognition Scheme!

Fin continues to go from strength to strength, achieving an incredible bronze medal in the 50m Backstroke at the Southwest Regional Championships - despite being ranked 6th going into the event!

He also smashed expectations with: 5th place in the 100m Butterfly Final (ranked 10th) 4th place in the 100m Backstroke

What makes these achievements even more impressive is that Fin was competing in the Open Age Group against swimmers aged 18+!

We're incredibly proud to support such a talented and dedicated athlete and can't wait to see what this next year brings. Well done, Fin!

UPDATE FROM THE FAMILY:

I want to say a truly heartfelt thank you to Freedom Leisure, and especially to Paula, for the incredible support Fin has received through the FLAIR programme and the Athlete Investment and Recognition Scheme.

From Mel:

As a mum, this support has meant more than I can properly express. I have recently been made redundant, and at a time when I was worrying about how we would manage, especially with the cost of gym membership and club fees, this opportunity has lifted a huge weight from our family. Without it, Fin simply wouldn't have been able to continue training in the way he needs to. Knowing he can keep going, stay in the pool, and keep building on everything he's worked for has been such a relief.

What I've loved most is seeing the difference it has made to him - not just physically, but in his confidence. He is more focused, more determined, and starting to really believe in himself in a way he didn't before.

From Fin:

This programme has helped me so much. It's given me extra time to train outside my normal schedule, which has helped me push myself harder and give 110%. I feel like I'm improving all the time, and I'm starting to see that hard work paying off.

I've gone from sometimes standing at the back and doubting myself, to feeling confident enough to get in, work hard, and really go for it. I'm proud of how far I've come and grateful for the support that's helped me get here.

Fin is now preparing to compete in London at the GB Aquatics meet in April - the highest level he can race at in the country. He is currently ranked 1st in the county for 50m backstroke and 2nd for 100m backstroke in his age group, which is something we are both incredibly proud of.

But more than the results, it's the journey that matters most - the growth, resilience, and self-belief that has come from this support.

From both of us, thank you to everyone involved for believing in Fin and giving him this opportunity. It truly means everything to our family.



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Heart of the Game – Case Study: Impact of Pre-Activity Blood Pressure Checks



At Blackbridge, a series of blood pressure checks were introduced in the lead-up to walking football sessions as part of the Heart of the Game NHS prevention and wellbeing initiative. The aim was to support early identification of cardiovascular risk factors and encourage healthier lifestyle choices through community sport.

One participant, **our Freedom Volunteer, Ken Blackburn (Head of Football Development, Tuffley Rovers FC and former professional footballer)**, shared his experience following several weeks of testing.

Despite a lifelong involvement in football and maintaining an active lifestyle at 74, Ken reflected that he had previously taken his health for granted. The routine blood pressure checks revealed slightly elevated readings, which acted as a meaningful prompt for change.

Rather than causing concern, the results became a catalyst for positive action. Ken reported that the feedback encouraged him to re-evaluate key aspects of his lifestyle, particularly his diet and alcohol intake, and to take a more proactive approach to managing his long-term health. He described the initiative as a “thoughtful and forward-looking” approach and expressed appreciation for the care and foresight shown in embedding health checks within a familiar and welcoming sporting environment.

Participant reflection (Ken Blackburn):

“Being an ex-professional footballer and still trying to keep fit and working at 74, I had been guilty of taking my health for granted. Not anymore. The slightly high readings have made me give more thought to my eating habits and alcohol intake. A big thank you for the foresight and care given to Blackbridge users.”

Impact summary:

- Early identification of elevated blood pressure in an active older adult
- Immediate behaviour change intentions around diet and alcohol consumption
- Increased health awareness in a traditionally hard-to-reach male demographic
- Reinforcement of walking football as a trusted setting for preventative health interventions
- Strong engagement from participants who may not otherwise access routine health checks

This case highlights the value of embedding NHS health screening within community sport environments, demonstrating how small, non-clinical interventions can prompt meaningful lifestyle reflection and behaviour change.

CIRENCESTER SIGNPOST IMPACT STATEMENTS

Statement 1:

"When I arrived in Cirencester homeless in early 2024, I was in a dark place. My mental health was at rock bottom - I couldn't see past my next meal, I was isolated, estranged from my children, and in very poor shape. Signpost was my constant, reassuring support, especially through a cold winter when I often felt I couldn't go on. By funding my gym membership, they gave me a lifeline. I began to build my physical health again and connect with others. Just this morning, I joined a walking group, and this afternoon I had my first Tai Chi class, a swim, and a workout. I feel incredible - probably for the first time in three years."

Statement 2:

"After years of battling long-term depression, substance abuse, and mental instability—spiralling into a near-fatal suicide attempt, I have found life-changing support through my membership at the leisure centre. The pool, sauna, and gym gave me a focus and a safe space to try new things - things I never imagined possible before. Now, I swim."

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regularly, and the combination of exercise and relaxation has been profound. My mindset, my self-confidence - everything is transforming. I can truly say this is saving my life."

Customer testimonial summaries for the Active and Able outreach class:

- "Returning to Jacki's classes after a shoulder injury made a huge difference to my recovery. The resistance band and light weight exercises helped me regain movement, strength, and confidence much faster than I expected."
- "Jacki's classes were instrumental in helping me rebuild my fitness after an Achilles injury. The stretching and mobility work complemented my physio perfectly and helped me feel stronger and more secure in my recovery."
- "After fracturing my elbow, Jacki's modified exercises and supportive approach helped me safely regain strength and confidence. Her tailored sessions made a real difference to my rehabilitation journey."

WOMENS ONLY PROVISION

Case Study: Building Confidence, Strength and Friendship Through GLI's Women's Gym

For many women, taking the first step into a fitness centre can feel daunting - particularly when managing long-term health conditions, recovering from surgery, or rebuilding confidence after periods of reduced mobility. At GLI, our Women's Gym is helping to change that experience by providing a welcoming, supportive environment where women can feel comfortable starting their health and wellbeing journey.



The two members pictured are a wonderful example of the positive impact this space can have. **Together, they have undergone six joint replacements, with a seventh surgery planned in the near future.** Despite the physical challenges they have faced, both women remain committed to staying active, maintaining their independence, and supporting one another through recovery and rehabilitation.

After attending their conditioning session in the Women's Gym, they regularly enjoy spending time together in the café - **highlighting how social connection and friendship can become just as valuable as the exercise itself.**

Both women shared that having access to a dedicated women-only space played an important role in helping them feel confident enough to begin using the centre. Knowing there was somewhere they could exercise at their own pace, in a comfortable and supportive setting, helped remove many of the barriers they had previously felt around attending a gym environment.

Since joining GLI, they have continued to build not only physical strength and mobility, but also confidence and routine. Their experience demonstrates how accessible, inclusive spaces can support people living with long-term conditions to remain active and connected within their community.

Their journey also reflects the wider purpose behind GLI's Women's Gym provision. We continue to work closely with local women and community groups to shape the ongoing development of the space and associated wellbeing activities, ensuring the environment continues to meet the needs of those using it.

GLI also offers an Exercise on Referral scheme for individuals living with a range of long-term health conditions, including arthritis and recovery following joint replacement surgery. The programme provides specialist support and guidance to help people safely improve their health, mobility, confidence, and overall wellbeing through physical activity.