EVALUATION REPORT

The Neighbourhood Fund

Implementation and Process Evaluation Annual Report – Year 3 Delivery Phase (2025–2026)

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NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY

YOUTH ENDOWMENT FUND

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 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 children and young people 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 that includes evaluators from Nottingham Trent University (NTU) and Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU). The NF programme involves complex, multi-phased delivery across five sites, and the evaluation team is implementing a complementary two-strand evaluation to 1) provide ongoing feedback on programme implementation (i.e. formative and process evaluation) and 2) understand programme impact (i.e. summative/impact evaluation). This report is one of a suite of reports that will be produced during the evaluation period and focuses on Year 3 of the NF action plan delivery phase (2025/26).

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List of abbreviations

CRCP	Community research and co-design partner
NEET	Not in education, employment or training
NF	Neighbourhood Fund
SEND	Special educational needs and disabilities
ToC	Theory of Change
VRUs	Violence Reduction Units
YEF	Youth Endowment Fund

Glossary of terms

Community research and co-design partner (CRCP): CRCPs led the discovery, feasibility and co-design phases of the Neighbourhood Fund (NF) by engaging deeply with local communities to understand their needs, challenges and resources. The CRCPs involved local community members in the research process and collaborated with them to develop tailored solutions, resulting in a community-informed local action plan. The CRCP role ended after the co-design phase, and the CRCPs have not been involved in the delivery, except in cases where they successfully applied to be the lead coordinator.

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.

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

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

Lead coordinators: Lead coordinators are organisations commissioned in each Neighbourhood Fund area responsible for guiding a community-led initiative by coordinating planning, partnerships and engagement efforts; managing resources; and acting as a liaison between funders, local organisations and residents to ensure the project aligns with community needs and goals.

Learning partners: The role of the learning partners, Renaisi and Dartington Service Design Lab, was to help the Youth Endowment Fund learn from the investment and share fundamental learning between the selected areas and more broadly. For example, the learning partners supported sites in producing their theories of change (ToCs) through the delivery of workshops on ToC production and subsequent reviews of drafts of site-level ToCs. The learning partner role ended at the close of the Year 2 delivery phase, and the learning partners have not been involved in subsequent delivery activities.

Neighbourhood Fund: The NF 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.

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.

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

Terms of Reference (ToR): A ToR is a formal document that sets out the steering group's purpose, scope, membership, responsibilities and ways of working.

Executive summary

The project

The Neighbourhood Fund aims to explore how empowering people to make decisions about their local neighbourhoods could help prevent children and young people (CYPs) from becoming involved in violence. It established and funded locally led partnerships in five areas with high levels of youth violence (Birmingham, Bradford, Cardiff, Manchester and Norfolk). Each site completed three preparatory phases between 2021 and 2023 before starting to deliver their action plans in 2023. In the first phase (feasibility), local statutory partners, the Youth Endowment Fund and a community research and co-design partner (CRCP) worked together to identify hyper-local areas experiencing high levels of youth violence. In the second phase (discovery), the CRCP engaged with the local community to identify the causes of the violence. In the third phase (co-design), the CRCP established a steering group of local organisations, community leaders and statutory partners that worked together to develop an action plan. They also appointed one organisation (often the CRCP) as the lead coordinator for delivery. The final phase (action plan delivery) is now ongoing and is where the lead coordinator and steering group are implementing the action plans.

This report describes the third year of delivery and the ongoing implementation and process evaluation (IPE). The Year 1 evaluation examined the transition from the preparatory phases to delivery. Year 2 examined early delivery, including the approaches delivery partners were taking, how well action plans were being delivered and stakeholders' and CYPs' perceptions of the programme. It found that the delivery partners' adaptability and flexibility helped increase engagement with CYPs, other stakeholders were broadly supportive of the programme and the partnerships were providing strong foundations for the activities. Some barriers remained, however, such as funding constraints, high staff turnover and inconsistent data collection. This report aims to build on the insights gained in Year 1 and Year 2. Data were collected through an online survey of the 29 steering group members and delivery partners; 26 interviews with site lead coordinators, steering group members and delivery partners; nine focus groups with 38 CYPs; and a monitoring data analysis. Since delivery began, 14,145 CYPs have been recruited and participated in activities across the five sites. The third phase of the evaluation started in November 2025 and concluded in March 2026.

Key conclusions
Delivery has continued and expanded across all five sites, with delivery partners reaching a large and diverse group of CYPs. Delivery partners used a wide range of locally tailored and youth-centred activities, including sports, mentoring, creative programmes, educational support and employability initiatives.
Year 3 represents a consolidation phase, with the delivery of the action plans generally progressing well. However, partnerships reported experiencing increasing capacity, governance and coordination pressures. These findings varied between sites and were based on a small survey sample, so these changes should be interpreted cautiously.
Stakeholders and CYPs generally reported positive experiences of the programme, particularly around CYPs' confidence, wellbeing, social connections, sense of belonging, skills and employability. There was also evidence of CYPs moving beyond participation into youth leadership and community organising.
Sustainability is now a central challenge for the programme. Grassroots organisations reported challenges with capacity, securing staff and venues, demand exceeding provision, inconsistent participation in steering groups and inconsistent recording practices for the monitoring data.
Sustainability requires continued support for the capacity building of grassroots organisations, more widely distributed leadership, stronger steering group structures and early planning for future funding and legacy.

Interpretation

Year 3 represents a consolidation phase of the programme, aiming to strengthen, stabilise and embed what the programme has established in Years 1 and 2. Across the five sites, delivery partners continued to adapt activities to local needs. Sports provision remained a key pathway to engage CYPs and was often combined with mentoring, wellbeing workshops and other support. Delivery placed a greater emphasis on employability, emotional wellbeing, community organising and more structured one-to-one support. Delivery partners tailored provision by introducing

girls-only activities, providing support in other languages and delivering activities through schools and community spaces, including faith settings. Some activities specifically targeted CYPs with particular needs, including those with special educational needs and disabilities; those who were not in education, employment or training; and those at risk of exclusion or disengagement from education. However, delivery has been increasingly affected by capacity constraints and challenges in coordination between partners.

Stakeholders and CYPs described a range of benefits from participating in the programme. Sports and creative programmes helped CYPs build their confidence and develop friendships. Further, the mentoring and career-focused workshops helped CYPs develop more practical skills and employment aspirations, with CYPs being supported with CVs and job applications. CYPs also accessed activities beyond their existing neighbourhoods, such as through trips and volunteering. Some progressed into leading projects, participating in youth panels and campaigning on local issues. It is important to note that these are perceived outcomes rather than demonstrated impacts.

Althoughe delivery partners generally reported positive experiences of implementing their activities and action plans, the partnership survey scores were less positive than in the previous year. Perceptions of leadership, administration and management, non-financial resources and overall satisfaction declined, although all areas still remained within the working zone. The qualitative interviews suggested this may reflect increasing coordination pressures as the programme progresses and partnerships mature rather than declining engagement or value of the programme. Delivery partners and steering groups also faced practical capacity and resourcing pressures, including limited staffing, difficulties recruiting skilled staff and securing suitable venues and demand for some activities exceeding available provision. The survey sample was small, and response rates were lower than in previous years, so changes over time should be interpreted cautiously and alongside the qualitative findings.

Participation in steering groups was inconsistent, with attendance affected by scheduling difficulties and differing levels of interest in wider partnership activities. Monitoring was a challenge, especially for the more informal activities and sites applying differing definitions of recruitment and retention, limiting the comparability of data. These experiences, however, varied between sites, and some did report stable and improved partnership working.

For the remainder of the programme, priorities include strengthening transparency and communication within partnerships, continuing to build the capacity of grassroots organisations and planning for sustainability and legacy. Earlier and more consistent sharing of monitoring and financial information may strengthen oversight and trust, while review of steering group structures and distributing leadership more widely may reduce reliance on lead coordinators. Continued support for grassroots organisations, including with monitoring, reporting, safeguarding and funding applications, will be important for sustaining delivery. Maintaining youth-centred approaches and adapting activities in response to CYPs' feedback will also help keep provision relevant.

There will be another IPE report in 2027, with a final report in 2028, incorporating findings from all five years. These reports will focus more on systems change outcomes, such as enhanced community cohesion, stronger partnerships and improved service coordination. They will also look at the evidence of impact on CYPs, such as on their wellbeing, leadership, confidence, social skills and perceptions of safety.

1. Introduction

The Neighbourhood Fund (NF) project contributes to the Youth Endowment Fund's (YEF's) wider commitment to tackling youth violence at a hyper-local scale. As a place-based initiative, the programme is delivered by five lead coordinators alongside locally established and led steering groups operating across five targeted areas in the UK (Birmingham: Lozells and Newtown; Bradford: Barkerend; Cardiff: Butetown and Grangetown; Norfolk: Nelson Ward/Central and Northgate Wards; and Manchester: Cheetham Hill).

The NF is underpinned by the recognition that violence is often concentrated within particular neighbourhoods and that meaningful change within those areas depends on local insight, partnership working and sustained investment. The programme enables local collaborations to design and deliver context-specific violence prevention responses, offering both financial resources and the autonomy needed to ensure activities reflect community priorities and lived experiences. A central aim of the NF is to assess whether this locally driven model can successfully reduce children and young people's (CYPs') involvement in violence. The YEF's original Theory of Change (ToC), developed at the outset of the programme, is provided in Appendix 1.

This report presents the findings from the Year 3 implementation and process evaluation (IPE), building on insights from the Year 1 (2023/24) and Year 2 (2024/25) IPE reports (Bates et al., 2025; Quigg et al., 2024). The Year 1 report examined the programme's progression from the feasibility, discovery and co-design phases into delivery. For a more detailed overview of the NF's design, including its key phases, site-level action plans and overarching programme ToC, readers should refer to the Year 1 annual report (Quigg et al., 2024). For a detailed overview of the plan for the project's impact evaluation, readers should refer to the evaluation study plan and statistical analysis plan (Newton et al., 2025).

Focusing on the 2025/26 period, this report centres on the Year 3 IPE, with particular emphasis on Year 3's delivery phase. It continues to address the programme's core research questions while also incorporating the perspectives of young people, exploring their experiences of the activities and the changes they would like to see in their local areas.

Neighbourhood Fund key questions

Through establishing the NF, the YEF aims to build evidence on the following (Quigg et al., 2024):

- Which community engagement and partnership approaches help 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 at preventing CYPs from becoming involved in violence?
- How do you measure changes in violence at a neighbourhood level?

Table 1: Neighbourhood Fund sites: lead partners and the Youth Endowment Fund's funding provision

Site	Phases 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. Research questions

The evaluation framework is structured around a set of core research questions (see Table 2). As in the Year 2 report, this year's analysis concentrates primarily on Questions 2–4, exploring how delivery partners enacted their action plans during Year 3, how different components of those plans were perceived in terms of the progress of the action plans and the overall progress of implementation across the sites. Although the remaining research questions will be addressed in future phases of the evaluation, this report also offers preliminary insights in relation to Question 6.

Table 2: Formative evaluation questions[1]

1	How effective was the transition from feasibility/discovery/co-design to delivery? (Year 1 report)
2	What approaches are delivery partners taking to deliver the plans?
3	How well are the different components of the action plan being delivered?
4	What are the stakeholders' and children and young people's views on the programme?
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 their mechanisms?

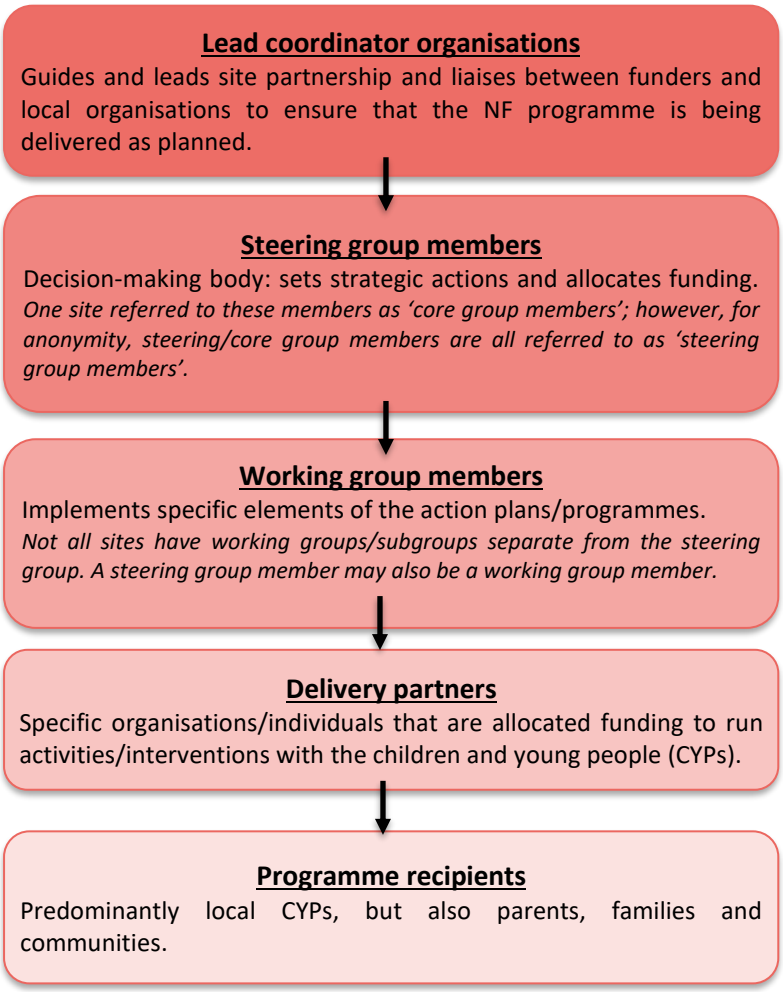
3. Methods

3.1 Methodological overview

Figure 1 presents the roles and responsibilities of those involved in the NF at the site level, from the lead coordinator role to the programme recipients. Further information on these roles can be found in the glossary of terms at the beginning of the report (p. vii), and a more comprehensive description of each can be found in the Year 1 report (Quigg et al., 2024).

[1] Two of the formative evaluation questions (Questions 2 and 4) were revised for the Year 2 report to better align with a feasibility study approach. The updated questions place greater emphasis on capturing the views of the stakeholders and programme recipients rather than on drawing conclusions about effectiveness. The original Year 1 formative evaluation questions are available in the Year 1 report (Quigg et al., 2024).

Figure 1: Site-level roles, responsibilities and interactions within the Neighbourhood Fund



The Year 3 evaluation draws on a combination of data collection methods, as follows.

Online survey (n = 29): An online survey was conducted among steering/working group members and delivery partners to evaluate the perceived effectiveness of local partnerships and the potential outcomes of interventions to date. The survey included questions for all or for specific types of partners; some survey respondents were both steering group members and delivery partners (n = 8) and some were only steering group members (n = 13) or delivery partners (n = 8). The numbers below correspond to the number of survey responses for each section of the survey. We recognise that a proportion of respondents held dual roles as both steering group members and delivery partners. To account for this, the survey was structured so that role-specific questions were answered according to the respondent's relevant role(s). Respondents with dual roles were therefore able to contribute to both sections of the survey where appropriate. Analyses were conducted at the question level, with the denominator reported for each survey section reflecting the number of respondents eligible to answer that particular set of questions. Given the relatively small sample size, formal subgroup analyses comparing respondents with single versus dual roles were not undertaken. We acknowledge that the overlap in roles may influence the perspectives reported in both sections of the survey and have noted this as a limitation when interpreting findings related to partnership effectiveness and intervention outcomes.

- **Steering group members (n = 21)**: The questions explored experiences related to how well partnerships are working together, collaborating and making decisions.
- **Delivery partners (n = 16)**: The questions explored the types of interventions delivered, the demographics of the young people served, perceived outcomes, the support received from the steering group and the challenges encountered.

- **Questions for both groups (n = 29)**: The questions explored the observed potential outcomes on the CYPs and the local community and considered areas for development.

Interviews (n = 26)[2]: Interviews were conducted across the five sites to explore participants' views and experiences in depth. Individuals who held both steering group member and delivery partner roles participated in a single interview and were asked questions relating to each role. Participants included:

- **The five sites' lead coordinator organisations (n = 6)**
- **Steering group members only (n = 8)**
- **Delivery partners only (n = 1)**
- **Steering group members and delivery partners (n = 11)**[2]

Focus groups with the CYPs (n = 38): Focus groups were designed to explore CYPs' experiences of participating in the programme/the interventions.

Monitoring data: Monitoring data were used to track the activities, participation and progress against objectives.

3.2 Participant selection

At each of the five sites, steering/working group members and intervention delivery partners were identified (through the lead coordinators) to participate in an interview and/or the online survey, which were both open to all steering group members/delivery partners. After contacting delivery partners, the evaluation team asked the partners to connect the researchers with the CYPs accessing their NF programme-funded activities/interventions. Participants in the interviews and focus groups represented a range of ethnic backgrounds. The demographic profile of the participants was broadly consistent with the demographic composition of the local populations from which they were recruited, although no formal assessment of representativeness was undertaken. Participant demographics are reported below. Ethnicity was recorded using the five broad categories specified within the YEF monitoring framework to ensure consistency across sites. These categories do not capture variation within ethnic groups and therefore provide only a high-level indication of participants' ethnic backgrounds.

Lead coordinators distributed a link to the online survey (via email or through steering group WhatsApp groups) to steering group members and delivery partners. They also shared the contact details of the research team with individuals who preferred to participate only in an interview or who had questions about the evaluation. Informed consent was initially obtained from service managers acting as gatekeepers for the intervention delivery partners and subsequently from all individuals who participated in the evaluation through surveys or interviews. CYPs were recruited through the delivery partners, who provided them and their parents or guardians with a participant information sheet and consent form. For those under 16 years old, both parental consent and the child's assent were required. Most CYPs were recruited at large community events, where the researcher approached parents and CYPs to invite them to join a focus group. Each CYP who participated received a £10 voucher as a thank you for their time.

[2] Across some sites, steering group members were often also delivery partners.

3.3 Data collection

Figure 2 and Table 3 summarise the evaluation timeline and methods used to address the research questions.

The qualitative interview and focus group materials (including topic guides, consent forms and information sheets for gatekeepers, local coordinators, steering group members, delivery partners and programme recipients [i.e. CYPs]) were developed by the evaluation team and reviewed by the YEF and site leads. Data collection was undertaken by trained researchers from Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) and Nottingham Trent University (NTU), who worked alongside the evaluation leads. Interviews were conducted online (via Microsoft Teams) and, where feasible, in person at the delivery sites. In total, 26 participants were interviewed: 42.3% (n = 11) White, 34.6% (n = 9) Asian and 23.1% (n = 6) Black ethnicity – see Figure 2 and Table 4 – and nine focus groups were conducted (including 38 CYPs). Of the 38 CYPs, 50% (n = 19) were of Asian ethnicity, 36.8% (n = 14) Black or mixed ethnicity and 13.2% (n = 9) White ethnicity.

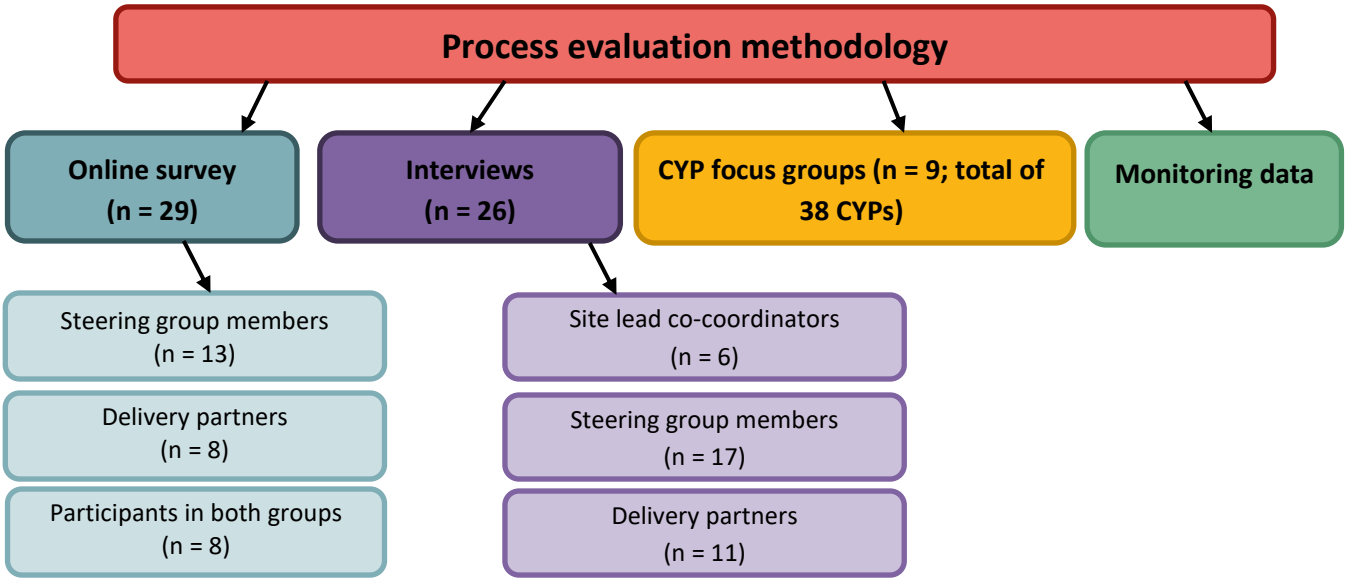
A structured survey was distributed to steering group members and delivery partners to assess how the partnership was working, intervention reach and perceived outcomes. For the steering group members, the first section incorporated the Partnership Self-Assessment Tool (PSAT) (Center for the Advancement of Collaborative Strategies in Health [CACSH], 2002) to measure elements such as synergy, leadership, efficiency, governance, resources and overall satisfaction. The PSAT includes 63 Likert-scale and yes/no items and has been widely used to assess multi-stakeholder partnerships, including in public health (Loban et al., 2021). Partnerships were required to meet the minimum criteria (e.g. at least six months' duration and five active partners). Due to the low response rates at some sites, the findings are presented at the programme level across all five sites and may not fully reflect individual partnerships. Subscale scores were calculated for each element.

The second part of the survey was aimed at delivery partners and included tailored questions on the types of activities delivered, participant demographics, perceived effectiveness, implementation successes and challenges, and support from local leads. The final section, completed by both groups, explored perceived outcomes for CYPs, the wider community and partnership working. The survey also supported recruitment for interviews and focus groups. In total, 29 steering group members and delivery partners responded (see Figure 2).

The documentary analysis drew on quarterly monitoring reports, using data collected by delivery partner organisations and provided to site leads to compile and present using the YEF's templates and supplementary evaluation forms. These reports provided data on reach (e.g. numbers of CYPs and breakdowns of demographic data), achievements, risks, planned activity, Gantt charts, risk registers and key learnings. The reports were reviewed in partnership meetings involving site leads, the YEF and the evaluation team, enabling the clarification of findings and the identification of gaps. Feedback was provided where necessary to strengthen reporting consistency while retaining flexibility for local variation.

Observations of implementation meetings and ongoing programme documentation were integrated into the qualitative analysis to ensure a comprehensive understanding of delivery across sites.

Figure 2: Summary of evaluation methods and participant groups



Note: CYPs = children and young people

3.4 Analysis

Stakeholder interview data (e.g. lead coordinators, steering group members and delivery partners) were analysed using framework analysis, a deductive method structured around pre-defined themes aligned to the applied research questions, with a particular focus on the delivery of action plans at this stage (Gale et al., 2013). This year's evaluation also placed a greater emphasis on understanding the experiences of racially underrepresented and marginalised ethnic communities. To support this, additional questions were included in the interview schedule relating to engagement and recruitment approaches, support provided to these groups and the monitoring of outcomes by ethnic background. Data were coded against a set of a priori themes linked to the evaluation framework. CYP focus groups were analysed separately using inductive thematic analysis to capture additional insights (e.g. views on their neighbourhoods). Quantitative data were analysed in SPSS (version 28), and relevant free-text survey responses were integrated with interview quotations. To assess partnership functioning, PSAT (CACSH, 2002) mean scores and percentages were calculated. Mean scores for each PSAT domain were used to classify partnership performance into one of four predefined categories.

- **1.0–2.9 Danger zone: This area needs a lot of improvement.**
- **3.0–3.9 Working zone: More effort is needed in this area to maximise the partnership's collaborative potential.**
- **4.0–4.5 Headway zone: The partnership is doing pretty well in this area but has potential to progress even further.**
- **4.5–5.0 Target zone: The partnership currently excels in this area and needs to focus attention on maintaining a high score.**

3.5 Ethical review

An ethical review was undertaken, and the NTU Research Ethics Committee received a favourable opinion.[3] Appendix 4 provides the participant information sheets and interview schedules used in this phase of the evaluation.

[3] Project ID 1544809.

Table 3: Timeline

Date	Activity
Nov 2025– Mar 2026	Recruitment and data collection • Online (Microsoft Teams) interviews • Survey live Dec 2025–Feb 2026 • Site visits in three locations (completed Jan–Mar 2026) to support recruitment for and the implementation of interviews/focus groups
Jan–Mar 2026	Data analysis
Apr 2026	Annual report submission to the Youth Endowment Fund

Table 4: Methods overview

Research questions addressed	Data collection methods	Participants/data sources	Data analysis methods	Implementation/logic model relevance
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. What are the stakeholders' and children and young people's (CYPs') views on the programme?	Interviews/CYP focus groups Survey Review of programme documentation provided to the Youth Endowment Fund	Stakeholder interviews (n = 26) and CYP focus groups (n = 9; consisting of 38 individual CYPs and ranging from 2–6 CYPs per focus group) • Manchester: lead coordinators (n = 1); steering group/delivery partners (n = 0); CYPs (n = 9) • Bradford: lead coordinators (n = 1); steering group/delivery partners (n = 8); CYPs (n = 14) • Great Yarmouth: lead coordinators (n = 1); steering group/delivery partners (n = 4); CYPs (n = 4) • Cardiff: lead coordinators (n = 1); steering group/delivery partners (n = 3); CYPs (n = 11) • Birmingham: lead coordinators (n = 2); steering group/delivery partners (n = 5); CYPs (n = 0) Online survey (n = 29 across the five sites): Birmingham (n = 4); Bradford (n = 12); Great Yarmouth (n = 8); Cardiff (n = 3); Manchester (n = 2) Quarterly monitoring documents and supplementary documents from each site	Qualitative: the coding of transcripts using framework and thematic analysis Quantitative: the means and percentages used to categorise the progress of the partnerships using the Partnership Self-Assessment Tool	Assess the dimensions of implementation, alignment with the programme logic model/action plan and areas for refinement. Assess the factors impacting implementation. Assess the outputs and explore the perceived outcomes for the neighbourhood/CYPs.

4. Findings

To protect the anonymity of participants as far as possible, sites were randomly assigned codes (i.e. Sites 1–5). These random assignments change between sites for each annual report. This approach helps mitigate potential conflicts and encourages steering group members, delivery partners and CYPs to engage in the evaluation process honestly and openly, both now and in future evaluations. In a small number of cases where events are already publicly known within the programme (e.g. changes to partnership structures), sites may be referenced more directly to provide necessary context for the findings.

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

This section explores the approaches delivery partners are taking to implement the plans, structured around the theme and sub-themes derived from the interview, survey and documentation data outlined in Table 5.

Table 5: Summary of theme and sub-themes

Theme	Sub-themes
Activity and intervention delivery	Programme reach and retention Demographics of the children and young people Activities/interventions across sites

4.1.1 Programme reach and retention

The YEF's quarterly monitoring forms show that since the commencement of delivery (April 2023 to the end of March 2026), 14,145 CYPs were recruited and participated in activities across the five sites, with a retention rate of 88.8% (n = 12,558); in addition, 15 community members (e.g. parents) and 69 practitioners were recruited to different project activities (Table 6).

However, these figures should be interpreted with caution, as differences in how sites recorded participation, retention and withdrawal mean that figures, particularly the retention rate, are indicative estimates rather than precise measures. Variations in recording practices, including differences in how withdrawal was defined for short-term and one-off activities, mean that the overall retention rate may over- or underestimate participant retention in some contexts. Similarly, apparent differences in retention between sites may partly reflect data collection approaches rather than genuine variation in participation engagement. As a result, comparisons between sites should be treated as indicative only.

Retention and participation data should be interpreted as indicative of overall trends rather than precise measures of programme performance. This highlights the importance of strengthening and standardising data collection processes to improve the reliability and comparability of findings in future evaluations.

Table 6: Estimated[4] programme reach by site and target group total since project commencement

Site	Target group	Number recruited	Number withdrawn[5]	Total	Retention rate
Birmingham	Children and young people (CYPs)	3,387	0	3,387	100%
	Community members	15	0	15	100%
	Practitioners	0	0	0	N/A
Bradford	CYPs	2,718	9	2,709	99.7%
	Community members	0	0	0	N/A
	Practitioners	8	0	8	100%
Cardiff	CYPs	2,645	590	2,055	77.7%
	Community members	0	0	0	N/A
	Practitioners	0	0	0	N/A
Great Yarmouth	CYPs	2,992	173	2,819	94.1%
	Community members	0	0	0	N/A
	Practitioners	24	18	6	25%
Manchester	CYPs	2,403	815	1,588	66.1%
	Community members	0	0	0	N/A
	Practitioners	37	0	37	100%
Programme total	CYPs	14,145	1,587	12,558	88.8%
	Community members	15	0	15	100%
	Practitioners	69	18	51	73.9%

[4] Data collection issues across sites resulted in some discrepancies. All numbers of recruited and retained CYPs are based on self-reported data from each site.

[5] Sites recorded withdrawal numbers differently; therefore, these numbers are cautious estimates (e.g. some activities were one-off events or short interventions, and once finished, some sites recorded those CYPs as having withdrawn).

4.1.2 Demographics of the children and young people

Table 7: Gender, age and ethnicity demographics[6] by site since project commencement

Site	Status	Total number of CYPs n	Female n	Male n	Gender NB or ND[7] n	Age range	White n	Asian or Asian British n	Black, Black British, Caribbean or African n	Mixed or multiple ethnic groups n	Other ethnic group n	Looked after CYPs n	CYPs with SEND
Birmingham	Recruited	3,387	1,196	2,038	153	7–25	150	1,217	1,472	344	69	0	8
	Retained	3,387	1,196	2,038	153	7–25	150	1,217	1,472	344	69	0	8
Bradford	Recruited	2,718	1,211	1,470	37	7–19	139	2,020	197	125	91	13	143
	Retained	2,709	1,208	1,464	37	7–19	139	2,011	197	125	91	13	143
Cardiff[8]	Recruited	2,645	9.97–49.2%	47.78–87.31%	0–0.3%	4–18+	2.84 – 9.89%	10.56–21.57%	27.98–64.61%	8.51–19.42%	3.51–18.73%	0.3–3.34%	2.42–7.67%
	Retained	1,745	N/A	N/A	N/A	4–18+	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Great Yarmouth	Recruited	2,992	1,167	1,260	565	9–19	1,987	81	135	154	181	19	491
	Retained	2,655	1,328	1,305	22	9–19	1,763	35	130	154	148	19	491
Manchester	Recruited	2,879	1,048	1,865	35	6–18+	151	1,437	334	252	656	32	124
	Retained	2,289	676	1,510	22	6–18+	87	878	225	148	65	6	4

Note: CYPs = children and young people; SEND = special educational needs and disabilities; NB = non-binary; ND = not disclosed

[6] Due to difficulties collecting demographic data for all activities, there may be missing data points across the sites.
[7] Gender not disclosed – this represents CYPs who identify as non-binary or did not want to disclose their gender identity or where sites registered children without recording their gender.
[8] Due to challenges encountered during data collection, Cardiff data on the number of new children recruited each quarter are unavailable. As an alternative, demographic breakdowns are presented as percentage ranges to indicate the proportion of children that participated each quarter (between Jan 2024–Dec 2025). Any data prior to Jan 2024 are not included.

Overall, the monitoring data indicate that the programme reached a large population of CYPs across sites, spanning a wide age range and including participants from a range of backgrounds and, in some sites, additional needs. However, the extent of participant diversity cannot be fully assessed from the available data, particularly given the use of broad ethnic categories. In addition, differences in how demographic information was recorded and reported limit the extent to which meaningful comparisons can be made across sites.

Across sites, some variation is evident in both engagement and participant profiles. While overall reach is broadly similar, retention rates vary, ranging from 66.1% in Manchester to 100% in Birmingham, although these differences should be interpreted with caution given the variation in how retention is recorded. Participant demographics also differ markedly by site. For example, Birmingham and Bradford show higher proportions of Asian and Black participants, whereas Great Yarmouth is predominantly White. Manchester reflects a more mixed profile, and Cardiff shows variation across reporting periods.

These patterns broadly align with the demographic composition of the local areas (based on Office for National Statistics Census 2021 data), for instance, in Lozells and Newtown (Birmingham), where the local population is predominantly Asian (44.5%) and Black (33.7%), the programme engages a high proportion of young people from these groups. By contrast, in Nelson (Great Yarmouth), where the population is largely White (86.3%), the majority of participants are also White. A similar pattern is observed in Bradford and Manchester, where participant profiles broadly reflect local population diversity. However, this comparison is based on aggregate demographic data and should be interpreted with caution, given the variation in how demographic information was collected and reported across sites, as well as the missing data for some activities and reporting periods. On this basis, the available data suggest that delivery partners are engaging young people in ways that are broadly reflective of the local communities in which they operate. As engagement appears to broadly reflect local population demographics, data do not indicate clear or consistent patterns of racial disparity across sites, although limitations in data quality mean this cannot be assessed definitively, and any conclusions should be regarded as tentative.

Interviews with delivery partners highlighted examples of how some interventions were specifically targeted towards distinct demographic groups based on age, gender, ethnicity and vulnerability.

Age groups

Across sites, delivery partners described engaging a broad age range of young people but with a clearer core focus around secondary school age and key transition points, particularly during General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) years. CYPs also tended to describe activities in school-year terms, suggesting that delivery was often aligned with stages where support with aspirations, engagement and next steps in education, training or employment pathways felt most relevant.

Building on this, in some sites, partners described adapting the age focus over time to strengthen support through transitions, including extending provision slightly earlier and/or into post-16 years when need was identified. Where older CYPs were included, this was often framed around supporting progression into further education, training or employment and preventing disengagement from these pathways.

"It's much easier to keep somebody where they are than to get them back into education." Site 4 Delivery Partner

Gender

Most activities were delivered on a mixed-gender basis, although boys tended to make up a larger proportion of participants in some activities, particularly sports-based provision. Monitoring data also indicate higher male participation in several sites. In response, delivery partners described introducing targeted initiatives to increase girls' participation, including female-only sessions, gender-specific staffing and programmes shaped by girls' interests and priorities. In some cases, these initiatives were developed directly in response to feedback from girls and young women. These initiatives also included creating culturally appropriate spaces to support participation among girls who might otherwise feel excluded from existing provision.

> *"We've worked hard to get way more girls' activities in place… a lot of the sports stuff has always been more popular with boys, so we've had to put in more targeted support for girls."* Site 1 Lead Coordinator

Ethnicity and cultural backgrounds

Monitoring data indicate that the programme has engaged CYPs from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, reflecting the diversity of the communities in which delivery took place. While some sites worked with large proportions of young people from minority ethnic groups, others engaged young people from a wider range of migrant communities, including those from Eastern European backgrounds. Interviews with delivery partners highlighted how activities were often shaped by the cultural context of local areas, with organisations working closely with trusted community institutions, such as faith settings and local community groups, to reach young people who might otherwise be unlikely to engage with formal provision.

Across several sites, delivery partners described adapting provision to meet the needs of specific cultural or linguistic communities, including by offering gender-sensitive activities, such as girls-only sports sessions (e.g. rugby, tennis, football and boxing), providing multilingual support and working with practitioners who shared similar backgrounds and lived experiences to the young people they supported. Delivery partners also described adapting how provision was delivered, including by working across multiple settings (e.g. schools, community spaces, religious buildings and outreach), empowering young people to have a voice and creating safe, targeted environments for specific groups.

> *"Because we come from that community and that background, we understand the issues and the constraints… it's lived experience for us practitioners."* Site 2 Delivery Partner

> *"You'll see us in school, you'll see us in the community, you'll see us on the streets… we try to have different touch points with every young person."* Site 3 Lead Coordinator

> *"They were really sad actually when it came to an end. It worked really well… they were able to meet other girls and have that social engagement, interaction, that safe space, because unfortunately there's not a lot of provisions for girls in the area."* Site 5 Delivery Partner

Delivery partners emphasised that these approaches helped build trust with young people and families and supported engagement with marginalised groups that may otherwise face barriers to participation. These barriers included language barriers within families, which could limit engagement with education and support, as well as issues relating to trust and confidence in services. Delivery partners also highlighted the

role of stigma, reluctance to engage with support and wider socioeconomic constraints, such as work patterns and limited availability, which could affect participation for some groups.

Vulnerable young people

Delivery partners described targeting support towards young people experiencing additional vulnerabilities, including those with special educational needs and disabilities; those at risk of becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET); and young people facing wider challenges, such as unstable home environments or limited support outside school. Across several sites, schools and local partners helped identify young people who might benefit most from targeted provision, particularly those at risk of exclusion or disengagement from education.

> *"We work with schools to identify young people from disadvantaged backgrounds… those who might not have the support at home or the opportunities that others do."* Site 5 Delivery Partner

> *"Young people with learning disabilities or cognitive differences are often the most underrepresented in these programmes."* Site 5 Delivery Partner

Delivery partners who participated in the survey (n = 16) also shared their views on who their interventions were targeted towards; respondents could select more than one answer. The majority (75.0%) reported that their activities were targeted towards males and females, with 19% and 13% targeting females only or males only, respectively. Half (50%) targeted young people from ethnic minority groups, and 31% targeted young people who were NEET.

4.1.3 Activity/intervention types

Delivery partners and CYPs interviewed shared examples of the activities that have been or are currently being offered. A diverse range of programmes continues to be delivered across the five sites, with an emphasis on education, sports, creative arts, mentorship and community initiatives to engage and support CYPs. This year's findings highlight a stronger focus on employability, emotional wellbeing, community organising and structured one-to-one support, reflecting adaptations made in response to local demand, emerging needs among young people and delivery partners' learning about which approaches are most effective in engaging and supporting young people.

These programmes focus on skill development, personal growth, wellbeing and social inclusion, providing safe spaces and structured interventions to support CYPs. Although the specific activities varied across sites, delivery partners described a number of common aims and ways in which provision was expected to support violence prevention outcomes. Across activity types, programmes sought to engage CYPs in safe and supportive environments, help CYPs build trusted relationships with peers and adults, provide positive alternatives to potentially harmful activities, teach skills and resilience, increase access to opportunities, and create meaningful opportunities for participation and leadership. Many activities were also designed to be responsive to local needs and shaped by young people themselves, with the intention of strengthening engagement, belonging and ownership. Consistent with the programme's Year 3 ToC (see section 4.7), these approaches are intended to strengthen the protective factors associated with violence prevention and support positive developmental pathways for CYPs.

Common activities include educational workshops, tutoring, sports-based mentorship, arts and creative programmes, outreach work, employability support and community-led events. Many sites also incorporate

career support, volunteering, environmental projects and trips to broaden CYPs' experiences. This summary categorises the key activity types delivered across the sites, highlighting shared themes.

1. Educational and skills-based activities

- **Workshops and awareness sessions**: internet safety, gang association, vaping, mental health awareness, financial literacy, consent, emotional wellbeing, social etiquette, supporting positive decision-making
- **Tutoring and academic support**: maths, English and science tuition; literacy interventions; homework clubs; additional learning needs support; school-based booster sessions
- **Literacy and reading interventions**: school-based reading schemes, community-led storytelling initiatives, structured literacy support to improve confidence and attainment
- **Employment and career preparation**: CV writing and job application support, work experience initiatives, subsidised employment, career fairs, recruitment drives, youth referee qualifications, local job boards and supporting progression into education, employment or training
- **Skill development and aspiration building**: leadership training, digital and media skills (including podcasting, videography and short-form content creation), drone flying, photography, communication and confidence building, budgeting and money management, resilience building, structured sessions exploring ambitions and future pathways, visits from local professionals to support aspiration and broaden career awareness

2. Sports and physical activities

- **Traditional sports**: football, boxing, basketball, cricket, swimming, rugby, badminton, tennis
- **Recreational and open-access activities**: gym access, hiking, climbing, multi-sports sessions, table tennis, pool, five-a-side tournaments
- **Sports-based mentorship and diversionary provision**: using football and boxing as structured engagement tools to attract CYPs alongside integrated educational or wellbeing workshops, late-evening diversionary sport, Ramadan sports provision, mentoring embedded within sports groups
- **Outdoor and adventure activities**: sailing, rifle shooting, farm visits, outdoor enrichment activities to broaden experiences beyond CYPs' local areas

3. Arts, culture and creative activities

- **Drama and performing arts**: theatre programmes at community hubs and places of worship, school-based creative workshops
- **Music and creative arts**: music workshops, graffiti projects, crafts, artist-led creative sessions, podcast studios and digital media projects (e.g. vlog and short-form video creation)
- **Art therapy and expressive sessions**: art therapy groups delivered in school settings to support emotional expression, sip-and-paint wellbeing sessions

4. Youth engagement, mentoring and wellbeing support

- **Mentorship and personal development**: small-group mentoring, structured discussions about future ambitions, female mentorship, life-skills conversations, one-to-one wellbeing coaching
- **Mental health and wellbeing navigation**: mental health navigators, walk-and-talk sessions, emotional wellbeing workshops, non-clinical advice and signposting, family drop-ins

- **Safe spaces and youth clubs**: youth pavilions, community centres, gaming hubs, chill spaces and structured Saturday youth sessions with mentor-led group work
- **Volunteering and youth leadership opportunities**: summer camp volunteering, peer leadership, youth panels, structured community volunteering

5. Community participation and social action

- **Detached and outreach youth work**: engaging hard-to-reach CYPs in safe community spaces, café-in-the-park initiatives, food provision, community-based drop-ins
- **Community organising and campaigning**: youth-led campaigns (e.g. transport affordability initiative), participation in policy discussions, community action projects
- **Public events and festivals**: park parties, music and food gatherings, youth celebration events
- **Community-led engagement**: youth-led planning of activities, leadership programmes, collaborative initiatives with local organisations
- **Environmental and social initiatives**: climate change projects, park improvement programmes, encouraging safe use of community spaces

6. Community, cultural and enrichment activities

- **Trips and educational visits**: museum visits, theatre events, adventure parks, local and regional trips to broaden experiences
- **Holiday and enrichment provision**: school holiday activities combining recreation and informal development, collaborative community events (e.g. beach days)

Across sites, delivery partners described delivering activities in combination, with diversionary, education and developmental elements intentionally linked. Sports continued to act as key engagement mechanisms but were frequently paired with structured mentoring, tuition or wider development activity rather than delivered in isolation.

> *"We use football as a tool to educate and empower young people… alongside our main diversionary activity… we try to get the kids into an education with workshops and extra tuition."* Site 2 Delivery Partner

Employability and progression pathways also appeared more visible within delivery. Delivery partners described partnerships with employers, recruitment drives and subsidised placements designed to reduce barriers for those who might otherwise struggle to access work. Some CYPs described how opportunities shared within sessions led directly to employment outcomes.

> *"They helped us make our CVs… they also put us on a couple of job interviews."* Site 2 CYP

> *"Someone told me about this job, and 15 of us all got hired… in a small area… it's very beneficial."* Site 2 CYP

Alongside employability support, wellbeing and mentoring continued to form a core part of delivery. In several areas, delivery partners described structured approaches to building CYPs' confidence, resilience and future planning through ongoing mentoring relationships. In some settings, mentoring and group-based discussions were used to help young people explore ambitions and future pathways in a supportive environment.

"Phase one is about supporting their wellbeing… building up their communication skills, their resilience, their confidence. And then phase two is about starting to think about next steps." Site 4 Delivery Partner

"We deliver small-group sessions… so that young people can openly discuss their ambitions and any doubts that they have." Site 5 Delivery Partner

Creative and community-based activity also provided accessible spaces for engagement. Delivery partners described arts, digital media and expressive sessions delivered in schools and community venues, sometimes designed as safe spaces for specific groups. Detached youth work and community-based engagement were also described as important ways of maintaining contact with CYPs across different settings.

"It worked really well because it was a safe space… they were able to meet other girls and have that social engagement." Site 5 Delivery Partner

"You'll see us in school, you'll see us in the community, you'll see us on the streets… we try to have different touch points with every young person." Site 3 Delivery Partner

Finally, stakeholders noted that the range of activities locally had increased over time for most sites, meaning that even CYPs who did not attend regularly were still increasingly aware of the opportunities available to them.

"Young people now know the things that are going on… even if they don't personally go, they know there are options." Site 1 Lead Coordinator

One site included a youth-led initiative where young people could apply for funding to put on their own activities, and it covered a wide range of topics, including violence prevention activities (e.g. knife awareness), skill building (e.g. learning sign language, DIY, painting), social activities (e.g. book club and quiet space) and inclusion activities (e.g. a magazine run by/for Black girls and tradition sharing).

"It's for Black girls, probably for around high-school age to maybe college age. It's basically like a magazine. We'll interview Black people from around [the area] and then put it into the magazine. I wanted to make something for ethnic girls from Africa, North Africa or basically anywhere so that it's deeply inclusive, and they feel more confident in their identity and in themselves. Because some people probably feel like, 'Oh, I don't want to be like this anymore,' or they're uncomfortable with how they're presented, or maybe they just don't feel confident about how they look. So that's what I wanted to do." Site 1 CYP

This example highlights how youth-led approaches can support more tailored and inclusive provision, particularly for groups who may otherwise feel underrepresented within more mainstream activities. By enabling young people to shape and deliver their own initiatives, delivery partners were able to respond more directly to the needs, identities and experiences of specific communities, helping to build confidence and strengthen engagement.

Delivery partners who participated in the survey (n = 16) selected activities that they were providing as part of the NF, and respondents selected as many as applied to their delivery activities. The majority of activities were sports-related (75.0%), followed by initiatives focused on improving wellbeing and mental health (69.0%). More than half of the activities (56.0%) involved skill development, including areas such as cooking, music and art. Half of the respondents (50.0%) reported that their activities included a mentoring

component aimed at increasing knowledge and awareness. Other common activity types included safety and violence prevention programmes (44.0%); educational support, such as GCSE assistance, reading and writing (25.0%); employment and training opportunities (19.0%); and environmental improvement projects (6.0%).

Taken together, the findings suggest that the sites are delivering flexible, locally responsive models rather than uniform interventions, with partnerships adapting activities to the needs of different communities and groups of young people. While limitations in the monitoring data mean that there may be some inaccuracies relating to reach figures, the combined quantitative and qualitative evidence indicates that partners are successfully creating multiple routes into support and strengthening protective factors linked to violence prevention and positive youth development.

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

This section discusses the following themes and sub-themes (Table 8).

Table 8: Summary of themes and sub-themes

Theme	Sub-themes
Overview of partnership working	Delivery partners' views on the delivery of their interventions/activities The Partnership Self-Assessment Tool assesses partnership work across the five sites (completed by steering group members only; n = 21), including synergy, leadership, efficiency, administration and management, non-financial resources, financial resources, satisfaction with the partnership and the decision-making process.
Challenges in activity/intervention delivery and strategies to overcome them	Challenges: • Wider project challenges: learning, evaluation and data collection; external context and community factors • Steering group challenges: the complexity of the lead coordinator role and managing partnership dynamics; steering group governance and participation; funding and decision-making; steering group size, focus and sustainability; lead coordinator staffing changes and organisational continuity within the steering group • Delivery partner challenges: the capacity of delivery organisations; resources, infrastructure and funding; engagement with communities and young people Strategies employed to overcome challenges: • Listening to young voices to improve retention and engagement • Flexibility, adaptability and diversity • Improving data collection • Celebrating success and strengthening visibility • Leveraging funding and resources • Building trust and strengthening community engagement • Utilising existing relationships and shared expertise

4.2.1 Delivery partners' views on the delivery of their interventions/activities

The survey findings indicate that delivery partners generally reported positive experiences regarding the delivery of their interventions and activities (Figure 3). Additionally, the interviews and qualitative responses

from the survey suggest generally positive perceptions of how their projects are engaging young people and contributing to programme objectives while demonstrating how activities have been adapted to meet the needs of specific groups. Several partners emphasised that their work focuses on safeguarding, wellbeing and building protective factors among young people who may be vulnerable to harm. For example, one partner explained, *"As our sessions are with young disabled people, our work has focused on consent and keeping ourselves and others safe rather than preventing youth violence."* Other partners described how activities were designed to engage young people in areas with higher levels of antisocial behaviour or risk. One organisation delivering football-based sessions noted that although the activity tended to attract more boys, it successfully engaged young people in a high-risk locality.

> *"As our provision is predominately football-based, this attracts more boys than girls… Our activities are delivered in [a local area], where ASB [antisocial behaviour] is higher than [the county] average, and engages those individuals at risk in meaningful and engaging activities during prime hours."* Delivery Partner Survey Respondent

Delivery partners also highlighted efforts to promote inclusivity across males and females, ethnic backgrounds and abilities. Some organisations reported strong engagement from girls and described adapting activities and delivery approaches to ensure that provision was accessible and welcoming to a diverse range of young people.

> *"The groups we were working with had a really good gender split, often with 60% or more girls and a large percentage of transgender and non-binary young people."* Delivery Partner Survey Respondent

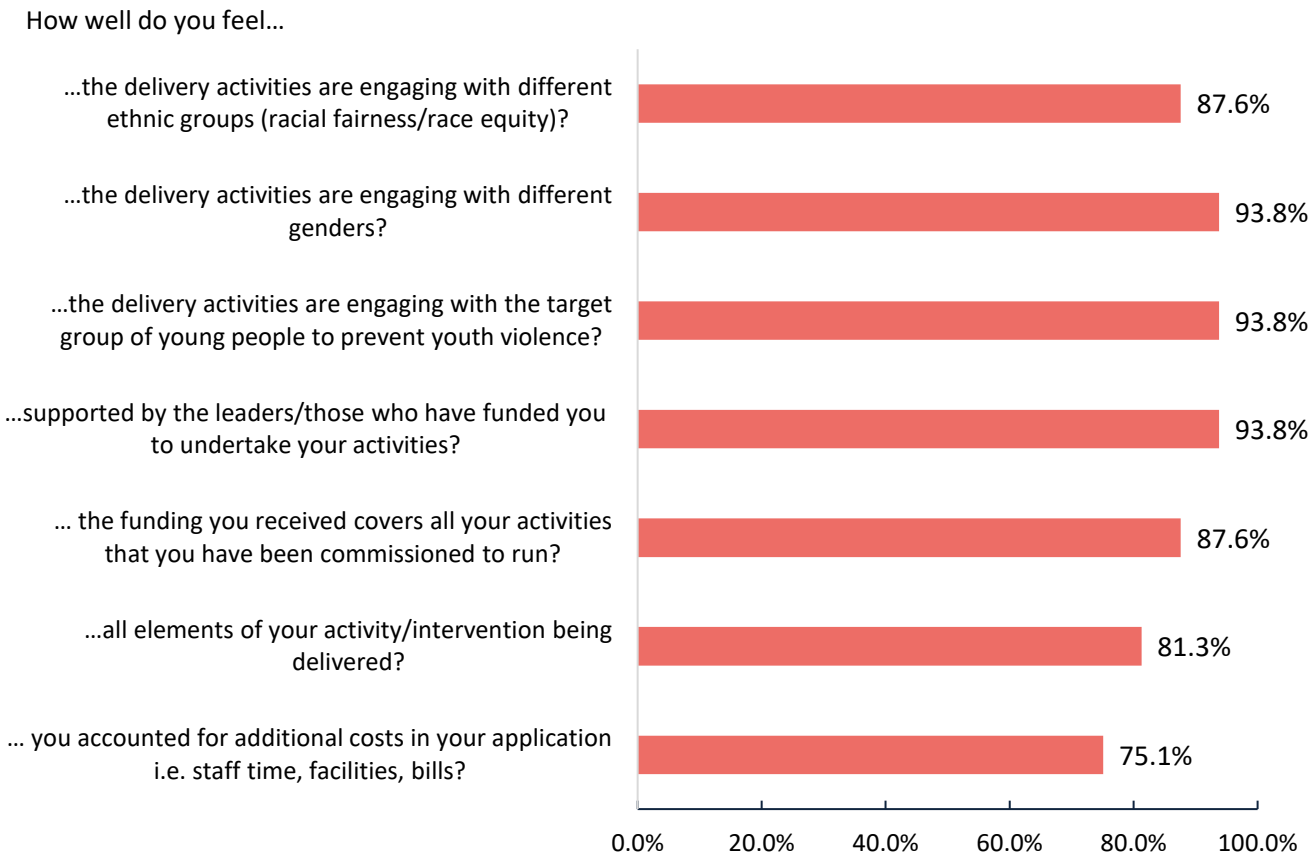
Delivery partners reported feeling well supported by programme leads and funders, highlighting clear communication, the accessibility of staff and opportunities for networking and learning, sharing, *"The group have been welcoming, very well organised and enthusiastic about our project"* and *"They are readily available and helpful."* Some respondents also valued opportunities for professional development and knowledge sharing: *"Regular meetings and opportunities for CPD [continuing professional development] and expert training supported us."* Most delivery partners reported that funding covered the key costs: *"Covers our venue hire, staffing costs, equipment and management fee."* However, some partners noted that work with particularly vulnerable groups required higher staffing ratios and longer engagement to build trust.

> *"Our interventions are expensive per person because our audience are usually the most difficult to engage… many of our families do not find leaving the house easy for any reason, and it takes a long time to build up trust."* Delivery Partner Survey Respondent

Overall, delivery partners reported that most planned activities were implemented successfully, although some projects experienced minor delays or required longer engagement to reach participants.

> *"Despite a slight delay in delivery, sessions have been well attended, and we have even been able to deliver additional sessions."* Delivery Partner Survey Respondent

Figure 3: Proportion of delivery partners who reported that they feel very good/good about statements relating to their activity/intervention delivery, survey data (n = 16)



The survey findings suggest that delivery partners have generally been able to implement activities as planned while adapting delivery approaches to suit different participant needs and local contexts. This indicates a good level of implementation fidelity alongside flexibility in delivery, particularly in relation to engaging young people from a variety of backgrounds and tailoring activities for specific groups. It was largely believed that delivery activities were targeting the right young people and engaging with those most likely to be in proximity to youth violence.

The positive feedback on communication, the accessibility of programme staff and opportunities for networking and training suggest that partnership structures are working effectively and supporting delivery organisations to implement their projects.

However, these findings reflect partner perceptions and should be interpreted as evidence of perceived delivery quality rather than independently verified outcomes. In addition, the need for higher staffing ratios and longer engagement periods for more vulnerable groups highlights variation in delivery intensity, which has implications for assessing resource adequacy and comparability across interventions.

4.3 Overview of partnership working

This section discusses the following themes and sub-themes (Table 9).

Table 9: Summary of themes and sub-themes

Theme	Sub-themes
The Partnership Self-Assessment Tool assessing partnership working across the five sites ***This part of the survey was only completed by respondents who were steering group members.***	• Synergy (2024/25 mean 3.92; 2025/26 mean 3.93) remained in the **working zone**. • Leadership (2024/25 mean 4.06; 2025/26 mean 3.63) fell from **headway** into the **working zone**. • Efficiency (2024/25 mean 3.97; 2025/26 mean 3.69) remained in the **working zone**. • Administration and management (2024/25 mean 4.0; 2025/26 mean 3.69) fell from **headway** into the **working zone**. • Non-financial resources (2024/25 mean 4.06; 2025/26 mean 3.90) fell from **headway** into the **working zone**. • Financial resources (2024/25 mean 3.89; 2025/26 mean 3.87) remained in the **working zone**. • Satisfaction with the partnership (2024/25 mean 4.11; 2025/26 mean 3.69) fell from **headway** into the **working zone**. Additional questions covered: • Decision-making process • Benefits and drawbacks of participation
Challenges faced by steering groups and delivery organisations	Challenges across partnerships and activity/intervention delivery Wider project challenges: • Learning, evaluation and data collection • External context and community factors Steering group challenges: • Complexity of the lead coordinator role and managing partnership dynamics • Steering group governance and participation • Funding and decision-making • Steering group size, focus and sustainability • Lead coordinator staffing changes • Disbandment of a steering group Delivery partner challenges: • Capacity of delivery organisations • Resources, infrastructure and funding • Engagement with communities and young people Strategies to overcome these challenges: • Listening to youth voices to improve retention and engagement • Flexibility, adaptability and diversity • Improving data collection • Celebrating success and strengthening visibility • Leveraging funding and resources

	• Building trust and strengthening community engagement through existing relationships and shared expertise

Findings were not consistent across sites, with one site reporting negative responses across all PSAT partnership measures. As a result, programme-level findings should be interpreted with caution, as aggregate scores may mask important variation in partnership experiences across sites. While this site's responses contributed to the overall reduction in programme averages, the pattern of results across some of the PSAT scores suggests that declines in mean scores cannot be attributed solely to a single partnership. The qualitative findings identified several common challenges across multiple sites that may help explain the reductions in scores observed. These themes are explored further in this section and in the Challenges section of the report.

Variation in response rates across sites further limits the generalisability of the survey findings. Small sample sizes prevented robust site-level comparisons, and response rates differed considerably between partnerships. Consequently, aggregate findings should be interpreted as indicative of broader programme trends and considered alongside site-level variation, local context and qualitative evidence.

A sensitivity analysis was conducted to assess the influence of outliers on the results. Following the removal of outlying responses, scores for synergy, leadership, administration and management and overall partnership satisfaction either moved or remained within the headway zone. Scores relating to efficiency, non-financial resources and the use of financial and other capital resources remained within the working zone. These findings indicate that these components remained a challenge across sites and more can be done to improve these elements across many of the partnerships.

Despite issues with the robustness of the survey data, the decision was made to retain all responses in the final analysis. Excluding the site that reported more negative experiences would have removed important learning opportunities and potentially obscured challenges associated with delivering community-led projects. Retaining these data provides a more complete representation of partnership experiences across the programme and offers valuable insights into areas requiring further support and development.

4.3.1 Synergy

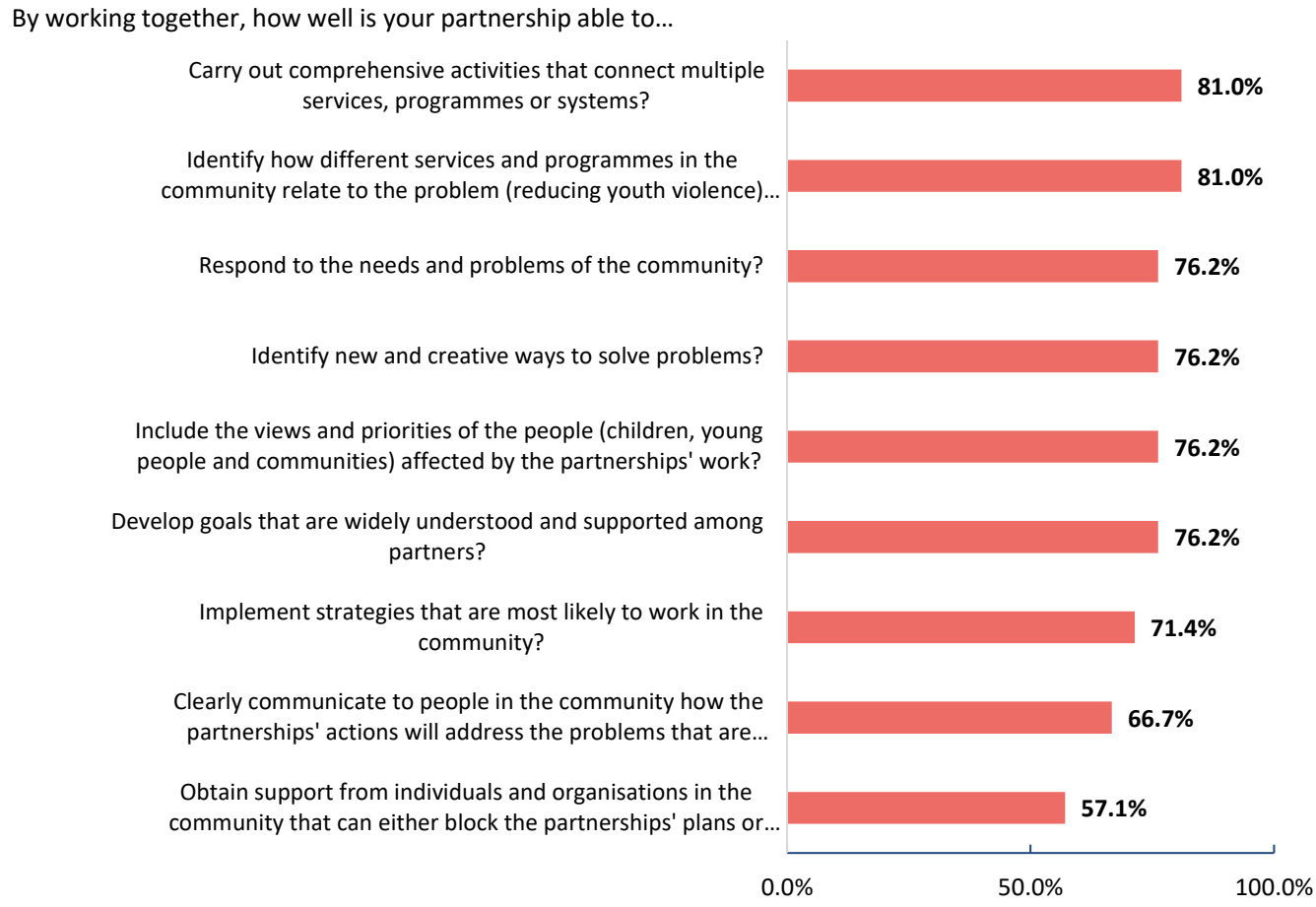
The PSAT survey asked nine questions relating to synergy (Figure 4). Responses from these questions (steering group members; n = 21) were summed to provide a mean score (1 being the lowest score and 5 the highest), indicating the level of synergy across the NF programme (see the Methods section).

- **Mean score = 3.93**
- Working zone: **More effort is needed in this area to maximise the partnership's collaborative potential.**

Figure 4 shows the proportion of survey respondents who rated the partnership as performing 'extremely well' or 'very well' in the synergy statements. The partnership's mean synergy score remained broadly consistent with the previous year, increasing marginally from 3.92 in 2024/25 to 3.93 in 2025/26 and continuing to fall within the working zone. Some notable differences when comparing Year 3 with Year 2 findings were declines in the proportion of respondents who felt the partnership was able to identify new and creative ways to solve problems (2024/25: 87.9%; 2025/26: 76.2%) and who felt the partnership was able to obtain support from individuals and organisations within the community that could either hinder the partnership's plans or help move them forward (2024/25: 69.7%; 2025/26: 57.1%). However, there was an

increase in the proportion of respondents who felt the partnership carried out comprehensive activities that connected multiple services, programmes or systems (2024/25: 57.6%; 2025/26: 81.0%).

Figure 4: Proportion of survey respondents rating the partnership as performing "extremely well" or "very well" across the synergy statements (n = 21)



Across sites, the interviewees emphasised that having the right organisations and individuals involved in the partnership was crucial to achieving meaningful collaboration. Community readiness and motivation to address local issues were frequently highlighted as important enablers of partnership working.

> *"Motivation from the community about wanting to see change was something that was evident in the early phases of the programme."* Site 5 Lead Coordinator

At the same time, participants from two sites noted that sustained engagement from local leadership and system-level partners was essential for ensuring that programme ambitions translated into concrete action. In some cases, however, attendance from senior stakeholders did not always lead to tangible contributions to programme delivery.

> *"Maintaining commitment from local leaders. Delivering what we collectively say we will. The kind of continued and, I suppose, increased engagement from the systems and the services… the counsellors have been really engaged but [have] not really done anything that we've asked."* Site 1 Lead Coordinator

Steering group structures and composition

The structure, size and composition of the steering groups varied across sites (i.e. 8–30 members) and had a significant influence on how effectively partnerships functioned. Some sites deliberately maintained smaller steering groups composed primarily of senior representatives from statutory services, including local authorities, policing, education and health. This approach was intended to ensure strategic oversight and enable partners with decision-making authority to influence wider systems. Participants involved in these models suggested that senior-level representation could help facilitate connections across systems and enable the partnership to identify relevant organisations and opportunities for collaboration.

> *"I think it was quite savvy… to have a group of people that would naturally come together anyway for the same reasons."* Site 4 Steering Group Member

Other sites adopted a more community-led model, with steering groups comprised largely of grassroots organisations and delivery partners. These structures were often seen as strengthening community ownership and helping to build capacity within local organisations. However, they could also present challenges, particularly where historical mistrust of statutory services limited partner engagement.

> *"We are lacking statutory presence in those steering group meetings, like the local council team… particularly the ward officers and neighbourhood."* Site 5 Lead Coordinator

Across both models, participants recognised that the balance between statutory and community representation presented both opportunities and challenges. Statutory-led groups were often described as experiencing fewer conflicts and clearer decision-making processes, while community-led groups were more likely to build local ownership and strengthen engagement with young people who might otherwise be less likely to participate.

Another commonly discussed issue related to the size of the steering groups. Across several sites, participants suggested that smaller steering groups tended to be more effective for strategic governance, particularly when complemented by additional working groups responsible for specific strands of the action plan. However, as the programme progressed, many sites experienced growing interest from organisations wishing to become involved. While this was widely seen as a positive outcome, it also introduced challenges for managing meetings and maintaining focus.

> *"The programme has been running [for] three years, and we've got 25 to 30 people, genuine people, coming on a Wednesday evening, six o'clock. It just shows how much trust has been built between the programme and between us as well."* Site 5 Steering Group Member

Roles and purpose of steering group members

Questions about the role of steering group members and the extent to which they should also be delivery partners emerged as a recurring theme across sites. Some partnerships deliberately separated governance from delivery by ensuring that steering group members were not direct recipients of programme funding.

> *"We're funding so many different partners. We really wanted a chair who was working actively in the area but not funded through the programme… just to ensure that the conflict of interest wasn't an issue."* Site 4 Lead Coordinator

"We made it quite clear that we would try to separate steering group members from delivery partners. So, there was a level of objectivity." Site 3 Steering Group Member

Other sites took a different approach, with steering groups primarily composed of organisations that were also delivering activities through the programme. In these contexts, the involvement of grassroots organisations was viewed as essential to maintaining a community-led approach. However, this model sometimes created tensions when discussions about funding dominated steering group meetings. Despite these tensions, delivery partners emphasised that their participation was driven primarily by their commitment to the programme's objectives.

"What happened with the steering group was it lost its focus… lots of the conversations turned into conversations about who's getting funding." Site 2 Lead Coordinator

"I think we're all engaged for this process, not only because we're recipients of funding but because it was something that we believed in." Site 2 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

These findings support the programme ToC (see section 4.7 Year 3 whole programme Theory of Change), which proposed that strong local partnerships, shared ownership and effective governance structures are key mechanisms through which neighbourhood-level interventions can achieve sustainable change. The variation observed across sites suggests that no single steering group model is universally effective; rather, successful partnerships appeared to balance strategic leadership, community representation and clear governance arrangements. These findings have implications for future neighbourhood-level delivery models, highlighting the importance of establishing clear roles, managing potential conflicts of interest and creating structures that facilitate both strategic decision-making and meaningful community engagement. Further consideration of these mechanisms is provided in the ToC section at the end of this report.

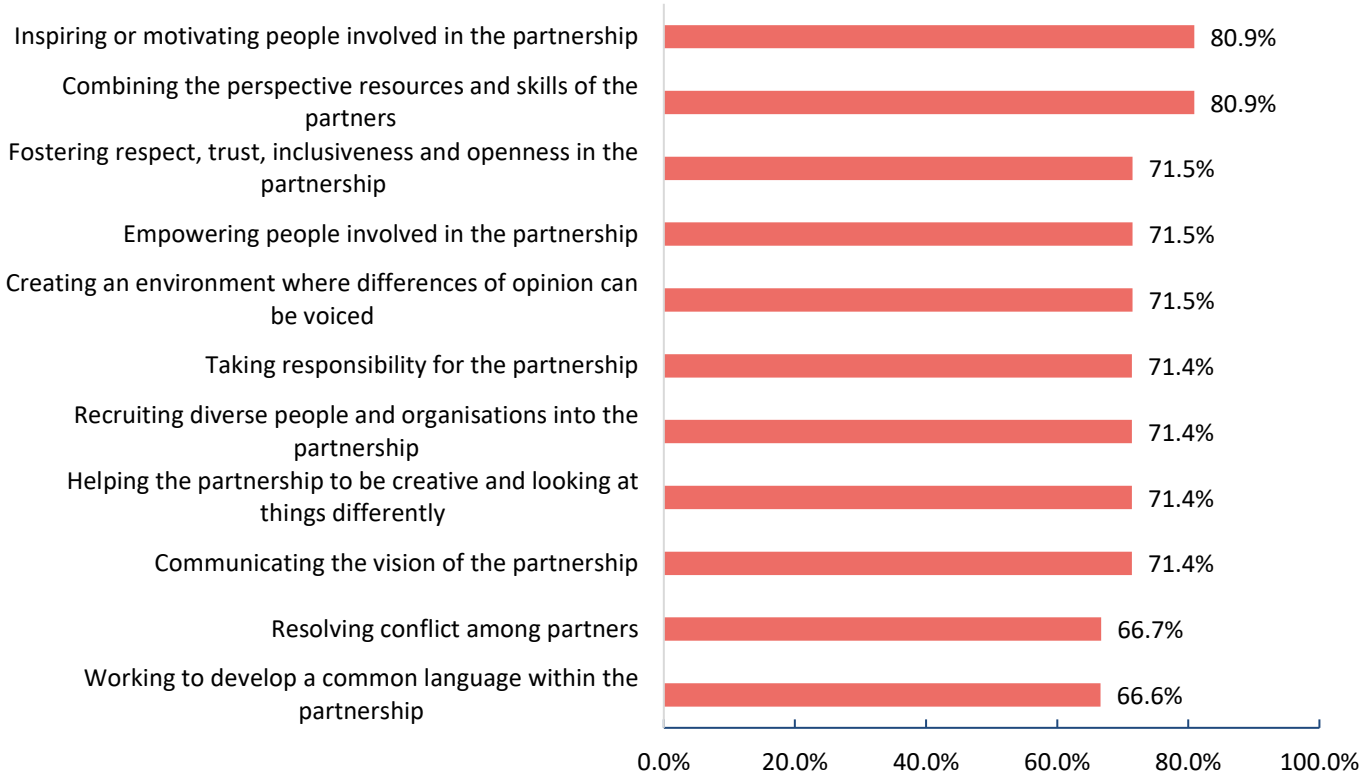
4.3.2 Leadership

The PSAT survey asked 11 questions relating to leadership (lead coordinator organisation) (Figure 5). The responses to these questions (steering group members; n = 21) were summed to provide a mean score indicating the level of good leadership across the NF programme.

- **Mean score = 3.63**
- **Working zone: More effort is needed in this area to maximise the partnership's collaborative potential.**

Figure 5 shows the proportion of survey respondents who rated the partnership as performing 'excellently' or 'very good' in the leadership statements. The partnership's mean leadership score declined from 4.06 in 2024/25 to 3.63 in 2025/26, resulting in a shift from the headway zone down to the working zone. There was a decline in scores from last year across all questions relating to leadership, apart from combining the perspective resources and skills of partners (2024/25: 68.8%; 2025/26: 80.9%).

Figure 5: Proportion of survey respondents rating the partnerships' leadership (both formal and informal) as 'excellent' or 'very good' across the leadership statements (n = 21)



Across sites, the role of the lead coordinator was widely viewed as critical to the success of the programme. Participants frequently emphasised that the effectiveness of partnership working depended heavily on the capacity of the lead coordinator to manage relationships, maintain momentum and coordinate activity across multiple organisations.

Collaborative leadership

While the lead coordinator role was widely recognised as central to programme implementation, many sites described leadership as a more distributed process involving multiple individuals or organisations. Some partnerships deliberately incorporated additional organisations or individuals to help support leadership functions, particularly where those organisations already had strong relationships within local communities. For example, one participant highlighted the importance of involving organisations with established community networks to support engagement and facilitate partnership activities.

> *"What's really important is having someone like [the lead coordinator organisation], who [comes] out into the communities… because they have that engagement and network, and they have that trust in the communities. It doesn't work without them."* Site 5 Steering Group Member

Similarly, some partnerships adopted shared leadership models within steering groups, including co-chairing arrangements that brought together individuals with different perspectives and experiences. In some sites, external organisations also played important roles in providing guidance and impartial, unbiased funding decisions. This reportedly helped to reduce conflicts of interest and animosity when steering group member organisations were unsuccessful in receiving funding.

> *"I would certainly say that was a benefit of having two co-chairs because we had completely different perspectives."* Site 4 Steering Group Member

"We've got a separate sort of financing funding committee. One of the [steering group] partners who is not receiving any direct funding for delivery sits on that with us and an independent person but outside of [the local area], and they sort of oversee the kind of financial decisions." Site 1 Lead Coordinator

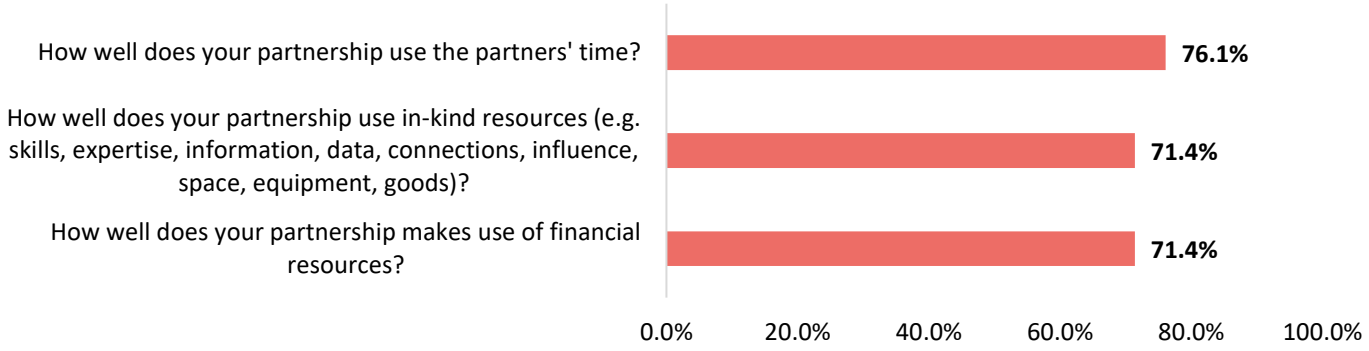
4.3.3 Efficiency

The PSAT survey asked three questions relating to efficiency (Figure 6). The responses to these questions (steering group members; n = 21) were summed to provide a mean score indicating the level of efficiency across the NF programme.

- **Mean score = 3.69**
- **Working zone: More effort is needed in this area to maximise the partnership's collaborative potential.**

Figure 6 shows the proportion of survey respondents who rated the partnership as performing 'excellently' or 'very good' in the efficiency statements. The partnership's mean efficiency score declined from 3.97 in 2024/25 to 3.69 in 2025/26, continuing to fall within the working zone. There was a decline from last year across all of the questions on efficiency.

Figure 6: Proportion of survey respondents rating the partnership as 'excellent' or 'very good' across the efficiency statements (n = 21)



Several interviewees across several sites reflected on the importance of effectively drawing on the diverse skills, expertise and resources that partners bring to the collaboration. While partnerships often included individuals and organisations with substantial experience and knowledge, some participants felt that these assets were not always fully utilised. This observation suggests that while partnerships bring together a broad range of expertise, there may be opportunities to more strategically coordinate these contributions in order to maximise the overall impact of the programme.

"So I think sometimes we don't use our assets properly… everyone's got a skill set, everyone's got some sort of assets and unique capabilities. I don't think we utilise each one to maximise the benefits of the greater good." Site 2 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

Additionally, some sites described improvements in monitoring and governance processes that supported more efficient partnership management. In one example, steering group members requested more detailed information on programme delivery and expenditure in order to strengthen oversight and support more informed decision-making.

"About 12 months ago… as co-chairs, we asked that we could have a look at more granular information. As a result, we now have a steering group dashboard… which breaks down the three work streams… we can see which ones are on track through a RAG [red–amber–green] rating, what's been committed and what's remaining in the budget. So it just helps us understand value for money." Site 4 Steering Group Member

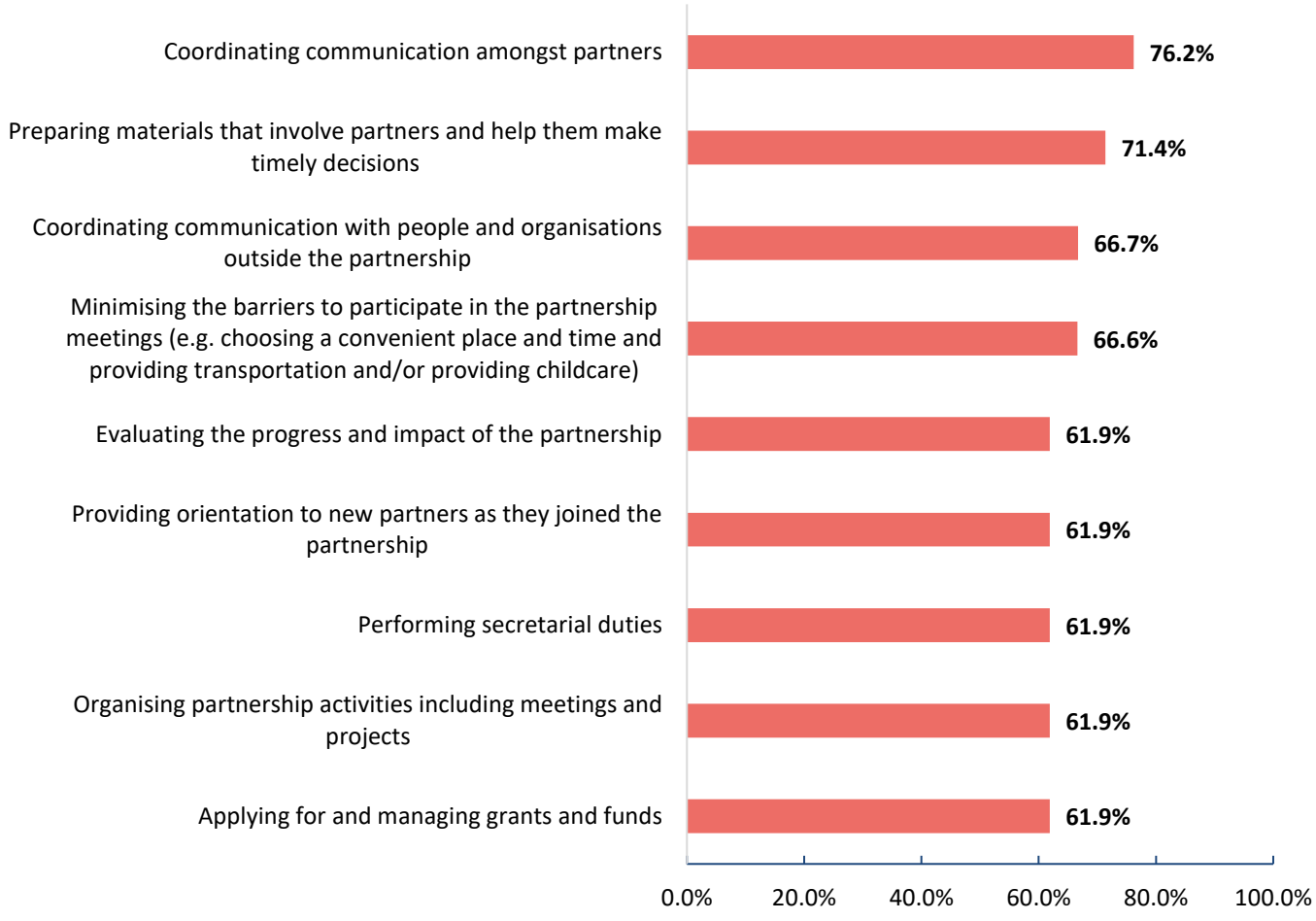
4.3.4 Administration and management

The PSAT survey asked nine questions relating to administration and management (Figure 7). The responses to these questions (steering group members; n = 21) were summed to provide a mean score indicating the level of good administration and management across the NF programme.

- **Mean score = 3.69**
- **Working zone: More effort is needed in this area to maximise the partnership's collaborative potential.**

Figure 7 shows the proportion of survey respondents who rated the partnership as performing 'excellently' or 'very good' in the administration and management statements. The partnership's mean administration and management score declined from 4.0 in 2024/25 to 3.69 in 2025/26, resulting in a shift from the headway zone down to the working zone. There was a decline from last year across all of the questions on administration and management.

Figure 7: Proportion of survey respondents rating the partnership as 'excellent' or 'very good' across the administration and management statements (n = 21)



Steering group meeting structure and agendas

Across several sites, participants reflected on the effectiveness of the steering group meetings and the extent to which these meetings supported strategic discussions about the project. In particular, some steering group members reported that a significant portion of meeting time was spent on partners providing updates about their individual delivery activities. While these updates were considered useful for maintaining awareness of programme progress, they sometimes limited opportunities for broader discussions about long-term priorities, emerging challenges and future opportunities.

> *"I think a lot of the meetings I'm at, it's just like feeding back on what we've been up to… and we're not having enough chance to talk about actually, what are the issues, what do we need to do, what's next, what are the opportunities… a bit more visioning and thinking more long-term about this."* Site 2 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

Frequency and format of meetings

Another administrative consideration discussed across sites related to the frequency of steering group meetings. In some cases, partnerships adjusted the number of meetings over time as the programme progressed and delivery activities became more established. One site described how, during the later stages of the programme, steering group meetings were reduced in frequency in order to better reflect the evolving needs of the partnership and to recognise the time constraints faced by partners.

> *"In Year 3, we have pulled that back… those agendas are becoming less full, and we're very conscious of people's time."* Site 4 Lead Coordinator

Communication and information sharing

In addition to formal meetings, several sites described the importance of maintaining regular communication through other channels to ensure that steering group members remained informed about programme developments. Email updates, WhatsApp groups and written reports were commonly used to supplement in-person meetings and maintain continuity between them. These additional communication mechanisms were viewed as helpful in ensuring that partners remained connected and aware of programme progress, particularly when meetings were less frequent.

> *"The communication to start there is really good because when we don't meet face to face, there's always a quarterly response on email, and we get an update."* Site 4 Steering Group Member

4.3.5 Non-financial resources

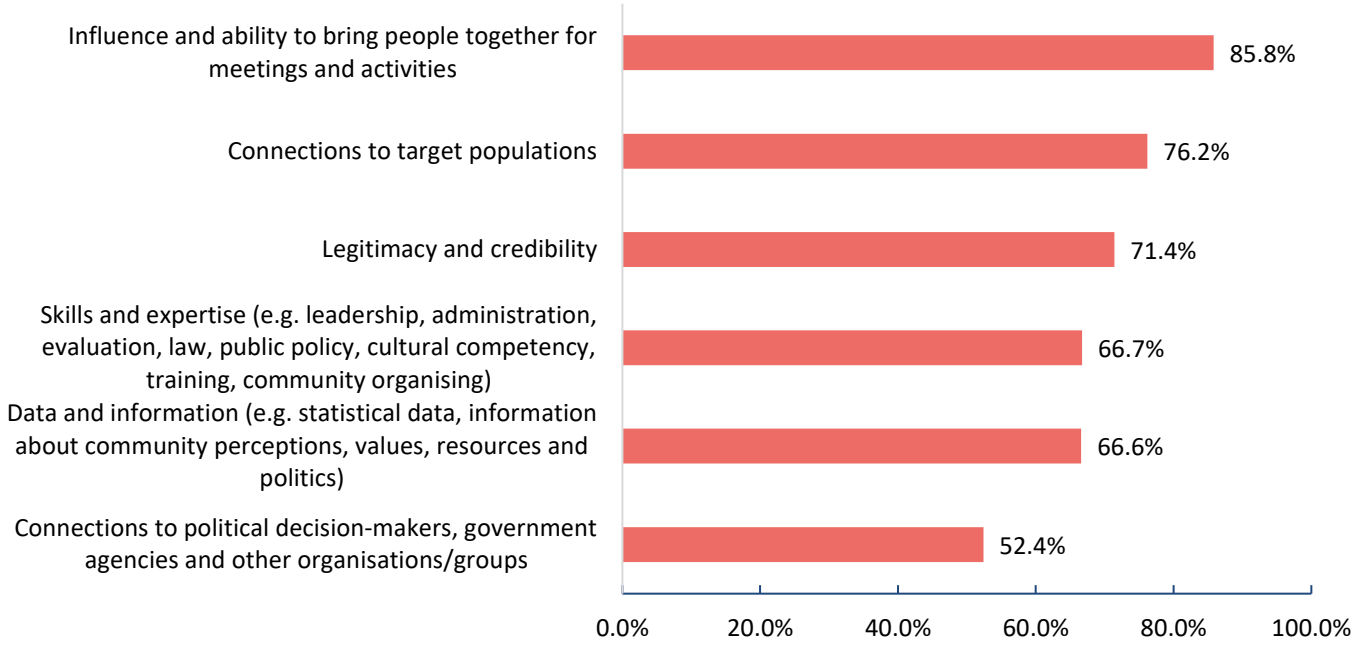
The PSAT survey asked six questions relating to non-financial resources (Figure 8). Responses from these questions (steering group members; n = 21) were summed to provide a mean score indicating the level of good use of non-financial resources across the NF programme. The findings here show:

- **Mean score = 3.90**
- **Working zone: More effort is needed in this area to maximise the partnership's collaborative potential.**

Figure 8 shows the proportion of survey respondents who rated the partnership as having 'all' or 'nearly all' of what they need in terms of non-financial resources statements. The partnership's mean non-financial

resources score declined from 4.06 in 2024/25 to 3.90 in 2025/26, resulting in a shift from the headway zone down to the working zone. There was a decline from last year across all of the questions on non-financial resources.

Figure 8: Proportion of survey respondents rating the partnership as having 'all' or 'nearly all' its needs across the non-financial resources statements (n = 21)



Across sites, participants highlighted the importance of in-kind support from partner organisations in enabling programme activities to take place. These forms of support included providing venues for activities, assisting with promotion and outreach and using existing organisational networks to connect young people and communities with the opportunities offered through the programme. One participant emphasised the value of local organisations contributing practical resources and community connections that supported programme delivery.

> *"Other local partners have been really good at giving us their venues, giving us support, promoting the opportunities, talking about what's coming up. So I think that's been really good in working together."* Site 2 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

4.3.6 Financial and other capital resources

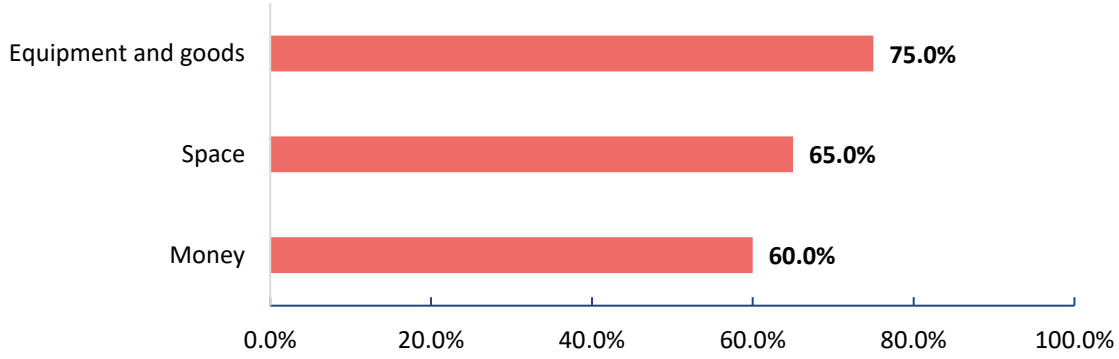
The PSAT survey asked three questions relating to financial and other capital resources (Figure 9). The responses to these questions (steering group members; n = 21) were summed to provide a mean score indicating the level of good use of financial and other capital resources across the NF programme. The findings here show:

- **Mean score = 3.87**
- **Working zone: More effort is needed in this area to maximise the partnership's collaborative potential.**

Figure 9 shows the proportion of survey respondents who rated the partnership as having 'all' or 'nearly all' of what they need across the financial and other capital resources statements. The partnership's mean financial and other capital resources score declined marginally from 3.89 in 2024/25 to 3.87 in 2025/26,

continuing to fall within the working zone. There was a decline from last year in how the partnership utilises money (2024/25: 75.0%; 2025/26: 60.0%) but an improvement in equipment and goods (2024/25: 66.7%; 2025/26: 75.0%).

Figure 9: Proportion of survey respondents rating the partnership as having 'all' or 'most' of what it needs across the financial and other capital resources statements (n = 20)



Another challenge highlighted by participants related to the management and allocation of financial resources within the programme. In some cases, steering groups faced difficulties ensuring that the allocated funding was spent within the required timeframes. One site described how an underspend within a particular strand of activity created pressure to identify appropriate uses for the remaining funds before the end of the funding period. Such situations limited the partnership's ability to fully maximise the potential benefits of the available funding, as decisions regarding the allocation of the remaining resources had to be made within relatively short timeframes.

> *"Where is the underspend? That was probably our biggest issue on the steering group… we had quite a significant underspend in the youth offer… about £200,000 at one point that needed to be spent quite quickly."* Site 4 Steering Group Member

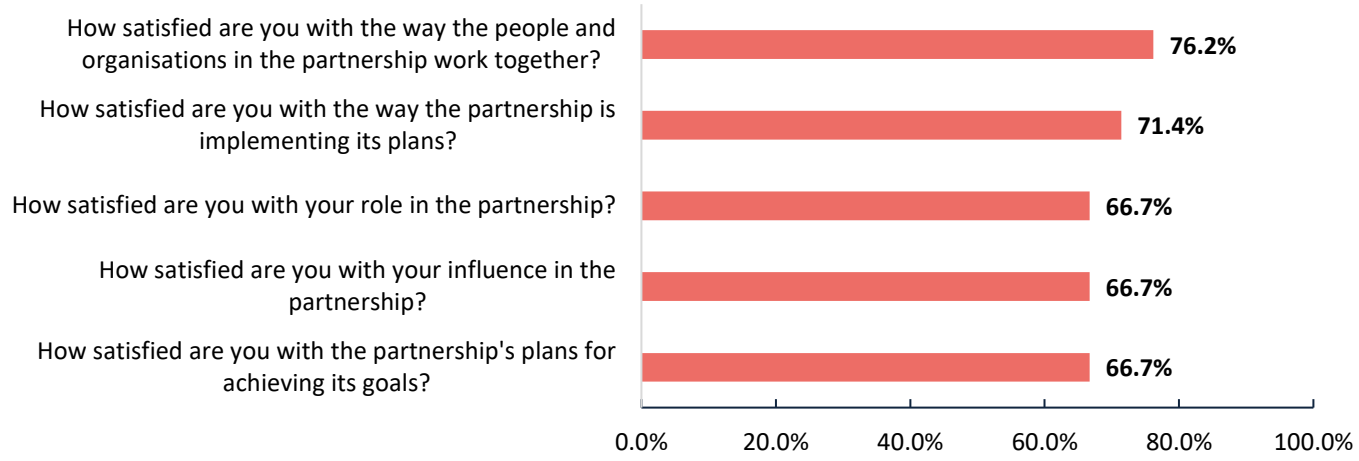
4.3.7 Satisfaction with participation

The PSAT survey asked five questions relating to partners' satisfaction with participation statements (see Figure 10). The responses to these questions (steering group members; n = 21) were summed to provide a mean score indicating the level of partnership satisfaction across the NF programme. The findings here show:

- **Mean score = 3.69**
- **Working zone: More effort is needed in this area to maximise the partnership's collaborative potential.**

Figure 10 shows the proportion of survey respondents who reported being 'completely satisfied' or 'mostly satisfied' across the satisfaction with participation statements. The partnership's mean satisfaction with partnership score declined from 4.11 in 2024/25 to 3.69 in 2025/26, resulting in a shift from the headway zone down to the working zone. There was a decline from last year across all of the questions on satisfaction with participation in the partnership.

Figure 10: Proportion of survey respondents who reported being 'completely' or 'mostly' satisfied across the satisfaction with participation statements (n = 21)



Across sites, participants expressed generally positive views about their experiences within the partnership. Many highlighted the supportive nature of the collaborative environment, noting that partners were welcoming, responsive and willing to work together to achieve shared objectives.

> *"To me, it was a good group who were very committed to getting things done, had a degree of capability and knowledge that really complemented the project."* Site 3 Steering Group Member

> *"It's been great. Everybody's very welcoming. Communication has been timely… it doesn't take forever to get hold of people. We've even been paid fairly quickly, which in a massive organisation like that can take a very long time."* Site 5 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

Participants also highlighted the sustained enthusiasm and commitment of partners over time as an important indicator of the partnership's success. Despite the challenges associated with long-term collaborative work, several sites reported that partners remained engaged and motivated to continue contributing to the programme. Similarly, some interviewees noted that collaboration and mutual support between organisations had strengthened over the course of the programme. In particular, the partnership was seen as enabling organisations to contribute to decision-making processes and support one another's work.

> *"It feels really good now… honestly that everybody's still there and everyone's still passionate. It's pretty amazing after all these years."* Site 2 Lead Coordinator

> *"The communication and the ability for everybody to have their part to make decisions and to empower others and to support each other's organisations grew quite significantly in Year 3."* Site 4 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

However, other interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with how their steering groups had been managed and reported that they wouldn't want to be involved in a project like this again. In addition, some noted starting to feel fatigued with the longevity of the partnership and the burden it places on their organisations' time and resources.

"Would I do it again? Hell no. Absolutely not, me and my community involvement. I'm not doing it. I'm not helping people that don't help my community anymore." Site 3 Steering Group Member

"It's good but a big responsibility. It can be a bit burdensome, which I think shows sometimes with things like attendance or little bickering on funding decisions and people kind of realising that the money's running out, and they haven't got out what they thought they were going to, you know." Site 4 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

Overall, the PSAT results indicate that partnership working across the programme remains functional but has weakened since 2024/25, with most domains shifting from the headway to the working zone. Declines in leadership, administration, satisfaction and efficiency suggest increasing strain on partnership coordination and governance. The pattern points to a maturing programme in which initial structures may no longer be sufficient to support more complex delivery demands, particularly as resources tighten and expectations for strategic decision-making increase.

The findings suggest that variability between sites is a key driver of the overall scores, with one site reporting consistently lower experiences and several others showing mixed or, in some cases, increased performance. This highlights that programme-level averages mask important differences in how partnerships are functioning locally. It also indicates that partnership effectiveness is strongly shaped by governance models, steering group composition and the balance between strategic oversight and delivery involvement. More statutory-led or structured models tended to support clearer decision-making, while more community-led approaches strengthened engagement but sometimes introduced governance and capacity challenges.

Across domains, a consistent theme is the under-utilisation of partnership assets, i.e. skills, networks and resources are present but not always effectively coordinated. This helps explain declines in efficiency and leadership scores and suggests that the issue is less about resource availability and more about how collaboration is structured and managed. Similarly, reductions in administration and satisfaction scores point to meeting fatigue, operational burden and growing tensions around funding decisions and programme conclusion pressures.

The sensitivity analysis reinforces that even where outliers are removed, several domains remain in the working zone, indicating that challenges are systemic across multiple partnerships rather than isolated to a single site. However, retaining all of the responses appropriately preserves important learnings about weaker-performing partnerships and avoids overstating overall programme effectiveness.

For future implementation, the findings suggest a need to strengthen governance design, clarify steering group roles, reduce administrative burden and better structure how expertise is mobilised across partnerships. Greater attention to balancing community ownership with decision-making efficiency and ensuring leadership capacity is sufficient for programme maturity will be critical for sustaining effective partnership working in future years of delivery.

4.3.8 Decision-making

Survey respondents (steering group members; n = 21) were asked how comfortable they felt with the way decisions were made within their partnerships. Compared with the previous year, there was a slight decrease in the proportion of respondents who reported feeling either extremely or very comfortable with partnership decision-making (2024/25: 75.0%; 2025/26: 71.4%). This suggests a modest decline in confidence in partnership decision-making processes.

Respondents were also asked about their involvement in decision-making and the extent to which they supported partnership decisions. The proportion of steering group members who reported supporting partnership decisions all or most of the time decreased from 87.6% in 2024/25 to 80.9% in 2025/26. At the same time, the proportion who reported feeling left out of the decision-making process increased substantially, from 25.0% to 47.6%. Together, these findings suggest that some steering group members felt less included in decision-making processes during 2025/26, which may have contributed to lower levels of support for partnership decisions.

Participation and decision-making

Some participants suggested that, in practice, certain individuals were more vocal during meetings, which could influence the direction of discussions. At the same time, quieter members were not necessarily less committed to the programme's goals and may have contributed in different ways. Other participants highlighted that the diversity of perspectives within the steering group could also be a strength, even when it led to differing viewpoints during discussions.

> *"A lot of the time people use co-production, but it's not really equal. It's just a word they like to chuck about."* Site 5 Steering Group Member

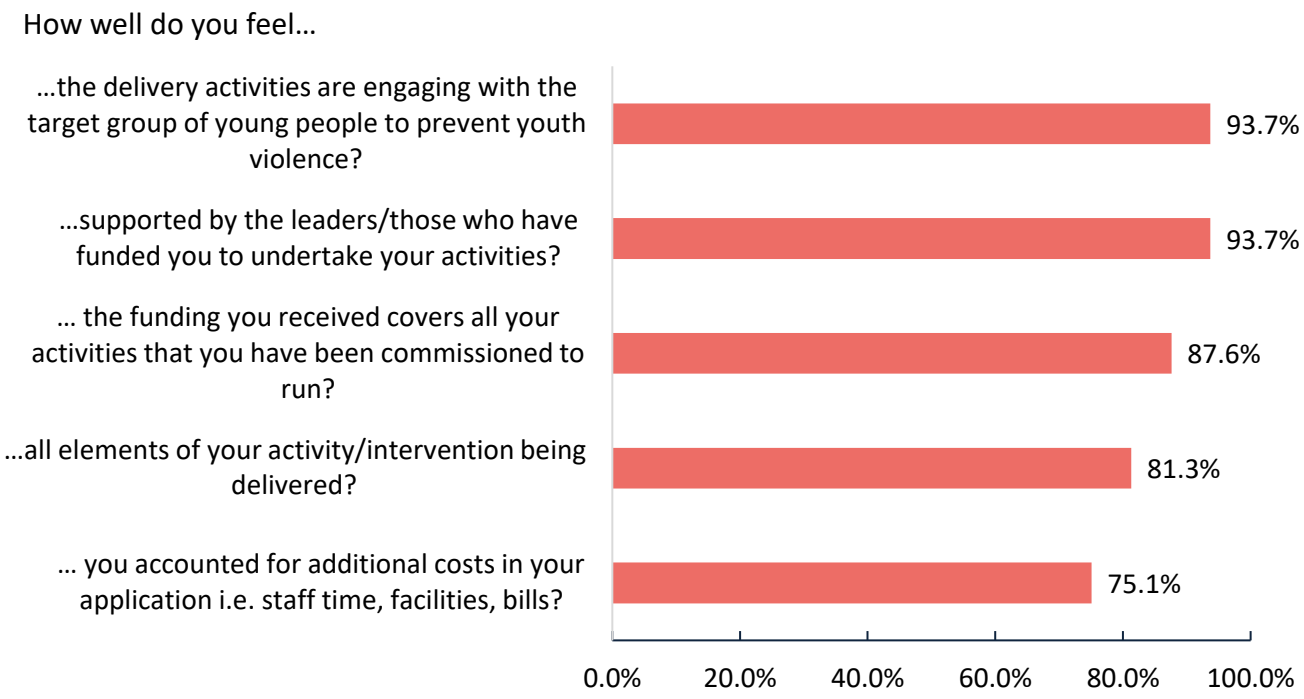
> *"Sometimes you do get one individual who is a bit more vocal… but that individual maybe looks at things from a different point of view and through a different lens."* Site 2 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

A steering group member from one site highlighted tensions in decision-making processes within their steering group, particularly where some members felt excluded from key decisions. The participant suggested that limited involvement in funding decisions conflicted with the intended purpose of a community-led steering group, which was designed to enable shared ownership and collective decision-making.

> *"They didn't want us to be part of the decision-making, yeah, which is the whole ethos and point of the, like, community steering… even around deciding where funding is going to go."* Site 3 Steering Group Member

The delivery partners who participated in the survey were asked how they felt about a number of statements; the number of delivery partners who responded 'very well' or 'well' increased across all statements compared with last year, apart from feeling 'supported by the leaders/those who have funded you to undertake your activities', which declined slightly from last year (2024/25: 100%; 2025/26: 93.7%) (Figure 11). Some survey comments from delivery partners included: *"These projects took a lot more time to set up than anticipated, so more funding to account for this would have been useful."* and *"We had fantastic support from [the lead coordinator organisation] and [the local organisation]. They have always communicated openly and provided the necessary resources and guidance needed to deliver activities. There is always a go-to person who we can communicate with and go to with issues".*

Figure 11: Proportion of delivery partners who reported they feel 'very well' or 'well' about statements relating to their activity/intervention delivery, survey data (n = 16).



Delivery partner feedback remains broadly positive, suggesting operational support is still working well. Overall, the findings highlight a need to strengthen inclusive decision-making and ensure shared ownership is consistently experienced across partnerships.

4.4 Challenges across partnerships and activity/intervention delivery

Across sites, participants identified a range of challenges affecting programme delivery, partnership functioning and long-term sustainability. These challenges related to learning and evaluation processes, the wider political and community context, steering group governance and participation, staffing changes and the capacity of delivery organisations. While many of these challenges are typical of complex, multi-partner initiatives, they highlight areas where additional support, coordination or structural adjustments may strengthen programme delivery. Some challenges remained consistent with previous years, including data inaccuracy, difficulties engaging with certain external partners – particularly political partners – and the demands placed on the lead coordinator. However, several notable new challenges emerged this year, including significant issues within steering groups, the disbandment of one steering group, challenges related to steering group formation and difficulties surrounding funding decisions.

4.4.1 Wider project challenges

Learning, evaluation and data collection

Learning and evaluation remained important components of the programme; however, several participants noted that opportunities for collective reflection had become more limited over time. Earlier in the programme, facilitated sessions by the learning partners provided space for steering groups to discuss challenges and share learning more formally and informally. Some participants felt that these opportunities had been valuable and expressed a sense of loss as the programme progressed into Year 3 without the learning partners' reflections.

"Like, I do kind of miss the… I miss the sessions that we had with [the learning partner organisation]." Site 1 Lead Coordinator

In addition to reduced opportunities for reflective discussion, delivery organisations reported practical difficulties associated with the monitoring and reporting requirements. Many organisations were focused primarily on delivering activities and supporting young people, which sometimes made it challenging to capture the detailed monitoring data required for evaluation.

"We may be struggling in that [monitoring] aspect of things, but we never struggle in the fundamental core thing [intervention delivery]." Site 2 Delivery Partner

A related challenge concerned the nature of some delivery activities, which made it difficult to collect detailed participation data. Detached youth work and other informal engagement activities often involve interacting with young people in community spaces rather than structured sessions with formal registration processes. Similarly, delivery partners noted that some activities involve fluid participation, making it difficult to track attendance or collect demographic information.

"I think it's very difficult because realistically we ain't captured their name, we ain't captured their age, we ain't captured their demographic… because they've engaged with us and said hello to them – that's their engagement." Site 3 Delivery Partner

"It's very hard to record certain amounts of data… because numbers fly in and fly out all the time." Site 2 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

Partners also described difficulties tracking longer-term outcomes once programme activities ended, particularly where organisations lacked the capacity to maintain ongoing contact with participants.

"We are seeing improvement… but after the end of the delivery, there's no way we can track if students need more support." Site 5 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

Over time, some improvements in the monitoring processes were reported as partnerships refined their reporting systems and clarified evaluation requirements.

"I feel like our quarterly reporting has got so much easier because we're gathering the right data from the project… some of the organisations we've funded… are the best [places] to do the activity that they do, but they're not always the best at reporting it." Site 3 Lead Coordinator

External context and community factors

Participants highlighted the influence of external political, social and environmental factors on programme delivery. Local political developments, policy changes and community dynamics sometimes affected partnerships' ability to progress work or maintain momentum. In some areas, wider political developments were felt to have indirect impacts on community cohesion and partnership working. Relationships with local authorities also varied between sites. While some partners described positive collaboration, others noted challenges related to differing priorities or slower decision-making processes.

"There are a lot of hurdles sometimes in certain sensitive topics, which kind of negate the progress and the flow of the group." Site 2 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

"Since the national election, we've also had a Reform MP who's now gone independent… there are indirect impacts from some of his comments as an MP in relation to community cohesion, which impact on this project." Site 4 Steering Group Member

"In some cases, the local authority has been really good, but in other cases they've been no good… they're doing their thing, and when we want to work with them… they don't really see the opportunity of collaborating." Site 2 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

Participants also highlighted how broader negative community events have led to reductions in perceptions of safety, influencing young people's participation in activities.

"Children and parents not feeling safe to go out… that's the bit that we found most difficult to unstick over this whole project because it's so outside of the fund itself." Site 1 Lead Coordinator

4.4.2 Steering group challenges

Complexity of the lead coordinator role and managing partnership dynamics

Several sites reflected on the complexity of the lead coordinator role, with participants noting that the scope and demands of the position were often greater than initially anticipated. While many of the lead organisations involved had extensive experience delivering programmes directly to CYPs, acting as a coordinating body responsible for managing partnerships, distributing funding and overseeing governance structures required a different set of organisational processes and leadership skills.

"We've always focused on delivering programmes ourselves, and this is one of the first projects where we're sort of acting as a consortium lead to grant aid [to] other organisations to do the sort of on-the-ground delivery." Site 3 Lead Coordinator

Facilitating community-led steering groups and coordinating a diverse network of partners required significant time and effort, particularly when partners held differing priorities, organisational cultures or expectations about the programme. Several lead coordinators described how managing these relationships involved responding to tensions or disagreements between organisations, which required careful facilitation and, at times, mediation.

"The nature of it, because it's about relationships… we have crises, and people fall out, and you need to kind of firefight a lot of the time." Site 2 Lead Coordinator

Lead coordinators also highlighted the challenge of navigating local politics and organisational disputes regarding booking physical spaces to run activities while trying to maintain neutrality, particularly where these issues fell outside the direct remit of the lead coordinator role.

"There seems to be heavy politics involved, and we're trying to not get involved in the politics on disagreements about who manages access to that space, because that's not our role." Site 5 Lead Coordinator

The breadth of responsibilities associated with the lead coordinator role also presented capacity challenges, particularly where the coordination of partnerships, programme delivery and governance structures rested largely with a single individual. Some sites reflected that stronger organisational oversight and multiple lead

coordinators with their own areas of expertise working together could have helped manage these demands more effectively.

> *"I think there's learnings from our side. We had a member of staff who came in and was very capable. And I think there was a mistake from our side that we kind of left that person to their own devices and we didn't stay close enough to what was going on… just checking and challenging and stuff."* Site 3 Lead Coordinator

Despite these challenges, several participants emphasised that effective leadership from lead coordinators had been critical in maintaining the stability of local partnerships during Year 3 and enabling the programme to continue.

> *"Without them, I don't think this would have stayed together, achieved what it achieved and benefited us as much as it has."* Site 2 Steering Group Member

As discussed earlier, nearly all sites discussed how group discussions could also be influenced by uneven participation, with some members dominating conversations while others contributed less actively.

> *"We're encouraging everyone in the group to put something forward, because you do get people that can dominate conversations."* Site 4 Lead Coordinator

Steering group governance and participation

Several challenges related to the functioning and structure of steering groups. Attendance and scheduling were frequently raised as barriers to consistent participation. Meetings were sometimes difficult for statutory partners or senior leaders to attend due to time pressures or conflicting responsibilities. Other factors affecting attendance included meeting length and logistical barriers, such as meetings held in locations that were less accessible or where hybrid meeting arrangements were difficult to arrange.

> *"If 15 organisations were invited to attend [a working group], you'd probably get 13 out of the 15, but on a steering group, you'd probably get 50% attendance, just due to availability."* Site 4 Steering Group Member

In addition, differences in expectations around the purpose of steering groups sometimes affected engagement. While some members were interested in broader systems change, others primarily focused on delivering their own activities.

> *"There are some who… say 'I just want to come do my thing… provide activities and then go home. I'm not as bothered about these wider things.'"* Site 5 Lead Coordinator

Another challenge identified across some sites related to maintaining consistent engagement from steering group members over the duration of the programme. While many partners remained enthusiastic and committed, some participants suggested that involvement in the partnership represented only one component of an individual's wider professional responsibilities. As a result, maintaining focus on the partnership's wider objectives could sometimes be difficult when partners were balancing multiple competing demands.

> *"I think, in all honesty, people are essentially just too busy. This is one strand of work that they do compared to other local work that they're getting on with."* Site 2 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

Funding and decision-making

Two sites expressed concerns to varying degrees about transparency in relation to funding decisions. In particular, a small number of interviewees suggested that they were not always clear about how decisions were made at levels above the local steering group.

> *"It's odd because the money comes from mysterious… because we know what our steering group does, and we know roughly whether things are funded or not, but the decisions that are above us I don't think we're always clear about."* Site 4 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

Funding allocation within the partnership could also create challenges, with competition for limited funding contributing to tensions, particularly when organisations involved in the steering group applied for funding but were unsuccessful. Participants emphasised that these situations were rarely driven by competition or financial motivations alone but often reflected the resource pressures faced by community organisations.

> *"We got way more applications for the microgrants than we had anticipated, and some people missed out on that, and there was a lot of fallout."* Site 2 Lead Coordinator

> *"It's not that they're grabbing for money or anything. It's just that they need to be doing the work that they're doing… they're working with really wonderful people and are burnt out."* Site 2 Lead Coordinator

Steering group size, focus and sustainability

In Year 3, several sites reflected on the challenges associated with the size and governance of steering groups. As the programme developed, many partnerships experienced growing interest from local organisations wishing to become involved. While this expansion was widely viewed as a positive outcome, reflecting increased trust in the programme and stronger local engagement, it also introduced practical challenges for managing meetings and maintaining a clear strategic focus. Participants noted that while large steering groups could bring valuable perspectives and wider representation, they could also make meetings more difficult to manage and slow decision-making processes. In some cases, interviewees felt that governance structures had become less clearly defined over time as the partnership expanded.

> *"We do recognise that something needs to change to make it more structured… it's kind of drifted away from over time."* Site 5 Lead Coordinator

Some sites also reported periods where steering groups had lost momentum or focus, highlighting the need for renewed structure or leadership to ensure that meetings remained purposeful and aligned with programme objectives. In addition, after several years of engagement, a small number of participants suggested that fatigue among long-standing partners could affect participation and energy within the group.

> *"We're kind of rebuilding the steering group at the moment. It's got a little bit lost."* Site 2 Lead Coordinator

> *"One of the things of doing this hyperlocal neighbourhood work is that… you're calling on the same people a lot of the time, and the energy after three or four years… it kind of starts to wane."* Site 2 Lead Coordinator

Another site highlighted the importance of steering group membership and composition evolving over time in response to the changing needs of the project. Participants acknowledged that the partnerships established at the beginning of a programme may not always remain the most appropriate configurations as priorities, activities and relationships develop. As a result, some sites recognised that it may be necessary for membership to change during the lifetime of the project, with some early members stepping back while new organisations or individuals become involved to better support the programme's current stage.

> *"It's not easy to set up steering groups that stay for the duration of a programme, you know, without changing into something else or having to be stopped and started again. You know…, that's a lesson learned in and of itself really."* Site 3 Lead Coordinator

Lead coordinator staffing changes

Three out of the five sites have had changes in the individuals representing lead coordinator organisations at some point in the past three years of delivery. Staff turnover and organisational changes also affected programme delivery and partnership functioning in some areas. Changes in key personnel sometimes disrupted relationships, decision-making processes and continuity within partnerships.

> *"We had staff changes… people got promoted… which was great, but it made things difficult because it felt like we didn't always know exactly where we were heading."* Site 4 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

Participants also highlighted how the departure or absence of key individuals, such as lead coordinators, led to temporary leadership gaps.

> *"[The lead coordinator] not being here… left a bit of a leadership gap… we did a lot of repairing work after that and a lot of relationship building."* Site 2 Lead Coordinator

Despite these difficulties, some participants noted that staff changes could also bring new perspectives and renewed energy to partnerships.

> *"I do think [the lead coordinator] has been a really good appointment… they are very good at explaining everything."* Site 4 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

Taken together, these findings suggest that the most effective steering group models were characterised by clear governance arrangements, strong and consistent leadership, a balance of statutory and community representation and a clear distinction between strategic oversight and delivery functions. Smaller steering groups, supported by task-and-finish or working groups, were often perceived as better able to maintain focus and support decision-making while still enabling wider stakeholder engagement. Partnerships also appeared to benefit from flexible governance arrangements that could evolve over time in response to changing local needs and membership. These features may provide useful considerations for the design of future neighbourhood-based initiatives seeking to establish sustainable and effective local partnerships.

Disbandment of a steering group

Box 1: Details relating to the disbandment of a steering group

During the current evaluation period, one site experienced some significant challenges in relation to its steering group, resulting in its disbandment. Due to an ongoing conflict between the lead coordinator and a steering group member, steering group meetings were paused for around 10–12 months. While the steering group reconvened after two meetings, the lead coordinator/organisation, in consultation with the YEF, decided to disband the steering group in its existing form, citing that the group had become untenable. The steering group members interviewed for this evaluation reported that the decision was communicated without consultation and that engagement with the lead coordinator had become difficult. Further, they expressed considerable disappointment, particularly given their long-term involvement in the project and the significant voluntary time and effort they had contributed. Equally, they noted that the NF fund was seen as an opportunity to rebuild relationships between the community, which already had a mistrust of initiatives, and organisations and that the disbandment of the steering group may have further affected trust within the community. All of the steering group members interviewed disagreed with the decision to disband the group and did not consider the situation to be irreparable.

"We've had to bypass a bit of the steering group function. I guess, weighing up, do we wait endlessly until this issue is resolved and the project falls miles behind, or do we continue to engage where we can constructively make decisions and continue to get the money out?" Lead Coordinator

"Implemented [steering group disbandment] without any due regard to the steering group's feelings, their work or anything. There was no regard to [the] involvement of the steering group at any point, but unbeknownst to us, they've been continuing with the delivering of the action plan." Former Steering Group Member

"It relied on a huge amount of goodwill for the project to happen and for it to be completely community delivered and community-owned." Former Steering Group Member

"I work in the area, and I do believe that they are right in saying that there is damage as a result [of the steering group disbandment]." Former Steering Group Member

During this period, the lead coordinator/organisation continued to implement the action plan without steering group input, a decision viewed as necessary to ensure the NF stayed on track and supported by the YEF. However, interviewees reported that tensions emerged regarding decision-making authority, particularly in relation to elements of the project action plan that were funded during this hiatus period. The steering group members raised concerns about decisions that were made without their involvement, especially regarding a delivery activity that represented a substantial proportion of the project's allocated funding. Their concerns centred on whether the proposed activity represented value for money and whether alternative approaches might have supported a greater number of young people. Despite these challenges, delivery continued during this period, with young people still able to access activities.

"They just launched it without us because we were challenging them. They didn't want us to be part of the decision-making." Former Steering Group Member

More broadly, some steering group members raised concerns about the overall governance and management of the NF programme, highlighting perceived shortcomings across multiple levels of delivery and oversight and suggesting that there should have been greater direct engagement from the funder in response to the situation.

"I think they should have consulted with YEF, because it's YEF's money. YEF should have came down and spoke to the steering group in person to find out what had gone on and not just listened to [the lead coordinator]'s side." Former Steering Group Member

As of April 2026, a new Birmingham steering group has been established with a combination of young people (18–24 years) from the local community and statutory organisations, including the Local Community Safety Partnership (LCSP). The key learning being carried forward has included the development of refreshed Terms of Reference, clearer governance and decision-making arrangements, stronger oversight through the LCSP and the recruitment of a new steering group, including 10 local young people. These changes, alongside significant work by the lead coordinator to rebuild partner confidence, have strengthened governance, embedded youth voice within partnership structures and better supported the programme's long-term sustainability.

4.5.3 Delivery partner challenges

Capacity of delivery organisations

Many delivery partners were small grassroots organisations with strong community connections but limited staffing capacity and resources. This sometimes created challenges in balancing programme delivery with wider organisational responsibilities. One delivery partner described difficulties in securing appropriately skilled staff to deliver activities, while a survey respondent highlighted concerns about ensuring that the right facilitators were available to help girls feel comfortable and engaged in sessions. Another delivery partner noted that their programme operated only on a limited number of key evenings each week, resulting in gaps in provision.

> *"We're not running a smooth corporate operation… it's one or two staff members who work part-time trying to deliver on complex needs that people have."* Site 2 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

> *"Getting women to volunteer/support for the female-only sessions."* Delivery Partner Survey Respondent

> *"I suppose, in terms of like a challenge, it could be potentially like capacity. In an ideal world, you'd have money to kind of run it across more days. How do you mitigate that risk, which on our shifts is brilliant, it doesn't happen, but then what happens when we're not here?"* Site 3 Delivery Partner

Limited staffing capacity, particularly in schools, also affected delivery organisations' ability to engage with schools, statutory services or other partners.

> *"The tricky part has been trying to get through to the secondary schools… there's not enough staff, the SENCO's [special educational needs coordinator's] really busy."* Site 5 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

Some grassroots organisations initially lacked confidence in engaging with partnership processes or delivering funded projects, requiring additional support and encouragement.

> *"The challenge was bringing those people that have never done anything like this… and walking alongside them and supporting them."* Site 5 Steering Group Member

Resources, infrastructure and funding

Access to suitable facilities, infrastructure and funding also presented challenges for some delivery partners. In particular, organisations highlighted difficulties securing appropriate venues or community spaces for activities. Some delivery organisations across several sites identified the lack of a permanent base or hub as a barrier to expanding their activities and limiting the types of activities that they can offer young people. One site noted that not having a base in the winter months is a significant challenge due to safety reasons.

> *"I think the adaptation that we would make is we would have a specific building that we can take some of the young people up, especially when it gets dark. Because summer is amazing, brilliant, we can make it work, but when it gets dark, it gets a little more complex because then you've now got different levels of risk, especially within the areas*

that we work with, especially when it comes to risk of serious youth violence and harm." Site 3 Delivery Partner

Uncertainty around future funding also affected planning and sustainability. However, partners were aware of the importance of making sure organisations who are having the biggest impact and getting better value for money were awarded funding again but acknowledged that measuring these impacts can be difficult, which led to uncertainty when it comes to funding decisions.

"You never know whether you're getting funding… and that weakens the projects because you're not sure what you're doing." Site 4 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

Engagement with communities and young people

Finally, participants described challenges related to engaging communities and supporting young people with complex needs. Some sites acknowledged that it can be difficult to engage with young people who may experience *"exhaustion"* from constant different messages around violence prevention and safety from multiple sources and that sometimes interventions need to adapt to this to deliver their messages in more *"bite-size"* ways. In some cases, organisations experienced resistance from community members when addressing sensitive issues, such as youth violence or crime, due to not wanting to label the area as problematic and criminalising young people. One delivery partner discussed how they have found it difficult to get parents to allow their children to engage in activities.

"You will always get people pushing back… when you're trying to reduce knife crime, violence and criminalisation of youth." Site 2 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

"Trying to convince parents to send the girls to girls-only sessions." Delivery Partner Survey Respondent

Despite this, the demand for services often exceeded the capacity of the delivery organisations.

"Some of the sports organisations are just overwhelmed with the need… there's just a lot to do." Site 2 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

4.5 Strategies to overcome challenges

This section outlines the range of strategies partnerships adopted to address delivery and governance challenges, including improving young people's engagement, adapting programme structures and delivery approaches, strengthening data collection, enhancing collaboration and communication and making flexible use of resources and existing community networks.

4.5.1 Listening to youth voices to improve retention and engagement

Incentives and practical support for young people

For some organisations, providing food during sessions became an important way of supporting young people's wellbeing, encouraging continued engagement and responding to the wider social and economic challenges affecting young people in the communities. Delivery partners noted that, for some young people, the programme activities provided access to resources that might not otherwise be available to them.

"This is the first time they eat in a day. Let's provide them a meal. Let's give them something that they can go and actually want to come back. So every time, they're like 'Oh, I'm hungry', they're not eating, and it's because of the deprivation within the area." Site 3 Delivery Partner

Building relationships and trust with local communities

Delivery partners highlighted that building trust with young people and families was a key strategy for overcoming engagement challenges. Many organisations emphasised the importance of consistency, familiarity and responsiveness to community needs in order to create environments where participants felt safe and comfortable attending activities. Several partners described how maintaining consistent staffing and scheduling activities at convenient times helped strengthen relationships with families over time.

"We ensure that we have consistent staff across the project so that families can get to know us and feel safe with us. We ensure that we run at a time when families have told us is convenient." Delivery Partner Survey Respondent

Others emphasised that trust building is often a gradual process, particularly when working with families of young people with additional needs. Establishing activities in familiar locations and connecting with existing peer networks were identified as important approaches to supporting engagement.

"Relationship building by using a trusted location for families of disabled young people and making links in their peer support networks, accepting that this trust comes slowly and is built over time. Being fully flexible and adaptable to the needs of the participants and their families." Delivery Partner Survey Respondent

In some cases, delivery partners also worked closely with parents to address concerns and build confidence in the programme. For example, one organisation described inviting parents to remain present during sessions in order to reassure them about how activities were delivered.

"Some parents stay at the sessions and monitor them, because they assumed the sessions will eventually be mixed gender. Which is not true." Delivery Partner Survey Respondent

4.5.2 Flexibility, adaptability and diversity

Adapting steering group structures and membership

Participants highlighted the need for ongoing reflection on the composition of steering groups and consideration of how membership could adapt to support the programme's objectives. It was suggested from several sites that reducing the main steering group down to a few key individuals or organisations could make meetings more manageable and allow them to more effectively make decisions. Then there could additionally be wider partner meetings/events to share updates and act as a network so organisations could continue to collaborate together. While some sites are already successfully following this model, other sites plan to implement a similar structure over the coming year, with the hopes that this way of working may solve some challenges relating to their steering groups during Year 3.

Some sites responded by experimenting with different meeting formats or creating additional opportunities for networking and collaboration outside of formal governance meetings. This helped ensure that discussions relating to delivery, learning and collaboration had sufficient space within partnership processes.

"Now, after two years of delivery, we have learnt many things, and now we are trying to change this strategy of steering group meetings a little bit… we are making sure that we do get some extra time out, either in [the] form of a different meeting… or a networking meeting so that small organisations can talk to each other, network and collaborate. It's a work in progress." Site 5 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

This was echoed by another site, which felt that having separate meetings for steering group business and another for sharing updates on delivery activities could help ensure sufficient time and space for both. However, some participants suggested that collaboration could be strengthened further by encouraging more interactive discussion between delivery partners rather than by focusing primarily on reporting progress.

"Making sure all the interventions continually share back in a collaborative format, not a feedback format… like a shared collaboration in the sense, 'This is what I've been doing, this is a challenge, this is where you can help with all the interventions'." Site 2 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

In response to steering group size challenges, several sites introduced or strengthened sub-groups or working groups focused on specific delivery areas, with these groups reporting back to the main steering group. Participants generally felt that this structure helped distribute responsibilities more effectively while enabling the steering group to retain a clearer strategic focus.

"I think now in Year 3… we are able to better anticipate those problems because of how those working groups seem to have harmonised over the last year." Site 4 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

Adapting delivery approaches

Flexibility was also evident in the way delivery partners adapted their activities to better meet the needs of young people and communities. Rather than applying rigid programme models, many organisations modified their approaches in response to participant engagement, emerging needs or practical challenges. For example, delivery partners sometimes adjusted the expectations around participation in order to maintain engagement among young people who might not initially feel comfortable joining structured activities. Creating informal opportunities for conversation and social interaction allowed young people to remain connected to activities even when they were not fully participating.

"You don't have to participate today, just have a little 10-minute chat, grab a bit of food, chill, relax… they're there for the social element of it." Site 2 Delivery Partner

Programmes were adapted to address the gaps in provision identified during delivery. In one site, partners recognised that young people with more complex disabilities were underrepresented in the activities and responded by developing targeted provision while also supporting other community groups to make their activities more inclusive.

"We've recognised that there's a gap in terms of disability… we've got one group that are doing activities specifically around young people with quite severe physical and learning disabilities… and that group offered training, so we're trying to encourage our other community groups… to understand how to adapt their provision." Site 5 Lead Coordinator

Flexibility in action planning and funding

Flexibility was also embedded within the design of local action plans, particularly in relation to the allocation of small grants funding. Rather than prescribing specific activities from the outset, some sites intentionally left elements of their plans open to allow partnerships to respond to evolving local priorities.

> *"There was the flexibility in the action plan, particularly around the small grants… what was in the action plan was about delivering small grants, and there was always a flexibility to those being able to meet the current needs of the neighbourhood… it was never detailed or specified what the small grants would be for."* Site 5 Lead Coordinator

This approach enabled partnerships to support a diverse range of initiatives and respond to community needs as they emerged during the programme.

4.5.3 Improving data collection

As previously highlighted, several participants noted that capturing monitoring data could be difficult in practice, particularly when staff were focused primarily on delivering activities and responding to the immediate needs of participants. As a result, some organisations found it challenging to consistently record participation data or complete reporting requirements alongside their delivery responsibilities. One delivery partner described how improving data collection and maintaining accurate records required sustained effort and ongoing reminders within their team.

> *"I kind of spoke to all the mentors and facilitators. We all unanimously found it difficult to keep recording numbers. It's because we're so busy and in the zone that we kind of forget, but we've got to provide some sort of report here, got to evaluate here, and we've got to give it to the funders. So the last six months I've been just drilling, drilling, drilling everyone."* Site 2 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

Recognising these challenges, some partnerships introduced targeted strategies to support organisations in strengthening their monitoring and evaluation processes. Rather than focusing solely on compliance, these approaches emphasised capacity building through practical support, simplified reporting tools and direct guidance. For example, one site described providing one-to-one support sessions with delivery organisations to help them understand reporting requirements and develop systems for capturing the necessary data.

> *"Rather than just penalising these groups… we're simplifying our reporting tools, we hold one-to-one guidance sessions with each organisation that's struggling with it."* Site 5 Steering Group Member

These efforts were seen as particularly important for smaller community organisations, which often operate with limited administrative capacity but play a key role in delivering locally trusted services. By providing tailored support and simplifying monitoring processes, partnerships aimed to ensure that organisations could continue focusing on high-quality delivery while also meeting evaluation and reporting requirements.

4.5.4 Celebrating success and strengthening visibility

Celebrating successes and communicating achievements were identified as important strategies for maintaining motivation among partners, recognising the contributions of young people and strengthening understanding of the programme's outcomes among wider stakeholders. Several participants highlighted

the value of sharing examples of successful activities or positive outcomes as a way of reinforcing collective progress and maintaining engagement within partnerships.

In some sites, short videos or blogs featuring young people involved in the programme were used to highlight achievements and share updates with the steering group. These materials provided a way of recognising the contributions of participants while also illustrating the impact of the activities taking place across the programme.

> *"When we have some great successes, we like to celebrate them. [The lead organisation] have got into a habit of putting very short video or blogs together, which they play into the steering group, and they've normally been developed with the children and young people in the project."* Site 4 Steering Group Member

Another participant noted that stronger external communication about the programme's achievements could help demonstrate the value of the work being delivered.

> *"One of the challenges that I do give from time to time to the project director is how much we shout about the project… it would be really helpful… to say, do you know what, we did this, and without us, we wouldn't have achieved X."*
> Site 4 Steering Group Member

4.5.5 Leveraging funding and resources

Another strategy used by partnerships to sustain delivery involved maximising existing funding streams and identifying opportunities to extend or align funding where possible. In some cases, this involved coordinating multiple funding sources to extend the duration of programme activities. Several sites described how partnerships had successfully aligned funding from different sources to match funds or to allow delivery to continue beyond the original end date.

> *"With the steering group's agreement, [the lead organisation] have managed to take the YEF funding and the [matched funding]… out. Instead of ending in June, it'll end in August of this year."* Site 4 Steering Group Member

> *"The [funding name] match funding has allowed us to put in bit more specific targeted support for girls, so there's quite a few girl-specific programmes running now."* Site 1 Lead Coordinator

4.5.6 Building trust and strengthening community engagement through existing relationships and shared expertise

Building trust within communities and among local organisations was also identified as a key strategy for strengthening programme participation and expanding delivery over time. In some areas, initial hesitation from organisations or community groups reduced once partners were able to demonstrate that funding and delivery commitments would be realised.

> *"Once we were able to show that the delivery was going to happen… that kind of then encouraged some of the other groups that might have been hesitant to start with to become involved."* Site 5 Lead Coordinator

Communication tools played an important role in maintaining engagement between partners. For example, some sites used messaging platforms to share updates, promote funding opportunities and celebrate activities taking place across the programme.

> *"We've got the WhatsApp group, which is the kind of main form of communication for sharing programme updates… it's the first place we post when the next [set] of funding is available. It's a space for people to share pictures of their activities."* Site 5 Lead Coordinator

Partnerships benefited from drawing upon existing relationships and networks within local communities. Many delivery partners had longstanding connections with other youth organisations, community groups and services, which helped facilitate collaboration and expand the reach of programme activities. One delivery partner described how these relationships helped spread awareness of the programme and encourage participation from other organisations.

> *"Using what other youth services there are… these are the sort of organisations that I've worked with previously and built a good relationship with and just said, 'Look, can you spread this message out?'"* Site 5 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

Taken together, the findings suggest that while programme delivery has continued successfully, partnership systems are under increasing operational and relational pressure. The challenges are not isolated but interconnected, particularly around capacity, governance complexity and data demands. This indicates a need for clearer governance structures, strengthened coordination capacity and more proportionate expectations around evaluation and reporting in future delivery phases.

4.6 What are stakeholders' and children and young people's views on the programme?

The Year 3 evaluation explored the perceived outcomes of the programme for CYPs, local communities and partnership organisations. This includes reflections on the benefits and drawbacks of participation, alongside early sustainability plans and how stakeholders see the programme developing in the future. As part of this, it also explores CYPs' perceptions of their local areas to further inform both current delivery and future programme development. This section discusses the following themes and sub-themes (Table 10).

Table 10: Summary of themes and sub-themes

Theme	Sub-themes
Outcomes to date from intervention/activity delivery	• Benefits and drawbacks of participation in the partnerships • Emerging outcomes for children and young people (CYPs): improved confidence, wellbeing and sense of belonging, development of skills, aspiration and employability, access to new experiences and opportunities, youth voice, leadership and active citizenship • Emerging outcomes for local community • Emerging partnership outcomes
Sustainability of the Neighbourhood Fund programme	• Strengthening organisational capacity • Sustaining partnerships and collaborative networks • The role of coordination and backbone support

	• Securing long-term funding and resources • Planning for long-term legacy
CYPs' perceptions of their local areas	• Community connection and belonging • Diversity and multicultural environments • Limited facilities and opportunities • Environmental and safety concerns

4.6.1 Benefits and drawbacks of participation in the partnerships

**Over three-quarters (76.1%) of the steering group member survey respondents (n = 21) reported that the perceived benefits of participating in the steering group greatly exceeded/exceeded the drawbacks. This represents a decrease compared with Year 2 (93.9%), although the majority of respondents continue to view participation positively overall. There has also been a small increase in the proportion of respondents reporting that benefits and drawbacks are equal (9.5% compared with 3% in Year 2), as well as those reporting that drawbacks exceed or greatly exceed benefits (14.3% compared with 3% in Year 2).

Figures 12 and 13 illustrate the proportion of steering group survey respondents who reported specific benefits and drawbacks gained through their involvement in the partnership. The majority of respondents reported experiencing benefits such as the ability to contribute to their communities and the development of valuable relationships, with slightly fewer reporting that they felt their partnerships were having wider contributions to systems and policies. However, respondents also reported a range of drawbacks, most commonly the diversion of time and resources away from other priorities, frustration or aggravation and perceptions of insufficient influence in partnership activities or recognition for contributions. These findings suggest that while partnerships continue to be viewed positively, there may be increasing pressures associated with participation, such as the previously mentioned challenges with capacity, resources, funding and engagement. It may also reflect the cumulative demands of sustained engagement over the course of the programme, with partners balancing ongoing involvement alongside other priorities, as well as evolving expectations around influence, recognition and impact as the partnerships and project develop.

Figure 12: Proportion of survey respondents who reported 'yes' to experiencing the following benefits because of their participation in their partnership (n = 21)

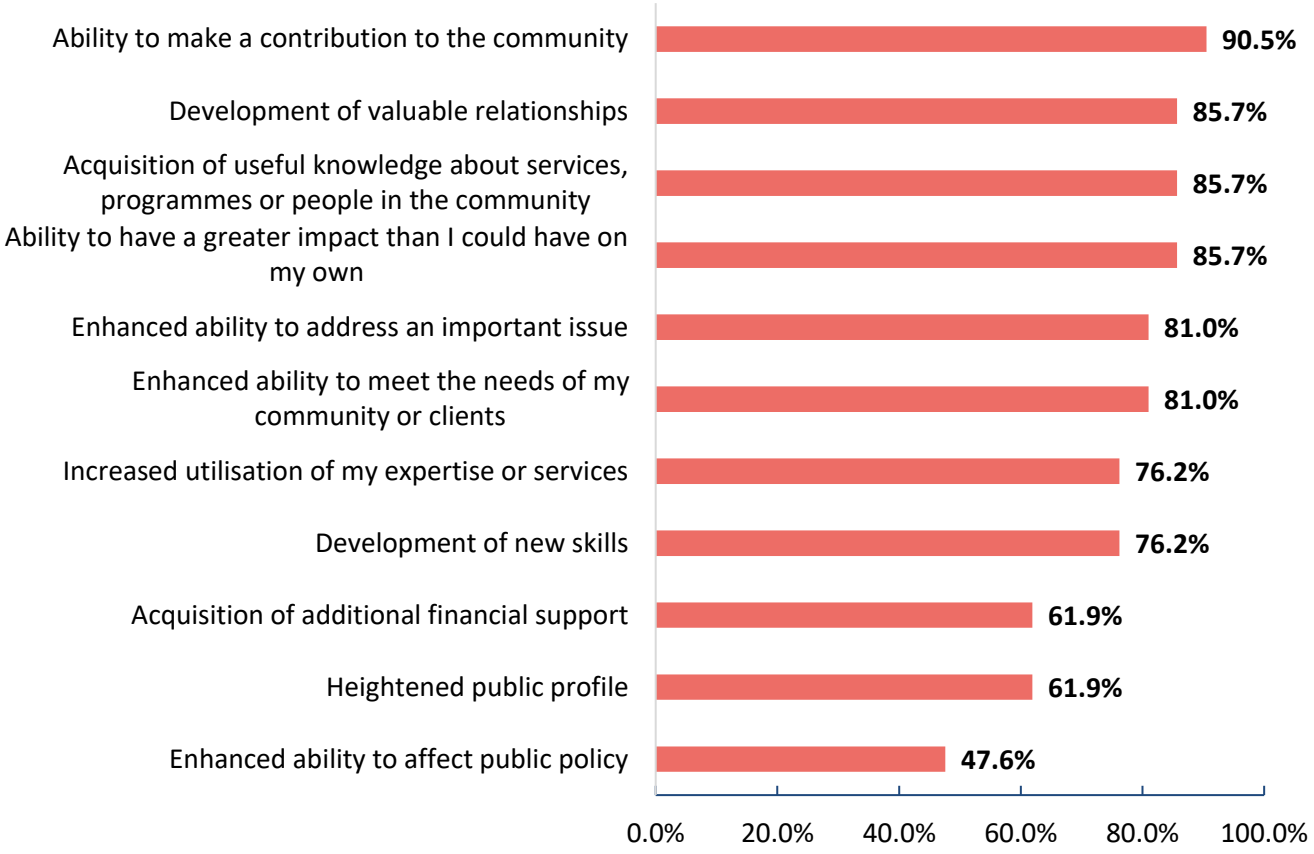
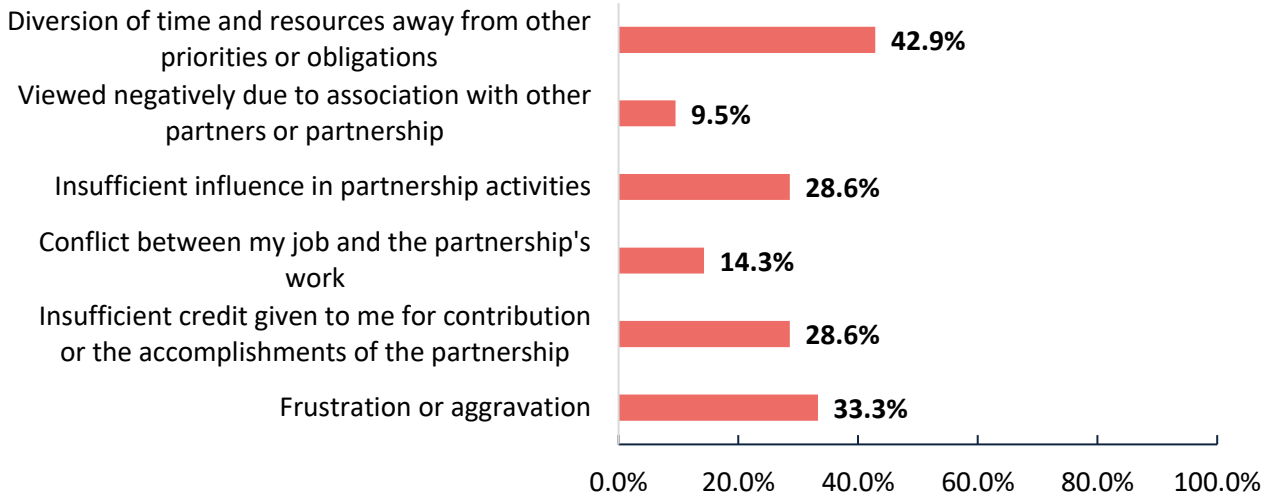


Figure 13: Proportion of survey respondents who reported 'yes' or 'no' to experiencing the following drawbacks because of their participation in their partnership (n = 21)



4.6.2 Emerging programme outcomes

This section summarises emerging evidence that the programme is contributing to change for CYPs, communities and partner organisations across the five sites. Longer-term quantitative impacts will be explored through the summative impact evaluation; however, the qualitative feedback collected this year highlights continued progress against key programme aims and broader alignment with the updated ToC. It should be noted that the majority of the qualitative evidence presented in this section is derived from interviews with steering group members, lead coordinators and delivery partners, who reflected on the observed changes and perceived impacts of the programme. While the perspectives of young people are also included where available and are acknowledged throughout this section, there is a disparity between the volume of evidence obtained from stakeholders and that gathered directly from CYPs. As such, findings relating to outcomes for young people should be interpreted primarily as stakeholder perceptions, supported by more limited direct evidence from CYPs. Across sites, these stakeholder accounts, alongside available feedback from young people, suggest that the outcomes identified during Year 2, including improved confidence, trusted relationships, youth voice and partnership working, have continued to develop. The Year 3 findings also provide stronger qualitative evidence of leadership development, employability pathways, community participation and more established partnership and referral networks. Collectively, these findings indicate a positive direction of travel towards the programme's longer-term aims relating to violence prevention, community trust and stronger local systems while recognising that these conclusions will require further validation through the forthcoming summative impact evaluation.

Emerging outcomes for children and young people

Improved confidence, wellbeing and sense of belonging

Across the sites, improved confidence and wellbeing were among the most consistently reported outcomes for CYPs participating in programme activities. Delivery partners described how young people who initially joined sessions with low confidence or limited social connections often became more comfortable engaging with peers and participating in group activities over time. The survey responses reflected this theme, with one respondent reporting that participation in programme activities helped young people *"grow in confidence, feel more connected to others and develop a stronger sense of belonging"* (Delivery Partner Survey Respondent).

"I would say confidence – confidence in who you are and your identity." Site 1 CYP

Participation in sports, creative activities and youth-led initiatives was seen to help young people strengthen their self-belief, develop friendships and feel part of a supportive peer environment.

"I think the biggest impact that we're seeing most consistently from the different delivery is the growth in self-confidence of young people taking part in the activities… that confidence hopefully then develops into aspirations and future hopes and goals as they continue to grow up." Site 5 Lead Coordinator

Young people also highlighted the importance of having welcoming spaces where they could socialise and build relationships with peers. Delivery partners further emphasised that these environments could create opportunities for young people to speak openly with trusted adults and access support when needed. In some cases, they described how relationships built through activities enabled young people to share personal challenges that they had previously kept to themselves. Across several sites, stakeholders

suggested that these experiences contributed to improvements in wellbeing, relationships and overall engagement among participating young people.

"I feel like we made friends and we all became like a little family." Site 4 CYP

"She confided in the woman who was facilitating our session… just for her to open up shows how much trust she had in the person leading the session." Site 5 Delivery Partner

These findings build on Year 2 evidence relating to safe spaces, trusted relationships and improved wellbeing and suggest that ongoing participation may be helping to strengthen protective factors linked to longer-term resilience, social connectedness and engagement.

Development of skills, aspirations and employability

Across several sites, participation in programme activities was also associated with the development of practical skills and clearer aspirations for the future. Delivery partners described how sports provision, mentoring, career-focused workshops and youth leadership opportunities supported young people to build communication skills, develop practical experience and begin thinking more concretely about their future education or employment options.

"Learning new skills, for example, through the leadership course, helps people build confidence, and that's a real-life skill. Later on, in university or college, you're going to need that. If you go into management, engineering or anything like that, being able to speak or articulate your ideas in a way that people will understand is a really important life skill." Site 1 CYP

In some cases, activities helped young people move from general aspirations towards clearer goals and plans for the future while also providing opportunities to gain practical skills or qualifications linked to employment pathways.

"So after a series of sessions, people have a more objective outlook towards the careers they can pursue in future, and they move beyond this ambiguous statement that 'I want a good job' to 'This is what I want, these are my short term goals and these are the steps I would be taking'." Site 5 Delivery Partner

"They're helping me get my SIA [Security Industry Authority] badge for security." Site 2 CYP

For some participants, involvement in programme activities also helped them develop the confidence to pursue further education and consider longer-term pathways.

"My plan is to head to the university… I think if I didn't do this [youth panel], I wouldn't have the confidence to go down that road." Site 4 CYP

Compared with Year 2, there was stronger evidence this year of structured employability and progression-focused support, including qualifications, work opportunities and future planning, suggesting that some sites are increasingly supporting young people to move towards longer-term education, training and employment pathways.

Access to new experiences and opportunities

Across several sites, delivery partners and young people described programme activities as creating opportunities that participants may not have otherwise accessed. These opportunities included trips, residentials, creative activities, volunteering roles and exposure to new settings, all of which were seen to broaden young people's horizons and encourage them to try unfamiliar experiences. In some cases, the interviewees emphasised that these opportunities were particularly meaningful for young people who had not previously travelled outside their immediate local areas or taken part in activities beyond their usual routines. One site described how trips and residential experiences helped young people build confidence by exposing them to different environments and possibilities beyond their neighbourhoods.

> *"Some of them had not left their neighbourhood before… it was about putting them into different situations and building their confidence and just seeing that there's different things they can do in their life."* Site 2 Lead Coordinator

Young people also reflected on the value of trying activities they would not usually have the chance to do, particularly where these experiences helped them to step outside their comfort zones. In some cases, these opportunities led to ongoing involvement beyond the initial activity, including volunteering and further participation.

> *"My two favourites were the [local radio] and the beekeeping experience… because I'm quite shy, so to put my voice on the local radio… and then the beekeeping is not an everyday experience you do."* Site 4 CYP

These experiences helped young people to broaden their horizons, increase confidence and develop aspirations beyond their immediate environments, reflecting wider programme aims around social inclusion and positive development opportunities.

Youth voice, leadership and active citizenship

Across multiple sites, young people were given opportunities to take on leadership roles, contribute to decision-making and influence activities within their communities. Delivery partners described how youth panels, community organising initiatives and leadership programmes enabled young people to develop confidence in expressing their views and participating in discussions about issues affecting their local areas.

In some cases, these opportunities allowed young people to take responsibility for projects or represent their peers in meetings with professionals and community organisations. Delivery partners suggested that this type of participation helped young people build communication skills and develop a stronger sense of agency.

> *"One of them was a young carer that had a lot of additional responsibilities, and they're now leading on projects… one of them is going for youth parliament, and they're presenting and having real influence on things that are going on."* Site 4 Lead Coordinator

Delivery partners also described how organising and campaigning activities helped young people build leadership skills and take action to address issues affecting their community. Across sites, these experiences were seen as helping young people move from participating in activities to taking more active roles in shaping initiatives and contributing to their communities. While youth voice and co-design were evident

during Year 2, the Year 3 findings suggest that in some sites, young people were increasingly moving into more active leadership, taking on organising and decision-making roles within their communities.

> *"We build, actually, a group of young people who are clearly affected by this issue, but give them the capacity and organising to go and campaign on employers they want to work with, target and build their leadership skills."* Site 2 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

Emerging outcomes for local communities

Across the five sites, qualitative feedback suggests that the programme is contributing to positive changes at the community level. Delivery partners described increased engagement between young people, families and local organisations, alongside growing trust in community-led activities and spaces. In some areas, the programmes helped create new opportunities for young people to participate in local initiatives, strengthening connections between residents and community institutions.

Several delivery partners highlighted how youth activities helped build stronger relationships within communities. In some cases, this included bringing together families and local residents who may not have previously engaged with youth provision.

> *"These opportunities have all brought the community together, all ages knowing each other, helping each other and even now having stronger relationships with their mentors."* Site 2 CYP

In some areas, delivery partners and steering group members reported increased recognition and trust in the programme locally, with residents more willing to engage with activities linked to it. In a couple of sites, stakeholders also perceived wider effects on community safety and a reduction in antisocial behaviour, linked to young people having more positive spaces to go and things to do.

> *"Antisocial behaviour is down and there's more engagement, so I know it's [the programme] doing it."* Site 4 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

> *"If there's a safe space or an activity happening and it's linked to the project, people recognise it and they trust it."* Site 4 Steering Group Member

Some stakeholders suggested that in addition to strengthening relationships, community attitudes towards youth activity programmes shifted over time. Delivery partners described how sustained engagement with local organisations and residents helped move initial scepticism towards greater confidence in the programme and its aims.

> *"We started from a place of scepticism… but through persevering with the community, we've seen that shift towards positivity and people recognising that something different is happening."* Site 5 Steering Group Member

Some sites also reported wider community-level effects linked to youth participation, including increased volunteering and community action. Activities such as environmental projects, local campaigns and community events were seen as helping young people develop a sense of responsibility and connection to their local area, making them *"active citizens"* (Site 5 Steering Group Member). These findings suggest early progress towards longer-term community-level outcomes within the ToC, particularly around strengthening trust, participation and community-led responses to local issues.

Emerging outcomes for partnerships

Across the five sites, the programme has contributed to stronger relationships between organisations directly involved with the NF and more broadly across local youth provision networks across the five sites. Partners across all sites reported increased collaboration, information sharing and coordination between local community organisations, enabling a more joined-up offer for CYPs and, in some cases, supporting organisations to build capacity and work together on funding opportunities.

> *"We have seen the collaboration between different organisations… when they applied for large grants this year, there was collaboration of certain organisations, and so there's an interaction between organisations that either didn't exist or were working in silos. Now they exist or they're working better, and now they're connected, and even young people from one organisation benefiting from the services provided being referred to other organisations."* Site 5 Steering Group Member

In some areas, partners also felt that working together through the programme helped address gaps in local youth provision, suggesting early signs of more coordinated and connected local systems of support.

> *"We're filling the gaps in service provision in what the [project] is doing. We're filling all the gaps that were there. It's been a great opportunity for us all to work together in partnership."* Site 5 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

Similar views were reflected in partners' survey responses, with one respondent noting that the programme helped *"bring organisations together who hadn't previously worked collaboratively and create stronger local networks of youth provision"* (Delivery Partner Survey Respondent). Interviewees also highlighted that organisations were increasingly signposting and referring young people to one another's activities and services, helping CYPs access a broader range of opportunities and support within their local areas.

> *"Some of them did work together before this project started… but they're certainly a lot closer than they were and much more willing to share support and signpost young people across different projects."* Site 1 Lead Coordinator

For one site, the support provided through the programme helped a parent-led group develop into a more formal organisation, enabling them to establish governance structures and secure funding to continue their work more formally within the community.

> *"So I'd say one of them would be for the family advocacy group… we supported them to put governance structures in place… and they're now like a fully flourished CIC [community interest company] and getting their own funding."* Site 3 Lead Coordinator

These findings build on Year 2 evidence relating to collaboration and partnership development, suggesting that relationships between organisations are becoming more established and, in some areas, are beginning to support longer-term capacity building, referral pathways and more coordinated local provision.

4.6.3 Sustainability of the Neighbourhood Fund programme

Across the five sites, interviewees emphasised that sustaining the progress achieved through the programme will require continued collaboration, organisational capacity and access to longer-term funding. While the programme has helped establish relationships, develop new activities and strengthen local organisations, the stakeholders widely recognised that maintaining this work beyond the current funding

period will require deliberate planning and continued investment. As the programme moves into its later stages, several sites reported that sustainability has become an increasing focus.

Strengthening organisational capacity

Across several sites, stakeholders highlighted the ways in which the programme had strengthened the capacity of local organisations, particularly smaller grassroots groups. Delivery partners described how participation in the programme provided opportunities for organisations to develop skills in areas such as safeguarding, monitoring and evaluation, funding applications and partnership working. In some cases, organisations also took steps to formalise their structures, enabling them to operate more independently and access future funding. This was reflected in the survey responses, with one respondent noting that the programme *"helped smaller community organisations build confidence, develop governance structures and become more prepared to apply for future funding"* (Delivery Partner Survey Respondent).

> *"A lot of the organisations on the back of this have now constituted and formed their own group… they've never done things like bid writing. They've never put in funding applications. They don't even know the first thing about it, but they've now become a constituted group. They're now delivering activities under their own umbrella."* Site 5 Delivery Partner

In addition to governance and organisational development, some delivery partners highlighted how training and practical support helped community organisations strengthen their operational capacity.

> *"We aren't just giving the money for the project. We are actually training them in safeguarding, in financial reporting, collaboration… this professionalisation helps these small groups become tender ready for other funding opportunities in the future."* Site 5 Steering Group Member

Similar experiences were reported across other sites, where participation in the programme helped organisations strengthen internal systems and demonstrate impact more effectively, which could support future funding applications.

> *"They do not usually write or report about it. So there's quite a lot we've had to do around capacity building them and making sure that they can demonstrate what they do well… if all of those organisations are better at securing funding for themselves at the end of our programme, then that's another positive."* Site 3 Lead Coordinator

Participants across several sites suggested that these forms of organisational development could represent one of the programme's longer-term legacies, enabling community groups to continue delivering activities and accessing resources beyond the current funding period.

Sustaining partnerships and collaborative networks

Many stakeholders highlighted the importance of the relationships developed through the programme as a potential foundation for longer-term sustainability. Across several sites, delivery partners noted that organisations that previously worked independently were now more familiar with one another's work and more likely to collaborate or share opportunities. In some cases, interviewees also described practical examples of collaboration emerging through these relationships, including coordinating delivery, sharing

referrals and signposting, supporting access to schools and venues and working together on funding applications.

> *"Now because they'll have that existing relationship and collaboration… hopefully in the future that becomes sustainable because they'll have developed the relationship through this programme."* Site 5 Lead Coordinator

> *"When they applied for large grants this year, there was collaboration of certain organisations… now they're connected, and even young people from one organisation are benefiting from services provided by another."* Site 5 Steering Group Member

In some cases, participants also described how the partnership had influenced how organisations approached their work more broadly. Shared approaches to analysing local issues, understanding power dynamics and working collectively were seen as shaping how partners approached collaboration beyond the programme itself.

> *"One thing that's really good about the group is the way that [the lead coordinator organisation] have kind of modelled everything… unpacking problems further, understanding how power works and holding people to account. They've modelled that very well to the extent that everyone's doing this by default, so it has left a legacy."* Site 2 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

Stakeholders also suggested that the relationships developed through the programme may continue to influence collaboration beyond the current funding period. In some cases, participants noted that organisations now have stronger connections and are more likely to approach one another to explore joint work in the future.

> *"I think, though, the youth providers may tail off over time, but partners know of each other a lot more, so they're definitely more likely to knock on someone's door and say, 'What are you doing?' and 'Shall we do this?'"* Site 4 Lead Coordinator

Another site reflected on similar changes, noting that stronger relationships between community organisations and local institutions had begun to influence how decisions were being made locally. Funding mechanisms such as microgrants also helped expand the network of organisations involved in the programme, bringing new groups into collaboration and increasing the potential for partnerships to continue in the future.

> *"I think that's had a positive impact on how decisions are being made across the local community… it's created a bit more of a sort of mutual, two-way relationship."* Site 1 Lead Coordinator

> *"We've introduced more people through the microgrants, more organisations, so we need to make sure that that kind of wider group builds this collaboration and sustains it."* Site 5 Lead Coordinator

The role of coordination and backbone support

While partnerships were widely seen as a positive outcome, many stakeholders emphasised that maintaining collaboration between organisations would require ongoing coordination or facilitation. In

several sites, participants described the role played by lead organisations or coordinating partners in bringing partners together, organising meetings and maintaining momentum.

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was the importance of developing leadership capacity within the steering groups themselves to support longer-term sustainability. Several sites described efforts to shift aspects of meeting facilitation and governance away from the lead coordinator and towards members of the steering group. This approach was seen as both empowering for local partners and beneficial for sustaining partnership activity beyond the current programme. Encouraging steering group members to chair meetings or take on leadership responsibilities helped foster a stronger sense of ownership over the partnership's work. One participant highlighted the importance of this coordination role in enabling busy organisations to work together effectively.

> *"Providing that kind of administrative backbone support to bring people together on the same page with the same intentions… does need that kind of three-year funding."* Site 4 Steering Group Member

Similarly, some participants noted that without a coordinating organisation or dedicated resource to convene partners, collaborative structures such as steering groups could be difficult to sustain. Other sites also reflected on the importance of maintaining some form of independent coordination to ensure balanced collaboration between organisations.

> *"What it won't have is a separate working group or a steering group with [the lead coordinator organisation] coordinating and making things happen, because none of the partners individually have had the time or the oversight."* Site 4 Steering Group Member

> *"It's important to have someone independent who's not delivering… because if one organisation that was being funded ended up chairing it, then there's a risk the dynamics in the space change."* Site 1 Lead Coordinator

Securing long-term funding and resources

Across all sites, the availability of future funding emerged as one of the most significant factors influencing sustainability. Many stakeholders (including delivery partners) expressed concern that without continued financial support, a substantial proportion of programme activities may not continue. Stakeholders emphasised the wider structural challenges associated with sustaining community initiatives once short-term programme funding ends. Critically, participants highlighted the broader challenges associated with securing funding in an increasingly competitive environment due to fewer funding opportunities.

> *"Maybe roughly 20–30% of the activities will sustain. The majority won't, and that is solely down to funding."* Site 5 Delivery Partner

> *"Funding has become tighter to get… the amounts of funding and criteria have become tighter… this is a shrinking pot with growing needs."* Site 2 Delivery Partner

Several sites described efforts already underway to identify additional funding sources, including engaging with local authorities, national funders and charitable foundations. In some cases, partnerships had begun exploring longer-term funding models or collaborative bids that could support continued work in their communities.

"Ultimately it comes down to resources… if there isn't funding coming into the areas, then it's very difficult." Site 3 Lead Coordinator

Planning for long-term legacy

Finally, most of the sites reported that they were beginning to focus more explicitly on the long-term legacy of the programme. This included reflecting on what elements of the programme should continue, how activities might evolve and what structures might be needed to sustain collaboration between partners.

"What does a 10-year journey look like here? If we're following a young person from when they're in primary school to high school… how do all our strands of work support that young person the best way possible beyond just this project?" Site 2 Steering Group Member/Delivery Partner

In some sites, this forward planning involved discussions about establishing new partnership structures, developing shared action plans or identifying ways to embed successful approaches within existing organisations and local systems.

4.6.4 Children and young people's perceptions of their local area

Understanding how CYPs perceive their local area is important for shaping interventions that are responsive to their lived experiences. This section explores how CYPs across the five sites (n = 38) describe their communities, highlighting the strengths and challenges within local contexts.

Community connection and belonging

Across several sites, CYPs spoke positively about the sense of community within their local areas, often emphasising familiarity, relationships and mutual support. In Site 2, CYPs frequently described their neighbourhoods as close-knit, with strong social bonds and shared identity across cultural backgrounds. Similar views were expressed in Site 5, where CYPs described their areas as lively and socially connected environments. Feeling safe and at home in their communities was an important aspect of how CYPs perceived their local areas. Some CYPs also linked their positive perceptions to long-term residence, suggesting that familiarity and continuity contributed to feelings of belonging.

"Our community sticks together as a strong unit. If anyone needs help, we always support each other." Site 2 CYP

Diversity and multicultural environments

Consistent with previous years, CYPs in some sites highlighted the multicultural nature of their communities as a positive feature. Diversity was associated with social cohesion, shared experiences and opportunities to interact with people from different backgrounds. CYPs described their areas as inclusive and vibrant, with different cultures and religions co-existing within the same community. For some young people, diversity was both a feature of the local area but also an opportunity to learn about different cultures and perspectives through everyday interactions. This suggests that multiculturalism may form part of what some CYPs viewed positively about their communities and contributed to perceptions of their local area as welcoming and inclusive.

"There's a great community with races, religions, all come together." Site 2 CYP

"I love how it's really diverse, there are a lot of different cultures, and you learn stuff about culture that you didn't know before. It's just, like, overall, a really nice environment to grow up in." Site 1 CYP

Limited facilities and opportunities

Alongside positive perceptions, CYPs across multiple sites raised concerns about the availability and quality of local facilities and activities. A lack of accessible spaces, limited sports provision and insufficient opportunities for young people were commonly discussed, particularly in Sites 2 and 4. Some CYPs described facilities as overcrowded or too small, while others highlighted the need for more consistent and frequent activities. Older CYPs also expressed interest in opportunities linked to employment, skills development and preparation for adulthood.

"There's not much to do… most of the parks are awful. There's no leisure. There's just one leisure centre." Site 2 CYP

Despite these challenges, some CYPs identified existing community assets, including parks, youth centres and sports facilities, which could provide some opportunities for socialising and participation.

Environmental and safety concerns

CYPs across four sites raised concerns about environmental conditions and local risks, including litter, abandoned buildings and exposure to drugs and antisocial behaviour. Concerns were raised from Site 4, where CYPs discussed how environmental factors could influence young people's behaviour and safety. A Site 1 CYP discussed feeling unsafe, particularly due to a number of violence incidences taking place in certain areas or during an evening. These concerns highlight contextual challenges that may affect how CYPs engage with their local environments and access available opportunities.

"There's a lot of abandoned buildings… people will go in there and destroy stuff, set fires and stuff like that." Site 4 CYP

"In terms of stabbings, there were around four, five, maybe seven last year. I live near Metrolink. There are lots of stabbings in the area." Site 1 CYP

"Sometimes I'm kind of scared because of the amount of people just walking around in the dark." Site 1 CYP

4.7 Year 3 whole programme Theory of Change

4.7.1 Purpose and scope

This section presents the updated Year 3 ToC for the programme. At the midpoint of the evaluation, this provides a timely opportunity to revisit the original ToC and reflect on the programme's key inputs, activities, mechanisms of change and intended outcomes in relation to preventing CYPs' exposure to violence across the five sites. This update draws on the evidence and learnings generated across Years 1–3 of the evaluation, including process evaluation findings, stakeholder engagement and ongoing programme monitoring. A revised ToC is presented in Figure 14, with the strength of evidence underpinning each component indicated using a RAG coding system. The ToC was refined following an analysis of the qualitative and quantitative findings from the Year 1, Year 2 and Year 3 evaluations. Compared with the previous version, a greater emphasis has been placed on the role of effective partnership working, community ownership and

governance structures as key mechanisms supporting programme delivery and sustainability. The revised model also reflects learning about the importance of lead coordinator capacity, adaptive steering group structures and the conditions required to facilitate meaningful engagement from local organisations and young people. These revisions were informed by evidence from interviews, focus groups, surveys and ongoing reflections from the delivery partners and steering group members, which highlighted the critical role of local partnership dynamics in shaping programme implementation, outcomes and longer-term sustainability.

The ToC specifies key inputs (e.g. funding, partnerships, youth voice, local data and delivery capacity), core activities (e.g. consultation, co-design, mentoring, enrichment, skills development and coordinated oversight) and the underlying mechanisms of change (e.g. empowerment, trust building, inclusion and skill development). These are expected to produce outputs such as sustained youth participation, effective programme delivery, strengthened governance structures and increased youth leadership. In turn, these outputs contribute to short- and medium-term outcomes, including improved wellbeing, confidence, perceptions of safety and enhanced collaboration across local systems. The intended long-term outcome is a sustained reduction in youth violence.

Needs of beneficiaries

The NF aims to target young people who are either involved in, or at risk of involvement in, serious violence within neighbourhoods where such violence is highly concentrated. These individuals are often exposed to multiple and intersecting risk factors, including poverty, trauma, school exclusion, limited access to services and strained relationships with statutory agencies. Existing responses are frequently fragmented, short-term and insufficiently grounded in the lived experiences of affected communities. This reinforces the importance of retaining a focus on targeted, trauma-informed and contextually responsive provision within the revised ToC.

System and policy needs

At the system level, there remains limited robust evidence regarding whether, how and under what conditions community engagement and co-design approaches can effectively reduce serious violence at a neighbourhood scale. Policymakers and funders lack practical, evidence-informed models for:

- Identifying priority neighbourhoods through the integration of quantitative data and local intelligence
- Supporting meaningful community-led action beyond consultation-based approaches
- Embedding continuous learning and adaptation within place-based violence prevention strategies

This means that, within the ToC, these pathways should currently be understood as evidence-informed assumptions rather than as established causal relationships. While there is a strong theoretical and practice-based rationale suggesting that community engagement, co-design and adaptive place-based approaches may contribute to reductions in serious violence, the evidence base remains limited regarding the specific mechanisms, contexts and conditions under which these approaches are most effective. Therefore, these assumptions remain important to retain within the ToC, but they should be treated as areas for testing and refinement through ongoing implementation and evaluation. The evaluation will help generate evidence on whether and how these mechanisms operate in practice, thereby strengthening or revising the underlying assumptions over time.

4.7.2 Overall aim and intended impact

The overarching aim of the NF is to achieve sustained reductions in serious violence involving young people in targeted neighbourhoods, alongside the development of stronger local systems capable of preventing violence in the long term.

This is pursued through three interrelated objectives:

- Enabling credible, community-led action tailored to local contexts
- Strengthening trust and relationships between communities, delivery partners and funders
- Generating actionable evidence on effective neighbourhood-based violence prevention

Core assumptions

The ToC is underpinned by several key assumptions, refined through iterative learning over three years:

- Serious violence is spatially concentrated and requires tailored, place-based responses.
- Communities possess critical knowledge about the local drivers of violence and viable solutions.
- Trust, relationships and perceived legitimacy are prerequisites for effective co-design and delivery.
- High-quality data must be combined with local insight to accurately identify priorities.
- Adaptive learning is essential when operating within complex social systems.

Inputs and enabling factors

Key inputs supporting the NF include:

- **Funding and infrastructure**: The YEF provides dedicated grant funding (about £1 million per site) and oversight. Each site has a paid community research and co-design partner to support planning and a lead coordinator to ensure action plans are successfully delivered and evaluated.
- **Community-led steering groups**: Multi-agency steering groups bring together statutory agencies, community organisations and youth representatives to pool resources and local knowledge.
- **Delivery partners**: Local charities, youth workers, mentors, coaches, etc. are recruited in each site to run youth programmes. These organisations bring expertise in education, youth work, arts, sports and mental health support.
- **Evaluation and learning partners**: NTU (outcome evaluation) and LJMU (process evaluation) were previously supported by learning partners who provide ongoing feedback and analysis of site progress and emerging evidence on youth violence trends.

Activities and mechanisms of change

Core activities in Year 3 include:

- **Community governance and planning**: Steering groups meet regularly (chaired by the lead coordinator for most sites, though some sites have nominated chairs) to refine the plan, allocate funding and oversee delivery. Some sites have network meetings for wider partners/delivery partners to share their activities.
- **Youth participation**: Young people shape and deliver interventions through advisory panels, the co-design of sessions and involvement in outreach and events. Young people also contribute to decisions on activity design and scheduling, including representation on steering groups.

- **Local interventions**: Delivery partners implement a suite of locally relevant programmes. Common activities include:
    - Mentoring and one-to-one support
    - Sports, arts and recreational programmes
    - Skills, education and employment activities
    - Community events
    - Culturally responsive programming, e.g. ensuring delivery is inclusive, contextually appropriate and co-produced with communities in which programmes are being delivered
- **Ongoing coordination and capacity building**: Lead coordinators and steering groups support delivery partners through training and joint funding support; in Year 3, the membership of steering groups expanded, which improved reach but sometimes complicated group size and management. Capacity-building sessions focused on bid writing, co-production and resource management to strengthen grassroots organisations.
- **Learning, evaluation and system influence**: There were independent evaluation and learning activities, including the production of annual process evaluation reports (Year 1, Year 2 and Year 3) and an in-depth evaluation protocol document. The learning partners produced site-specific learning reports (Years 1 and 2 of delivery).

These activities are intended to contribute to change through several underlying mechanisms. The following mechanisms are informed by a combination of emerging evaluation findings and existing theoretical and evidence-based literature. While some are supported by early evidence from the evaluation, others remain plausible but not yet fully tested within this context. These activities activate several potential mechanisms of change, which remain central to the revised ToC while continuing to be refined as further evidence emerged regarding how they operate in practice:

- **Empowerment and ownership**: Local stakeholders and young people co-design activities and contribute to decision-making processes, increasing confidence, agency and programme ownership. Enabling young people to shape and implement programme activities is expected to encourage sustained engagement in positive and prosocial activities. Although approaches such as Communities That Care are currently classified within the YEF Toolkit as having low evidence of impact due to the limited existing evidence base, the Toolkit highlights the need for further evaluation of community-led violence prevention approaches (YEF, 2026). As such, programmes such as the NF may contribute valuable evidence regarding the conditions under which community engagement and co-production approaches are effective. This assumption is supported by Empowerment Theory, which focuses on helping marginalised individuals, groups and communities gain control over their lives by building personal, interpersonal and political power (Rappaport, 1987), and by Positive Youth Development frameworks, which are research-based approaches that focus on building young people's strengths, assets and skills rather than merely preventing problems (Lerner et al., 2005).
- **Trust and collaboration**: Regular multi-agency meetings strengthen partnerships and coordinated problem-solving, aligning resources and improving support for vulnerable young people. This reflects the Collective Efficacy Theory (Sampson et al., 1997), which suggests that strong relationships, trust and shared responsibility within communities can help reduce violence. It also aligns with evidence showing that good coordination between services and agencies improves the consistency and effectiveness of programme delivery, which is a key principle within the YEF Toolkit guidance.
- **Safe alternatives**: Structured youth clubs, mentoring and recreational activities provide positive environments that reduce exposure to risky settings and foster belonging. This is consistent with

Routine Activity Theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979), which emphasises reducing opportunities for harm through structured activity. The YEF Toolkit (YEF, 2026) similarly identifies structured, well-implemented activities (e.g. sports and mentoring) as protective when delivered consistently and with quality implementation.

- **Cultural relevance and inclusion**: Tailored programming (language support, gender-specific sessions and community input) removes barriers and improves participation among diverse groups. This is grounded in cultural competence and cultural humility frameworks (Sue et al., 2009; Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998), which emphasise ongoing adaptation to lived experience and identity. The YEF Toolkit also highlights that effectiveness is highly contingent on context and implementation quality, reinforcing the need for culturally responsive adaptation rather than one-size-fits-all delivery.
- **Skill building and early intervention**: Mentoring and training develop communication and life skills that protect against antisocial behaviour and support long-term opportunities. This is supported by the well-established Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), which suggests that young people learn behaviours through observation, role modelling and reinforcement, as well as Risk-Need-Responsivity principles (Andrews & Bonta, 2010), which emphasise reducing risk factors while building protective skills and resilience. Consistent with this, the YEF Toolkit identifies cognitive-behavioural and skills-based approaches as among the most effective interventions for reducing violence when delivered well. The Toolkit also highlights that summer employment programmes, although often resource-intensive, can have a high impact on reducing violence (YEF, 2026).
- **Evaluation methods**: Engaging partners, CYPs and community members through a range of evaluation methods, including interviews, focus groups, surveys and quarterly monitoring data, strengthens the validity of the findings and supports ongoing learning and programme adaptation. This aligns with the YEF Toolkit's emphasis on continuous learning, implementation feedback loops and the use of both quantitative and qualitative data to understand not only whether interventions work but also how, why and in what contexts they are most effective and can be successfully replicated in the future.

Outputs

The programme generates several key outputs:

- **Youth and community participation**: By March 2026, 14,145 CYPs (mostly age 10–18) had been recruited into NF-funded activities across the five sites.
- **Delivered programmes**: Weekly sessions and events across all five sites have engaged thousands of young people and community members, including culturally specific programmes for subgroups such as faith-based and girls-only groups.
- **Established governance and plans**: In Year 3, steering groups expanded to include schools, charities and local figures. Lead coordinators convened meetings, resolved operational issues, supported joint funding bids and assisted delivery partners with data collection.
- **Youth empowerment and leadership**: Participation enables young people to take on civic roles, such as in peer-led workshops and community volunteering, building confidence and a sense of belonging, and their input shapes programme development.
- **Violence reduction**: The initiative aims to address root risk factors (education, mental health and opportunity) to reduce youth involvement in violence. Direct crime impacts are not yet measurable, but the qualitative feedback suggests improved safety.

- **Evaluation outputs**: These include process evaluation reports and individual site case studies (Years 1, 2 and 3), as well as evaluation protocol and learning partner reports for each site.

4.7.3 Outcomes

Immediate/short-term (for CYPs and families): While findings have begun to emerge across the three years of evaluation, it is expected that participation in the programme will increase young people's sense of safety, belonging and social connectedness while improving confidence, emotional wellbeing, communication and social skills. Young people may also demonstrate increased engagement in positive activities, stronger peer relationships and reduced exposure to risky environments. For parents and families, the anticipated short-term outcomes include an increased awareness of violence prevention approaches, improved relationships with support services and greater confidence in accessing support when needed.

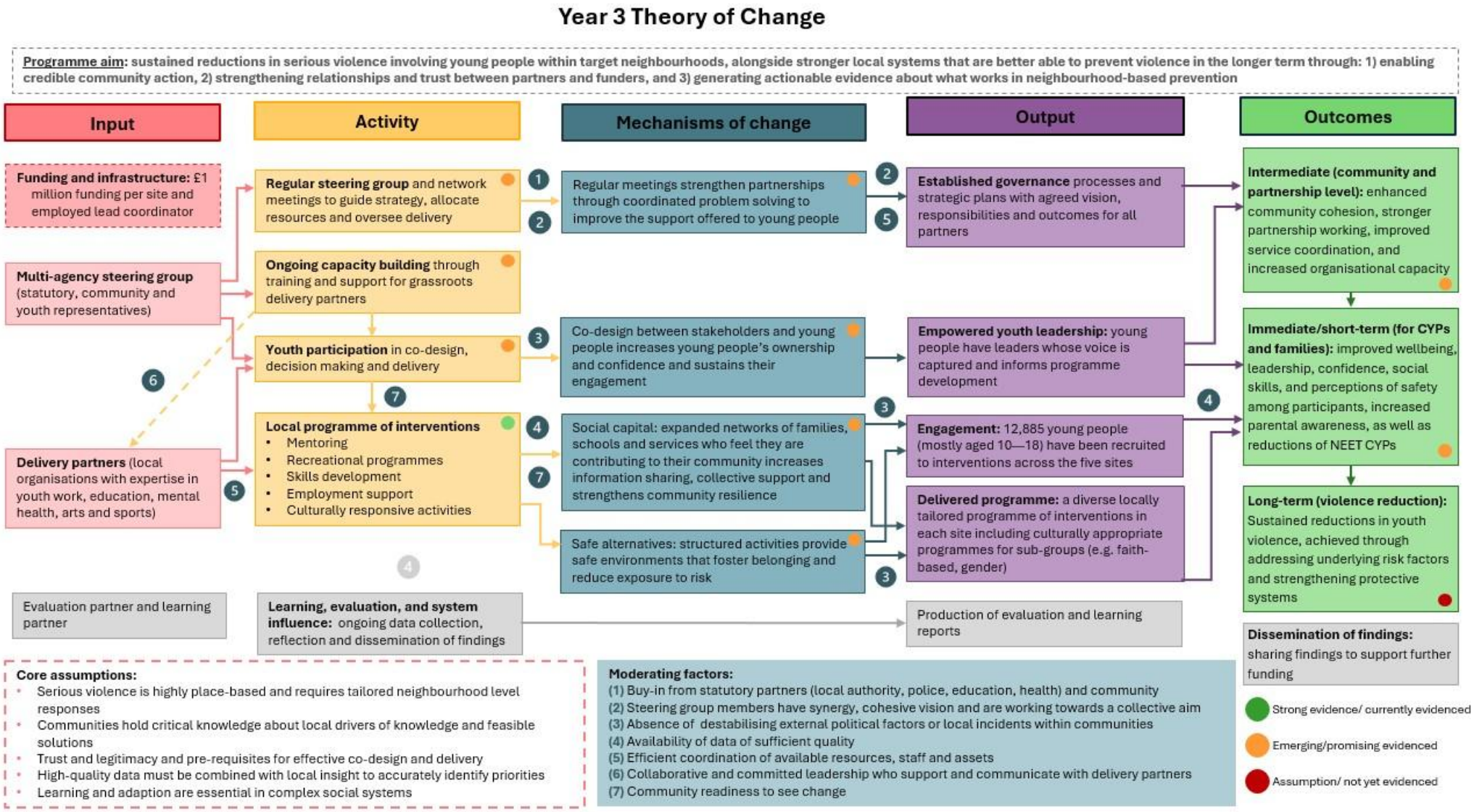
The intermediate outcome indicates that over time, these changes are expected to contribute to improved school or community engagement, strengthened family and peer relationships, increased trust in local services and reductions in risk factors associated with violence and antisocial behaviour. Intermediate outcomes may also include greater community participation, increased protective factors such as resilience and emotional regulation and improved multi-agency collaboration to support vulnerable young people and families.

Intermediate (community and partnership level): The NF is potentially strengthening community cohesion. New linkages among organisations mean that youth referrals and support are more coordinated. Capacity has grown, with some sites reported securing follow-on funding for successful projects. The community action plans serve as blueprints for sustained youth safety efforts.

Long-term (violence reduction): While the ultimate goal is to reduce children's involvement in violence, it is too early to measure reductions in crime directly. However, stakeholders perceive emerging signs of improved safety in the areas. By addressing root causes (education, mental health, employment) and building protective factors, the NF is hoping to yield long-term decreases in youth offending. Future impact evaluations will test whether the place-based, community-led approach yields sustained violence reduction across the sites.

Youth empowerment and leadership: As a result of participation, many CYPs take on civic roles (organising peer workshops, volunteering in the community) as well as paid internships and employment.

Figure 14: Year 3 Theory of Change



Note: CYPs = children and young people; NEET = not in education, employment or training

5. Key learnings and conclusions

5.1 Key learnings for this project (Year 3)

Across the five sites, the delivery partners and steering group members reflected on the approaches that supported programme delivery as well as areas where challenges required adaptation over time. These insights relate both to how activities were delivered for CYPs and how partnerships functioned across the programme.

The findings highlight two broad areas of learning. The first relates to programme delivery, including the importance of youth-centred and flexible approaches, continued support for grassroots organisations delivering activities locally and planning for sustainability to ensure that progress made through the programme can be maintained beyond the current funding period. The second relates to partnership governance and coordination, including the importance of strong partnership working, clear governance structures, transparent communication, effective leadership and robust systems for information sharing and decision-making.

The Year 3 findings indicate a programme in a consolidation phase, where established delivery is being maintained but increasingly shaped by capacity constraints, coordination demands and partnership maturity. Quantitative declines in selected partnership experience measures should therefore be interpreted alongside qualitative evidence of continued delivery and outcomes, suggesting increasing operational pressure rather than reduced programme value or engagement.

Key learnings for programme delivery

- **Youth-centred and flexible delivery**: Activities that responded to young people's interests and needs were consistently viewed as more effective in maintaining engagement. Across sites, delivery partners described adapting provisions based on ongoing feedback from young people, including by introducing new activities, creating safe spaces and combining informal engagement with structured development opportunities, such as mentoring or employability support. In several areas, delivery partners also described using targeted and youth-led approaches to ensure that the views and experiences of different groups of young people, including underrepresented communities, informed delivery. These approaches helped programmes remain relevant to local contexts and supported sustained participation among young people.
- **Supporting grassroots organisations and building capacity**: Smaller grassroots organisations played an important role in engaging young people within their communities and often had strong local relationships that supported participation. However, these organisations sometimes faced capacity constraints, particularly in relation to monitoring, reporting and managing funded activities. Providing practical support, training and guidance helped enable these organisations to participate fully in the programme and strengthen their ability to sustain activities beyond the current funding period.
- **Planning for sustainability**: Sustaining the progress achieved through the programme will depend on continued collaboration, organisational capacity and access to future funding. While the programme has supported the development of new activities and strengthened partnerships across sites, many stakeholders emphasised that maintaining this work beyond the current funding period will require additional resources and long-term planning. Strengthened partnerships, improved

organisational capacity and increased youth engagement were viewed as important foundations for sustaining aspects of the programme's work in the future.

Overall, the delivery outcomes appear strongest where organisational capacity and flexibility are highest. This suggests that delivery effectiveness is contingent on enabling conditions (capacity, stability and local infrastructure), not solely on programme design. This is important when interpreting variation across sites and highlights the importance of embedding capacity building within delivery models.

Key learnings for partnership governance and coordination

While PSAT scores declined across most areas in 2025/26, the qualitative findings suggest that this reflects the practical challenges associated with sustaining and evolving complex local partnerships over time. While these challenges have caused disruptions, the sites that experienced these challenges managed to persevere and continue to provide provision to CYPs. Several governance challenges were identified, including changes in lead coordinator personnel, difficulties maintaining consistent engagement from steering group members, tensions relating to funding decisions and, in one site, the disbandment and subsequent rebuilding of the steering group. In some areas, partnerships reported a loss of focus as steering groups expanded and governance arrangements became less clearly defined. Although these challenges may have contributed to lower perceptions of partnership functioning, they also generated important learning about the conditions required to sustain effective neighbourhood-based partnerships. Experiences across the sites highlighted the importance of clear governance structures, transparent decision-making processes, strong and consistent leadership, succession planning and mechanisms for maintaining partner engagement over time. While these challenges occasionally affected partnership functioning and, in some cases, action plan delivery, they provided valuable insights for the NF and offer important considerations for the design and implementation of future place-based interventions.

These findings indicate that partnership functioning is increasingly shaped by cumulative coordination burden, role intensity (particularly for lead coordinators) and competing organisational demands. As such, reductions in perceived partnership effectiveness should be understood as reflections of structural pressure points within the delivery systems rather than weakening partnership intent or value.

- **Transparency and early data sharing**: Ensuring that steering group members have early access to programme data was identified as an important factor in supporting effective governance. Some participants reflected that during the early stages of the programme, partners did not always feel fully sighted on programme delivery, particularly in relation to monitoring data and financial information. As the programme progressed, improvements in data sharing and reporting strengthened partners' understanding of programme activity and decision-making processes. Early and transparent sharing of programme data can therefore support stronger oversight and help build trust within partnerships.
- **Managing expectations around funding**: The scale of the investment associated with the programme generated significant interest among local organisations and, in some cases, expectations that substantial funding would be distributed directly to a wide range of groups. Clear communication about how funding decisions were made, how resources were allocated within action plans and the role of steering groups in these processes was identified as important in managing expectations. Establishing shared understanding about funding structures and decision-making processes from the outset can help reduce misunderstandings and tensions within partnerships.

- **Leadership and coordination**: Effective leadership was consistently identified as a key factor supporting partnership functioning. The role of the lead coordinator was widely viewed as central to maintaining relationships between partners, coordinating delivery activity and sustaining programme momentum. At the same time, the role was often described as complex and demanding, particularly where responsibility for partnership coordination, delivery oversight and governance processes rested heavily on a single individual. Across several sites, leadership functions were shared among key partners, each contributing their own expertise, local insight and community connections. This shared model strengthened collective decision-making and reduced dependence on a single leader or organisation.
- **Improving partnership processes**: Strong administrative and operational systems were identified as important for supporting partnership working. Improvements in monitoring systems, information sharing and financial oversight helped partnerships operate more efficiently and enabled steering groups to maintain clearer oversight of programme delivery. Ensuring that steering group meetings remain purposeful and strategically focused was also highlighted as important. Adjustments to meeting formats, frequency and communication channels helped respond to partners' time constraints while maintaining effective collaboration.

Overall, the findings indicate that partnership effectiveness depends on the interaction between governance structure, coordination capacity and time. As partnerships mature, maintaining function requires increasing levels of infrastructure and facilitation. This should be considered when interpreting Year 3 declines in the survey measures alongside continued qualitative evidence of delivery progress.

5.2 Recommendations

5.2.1 Recommendations for the remainder of the programme

Based on the findings from this year's evaluation, several recommendations can be made to strengthen partnership working and support the continued development of the programme during its remaining delivery period. While all recommendations may support implementation, three areas appear particularly important for the remainder of the programme: strengthening transparency and communication within partnerships to support effective decision-making and trust; continuing to support grassroots organisations to build capacity and sustain delivery; and planning for sustainability and legacy to maximise the likelihood that activities, partnerships and learning continue beyond the current funding period. The remaining recommendations are actions that may further strengthen delivery and partnership functioning.

- **Strengthen transparency and communication within partnerships.** Some participants reflected that earlier access to programme data, monitoring information and financial updates helped improve partners' understanding of programme delivery and decision-making processes. Continuing to share programme information clearly and consistently across partnerships may help strengthen trust, support more informed discussions within steering groups and improve collective oversight of programme progress.
- **Continue to support grassroots organisations to build capacity**. Many delivery partners were small grassroots organisations with strong community relationships but limited organisational capacity. Providing ongoing support in areas such as monitoring, reporting, safeguarding and funding applications may help these organisations participate more fully in the programme and strengthen their ability to sustain activities beyond the current funding period.

- **Continue planning for sustainability and legacy**. As the programme moves into its later stages, sites may benefit from continuing to explore opportunities to sustain elements of the work beyond the current funding period. This may include identifying additional funding opportunities, embedding successful activities within existing organisations or local systems and maintaining the partnerships developed through the programme.
- **Review steering group size and structure**. In several sites, the steering group was perceived as too large to enable effective discussion and decision-making. A smaller core steering group may support more focused governance and clearer decision-making processes. Alongside this, wider engagement with delivery partners and community organisations could continue through network events or working groups, allowing broader participation without limiting the effectiveness of strategic discussions.
- **Develop a wider partnership network**. Alongside the core steering group, periodic network-style events could be used to bring together a wider range of partners, including delivery organisations, community groups and statutory stakeholders. This approach may support information sharing, strengthen relationships between organisations and maintain wider engagement in the programme while allowing the steering group to retain a clearer governance function.
- **Continue to build leadership capacity within partnerships**. Leadership was identified as a key factor influencing the effectiveness of partnerships. Continued efforts to develop leadership capacity across steering group members and partner organisations may help distribute responsibilities more evenly and strengthen shared ownership of the programme. Encouraging distributed leadership across multiple partners may also help partnerships manage complex relationships and support longer-term sustainability.
- **Maintain youth-centred and responsive delivery approaches**. Activities that responded to the interests and needs of CYPs were consistently reported as supporting engagement and participation. Continuing to incorporate youth voices into programme development and adapting activities in response to feedback may help ensure that provision remains relevant and accessible to young people across sites, maintaining engagement and avoiding the risk of fatigue with existing activities.

5.2.2 Recommendations for future community-led projects

The findings from this evaluation also highlight several considerations that may inform the design and delivery of future community-led or place-based initiatives aimed at supporting CYPs.

- **Establish clear governance arrangements from the outset.** Place-based programmes involving multiple partners benefit from clearly defined governance structures from the beginning of delivery. Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of steering group members, lead organisations and delivery partners can help ensure that decision-making processes are transparent and understood by all partners. Clear governance arrangements may also help partnerships manage disagreements and maintain trust between organisations over time.
- **Ensure balanced partnerships between community and statutory organisations.** Partnerships that include a combination of community organisations, delivery partners and statutory stakeholders can bring a wider range of expertise, resources and influence. Community organisations often contribute strong local relationships and knowledge of community needs, while statutory partners can support access to wider systems and services. Ensuring that partnerships maintain an appropriate balance between these perspectives may help strengthen both local engagement and system-level influence.

- **Embed youth voice throughout programme design.** Involving CYPs in shaping programme priorities and activities can help ensure that provision remains relevant and engaging. Creating meaningful opportunities for young people to contribute to programme development, decision-making and leadership roles may strengthen participation and help programmes respond more effectively to local needs.
- **Consider sustainability early in programme design.** Many place-based initiatives rely on time-limited funding, making early planning for sustainability important. Building strong partnerships, supporting organisational capacity and exploring potential future funding opportunities from the outset may increase the likelihood that successful activities and collaborations continue beyond the initial programme period.
- **Build in structured opportunities for cross-site learning and networking.** In multi-site programmes, creating regular opportunities for sites to share learning, challenges and effective practice can support continuous improvement and strengthen delivery. This may include facilitated learning sessions, peer exchange or networking events that enable sites to reflect collectively, identify common challenges and adapt approaches over time.
- **Establish clear and consistent monitoring and reporting processes from the outset.** Programmes should provide clear guidance on data collection requirements, including consistent definitions (e.g. recruitment, retention and withdrawal), alongside training and support for delivery partners. This is particularly important for smaller grassroots organisations, which may require additional support to implement monitoring systems. Early investment in consistent reporting processes can improve data quality, reduce inconsistencies across sites and strengthen the overall evaluation.

5.3 Limitations of the evaluation

Several limitations affected the evaluation process and the interpretation of findings presented in this report. While many of the challenges were also present in earlier stages of the evaluation, some have become more pronounced as the programme has progressed.

5.3.1 Evaluation participation and survey fatigue

A key limitation of the partnership survey was the relatively low response rate, which reduced the robustness of the quantitative analyses and limited the extent to which the findings could be generalised across all partnerships. Participation varied considerably between sites, and response rates were lower than in previous years, potentially reflecting evaluation fatigue among stakeholders who had participated in multiple rounds of surveys, interviews and focus groups over the three years of evaluation thus far. As a result, the survey findings may be more reflective of the views of those who chose to participate than of all steering group members and delivery partners, introducing the potential for response bias.

The low and uneven number of responses across sites also limited the ability to undertake meaningful site-level analyses or robust comparisons between sites. Consequently, the findings have been reported primarily at the programme level, which may mask important local variation in partnership experiences. While one site reported consistently negative responses across all PSAT domains, this site did not have the highest response rate, suggesting that the programme-level findings were not disproportionately influenced by a single partnership. Nevertheless, the small sample size means that the aggregate scores should be interpreted as indicative of broad trends rather than as precise measures of partnership functioning across all sites.

The survey sample size also restricted the statistical analyses that could be undertaken. It was not possible to conduct more detailed analyses to explore differences between sites, stakeholder groups or changes over time with a high degree of confidence. Similarly, year-on-year comparisons should be interpreted cautiously, as changes in scores may reflect differences in who responded to the survey as well as genuine changes in partnership functioning. For these reasons, the survey findings should be considered alongside the qualitative evidence, which provided important contextual insights into the factors influencing partnership development, governance and delivery across the programme.

5.3.2 Monitoring data quality and consistency

Challenges relating to monitoring data collection continued to affect the evaluation. Monitoring data for the programme rely largely on self-reported information submitted by delivery partners across the five sites. While considerable efforts have been made this year to standardise reporting processes, variability in data recording practices across sites resulted in some inconsistencies and missing data.

Sites interpreted and recorded participation metrics differently, including definitions relating to recruitment, retention and withdrawal. For example, some activities consisted of short-term or one-off sessions, and in these cases, some sites recorded participants as having withdrawn once the activity concluded. As a result, figures relating to withdrawal should be considered indicative estimates rather than precise measures of attrition.

There were also challenges in collecting complete demographic information across all activities. Smaller community organisations delivering activities often did not routinely collect detailed monitoring information such as demographic characteristics or attendance records, leading to missing data points in some areas.

In addition, specific data collection issues affected the availability of monitoring data for certain sites. For example, in one site, the quarterly data recorded the number of children attending activities rather than the number of new participants recruited during each period. This meant that participants may have been counted multiple times across reporting periods, making it impossible to calculate reliable recruitment totals across the full programme period. As a result, the demographic information for this site has been presented using percentage ranges rather than cumulative totals. These challenges mean that the programme reach figures presented in this report should be considered best estimates based on the available monitoring data.

5.3.3 Methodological considerations

Finally, the qualitative analysis undertaken for this evaluation used a framework analysis approach. This method provides a structured way to organise qualitative data and allows findings to be analysed systematically against key research questions and programme objectives. However, because the approach relies on pre-defined thematic categories, it may limit the extent to which unexpected or emergent insights are captured. Although the analytical framework has been refined iteratively during the analysis process, the largely deductive nature of this approach means that some nuanced perspectives within the data may not be fully reflected in the thematic structure of the findings (Gale et al., 2013).

5.3.4 Understanding the experiences of minoritised ethnic groups

While the evaluation included delivery partners and young people working with a wide range of ethnic communities across the five sites, the study and interview schedule were not specifically designed to explore the experiences or outcomes of particular minoritised ethnic groups in depth. Although the qualitative findings provide examples of culturally responsive and targeted approaches to engagement, this restricted

the extent to which differences in experiences or outcomes across ethnic groups could be assessed. As a result, the evaluation provides stronger evidence regarding inclusive delivery approaches and engagement than differential outcomes between ethnic communities.

Balance of stakeholders' and children and young people's perspectives relating to outcomes

Evidence relating to programme outcomes for CYPs is weighted towards the perceptions and observations of steering group members, lead coordinators and delivery partners, with comparatively less direct evidence collected from young people themselves. While CYPs' perspectives have been incorporated where available, this imbalance should be considered when interpreting the qualitative findings on potential programme impact.

5.4 Conclusion

Key conclusions
Delivery has continued and expanded across all five sites, with delivery partners reaching a large and diverse group of CYPs. Delivery partners used a wide range of locally tailored and youth-centred activities, including sports, mentoring, creative programmes, educational support and employability initiatives.
Year 3 represents a consolidation phase, with the delivery of the action plans generally progressing well. However, partnerships reported experiencing increasing capacity, governance and coordination pressures. These findings varied between sites and were based on a small survey sample, so these changes should be interpreted cautiously.
Stakeholders and CYPs generally reported positive experiences of the programme, particularly around CYPs' confidence, wellbeing, social connections, sense of belonging, skills and employability. There was also evidence of CYPs moving beyond participation into youth leadership and community organising.
Sustainability is now a central challenge for the programme. Grassroots organisations reported challenges with capacity, securing staff and venues, demand exceeding provision, inconsistent participation in steering groups and inconsistent recording practices for the monitoring data.
Sustainability requires continued support for the capacity building of grassroots organisations, more widely distributed leadership, stronger steering group structures and early planning for future funding and legacy.

The YEF NF has made continued progress over Year 3, with delivery across the five sites expanding alongside increasing attention to partnership development and longer-term sustainability. The process evaluation for this year examined how delivery approaches are evolving, how effectively action plans are being implemented and how the programme is being experienced by stakeholders and CYPs. The Year 3 process evaluation explored three core research questions:

- What approaches are delivery partners taking to deliver the plans?
- How well are the different components of the action plan being delivered?
- What are stakeholders' and CYPs' views on the programme?

Since delivery began in April 2023, an estimated 14,145 CYPs have been recruited and participated in programme activities across the five sites. The monitoring data suggest that the programme has reached a large and diverse group of young people, including those from a range of ethnic backgrounds, age groups and communities, as well as young people with additional needs. Across sites, delivery partners also described targeting activities towards young people experiencing particular vulnerabilities, including those

at risk of disengagement from education or employment. Findings from this process evaluation suggest that delivery has continued to expand and evolve over time, with a diverse range of activities being implemented across sites, ongoing adaptation to local needs and strengthened partnership working in several areas.

In relation to potential long-term outcomes, stakeholders and CYPs described a range of perceived benefits associated with participation, including improvements in wellbeing, engagement, employability and community participation, particularly where young people experienced sustained involvement and trusted relationships with delivery staff. However, stakeholders also identified ongoing risks that may affect the achievement of longer-term outcomes, including capacity pressures, funding uncertainty, uneven engagement across some groups of young people and challenges sustaining support for those with more complex or long-term needs.

Table 11 summarises the key findings from the Year 3 evaluation in relation to each of the research questions.

Table 11: Summary of the Year 3 study findings

Research question	Finding
What approaches are delivery partners taking to deliver the plans?	Delivery partners across the five sites implemented a wide range of locally tailored activities designed to engage young people and support positive development. These activities included sports provision, mentoring, creative programmes, educational support and employability initiatives. The activities were often delivered through flexible and youth-centred approaches, combining informal engagement with structured development opportunities and drawing on partnerships with schools, community organisations and trusted local networks to reach diverse groups of young people. Alongside this, lead organisations took a capacity-building approach to implementation, supporting grassroots organisations through training, partnership working and practical support to strengthen their ability to deliver activities and access future funding.
How well are the different components of the action plan being delivered?	Overall, the delivery of the action plan progressed across the five sites, supported by collaboration between delivery partners and steering group members. Improvements in monitoring processes and communication strengthened oversight of delivery in several areas. The Partnership Self-Assessment Tool suggests that all partnership domains currently fall within the working zone, indicating that partnerships are functioning effectively enough to support delivery across sites while also highlighting areas for future development to enhance collaborative potential. Compared with 2024/25, four of the seven domains moved from the headway zone into the working zone (leadership, administration and management, non-financial resources and satisfaction with the partnership).

	Efficiency, financial resources and synergy remained within the working zone across both years. Although these findings suggest somewhat less positive perceptions of partnership functioning in 2025/26, all domains remained within a positive performance range, and partnerships continued to support the delivery of the action plan activities. (Given the small survey sample, these changes should be interpreted with caution.) Several operational challenges were identified, including capacity constraints within smaller organisations, governance complexities within some steering groups and difficulties maintaining consistent engagement from partners. These factors influenced how effectively some elements of the action plan were implemented.
What are the stakeholders' and children and young people's views on the programme?	Stakeholders and young people generally reported positive experiences of the programme. Participants described improvements in confidence, wellbeing and social connections among young people, alongside opportunities to develop skills, explore education or employment pathways and access new experiences. Stakeholders also highlighted strengthened relationships between organisations and increased collaboration within local youth provision. However, participants noted that sustaining activities beyond the programme period will depend on continued partnership working and access to future funding.

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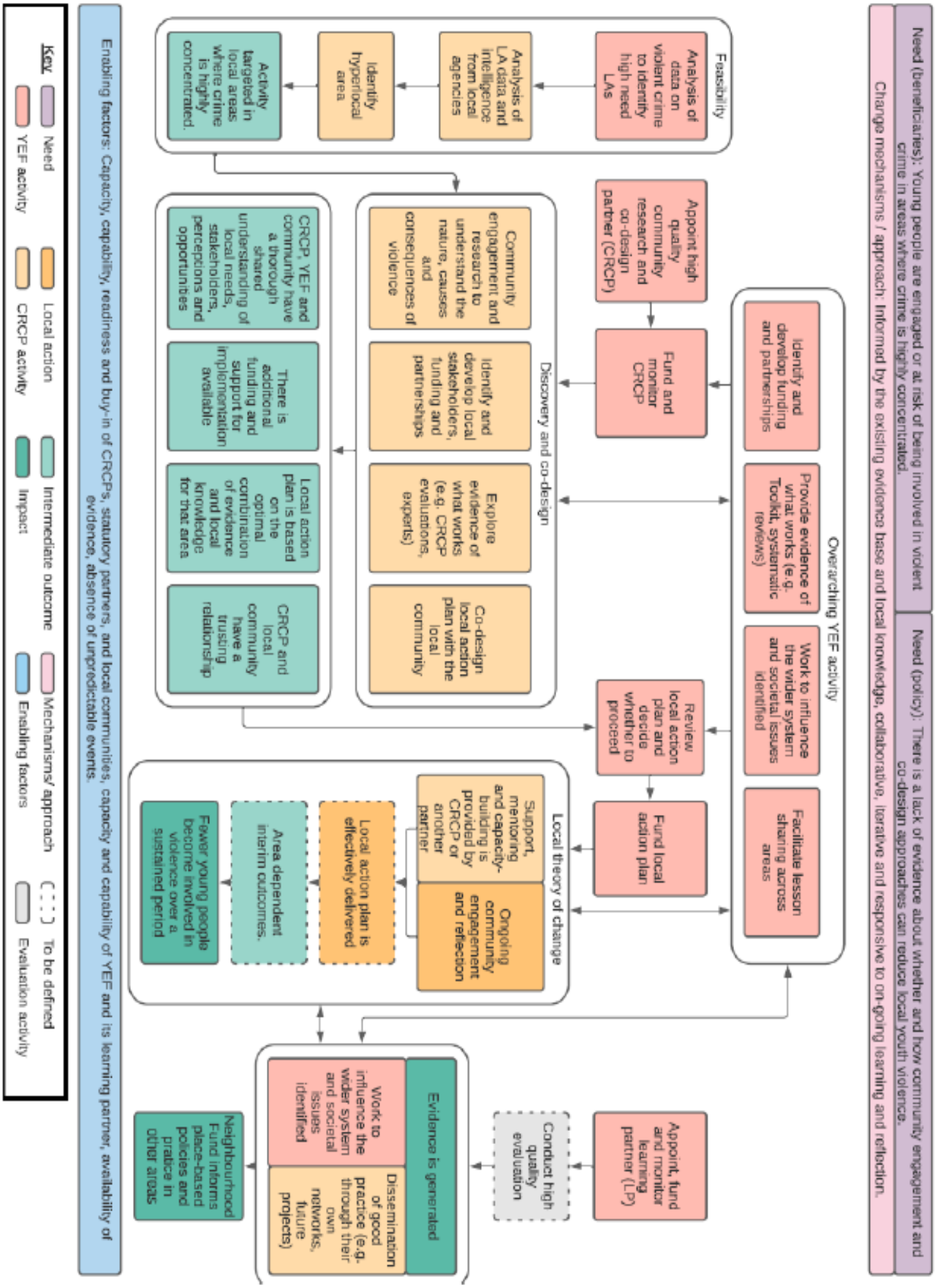
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Appendices

7.1 Appendix 1:

YEF a priori Theory of Change



7.2 Appendix 2: Site-level action plan themes and activities

Site (delivery period)	Action plan themes/activities
Aston Villa Foundation, YEF NF project, Newton and Lozells, Birmingham (3 years)	**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. **Promote a safe, welcoming, and prospering neighbourhood**: distribute small grants to support environmental improvement, distribute a Community Chest and 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.
The Youth Resilience Programme, Barkerend, Bradford (5 years)	**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. **Encouraging positive mental health**: provide youth worker support, build awareness and education on vulnerabilities, and connect young people with mental health support. **Role modelling, mentoring, and supporting career pathways**: promotion of positive role models, mentorship, and career pathways support.
Citizens UK, YEF NF project, Butetown and Grangetown, Cardiff (5 years)	**Microgrant and capacity building:** create a microgrant and capacity building scheme for grassroots organisations. **Establish a youth action zone**: local organisations collaborate to establish a youth leadership programme and work with the police to build relationships. **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. **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, Astroturf access, basketball provision, litter and needle pick-ups). **Literacy intervention**: providing literacy support for parents and young people and building parents' confidence in supporting their children with learning. **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. **Establishing diversionary activities:** work with the community safety partnership to establish diversionary activities embedded in grassroots organisations.
Hope for Cheetham, Cheetham Hill, Manchester (5 years)	**Sporting activities:** offer activities like football, boxing, and dancing in safe spaces (including girls-only activities to consider cultural restrictions). **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). **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.

	Life skills: years 5/6 participate in awareness raising and trauma-informed workshops (e.g. child sexual/criminal exploitation, healthy relationships). In addition older CYP could participate in 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. **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. **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. **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.
The Great Yarmouth NR30 project, Nelson/central and Northgate Wards, Norfolk (3 years)	**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. **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. **Education, employment, and training (EET)**: rreview 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.

7.3 Appendix 3: Site level case studies

Site-level case studies offer a comprehensive overview of each local area, including the CRCP and lead coordinators, local action plans, and key achievements from Year 3 of delivery. They also outline, perceived challenges, anticipated outcomes identified through the year two evaluation, along with next steps for future implementation. The following pages present case studies for:

- The Youth Resilience Programme, Barkerend, Bradford.
- Citizens UK YEF NF, Butetown and Grangetown, Cardiff.
- The Great Yarmouth NR30 Project, Norfolk.
- Aston Villa Foundation YEF NF, Newton and Lozells, Birmingham.
- Hope for Cheetham, Manchester

Citizens UK, Butetown and Grangetown, Cardiff (Year 3 Case Study 2025-2026)

In Year 3, the Citizens UK Cardiff programme continued to bring together community organisations to deliver a range of youth-focused activities aimed at improving wellbeing, increasing opportunities and reducing involvement in crime. Delivery partners engaged large numbers of young people through accessible, community-based provision, including sports, mentoring and employment support. A key strength of the programme has been its ability to build trusted relationships with young people, particularly within underserved communities, by using locally embedded staff and culturally relevant approaches. While the programme appears to demonstrate early positive impacts in terms of engagement, confidence and community cohesion, stakeholders highlighted ongoing challenges around sustainability, capacity and resources, particularly in relation to staffing, facilities and longer-term funding.

Action plan key activities	Key achievements delivered in Year 3
Theme 1: Microgrant and capacity building. • Create a microgrant and capacity building scheme for grassroots organisations providing targeted support for young people at risk.	• Launched and delivered first round of microgrants, awarding funding to six community-led projects (~£80k). • Established community-led assessment panel and supported grassroots organisations with applications.
Theme 2: Establish a Youth Action Zone in Butetown and Grangetown. • Build relationships with police and develop a charter for working together including anti-racism training and a jobs compact. • Youth leadership academy to train young people as leaders.	• Continued development of the Youth Action Zone model through strengthened partnership working and quarterly reflection sessions. • Increased collaboration between community organisations, schools, police and local stakeholders.
Theme 3: Emotional wellbeing navigator embedded in the community. • Develop links between the community and mental health services • Support young people with access issues • Tackle stigma	• Expanded delivery of mental health support through community-based activities (e.g. 'sip and paint' workshops) and youth group engagement. • Built new partnerships with local support services and increased reach through youth clubs and sports settings, using activities to open up conversations about wellbeing.
Theme 4: Community Organiser to develop the power of local people and lead local campaigns. • Listening to young people in local schools, colleges and sports clubs and creating campaigns around their issues. • Campaign around the redevelopment of Canal Park to ensure young people's voices are heard and asks are developed including turning on floodlights and astroturf resurfacing. • Campaign around local bus fares	• Youth-led campaign contributed to introduction of £1 bus fares for young people across Wales. • Young people organised public actions, engaged with Senedd members and national decision-makers, and influenced policy discussions.
Theme 5: Literacy intervention. • Literacy support for parents and CYP. • Build parents' confidence in supporting their children with learning.	• Strengthened partnerships with schools, youth clubs and national stakeholders, including engagement with the Children's Commissioner for Wales. • Approach recognised as a potential blueprint for wider policy development on additional learning needs (ALN).

Theme 6: Tigerbay employment partnership.

- Promote jobs and support applications
- Sign up employers to pay the Real Living Wage
- Tackle under-representation in the workplace locally
- Scale up and rollout the Tiger Bay Security model

- Engaged local employers in signing the Community Jobs Compact, an agreement with employers committing businesses to paying the real Living Wage and using equitable recruitment processes
- Supported young people into employment opportunities, including 10 targeted work placements with Transport for Wales.

Theme 7: Establishing diversionary activities.

- Establishing diversionary activities in grassroots sports clubs supporting young people at risk
- Using sport as an incentive to support young people more widely including in education and mentoring

- Continued delivery of sports and youth provision with high engagement, including regular sessions and tournaments.
- Delivered trips (e.g. Scotland, theme parks) and expanded activities to broaden experiences and strengthen community engagement.

Challenges

Tensions from microgrant funding decisions

The introduction of microgrants created challenges where demand exceeded available funding, leading to frustration among organisations that were unsuccessful.

"We got way more applications for the micro grants than we had anticipated, some people missed out, and there was a lot of fallout from that. The people trying to support young people then felt frustrated that they didn't get this funding." (Site Lead Coordinator)

Loss of focus within the steering group

Some stakeholders felt that the steering group had become less focused over time, with discussions shifting away from strategy and towards funding.

"I think what happened with the steering group was it lost its focus more than anything… lots of the conversations turned into conversations about who's getting funding, who isn't getting funding, and can we have more funding… we kind of lost the focus of, like, we are steering this action plan and the legacy and the strategy for this work." (Site Lead Coordinator)

Limited capacity to meet complex needs

Some partners highlighted the difficulty of delivering support for young people with complex needs within limited staffing and resources.

"It's one or two staff members who work part time trying to deliver on complex needs that people have and that's hard." (Steering Group Member and Delivery Partner)

Limited facilities and space for young people

Young people felt that the current facilities could become overcrowded, which may limit participation.

"Sometimes you can see people getting a cramped because there's way more people than space nowadays… so it's like there's a bigger facility… a lot more people then would be more likely to come."
(Young Person)

Outcomes & Impacts*

Achieving tangible change through youth-led campaigning



In Cardiff, stakeholders suggested that community organising may have contributed to young people becoming more engaged in local campaigning and decision-making processes. The introduction of £1 bus fares for young people was frequently cited as an example of an issue that young people had campaigned on, providing a potential indication of how collective action can influence local policy and contribute to tangible change.

"Then they see how the process of community organising works, and that you can change things. And now they're like, OK, what are we doing next? What we doing? You know, they've got a major change in legislation. They've got £1 bus fares for all young people, it's a pretty good thing to win, and so they're just like excited about that." (Site Lead Coordinator)

Building young people's confidence and aspirations



Stakeholders described how trips, activities and wider opportunities helped young people build confidence and broaden their sense of what was possible for their futures.

"Some of them had not left their neighbourhood before and it's all about putting them into different situations, building the confidence. Some of the stories that came from that of people, just seeing that there's different things they can do in their life and they're not defined by their neighbourhood." (Site Lead Coordinator)

Increasing access to employment opportunities



Young people also highlighted the practical support they had received around work and employment, including direct routes into jobs.

"I got told about this job and 15 of us all got hired just from them telling us, and we're all still together working. I know 15 people, it's not a lot of people if you think about it, but at the same time, in a small area, to get 15 kids hired and making decent money. It's very beneficial." (Young Person)

Creating supportive spaces and stronger relationships for young people



Young people described the programme as helping to strengthen relationships, bring the community together and create supportive spaces where they felt connected to others.

"These opportunities have all brought the community together, all ages, knowing each other, helping each other and even now having stronger relationships with their mentors." (Young Person)

Next Steps

- Develop a clear legacy and sustainability plan for the programme, including future structure, leadership and partnership working.
- Produce impact reports across all strands to better evidence outcomes and inform future delivery.
- Deliver a second round of microgrants with a more targeted focus on employment, skills and interview readiness.
- Strengthen employment pathways by linking young people to opportunities arising from local developments and employer partnerships.
- Continue to expand collaboration between community organisations, schools, sports providers and local services.

"I think we're developing a mechanism of working that will sustain us into the future, long after this fund is finished. We've seen the benefits of working together… this structure has created a network that will be facilitated in some way or another." (Delivery Partner)

Born in Bradford Youth Resilience Programme (Year 3 Case Study 2025-2026)

The Born in Bradford Youth Resilience Programme has continued to deliver a place-based approach focused on youth engagement, mental health and wellbeing, and supporting positive pathways for young people. In Year 3, the programme has built on its community-led foundations through the delivery of small grant-funded activities, including sports, creative workshops, youth clubs and targeted support for vulnerable groups. Activities have been delivered in trusted community settings, including faith centres and local venues, supporting strong engagement from young people and families. Alongside delivery, the programme has continued to strengthen partnerships between community organisations and support capacity building across partners through training, funding opportunities and collaboration. Role modelling and career support activities, including workshops, events and visits, have helped young people explore future pathways, and an annual Youth Forum has provided opportunities for young people to contribute their views to programme development.

Action Plan Themes

Strategic Theme A

Build capacity through partnerships, collaboration, training, and small grant facilitation. Key activities:

1. Capacity building.
2. Training.
3. Youth forum.
4. Small grant facilitation.

Strategic Theme B

Encouraging positive mental health. Key activities:

1. Youth Worker support.
2. Awareness and education on vulnerabilities.
3. Connecting with mental health support.



Strategic Theme C

Role modelling, mentoring and career pathway support. Key activities:

1. Promotion of positive role models.
2. Mentorship.
3. Career pathways support.

Key achievements in Year 3*

A range of youth-focused community activities continued to be delivered through small grants and partnership working. These included:

- Community events and engagement: Annual Youth Forum to gather young people's views, community picnic and BBQ to strengthen partner relationships, and consultation with young people on programme website design.
- Small grant activity delivery: Football coaching and weekly sessions; boxing (including girls-only provision); arts, crafts and photography; in-school dance programmes; wellbeing and resilience workshops in faith settings; and inclusive activities for young people with physical and learning disabilities (including parent support). Delivery also continued through existing provision such as Premier League Kicks.
- Capacity building and partnership: Regular steering group meetings with a wide range of community partners, support for partners to access additional funding, and ongoing engagement with statutory partners and local initiatives.

Work to support young people's mental health and wellbeing continued through a range of targeted and open-access activities:

- Weekend youth club provision for boys and girls through local faith settings.
- Girls' multi-sports sessions and weekly community-based sports provision.
- Continued youth club activities including cooking, arts, swimming and self-defence.
- Resilience and wellbeing workshops delivered through community and faith settings.
- Football tournaments and wider group activities to support engagement.
- Targeted sessions for young people and parents on issues such as antisocial behaviour and safety.

Role modelling and career support activities continued to develop through school and community-based delivery:

- Tailored tutoring and academic support for young people identified as needing additional support.
- In-school sessions linking education with future career pathways.
- A careers event showcasing local role models and non-traditional pathways.
- Day trip to the National Science and Media Museum.
- Role modelling sessions delivered by professionals (e.g. healthcare, emergency services and finance).

Challenges*

Size and structure of the steering group

As the programme grew, the steering group became harder to use as a focused decision-making space. While partners valued coming together, the group had started to feel more like a broad network than a structured steering body.



"Our steering group is essentially all the community groups that have been involved in delivery, or that have an interest in being involved in delivery… that's the kind of big challenge we're having in terms of the organisation of the steering group at the moment and kind of keeping that, reformulating that, or how to reformulate that into a bit more structured and a bit more organised steering group rather than a sort of network of community organisations, which it slightly feels like it's becoming at the moment." (Site Lead Coordinator)

Level of support needed for small grassroots organisations

Many local groups had strong relationships with young people, but needed ongoing support with the formal requirements of delivery, including reporting, safeguarding and administration.



"The challenge was all bringing those people that have never done anything like this to be able to do it, and standing next to them, and walking alongside them and supporting them… you have to chase and chase again and chase again after that and not be put off by that." (Steering Group Member)

Working through schools and formal settings

Delivering sessions through schools created practical barriers, particularly around access, communication and timetabling. Partners described difficulties securing engagement from schools, as well as the limited flexibility within school structures.



"We would like to track students over a one-year period… but for us it's just a three months window… I'm not saying it's the funding, it's the window that we find within the school timetables."

(Delivery Partner)

"So the tricky part has been trying to get through to the secondary schools, so it's often a case of like, there's not enough staff, the SENCOs really busy… after emailing them quite a few times, sadly I haven't had a reply… I'm going to… just go down and just have a quick chat and see if I can get some more response that way…" (Delivery Partner)

Uncertainty about sustainability after the programme ends

Partners spoke positively about the programme, but were clear that much of the activity would be difficult to sustain without continued funding and support to strengthen organisations' longer-term capacity.



"I think if the YEF funding goes, then I do feel that a lot of their delivery will go. You know, if it was cut short, I think then it would all stop essentially." (Site Lead Coordinator)

Outcomes & Impact*

Strengthening collaboration between community organisations

The programme brought together organisations that had previously worked separately, creating new relationships and opportunities for joint working.



"We are now working together in partnership… linking up with other organisations… we didn't have that kind of partnership working before." (Delivery Partner)

Enabling local organisations to expand delivery

Participation in the programme enabled organisations to deliver more activities and reach young people in ways that would not have been possible independently.

"It is through the Youth Resilience project… that I've been able to deliver more, which I wouldn't have been able to do otherwise." (Delivery Partner)

Increasing aspirations and understanding of career pathways

Role modelling sessions helped young people better understand career options and think more concretely about their futures.

"It gives us more of an idea of career paths in the future." (Young Person)

"I changed my mind about my future career." (Young Person)

Providing relatable role models from local communities

Young people engaged with professionals from similar backgrounds and local areas, helping make career pathways feel more achievable.

"They were all from the local area… young people from the local area that they could connect with."

(Delivery Partner)

Creating opportunities where provision was previously limited

The programme provided new activities and support for young people in areas where participants felt there were few existing opportunities.

"There's nothing provided to us as a local suburb… this programme has given us a real opportunity to engage with the youth." (Delivery Partner)

Next Steps*

- Refine the steering group structure and focus to better manage its size and improve effectiveness.
- Strengthen engagement with schools, including more direct, in-person approaches to improve access and build relationships with key staff.
- Continue delivery of role modelling and prevention-focused activities, including Beyond Words workshops, crime prevention and substance misuse awareness sessions, alongside ongoing youth provision.
- Maintain delivery of sports, arts and youth activities
- Continue to build capacity within community organisations, including support with delivery, sustainability and accessing future funding.
- Maintain and develop collaboration across partners, including steering group activity focused on long-term sustainability and legacy.

"We've still got a way to go, I think, over the next two years for the delivery to try and keep, keep that [sustainability] as a focus, and try to keep building that through the steering group meetings, through the partnerships."

(Site Lead Co-ordinator)

*Based on Year 3 evaluation findings

Right to Succeed, Norfolk, Great Yarmouth

(Year 3 Case Study 2025-2026)

Right to Succeed has continued to deliver a place-based programme in Great Yarmouth (NR30), focused on youth engagement, literacy, and supporting progression into education, employment and training. The programme has built on earlier foundations, with the Youth Panel continuing to shape delivery and engage with local partners. In the Youth Offer, a range of activities have been delivered through local organisations, including safe spaces, summer provision and community events such as the Big Beach Bonanza. The NR30 website has also been launched to increase awareness of opportunities for young people. In Literacy, schools have implemented targeted interventions supported by assessment data, with evidence of improved reading outcomes. In EET, delivery partners have expanded work experience opportunities and in-school support. The programme reflects a continued emphasis on partnership working, youth voice and community-led delivery, alongside a growing focus on sustainability and future funding.

Action plan key activities



Youth Offer

- Map the existing youth provision and services.
- Design and develop an enhanced youth offer.
- Develop a youth panel.
- Design and deliver two safe spaces.



Literacy

- Design, implement and monitor literacy interventions, approaches, and strategies.
- Pupil assessments for school year 5-9, across all three years of intervention.
- Design and implement targeted interventions and assessments for students with SEND.
- Develop community of practice.
- Design training and capacity building with teaching staff and CPD programme.



Education employment and training (EET)

- Review use of Risk of NEET indicators across years 9, 10 and 11.
- Post 16 years old provision mapping.
- Develop, deliver and evaluate the futures framework.
- Develop community of practice for EET.
- Launch, implement, and evaluate Secondary School EET Pilot, providing additional careers support in school.
- Design, implement and evaluate Engagement Coach Pilot, providing 1:1 support for young people identified at risk of becoming NEET.

Key achievements delivered in Year 3

- Launch of the NR30 website for young people to access local activities and opportunities.
- Delivery of the Big Beach Bonanza, a large-scale community event engaging 400 residents and multiple partners.
- Continued development of the Youth Panel, influencing local services (e.g. East Norfolk Medical Practice) and contributing to new facilities.
- Youth Panel residential and celebration event to showcase YP's contributions.
- Sustained delivery of Safe Spaces and youth provision with strong attendance.
- Expanded partnership working across youth providers, including microgrant-style engagement.
- External recognition through Flourish Awards, including a win for a Safe Spaces project.

- Continued delivery of literacy interventions with targeted support and a focus on reading for pleasure.
- Improvements in NGRT scores, from 92.9 to 100.4.
- Introduction of evidence-informed approaches through partnership with Norfolk Research School.
- Development of a revised Literacy Working Group model. Ongoing support for schools to analyse data and refine interventions.
- Positive feedback from schools on literacy provision, including increased engagement in reading activities.

- Delivery of work experience pilot, with 100% of participating Year 10 pupils accessing placements.
- Work experience opportunities in construction, mechanics, cookery, technical and community roles.
- Increased referrals from schools into EET support and continued delivery of one-to-one coaching for young people at risk of becoming NEET.
- Strengthened partnerships with local organisations to support pathways into employment.
- Engagement with wider networks (e.g. Coastal Navigators Network) to support joined-up provision.

Challenges

Delays caused by complex commissioning and decision-making processes



Early delivery was slowed by lengthy processes for approving and commissioning activity, particularly when involving senior stakeholders in decision-making.

"The actual selection process was just way too long… it was really finding time to get them to sit around a panel and make a decision… so then we just said… we would like to give [working groups] more autonomy." (Site Lead Coordinator)

Challenges engaging schools, particularly within the literacy workstream

Engagement with schools was more difficult than anticipated, especially at primary level, both in recruiting schools and in enabling staff to participate in training and delivery.



"It took longer to recruit schools than it has done in other areas… they needed to see the proof of what we were doing before they were going to commit to it."
(Site Lead Coordinator)

"we only have one red action… on staff receiving training within the literacy work stream… it's just trying to find their CPD time to do this type of literacy training." (Steering Group Member)

Political sensitivities shaping how the programme was framed



Local political dynamics influenced how the programme could be communicated, particularly around acknowledging levels of violence in a key tourism area.

"None of my politicians wanted to communicate or acknowledge that we had a high knife crime problem right in the tourism centre… it would have impacted on our tourism. So we worked pretty hard… to get the key messages right, which is about raising aspiration for young people rather than focusing on the knife crime." (Steering Group Member)

Sustainability concerns and reliance on continued funding



Stakeholders highlighted significant concerns about the continuation of delivery once funding ends, with limited capacity for local services to absorb the work.

"I think if there is no further funding after August, a lot of this will end… there isn't the sustainability or continuity because the funding… is in addition to any detached youth support work that the county council can give, which is very, very limited." (Steering Group Member)

Outcomes & Impact*

Increased confidence and personal development among young people



Participation in youth panels and activities has supported young people to build confidence, particularly for those who were previously less confident or anxious.

"When I first met him, he like wouldn't have talked and then see him at a celebration event, like actually on a stage talking." (Young Person)

"It's just made me more comfortable and it helps share my opinions of what I think could make change." (Young Person)

Improved wellbeing, social connection and sense of belonging



Young people reported forming friendships and feeling more connected through the programme, contributing to a stronger sense of belonging.

"I feel like me and YP4… we weren't all in the same place at the same time… and I feel like we made friends and we all became like a little family. It was very nice." (Young Person)

Raised aspirations and clearer future pathways



The programme has helped young people develop clearer plans for their futures, including further education, careers and community-focused roles.

"It's given me something to be dead set on that I want to do in the future… it's given me a plan for my life when I leave college next year on like what I want to do." (Young Person)

Increased engagement in positive activities and safer use of community spaces



Activities have encouraged more positive use of local spaces and helped shift behaviour in areas previously associated with antisocial behaviour.

"The idea was to not only make it look nicer and make the community feel safer… but also to take the kids that were in there being antisocial… and show them that there is another route than the route that they were on… we have genuinely got a bigger intake on a lot of our groups because of that." (Young Person)

Strengthened collaboration and collective action between local partners



The programme has improved coordination between organisations, enabling partners to work together more effectively and deliver joint activities.

"Eight different partners… came along and showcased the sorts of activities… and those partners are already now talking about, well, this should be a regular thing." (Site Lead Coordinator)

Next Steps

➢ Maintain and further develop partnership working across organisations, including opportunities to reflect collectively on progress and align priorities.

➢ Explore sustainable models for delivery and coordination beyond the current funding period, including securing additional external funding.

➢ Continue supporting organisations to build capacity, including skills in delivery, evaluation and accessing future funding opportunities.

"So we've run some sustainability workshops with all of the working groups and the steering group, and there are some things that I think would still continue, but the overall feeling was that, at this stage, there wasn't an organisation who could take on holding that just yet, so we are applying to National Lottery for a further three years."
(Site Lead Co-ordinator)

*Based on Year 3 evaluation findings

Aston Villa Foundation, Newtown and Lozells, Birmingham (Year 3 Case Study 2025-2026)

The Aston Villa Foundation has delivered initiatives through strong partnerships, supporting safer, thriving neighbourhoods and youth leadership. In year three, the Birmingham site significantly increased engagement, reaching **3,387** children and young people (CYP), bringing the total to **2,622**. Key achievements included launching the employment strand and continued success in detached youth work. Community Chest Grants funded workshops on environmental improvement, wellbeing, and leadership, alongside mentoring, CV support, and employability sessions, as well as activities such as rock climbing and archery. Challenges included the disbandment of the community steering group, causing delays. Governance arrangements are now being restructured to establish a new group with an updated framework.

Action plan key activities

Strategic Theme A
Support a collaborative and responsive system

1. Develop a system-wide strategic pledge.
2. Work towards establishing Lozells and Newtown as a "Restorative Neighbourhood".
3. Co-design (with families) and pilot approaches to family advocacy.

Strategic Theme B
To promote a safe, welcoming and prospering neighbourhood

1. Distribute small grants to support environmental improvement.
2. Distribute a "Community Chest" and "Flexible Response Fund" to support grassroots organisations delivering youth activities and community responses to incidents of serious youth violence.
3. Fund the creation of a Neighbourhood Development Forum.
4. Enhance links between businesses and the community.

Lead co-ordinator role

1. Provide support to the steering group and implementation of the action plan.
2. Commissioning and procurement of service delivery leads.
3. Management of funds and monitoring and evaluation.
4. Recording and reporting of programme progress and impact.
5. Community and stakeholder relationship management and communications.

Key achievements delivered in Year 3*



- A system-wide **community pledge** is still active and being embedded. The new steering group will operate under a new framework as per YEF's guidance (YEF Community Report).
- All environmental improvement grants commenced across the selected schools and parks in Lozells and Newtown.
- Implemented Step into Work Programme
- Commissioned Neighbourhood Development Fund (NDF) projects



Five Community Chest Grants were awarded leading to….

- Educational and leadership workshops including, environmental knowledge, leadership programme and team building workshops
- Provide mentorship to young people through networking events, entrepreneurship and CV support, and mental health discussions.
- Run physical and recreational activities including archery and rock-climbing sessions.
- Continued to support the implementation of remaining Community Chest and Neighbourhood Development Fund (NDF) projects, providing guidance to funded organisations, monitoring delivery, and capturing early learning and impact.



- **Rebuilding physical spaces** by using school spaces where possible and securing reliable partner venues to ensure consistency and reduce disruption
- **Explore additional partnership** and funding opportunities to support the sustainability particularly those aligned to employment pathways and youth violence reduction outcomes

Challenges*

Disbandment of the community steering group

Lack of engagement from statutory organisations in the steering group



"There was a lot of community representation, whereas some of the statutory organisations I think have checked out would be my honest view and actually you kind of want those people in the room because I think they've got a little bit more experience and probably a little less personal gain involved, they're there because it's their job rather than they're an organisation who's looking for funding" Lead co-ordinator

Breakdown in communication



"It's very difficult to build a position of trust without being able to talk about why the group was disbanded for nine months." Steering Group Member

Decision-making without the steering group members



"So, during the period in which the steering group had been disbanded, they chose to take, they chose to develop a project with people, with some people who are connected to the steering group, but without any of the core members of the steering group." Steering Group Member

"They just launched it without us because we were challenging them. They didn't want us to be part of the decision making." Steering Group Member

Lead co-ordinator role vs steering group role



"There's a fundamental disagreement about what the role of the steering group is and what the role of the Villa Foundation is in the project." Steering Group Member

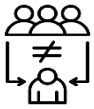
"We brought them in to help us, and then next meeting they tell us that they don't want us, and then they're starting another steering group." Steering Group Member

Consistency for young people



"Continuity of care is important for a lot of our young people, they need to see the same faces consistently, they need to have that support, they need to have that respect because what happens is the first three to six months of a new programme it's trying to get to know the community. So actually, we should have a blend where we partner with some of the other organisations [who are already established in the community] and then do something. I think that would be my solution." Delivery Partner

Systemic issues



"I've had to work in some difficult situations. I've had to address my own racism. I've had to address my own sexism and had to work through ways of trying to engage with people. It felt to me that Aston Villa didn't know how to do that." Steering Group Member

Outcomes & Impacts*



Employment opportunities and role models for young people

"For a lot of the young people that we work with, a lot of them got into employment. The majority of them now have CVs. The majority of them have a positive role model that's around an area that they can contact. We've disengaged a lot of situations and de-escalated a lot of tensions that's been within the area." Delivery Partner



Creating a legacy with young people

"This is about creating the young leaders in those in these communities. So, what we're talking about potentially doing now within this restorative neighbourhoods using that fund to get the young people to become the steering group… the legacy being that they are a constitution or like an entity of 18- to 24-year-olds" Lead coordinator



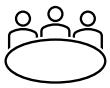
Consistent effort in learning from feedback

"Adapted sessions based on youth friendly approaches and remaining flexible whilst consistent." Delivery Partner



Using wage subsidy to maximise youth employment

"Putting in young people who would never get through the door with certain employers breaking down those barriers by creating a wage subsidy. So, we pay for their work placement for up to six months. You know, I know personally, growing up not far from where we were, that kids just don't get those kind of opportunities, you know, so a programme that kind of does that for me is like is a game changer." Lead coordinator



Aligned with local VRP

"the outcome is that we've aligned our programme to the VRP so we're now sort of sit as part of that wider infrastructure in my mind that probably should have happened from the start." Lead coordinator

Next Steps*

- Finalise and embed the revised governance arrangements, including the updated Terms of Reference and clarified partner roles.
- Support the ongoing operation of the newly established steering group, comprising local young people (aged 18–24 years) and statutory partners, including the Local Community Safety Partnership (LCSP).
- Continue regular Steering Group meetings under the revised governance framework.
- Strengthen integration with the LCSP to support long-term sustainability and strategic oversight.
- Continue delivery and monitoring of funded projects.
- Strengthen evaluation and learning to inform programme delivery, governance development, and future sustainability planning.
- Ensure effective engagement and collaboration between community and statutory partners to support the ongoing development of the new steering group.
- Continue to build the business case for extending the employment programme to maximise its reach and impact among young people.
- Continue to build trust and confidence within the community to support a sustainable programme legacy.

*Based on year 3 evaluation findings

Hope for Cheetham, Manchester (Year 3 Case Study 2025-2026)

Hope for Cheetham has continued to expand its reach, recognition, and impact, with partners delivering a diverse mix of sports, creative, educational, and youth-led activities. This year, the programme engaged with 1008 children and young people (CYP), bringing the total to 2403 since its launch. Strong community engagement was maintained through local outreach, the introduction of Youth Social Action Grants, and new school-focused approaches targeting those not currently accessing provision—helping build trust and widen access, particularly for those most at risk. Despite ongoing challenges around capacity, business engagement, short-term funding, and community safety, partners report positive progress in youth leadership, inclusive programming, and cross-agency collaboration. More young people are aware of and shaping local opportunities, with increasing numbers developing their own ideas. As the current funding cycle nears its end, the Steering Group is focusing on sustainability, strengthening delivery, and supporting a more youth-led, collaborative future. The *Hope for Cheetham* name is becoming more trusted and recognised locally, strengthening future engagement.

Action plan key activities	Key achievements delivered in Year 3*
Theme 1: Sporting activities • E.g. football, boxing and dancing in safe spaces (including girls-only activities to consider cultural restrictions).	 • Swimming, football, boxercise, gym, squash, martial arts, bike programme, park runs. • Estimated well over 600 sessions delivered this year on weekdays and weekends.
Theme 2: Non-sporting activities • E.g. cooking, music, film-making in safe spaces (including girls-only activities to consider cultural restrictions).	• Digital skills club, arts and crafts, stop motion animation, voices of change girls club (empower south Asian girls through leadership and social action), drama and music. • A youth takeover of the We Love Cheetham & Crumpsall newspaper. • Youth clubs specifically targeting boys, girls (one club was tailored towards Muslim girls and tackling islamophobia) and SEND needs.
Theme 3: Detached youth work • Detached youth work in key hotspot areas. • Led by women to better engage with girls. • Inclusion of local police officers to build trust with the community.	• Engagement work with young people at risk and guidance towards positive activities.
Theme 4: Mentoring • "Big Brother"/ "Big Sister" programmes focusing on the most vulnerable young people. • Wider mentoring programmes in schools, with a focus on education and employment.	• Weekly 1-2-1 mentoring sessions • Personal development planning opportunities • Pizza and chats • Intensive violence interruption Programme
Theme 5: Life skills • Years 5/6 participate in awareness raising and trauma-informed workshops e.g. Child Sexual/Criminal exploitation, healthy relationships, drug trade and grooming, safe social media use. • Employment/education training delivered in partnership with local businesses. • General drop-in life skills support – e.g. using public transport, homework, CVs/ job applications. • Social skills training- vulnerable young people in schools.	• Homework clubs, tuition classes, hands-on experience on alternative work routes (creative, arts, digital media), collaborations with local professionals. • Youth Social Action Grants • Project Design Workshop to directly support young people who are not connected to a local group, giving them practical help to turn their ideas into fundable projects and ensuring equitable access to the Youth Fund.

Theme 6: Programme management

- Develop/deliver inclusive grants processes, with focus on building sustainability of local organisations.
- Map needs and provision within Cheetham Hill.
- Co-ordinate/participate in the governance of the strategy.
- Support evaluation and engagement with YEF partners.

- Initiated a school engagement plan to reach young people who are not currently engaged in youth provision
- Quarterly Cheetham stakeholder and funder meeting, with all grantees in attendance.

Theme 7: Capacity, training and support

- Provide 1-1 support to local organisations to help them build their capacity.
- Building on existing capacity building funded in the area.

- Hope for Cheetham and Shared Future were invited by LiveWell (Greater Manchester Integrated Care Partnership) to co-host a webinar on the Choose for Cheetham participatory budgeting model.
- Upskilling sessions for organisations working with CYP, supporting them to apply for funding, developing project ideas, building simple budgets and timelines, and helping young people shape realistic, well-structured applications.

Theme 8: Strategy, systems and fundraising

- Pursuing match funding.
- Engagement with businesses to support the education, employment and training activities.
- Engaging and co-ordinating activity with strategic partners.
- Facilitate engagement with the Police to encourage referrals and trust building with local young people.
- Development and delivery of targeted communications plan.

- Youth takeover of We Love Cheetham & Crumpsall showcased creativity and shaped community narratives.
- Cross-sector meeting aligned services, leaders, and youth to strengthen action for a safer Cheetham Hill.
- Youth-led police Q&A built trust, with demand for follow-up sessions.
- The Cheetham Summer Fun Day
- Outreach at the Cheetham Cultural Festival to raise awareness of the Hope for Cheetham

Challenges*

Environmental factors and safety



"Sometimes at night, when my friends come over, they say they feel unsafe around the alleys. I don't even realize that, because I've been here for so long, but they feel unsafe because the alleys are very dark, you know, people can pop out, and it can be quite dangerous at night." CYP

"This was originally due to take place in the local park, but safety concerns led to us hiring a private and (expensive!!) football pitch to ensure the activity could continue safely." Delivery partner data monitoring

Struggles with business engagement



"It's just been difficult to engage businesses in the area like we've done all the outreach and stuff and they're just not really responding to us. So, it's not like a lack of trying or lack of capacity or whatever. It's literally just been like they've not…bitten in the same way [some of the other action plan activities]. So yeah that's [action plan activity] probably a bit behind…" Lead coordinator

Short term funding



"I think it kind of runs in terms of the funding cycles really because they're like year annual funding and the funding tends to dictate sort of where the support is or isn't. So, we're obviously coming up to the end of a funding cycle now." Lead coordinator

Commitment from local leaders



"The kind of continued and I suppose increased engagement from the systems and the services and stuff like the counsellors have been really engaged but not really done anything that we've asked like they come along and they'd be lovely but like then I don't I don't personally feel like they're particularly advocating for the group." Lead coordinator



A need to focus on key regions

"I think I'd probably spend the budget differently. I think just based on that like, I think. The action plan is brilliant, but also like so ambitious and like a bit like… I'm wondering whether it might be better to, like kind of focus down on a few specific areas…" Lead co-ordinator

Observed Outcomes*



Systemic shifts

"They'd be like, oh, I'll just ring that person up and ask them to do this thing or ask their opinion or whatever and that always ended up excluding the same people again. So, a lot of the kind of systematic change we've been doing has been helpful in making sure that they see they're kind of using the group rather than just phoning up individuals. I think that's had a positive impact on how decisions are being made across the local community and, it's created a bit more of a sort of mutual decision making." Lead co-ordinator



School engagement

"I'm hopeful about the connections between schools and community coming forward as well. We're doing bit more engagement with schools this year, which we've not managed to do in previous years and they're always seem super keen but difficult to engage with capacity wise. I'm hopeful about it because we've got such a good understanding of the area now almost so like link in with everyone that they're not going to come to us in a year time and be like, well, there's nothing to do in the local area." Lead coordinator



Increase in awareness and reach

"There's some of the some of the insights that shaped the programme from the beginning, which were about, like, you know, young people feeling like there was nothing to do in the area. I reckon if you asked young people that now sure, some of them might still say that but actually a lot of them wouldn't, and they'd be like "I know the stuff going on, even if I don't personally go, I know that this thing's happening" which is good because it means that there's options" Lead coordinator



Accessibility for girls' activities

"They've [delivery partners] become way more proactive about making sure that things are accessible for girls, so like instead of just being like we're going to put on a boys boxing class, they think, oh, we'll put on a boy's class and a girl's class. That's a change that I've seen. They're trying to get funding and stuff for different girls, specific groups we just had a few more sort of youth leadership opportunities. They've got all these like young women leaders who are awesome, who are saying that they want to do stuff." Lead coordinator



Learning new skills

"It's going to have a big impact on the community, especially for the age range we're working with, from 12 to 18. It will give them a chance to go into careers in labouring or engineering. They're going to meet new people, and they're actually going to use these skills in real life. It's not like a one-off thing; it's everyday stuff. I mean, you don't know when you're going to need to put a clock on the wall." CYP

Next Steps*

- Decrease scaffolding and support the delivery partners to be sustainable.
- Continue working in collaboration with partners across local area.
- Secure income and funding beyond the current funding cycle.
- Expand on the activities: perform in professional theatres, increase number of educational trips, more frequent youth club sessions, homework clubs.
- Delivery organisations to expand e.g. hire additional staff.
- Invest in technology for some of the activities.
- Reach more young people.
- Make including young people in the decision-making a priority.
- Move away from a structured approach and towards a co-created model.
- Keep upskilling organisations, expand capacity, and share the workload.
- Implement youth-led fun day.
- Launch of School Funding to increase engagement and collaborations between Hope for Cheetham and schools.
- Start youth-led social action fund

*Based on year 3 evaluation findings

7.4 Appendix 4: Research tools

7.4.1 Topic guide YEF NF Programme –Steering group members and other partners (Green highlight indicates new/amended questions added this year)

Topic guide YEF Neighbourhood Fund 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)*?
3. Why was your neighbourhood chosen for the project? What were the existing strengths/assets in your neighbourhood that make the action plan work?
    - What were the challenges in your community that could hinder the action plan?
4. What is your role specifically within your steering group?
5. How is your steering group organised?
    - Do you have specific working groups to achieve action plan tasks? If so, how do these work?
    - How often does your steering group meet/ for how long?
    - Does your steering group meeting tend to have a specific agenda?
    - Is there a specific format the meetings tend to follow?
6. How well do you think your steering group works together?
    - Good communication
    - Everyone has a voice e.g. all ideas are listened to
    - Is there anyone/organisation that's not represented on your steering group that should be?
    - Equal/fair contributions
    - Commitment i.e. attendance
    - What could be improved to make your steering group work better?
7. How does your steering group hold each other accountable for the agreed actions and ensure actions are delivered on time.

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 know about the local action plan?
    - How well is your action plan being delivered?
    - How do you know it's been delivered well?
    - Is your action plan on track or are there any specific actions that are behind schedule?
9. Which activities/actions have been implemented to date?

- And what actions from your action plan haven't been implemented yet and why?
- Have there been any adaptations or changes made to your activities or action plan based on feedback or emerging needs?

10. What are the roles of different stakeholders in delivering the action plan?
11. What are the key enablers and barriers to implementing the action plan?
12. Overall, how well are the different components of the action plan being delivered?
13. How does your steering groups strategic decision-making ensure that your action plan activities effectively reach and respond to the needs of young people from racially minoritised backgrounds in your neighbourhood?
    - How do you identify and address any gaps in participation among specific racial or ethnic groups?
    - Can you give an example of a decision or change that was made to improve race equity in programme delivery?
    - To what extent are individuals from racially minoritised backgrounds involved in shaping decisions?
14. How are the activities that your steering group are funding targeting CYP who are most at risk of being involved in violence?

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?
    - Do you think there are particular groups of young people, for example, based on race, gender, or disability, whose experiences or barriers differ? How does your project respond to these intersecting needs?
16. To what extent are strong sustainable collaborations being formed between delivery partners, young people, and the wider community?
    - what does a strong sustainable collaboration look like, what are the key ingredients
17. Have you observed any other outcomes or impacts of the project or action plan across the community or partnership?
    - Unexpected outcomes?

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?
    - Funding, do you think smaller grassroot organisations have improved their capacity to apply for larger funding grants
    - Do you think most neighbourhood funded activities will continue after the project and if so, how will that look/work?
21. How sustainable do you feel your steering group is once the project has concluded?
    - Do you think this steering group will continue?
    - Will the same partners still be involved
    - Will you look for new partners to continue to be involved?
    - Who will lead the steering group without the lead coordinators

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?*

22. 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?
23. In what ways does your programme actively engage and support young people from racially underrepresented or marginalised communities?
    - How is your activity recruiting these young people
    - How do you track and measure outcomes for young people from different racial backgrounds?
24. 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?
25. What are the key facilitators to implementation?
26. What are the key barriers to implementation?
27. 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)
28. What is working well and less well?
29. What are the key areas for improvement?
    - How have you found completing your quarterly monitoring data and providing high levels of details about CYP participating in your activities?

7.4.2 Topic guide YEF NF Programme –Children/ young people and local community members.

Introduction

Hello, my name is *[*research's *name]*, and we are carrying out a study to look at how the *[activity/intervention] (s*) has been implemented and what impact it may have had for those taking part. Please be aware that (even when working within in a group) you are always welcome to stop the interview/focus group, ask any question or have a break to step out or consult privately with the researcher if you feel you need to.

Background

1. Before we start, I'd like to start with some questions about you. Could you tell me a bit about yourself?

   Age; gender; school.

2. Could you tell me a bit about your local area?
    - How long have you lived in the area?
    - What do you like about the area? Why?
    - What do you think could be better? Why?

Experience and understandings of *[activity/intervention]*

Questions	Prompts (these are additional questions that we may ask)
Can you tell us about the first time you came to [activity/intervention]? Can you describe what happens at [activity/intervention]	• How did you hear about [activity/intervention]? • How did you get involved? • Why did you take part? • What were you looking forward to? If anything? – why? • What were you not looking forward to? If anything? – why? • What were your expectations at the beginning? What were you hoping to achieve? • How did you feel the first time you took part? Why did you feel that way? • Did that change after you had attended? • How long have you taken part for? • How often do you attend? • What happens when you attend – what different activities do you take part in? • Who is [activity/intervention] aimed at? (Who can attend?)
Can you tell us what works well about [activity/intervention]?	Prompts: • the content/things you do, • the people delivering [activity/intervention], • the length of the sessions, • the location. • other service users/peer support
Can you tell us anything that you would improve or change about [activity/intervention]?	Prompts as above

Outcomes and impact

Questions	Prompts
Can you tell us about what you think the overall aim of [activity/intervention] is?	Prompts: • New skills and abilities, improved health hand well being

What difference has [activity/intervention] made for you?	• Have the aims described above been achieved? • If yes, can you tell me more about how [activity/intervention] have made this happen? • Why has [activity/intervention] made a difference for you? • If no, why do you think this is?
Do you think there have been any other impacts?	• Prompts: on your family members, friends, adults who support you e.g. at school.
Do you think there is anything that might stop [activity/intervention] being successful?	

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about *[activity/intervention]* that we haven't talked about?

Support for children and young people (Children 10-18 years old)

1) In your local area, what local support or activities are there for children and young people?
    a. What does it involve?
    b. Who is this for? Can all who need to access do so?
    c. What impact does it have (why)? Are these impacts the same for all?
    d. Do you think local support/activity has been designed based on their what they have said and needed?

2) What more could be done to support children and young people in regard to local support or activities?
    - What activities would you like to see/are needed?
    - Why? How could this be implemented?

Support for children and young people (adults)

3) In your local area, what local support or activities are there for children and young people?
    a. What does it involve?
    b. Who is this for? Can all who need to access do so?
    c. What impact does it have (why)? Are these impacts the same for all?
    d. Do you think local support/activity has been designed based on what they have said and needed?

4) What more could be done to support children and young people to influence the design and running of local support or activities?
    - What types/specific activities do you think are needed?
    - Why? How could this be implemented?

5) In your local area, do you think children and young people are supported to make positive decisions that affect their lives?
    e. No: why not?

f. Yes: How are they supported? Is this the same for children and young people? What impact does this have (why)? Are these impacts the same for all?

6) What more could be done to support children and young to make positive decisions that affect their lives?
   - Why? How could this be implemented?

Thank participants for their time and explain what happens next/how their data will be used.

7.4.3 Online survey: Steering group members and delivery partner survey questions

1) Location

- ☐ Birmingham (Lozells and Newtown)
- ☐ Bradford (Bowling and Barkerend)
- ☐ Cardiff (Butetown and Grangetown)
- ☐ Norfolk (Nelson ward, Central and Northgate, Great Yarmouth)
- ☐ Manchester (Cheetham Hill)

2) Your role within the project

- ☐ Steering group member *(also known as core group member)*
- ☐ Delivery partner (skip to section 2 delivery)
- ☐ A steering group member and a delivery partner

Section 1: Partnership working (steering group members only)

The next few questions will focus of steering group participation. Please consider your answering in relation to the YEF Neighbourhood Fund Project *(local project name to be inserted here)* which aims to *(local or programme level aim to be inserted here)*.

	Synergy				
Please think about the people and organisations that are participants in your partnership. By working together…	**Extremely well**	**Very well**	**Somewhat well**	**Not so well**	**Not well at all**
How well is your partnership able to identify new and creative ways to solve problems?					
How well is your partnership able to include the views and priorities of the people *(children, young people, and communities)* affected by the partnerships work?					
How well is your partnership able to develop goals that are widely understood and supported amongst partners?					
How well is your partnership able to identify how different services and programmes in the community relate to the problem *(reducing youth violence)* the partnership is trying to address?					
How well is your partnership able to respond to the needs and problems of the community?					
How well is your partnership able to implement strategies that are most likely to work in the community?					

How well is your partnership able to obtain support from individuals and organisations in the community that can either block the partnerships plans or help move them forward?					
How well is your partnership able to carry out comprehensive activities that connect multiple services programmes or systems?					
How well is your partnership able to clearly communicate to people in the community how the partnerships actions will address the problems that are important to them?					

Leadership

Please think about all of the people who provide either formal or informal leadership in this partnership. Please rate the <u>total effectiveness</u> of your partnership's leadership in each of the following areas:	**Excellent**	**Very good**	**Good**	**Fair**	**Poor**	**Don't know**
Taking responsibility for the partnership						
Inspiring or motivating people involved in the partnership						
Empowering people involved in the partnership						
Communicating the vision of the partnership						
Working to develop a common language within the partnership						
Fostering respect, trust, inclusiveness, and openness in the partnership						
Creating an environment where differences of opinion can be voiced						
Resolving conflict among partners						
Combining the perspective resources and skills of the partners						
Helping the partnership to be creative and looking at things differently						
Recruiting diverse people and organisations into the partnership						

Efficiency

Please choose the statement that best describes how your partnership uses <u>financial resources, in-kind resources,</u> and <u>time</u>.	**Excellent**	**Very good**	**Good**	**Fair**	**Poor**	**Don't know**
How well does the partnership makes use of <u>financial resources.</u>						
How well does your partnership use <u>in- kind resource</u> (e.g. skills, expertise, information, data, connections, influence, space, equipment, goods).						

How well does your partnership use the partner's time.						

Administration and management

We would like you to think about the administration and management activities in your partnership please rate the effectiveness of your partnership in carrying out each of the following activities	**Excellent**	**Very good**	**Good**	**Fair**	**Poor**	**Don't know**
Coordinating communication amongst partners						
Coordinating communication with people and organisations outside the partnership						
Organising partnership activities including meetings and projects						
Applying for and managing grants and funds						
Preparing materials that involve partners and help them make timely decisions						
Performing secretarial duties						
Providing orientation to new partners as they joined the partnership						
Evaluating the progress and impact of the partnership						
Minimising the barriers to participate in in the partnership meetings and activities (e.g. by holding them at a convenient place and time, by providing transportation, and childcare)						

Non-financial resources

A partnership needs non-financial resources in order to work effectively and achieve its goals. For each of the following types of resources, to what extent does your partnership have what it needs to work effectively?	**All of what it needs**	**Most of what it needs**	**Some of what it needs**	**Almost none of what it needs**	**None of what it needs**	**Don't know**
Skills and expertise (e.g. leadership, administration, evaluation, law, public policy, cultural competency, training, community organising).						
Data and information (e.g. statistical data, information about community perceptions, values, resources, and politics).						
Connections to target populations						
Connections to political decision makers, government agencies, and other organisations/groups						
Legitimacy and credibility						
Influence and ability to bring people together for meetings and activities						

Financial and Other Capital Resources

A partnership also needs financial and other capital resources in order to work effectively and to achieve its goals. For each of the following types of resource is to what extent does your partnership have where it needs to work effectively?	All of what it needs	Most of what it needs	Some of what it needs	Almost none of what it needs	None of what it needs	Don't know
Money						
Space						
Equipment and goods						

Decision-making

	Extremely comfortable	Very comfortable	Somewhat comfortable	A little comfortable	Not at all comfortable
How **comfortable** are you with the way decisions are made in your partnership?					

	All of the time	Most of the time	Some of the time	Almost none of the time	None of the time
How often do you **support** the decisions made by the partnership?					
How often do you feel that you have been **left out** of the decision-making process?					

Benefits of participation

For each of the following benefits, please indicate whether you have or have not received the benefit as a result of participating in the partnership	Yes	No
Enhanced ability to address an important issue		
Development of new skills		
Heightened public profile		
Increased utilisation of my expertise or services		
Acquisition of useful knowledge about services programmes or people in the community		
Enhanced ability to affect public policy		
Development of valuable relationships		
Enhance ability to meet the needs of my community or clients		
Ability to have a greater impact than I could have on my own		
Ability to make a contribution to the community		
Acquisition of additional financial support		

Drawbacks of participation

For each of the following drawbacks, please indicate whether or not you have or have not experienced the drawback as a result of participating in this partnership	Yes	No
Diversion of time and resources away from other priorities or obligations		
Insufficient influence in partnership activities		
Viewed negatively due to association with other partners or partnership		

Frustration or aggravation		
Insufficient credit given to me for contribution to accomplishments of the partnership		
Conflict between my job and the partnerships work		

Compared benefits and Drawbacks

	Benefits greatly exceed the drawbacks	Benefits exceed the drawbacks	Benefits and drawbacks are about equal	Drawbacks exceed the benefits	Drawbacks greatly exceed the benefits
So far, how have the benefits of participating in this partnership compared to the drawbacks?					

Satisfaction with Participation

	Completely satisfied	Mostly satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	A little satisfied	Not at all satisfied
How satisfied are you with the way the people and organisations in the partnership work together?					
How satisfied are you with your influence in the partnership					
How satisfied are you with your role in the partnership					
How satisfied are you with the partnership's plans for achieving its goals					
How satisfied are you with the way the partnership is implementing its plans					

Section 2: Delivery of activities (Delivery partners only)

What types of activities are you/your organisation involved in running as part of funding you have received for The YEF Neighbourhood Fund (tick as many that apply).

- ☐ Sport
- ☐ Skill based activities (i.e. cooking, music, art etc)
- ☐ Education/learning (GCSE help, literacy, reading/writing)
- ☐ Improving knowledge (safety, violence prevention, mental health)
- ☐ Mentorship
- ☐ Employment and training
- ☐ Environmental improvement
- ☐ Other
    - If other, please state what type of activity/intervention you run.

Who is the target group for you activity/intervention (tick as many that apply)

- ☐ Boys
- ☐ Girls
- ☐ Both boys and girls
- ☐ Those at risk of NEET (not in employment, education, or training)
- ☐ Those with additional learning needs
- ☐ Other (please specify)

Please select which best fits your activity/intervention.

- ☐ Drop in sessions

- ☐ Structure intervention with a set number of children/young people
- ☐ Other (please specify)

How well do you feel….

	Very well	Well	Adequately	Poorly	Very poorly
…the delivery activities are engaging with the target group of young people to prevent youth violence?					
Please explain your answer:					
…supported by the leaders/those who have funded you to undertake your activities?					
Please explain your answer:					
… the funding you received covers all your activities that you have been commissioned to run.					
Please explain your answer:					
… you accounted for additional costs in your application i.e. staff time, facilities, bills etc.					
Please explain your answer:					
…all elements of your activity/intervention being delivered?					
Please explain your answer:					

What has worked well or has been key to the success of delivering your activity?

(Free text) _____

What challenges have you faced in delivering your activity?

(Free text) _____

What strategies have you used to overcome these challenges?

(Free text) _____

What strategies have been effective in attracting young people to participate in the project?

(Free text) _____

Impact and Outcomes (all participants)

What positive changes have you observed so far for children and young people as a result of the Youth Endowment Fund, Neighbourhood fund (if any)?

(Free text) _____

What positive changes have you observed so far for the local community as a result of the Youth Endowment Fund, Neighbourhood fund (if any)?

(Free text) _____

What positive changes have you observed so far for partnership working as a result of the Youth Endowment Fund, Neighbourhood fund (if any)?

(Free text) _____

Have you noticed any early indicators of reduced youth violence as a result of your activity or the project over all?

- ☐ **Yes**
- ☐ **No**
- ☐ **Too early to tell**
- ☐ **If yes, please describe: _____**

What potential long-term impacts do you foresee if the project continues on its current trajectory?

(Free text) _____

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your feedback is invaluable in shaping the future of the project and ensuring its success in reducing youth violence.

We are currently interviewing delivery partners to find out more about their activities. If you would like to tell us more about your activity, please leave your contact email and one of our research team will be in touch to arrange an interview for a convenient time**.**

Email: (Free text) _____

In additional, this year's evaluation report would like to include young people's voices and their experiences of participating in the programme. The evaluation team feel it's very important that they are represented in the report and have the opportunity to share their views. Please let us know if it would be possible to organise a short focus group with young people attending your activity. If this is something you can help facilitate, please leave your contact email address and someone from the research team will be in touch to organise.

Email: (Free text) _____

Thank you again for participating in this survey