

EVALUATION REPORT

The Youth Endowment Fund's Place-Based Neighbourhood Fund

Implementation and Process Evaluation Annual Report - Year 1 Delivery Phase (2023/2024)

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About the Youth Endowment Fund

The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) is a charity with a mission that matters. We exist to prevent children and young people from becoming involved in violence. We do this by finding out what works and building a movement to put this knowledge into practice.

Children and young people at risk of becoming involved in violence deserve services that give them the best chance of a positive future. To make sure that happens, we'll fund promising projects and then use the very best evaluation to find out what works. Just as we benefit from robust trials in medicine, young people deserve support grounded in the evidence. We'll build that knowledge through our various grant rounds and funding activities.

And just as important is understanding children and young people's lives. Through our Youth Advisory Board and national network of peer researchers, we'll ensure that they influence our work and that we understand and are addressing their needs. But none of this will make a difference if all we do is produce reports that stay on a shelf.

Together, we need to look at the evidence and agree on what works, then build a movement to make sure that young people get the very best support possible. Our strategy sets out how we'll do it. At its heart, it says that we will fund good work, find what works and work for change. You can read it [here](#).

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About the evaluator

The Neighbourhood Fund (NF) is being evaluated by a consortium including evaluators from Nottingham Trent University (NTU) and Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU). The NF programme involves a complex multi-phased delivery across five sites, and the evaluation team is implementing a complementary two-strand evaluation to 1) provide on-going feedback on programme implementation (i.e. formative/implementation and process evaluation) and 2) understand programme impact (i.e. summative/impact evaluation) (for further details see the evaluation protocol, Newton et al., 2024). This report is one of a suite of reports that will be produced throughout the evaluation period, which focuses on year 1 of the NF action plan delivery phase (2023/2024).

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We are grateful to the Youth Endowment Fund and partners across the NF sites for supporting evaluation implementation and learning partners, Renaisi and Dartington Service Design Lab, and LJMU staff Chloe Smith and Nadia Butler for supporting report finalisation.

List of abbreviations

| | |
|------|---|
| APCC | Association of Police and Crime Commissioners |
| CRCP | Community research and co-design partner |
| EET | Education, employment, and training |
| GeCo | Grants and Evaluation Committee |
| NF | Neighbourhood Fund |
| PHPC | Public Health and Police Collaborative |
| SVD | Serious Violence Duty |
| SVS | Serious Violence Strategy |
| TOC | Theory of Change |
| VCSE | Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise |
| VRUs | Violence Reduction Units |
| WHO | World Health Organization |
| YEF | Youth Endowment Fund |

Glossary of terms

Hyper-local/small-scale area: A hyper-local/small-scale area refers to a very specific, narrowly defined geographic region, such as a neighbourhood or small community.

Neighbourhood Fund: Aims to understand if and how empowering people to make decisions about their local neighbourhoods can prevent children from becoming involved in violence.

Problem-solving approach: A problem-solving approach systematically addresses and resolves issues.

Summative evaluation: A summative evaluation assesses the outcomes of a programme or project at its conclusion.

Formative evaluation: A formative evaluation provides ongoing feedback to improve a programme or project during its development.

Terms of reference: Terms of reference are a code of conduct for steering group members to follow.

Steering group member: A steering group member is someone from a local organisation or statutory agency who collaborates with other members to make decisions, support funding interventions and ensure the action plan aligns with community needs and interests.

Delivery partner: A delivery partner is an organisation that has received funding to run an intervention/activity relating to a specific strand of an action plan.

The project

The Neighbourhood Fund aims to establish if and how empowering people to make decisions about their local neighbourhoods can prevent children from becoming involved in violence. It is part of the Youth Endowment Fund’s (YEF) work to invest in and evaluate place-based approaches to preventing violence. The Neighbourhood Fund seeks to establish community violence prevention partnerships in specific areas with high levels of violence among children and provides funding for their plans. This report describes initial implementation findings from five sites in England and Wales (Birmingham, Bradford, Cardiff, Manchester and Norfolk). Each site has completed three preparatory phases (2021–2023) and begun action plan delivery (April 2023–present). In the feasibility phase, local statutory partners, YEF, and a community research and co-design partner (CRCP) worked together to identify a small area experiencing high levels of violence. In the discovery phase, CRCPs engaged with the local community to identify the causes of the violence. In the co-design phase, the CRCP established a steering group of local organisations that worked together to develop an action plan and appointed one organisation as the lead coordinator for delivery (often the CRCP). In the final phase, action plan delivery, which is ongoing, the lead coordinator and steering group work together to implement the action plan for up to five years.

This implementation and process evaluation report, the first in a wider ongoing evaluation of the Neighbourhood Fund, reflects on the first year of action plan delivery (2023/2024), synthesising findings across all five sites. It examines the transition from the preparatory phases to the delivery phase and the various approaches that sites are taking to deliver their plans. Early findings (based on the preparatory phases and first year of delivery) regarding how well the action plans are being delivered are also included, as are initial insights from the learning partners, Renaisi-TSIP, that have supported sites throughout the process. Data was drawn from qualitative interviews with 11 members of lead coordinator organisations and 28 steering group members/delivery partners using framework analysis, which organises content according to pre-specified themes. The report also drew on each site’s quarterly reports of programme implementation and their action plans, the learning partner’s reports for each site and for the programme as a whole, and observations of programme meetings. This phase of the evaluation started in December 2023 and concluded in April 2024.

| Key conclusions |
|---|
| The preparatory phases of the programme laid the groundwork for effective delivery by building trust among community groups and developing an understanding of local issues. The community-led steering groups, appointed during co-design, supported the legitimacy of the project and facilitated delivery. |
| The lead coordinator facilitated collaboration among the steering group members and was key to delivery. In many cases, the CRCP was appointed as the lead coordinator. The two sites that appointed a new organisation as lead coordinator experienced delays in delivering their action plans. |
| All sites experienced challenges in preparing for delivery. The time taken for administrative processes led to delays in recruiting staff and delivery partners. Some sites also needed more time to refine their action plans. |
| Across sites, the focus of the year was on establishing the infrastructure and processes needed to deliver the planned activities. Examples included making the most of existing resources, setting up community grant processes, and building capacity for delivery. Lack of capacity within partner/grassroots organisations caused delays in some sites. |
| Planned activities varied across sites but often focussed on providing children with safe spaces for social interaction and personal development. Sites sought to make activities meaningful and inclusive for young people, with efforts to incorporate youth voice. However, young people’s engagement in activities varied. |

Interpretation

The preparatory phases of the programme were widely valued for building trust among community groups and developing an understanding of local issues. The community-led steering groups, set up during the co-design phase, were key to action plan delivery. Steering groups varied in size and make-up across the five sites but generally represented a diverse range of ethnic and religious backgrounds. This supported the legitimacy of the programme and facilitated a deeper understanding of local needs, enabling greater reach into the community. Bringing together existing organisations through the steering groups meant that their resources, expertise, and connections could be used to support the implementation of the action plans. Within the steering groups, fostering trust and retention, managing different perspectives, and navigating dynamics between members was often challenging. However, efforts to address these issues were often effective.

The lead coordinator facilitated effective collaboration among the steering group members and was key to delivery. All sites saw the lead coordinators as pivotal. Lead coordinators were consistently described as key for the effective governance and leadership of steering group meetings, where they provided clear communication, transparency, and a focus on community goals. Appointing a lead coordinator could be challenging, however, as there was no formal process for this. In three sites, the CRCP was appointed as lead coordinator; in two sites, new lead coordinators were appointed. In both cases, the transition was felt to have been managed well overall, although it delayed delivery. One site updated its action plan to refine objectives and activities; the other had to pause progress while waiting for YEF sign-off for the new appointment.

All sites experienced challenges in preparing to deliver their action plans. Some sites succeeded in getting their activities up and running by the end of the year, while others were still preparing to do so. The transition from co-design to delivery required sites to establish infrastructure (e.g. facilities, grant processes) to support the delivery of their plans. However, administrative processes led to delays in recruiting staff and delivery partners. Some sites were unclear on the timescales for the transition, and many sites paused their preparation for two to three months while waiting for YEF approval for funding for their action plans. This delay led to changes in the planned timescales, with YEF acknowledging that sites would need more time to prepare and classing the first year as an action plan mobilisation phase. Some sites also needed to refine their action plans before delivery could begin.

Across sites, the focus of the year was on establishing the infrastructure and processes needed to deliver the planned activities. Several sites set up processes so that community partners could bid for grants to implement activities aligned with the action plan, with applications assessed by members of the steering group. Across sites, bringing together local resources and building capacity was key, involving initiatives such as co-designing delivery processes and assisting with community grant applications. In some sites, delivery was delayed because organisations lacked the capacity to provide the planned activities due to factors such as a lack of facilities or a shortage of suitably trained youth workers.

Planned activities varied across sites but were often focussed on creating safe spaces for social interaction and personal development for children (e.g. drama clubs, sports tournaments, mental health support, mentoring, and leadership classes). All sites felt that ensuring activities were meaningful and inclusive for young people was key to delivery and wished they had more input from young people. Some sites included children and young people in programme design, decision-making, or delivery (e.g. through workshops, as members of the working group, or as facilitators or mentors). Planned activities were frequently tailored to address the needs of specific groups. However, participation varied, with some sites experiencing more demand than they could provide for and others struggling to fill the available places. Several sites experienced children signing up for but not attending activities, potentially indicating accessibility issues.

All five sites are continuing to progress with the delivery of their action plans. The YEF will conduct further evaluations to learn from their experiences and assess the impact of the Neighbourhood Fund on levels of violence.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The Youth Endowment Fund's (YEF) Neighbourhood Fund (NF) is part of the YEF's broader work to tackle local youth violence.¹ The NF sits within YEF's place-based funding stream and was developed under the premise that violence is concentrated in specific places, and local knowledge and buy-in to preventing youth violence are pivotal to making effective change. The NF aims to invest in and build long-term partnerships in up to 15 'small-scale' areas in England and Wales, where there are high levels of children and young people involved in crime and violence. The goal is to empower local partnerships to make decisions about how best to reduce youth violence in their areas and to provide the funding and freedom to determine how prevention activities are implemented locally based on local data and partner and community insights (see Appendix 1 for the a priori programme-level theory of change [TOC]). A key part of the NF is to understand if and how this approach can prevent children from becoming involved in violence (YEF, ND). Round 1 of the NF is being implemented in five sites in England and Wales.² This report forms part of a wider formative (implementation and process) and summative (impact) evaluation of this round (Newton et al., 2024). Specifically, it provides findings from the implementation and process evaluation, covering the mobilisation and implementation of local NF delivery action plans during year 1 (2023/24).

1.2 Theoretical and scientific background³

There is an established body of research that demonstrates how crime, including youth violence, is concentrated in specific locations, places, and times (often referred to as crime hot spots), for example, Braga et al. (2019a), Eck et al. (2017), Newton et al. (2015, 2021), Smith et al. (2023), Sherman et al. (1989), and Weisburd (2015). These micro-level empirical studies of crime concentrations arise from classic opportunity theories, including routine activities (Cohen and Felson, 1979), the geometry and patterns of crime (Brantingham and Brantingham, 1984), young people's lifestyles (Hägerstrand, 1970), and the choices people make in different settings and places (Cornish and Clarke, 1986). Beyond opportunity, additional relevant factors at a more structural/societal level include socio-demographic characteristics, such as deprivation, inequality, and poverty (McAra and McVie, 2016), and levels of social cohesion and collective efficacy (Hipp and Wickes, 2017; Sampson et al., 1999). Crime opportunities are also influenced by levels of capable guardianship (Reynald, 2016) and how a place is managed (Madensen and Eck, 2013). Given the role of opportunity and the successes of place-based interventions in reducing violence (Braga et al., 2019a; 2019b), it follows that the NF approach of concentrating on small-scale locations may be effective at reducing violence.

¹ The YEF provide three types of fundings: (i) themed rounds prioritised through a series of focus areas, (ii) place-based approaches, and (iii) targeted projects. Place-based approaches are defined as "*Organised effort across a defined geography to prevent children and young people becoming involved in violence in a way that is responsive to local needs and context*" (YEF, ND).

² For details of the site selection process, see Louette et al., 2021.

³ See the evaluation plan for a detailed overview of the theoretical and scientific background of the NF (Newton et al., 2024).

However, evidence of the success of these approaches is limited, in part due to a lack of robust evaluations (YEF, 2023). It could be asserted that local prevention efforts work best when they are specific – linked to a well-defined localised crime setting and using a problem-solving approach (Hinkle et al., 2020). A criticism that is levelled at these local approaches is that communities are generally not engaged in their design and implementation, and they are generally top-down approaches delivered by the police or community safety partners. Collaboration with young people who live in and the organisations that operate in communities with high levels of youth violence has been identified as an essential part of making effective change (Open Innovation Team, 2023), but it has rarely been applied to place-based violence prevention.

Socio-ecological theory has been widely considered in place-based community approaches to crime prevention (Baidawi et al., 2023; Krug et al., 2002). In the NF context, socio-ecological theory proposes that a set of interconnected systems influences the development of young people. These are *the micro-system* – individual families, peers, and school are all examples of systems that a young person directly and most frequently connects with – the *mesosystem* – connected groups of families and peers with which the child engages but less directly – the *exosystem* – broader structures, such as social services and local politics, which influence a child’s development but in which they do not directly function – and the *macrosystem* – the larger cultural context within which they live. The World Health Organization (WHO) offers a socio-ecological model for violence prevention centred on the ‘public health’ approach focused on four levels: individuals, relationships, communities, and societal factors. The WHO recommends that violence prevention strategies focus on the complex interplay between these four factors (Krug et al., 2002).

Community empowerment and co-creation is another relevant theory to consider relating to the NF (WHO, ND). A key feature here is the notion of power renegotiation, as empowering local communities to make decisions requires others, such as statutory partners, to either share power or relinquish some control (Baum, 2008). Theoretically, this power dynamic could be considered one of the fundamental obstacles to the delivery of the NF. The process of engaging communities in the design and delivery of youth violence interventions could be considered as being very similar to the process of co-creation (Vargas et al., 2022).

The Baidawi et al. (2023) YEF systematic review of methods used internationally for evaluations of place-based complex interventions (not specifically violence due to small numbers) identified a range of possible methodological approaches. The authors sought to devise a typology of existing provisions while highlighting that the flexible nature and adaptability of these programmes make this challenging. However, some of the key types of programme levels they identified were:

- **Individual/family level:** family/parenting programmes, youth development programmes, and education programmes targeting children in schools
- **Community level:** building community identity, positivity, and confidence and increasing community cohesion and mutual support
- **Systems-level:** improving connectivity between local organisations, creating new partnerships, improving the capacity of organisations and services to support local people, increasing funding targeted at young people or other focus populations, and changing the culture of local services (e.g. more holistic, tailored, or people-centred ways of working; more community involvement in service development; and more use of evidence and data)

They established commonalities between these programmes, including a focus on a specific locality, several agencies working together, an emphasis on community engagement, and an aim to tackle the cause as well as the prevalence of the issue (Baidawi et al., 2023).

1.3 Policy background

Across the United Kingdom, several place-based approaches to tackling local issues have been promoted or introduced through government policy. The Serious Violence Strategy (SVS) (Home Office, 2018) explored how best to deter young people from violence. Notably, the strategy highlights that preventing violence requires a multi-component approach, including a range of partners across sectors. Building on this, since June 2019, the Home Office has funded the implementation of Violence Reduction Units (VRUs) across areas with the highest levels of violence across England and Wales. The aim of VRUs is to lead and coordinate a whole-system public health approach to addressing violence at a local level (Home Office, 2023a) through multi-agency working, data sharing and analysis, engagement with young people and communities, and the commissioning (and delivery) of evidence-based interventions. The most recent national evaluation of VRUs suggests that areas were generally making progress in implementing the approach (Home Office, 2023a). Further, while the evaluation shows no statistically significant impacts on primary outcomes (i.e. hospital admissions for sharp object violent injury or homicides), the direction of change is in a positive direction (i.e. reduction), and a statistically significant reduction was seen for secondary outcomes (i.e. hospital admissions for any violent injury) (Home Office, 2023a).

More recently, the Serious Violence Duty (SVD) (Home Office, 2023b) has placed a statutory duty onto public sector agencies to adopt a multi-agency approach in developing strategies for the prevention of serious violence at the local level. Responsible authorities include police, the children and young people secure estate, youth offending teams, probation services, integrated care systems (National Health Service), local authorities (district councils), fire and rescue, and educational institutions. The duty requires them to work together to develop a strategic needs assessment identifying the types of serious violence occurring in their local area, the potential causes, and the populations most at risk of being victims. The SVS, work of VRUs, and the SVD have focused on the prevention of serious violence, looking at potential causes for why these crimes may be occurring and how to tackle them. They recognise that specific communities may be faced with individual problems, thereby placing the emphasis on local agencies to work collaboratively to research and evaluate what may be effective for their own areas.

In addition, the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) and the Public Health and Police Collaborative (PHPC) released guidance for *Taking a Public Health Approach for Police and Crime Commissioners and their Offices* (APCC/PHPC, 2023). The guidance emphasises the importance of policing moving away from a reactive approach to being proactive and preventative, working with their partners and communities to take a multi-agency approach to address underlying causes, as risk factors for crime are often linked with health problems, social exclusion, and inequality. This guidance highlights that those who are at higher risk for offending often suffer from complex health and social issues, such as poor housing, lack of access to, or engagement in education, and lack of work and income.

Guidance by national health agencies also endorsed community engagement as a strategy for health improvement. *Vulnerability in childhood: a public health-informed approach* aims to support local governments and their partners to work together to reduce vulnerability and adversity in childhood (Public

Health England, 2020a). The approach advises on preventing these impacts or intervening early when problems arise to mitigate harm. *Community-centred public health: taking a whole system approach* emphasises the importance of systems that engage the whole system in reducing health inequalities (Public Health England, 2020b). *A guide to community-centred approaches for health and wellbeing* (Public Health England, 2015a) identifies assets within communities that are essential building blocks for better health, such as local skills and knowledge, social networks, and community organisations. Strategies which can be adopted by local leaders and service providers are identified as building on communities' existing capacities, promoting volunteer and peer roles, fostering collaborations and partnerships, improving access to community resources, incorporating community-centred approaches as an essential part of local health plans, involving at-risk individuals in the development of solution plans, and continuing to evaluate initiatives to maintain an evidence-based approach. The NF provides an opportunity to operationalise aspects of these strategies.

2. The Neighbourhood Fund programme

2.1 The design of the Neighbourhood Fund programme

Neighbourhood Fund key questions

Through establishing the NF, the YEF aims to build evidence on the following (YEF, ND):

- Which community engagement and partnership approaches help to keep children safe from violence, and how do they work?
- How do different conditions and contexts affect change?
- Which hyper-local activities, interventions, and approaches are most effective in preventing children and young people from becoming involved in violence?
- How do you measure changes in violence at a neighbourhood level?

Neighbourhood Fund areas, organisations, and phases

When the NF was established, the YEF analysed national data (e.g. police-recorded crime) to identify appropriate places to invest (see Louette et al., 2021) and, through this, identified five local authorities for the NF round one: Bradford, Cardiff, Manchester, Birmingham, and Norfolk. A range of partners were commissioned by the YEF to deliver the NF: a community research and co-design partner (CRCP), a learning partner, an evaluation partner, and a lead coordinator. The NF is split into four phases⁴:

1. Feasibility (year 1, ~1–6 months)
2. Discovery (year 1, ~6–12 months)
3. Co-design (year 1–2, ~6–24 months)
4. Action plan delivery (up to five years from April 2023)

One CRCP was commissioned at each of the five sites to conduct a range of activities for phases 1–3. A lead partner was then identified by the local steering group to coordinate delivery (Table 1).

The role of the learning partners, Renaisi and Dartington Service Design Lab, is to continuously help the YEF learn from the investment and share fundamental learning between the selected areas and more broadly.

⁴ See Newton et al., 2024 for a more detailed overview of each of the phases.

Table 1: NF sites: lead partner and YEF funding provision

| Site | Phase 1–3 (feasibility, discovery, and co-design) | Phase 4 (delivery) |
|------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| Birmingham | Birmingham Voluntary Service Council (£146,601) | Aston Villa Foundation (£1,000,000) |
| Bradford | Born in Bradford (£139,995) | Born in Bradford (£1,000,000) |
| Cardiff | Citizens UK (£117,731) | Citizens UK (£1,000,000) |
| Manchester | Social Finance and Lennina Ofori (£155,276) | Young Manchester (£1,000,000) |
| Norfolk | Right to Succeed (£158,833) | Right to Succeed (£1,000,000) |

2.2 The feasibility phase

The YEF commissioned five CRCPs, one for each local authority, who worked alongside the YEF and local statutory partners (e.g. local councils, police, and VRUs where in existence) to identify local places where youth violence is concentrated and where there was likely to be an opportunity for change. The key purpose of this stage was to use available data (e.g. police-recorded crimes) and community insights to select appropriate small-scale areas within each of the five local authorities identified for the NF to invest in. At the conclusion of the feasibility phase, each CRCP recommended a small-scale site to invest in to test out the effectiveness of locally driven approaches to reducing youth violence. The identified intervention areas for the NF round one were as follows (see Appendix 2 for further details):

- Barkerend, an inner-city area of Bradford
- Grangetown and Butetown, south of the city of Cardiff
- Cheetham Hill, north of Manchester City Centre
- Lozells and Newtown, an inner-city area in West Birmingham
- Nelson, an area close to the town centre and seafront in Great Yarmouth, Norfolk

2.3 The discovery phase

During the discovery phase, CRCPs engaged with the local community (e.g. through focus groups and community surveys) to gather intelligence to understand the causes of violence and the community's key priorities for reducing youth violence to ensure that their needs and aspirations were embedded in the local NF project. Community and multi-agency meetings/forums were implemented to build trust and relationships across the community and recruit local community members, statutory partners, and third sector organisations to form a locally appropriate steering group.

2.4 The co-design phase

This phase built on the discovery phase and aimed to develop a local community action plan to prevent children and young people from becoming involved in violence. Steering group member recruitment varied site by site. In several sites, steering group members were approached by the CRCPs based on their research of organisations operating in the area. In other sites, a call was put out for organisations to join the steering group (e.g. via hosting an event) and/or members were recruited by word of mouth by other steering group members already on board. The plan was developed by the local steering group with the support of the

CRCP and learning partner and was informed by local insight and evidence on what works to prevent youth violence. Activities to co-produce action plans varied by site but included the CRCPs facilitating meetings/events to define and prioritise actions and formulate a plan for delivery. Action plans include locally co-developed TOCs, including the rationales for actions posed, a list of core actions/strategic themes, and theorised mechanisms and pathways by which the action plan should reduce youth violence in the local context. The site-level TOCs were developed by the sites using a bottom-up approach, with a broader YEF NF programme TOC (Appendix 1) used as a guide. The learning partner supported sites in producing their TOCs through the delivery of workshops on TOC production and subsequent reviews of drafts of site-level TOCs. The site-level TOCs were submitted to the YEF Grants and Evaluation Committee (GeCo) for approval before the sites were able to move on to the delivery phase. While all TOCs were approved by the YEF, at the end of the co-design phase, the level of detail and development of the TOCs varied between sites, and there was a need for sites to continue to develop their TOCs as they moved forward from planning interventions to delivering them during the delivery phase.

2.5 The action plan delivery phase (up to five years from April 2023)

Each site will deliver its action plan over a 3–5-year period (Table 2). In year one (the focus of this report), sites commenced by refining their community action plans, identifying local arrangements for commissioning, and deciding how to prioritise the different strategic themes from their action plan. Steering group membership was reviewed, and sub-action or working groups were formed to carry out key activities and priorities. As relevant to each site-level action plan, the delivery of activities for children and young people commenced (Table 2).

For each site, the local steering group appointed a lead coordinator (i.e. organisation) to be responsible for leading the delivery phase. In three sites (Bradford, Cardiff, and Norfolk), the CRCP was in a position to become the lead coordinator and was selected to do so by the steering group, meaning there was a smooth transition between phases. In two sites (Birmingham and Manchester), this was not the case, and new lead coordinators were appointed, which required an onboarding and transitional approach at the start of the delivery phase.

Across the five sites, the community action plans have their own context-specific variations. Moreover, there is a recognition of the need for flexibility and adaptability over the delivery phase. Reasons for this include the fact that sites are continually learning, community priorities and acceptance of interventions may change, and TOC models may develop over time. An overview of site-level action plans, including overarching themes and activities, is provided in Table 2, and an overview of year 1 delivery across the NF programme is detailed in the findings section and for each site in the form of case studies in Appendix 2.

Table 2: Site-level action plan themes and activities

| Site (delivery period) | Action plan themes/activities |
|--|---|
| Aston Villa Foundation, YEF NF project, Newton and | <p>Support a collaborative and responsive system: develop a system-wide strategic pledge, work towards establishing Lozells and Newtown as a Restorative Neighbourhood, and co-design and pilot approaches to family advocacy.</p> <p>Promote a safe, welcoming, and prospering neighbourhood: distribute small grants to support environmental improvement, distribute a Community Chest and</p> |

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Lozells, Birmingham</p> <p>(3 years)</p> | <p>Flexible Response Fund to support grassroots organisations delivering youth activity and community responses to incidents of serious youth violence, fund the creation of a Neighbourhood Development Forum, and enhance links between businesses and the community.</p> |
| <p>The Youth Resilience Programme, Barkerend, Bradford</p> <p>(5 years)</p> | <p>Build capacity through partnerships, collaboration, training, and small grant facilitation: build capacity, implement training, set up a young people’s forum, and facilitate small grants.</p> <p>Engage vulnerable young people for better mental health: provide youth worker support, build awareness and education on vulnerabilities, and connect young people with mental health support.</p> <p>Role modelling, mentoring, and supporting career pathways: promotion of positive role models, mentorship, and career pathways support.</p> |
| <p>Citizens UK, YEF NF project, Butetown and Grangetown, Cardiff</p> <p>(5 years)</p> | <p>Microgrant and capacity building: create a microgrant and capacity building scheme for grassroots organisations.</p> <p>Establish a youth action zone: local organisations collaborate to establish a youth leadership programme and work with the police to build relationships.</p> <p>Emotional well-being navigator in the community: link the community and well-being services, provide support such as translation and service access guidance, advise on services, identify gaps, and campaign for improvements.</p> <p>Community organiser to develop the power of local people and lead local campaigns: review school admissions and exclusions policies, develop a plan for the Butetown hub, raise awareness and prevent drug use, create a microgrant scheme and attract further funding, and redevelop Canal Park (lights, Astro turf access, basketball provision, litter and needle pick-ups).</p> <p>Literacy intervention: providing literacy support for parents and young people and building parents’ confidence in supporting their children with learning.</p> <p>Tigerbay employment partnership: promote jobs and support applications, sign up employers to pay a real living wage, tackle under-representation in the workforce, provide job security and development, and scale up the Tigerbay Security model.</p> <p>Establishing diversionary activities: work with the community safety partnership to establish diversionary activities embedded in grassroots organisations.</p> |
| <p>Hope for Cheetham, Cheetham Hill, Manchester</p> <p>(5 years)</p> | <p>Sporting activities: offer activities like football, boxing, and dancing in safe spaces (including girls-only activities to consider cultural restrictions).</p> <p>Detached youth work: detached youth work in key hotspot areas (including those led by women to better engage with girls and those that include local police officers to build trust with the community).</p> <p>Mentoring: Big Brother/Big Sister programmes focusing on the most vulnerable young people and wider mentoring programmes in schools, with a focus on education and employment.</p> <p>Life skills: years 5/6 participate in awareness raising and trauma-informed workshops (e.g. child sexual/criminal exploitation, healthy relationships), employment/education training delivered in partnership with local businesses, general drop-in life skills support (e.g. CVs, job applications), and social skills training with vulnerable young people within schools.</p> |

| | |
|---|---|
| | <p>Programme management: develop/deliver inclusive grants processes, with a focus on building the sustainability of local organisations, and map needs and provision within Cheetham Hill.</p> <p>Capacity, training, and support: provide one-on-one support to local organisations to help build their capacity and build on existing capacity building that is funded in the area.</p> <p>Strategy, systems, and fundraising: pursue match funding; engage with businesses to support education, employment and training activities; engage and coordinate activities with strategic partners; facilitate engagement with the police to encourage referrals and trust building with local young people; and develop and deliver a targeted communications plan.</p> |
| <p>The Great Yarmouth Place project, Nelson/central and Northgate Wards, Norfolk</p> <p>(3 years)</p> | <p>Literacy: design, implement, and monitor literacy interventions, approaches, and strategies; provide pupil assessments for school years 5–9 across all three years of the intervention; design and implement targeted interventions and assessments for students with special educational needs and disabilities; develop communities of practice; and design training and capacity building with teaching staff.</p> <p>Youth offer: map the existing youth provision, design and develop an enhanced youth offer, develop a youth panel, and design and deliver two safe spaces.</p> <p>Education, employment, and training (EET): review the use of risk of NEET (not in education, employment or training) indicators across years 9, 10, and 11; perform post-16-years provision mapping; develop, deliver, and evaluate the future framework; develop a community of practice for EET; launch, implement, and evaluate the Secondary School EET Pilot, providing additional careers support in schools; and design, implement, and evaluate the Engagement Coach Pilot, providing one-on-one support for a cohort of young people identified as being at risk of becoming NEET.</p> |

3. Research questions

The formative evaluation will be embedded throughout all stages of the project, iteratively supporting programme implementation and the development and implementation of the summative evaluation. Formative evaluation data will be collected through a mixture of monitoring exercises and qualitative work with participants, practitioners, and other stakeholders. This will facilitate an understanding of the variation between the planned and actual implementation of the intervention and indicate any contextual variations across sites. Formative evaluation questions for the full evaluation period are detailed in Table 3 below. This year's report focuses on questions 1 and 2, examining the transition from feasibility/discovery/co-design to the delivery phase and the approaches delivery partners have taken to operationalise their action plans during year 1. While other research questions will be a focus of future evaluation reporting periods, where relevant, early findings related to these questions are also provided in this report (particularly questions 3/4).

Table 3: Formative evaluation questions

| | |
|----------|--|
| 1 | How effective was the transition from feasibility/discovery/co-design to delivery? |
| 2 | What approaches are delivery partners taking to deliver the plans, and are these approaches effective? |
| 3 | How well are the different components of the action plan being delivered? |
| 4 | How effective is implementation in each area? |
| 5 | To what extent are systems change outcomes being achieved and in what context: for whom/where, how, and why? |
| 6 | What evidence is there of impacts on intended outcomes, and what are the mechanisms of these? |

4. Methods

4.1 Participant selection

At each of the five sites, participants were purposefully identified through the lead coordinator, who connected the evaluation researchers with local steering group members, working groups tasked with carrying out the action plans, and, where relevant, those delivering or commissioned to deliver interventions. Participants were recruited by email via the gatekeeper. Consent was obtained from managers of services acting as gatekeepers to delivery partners and directly from anyone who participated in an interview.

4.2 Data collection

Tables 4 and 5 outline the timeline and methods used to answer the research questions for this phase of delivery.

Due to differences across sites in their TOCs and action plan development at the end of the co-design phase and the need for sites to refine these further at the start of the delivery phase, year 1 was viewed by the YEF and the evaluation team as an action plan mobilisation phase. As such, qualitative interviews were deemed most appropriate to understand key stakeholders' perceptions and experiences of transitioning from the co-design to the delivery phase and the progression and key learnings in implementing locally defined action plans. Data collection instruments for qualitative interviews (consent forms and information sheets for gatekeepers, local coordinators, steering group members, delivery partners, programme recipients) were developed by the evaluation team. These were reviewed by the YEF and lead coordinators across the sites. Data collection was carried out by a team of trained researchers from Liverpool John Moores University and Nottingham Trent University working with evaluation leads. Data were collected both online via MS Teams and, where possible, onsite at services where activities were being delivered. We aimed to interview ~10–15 participants, representing lead coordinators, steering group members, and delivery partners⁵ and 4–5 programme recipients per site during this phase. However, as activities/interventions did not commence until near the end of the year (and, for the most part, after the evaluation data collection period), this evaluation phase only includes interviews with lead coordinators, steering group members, and delivery partners. This includes interviews with 11 members of the lead partner organisations and 28 steering group members/delivery partners⁶ (~25 steering group members/~13 delivery partners⁷.)

⁵ Sample size estimated based on number of steering group members and delivery partners across sites.

⁶ A steering group member is someone in a local organisation who sits on the community steering group and collaborates with other members to make decisions, provide advice and support for funded interventions/activities, and ensure the action plan aligns with the community's needs and interests. A delivery partner is an organisation that has received funding to run an intervention/activity relating to a specific strand of a site's action plan.

⁷ Across some sites, steering group members were often also delivery partners.

Quarterly reports of programme implementation produced by site leads using YEF monitoring and supplementary evaluation forms were collected and reviewed for content relevant to the evaluation research questions. The YEF quarterly monitoring report aims to collate a high-level summary of site-level progression, including the number of children and young people and practitioners referred/recruited/retained in activities, key achievements, risks, and planned activities for the forthcoming quarter. The supplementary evaluation form collates site-level project Gantt charts detailing progress per activity and including a risk register, a summary of key learnings for that quarter, and details for each activity implemented, including what the activity involved and the number of children and young people and practitioners referred/recruited/retained. Following each submission of a quarterly report, meetings were held between the site leads, YEF, learning partner, and evaluation team to review progress and report submission and content. Meeting discussions were used to add context to submitted reports and clarify submitted data. Where relevant, the YEF and the evaluation team provided suggestions for future completion of reports (e.g. providing greater detail on activities) to aid the understanding of site-level implementation and progress and ensure comparability in data across sites.

In addition, we reviewed programme materials (e.g. action plans) and learning partner reports produced to inform the evaluation. Learning partner reports were for each site and the programme as a whole, providing an overview of the programme/site-level project and the perceptions of progress, successes and challenges, and key learnings. Further, they discussed the use of the TOC by sites in delivering action plans, any evidence of outputs/activities they had observed that supported mechanisms of change, and where amendments to TOC may need to be explored in the future. Other reports included summaries of learning partner peer learning sessions⁸ held with sites and a short overarching key learning summary document.

Evidence from YEF monitoring and supplementary evaluation forms, programme documentation, learning partner reports, and observations of programme implementation/meetings have been used throughout to support the qualitative data collection.

4.3 Analysis

Qualitative data analysis of interviews with stakeholders (e.g. leads, steering group members, delivery partners) were subjected to framework analysis. This is a deductive approach, and analysis is structured around pre-specified themes so that findings have relevance to applied research questions (at this stage of evaluation, focusing on the mobilisation and delivery of action plans) (Gale et al., 2013). Data was coded under a list of a priori themes relevant to the research questions examined during this phase.⁹

⁸ Peer learning sessions were delivered by the learning partners to enable sites to come together, share experiences, and/or learn techniques to support them in designing and implementing their local action plan.

⁹ The framework analysis model will be refined and updated at key review points as the evaluation progresses.

4.4 Ethical review

An ethical review was undertaken and approved by the Nottingham Trent University Research Ethics Committee.¹⁰ Appendix 3 provides participant information sheets and interview schedules used in this phase of the evaluation.

Table 4. Timeline

| Date | Activity |
|---------------------|---|
| Dec 2023–March 2024 | Recruitment and data collection <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="427 510 1503 589">• Online (MS Teams) interviews with site leads, followed by interviews with steering group members/delivery partners<li data-bbox="427 600 1503 678">• Site visits in two locations (completed in February) to support recruitment and implementation of interviews |
| Jan–March 2024 | Data analysis |
| April 2024 | Annual report submission to the YEF |

¹⁰ Project ID 1544809

Table 5: Methods overview

| Research questions addressed | Data collection methods | Participants/data sources | Data analysis method | Implementation/logic model relevance |
|--|--|--|--|---|
| <p>FEQ1: How effective was the transition from feasibility/discovery/co-design to delivery?</p> <p>FEQ2: What approaches are delivery partners taking to deliver the plans (<i>and are these effective</i>)?</p> | <p>Interviews</p> <p>Review of programme documentation and YEF and learning partner reports.</p> | <p>Interviews</p> <p>Manchester: lead coordinators (2), steering group/delivery partners (6)</p> <p>Bradford: lead coordinators (2), steering group/delivery partners (6)</p> <p>Great Yarmouth: lead coordinators (2), steering group /delivery partners (2)</p> <p>Cardiff: lead coordinators (3), steering group /delivery partners (6)</p> <p>Birmingham: lead coordinators (2), steering group /delivery partners (8)</p> | <p>Qualitative: coding of transcripts using framework analyses (i.e. deductive approach)</p> | <p>Explore the inputs to and readiness for programme implementation</p> |

5. Findings

5.1 How effective was the transition from feasibility/discovery/co-design to delivery?

This section discusses the following themes and sub-themes:

Table 6: Summary of themes and sub-themes

| Theme | Sub-themes |
|--|--|
| Ongoing reflections on the NF approach and phases | Buy-in to the bottom-up community-led model The value of the feasibility/discovery/co-design phases to action plan delivery <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building community trust, empowerment, and insight • Identifying wider partners and building and maintaining relationships |
| Setting up and implementing a community-led steering group (discovery/co-design and year 1 delivery) | Steering group structure and governance Steering group relationships and retention Relationships between site lead coordinators and steering groups |
| Transition into the delivery phase | Transitioning from CRCP to a lead coordinator Mobilising delivery of action plans across sites Adaptating the action plan |

Ongoing reflections on the Neighbourhood Fund approach and phases

Buy-in to the bottom-up community-led model: the bottom-up approach and community-led model promoted by the YEF NF were discussed positively by several stakeholders across sites. Stakeholders felt that this approach was necessary and effective in engaging the most vulnerable and at-risk members of their communities in services/interventions to prevent youth violence. Stakeholders believed that adopting a community-led model would lead to a lasting long-term impact on preventing violence in the neighbourhood.

“If you can do something from the bottom up and it's very, it's very owned by the community, you will make bigger footprints”. (Site 1, steering group member)

However, some interviewees felt the concept of a bottom-up community-led model was too idealistic and that more thought was needed to make the concept work in a realistic way. For example, at one site, a steering group member worried that the lead coordinators appeared more focused on advocating for the model rather than practical learning through experience, and although they appreciated the underlying

values, they remained sceptical about the methodology employed. At another site, a steering group member felt that it is essential to establish joint accountability between the lead coordinator/steering group/delivery partners and the funder (i.e. the YEF), recommending that the YEF engage more directly with local steering group partners.

“I like what they're trying to do. I like the values behind it, but I'm not convinced about the methodology”. (Site 1, Steering group member)

“So, if it's [a] community project, what is a community-led model? And I don't think we quite have that yet”. (Site 4, Steering group member)

The value of the feasibility/discovery/co-design phases to action plan delivery: at the end of the feasibility, discovery, and co-design phase, the learning partners produced a report for each site detailing key learnings. To understand how effective the transition from feasibility/discovery/co-design to delivery was, the evaluators asked interviewees to consider the value of these stages in delivering the action plan. Two key themes were identified from interviews: building community trust, empowerment, and insight and identifying wider partners and building and maintaining relationships. These are summarised below and should be considered alongside information detailed in the learning partner reports produced at the end of subsequent NF phases.

a) Building community trust, empowerment, and insight: generally, stakeholders across all sites valued the feasibility/discovery/co-design phases because they allowed important trust and confidence to be gained by and between the local community and organisations. Steering group members discussed how the first two phases (feasibility and discovery) were seen as being invaluable to the success of the following phases (co-design and delivery). An emphasis was put on the importance of those phases and of making sure they are implemented effectively so that community trust and empowerment were built, the nature of the problem was fully understood, action plans could be designed, and their implementation could be driven by the community.

“Without that initial consultation and research, I think the next stages would not have been done. So, it was absolutely massively [significant] and important to do that first step to identify the problem”. (Site 2, Steering group member)

Consultation with various community groups, including young people, allowed for a comprehensive understanding of local challenges, strengths, and assets. The structured approach to consultation during the co-design phases provided legitimacy to the project and helped in addressing community concerns and challenges. Sites discussed how these phases helped to identify crucial gaps and allowed the needs of the community to be at the forefront of *“putting people at the heart of everything we do” (Site 2, Steering group member)*, helping sites to understand the needs of young people living in those areas. One site did, however, note that on reflection, there were missed opportunities to involve young people more actively from the outset, suggesting the establishment of a youth steering group during the discovery phase as a potential improvement for future projects.

All the sites discussed the importance of community engagement and listening to and taking on board feedback from people living in the neighbourhoods receiving the funding to identify what they felt were priorities for that area. Some sites collected this information via focus groups or one-on-one interviews to

identify the different needs within the community. One stakeholder noted how these phases provided a useful platform to navigate community critique of existing approaches.

“[...] detailed focus groups or one-on-one interviews [... are] different means of targeting and getting those detailed conversations from all the different kinds of partners, from both adults in community groups and the young people themselves”. (Site 4, steering group member)

“Having that engagement with the community and the people who live it, breathe it, feel it every single day. To say, ‘OK, you’re the people that are entrenched in this; what do you think can be done to improve serious youth violence to make your streets safer for your kids and your families growing up?’” (Site 1, steering group member)

Across all sites, the complexity of community dynamics and building trust was raised. Across several sites, engaging with communities was marked by deep-seated mistrust due to previous projects which were perceived as ineffective. These feelings of ineffectiveness were due to previous project funding being allocated to statutory organisations rather than community-organisation-led approaches despite community organisations giving up their time to sit on steering groups and other organisational bodies. This led to negative impacts on trust-building processes and resulted in a strong emphasis on involving various groups to foster community trust during the discovery and co-design phases, with sites using different methods to engage with communities – for example, setting up WhatsApp groups to maintain regular communication with partners, ensuring transparency and accessibility, or implementing several focus groups to ensure comprehensive and diverse input from different community members. Trust emerged as a central theme in community engagement efforts, with one individual stating that *“trust is key” (Site 4, steering group member)*, underlining its significance in fostering meaningful collaboration and participation.

b) Identifying wider partners and building and maintaining relationships: overall, the feasibility/discovery/co-design phases served as a foundation for mobilisation and preparation for project delivery, laying the groundwork for effective community engagement and collaboration across all partners. The discovery phase was noted as aiding the identification of partners who would not normally engage in a project like this (e.g. small organisations or those distrustful of governmental funding) and who had the potential to support the project in reaching a wider audience of young people. Across sites, most organisations that were part of the steering group had never worked together before, although some interviewees were aware of other group members and their organisations. However, they acknowledged that they had never collaborated in this kind of capacity, and, therefore, the time spent on the feasibility/discovery/co-design phases was necessary to build up trust and strong working relationships between steering group members.

“Challenges [of implementation] have been gaining the confidence of those people that we have engaged as a part of the steering group because I didn't know a lot of them, and a lot didn't know me and maybe didn't know each other [...] At the end of it, the most rewarding thing to see was people that have gone through the process of two years stating openly, actually, ‘You know what, this has been different’. And they have the confidence”. (Site 4, steering group member)

In contrast, some interviewees across several sites felt the initial phases of the project *“felt clunky and slow [...] it didn't feel smooth” (Site 1, steering group member)* and that more clarity on the timeframes of the

project was needed to ensure members were working towards realistic and attainable goals. The 18 months to two years was felt to be too long in some sites, as some steering group members appeared to lose commitment to the project, which presented risks for mobilising the delivery phase.

“I think [phased implementation] was a good idea when we launched it [...], but I think we should have been clearer about time scales”. (Site 2, steering group member)

The accounts from various steering group members highlight the importance and complexities of building relationships and collaboration within diverse communities. One site noted progress in different religious communities coming together to address shared issues alongside efforts to unite individuals from disparate backgrounds.

“The church, so [the other steering group member] who runs that, our relationship is just going crazy sky high. Who would have thought, like, two different religions coming together to solve a common problem? [...] Every aspect of every corner of the community [is] coming in to solve a problem that connects us all”. (Site 2, steering group member/delivery partner)

Similarly, another site felt that despite initial challenges, strong relationships had been forming within the steering group, fostering mutual respect and appreciation. However, tensions with local authorities were noted across a number of sites, underscoring the need for continued efforts to build trust. The engagement of local councillors was seen as crucial for project success, though some reluctance was observed by steering group members from two sites.

Setting up and implementing a community-led steering group (discovery/co-design and year 1 delivery)

Steering group structure and governance: the composition and size of steering groups vary across the five sites and have been designed to meet the bottom-up focus of the NF programme, local needs, assets and strengths, and action plan delivery. While some site steering group meetings are chaired by one partner, others have rotating chairs to help break down power dynamics, increase ownership of the project, and reduce the time commitment of one individual having to take on the responsibility of the chair. While the structure, governance, and authority of community steering groups were generally not noted as a concern, in one site, a steering group member expressed confusion about the operational structure and questioned the governing authority of the project and how much power the steering group had, given the role of the lead organisation and the YEF. Further, stakeholders at another site discussed how it was important that the steering groups were community-led and that statutory organisations didn't take over in order to keep the group community-led. One site lead reiterated this by stating that their role is to act as a *“backbone of support”* (Site 3, steering group member) to ensure that the project is community-led.

“I think there was always a little bit of confusion around how it was going to work. We are the steering group, so we're in charge, but then we have a parent company [lead organisation] that sits there that's in charge. Then we have the YEF that sits behind them that's in charge [...] who's actually in charge and driving this?” (Site 1, steering group member)

“The police officer was chairing the meetings, and I've had some concern about that because I didn't really feel that that accurately represented what we were trying to

achieve in terms of a community-led approach. That has now changed, so it is a community member chairing". (Site 1, steering group member)

A democratic decision-making process was seen as a key facilitator from the initial phases. Two sites discussed having official terms of reference/conduct for steering group members to abide by to maintain productive discussions and decision-making processes. In one site, the creation of terms of reference was likened to a job description or governing document outlining how the group would collaborate. In addition to this, having a fixed meeting schedule with regular meetings was seen as beneficial, especially for steering group members with large demands on their time. Discussions with sites underscore the importance of establishing clear governance structures and expectations within steering groups to ensure effective collaboration and decision-making processes. At one site, practical arrangements, such as very early planning of meetings, as well as staggered meeting schedules, were being implemented to optimise participation.

"In terms of governance, there [are] the terms of reference we all signed up to, and within that, there is stuff about [a] code of conduct, which obviously was the cause of tension with particular individuals". (Site 1, steering group member)

To ensure the action plans were focused and to enable their progression during the delivery phase, most sites set up smaller working groups to lead on specific elements of their action plan. This helped to reduce demands on steering group members' time, as inputs were more focused on their skill sets and interests. The level of authority for site-level working groups varied, with some steering group members discussing how decision-making was placed primarily on the working group members who were working on the specific action plans. This was viewed as important to building ownership of the project and reducing power dynamics between community organisations and those at the statutory level. Other sites had less official working groups but reported that they had naturally formed due to the interests and skills of the steering group members to deliver elements of the action plan.

"The steering group has been designed in a way that it doesn't step on the toes of the working groups because [...] they really wanted those working groups to own the decisions that they made and for the steering group to have, in the nicest way, boring oversight of governance and the budgets. Whereas the decisions that were specific to a workstream are made at the lowest possible level, as close to the operational side as possible". (Site 3, steering group member)

"There [are] groups that are working together to deliver and work on different parts of the action plan, but it's not formalised working groups as such". (Site 4, steering group member)

Steering group relations and retention: all sites highlighted the importance of trust and relationship building, particularly during the co-design phase when more organisations were brought on board. These relationships were crucial in steering group meetings to ensure a unified approach to deciding on and then delivering the action plans. Members from three sites emphasised the significance of establishing trust, managing different voices and opinions, and fostering collaboration. Building on existing relationships with organisations that have previously worked together and having steering group members with community leadership experience helped to facilitate open communication and ensure diverse perspectives were heard.

Additionally, cohesion across steering groups was attributed to shared goals, mutual respect, and a commitment to addressing community needs.

“We were lucky that most of the people [in] that group were like-minded; none of us [came] with agendas, but we were just really interested in how we [could] communicate with the community to find out what they need and obviously [use] our professional expertise to find out the barriers and the circumstances”. (Site 2, steering group member/delivery partner)

Despite this, all sites had experienced some challenges in setting up and implementing a community steering group. This included navigating differences of opinion, making decisions, and members dominating discussions. Due to different views and ideas, sometimes disagreements would ensue: some were minor and resolved more easily. Disagreements included political differences, views on who should receive funding, and the inclusion of statutory organisations in decision-making and/or on the steering group. At one site, some steering group members were removed from the group due to their views limiting project progression. For some sites, it was seen as important that the steering group only involved community members, or where statutory partners were present, that they did not take a leading role (i.e. chair) to rebalance the power between community members and statutory partners. There were also some issues with some steering group members, organisations, and, at one site, ethnicities being underrepresented or not feeling listened to due to other members of the steering group monopolising the meetings and dismissing others’ ideas. One steering group member felt that they needed more trust-building exercises to facilitate relationships-building between the group members.

“I felt, personally, that I'm the only [minority ethnic] person [...] I felt spotlighted. I thought that there was hostility towards me because violence is seen as a [different minority ethnic group's] problem”. (Site 1, steering group member)

“It took me a long time to gain [the] trust of other members in that steering group because I think there was a serious lack of trust building at the beginning. That's just what you do in a community context. You put in activities to first make sure there's trust and honesty within the group”. (Site 1, steering group member)

Various steering group members across sites highlighted the challenges faced in collaborative decision-making processes. These challenges range from difficulties transitioning from discussion to action to managing new members' expectations and conflicting opinions within the group. Members expressed frustrations with not being able to please everyone and the perception of favouritism. Managing passionate voices while staying focused on practical outcomes within the remit of the NF programme/funding allocation was noted as a struggle. Overall, while the decision-making element of the steering group meetings was seen as challenging, managing diverse stakeholder voices and maintaining structured communication channels were seen as crucial for effective collaboration and decision-making within steering groups.

“There is a particular person who's very, very passionate [...]who can sometimes derail meetings because of their enthusiasm, and it's lovely, and they're passionate, but they will sometimes veer us off [project plan]”. (Site 3, steering group member)

Across several sites, various steering group members underscored the challenges in inclusive community engagement and collaboration. Members expressed concerns about the underrepresentation of certain ethnicities and faith groups in the steering group, highlighting missed opportunities for involvement and input. There was a recognition of the difficulty in engaging smaller organisations due to resource constraints and the need for proactive outreach strategies beyond traditional methods. Moreover, a steering group member from one site felt there was a need for community development workers to help facilitate grassroots involvement and bridge gaps between different sectors. Despite efforts to reach a wide audience, there was an acknowledgement of the limitations in reaching everyone and the importance of engaging influential community members. Additionally, there was a recognition of the need to involve a diverse range of voices to ensure a comprehensive understanding of community needs and challenges.

“I think we should have built up those stronger relationships with some of the churches and the mosques in the area [...] There [are] ten churches and a mosque in the area. That's 10,000 people in the area we could be getting our message to”. (Site 1, steering group member)

It was highlighted by several sites that there were challenges with steering group retention and attendance due in part to work and life commitments. However, sites felt that building strong relationships and, when necessary, recruiting new members helped drive forward the action plan. Other interviewees acknowledged that some items on the steering group meeting agenda might not be relevant to all members, highlighting that the NF project is only one part of a much wider work programme that members are involved in.

“One of the biggest barriers is the capacity of people to having the time; we meet once a month with the steering group. It's for two hours, and it's always a packed agenda. So, to have the time and capacity to dedicate to doing that thinking [...] it's quite challenging when a lot of the groups are already delivering activity”. (Site 5, steering group member)

One site highlighted concerns about the location of meetings being too distant from the intervention neighbourhood, leading to difficulties in steering group engagement and thus contributing to challenges in connecting with the community. Additionally, there was criticism about the project being pitched too broadly outside the targeted community. This geographical distance, alongside a lack of information about the project, has created misunderstandings and hindered effective engagement efforts. This confusion also led to areas on the boundaries of the chosen site wanting to become involved in the project, especially when some organisations involved in this project also work across multiple wards.

“Some of the meetings took place up there, up in that area, but the majority of them took place a mile away. It's too far away [...] that led to possible difficulties in engaging people”. (Site 1, steering group member)

Relationship between the site lead coordinator and steering group: across all sites, the lead organisations were seen as pivotal, particularly in enabling effective governance and leadership within steering group meetings. Steering group members emphasised transparency, clear communication, and a focus on community-driven goals as key benefits of having good relationships with their site leads. In two sites, steering group members highlighted the structured nature of meetings, ensuring alignment with project objectives and encouraging active participation from all stakeholders. Moreover, the importance of being listened to and valued was emphasised by members from another site, who appreciated the opportunity to

contribute meaningfully to the project. Other steering group members felt the leads did an excellent job of negotiating differences and conflicts between steering group members. Additionally, a number of steering group members expressed gratitude for the support and guidance that they had received throughout the project.

“They made it very transparent and clear. They held every meeting really well, chaired it really well. The agenda was clear [...] about what the end goal is [...] in a year or two years’ time, and we saw pretty much after a year, which would have been 3–4 meetings, we actually saw things happening, which was really good”. (Site 4, steering group member)

Furthermore, several sites appreciated the support and guidance without feeling like the lead organisations were trying to take over. It was felt by several sites that while it was being governed by particular organisations, the project was still very much community-led. Further, lead coordinators were able to support steering groups and, critically, community members to maintain their control of the project, helping them to avoid undue influence from stakeholders who have traditionally held more control over funding allocation and decision-making in the area.

“I’ve been so impressed with [lead organisation’s] approach to things that, kind of, ‘we’re here, but we’re here just to do the infrastructure. We are not here to compete; we’re not here to take the money. We’re here to make the money go out of the door’”. (Site 3, steering group member)

Transition into the delivery phase

Transition from CRCP to a lead coordinator: insights from learning partner reports and observations of programme meetings suggest that there were difficulties in managing the coordination, expenses, and logistics of set-up and transition plans from the CRCP to the lead coordinator. Without a formal set-up process for recruiting the lead coordinator, the CRCPs were left to organise and build consensus locally for the process of recruitment. Timing was also difficult, as areas needed to develop the TOC and action plan at the same time as recruiting and onboarding the local coordinator. Building trusted relationships was repeatedly identified as vital to the success of the programme – gaps in transitioning between phases and between organisations presented a risk to relationship building.

For three out of five sites, the lead organisation was also the same organisation that led the feasibility/discovery/co-design phases (i.e. the CRCP), meaning there was consistency in people involved in all phases and who had built up a relationship with the community/steering group. The remaining two sites had a different organisation leading the delivery phase, having successfully progressed through an application process to be the lead for that area. In general, this change in leadership was seen as a relatively smooth process and was perceived positively by the steering group. The transition from the CRCP to the delivery partner was perceived as being well-managed, with clear communication and guidance provided throughout the process, with the CRCPs, and the feasibility/discovery/co-design documentation (e.g. action plan) ensuring a smooth handover to the new organisation, despite some initial apprehension from certain members owing to them forming relationships with previous lead coordinators. These transitions were ultimately appreciated and respected due to the effort the new lead coordinators made to honour the work done so far and their enthusiasm for the project to be successful. At one site, the new leads could adopt the

site action plan without making significant amendments. However, at the other site, more work was required to further refine the action plan to ensure it was actionable.

“[New lead coordinator has] taken the action plan as they received it and not been amending it or changing it. So, I think that’s a good legacy handover. You know, this is what the community have asked for. This is how [CRCP has] interpreted and written it up, and now it’s over to you guys to deliver on that”. (Site 1, steering group member)

Despite the smooth handover, the transition between organisations caused some delays in action plan implementation. At one site, stakeholders felt that delays occurred due to the late arrival of the lead organisation, necessitating a revisit of the action plan to ensure project alignment. However, it was acknowledged that the forward-thinking nature of the organisation was seen as a bonus, and it was felt that if the organisation had been brought on board sooner, it would have helped streamline the process. At the other site, they faced challenges in the timeliness of recruiting one of the site lead coordinators due to delays with the YEF signing off on the role. It was felt that this hindered the transition from those initial phases to delivery.

“I think we need to revisit some of it [action plan] to tighten it up just because the lead organisation came in a little bit late, but it wasn't their fault. It's just the way things happen sometimes [...] so that delayed some things, but also, some things were missing [...] But to be fair to the organisation, they've been really good because they're quite forward-thinking, and they're always ahead of the game, and that's been useful for us [...] we've always felt that we've owned the project, which is fantastic, and I'm wondering whether or not the engagement of a lead partner could have been done sooner so that the transitions were a little bit smoother”. (Site 5, steering group member/delivery partner)

Mobilising the delivery of action plans across sites: for the most part, transitioning from the feasibility/discovery/action plan phases to delivery was relatively smooth. Critically, the thoroughness of the feasibility/discovery/co-design phases allowed for the identification of key community actors and the understanding of local needs, ensuring that the action plan was well-informed and community-driven, and for most sites, a clear action plan was ready to drive delivery. Some steering group members across sites highlighted the challenges faced during this transition phase. In addition to changes in the lead organisation (discussed above), stakeholders noted how the structured and lengthy processes of the YEF and, specifically, the phases of the NF project had hindered the true spirit of the co-design efforts and co-production elements of the project, which had an impact on mobilising the delivery phase. Building trusted relationships throughout the programme was repeatedly identified as vital to its success – gaps in transitioning between phases posed a risk for relationship building across sites.

“Some of the processes that we had to go through for YEF were quite lengthy and quite structured in a way that almost prohibited you from doing co-design and co-production with people”. (Site 1, steering group member)

Again, there were mixed views on the value of the time spent on the feasibility/discovery/co-design phases, the importance of this in building relations and a community-driven action plan, and the impact this ‘time’ had on maintaining community relations and buy-in to the project and action plan. However, it was

acknowledged that this is a new concept and a new way of working for a lot of organisations, which takes time.

“It took, like, 18 months to get it actually flying [...] we're all new; we all had to come together with all different ideas [...] I understand in that aspect, it may take a bit of time. But the time was so, so long”. (Site 2, steering group member/delivery partner)

Utilising pre-existing resources/assets was seen as a key facilitator to mobilising the action plans and assimilating the new YEF funding and interventions into established work programmes. This was seen as important to ensure provision is as inclusive and wide-reaching as possible. This has been facilitated by existing institutions and organisations coming together to form a framework for collaborative work, leveraging their respective skills and expertise. For most sites, the focus has been on enhancing and improving existing services rather than creating new ones, recognising the value of long-standing community connections and expertise. Recruitment efforts for interventions have prioritised personal invitations and leveraging existing connections with young people, ensuring trust and familiarity. Partnerships with various stakeholders, including religious leaders and community organisations, have been instrumental in driving engagement and action. Initiatives such as safe spaces and youth programmes have been supported by utilising existing projects and community centres. Collaborations among organisations have fostered trust and learning, leading to successful joint grant applications (see below). The involvement of schools, colleges, and cultural institutions has further enriched the provisions provided, offering diverse opportunities for young people. Efforts are underway to streamline communication and coordination among partners, with a focus on maximising opportunities for young people to engage and take on leadership roles across different activities.

“There's always been trust in there, so our cohort of coaches always had that relationship prior to all of this, so it was easier for us to assimilate within the project. It was just continuing things that we've done with more resources and funding. So, it was fairly OK for us to bring in the young people, and they enjoyed it”. (Site 2, steering group/delivery partner member)

“Our venue is at the [location] in their hall, and so that's been perfect. And we've been entrusted with the key and the alarm”. (Site 4, steering group member)

Another site acknowledged that one of its workstreams from its action plan emerged late in the consultation process, highlighting a need for more youth facilities and services. Consequently, there was a lack of early discovery work, leading to a focus on mapping existing provisions and youth services. This delay necessitated recruitment efforts and the mobilisation of various stakeholders to address the newly identified needs in the area.

“It was challenging that we were going through [the] recruitment process for [the site lead coordinator role]; if we could have got them in a bit earlier, that might have helped, but that was a bit of a sticking point with a sign off from YEF”. (Site 1, steering group member)

In addition, another site discussed the learning curve related to the governance, finances, and management for a project of this size, which took longer than anticipated to understand and navigate.

“The whole idea of coming up with project governance, project management, governance, and then, of course, the financial governance that took significantly more time than we imagined”. (Site 4, steering group member)

One site encountered challenges in aligning the action plan's long-term ambitions with the project timeframe and the practicalities of implementation. While the plan aimed for transformation, an interviewee believed that, realistically, change would occur after 10–15, and thus, the immediate focus needed to be on achievable goals within the YEF NF funding period. This required significant effort to translate high ambitions into tangible objectives. This was similar across other areas where there was a need to narrow down priorities and focus areas amidst the desire to tackle multiple issues. Sites emphasised the importance of realistic goal setting and alignment with the YEF's objectives. Exercises were conducted to address these challenges, clarify objectives, prioritise focus areas, and ensure alignment with available resources and timeframes.

“We were handed [...] the action plan, that is, this five-year project, but the action plan speaks to like a 10–15-year ambition, and it literally says that. So, you're like, OK, we're aiming really big here. So, the theory of change is in line with that 10–15-year ambition. So, trying to get that down into, like, OK, but we've got five years' worth of funding. How do we get that into a deliverable [...] what's the actual goal here within the timeframe that we have”? (Site 5, steering group member)

Generally, sites faced challenges related to delays in starting delivery, which led to a lack of adherence to anticipated timescales. Some sites raised concern about the clarity of timeframes for the feasibility/discovery/co-design phases moving into action plan delivery, highlighting the need for clearer planning and realistic expectations among stakeholders. For example, stakeholders discussed how the time to progress through the YEF grant agreements approval processes (and additional delays relating to this) led to subsequent delays in funding action plan interventions/activities. This hindered progress, caused uncertainty, and impacted the ability to commit to employment and other essential aspects of programme delivery. Delays extending over months led to questions and concerns among local stakeholders about the feasibility and credibility of the project. Another site felt that certain elements of its action plan could have been delivered much quicker and that some elements took too long to mobilise due to the indecision of the steering group members and delays in staff recruitment. One steering group member found these delays frustrating, stating that one element of their action plan was brought forward *“purely as a quick win and a morale-boosting effort”* in order to make some progress. Moving forward, frontline delivery partners felt that shorter timescales, less bureaucracy, and a stronger focus on community needs would benefit the NF.

“There were definitely delays in terms of [the] YEF decision-making process that meant we were all ready to go, and YEF wasn't. I think it was almost delayed by six months, where we were actually needing to wait to be able to properly go [...] It's a testament to the people that the work didn't unravel at that point. That's a huge risk that people are even gonna be there in five months, let alone still be as committed to give their time and attention and energy to that process”. (Site 5, steering group member)

“Then we went into delays getting the grant agreement signed and approved [...] we did not envisage the complexity of finances”. (Site 4, steering group member)

Adaptations to the action plan: three sites felt it was important to continue to review and refine their action plans to enable tangible, realistic outcomes. At one site, adjustments were made to the age range targeted for funding, expanding it from originally targeting 16– to 25–year-olds to include younger individuals (10–25-years old).

“In the action plan, it was set that would be about 16- to 25-year-olds that would be targeted for the funding that we're giving out on the [grants procedure], but actually, having been involved in the working groups and having conversations with the working group members, we've realised there is a need to be flexible and try to target much lower age ranges”. (Site 1, steering group member)

Similarly, another site that adapted its action plan reported that *“flexibility was key”*, and also expanded its age range to include children on the peripheries of the target age range. This is similar to a third site that emphasised involving younger individuals earlier, recognising that children in high school might be too old to engage effectively, and, therefore, they needed to shift their action plan to target some of their interventions/activities towards young children. These adaptations reflect a commitment to meeting the diverse needs of young people across different communities.

Other amendments were implemented based on a review of current assets in the community. For example, at one site, they had planned to commission an external organisation to complete a key action plan activity; however, they found that the steering group had the internal capacity to develop this in-house, allowing them to save money to allocate to other action plan activities. At another site, they paused implementing some activities to prevent duplication after having recognised that there were a plethora of positive developments occurring in the neighbourhood already.

5.2 What approaches are delivery partners taking to deliver the plans?

The delivery of a place-based, community-led action plan that aims to meet the needs of the local neighbourhood means that each site has its own unique plan for delivery over a 3–5-year period (see case studies in Appendix 2). The transition from the feasibility/discovery/co-design phases to delivery necessitated sites to implement a number of preparatory steps at the end of the co-design and beginning of the delivery phase, including setting up systems and processes to enable delivery. Due to uncertainty around the progression of YEF funding for the delivery stage and with action plans having to be signed off by the YEF GeCo board, these preparatory steps were paused (~2–3 months) across many of the sites until delivery phase funding was confirmed. Consequently, the YEF acknowledged that during year 1, sites may need time and space to refine and mobilise their action plans with community partners prior to the delivery of activities/interventions with young people.

Across all sites, a key focus of the year 1 delivery phase has been to establish the infrastructure and processes for mobilising site-level action plans and, where required, to refine action plans and site-level TOCs. This has included raising awareness of the programme across local partners, including the community (e.g. through community events and flyers), refining site-level steering/working groups, building the capacity of the group and wider partners (e.g. delivery partners) as relevant, building relationships of trust across partners, promoting ownership, balancing power, ensuring power is shifted towards communities, setting up processes to implement activities in the community (e.g. grant selection and commissioning),

implementing activities to support community/youth-led approaches to decision making, and, in some sites, commencing delivery of programmes/interventions for young people (including smaller and larger grant programmes).

This section provides an overview of activities implemented across sites and approaches to delivery during year 1, including community grants/application processes, consultations with children/young people, capacity building, and interventions/activities for young people.

Community grants/application processes

Several sites have implemented processes to enable community partners to bid for grants to implement activities that align with the action plans. Having a democratic decision-making process which allowed steering/working group members to be at the forefront of deciding which organisations were going to receive the grant money was seen as instrumental in maintaining a community-led approach and developing steering group members' power. Delivery partners were selected through interview stages and decision panels either by all or a select few steering group members. The steering/working group members ensured that grants and applications aligned with their action plan themes and worked towards the overall goal of the NF to reduce youth violence. This involved requesting additional information from applicants to ensure alignment with the project's goals. Across some sites, some members of the community steering groups also applied for these grants.

“Small grants we will leave up to project steering group and [local community organisation] to a lead. If we start dictating that process, then that defies the logic of neighbourhood ownership and empowerment”. (Site 4, steering group member)

One site discussed its small grant application process and how efforts were made to anonymise applications during the selection process to maintain fairness and transparency, allowing members to provide feedback without bias. Overall, steering group members felt valued and integral to shaping the direction of the programmes, giving them a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction with their involvement. Collaboration among community groups is key, with some sites discussing how some organisations had jointly applied for grants to maximise their reach and impact.

“That [anonymising grant applications] came about from some of the feedback that we gave that it might be better to anonymise which organisations have submitted it [grant] because some of the people that are on the steering group applied for that funding”. (Site 4, steering group member)

Another site discussed how their steering group decided to “drip-feed” money to delivery partners to ensure delivery was implemented as specified within the action plan. One steering group member talked about maintaining the integrity of the project by only providing half the money to delivery partners and, after a period of time, assessing whether that delivery organisation is delivering what it promised before providing further funding.

“What I didn't want to do is give them all the funding and then realise afterwards that they haven't done anything [...], so we give them half the funding [...] we'll get monitoring

and then when we are comfortable that you are delivering, then we can discuss the next payment". (Site 4, steering group member)

Consultations with children and young people

All sites expressed their desire to have more young people's voices represented in their projects. Across several sites, efforts have been made to involve young people in programme design and decision-making processes, ensuring their voices are heard and their needs are addressed. Several sites have hosted young person workshops or events, where they invited young people living in the local neighbourhood (young people were made aware of these events via social media posts, posters, and word of mouth from steering group members and delivery partners). The purpose of the events/workshops was to encourage young people to come along and share their views and discuss what activities they would most like to participate in. Across sites, the importance of ensuring activities were meaningful and inclusive for young people was highlighted as a key approach to delivery, including the consideration of the language used, to ensure they reflect the voices and experiences of young people and avoid stigmatisation, for example, through avoiding terms such as youth violence and framing activities in a positive, strengths-based, and empowering way (e.g. building resilience, growth, community-building).

"We had a really good engagement from young people [...] just to see the number of young people that we had from different backgrounds coming through from different organisations we thought was really useful. We also thought it was a really good opportunity to just continue to hear what young people are currently interested in [...] It was a really useful opportunity to just keep ourselves on the ground with what it is that young people are currently interested in and what they're engaging with". (Site 4, steering group member)

Leveraging local assets and capacity building

Across all sites, leveraging local assets and building on existing community strengths has been pivotal to the delivery stage. Further capacity building across the local neighbourhood and bringing together local assets to enhance prevention activities have been key actions during year 1. At one site, a working group has played a pivotal role in co-designing delivery processes alongside community partners, with a notable inclusion of two young individuals in the working group. This inclusion ensures that programmes selected for delivery reflect young people's needs while empowering young voices in decision-making processes. Collaborative efforts among organisations have fostered trust and learning, resulting in successful joint grant applications. Another site facilitated an adaptable application process. This involved providing some applicants with feedback on their applications, for example, areas where more information or specificity might be needed, and allowing them additional time to address feedback and resubmit, enhancing local organisations' capacity (and success) in grant application processes. Furthermore, another site has recognised the value of in-depth community organising training,¹¹ suggesting it may offer an opportunity to develop skills, expertise, and connections with other leaders, ultimately bolstering the group's collective power and effectiveness. These initiatives demonstrate a concerted effort to not only expand services but also to empower and uplift

¹¹ For further information on community organising, see <https://www.citizensuk.org/about-us/what-is-community-organising/>

young voices, foster collaboration among organisations, and build the capacity of local services to address youth-related challenges effectively.

“There's a lot of training, support, and discussion and one-to-ones about this is what we're looking to do, [and] this is about a long-term difference about getting people not just on programme activities but how can we make sure our communities are empowered to feel that they can win on issues that they care about. That involves training to be leaders by making sure that you can pass those skills and develop others as part of community organising”. (Site 2, steering group member)

Interventions and activities for young people

Four sites had begun to run activities directly involving young people, often centred around faith groups (e.g. Christian and Muslim), with deliberate efforts to involve a variety of ethnicities and genders, such as organising workshops in mosques and girls-only sessions. Additionally, one site discussed having creative individuals (e.g. photographers), as well as community leaders, attend steering group meetings and talk to young people in their local areas to add different perspectives and further enrich the provision available. Several sports diversionary activities combined physical activities with educational components on topics like exploitation, healthy relationships, and knife crime awareness. The number of young people attending activities varied by intervention and by site, with some hosting large groups of children and others providing smaller, more targeted interventions. The number and frequency of sessions also varied greatly, with some having a set number of sessions before recruiting a new cohort and others operating on a rolling basis. In addition, the diverse range of activities offered includes literacy improvement, drama clubs, art workshops, sports tournaments, and leadership classes, all aimed at providing young people with valuable skills and experiences. The emphasis for many interventions is to create safe spaces for social interaction and personal development. Ultimately, these efforts aim to provide meaningful opportunities for young people to thrive and contribute positively to their communities.

“We deliver a series of physical [activities], and then an education aspect [...] We've got things like critical thinking for the kids, understanding of exploitation, healthy relationships, knife crime awareness, [and] drug awareness, and then we've got a role model aspects of it [...] Giving them a physical activity to then bring them into an education session is the way to do it; if I just said, 'Come and have a session around exploitation', I'd have nobody turn up”. (Site 4, steering group member)

Across sites, several programmes focused on offering intergenerational activities, promoting respect across age groups, and training young people to deliver aspects of the initiatives alongside adult facilitators. Some interventions involve young people (16+ years old) acting as mentors/facilitators/peers to help deliver sessions, which was seen as important for several reasons. Firstly, it helped upskill young people by empowering them to develop their leadership skills in order to help deliver programme content to their peers, build their confidence, and give them more ownership of and responsibility in their communities. Secondly, it was also seen as an important facilitator for the children and young people receiving the intervention/activity, as they could relate to the delivery team and engage more effectively.

“Where there is a young person who wants an opportunity to develop and enhance themselves and their skill set, why are we not, as organisations, helping them to do that?”

[...] We've had young people who've reached out wanting to be part of it. I will be looking at recruiting young coaches who then can go out and deliver some of this [... There are] going to be lots of opportunities for young people to be those leaders [who] want to have those skill sets and sports leadership". (Site 4, steering group member)

This enabled older young people to act as role models and be more on the young people's level, helping to ensure programmes were acceptable to young people and supporting their engagement and potential outcomes. Efforts were also made to ensure there was ethnic diversity among peer mentors, allowing participants to see representatives from various backgrounds. This engagement with the programmes has the potential in the future to extend beyond adolescence, with delivery partners from several sites discussing young people staying on as volunteers or leaders after the age of 16 in other programmes, which may contribute to the longevity and success of the programmes.

"Offer opportunities to the young people [who] are coming along to take my role and to take other roles [...] So, it's teaching them some of the management of but also the creativity of keeping the organisation alive. And they'll be supported by the board and others". (Site 5, steering group member/delivery partner)

Gender-specific interventions are being implemented across various areas to address the unique needs and preferences of young people, considering local cultures and religious affiliations. At one site, workshops were tailored specifically for girls and boys, focusing on topics like self-defence and critical thinking. These workshops are designed to provide a safe space for young people to express themselves and their opinions freely and learn important skills. Additionally, there was a concerted effort to ensure equal access to activities across genders; for example, at some sites, funding was allocated specifically for work with girls due to the lack of current provision available. Overall, gender-specific interventions aim to create inclusive environments where young people can develop confidence, skills, and resilience while addressing gender-related challenges effectively.

"I think the boys went on a Saturday and the girls on a Sunday, and the reason we've kept it separate is we want the boys to feel that they've got a safe space to speak freely". (Site 4, steering group member)

"It'll be a male navigator and a female navigator to work within those communities because there are certain cultural and religious understandings that would mean it would be difficult for the boy to move girls, and the girls might not want to work with the boys". (Site 2, steering group member)

5.3 How well are the different components of the action plan being delivered?

This section discusses stakeholders' views on challenges that may or have affected the delivery of local action plans relating to changes at the community/system level, partner engagement, capacity to deliver, and the level of engagement of young people in activities.

Changes at the community/system level

Changes at the community and system levels have the potential to influence local projects, including their ability to deliver as planned and have an impact. For example, in two areas, there were concerns over the reduced availability of wider funding and investment in the area, as this would subsequently reduce the opportunities available for young people. At another site, delays in announcements of wider funding for youth provision delivered for local youth sector organisations exacerbated the instability faced by many local youth organisations. In another area, recent homicides have impacted the community and project steering group members. Changes in political leads (e.g. Police and Crime Commissioner, local elections) may present opportunities for forging new/stronger relationships but also require continued efforts to build relationships. Wider initiatives to address crime also have the potential to negatively impact the community and project. For example, at one site, learning partner reports highlight how a police operation to address a local counterfeit goods trade led to fears among local organisations of a heavier and more punitive police presence in the neighbourhood and greater criminalisation of young people.

Engaging partners

Engaging partners in the project and action plan delivery was noted as a challenge across several sites. This included engagement with key partners (e.g. local councillors, statutory organisations) critical to the delivery of the action plan, often due to a reluctance to engage due to historical challenges and opposing priorities. Further, complexities in engaging with statutory partners and policymakers were highlighted across several sites, particularly relating to opposing views on how the project should be implemented and the renegotiation of power to communities.

“One of the main challenges that those areas usually have is mistrust [...] simply because of times where funding has been pumped into those areas, but they've not really seen any results for it or haven't seen any positives or benefits from it”. (Site 1, steering group member)

Capacity to deliver

The capacity of different services to support young people varies, with some organisations not being at the point of delivering all of their agreed activities due to several factors, including understaffing and lack of facilities, necessitating a phased approach to implementation. This has resulted in longer timeframes for some sites before all services that they have commissioned are fully implemented. One steering group member felt that despite the allocation of money already being spent or allocated, there should be funding set aside to spend when new opportunities arise. They felt that small organisations might only need smaller sums of money rather than having to bid for some of the larger grants, and, therefore, this should be taken into account in the future (e.g. some organisations may only need money for sports/electronic/music equipment). However, there's a desire for more collaboration among smaller organisations, allowing them to bid for larger sums of money, focus on their specialities, and build relationships across the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector.

“There's been a lot of money go out the door in a short space of time. In an ideal world, you spend the money as the opportunities present themselves [...] But if you can have the luxury of all of these small organisations, who've probably missed out on funding because

they're not really big enough to have great governance, they're not really big enough to have taken on a £25,000 grant. Actually, what they needed was about £5,000. If that could have been done in a way that promoted partnership working more and everyone doing their specialism within that and growing their relationships across [the] VCSE sector, that would have been epic. But genuinely, I think we're probably a long way from that". (Site 3, steering group member)

The learning partner reports also note that in one site, delivery partners have encountered safety risks, both this year and historically, such as being threatened when out in a public space delivering their interventions. This may present an additional barrier to supporting the delivery of detached youth work and the identification of suitable youth workers to lead this provision. More broadly, at the lead coordinator level, for one site, the commissioning of delivery was a new process for the organisation, and thus, funding delivery took additional time to set up, meaning that some interventions took longer to commission and were behind schedule. Further, in another site, there was a shortage of detached youth workers, and thus, for this site, building capacity to ensure a sustainable detached youth work presence was critical. The site has conducted a scoping exercise of provision and developed a training offer for local youth workers. However, the lack of capacity of trained youth workers to deliver the training and broader organisational changes and capacity challenges within the partner organisations have contributed to a delay in the planning and delivery of the local detached youth work training offer.

Level of engagement in activities by young people

A lack of attendance among young people in certain activities has raised concerns by delivery partners across several sites, particularly when considering the missed opportunities for those on waiting lists. Various factors contribute to this issue, including cultural responsibilities, such as young people having care responsibilities for younger siblings, which was noted as disproportionately affecting teenage girls. Delivery partners discussed being flexible when reallocating places and based this decision on whether the young person has any mitigating circumstances. Another delivery partner stated that they are committed to engaging with each young person and their family through house visits and communication efforts to fully understand their reasons for not attending and developing plans to remedy any outside factors hindering the young person's attendance.

"We would look at the mitigating circumstances. So, if the young person wasn't coming around because she didn't want to come anymore, not a problem, and we can reallocate a place. If it was that it was situational problems or accessibility problems, we can look at addressing that [... through] house visits, dropping off postcards, so that even if they don't attend, they won't miss the content of what it is that we're delivering". (Site 4, delivery partner)

Additionally, there's a recognition of the need for local, accessible, and low-cost options to ensure participation, with considerations for transportation and inclusive access regardless of socioeconomic status. Several delivery partners from a number of sites discussed plans to increase accessibility to activities to ensure that all young people, regardless of their circumstances, have the opportunity to participate and benefit.

“It's a pound a week to come in, so they either come to the youth club or they come to football”. (Site 5, steering group member/delivery partner)

All sites discussed the lack of variety and inclusivity in activities and the significant challenge these pose for engaging young people. Some sites felt there were limited options beyond traditional offerings, such as football clubs. Two sites felt that there was a recognition of the need for diverse activities catering to a range of interests, including performing arts and gaming, to better meet the preferences of today's youth. However, the availability of such activities has been limited, leading to concerns about young people being left without suitable options for recreation and socialisation. Efforts are being made to address this gap with initiatives such as partnerships with local colleges to provide gaming sessions, acknowledging the importance of meeting young people where they are, even if that means embracing non-traditional forms of social interaction and recreation.

“There's lots of football clubs out there where we divert kids to. But what if you don't want to play football, but you want to go and learn to play the cello; what if you want to go and be [...] something with a performing art? Whatever it might be, then where do we divert those kids to?” (Site 1, steering group member)

5.4 How effective is implementation in each area?

This first year of delivery has focused on transitioning from the co-design phase to action plan delivery. Several activities are emerging across sites:

- The implementation of community and youth engagement events and activities, creating opportunities for the community and young people to influence what happens in their communities and what support is offered to them
- The development of trust and relationships across partners and with the community
- A rebalancing of power – placing more power in the hands of the community
- A strengthening of partnership work, breaking down barriers to collaboration leading to more effective collaborative work, including supporting collaborative approaches to commissioning services/interventions (building on local assets, avoiding duplication, and filling gaps in provision) and securing match funding
- Capacity building and training for partners to develop skills and expertise
- The production of programme documentation (e.g. community pledge) to engage communities, provide clarity on project aims, promote a shared vision across the community, and drive action plan implementation
- The provision of services/interventions for young people (e.g. diversionary activities)

Stakeholders across some sites acknowledged several anticipated impacts of their projects. However, many of the activities have only just begun, so it is difficult to assert any impact at this stage of delivery. Anticipated shorter-term impacts include increases in young people's knowledge, power, and decision-making skills. Some expected increases in young people's knowledge included increases in safety awareness, the ability to identify misinformation, critical thinking, and resilience. In addition to this, many sites are planning to increase young people's skills and qualifications in order to upskill them for the future. Furthermore, delivery

partners plan to continue to build rapport in order to increase young people's engagement in the project and improve overall buy-in from young people.

Some anticipated long-term impacts included wider system impacts on the young people's families and local communities. This could include the sharing of knowledge and skills learnt with family members. Some other anecdotal outcomes include a break in generational cycles of violence, exploitation, substance use, and a lack of opportunities. In order to break these cycles of negative behaviours, partners recognised the need for deep, systemic change to impact families, friends, and communities; by providing support and safe spaces, it was felt that partners could help mitigate some of these risks. Envisioning community transformation, members aspire to see improved cooperation among services, decreased conflict, and a reduction in entrenched negative behaviours, such as *"fly-tipping and littering"*. It is the hope that providing more opportunities, guidance, and safe spaces will enable young people to become empowered, steering them away from harmful influences like county lines and gangs.

"If they see their mates have got brand new trainers and they're saying well, 'You know if you go and do some, like, drug smuggling [...] you can get a brand-new pair of trainers'. There's a real, kind of, lure for those young people that aren't ready to make a decision or don't feel confident. So, we want to make young people feel confident in their skills and feel like they've got the support around them". (Site 3, steering group member)

As part of routine monitoring of the NF and to inform the evaluation, each site completes a quarterly monitoring form that aims to capture programme implementation, key successes and/or lessons learnt, spending, and risks. Within this, details of the number of people (e.g. young people/stakeholders) engaging in different parts of the action plan activities are reported. Such data has the potential to provide an understanding of the reach of action plan activities. However, throughout year 1, there have been variations across sites in how these monitoring forms are completed. Due to the lack of comparability in the data on the implementation and reach of activities across sites, this data is not provided in this report.¹²

All sites discussed the importance of monitoring and evaluating project outputs and impacts. Steering group members stressed the importance of actively getting delivery partners involved in recording intervention implementation and tracking progress in intended impacts. Some data collection measures are already being utilised across sites, including databases, registers, and social media, to document activities and reach. Feedback forms are utilised to gather information on session outcomes, skills learned by participants, and perceptions of overall effectiveness. Additionally, periodic meetings and daily engagements are scheduled with delivery partners to assess progress and address any challenges encountered.

"We do a real blend of collecting quantitative data, but [we] also think about the qualitative data [...] once we've got the youth panel in place, there will be a real targeted focus on doing in-depth conversation work and getting that qualitative data from those targeted young people". (Site 3, steering group member)

¹² Based on the experiences of completing the routine monitoring form during year 1, YEF and the evaluation team are working with sites to ensure the comparability of data across sites in subsequent years and the inclusion of such data in future reports.

The discussions highlight the challenges and importance of effective data monitoring and evaluation within the youth engagement programmes. There is an acknowledgement of the difficulty of measuring intangible outcomes and the need for continuous reflection on interventions to understand what works. There is a shared understanding across sites of the importance of both quantitative and qualitative data collection. Some sites have a structured measurement framework followed by site leads, blending quantitative data with qualitative insights gathered through surveys and in-depth conversations. However, challenges exist, such as delays in data sharing and incomplete information from delivery partners (e.g. the number of young people attending and demographic information), which hinder the monitoring and evaluation processes. There are concerns about naivety around measurement and the lack of infrastructure and training to support proper data collection and evaluation.

“There will be an information gap for some people who haven't had experience of doing this sort of thing before [data collection] in terms of A) what to measure [and] B) what to collect”. (Site 1, steering group member)

Plans for future data collection include simplified monitoring forms, direct engagement with stakeholders, and support for volunteer-led organisations to ensure data collection is simple, understandable, and effective. Furthermore, there is a desire from sites that monitoring data and evaluation findings are feedback so they can better understand the purpose and importance of evaluation. Overall, there is a clear need to develop better data monitoring practices to assess the effectiveness of the programmes and inform future decision-making.

“There's a plan to make sure that we are effectively monitoring the data and impacts of the work that we're doing [...] it's about, actually, how can we show all the stuff we're doing; how can we evidence that in an effective storytelling way?” (Site 2, steering group member)

5.5 Initial considerations for future implementation and sustainability

Interviewees were asked to consider factors that may impact the future delivery of their action plans and their sustainability. While sites were not expected to consider the sustainability and legacy of their site-level projects post the NF programme at this stage, some interviewees commented on this, and these early considerations are detailed below.

Wider funding cuts and reductions in service capacity

Steering group members from three sites discussed their anticipation of and concerns around future funding cuts and reductions in service capacity. They recognised the potential for increased gaps in essential services; this included the potential closure of community centres and other vital resources, highlighting the need to remain adaptable to changing circumstances. Members emphasised the importance of addressing wider societal challenges, such as the cost-of-living crisis, which underscores the significance of supporting families. Financial challenges, including budget cuts from local councils, further compound these issues, impacting the availability of services for young people and exacerbating issues such as mental health concerns and increases in children spending more time indoors at home. In the face of these challenges, there's a call for collaboration and the exploration of sustainability options, including seeking additional funding opportunities to mitigate the impact of funding cuts on vulnerable communities.

“If they [government] close any more centres, where are they [young people] going then? That is the challenge [...] We can't go around completely focused; we have to have our ears peeled to what's coming behind us”. (Site 2, steering group member/delivery partner)

Continuous review and adaptation of the action plan

The importance of continuous review and adaptation of the action plan was emphasised by stakeholders across different sites. At one site, there's a recognition that while the initial action plan was robust and detailed, it needs to evolve to better suit current needs. This sentiment is echoed by a steering group member who emphasises the need to change elements of the plan that aren't working. Similarly, two other sites acknowledged the importance of flexibility in approaching project goals, methods, and regular reviews to ensure that young people's voices shape the direction of the project, indicating a commitment to responsiveness and inclusivity.

“It's important for us to continually review [...] It was a very robust action plan, really detailed [...], but that was fifteen months ago, and we think we can operate it in a slightly different way. Not with every action, but we're just reviewing each one as we go”. (Site 1, steering group member)

Increasing service capacity and reach

At some sites, several delivery partners expressed that they are currently operating at full capacity and are having to turn away young people due to high demand. They emphasise the need for future expansion efforts to increase the number of young people supported, recognising the hunger of young people to be more involved. In contrast, other sites discussed their need to increase the number of young people recruited and to fill interventions. One delivery partner felt there had been less interest than they had hoped; the delivery partner felt this was due to the cohort they were trying to engage being historically difficult to engage with. However, they suggested that despite the limitations, they remain optimistic about growth and plan to leverage strategies such as social media outreach and community engagement to expand the number of young people taking part. A partner from another site highlighted the importance of actively engaging with young people both in schools and on the streets to ensure their participation and inclusion in future programmes. These sentiments underscore the urgency and importance of broadening the availability of support for young people in the community.

“We'd love to be able to have loads of girls already signed up, but that's OK; we'll just roll with what we've got right now, and it'll grow [...] Sometimes people need to see the vision of what it is before they buy into it [...] We'll take a few more photos and do a creative social media video that we can then share [...] It [has] all been positives, other than the challenges of building trust in a community to allow their girls to come”. (Site 4, delivery partner)

“And try to engage people. We should be talking to the kids in schools about it. We should be talking to the kids on the street about it”. (Site 1, steering group member)

Upskilling professionals

The discussions among various steering group members and delivery partners highlight a concerted effort to upskill professionals for future sustainability. At one site, there's a recognition of the need to support organisations in valuing themselves and covering management costs adequately. Across multiple sites, upskilling community groups to manage grants and develop connections was seen as essential for future sustainability. Additionally, there's an emphasis on paying professionals appropriately for their time and expertise, ensuring a competitive field and helping to develop local grassroots organisations. Overall, these efforts aim to create a more resilient and self-sustaining system that can continue to support young people effectively despite potential funding challenges.

“None of the organisations that applied for funding accounted for any management costs; they undercut themselves. So, I guess it's a bit of a, sort of, culture shift, attitude shift, and us recognising that work should be funded to support them to build their resilience”. (Site 5, steering group member)

Increase awareness of the project

Several sites discussed the importance of sharing successes and raising awareness of the work being done. This includes showcasing available provisions and highlighting the positive impact of the programmes. There is a recognition that more effort needs to be directed towards identifying and engaging local businesses, councils, and other organisations to expand the network of support. Additionally, there are suggestions for innovative approaches, such as creating films, mini-productions, and community events, to effectively communicate the achievements and drive for change to a wider audience. These efforts aim to foster greater community engagement and attract new potential partners and collaborators.

“Let's start talking to the groups that we're already aware of and directly saying who else do you know?” (Site 1, steering group member)

Relationship building

The discussions highlight the importance of strengthening collaborative working between organisations to enhance the effectiveness of youth-focused initiatives. Initiatives such as pledges and community funds are seen as efforts to address the need for better collaboration, particularly in areas where organisations may not have been working together effectively in the past. Improved relationships between organisations, facilitated through activities such as steering group meetings, were noted as positive steps towards fostering collaboration. Additionally, efforts to align with local objectives and mainstream services, such as local councils, police, social care, and education, were seen as crucial for sustainability. The inclusion of young people in steering groups was emphasised to ensure their voices are heard, increase ownership of projects, and empower young people in decision-making processes. Overall, building trust, fostering positive relationships, and aligning efforts with community needs were key strategies identified to strengthen collaborative working and empower young people.

“It's a bit too early to say how impactful the [intervention] will be because it's all about trust and relationships”. (Site 1, steering group member)

“What we want is to achieve the aims of the project and then drive that into mainstream delivery so it delivers a lasting change”. (Site 4, steering group member)

“From each of the organisations, we’re suggesting that young people sit on that steering group but also [that] there are young people outside of those organisations that also need to be captured. So, it's about how do we communicate to those that are outside of all of our organisations to ensure that they also can have a seat at the table?” (Site 5, steering group member/delivery partner)

Future funding alternatives

The discussions across sites highlight a proactive approach towards ensuring sustainability and continuity of programmes beyond the duration of YEF funding. Key strategies include creating sustainable projects by developing action plans and models that can be replicated and presented to other funders, showing the success and impact achieved during the YEF-funded period. In addition to this, some sites discussed the need to diversify funding sources in addition to the YEF funding, including match funding, grants from other sources, and the involvement of local businesses. This diversification reduces dependency on a single funding stream and potentially enhances financial sustainability.

Several sites also discussed the importance of building infrastructure and capacity within organisations to enable them to apply for larger and more competitive grants. This includes improving service delivery quality, securing spaces to deliver, and establishing connections with larger organisations for collaboration opportunities.

“We recognise that within five years, these organisations need to be able to apply for their own funding and get that without any support. They need to be able to deliver what they are doing in a really up-to-spec, high-quality way and hopefully have spaces and things that they don't have to pay rent for, have connections with bigger organisations [that] can deliver opportunities in collaboration with them for free so they're not having to pay for it, that people recognise the group in [the neighbourhood] and want to work with them and pay them to reach the young people”. (Site 5, steering group member)

In addition, maintaining relationships and commitments already made during the YEF-funded period was seen as pivotal. Some steering group members felt this could be done through the steering groups to ensure continued collaboration and support beyond the funding period.

Creating a legacy after the Neighbourhood Fund

The discussions emphasise the importance of creating a legacy. To help organisations become more sustainable, sites acknowledged the importance of planning for the end of the funding provided by the YEF. Participants acknowledged the temporary nature of funding and planned for its absence by identifying which aspects of the programmes will continue independently and ensuring continuity through other means, such as volunteer engagement and community support. Some sites discussed the importance of shifting focus from financial investment to empowering communities and organisations to continue their work independently. Some sites were hopeful that this project would create lasting cultural and systemic changes in their areas. This included creating better core memories for children and stressing the need for projects

to leave a lasting impact on the community, ensuring that the changes and improvements implemented during the funding period continue to benefit individuals and the community in the long term.

“It goes way beyond just the funding or what they're going to do. This is about a lifestyle. This is about roots. This is about growing up. This is about childhood. This is about memories”. (Site 1, steering group member)

Another steering group member discussed the importance of replicability and being able to translate the learning from their project to allow other areas to successfully implement a community-led model.

“Change. Innovation. Collaborative working. Outcomes and impact, you know, but for me, it's more about the innovation. This is about rolling something out that can be replicated in other communities in other areas”. (Site 1, steering group member)

6. Key learning and conclusion

6.1 Initial learning for this project

A key element of the YEF NF is to continue to learn from the investment into place-based, community-led approaches to preventing violence. The role of the learning partners, Renaisi and Dartington Service Design Lab, is to continuously help the YEF learn from the investment and share fundamental learning between the selected areas and more broadly. This year 1 implementation and process evaluation report aims to support this learning and forms the first of a suite of annual evaluation reports that will be produced at the end of each year of delivery. A final evaluation report will bring together learning from the overall evaluation (including implementation, process, and impact evaluation; see Newton et al., 2024). Key learning identified through the evaluation of the year 1 delivery phase is summarised below.

- **Insights from the feasibility/discovery/co-design phases and year 1 delivery phase underscore the essential role of trust building and clear communication** across stakeholders within neighbourhoods. This is essential in facilitating (or impeding) collaboration and the development and timely implementation of action plans. It is vital to ensure all partners, particularly community members, are listened to and that their contribution is valued.
- **The role of the lead coordinator is valued by local steering groups, demonstrating their pivotal role in supporting the community-led project.** Lead coordinators have a key role in ensuring communities remain empowered to drive action plan delivery while also enabling effective project governance and leadership. Transparency, clear communication, and a focus on community-driven goals help to build positive relationships between lead coordinators and steering group members, enabling more effective collaboration.
- **Effective leadership involves managing diverse viewpoints across stakeholders and aligning messaging and priorities to maintain the project's community-driven focus.** These experiences underscore the importance of thoughtful partner selection, clear communication, and the early involvement of key stakeholders for successful project implementation.
- **Representation from different backgrounds, ethnicities, and religions aids in giving the programme legitimacy and a deeper understanding of local needs and enabling greater reach into the community.** Steering group members and wider community and statutory stakeholders possess invaluable knowledge and expertise that can enable more effective engagement with residents, including those from minority groups.
- **Building community trust, empowerment, and insight is a vital ongoing process that takes time and commitment across all stakeholders. Ensuring community members have a central role in decision-making (e.g. through leading action plan themes/attending steering groups)** is important to build ownership of the project and reduce power imbalances between community and statutory organisations.
- **Democratic decision-making processes have been a key facilitator to co-design and delivery.** Having clear project/steering group terms of reference, codes of conduct, and governance structures assist stakeholders in collaborating, maintaining productive discussions, and making decisions. Having a process which allowed community steering group members to be at the forefront of deciding how action plans should be delivered and/or which organisations were going to receive the

grant funding was seen as instrumental in maintaining a community-led approach and developing community steering group members' power.

- **Continuous review and adaptation of the action plan and TOC is key to ensuring actions are appropriate for the community, activities can be implemented in the most effective way (building on existing assets/avoiding duplication), and mechanisms of change are understood.** Sites need to be adaptive to the changing landscape (e.g. political changes, funding cuts), emerging community insights and assets, and unexpected challenges (e.g. lack of capacity in the neighbourhood to deliver activities).
- **Capacity building across the local community is vital to action plan implementation.** Capacity building includes identifying and engaging new partners in the project who are pertinent to action plan delivery (particularly in ensuring activities are accessible to the community), upskilling the community to enable them to bid for and deliver action plan activities (e.g. supporting collaborative bids), increasing the involvement of young people in interventions, and enhancing infrastructure to facilitate greater youth engagement.
- **Enhanced and flexible provision to increase the accessibility of interventions/activities for young people is important to ensure all groups can participate.** Levels of engagement in activities by young people vary across sites/interventions. Some are oversubscribed; however, a lack of subsequent attendance means that those on waiting lists miss out. Activities provided focus on traditional diversionary activities, such as sports, which may not be of interest to all young people. Wider factors were also noted as contributing to a lack of attendance, including cultural responsibilities, such as young people (mainly girls) having care responsibilities for younger siblings. Creating solutions to increase the interest in and accessibility of interventions/activities for young people is important to ensure all groups can participate.
- **Streamlining procedures to expedite funding disbursement is important to enable timely delivery.** Issues such as bureaucratic red tape and delays in grant agreements have hindered progress, caused uncertainty, and impacted the ability to commit to employment and other essential aspects of programme delivery. Delays extending over months have led to questions about the feasibility and credibility of the initiatives, prompting concerns among stakeholders. The complexity of financial processes and the need for multiple approvals have exacerbated these delays, highlighting the need for more streamlined procedures to expedite funding disbursement. There's a call for greater consideration of the time scales of frontline delivery partners and the prioritisation of community needs over bureaucratic processes to ensure timely and effective implementation of activities.

6.2 Early recommendations for future Neighbourhood Fund programmes

Phase one of the YEF NF includes investment across five neighbourhoods included here in this report. To inform any future phase of the NF, both the learning partners and evaluation partner have a key role in identifying learning for future implementation. Drawing on findings from this evaluation report, we present initial recommendations for future NF programmes below.

- **Provide clarity to all stakeholders on the YEF NF programme timeframes and how these relate to local site-level delivery.** The time required prior to delivery to progress through the feasibility/discovery/co-design phases and YEF governance processes needs to be clear to partners across sites to ensure clarity on delivery commencement. Relatedly, plans for action plan delivery

should consider the timeframes required for mobilising action plan activities, with realistic timeframes communicated to partners. A lack of clarity can lead to uncertainty among stakeholders, which impacts trust and power dynamics. Practically, it can impact organisations' abilities to implement activities within planned timeframes.

- **The feasibility/discovery/co-design phases are vital to developing and implementing a community-driven, place-based approach to preventing youth violence among young people, and the time provided for this stage should be a key part of programme planning.** These phases enabled several outcomes that enhanced the mobilisation and implementation of the action plans. The evidence-based and bottom-up approach to defining the problem and developing solutions in the form of an action plan enhances the validity of the plan, while engagement across stakeholders helps to build trust and empowers ownership.
- **Ensure youth voice from the outset.** Several sites highlighted that if they could do this process over again, they would have involved young people's voices in their projects sooner, either via inclusion in the steering group or through events and workshops.
- **Identify assets during the discovery/co-design phases to facilitate the delivery of action plans.** It was highlighted, for example, that identifying existing assets (e.g. community centres) where activities can be held, finding partners who can develop and/or run activities, or assimilating the YEF funding into established work programmes should be prioritised in the discovery/co-design phases in order to help streamline delivery.
- **Ensure goals set are realistic within the funding period and targeted outcomes align with the YEF's objectives.** When writing the action plans, it is important for sites to set tangible and achievable goals within the up-to-five-year time frame of the programme (while acknowledging that large systemic and cultural changes may take longer to achieve).
- **Establish the infrastructure and processes for mobilising site-level action plans: this has been a key and important focus of year 1 delivery that needs to be considered in project planning.** While these activities may take time, they are laying the groundwork for the continued implementation of site-level action plans and wider ownership and buy-in to the programme. Year 1 should be recognised as an action plan mobilisation phase.
- **Consider the impacts of a change in partner from CRCP to lead coordinator.** Generally, a change in partner from CRCP to lead coordinator does not appear to negatively affect action plan implementation. However, identifying and recruiting lead coordinators prior to CRCP role completion is critical for a smooth handover of the project and a reduction in delays in transitioning to delivery.

6.3 Conclusion

The YEF NF and the funding of the five neighbourhood projects provide a unique opportunity to understand if and how empowering people to make decisions about their local neighbourhoods can prevent children from becoming involved in violence. The year 1 formative evaluation focused on examining two research questions:

- How effective was the transition from feasibility/discovery/co-design to delivery?
- What approaches are delivery partners taking to deliver the plans, and are they effective?

Further, it presents early findings, exploring how well the different components of the action plan are being delivered and how effective the implementation is in each area.

Study findings show that the feasibility/discovery/co-design helped lay the groundwork for delivering local action plans over a 1-year period. The evaluation of year 1 delivery has highlighted that while all sites have transitioned effectively into the delivery stage, this has not been without challenges, raising the importance of viewing year 1 as an action plan mobilisation phase. Despite challenges, as sites have progressed through year 1, they have started to make significant progress in mobilising and commencing their action plan activities. While there are variations across sites, the evaluation of year 1 suggests that significant developments are starting to be achieved, for example, building trusted and meaningful relationships and collaborations across stakeholders, including community members; placing more power in the hands of the community and young people to enable them to make decisions, drive activity, and promote ownership; and delivering interventions/activities to children and young people. Findings are limited, however, due to limited implementation of action plan activities during year 1, specifically with young people, and a subsequent lack of data on programme-level implementation (including reach) and young people’s views. The experiences and learning from feasibility/discovery/co-design and year 1 delivery phases to date, however, should provide a strong foundation to enable sites to progress their action plans over the next two to four years. This learning can also be used to consider the development and implementation of future rounds of the NF.

Table 7: Summary of year 1 study findings

| Research question | Finding |
|--|---|
| How effective was the transition from feasibility/discovery/co-design to delivery? | The feasibility, discovery, and co-design phases were valued for building community trust, empowerment, and understanding of local issues. This was seen as crucial for the effective implementation of action plans. However, in some instances, the transitioning from the CRCP to a lead coordinator posed challenges, highlighting the importance of early engagement for smoother transitions. |
| What approaches are delivery partners taking to deliver the plans, and are they effective? | A key approach to successful action plan delivery involved setting up community-led steering groups that varied in composition and size across sites. Representation from different backgrounds, ethnicities, and religions supported programme legitimacy and a deeper understanding of local needs and enabled greater reach into the community. Challenges included ensuring democratic decision-making, fostering trust and retention, increasing community inclusivity, and managing relationships. Efforts to build community trust and engagement, along with identifying wider partners and building relationships, were crucial. This emphasised the importance of clear communication and proactive measures to overcome challenges and foster collaboration. |
| How well are the different components of the action plan being delivered? | All sites faced challenges in mobilising the delivery of their action plans. Bureaucratic hurdles, funding delays, and subsequent delays in staff and delivery partner recruitment meant that action plan timeframes required adjustment. Adaptations to action plan timeframes were made to make them more realistic and to address the needs of the community (identified just prior to and during the delivery phase). Leveraging existing |

| | |
|--|--|
| | <p>resources (e.g. building on current relationships and sharing facilities in the area to help accommodate larger interventions/activities) facilitated implementation. The role of the lead coordinator was valued, demonstrating their pivotal role in supporting the community-led project. Building community trust, empowerment, and insight was highlighted as a vital ongoing process that takes time and commitment across stakeholders.</p> |
| <p>How effective is implementation in each area?</p> | <p>The sites varied in their stage of delivery; however, all sites had a strong focus on establishing infrastructure, building relationships, and initiating activities to prepare to implement interventions, mainly in the latter part of the year. This included implementing processes for community grants and consultations for developing inclusive activities. Leveraging local assets and capacity building were crucial, with diverse interventions aiming for inclusivity and empowerment. Challenges in engaging partners and addressing capacity constraints complicated delivery, while low attendance among young people at activities highlighted the need for diverse offerings and expanded accessibility.</p> |

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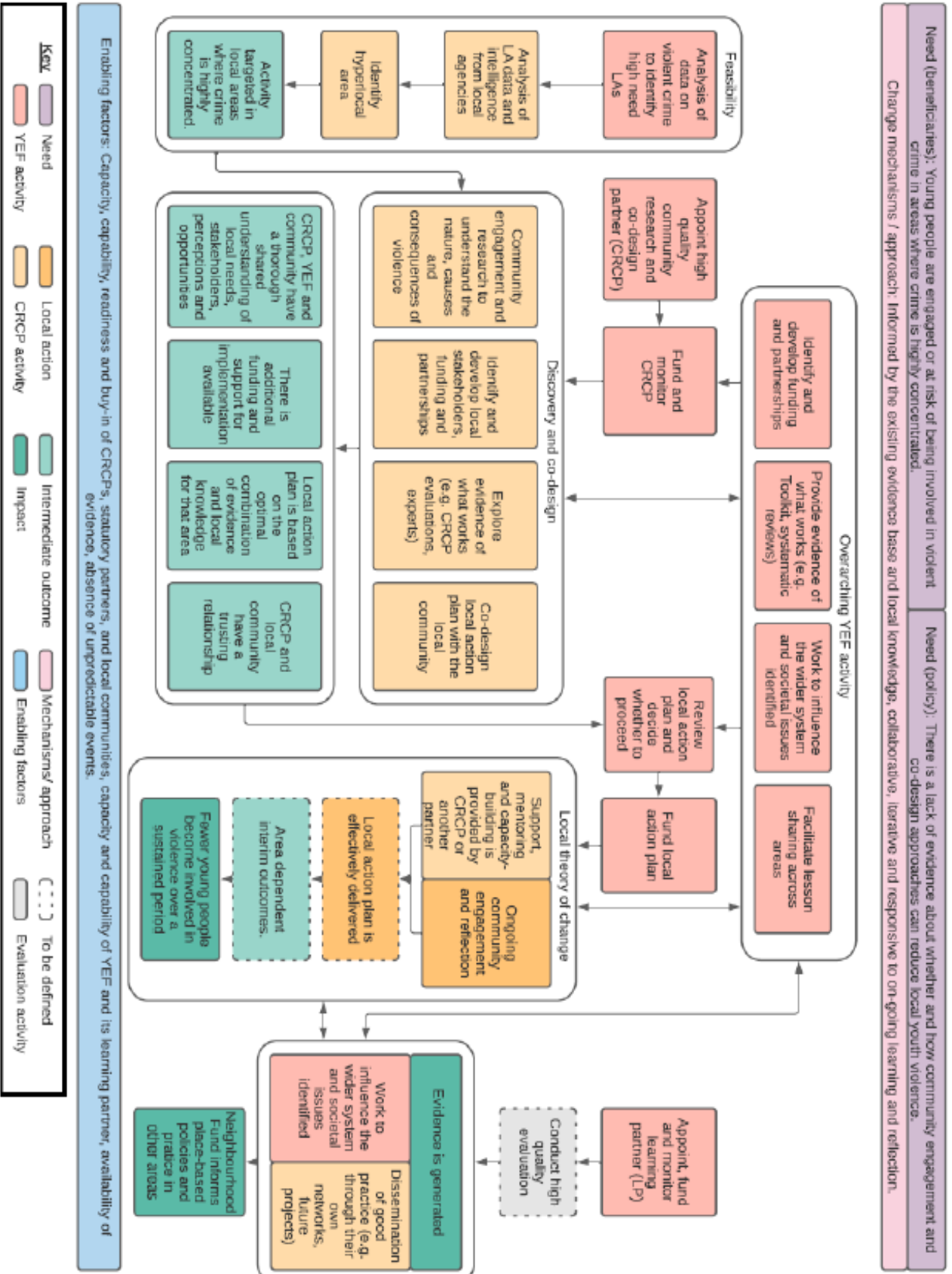
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8. Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1: YEF a priori theory of change



8.2 Appendix 2: Site level case studies

Site level case studies provide a high-level overview of the local area, CRCP and lead coordinator, local action plans, and delivery and achievements for year one delivery. Anticipated outcomes identified through the year one evaluation and next steps for delivery are also provided. The case studies are presented on subsequent pages for:

- Aston Villa Foundation YEF NF, Newton and Lozells, Birmingham.
- The Youth Resilience Programme, Barkerend, Bradford.
- Citizens UK YEF NF, Butetown and Grangetown, Cardiff.
- The Great Yarmouth Place Project, Norfolk.
- Hope for Cheetham, Manchester

8.3 Appendix 3: Research tools

Information Sheet YEF NF Programme - Local Coordinator, steering group members and other partners

About the research

Nottingham Trent University, Liverpool John Moores University and the Behavioural Insights Team have been appointed by the Youth Endowment Fund to carry out an independent evaluation of their place-based neighbourhood fund project being implemented in five neighbourhoods across England and Wales. In your area, the project is known as *[local programme]*. The evaluation aims to understand how *[local programme]* is working and what changes it is making for the community. As part of this evaluation, we would like to speak to individuals who have been involved in the development or implementation of the *[local programme]* or are aware of the programme.

Why have I been invited to participate?

You have been invited to take part because you are involved in the development, delivery, or have a professional interest in the *[local programme]* (e.g., you are a steering group member, delivery partner, community representative).

What does taking part in this research involve?

We would like to invite you to take part in an interview via telephone or online software (e.g. Microsoft Teams) between [add dates]. The interview will last between 45-60 minutes. The discussion's purpose is to gather views and experiences of the *[local programme]* to date, including things that have worked well and less well. The kinds of things we'd like to ask you about are your views on:

- How the project has been designed and implemented so far. We will ask questions about the project action plan and activity / intervention delivery generally, and if you or your organisation delivery activities /interventions as part of the project, we will ask you to provide more details about these also.
- Facilitators, barriers and perceived impacts of the project and action plan activities / interventions.

- Management of the project and action plan delivery, and partnership working.
- Recommendations for enhancing and continuing the programme.

Do I have to take part?

No. You can ask questions about the research before deciding whether to take part. If you do not want to take part that is okay. Before you participate, we will ask you to sign a consent form to indicate if and how you wish to participate. We will also ask for verbal consent at the start of the interview (and this will be used to indicate your consent if written consent is not possible). You can stop being part of the study at any time, without giving a reason, but we will keep information about you that we already have. You may withdraw from the study by contacting *[add researcher name and email address]*.

Will I be audio recorded and how will the recorded media be used?

With your permission, interviews will be audio recorded. This helps us to remember what has been talked about. As soon as possible after the interview, the recording will be transferred to secure storage and deleted from the recording device. The audio recording will be transcribed and used for analysis. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

You are free to decline. You should be comfortable with the recording process and are free to stop the recording at any time whilst continuing to participate in the study. You can ask for the recording to be stopped at any time and words to be changed or deleted.

With your consent, quotes from the recordings may be used in the final report and any further outputs. Please notify the investigator if you require any restrictions on the use or availability of recordings at the time or in the future. Your name will not be attributed to the recordings or quotes.

Please keep a copy of this information sheet.

What happens next?

If you are happy to be involved, please contact the research team by **[date]** by sending an email to *[name and email address]*. Please be aware that it may not be possible for us to interview or speak to everybody who is interested in taking part.

Are there any potential risks in taking part?

Participating in the research is not anticipated to cause you any disadvantages or discomfort. The potential physical and/or psychological harm or distress will be the same as any experienced in everyday life.

Are there any benefits in taking part?

There are no direct benefits to you taking part in this research, however, the findings will be used to directly inform the future development of the *[local programme]* and inform the overall Youth Endowment Fund Neighbourhood Fund project evaluation.

What will happen to information/data provided?

The information you provide as part of the study is the study data. Any study data from which you or others can be identified (e.g. from identifiers such as your name, date of birth, audio recording etc.), is known as personal data. Your participation in this study will involve the collection/use of personal data by the investigator, for the purposes of setting up interviews and with your permission, recording the interviews. No other use of your personal data will be made.

We will keep all information about you safe and secure. People who do not need to know who you are will not be able to see your or contact details. Your data will have a code number instead. Once we have finished the study, we will keep some of the data so we can check the results.

We will write our reports in a way that no-one can work out that you took part in the study. Please note that confidentiality may not be guaranteed; for example, due to the limited size of the participant sample, the position of the participant or information included in reports, participants might be indirectly identifiable in transcripts and reports. The investigator will work with the participant in an attempt to minimise and manage the potential for indirect identification of participants.

The Investigator will keep confidential anything they learn or observe related to illegal activity unless related to the abuse of children or vulnerable adults, money laundering or acts of terrorism. The investigator has a professional obligation to inform relevant agencies if they learn about anything of this nature during any interviews.

In certain exceptional circumstances where you or others may be at significant risk of harm, the investigator may need to report this to an appropriate authority. This would usually be discussed with you first. Examples of those exceptional circumstances when confidential information may have to be disclosed are:

The investigator believes you are at serious risk of harm, either from yourself or others

- The investigator suspects a child may be at risk of harm.
- You pose a serious risk of harm to or threaten or abuse others.
- As a statutory requirement e.g. reporting certain infectious diseases.
- Under a court order requiring the University to divulge information.
- We are passed information relating to an act of terrorism.

Who do I contact if I have questions?

Please contact us if you have any questions or to tell us if you are worried about any part of this study, by contacting (redacted) or another researcher.

Principal Investigator: *(redacted)*

Co-investigator: *(redacted)*

Local site researcher: *[to insert]*

If you want to speak with someone who is not directly involved in this research, or if you have questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact *(redacted)* Associate Dean of Research for *(redacted)*. You can contact them at *(redacted)* or send an e-mail to *(redacted)*

Topic guide YEF NF Programme –Steering group members and other partners

Introduction

Aim: to ensure the participant understands the aim of the evaluation, how the interview will be conducted and how the data will be used.

- Introduce self and evaluation team.
- Introduce research, aims of study and interview topics.
- Discuss voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and potential caveats.
- Describe interview process (about 60 minutes) and confirm recording.
- Ask if they have any questions and obtain verbal consent.

Context

Aim: to understand the participant's background and involvement in the project

1. Can you tell me about the service that you work in/organisation or group you represent and your role?
2. Can you tell be about your specific role in the *(local programme name)*?

Transition into the delivery phase *(questions for year 1 delivery phase only)*

Aim: to understand the participant's views on the feasibility/discovery/co-design phase, and the transition from this phase to delivery

The following questions focus on the early stages of the development of the *(local programme name)*, which prior to delivery were referred to the feasibility/discovery/co-design stage.

Question for local coordinator and other key partners involved prior to delivery phase only (identified during context above)

3. To your knowledge, what was the purpose of these stages?
4. What approaches did the CRCPs use to develop governance structures and the action plan?

To sites with a different CRCP organisation for the initial feasibility/discovery/co-design to the delivery phase or organisations who had to go through an application process to lead on the delivery phase.

5. What were the processes for transitioning from the CRCP to local coordinator?
6. How effective do you think the transition was from the feasibility/discovery/co-design stage to the delivery stage?

All sites

7. How useful were the feasibility/discovery/co-design stages in facilitating programme delivery?

Implementation

Aim: to understand the participant's views on the implementation of the project and action plan

The following question focus on the *(local programme name)* and specifically the action plan.

8. Can you tell me what you believe are the key objectives of the *(local programme name)*?
9. Can you tell what you know about the local action plan?

10. Which activities/actions have been implemented to date?
11. What strategies or activities are being implemented to support the implementation of the action plan?
12. What are the roles of different stakeholders in delivering the action plan?
13. What are the key enablers and barriers to implementing the action plan?
14. Overall, how well are the different components of the action plan being delivered?

Outcomes and impact

Aim: to understand the participant's views on the outcomes and impacts of the project and action plan

15. What evidence is there of impacts on intended outcomes for individuals and community groups?
16. To what extent are strong sustainable collaborations being formed between delivery partners, young people, and the wider community?
17. Have you observed any other outcomes or impacts of the project or action plan across the community or partnership?

Reflections and next steps

Aim: to understand the participant's views on areas for development and sustainability

18. What are the key components that are critical to the future success of this project?
19. If you were to do this again, what changes would you make?
20. Do you think the project and action plan is sustainable?

Activity/interventions (selected delivery partners only)

Aim: to understand the delivery, outcomes and impacts of selected action plan activities and interventions to develop case studies and inform the wider evaluation.

As a delivery partner, we would like to ask you some additional questions about (*activity/intervention name*). This will be used to develop short *case studies on action plan activities and interventions and will also inform the wider evaluation. Would you be happy to answer a few more questions?*

21. Can you tell me about the activity/intervention you/your organisation/group delivers as part of the action plan?
 - How does this fit into the action plan?
 - What is delivered?
 - Where, how, why and to whom?

- How engaged are participants?
 - Is there a need for the activity/intervention?
 - Do participants fully engage or drop out?
 - What are the reasons for this?
- What are the key facilitators to implementation?
- What are the key barriers to implementation?
- What are the intended outcomes or impacts of it?
 - Have these been observed? For whom, how, why and in what context?
 - What are the key elements of the activity/intervention that lead to these impacts?
 - Do any other elements affect that likelihood of impacts (e.g. external factors / individual circumstances)
- What is working well and less well?
- What are the key areas for improvement?