Hartlepool Sport Toolkit - Start a Club

A practical, place-first guide for turning an idea into a sustainable community sports or activity group in Hartlepool

Starting a club shouldn't feel like setting up a company.
It's closer to **inviting your neighbours to do something good together** — then adding just enough structure so it lasts.

This toolkit is built around how Hartlepool actually works:

- relationships first

- trust over paperwork

- small starts

- visible wins

- grow what people show up for

Not "write a 40-page constitution before you kick a ball".

---

1. Start with People (not paperwork)

Ask first:

- Who is this for?

- What problem are we solving?

- Would people actually come?

- Where do they already gather?

Quick test (2–3 weeks)

Before forming anything official:

- Run 2–3 free sessions

- Borrow space

- Invite through WhatsApp / Facebook / school gates

- Count attendance

- Ask: "Should we keep this going?"

If nobody shows → change the offer
If they come back → you've got a club

Rule of thumb:

👉 *Participation proves demand better than surveys.*

---

2. Shape the Offer

Keep it simple and consistent.

Decide:

- Day + time (same every week)

- Age group or open access?

- Cost (free / £2 / subs?)

- Who leads?

- What does "good" look like?

Start tiny

Better:

- 10 kids every week
  than

- 40 once then never again

Consistency builds trust.

---

3. Find a Space

Options in Hartlepool often include:

- community centres

- parks & greenspaces

- school halls

- church halls

- waterfront/open spaces

- existing clubs sharing space

Tips

- Start informal → pay per hour

- Avoid long leases early

- Partner with someone already trusted locally

- Ask for off-peak rates

Many venues prefer:
"regular, reliable small group"
over
"big promises"

---

4. Gather a Tiny Team

No one sustains a club alone.

Minimum viable team

- 1 lead coach / organiser

- 1 helper

- 1 admin/parent/tea-maker

That's enough.

Look for:

- parents

- older young people

- retired coaches

- local volunteers

- existing groups

People support what they help build.

---

5. Do the Basics (lightweight governance)

Only add structure when you need it.

When you're running regularly, set up:

- simple name

- bank account

- safeguarding lead

- basic risk assessment

- public liability insurance

Optional later:

- constitution
- committee
- CIC/charity status
- policies

Sequence matters:
Run → prove → formalise
(not the other way round)

---

6. Make it Affordable

Simple starter model

- £2–£4 per session
- or £15–£25 monthly

Enough to cover:

- hall hire
- equipment
- insurance

Free isn't always better — small subs increase commitment.

Use hardship options quietly, not publicly.

---

7. Find Support & Funding (when ready)

Start local first

Before grants:

- ask parents to help
- small fundraiser
- local business sponsor (£100–£300)
- kit donations
- shared equipment

Then look at:

- small pots (£500–£2k)

- equipment funds

- place-based programmes

- social value partnerships

Avoid chasing big funding before you've proven demand.

Money should scale something that already works.

---

8. Build Belonging (this is the secret)

Clubs survive because of **relationships**, not sport quality.

Do:

- learn names

- celebrate birthdays

- WhatsApp group

- photos

- certificates

- end-of-term fun day

- parents stay for tea

If people feel ownership, they'll protect the club.

If it feels transactional, they'll drift away.

---

9. Grow Carefully

When to grow?

Only when:

- waiting list exists

- volunteers exist

- space exists

Ways to grow

- second session

- older age group

- holiday activities

- partner with schools

- train young leaders

Not:

- bigger grant → bigger stress → burnout

---

10. The Hartlepool Sport Way (Place-first principles)

Because you're working in Hartlepool, this matters:

Anchor locally

- use local suppliers

- recruit locally

- partner locally

Show visible wins

- tidy spaces

- new kit

- photos

- community pride

Keep it human

- informal > corporate

- conversation > surveys

- action > strategy

Think:

"Would my neighbour feel comfortable walking in?"

If yes → you're doing it right.

Quick Start Checklist

Week 1–2

☐ Test idea
☐ Borrow space
☐ Run 2 sessions

Week 3–4

☐ Confirm regular slot
☐ Recruit helper
☐ Set subs

Month 2–3

☐ Insurance
☐ Bank account
☐ WhatsApp group
☐ Basic kit

Month 4+

☐ Partnerships
☐ Small funding
☐ Celebration event

One-line philosophy

Start small.
Start local.
Make it regular.
Let people shape it.
Grow what sticks.