Education Authority

2026 - 2029



ARMAGH, BANBRIDGE & CRAIGAVON

LOCAL ASSESSMENT OF NEED

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Introduction

The Education Authority (EA) Youth Service Local Assessment of Need is a key document outlined in the Department of Education's (DE) Youth Work Policy Priorities for Youth (2013) as it requires the Education Authority to ensure 'planning, funding and the delivery of youth work will be based on the EA composite (local and regional) assessment of need.'

The wider requirements and purpose of undertaking the assessment of need process is outlined in detail within the Regional Assessment of Need 2026-2029. This regional document provides further detail on the EA's statutory duty, other policy requirements and links to Northern Ireland Government strategies. It also sets the context within which these documents are being completed as well as the key purpose and functions the effective youth provision provides for children and young people. The regional document can be found here.

This document should be read in conjunction with the Regional Assessment of Need. Its key objective is to establish the level of need for Youth Service provision for children and young people aged 4-25 years in Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon. It brings together data, evidence and local insight to help identify the needs and barriers children and young people in Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon face. Listening to, and understanding, the voices and opinions of children and young people is an important part of this process.

Methodology

Following on from the methodology of the Regional Assessment of Need process, there were six parts to developing the Local Assessment of Need for in Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon. The tools used to gather essential information and data for the regional document had the ability to be filtered at a local level and this supplied EA with an excellent resource to listen to and understand the direct voices of children and young people. Details of how this was achieved are laid out in the regional document.

Part One – Children and Young People's Survey

A survey for all children and young people aged 4-25 years was designed and developed by a project team set up within the Education Authority Youth Service based on the eight strategic outcomes of the Children and Young Peoples' Strategy 2020-2030. A total of 5,451 children and young people responded to the survey. From those figures 664 participants completed the survey in Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon.

Part Two – Children and Young People's Focus Groups

The Education Authority Youth Service Participation team, working with young people from the Small Grants panel, designed a resource allowing facilitators to manage and record the focus group sessions. Focus groups with children and young people were facilitated by youth workers. These were based on the policy age group bands and including specific groups of young people, within the Section 75 grouping, or those who may be at greater risk of social exclusion, marginalisation or isolation because they experience a combination of barriers to learning. A total of 138 focus groups, involving 1,630 participants, were facilitated throughout Northern Ireland. 30 focus groups, involving 340 participants were completed in Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon.

Part Three – The Development of Area Profiles

Area Profiles using all available statistical data and information about the needs of children and young people have been produced using a range of data and information from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. These reports focused on demographic information and reflected wider social, economic and environmental determinants which negatively impacted children and young people. The Area profile Report for Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon can be found here.

Part Four – Embedding Findings from Key Research

The Education Authority Youth Service's Information and Planning Team conducted a significant literature review under the key outcome areas used in the survey and focus group materials. They also had access to all research and stakeholder engagement event reports conducted by the Youth Service as well as other research completed by academics and youth organisations relevant to the assessment of need.

Part Five – Parents and Organisation Survey

A survey for parents and other relevant organisations was designed and developed by a project team set up within the EA Youth Service based on the eight strategic outcomes of the Children and Young Peoples' Strategy 2020-2030.

Part Six – Wider Stakeholder Engagement

- Youth Engagement Event 15 January 2025
- Youth Engagement Event 5 February 2025
- Youth Engagement Event 6 February 2025
- Youth Engagement Event 7 February 2025
- Youth Engagement Event 11 February 2025
- Youth Engagement Event 13 February 2025
- Youth Engagement Event 20 February 2025
- Youth Engagement Event 27 February 2025
- Youth Work Staff Engagement Event 7th February 2025
- Youth Work Staff Engagement Event 19th February 2025
- Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon Local Advisory Group 8 October 2025
- Stakeholder Engagement Event on the Cost-of-Living 27 November 2024
- Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon Local Advisory Group 28 November 2025
- Local Advisory Group Stakeholders Engagement Event Health & Wellbeing 7th February 2025
- Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership - Armagh Locality Planning Group 24 October 2024 & 9 January 2025
- Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership - Banbridge Locality Planning Group 27 November 2024 & 5 February 2025
- Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership - Craigavon Locality Planning Group 5 November 2024 & 21 January 2025
- Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership Southern Outcomes 18 February 2025

Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council Area in Numbers

The population of Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Local Government District is 220,271 people.

72,603 children and young people are aged 0-25 years live in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon.

61,470 children and young people are aged 4-25 years live in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon.

Age bands population

- 11,139 aged 0 – 3 years
- 15,323 aged 4 – 8 years
- 15,904 aged 9 – 13 years
- 13,989 aged 14 – 18 years
- 16,251 aged 19 – 25 years

In Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon 6,538 children and young people aged 0-25 years (9%) live in deprivation.

30,495 children and young people (42%) live in a rural community in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon.

22% of children and young people aged 0-24 years old in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon come from a lone parent family (census21).

9,082 (20%) Children and young people in Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon were living in relative poverty in the year ending April 2022 (Department for Work and Pensions)

3,861 Newcomers attend schools in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (8.9%) – NI Average 5%.

154 Irish Traveller children and young people.

8,766 (28.5%) of all pupils in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon are eligible for Free School Meals. 2023/24. (NI average 28%).

6,998 pupils (16.6%) who attend school in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon 2022/23 have a Special Education Need or Disability Stage 1-3 (NI average 19%).

The percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C (incl. equivalent qualifications) including GCSE English and Math in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon in 2022/23 is 75% compared to the NI average of 76.1%.

The percentage of school leavers who are unemployed and/or unknown in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon in 2022/23 is 5% (NI average 4.7%).

4.8% of young people 20-24 years old are not in employment and do not have a qualification. (NI average 4.9%).

The proportion of Primary 1 pupils identified as obese or overweight in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon in 2022/23 is 19.9% (NI average 20.4%).

The proportion of Year 8 pupils identified as obese or overweight in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon in 2022/23 is 26.4% (NI average 26%). This represents 25.3% of girls (NI 26.2%) and 27.5% of boys (NI 25.8%).

Suicide rates in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon have decreased by 27% from 2020 with 29 suicides to 21 suicides in 2023. The suicide rate has continued to fall this past 2 years in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon.

There were 104 incidents with a sectarian motivation in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon in 2023/24.

There were 102 incidents with a racist motivation in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon in 2023/24. This is a 7.4% increase from the previous year of 95 racial motivated incidents.

There has been a 10.8% (1,353) rise in incidents with a racist motivation in 2023/24 to year 2022/23 (1,221) in Northern Ireland.

Across Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council Area there were a 104 people Killed or Seriously Injured in 2024. (Police recorded road traffic casualties by injury severity- 2024)

There was a total of 2,271 domestic abuse crimes in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon in 2023/24. This is a +1.5% increase from the previous year. The average rate for domestic abuse crimes in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon DEAs is 325 (NI average 250).

There was a total of 4,813 anti-social behaviour incidents in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon in 2023/24. This is an 8% drop from the previous year. The average rate for anti-social behaviour incidents in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon DEAs is 688 (NI average 567).

Constituency Data

27.2% of children in the Newry and Armagh electoral constituency live in poverty (District Electoral Area include Cusher and Armagh).

In terms of relative poverty, Newry and Armagh was the highest, with 6,592 children under 16 living in poverty. The second highest figure was 6,023, which was in Belfast West.

5,599 children in Upper Bann are living in relative poverty. - (Portadown, Craigavon & Lurgan)

Northern Ireland Data:

The Executive Office Ending Violence Against Women and Girls: Experiences and Attitudes of 16-year-olds in Northern Ireland in 2024 Report:

In the last year, almost a fifth of 16-year-olds had experienced online violence (19%).

Psychological violence was experienced by 18% of respondents. Just over one in ten had experienced sexual violence (11%) and 7% had experienced physical violence

Of those respondents experiencing violent acts or behaviour in the last year, the most common places where they occurred were online (42%), at school (35%) and a public outdoor space (26%).

Prevalence of Bereavement

Four young people in Northern Ireland experience the death of a parent every day (NICVA Community NI April 2023)

Key Trends/Highlights

Growing Youth Population: The increase in younger populations (especially in the 4-13 age bands) will lead to a higher number of 14-18-year-olds over the next few years.

Economic Disadvantage and Deprivation: Within the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Area 9% of children and young people in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon live in deprivation. This highlights the socio-economic challenges faced by many in the area. With 42% of young people living in rural communities and 22% coming from lone-parent families, there are interconnected challenges of limited access to resources, social isolation and increased vulnerability to poverty-related issues.

Mental and Physical Health Concerns: The obesity rates across Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon raise concerns, with 19.9% of Primary 1 pupils and 26.4% of Year 8 pupils identified as overweight or obese. These figures closely mirror the Northern Ireland average, highlighting the need for health initiatives aimed at preventing obesity among children and young people. This trend not only affects general well-being but contributes to deeper mental health issues.

Rising Incidents of Hate, Anti-Social Behaviour and Domestic Abuse: Hate crime and sectarianism remain pressing concerns in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon. There was a 7.4% increase in racially motivated incidents from 2022/23 to 2023/24, alongside 104 sectarian incidents in 2023/24. However, the most alarming trend is the significant rise in domestic abuse crimes, which totalled 2,271 incidents in 2023/24 - a 1.5% increase from the previous year and significantly higher than the NI average. This is particularly concerning given the impact of domestic abuse on children and young people's safety and mental health. Children and young people are affected by domestic abuse, with the trauma often spilling over into their school and social environments, further complicating their emotional and mental well-being**.**

Educational Achievement and Employment Concerns: In Armagh City, Banbridge, and Craigavon 75% of school leavers achieved at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C, slightly below the Northern Ireland average of 76.1%. However, 5% of school leavers in the area were either unemployed or their status was unknown, which is slightly higher than the Northern Ireland average of 4.7%. This highlights the ongoing issue of youth unemployment in the area and challenges faced by young people, including additional barriers such as limited career opportunities. Additionally, 4.8% of young people aged 20-24 are neither employed nor qualified, which is close to the Northern Ireland average of 4.9%. This situation highlights the need for career guidance, better access to vocational training and employment support for all children and young people, especially those from marginalised and vulnerable groups**.** Furthermore, 16.6% of pupils (6,998 students) in the area have Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND), whilst slightly lower than the Northern Ireland average of 19% it still highlights the challenges faced by these young people and the barriers, they may encounter in accessing support and opportunities.

Violence against young women and girls in Northern Ireland is a growing concern in Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Area with 18% of 16-year-olds reported experiencing psychological violence, 11% sexual violence and 7% physical violence. These incidents are most commonly occurring online (42%), in schools (35%) and in public spaces (26%). Young women and girls are particularly vulnerable to these forms of violence, which negatively impact their mental health and safety. Domestic abuse crimes are also rising in Armagh, Banbridge, and Craigavon, with 2,271 incidents reported in 2023/24. This suggests that young women often face violence both in their homes and in public spaces.

Overall, these trends suggest that young people in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon face socio-economic challenges that affect their mental health, educational attainment and employment prospects, alongside rising community tensions and violence against women and girls.

Findings From Children and Young People

This section combines the results from the Regional Assessment of Need survey conducted with children and young people across Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Area, NISRA statistical data, feedback from focus groups and engagement from wider key stakeholders.

When asked what the most important theme of provision was for children and young people across Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Area, through the Regional Assessment of Need survey, children and young people ranked the themes by importance to them as follows:

1. Economic and Environmental Stability – 30%
2. Access to Play and Leisure – 18%
3. Emotional Health and Wellbeing – 17%
4. Living in Safety and Stability – 12%
5. Respect for Young People's Rights – 9%
6. Learning and Achieving – 7%
7. Good Relations and Equality – 5%
8. Making a Positive Contribution to Society – 1%

Economic and Environmental Stability

Key facts

In Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon 6,538 children and young people aged 0-25 years (9%) live in an area of deprivation.

30,495 children and young people (42%) live in a rural community in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon.

The percentage of school leavers who are unemployed and/or unknown in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon in 2022/23 is 5% (NI average 4.7%).

4.8% of young people 20-24 years old are not in employment and do not have a qualification. (NI average 4.9%).

8,766 (28.5%) of all pupils in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon are eligible for Free School Meals. 2023/24. (NI average 28%).

Stakeholder input/feedback

Economic well-being plays a significant role in determining the overall quality of life, including income, job opportunities, access to basic needs like food and housing and overall happiness. For children and young people, a family's financial situation directly impacts their educational performance, health and overall life satisfaction.

In Armagh City, Banbridge, and Craigavon, 6,538 children and young people (about 9%) live in areas of deprivation, which makes it more difficult for them to thrive. Stakeholders have agreed that certain areas face significant challenges in terms of economic stability, which affects children and young people's ability to succeed.

Children and young people from lower-income families often face additional challenges, such as difficulties with learning, health and social skills. In Armagh, Banbridge, and Craigavon, 8,766 pupils (28.5%) are eligible for Free School Meals in the 2023/24 school year, which reflects the Northern Ireland average. However, stakeholders reported that despite this, a significant number of children lack access to essential services that can improve their quality of life, which impacts their overall well-being.

Over 25% of young people across the area have expressed that they feel there will not be a career option for them in the future and many feel ill-equipped for the job market ahead. Stakeholders have stated that this uncertainty leaves young people feeling anxious about their prospects.

A long-term low income makes these challenges even more difficult for children and young people. The ongoing cost-of-living crisis, characterised by rising costs of food, energy and fuel, has intensified the situation for many families. This financial strain is affecting children and young people, particularly as they struggle to meet their basic needs. Emotional mental health concerns are also rising, with stakeholders agreeing that children and young people from lower-income families are four times more likely to experience mental health issues compared to their wealthier peers. This disparity has been reported by local health services, who have noted an increased need for mental health support in communities. The rate of mental health issues is further increased by the feeling of limited opportunities for the future, with many young people acknowledging that their current experiences contribute to their anxiety. Almost 25% of young people have expressed concerns that they're not equipped to get a job in the future, and some have voiced frustration that not enough is being done to address mental health and well-being. Stakeholders reported that these concerns need attention, as the financial strain is not only affecting young people's emotional mental health but also their employment opportunities.

In Armagh City, Banbridge, and Craigavon, 5% of school leavers were either unemployed or had an unknown status in 2022/23, slightly higher than the Northern Ireland average of 4.7%. Additionally, 4.8% of young people aged 20-24 in this area are neither employed nor have qualifications, which contributes to the worry that a lack of job opportunities will prevent them from securing a stable future. Stakeholders have agreed that this situation reinforces the need for more practical learning experiences, such as apprenticeships and employment training programmes, to help young people build the skills required to succeed in today's competitive job market. Over 25% of young people in Armagh, Banbridge, and Craigavon feel that they won't have career options in the future, underlining the urgency for increased opportunities.

The surrounding environment also plays a role in young people's health and happiness. Due to their developing bodies, children are particularly vulnerable to pollution and other environmental hazards. In Armagh City, Banbridge, and Craigavon, 30,495 children and young people (42%) live in rural communities, which presents unique challenges. These young people often lack the opportunities that are more readily available in urban areas, making them feel disconnected and left behind. Stakeholders reported that the isolation and often the loneliness experienced in these rural areas further increases feelings of exclusion.

Furthermore, environmental concerns are high on the minds of young people across the area. Almost 50% of young people across the area have expressed worry about climate change and its impact on their local area. This growing anxiety is increased by the feeling that they have no control over the environmental damage taking place around them. Almost 40% of young people stated that they feel they are not getting enough education on climate change and almost 66% believe that not enough is being done to tackle its effects. Many of them want to be part of the solution, actively engaging in environmental actions and contributing to efforts aimed at protecting and improving their surroundings.

Additionally, the economic challenges many families face are felt by young people, with poverty impacting their day-to-day lives. Almost 25% of young people have reported that it's difficult for their families to pay for the things they want to do, which can contribute to feelings of social exclusion and isolation. Many have also highlighted that living with financial uncertainty leads to bullying, health problems and sometimes even substance misuse as a way of coping. Stakeholders have expressed concern that this cycle of poverty affects young people's self-esteem and well-being, with many also reporting that not having enough money for necessities such as clothes, hygiene products and food further increases their sense of insecurity. Over 25% of young people feel that they are not equipped to get a job in the future, reflecting ongoing concerns about their future aspirations.

Beyond financial worries, young people want a society where they don't have to worry about their families' financial stability. They expressed the desire for their parents to have stable, well-paying jobs and access to affordable childcare. Stakeholders reported that this is particularly relevant in certain District Electoral Areas across Armagh City, Banbridge, and Craigavon, where a significant portion of young people (4.8%) aged 20-24 are neither employed nor have qualifications, highlighting the need for greater support and opportunities for young people to thrive.

Many young people also feel that climate change and poverty are undermining their chances for success and stability. They are asking for more support to address these concerns—whether it's more educational opportunities or community initiatives that address both environmental and economic challenges. Children and young people across the area have expressed a desire to live in a world where their families don't have to worry about money and want their communities to be cleaner, safer and more sustainable - they want to be part of the solution, contributing to cleaner, greener and more sustainable communities.

Despite the economic difficulties faced by children and young people, especially those from lower-income families across the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Area, they continue to show resilience. They are determined to contribute positively to their communities, demonstrating a desire for change and growth. With the right support and opportunities, they can overcome these challenges and create a better future for themselves and their communities.

Access to Play and Leisure

Key facts

There is 11 Leisure facilities located across Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council: South Lake Leisure Centre, Banbridge Leisure Centre, Orchard Leisure Centre, Tandragee Leisure Centre Gilford Community Centre, Rathfriland Community Centre, Dromore Community Centre, Ardmore Recreation Centre, Cathedral Road Recreation Centre, Keady Recreation Centre and Richhill Recreation Centre.

There are 95 fixed play areas located across Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council. These range in size from small play parks located in rural areas and areas of low population density through to larger parks located in urban areas that offer a wide range of fixed play equipment and play opportunities.

54 Local Play Areas: Small fixed play parks aimed at toddlers and younger children. Local Play areas cater for a specific, defined residential catchment area of no more than 600m and consist of a small number of pieces of fixed play equipment.

31 Neighbourhood Play Areas: Fixed play areas located within larger scale residential locations and housing estates. Typically provide fixed play for a wider age range and have a larger catchment area of around 1,000m.

10 District Play Areas: The largest type of fixed play installation caters for children and young people up to and including teenagers, typically have a catchment area of around 5,000m and includes a variety of play and leisure options including natural play opportunities.

The Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council area is served by numerous football clubs with an excess of 50 Football Clubs

The Armagh, Banbridge, and Craigavon Council area offers football pitches for public use, as well as pitches for local clubs and organisations. There are at least 11 football pitches across facilities in the council area.

The Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council area is served by numerous Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) clubs, encompassing Gaelic football, hurling and camogie more than 44 football clubs and 8 hurling clubs.

Regional Data

97% of teachers agree that outdoor play is critical for a child to reach his/her potential. (Muddy Hands Report)

88% of teachers agree that children are happier after playing outdoors. (Muddy Hands Report)

86% of teachers agree that playing outdoors gives children a better understanding of the environment. (Muddy Hands Report)

Research conducted by Queen's University Belfast highlights that a significant majority of teachers in Northern Ireland believe outdoor play is essential for children's overall development. Additionally, many teachers report that children exhibit increased happiness and improved mental health after

There were 22,715 pre-school placements in Northern Ireland in 2022/2023.

36,556 children aged 0-3 were registered with Sure Start projects in 2023-2024.

There are more than 700 council registered playparks in Northern Ireland.

Stakeholder input/feedback

Play, leisure and fun are essential for children's growth, helping them develop skills, form social connections and understand the world. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees the right to rest, play, and engage in activities like sports or spending time with friends. Research shows play is essential for both physical and mental health, strengthening bodies, boosting happiness and developing lifelong skills. Research reveals that 97% of teachers agree outdoor play is essential for development, with 88% saying children are happier afterward and 86% believing it enhances their understanding of the environment. Stakeholders also agree on the importance of play for both physical and emotional development.

In Armagh City, Banbridge, and Craigavon Borough, there are 95 fixed play areas, including small parks in rural areas and larger parks in urban areas offering a variety of play equipment and opportunities. These include 54 Local Play Areas aimed at toddlers, 31 Neighbourhood Play Areas designed for a wider age range and 10 District Play Areas offering more extensive play options, including natural play spaces for teenagers. These areas provide essential spaces for young people to enjoy themselves, learn life skills and stay active. However, many young people report a lack of opportunities for play and leisure in their local areas. Almost half say there are no fun activities available and over a fifth stated there is no safe place to hang out with friends. This highlights the need for more accessible, safe and supportive spaces for recreation without the risk of anti-social behaviour or unsafe environments.

Play also helps develop life skills such as sharing and listening, while providing emotional benefits like building confidence and resilience. These activities are important not only for younger children but for all young people, regardless of age. Stakeholders stated that having spaces for relaxation and fun, especially after school or on weekends, is important for well-being and social and emotional development.

Young people have expressed the need to be supported in accessing safe and enjoyable play and recreational activities within their communities. These activities help improve physical and mental health, reduce stress and boost mood while providing opportunities to make new friends. Unfortunately, young people stated that some parks are not perceived as safe spaces, making it essential to address these safety concerns to ensure young people feel secure when participating in outdoor play activities.

In response to this, young people are calling for more opportunities to explore hobbies such as sports, music and art. They stress the importance of making these activities accessible to all, especially for those from lower-income families or with disabilities. Affordability is key to ensuring no one is excluded due to financial constraints. Inclusivity is a central concern, as young people want everyone to participate in leisure and play activities, regardless of their circumstances. Stakeholders agree that creating inclusive opportunities plays a significant role in improving community engagement and participation, enhancing the overall well-being of children and young people across Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Area.

Emotional Health and Wellbeing

Key facts

6,998 pupils (16.6%) who attend school in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon 2022/23 have a Special Education Need or Disability Stage 1-3 (NI average 19%).

Approximately 14,500 children and young people aged 0-25 years have a mental health need.

2,220 children and young people aged 0-24 years have autism.

The proportion of Primary 1 pupils identified as obese or overweight in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon in 2022/23 is 19.9%. (NI average 20.4%).

The proportion of Year 8 pupils identified as obese or overweight in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon in 2022/23 is 26.4% (NI average 26%). This represents 25.3% of girls (NI 26.2%) and 27.5% of boys (NI 25.8%).

15.4% of children and young people aged 0-24 years have a long-term health condition (NI 19.8%).

There were 4.98 births per 1,000 births to young mothers aged under 20 years (NI average 5.83%).

There were 0.4 births per 1,000 births to young mothers aged under 17 years (NI average 0.75%).

According to the most recent census, 727 young people aged 16-24 years old identify as LGBTQI+.

Suicide rates in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon have decreased by 27% from 2020 with 29 suicides to 21 suicides in 2023. The suicide rate has continued to fall this past 2 years in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon.

Stakeholder input/feedback

Being healthy is not only about physical fitness but also mental and emotional well-being. A healthy lifestyle boosts confidence, fights illness and improves happiness. When children and young people face mental health challenges, it can affect schoolwork, friendships and overall well-being. A balanced diet, regular exercise and enough sleep are essential for maintaining health and emotional resilience.

Across Armagh, Banbridge, and Craigavon, children and young people have voiced concerns about both their mental and physical health. Over 14,500 young people aged 0-25 in the area have emotional and mental health needs. Many young people have reported stress, anxiety, bullying and body image as issues. Stakeholders agree that there is a need to address these concerns. Excessive phone use, particularly through social media, was also identified as contributing to emotional difficulties, with concerns over screen time's impact on mental health.

More than 25% of young people in the area reported feeling they have nowhere to go for help with their emotional well-being. Many suggested the creation of safe spaces for relaxation, discussing feelings and mindfulness activities. Young people also raised concerns about vaping, substance misuse, lack of exercise and poor eating and sleeping habits. 25% of young people expressed that there are no local opportunities for physical activities to support health and well-being. Stakeholders agree that promoting both physical and emotional well-being, including exercise and healthy habits, is essential.

Despite these challenges, many young people in the area show signs of resilience. Around 84% reported feeling cheerful and in good spirits recently, with 65% feeling calm and relaxed and 78% feeling active and vigorous. More than 50% shared that they had woken up feeling fresh and rested, suggesting that many are finding ways to maintain emotional and physical health despite their challenges. Stakeholders highlighted the importance of continued support to help young people sustain these positive practices. About 79% of young people said their daily life has been filled with activities they enjoy, indicating that many are successfully staying engaged and emotionally stimulated.

In Armagh, Banbridge, and Craigavon, 16.6% of pupils have Special Education Needs or Disabilities (SEND), slightly below the Northern Ireland average of 19%. Stakeholders reported that support should be provided to ensure all young people, regardless of their challenges, have access to activities and services promoting good health. Furthermore, 15.4% of young people aged 0-24 years in the area have a long-term health condition, lower than the Northern Ireland average of 19.8%. Despite this, many young people feel more help is needed to address emotional and mental health before they escalate.

Suicide rates in the area have decreased by 27% from 2020 to 2023, from 29 to 21 suicides, suggesting progress is being made in tackling mental health crises. However, stakeholders communicated that work is needed to further reduce mental health-related challenges. In terms of physical health, 26.4% of Year 8 pupils are obese or overweight, slightly higher than the Northern Ireland average of 26%. This highlights the ongoing need for physical activity and healthy eating programmes to create healthier outcomes for young people. The area has seen lower rates of teenage pregnancies compared to the Northern Ireland average, with 4.98 births per 1,000 young mothers under 20, and 0.4 births per 1,000 mothers under 17 years old.

Maintaining emotional and physical health is important for young people's overall well-being. Ensuring access to safe spaces for emotional support, physical activities and addressing wellbeing for all. Young people reported that addressing these needs would improve their lives, better prepare them for the

future and contribute to healthier communities. Both emotional and physical health is important to providing the necessary support for children and young people to thrive.

Living in Safety and Stability

Key facts

In Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon 6,538 children and young people aged 0-25 years (9%) live in an area of deprivation.

30,495 children and young people (42%) live in a rural community in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon.

According to the most recent census, 727 young people aged 16-24 years old identify as LGBTQI+.

22% of children and young people aged 0-24 years old in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon come from a lone parent family.

There were 104 incidents with a sectarian motivation in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon in 2023/24.

There were 102 incidents with a racist motivation in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon in 2023/24. This is a 7.4% increase from the previous year of 95 racial motivated incidents.

There has been a 10.8% (1,353) rise in incidents with a racist motivation in 2023/24 to year 2022/23 (1,221) in Northern Ireland.

There was a total of 2,271 domestic abuse crimes in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon in 2023/24. This is a +1.5% increase from the previous year. The average rate for domestic abuse crimes in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon DEAs is 325 (NI average 250).

There was a total of 4,813 anti-social behaviour incidents in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon in 2023/24. This is an 8% drop from the previous year. The average rate for anti-social behaviour incidents in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon DEAs is 688 (NI average 567).

Suicide rates in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon have decreased by 27% from 2020 with 29 suicides to 21 suicides in 2023. The suicide rate has continued to fall this past 2 years in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon.

Across Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council Area there were a 104 people Killed or Seriously Injured in 2024. (Police Recorded Injury Road Traffic Collisions and Casualties Northern Ireland 2024 Key Statistics Report 1st January 2024 to 31st December 2024)

Northern Ireland Regional Data:

Ending Violence Against Women and Girls: Experiences and Attitudes of 16-year-olds in Northern Ireland in 2024:

In the last year, almost a fifth of 16-year-olds had experienced online violence (19%).

Psychological violence was experienced by 18% of respondents. Just over one in ten had experienced sexual violence (11%) and 7% had experienced physical violence

Of those respondents experiencing violent acts or behaviour in the last year, the most common places where they occurred were online (42%), at school (35%) and a public outdoor space (26%).

Stakeholder input/feedback

Children and young people learn a great deal from the relationships they have with their parents, guardians, and other trusted adults who care for them. When these relationships are safe, stable, and nurturing, they contribute to the healthy physical and emotional development of children. However, when these relationships are unstable or harmful, they can make a child or young person feel unsafe, which can negatively affect their health and happiness. Studies suggest that children thrive when they have a stable and loving home environment, where routines are in place and they feel secure in their relationships and surroundings.

In Armagh City, Banbridge, and Craigavon, 6,538 children and young people live in areas of deprivation, which can create additional barriers to safety and stability. Furthermore, 30,495 children and young people (42%) in this area live in rural communities, which young people have stated can sometimes limit access to opportunities or support networks. Stakeholders have expressed that support is needed in these areas to address the unique challenges faced by children and young people, particularly in rural communities.

Across Armagh, Banbridge, and Craigavon, children and young people have highlighted the need for safe, supportive and inclusive spaces where they feel welcome, valued and respected. These spaces are essential for promoting a sense of belonging, enabling young people to thrive emotionally and socially. They believe that having access to such environments can provide them with the opportunity to express themselves freely, build meaningful connections with peers and develop resilience in the face of life's challenges. Furthermore, these spaces can offer a sense of stability and security, which is particularly important for those facing adversity or dealing with mental health issues.

Many young people shared concerns about the things that make them feel unsafe in their homes, schools and communities. Some of their biggest worries include domestic abuse, violence against women and girls and issues related to drug and alcohol misuse. In Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, 2,271 domestic abuse crimes were reported in 2023/24, representing a 1.5% increase from the previous year. This area also has a higher rate of domestic abuse crimes compared to the Northern Ireland average, with 325 crimes per 100,000 people, compared to the Northern Ireland average of 250. Stakeholders have stated that addressing domestic abuse is a key priority to ensure that children and young people feel safe both at home and in their communities.

In the past year, the prevalence of gender-based violence across Northern Ireland among 16-year-olds has highlighted the importance of this stability. The 'Ending Violence Against Women and Girls' report found that 19% of 16-year-olds had experienced online violence, while 18% reported psychological violence. The locations where these violent acts occurred most frequently were online (42%), at school (35%), and in public outdoor spaces (26%). These alarming statistics emphasise the importance of safe, secure environments where young people can grow and learn without fear of harm. These statistics highlight the importance of a safe and supportive environment both at home and in the community, where young people can learn, grow and thrive without fear of violence or abuse.

Moreover, the safety of women and girls is a prominent issue across the area, with 66% of girls and over 50% of boys expressing concern about their safety in their local communities. This is a broader concern for 61% of young people, highlighting the ongoing need for initiatives that ensure the well-being and protection of women and girls in society. Stakeholders have also highlighted the importance of ensuring safety for all young people, particularly women and girls, to create healthier and more secure

communities. Additionally, young people have expressed the desire for a safer internet experience. They have shared their concerns about bullying, exploitation and harmful content online, as they spend a significant amount of time on the internet. Stakeholders have expressed concern that online safety is an issue, as young people are increasingly vulnerable to digital harm and exploitation.

Young people across Armagh and Banbridge have also highlighted that road safety is a real issue in their daily lives—whether it's walking to school, learning to drive, or accessing community spaces. This is especially important for those living in rural areas, where a lack of pavements, lighting or public transport can increase their vulnerability. In fact, across Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council area, 104 people were killed or seriously injured in 2024 in road traffic collisions (Police Recorded Injury Road Traffic Collisions and Casualties Northern Ireland 2024 Key Statistics Report). This figure highlights the very real and serious risks faced by children and young people navigating rural infrastructure. Feeling unsafe on the roads adds to the broader concern about personal safety, which is already affecting many aspects of their lives.

In terms of community relations, Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon recorded 104 sectarian incidents and 102 racist incidents reported in 2023/24. The number of racist incidents has increased by 7.4% from the previous year. Many children and young people stated they feel unsafe in their communities and there has been a 10.8% rise in incidents with a racist motivation across Northern Ireland as a whole, highlighting a broader societal issue. Stakeholders have expressed concern about these rising figures and have called for measures to address these issues and create safer communities.

Young people also highlighted the importance of having a stable and safe environment, especially if they are in care or living in difficult home situations. They expressed the need for a consistent and caring space where they can feel secure. In Armagh City, Banbridge, and Craigavon, 727 young people aged 16-24 years identify as LGBTQI+ and for many of them, the importance of a safe and stable environment is heightened due to the unique challenges they face in their communities. Frequent moves or changes in schools can add additional stress for these young people.

Anti-social behaviour remains an issue in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, with 4,813 incidents of anti-social behaviour recorded in 2023/24, although this marks an 8% decrease from the previous year. This reduction is encouraging, but the overall number of incidents remains high compared to the Northern Ireland average, which stands at 567 incidents per 100,000 people, compared to 688 in this area. Young people and stakeholder expressed that ongoing work is needed to create safe spaces and implement interventions to help young people avoid situations that could negatively impact their emotional and physical safety.

In the wider context, young people have also expressed feelings of insecurity in their local areas. Over 25% of them do not feel safe in their communities and a similar percentage report that social media is negatively impacting their lives. Concerns about crime, particularly within their local areas, are also significant, with nearly 40% of young people feeling uneasy about local crime rates. This is coupled with pressure to engage in potentially harmful or dangerous activities, as nearly 33% of young people report feeling this way.

In summary, children and young people have stated that having stable, safe and supportive environments is important to their overall well-being. They need to feel safe both at home and in their communities, have access to support networks and be protected from harm, whether online or offline. They believe that all adults, must work together to safeguard them and no child or young person should

have to live in fear of abuse, bullying or instability. Stakeholders have agreed that creating these safe, stable and supportive environments is essential for young people's health, happiness and long-term success.

Respect for Young People's Rights

Key facts

According to the most recent census, 727 young people aged 16-24 years old identify as LGBTQI+.

Approximately 14,500 children and young people aged 0-25 years have a mental health need.

In Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon 6,538 children and young people aged 0-25 years (9%) live in an area of deprivation.

30,495 children and young people (42%) live in a rural community in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon.

3,861 Newcomers attend schools in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (8.9%) – NI Average 5%.

154 Irish Traveller children and young people.

8,766 (28.5%) of all pupils in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon are eligible for Free School Meals. 2023/24. (NI average 28%).

6,998 pupils (16.6%) who attend school in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon 2022/23 have a Special Education Need or Disability Stage 1-3 (NI average 19%).

Stakeholder input/feedback

Children and young people have rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ensuring protection and respect regardless of religion, race, gender, or disability. However, 50% of children and young people in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon feel their views are not considered in decisions affecting them. Stakeholders highlight the need for more opportunities to ensure young people's views are heard and taken seriously.

Some children and young people face barriers to enjoying their rights, particularly those transitioning to adulthood. In Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, 6,538 (9%) children and young people live in areas of deprivation, limiting access to rights and opportunities. Additionally, 8,766 (28.5%) pupils are eligible for Free School Meals, reflecting the economic challenges they face. Stakeholders highlighted the need to address these disparities for equal opportunities.

Marginalised and vulnerable young people are more likely to experience violence, discrimination and poor outcomes in education and health. While over 75% stated they are aware of their rights they expressed more accessible information is needed to help them understand and exercise these rights, especially for vulnerable groups. Stakeholders agree that clearer guidance is essential for empowerment.

Young people expressed a desire for better education on their rights, greater freedom of expression, and more leadership opportunities. In Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, 154 Irish Traveller children and young people and 3,861 (8.9%) newcomers face unique challenges in having their rights fully recognised. Children and young people noted that Youth Services play a key role in respecting and supporting young people's rights. Over 80% of young people feel their voices are heard in youth work programmes. However, many suggest more could be done including more engagement and revising policies.

LGBTQI+ young people, who make up 727 of the 16-24 age group in the area, expressed they often face discrimination, affecting their well-being. They highlighted the importance of societal recognition and acceptance. Additionally, 6,998 (16.6%) students have Special Educational Needs or Disabilities, with many facing challenges. This can make it more difficult for them to do well in school, make friends and feel good about themselves, which can affect their future happiness and success.

In summary young people in the area need greater freedom of expression, better leadership opportunities and increased awareness of their rights. Almost 75% feel confident fighting for their rights, but many believe more needs to be done for full recognition and respect. Stakeholders agree that creating a society where young people’s rights are respected is essential for promoting a sense of belonging, dignity and empowerment. When young people’s rights are upheld, it not only strengthens their confidence and self-worth but also encourages them to actively participate in their communities and society at large. Respecting these rights ensures that they have equal access to opportunities, education and services and are treated with fairness and justice, which are key factors in helping them reach their full potential. It also helps to protect them from exploitation and discrimination, contributing to a more inclusive society for all.

Learning and Achieving

Key facts

The percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C (incl. equivalent qualifications) including GCSE English and Math in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon in 2022/23 is 75% compared to the NI average of 76.1%.

The percentage of school leavers who are unemployed and/or unknown in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon in 2022/23 is 5% (NI average 4.7%).

4.8% of young people 20-24 years old are not in employment and do not have a qualification. (NI average 4.9%).

3,861 Newcomers attend schools in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (8.9%) – NI Average 5%.

154 Irish Traveller children and young people.

8,766 (28.5%) of all pupils in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon are eligible for Free School Meals. 2023/24. (NI average 28%).

6,998 pupils (16.6%) who attend school in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon 2022/23 have a Special Education Need or Disability Stage 1-3 (NI average 19%).

589 children and young people were suspended from school in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon.

The attendance rate for post-primary schools was 93.6%. (NI average 96%).

According to the most recent census, 727 young people aged 16-24 years old identify as LGBTQI+.

Stakeholder input/feedback

Education is a fundamental right for all children, as outlined in Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It helps children and young people learn, develop life skills and understand right from wrong, preparing them to be active members of society. Education fosters success, job opportunities and personal achievement while also promoting important life skills like communication, problem-solving and emotional understanding.

However, many children face challenges that hinder their educational success. Vulnerable groups, such as those with special educational needs or disabilities, children who are looked after, newcomers, young carers, or those from disadvantaged backgrounds, often struggle to fit in, make friends, or keep up with learning, leading to feelings of isolation.

In Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, for example, 6,998 pupils (16.6%) have special educational needs or disabilities, lower than the Northern Ireland average of 19%, but still a significant number of students who may need extra support. Furthermore, 8,766 pupils (28.5%) are eligible for Free School Meals, reflecting the financial challenges faced by many families in Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon. These barriers can prevent children and young people from fully accessing their educational rights and achieving their potential. Stakeholders have acknowledged that addressing these inequalities is needed to ensure all young people can succeed.

Young people stated that they understand that education is important because it helps them learn new skills and gives them a chance to be part of their community and society. Over 75% of young people surveyed reported that they learn and achieve something through their existing youth work programmes, highlighting the value of such initiatives in supporting their educational journey. However, many also recognise that for some groups, school is not always a positive experience. Almost 40% of young people expressed that they face barriers that limit their opportunity to succeed in education, such as financial difficulties, lack of support, or other personal challenges. Additionally, over 33% of young people mentioned that they don't feel supported when big changes take place in their education, such as moving to "big school," underlining the need for more consistent support during transitions. Stakeholders have agreed that more support is needed during these important times, such as moving from primary to secondary school.

Children and young people reported that they need help to bridge this gap to support individuals who face difficulties in school. Additionally, almost 75% of young people told us they can access and gain qualifications because of their youth work programmes, demonstrating how such services can make a significant impact on their educational success.

Children and young people also reported a growing need to recognise that everyone learns in their own way. Some may need extra help with reading, writing or other activities, while others may have special educational need or disabilities that requires additional support. They noted that it is important to be flexible and to provide support to ensure everyone can succeed. No young person should be left behind due to personal challenges, family issues, background.

In Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, 3,861 newcomers attend schools (8.9%), a higher percentage than the Northern Ireland average of 5%, which highlights the importance of providing inclusive learning spaces for all, regardless of background or previous experiences.

Additionally, 154 Irish Traveller children and young people are part of the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon community and it's important that they, along with other minority groups, receive the support they need to succeed. Stakeholders have agreed that early intervention and support programmes are important in helping these young people to overcome any barriers they may face.

Children and young people also stated that it is important not only to be taught academic subjects but also to be prepared for real-life challenges. Life skills such as how to get a job, manage money, solve problems and handle stressful situations are essential for their future success and well-being. They noted that it is important in providing these skills outside of the traditional classroom, helping young people feel confident and ready for the future. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of equipping young people with both academic and life skills, ensuring they are prepared for adulthood.

In Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, the percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C, including English and Math, was 75% in 2022/23, slightly below the Northern Ireland average of 76.1%. Additionally, the percentage of school leavers who are unemployed or whose status is unknown is 5% in the area, compared to the NI average of 4.7%. These statistics indicate that while education is an important tool for success, there are still challenges to overcome in ensuring all young people achieve their potential. Stakeholders also stated more needs to be done to support school leavers, particularly in bridging the gap between education and employment opportunities.

Young people in the area want to be better supported in their educational journey, particularly when it comes to overcoming barriers such as financial difficulties and the need for additional learning support. They need support to understand and respond to their unique needs, helping them navigate challenges and develop the skills necessary to succeed. Over 33% of young people mentioned they don't feel supported when big changes take place in their education, such as moving to "big" school. Stakeholders shared that transition periods can be particularly difficult and overwhelming for children and young people, as they navigate various stresses and challenges.

In summary, while education is a fundamental right, it must be accessible and inclusive for all children and young people. Support and opportunities should be provided to ensure all children and young people can succeed, regardless of their background or circumstances. Education is not only about academic learning but also about preparing children for life and it is essential that it recognises the diverse needs of all children and young people. Stakeholders discussed the importance of creating inclusive, safe educational environments that addresses the needs of all, ensuring that no child or young person is left behind.

Good Relations and Equality

Key facts

There are 2 interface areas in Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon.

30,495 children and young people (42%) live in a rural community in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon.

3,861 Newcomers attend schools in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (8.9%) – NI Average 5%.

154 Irish Traveller children and young people.

8,766 (28.5%) of all pupils in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon are eligible for Free School Meals. 2023/24. (NI average 28%).

6,998 pupils (16.6%) who attend school in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon 2022/23 have a Special Education Need or Disability Stage 1-3 (NI average 19%).

In Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon 6,538 children and young people aged 0-25 years (9%) live in an area of deprivation.

According to the most recent census, 727 young people aged 16-24 years old identify as LGBTQI+.

**Figures for some section 75 groups are only available by NI level. These include Looked After Children, NEETS and Young Carers. **

Stakeholder input/feedback

An equal society is one where everyone is treated fairly, regardless of their background or identity. Good relations are built on kindness, respect and understanding, where diversity is recognised and everyone feels welcome. The United Nations highlights that all children should be treated equally, regardless of culture, language, or abilities, ensuring they have equal opportunities to succeed. In Northern Ireland, “Good Relations” aims to promote understanding and cooperation between people from different backgrounds, addressing issues like racism, bullying and disrespect. While progress has been made, stakeholders, including children and young people, note that challenges persist, particularly in areas where divisions remain across the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon area.

Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon have made great strides towards maintaining a peaceful society. However, there are still several factors that contribute to community tensions, polarisation and segregation as many people in this area still experience forms of residential, educational, environmental and social segregation. "Interface areas," as they are called in Northern Ireland, refer to areas where segregated nationalist and unionist residential areas meet. Unfortunately, several areas across Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon continue to be single-identity areas, facing legacy issues and sectarianism. The area has several interface areas in Portadown and Lurgan. Children and young people growing up in these environments are more likely to experience educational challenges and a greater risk of engaging in antisocial behaviour. Whilst relationships continue to improve more work is still required to ensure lasting peace and cooperation in the area.

Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon have also become much more culturally diverse in recent years. However, despite this, racist hate crimes have exceeded sectarian hate crimes in the last number of years, highlighting the increasing challenges surrounding race and discrimination. In response to these challenges, young people have strongly supported the need for safe spaces for children and young people, where inclusion is promoted and differences are embraced and celebrated.

Young people in the area have shared their strong desire for more inclusive safe spaces where everyone is treated fairly. They want to see less bullying, reduced discrimination and more support for vulnerable groups, such as children with special educational needs and disabilities or those from the LGBTQI+ community. They have communicated the importance of creating safe spaces where these issues are addressed and where young people feel heard and supported.

Recent feedback from the young people’s survey shows a mixed picture. Over 50% of young people feel that all individuals are included in their youth programmes, and no one feels left out. A majority believe that their youth work programmes are inclusive and provide support for those from different backgrounds. Many feel that these programmes are accessible to everyone who wishes to participate. Additionally, more than 80% report having the opportunity to interact with individuals from diverse backgrounds. However, a significant number of young people feel that children and young people in their local area are not treated equally. Almost 50% of those surveyed also believe that other young people in their area lack respect for those who are different or from diverse backgrounds. Stakeholders have stated that these findings highlight the need for ongoing efforts to promote respect, inclusion and equality among young people, both in formal and informal settings.

Across Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon, around 42% of children and young people live in rural communities, with 8.9% being newcomers to Northern Ireland, above the national average. The area also has 154 children from the Irish Traveller community. Approximately 28.5% of children receive Free

School Meals, matching the national average, while 16.6% have Special Educational Needs or Disabilities, slightly below the national average. However, 9% of young people live in economically disadvantaged communities with limited opportunities. The most recent census data also shows that 727 young people aged 16-24 identify as LGBTQI+, highlighting the diverse nature of the youth population. Stakeholders have expressed the importance of creating safe, inclusive spaces where all children and young people can feel supported and celebrated for who they are, further promoting equality and acceptance within the community.

Despite the Community Relations Equality and Diversity Policy (CRED) parts of Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon remains a divided community. The education system is still largely segregated, with most children and young people attending schools based on their religion. While significant progress has been made towards peace, the challenges outlined here highlight that there is still much work to be done to create a truly inclusive society where everyone feels equal, respected and supported.

Making a Positive Contribution

Key facts

The attendance rate for post-primary schools was 93.6%. (NI average 96%).

3,861 Newcomers attend schools in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (8.9%) – NI Average 5%.

154 Irish Traveller children and young people.

589 children and young people were suspended from school in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon.

In Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon 6,538 children and young people aged 0-25 years (9%) live in an area of deprivation.

30,495 children and young people (42%) live in a rural community in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon.

According to the most recent census, 727 young people aged 16-24 years old identify as LGBTQI+.

Stakeholder input/feedback

Making a positive contribution helps children and young people grow, build confidence and develop skills to face challenges. Participation in activities strengthens connections, encourages independence and builds resilience. In Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, 42% of young people live in rural areas, highlighting the need for accessible opportunities. Stakeholders agree that encouraging positive participation is important and ensuring these opportunities are available to all children and young people is key to achieving this.

For young people to succeed, they need to feel valued and respected. Having the ability to express their opinions in schools, youth centres and communities is essential for their growth and confidence. Stakeholders highlighted the importance of creating safe environments where young people's voices are heard, promoting their development and sense of belonging.

In Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, 3,861 newcomers (8.9%) attend schools, indicating a diverse group of young people who may need additional support to feel integrated and represented in decision-making processes. Over three-quarters of young people surveyed reported that they can make a difference by expressing their views, showing that participation in decision-making is something they value. However, over a third of young people shared that they don't feel they are given the opportunity to make a difference in school or in their local community, highlighting significant barriers to full participation. Stakeholders agree that these barriers must be addressed to ensure that all young people can have a meaningful voice in their communities.

Young people said that engaging in community activities helps them learn and grow, preparing them for future challenges. They explained that it helps them develop essential skills like leadership, communication and problem-solving.

When children and young people are involved in decisions, it helps them grow as individuals and prepares them to contribute meaningfully to their communities. Participation encourages responsibility and helps them develop socially, personally and even politically. However, various factors like financial worries, where someone lives, or societal expectations can create barriers to involvement. In Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, 6,538 children and young people (9%) live in areas of deprivation, making it harder for them to participate in community activities. Children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) may face additional challenges. It is important that every young person, regardless of their circumstances, can participate and make a difference. Stakeholders agree that support needs to be tailored to these challenges to ensure no one is excluded.

Children and young people also expressed that they greatly value Youth Services because it provides safe spaces where everyone is welcome and offers opportunities to take on leadership roles and to engage in a range of activities. They would like to see an increased variety of activities to offer new learning opportunities and cultural experiences. However, many young people feel they are not always included in decision-making for their communities. Almost two-fifths of young people surveyed said they feel they are not taken seriously when it comes to making a positive contribution, highlighting the need for more inclusive platforms for their voices to be heard. In Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, 154 Irish Traveller children and young people could benefit from more inclusive decision-making platforms because it would give them a voice in shaping the services and policies that affect their lives. It would also promote a sense of belonging and inclusion within the wider community, ensuring their unique needs and perspectives are considered.

Young people also stated they believe they can make a difference by helping others, joining school or youth councils and working on community projects. Participating in these activities not only helps others but also makes young people feel heard, respected and valued. Many young people agree that when involved, they can improve their communities. They need more opportunities to get involved, particularly in decision-making processes that directly impact their lives and communities. They believe that when adults or politicians are making decisions, their input should be taken into consideration, as they know what works best for them. Stakeholders agree that young people's perspectives are invaluable in shaping policies and decisions that affect their lives.

Furthermore, young people are passionate about social and political issues such as climate change, education and justice. They want to be educated on these topics to participate in discussions that will shape their future. Young people shared that by volunteering and joining community projects provide excellent opportunities for young people to learn new skills and meet new people.

In Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon, the attendance rate for post-primary schools is 93.6%, slightly lower than the Northern Ireland average of 96%. This indicates that barriers to consistent participation in educational and community activities need attention. Stakeholders have noted that tackling these barriers is essential to improving overall participation rates and ensuring young people can engage fully in education and community activities. It's not just about being heard; it's about making a real impact in their communities and feeling respected for their efforts.

In summary, young people want to feel respected and valued for their contributions. They seek opportunities to take part in decision-making, learn about social and political issues and engage in community activities. These experiences help them grow personally and socially, preparing them to become active, responsible citizens. Over 33% of young people shared that they don't feel they can make a difference in school or their local community, indicating barriers to full participation. Stakeholders have expressed the need to remove these barriers and provide more opportunities for young people to contribute meaningfully. They noted by providing more opportunity for participation, we can help young people realise their potential and make a lasting, positive impact on society. Stakeholders have noted that we need to help young people realise their potential, make a lasting, positive impact on society, be trusted with responsibility and take initiatives.

Summary Conclusion of Needs across Strategic Themes for Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon

Economic and Environmental Stability

- Socio-economic disadvantage affecting young people's well-being, aspirations and life chances
- Economic hardship increases anxiety and mental health issues
- Environmental concerns
- Isolation and inequality caused by rural poverty, affecting inclusion, mobility and opportunity
- Climate change
- Low aspirations and limited belief in future opportunities

Access to Play and Leisure

- Play, Leisure & Fun
- Play and stimulation
- Physical activities to develop growth and co-ordination
- Safe accessible inclusive spaces
- Secure environments in which to express themselves

Emotional Health and Wellbeing

- Lack of safe, inclusive spaces for support, connection
- Poor mental health and emotional well-being, driven by anxiety, depression and academic pressure
- Bullying, body shaming and low self-esteem affecting confidence and healthy relationships
- Physical activity
- Emotional Resilience
- Heavy reliance on screens and online activity

Living in Safety and Stability

- Lack of safe, inclusive spaces for support, connection and non-judgmental guidance
- Exposure to Domestic abuse
- Violence against women and girls
- Exposure to substance misuse
- Anti-social behaviour
- Bullying and peer pressure
- Online violence and negative impact of social media
- Impact of poverty on young people's access to basic needs and opportunities
- Experiences of racism and discrimination among minority ethnic young people
- Ongoing community division and need for peacebuilding
- Exposure to unsafe driving behaviours and limited road safety awareness

Respect for Your Rights

- Rights to be valued and respected
- Knowledge and confidence to proclaim and defend their rights
- Participate and own decision making

Learning and Achieving

- Educational underachievement
- Staying engaged in formal education
- Accessible, inclusive educational experiences and pathways to employment
- Early intervention, especially for vulnerable groups
- Support to overcoming barriers and ensuring success
- Opportunities to widen experiences
- Fresh challenges to improve skills and communications

Good Relations and Equality

- Experiences of racism and discrimination among minority ethnic young people
- Ongoing community division and need for peacebuilding
- Need for inclusive, respectful environments
- Safe spaces for dialogue and connection

Making a Positive Contribution to Society

- Being respected and valued
- Trust and responsibility to take initiatives
- Secure environments to express and explore feelings and opinions
- Political engagement

The findings – Identification of priorities/DEA profiles

Armagh

Key facts

There is 11,092 children and young people aged 0 -25 years old in Armagh DEA.

4,604 fall within the key Youth Service priority aged bands of 9-13 years and 14-18 years.

5.5% of young people 20-24 years old in Armagh DEA are not in employment and do not have a qualification (NI average 4.9%).

The percentage of school leavers who are unemployed and/or are unknown in Armagh DEA in 2022/23 is 5.2% compared to the NI average of 4.7%.

The percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C including GCSE English and Math in 2022/23 in Armagh DEA is 71.8% (NI average 76.1%).

1,022 (15.9%) primary and post primary pupils have a Special Education Need 1- 3 The NI average for pupils with a SEN 1- 3 Statement is 19%.

790 newcomer pupils in Armagh DEA primary and post primary schools in 2023/24.

There were 20 incidents with a racist motivation in 2023/24 in Armagh DEA. This is a 17.6% increase from the previous year of 17 racial motivated incidents.

765 (8.1%) children and young people aged 4-24 whose main language is not English 2021 in Armagh DEA (NI Average 4.1%).

80 pupils were suspended in Armagh DEA in the 2022/23 academic year (NI Average 65).

7 Youth Justice Referrals in Armagh DEA 2022/23 (NI Average 17).

Armagh DEA is above the Northern Ireland Average with 301 Incidents recorded with a Domestic Abuse Motivation and Crimes Recorded with a Domestic Abuse Motivation (NI Average 260) 2023-2024.

There is one NRA in the DEA area of Armagh Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (NRAs) are neighbourhoods identified as experiencing the most severe multiple deprivation and received support under the Department for Communities People and Place Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. In total 36 neighbourhoods have been identified to received support.

Armagh Stakeholder input/feedback

The data from Armagh DEA, combined with feedback from young people and stakeholders, highlights several key challenges faced by young people in the area, including education, employment, substance misuse, violence and safety concerns. With 11,092 children and young people aged 0-25, a significant portion (4,604) falls within priority Youth Service age groups (9-13 and 14-18). Stakeholders agreed that these age groups are most in need of support. One key statistic for Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon is that 71.8% of school leavers in Armagh achieved five GCSEs at grades A*-C, which is below the Northern Ireland average of 76.1%. This statistic confirms that there are ongoing educational challenges for children and young people across the Armagh DEA. Moreover, unemployment rates are also concerning, with 5.5% which is above the NI average of 4.7% of young people aged 20-24 neither in employment nor possessing qualifications, highlighting that young people face greater barriers to entering the workforce. Additionally, 1,022 (15.9%) primary and post-primary pupils in the DEA have Special Educational Need (SEN 1-3). Although this figure is lower than the Northern Ireland (NI) average of 19%, it still may still their academic progress, social integration, emotional well-being and future employment opportunities.

Young people themselves have raised concerns about the pressures of school, limited access to creative and fitness activities and mental health challenges.

Substance misuse, including vaping, smoking and the prominence of drugs like 'spice' was highlighted as an important issue. Stakeholders reported that preventive opportunities are needed to address this growing issue, with many agreeing that this is an area requiring attention.

Violence, particularly towards women and girls, is another area of concern. Reports of harassment, catcalling and fears of theft have become normalised among young people, especially girls. These concerns were raised in community surveys and focus groups. Stakeholders also reported that certain behaviours, also contribute to young people's fears for their safety, particularly at night. Children and young people also noted that bullying, particularly related to differences in background, identity and appearance, remains a significant concern and contributes to their feelings of insecurity and exclusion.

Concerns about future job opportunities and rising housing costs also add to the uncertainty young people feel. Stakeholders confirmed that addressing these concerns early can help young people better prepare for the challenges they will face in adulthood.

Additionally, young people have voiced a need for greater cultural representation, particularly for Irish speakers. Cultural organisations reported that initiatives would promote a more inclusive environment and stakeholders reported that increasing cultural awareness opportunities would help reduce discrimination, especially towards the LGBTQIA+ community. This would also promote better relations between different cultural groups.

Children, young people and stakeholders said there is a need to empower young people through accessible mental health resources, educational support and safe spaces that prioritise their safety, mental health and cultural identity enabling them to thrive in a supportive environment.

Armagh Summary

- Low educational attainment and lack of support to achieve academic potential
- Limited access to employment, training and skills development pathways
- Poor mental health and limited access to responsive emotional wellbeing support
- Increasing substance misuse, including drugs, vaping and smoking, with limited prevention options
- Experiences of violence, harassment and personal safety concerns, particularly among girls
- Bullying and exclusion based on background, identity or appearance
- Lack of access to creative, cultural and physical activities for personal development
- Underrepresentation of cultural identity, language and LGBTQIA+ inclusion in community spaces
- Uncertainty about future opportunities, including employment and affordable housing
- Limited access to safe, inclusive spaces that support wellbeing, identity and belonging

Banbridge

Key facts

There are 11,108 children and young people aged 0 -25 years old in Banbridge DEA.

4,684 fall within the key Youth Service priority aged bands of 9-13 years and 14-18 years.

5% of young people 20-24 years old in Banbridge DEA are not in employment and do not have a qualification (NI average 4.9%).

The percentage of school leavers in Banbridge DEA who are unemployed and/or are unknown in 2022/23 is 4.2% compared to the NI average of 4.7%.

The percentage of school leavers in Banbridge DEA achieving at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C including GCSE English and Math in 2022/23 is 74.7% (NI average 76.1%).

1,063 (16.6%) primary and post primary pupils have a Special Education Need 1- 3 The NI average for pupils with a SEN 1- 3 Statement is 19%.

There are 173 newcomer pupils in Banbridge DEA in primary and post primary schools in 2023/24.

There were 13 incidents with a racist motivation in Banbridge DEA 2023/24. This is a 116% increase from the previous year of 3 racial motivated incidents.

There were 29 Youth Justice Referrals in Banbridge DEA in 2022/23 (NI Average 17).

There were 185 (1.9%) children and young people aged 4-24 in Banbridge DEA whose main language is not English 2021 (NI Average 4.1%)

The were 70 pupils suspended in Banbridge DEA in the 2022/23 academic year (NI Average 65).

Banbridge DEA is above the Northern Ireland Average with 418 Incidents recorded with a Domestic Abuse Motivation and Crimes Recorded with a Domestic Abuse Motivation (NI Average 260) 2023-2024.

Banbridge Stakeholder input/feedback

The data from Banbridge DEA provides insight into the lives of children and young people in the area, highlighting issues related to health, well-being, safety, education and their future aspirations. There are 11,108 children and young people aged 0-25 in Banbridge DEA, with 4,684 falling into the key Youth Service priority age groups of 9-13 years and 14-18 years. A key concern for children and young people in this area is their mental health, safety and the lack of accessible support systems to help them manage these challenges. Stakeholders also agreed and supported that there is a need for services to assist young people with these ongoing issues.

Mental health issues such as anxiety, stress and body image were reported among young people. Young people also discussed the pressures of comparing themselves to others, particularly on social media, which can contribute to feelings of insecurity. Some young people believe that a bit of stress is good for personal development, while others express concern that stress can lead to negative mental health like self-harm. Stakeholders also agreed and supported the idea that stress around academic performance remains an issue that requires attention, as 74.7% of school leavers achieved 5 or more GCSEs, including English and Maths in 2022/23 (below the NI average of 76.1%).

A significant issue identified by young people is vaping, with mixed opinions on whether it is a problem. Some young people view it as a coping mechanism for mental health or a way to fit in with peer groups, while others see it as harmful and linked to deeper personal issues. Stakeholders also agreed that vaping remains a growing concern among young people, with rising rates of use and increasing evidence linking it to potential health risks. Many expressed alarm over the accessibility of vaping products, the influence of social media marketing and the widespread normalisation of vaping culture, which often glamorises it as a harmless or trendy activity.

Safety is another key area of concern for children and young people in Banbridge DEA. The community has seen a 116% increase in racist incidents (from 3 in the previous year to 13 in 2023/24) and the number of youth justice referrals is significantly higher than the Northern Ireland average (29 referrals compared to the NI average of 17). Additionally, there were 418 incidents with domestic abuse motivation recorded in 2023-24, well above the NI average of 260. These statistics reflect an environment where many children and young people feel unsafe. Stakeholders also reported that the number of domestic abuse incidents remains a significant concern, with concerning rates continuing to affect individuals and families.

In focus groups, young people shared fears about walking alone, dark alleyways and certain areas perceived as dangerous due to antisocial behaviour and underage drinking. Online spaces are also seen as unsafe, with cyberbullying, trolling and toxic group chats cited as major concerns. Despite some feeling safe at home or in school, many express anxieties about violence and crime in their community.

When it comes to their future, many young people express uncertainty. Economic hardship and rising living costs are sources of anxiety. While 5% of young people aged 20-24 are not in employment and do not have qualifications (slightly above the NI average of 4.9%), group discussions revealed that young people worry about money, the ability to afford education and the potential challenges of living independently. Some participants are hopeful about their future careers, particularly those who are already working or involved in personal and social development activities. However, others feel trapped

by financial limitations and a lack of self-belief, with many expressing that they do not feel smart enough or financially capable of achieving their goals.

Young people also talked about the need to get qualifications, because it helps them get better jobs and can even lower the number of people without jobs. They explained that learning new skills and getting the right certificates can help them find work, earn money and become more independent. Besides helping with money, they also said that finishing their education makes them feel proud of themselves and more confident about what they can do.

Young people in Banbridge also show significant concern for global issues like climate change, which they view as a threat to their future. Many expressed feelings of fear and uncertainty about the long-term impacts of environmental degradation, emphasising how climate change could affect their livelihoods, health and the overall quality of life. Discussions around climate anxiety reveal worries about the environment, wildlife and the impact of human actions on the planet.

Banbridge Summary

- Poor mental health and emotional wellbeing, driven by stress, anxiety, body image concerns, and academic pressure
- Normalisation and rising use of vaping, with limited awareness of risks and lack of prevention measures
- Increased exposure to racism, domestic abuse and youth crime affecting feelings of safety and trust in the community
- Fear of unsafe environments in public and online spaces due to antisocial behaviour, cyberbullying and violence
- Uncertainty about prospects due to financial hardship, low confidence and barriers to independence
- Insecurity around educational attainment and the impact of academic performance on self-worth and opportunity
- Limited access to support systems that help young people navigate personal, emotional and social challenges
- Disconnection between young people's aspirations and access to education, training and employment pathways
- Lack of empowerment to address global concerns such as climate change and environmental degradation
- Inequality in access to resources, qualifications and opportunities that support long-term wellbeing and success

Lurgan

Key facts

There is 12,570 children and young people aged 0 -25 years old in Lurgan DEA.

4,957 fall within the key Youth Service priority aged bands of 9-13 years and 14-18 years.

5.4% of young people 20-24 years old in Lurgan DEA are not in employment and do not have a qualification (NI average 4.9%).

The percentage of school leavers who are unemployed and/or are unknown in Lurgan DEA during 2022/23 is 5.5% compared to the NI average of 4.7%.

The percentage of school leavers in Lurgan DEA achieving at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C including GCSE English and Math in 2022/23 is 67.7% (NI average 76.1%).

1354 (19.0%) primary and post primary pupils have a Special Education Need 1- 3 The NI average for pupils with a SEN 1- 3 Statement is 19%.

There are 713 newcomer pupils in Lurgan DEA primary and post primary schools in 2023/24.

There were 22 incidents with a racist motivation in Lurgan DEA in 2023/24. This is a 12% decrease from the previous year of 25 racial motivated incidents.

147 pupils were suspended in Lurgan DEA during 2022/23 academic year (NI Average 65).

Lurgan DEA is above the Northern Ireland Average with 493 Incidents recorded with a Domestic Abuse Motivation and Crimes Recorded with a Domestic Abuse Motivation (NI Average 260) 2023-2024. The highest across all DEA's across Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Area.

Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (NRAs) are neighbourhoods identified as experiencing the most severe multiple deprivation and received support under the Department for Communities People and Place Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. In total 36 neighbourhoods have been identified to received support. There is one NRA in the DEA area of Lurgan .

Young people living in NRAs tend to have lower educational outcomes than their peers who do not live in renewal areas.

Lurgan Stakeholder input/feedback

The data from Lurgan DEA highlights several significant challenges faced by children and young people in the area, particularly in terms of education, employment, health, safety and well-being. There are 12,570 children and young people aged 0-25 years old in Lurgan DEA, with 4,957 falling within the key Youth Service priority age bands of 9-13 years and 14-18 years. However, 5.4% of young people aged 20-24 are not in employment and do not have a qualification, compared to the Northern Ireland (NI) average of 4.9%. Furthermore, the percentage of school leavers who are unemployed or whose status is unknown in 2022/23 is 5.5%, which is higher than the NI average of 4.7%. Additionally, 1,354 (19.0%) primary and post-primary pupils in the area have a Special Education Need (SEN 1-3), which aligns with the Northern Ireland (NI) average of 19%. This can impact their academic performance, social integration, emotional well-being, and future employment prospects. Stakeholders expressed that these statistics reflect the growing educational and employment challenges faced by young people in the Lurgan DEA.

The area is home to 713 newcomer pupils in primary and post-primary schools for 2023/24, and 736 (7%) children and young people aged 4-24 whose main language is not English, significantly higher than the NI average of 4.1%. Stakeholders also reported that Lurgan DEA recorded 22 racist incidents in 2023/24, showing a decrease from 25 incidents in the previous year, but it remains a concerning issue. Additionally, Lurgan DEA recorded 52 youth justice referrals in 2022/23, well above the NI average of 17, indicating elevated levels of youth crime and anti-social behaviour in the area. Stakeholders highlighted that these figures highlight the need for more effective community-based early interventions to prevent children and young people involvement in criminal activity and provide alternative pathways for young people.

Another issue raised by stakeholders is the high number of school suspensions. In the 2022/23 academic year, 147 pupils were suspended, more than double the NI average of 65. This points to significant challenges within schools and the wider community in addressing behaviour issues and supporting young people in their education. The high incidence of domestic abuse is another significant issue affecting children and young people in the area, with Lurgan DEA having the highest recorded incidents with a domestic abuse motivation across Armagh, Banbridge, and Craigavon, with 493 incidents in 2023/24 compared to the NI average of 260. Stakeholders agreed that young people in homes affected by domestic violence are particularly vulnerable and therefore need access to safe spaces.

Furthermore, young people living in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (NRAs), which are areas of severe multiple deprivation, tend to have lower educational outcomes compared to their peers. Lurgan DEA contains one NRA where these challenges are particularly prevalent. Stakeholders confirmed that this demographic requires support to address the issues of poverty and educational underachievement.

In terms of health and well-being, young people identified several factors impacting their physical and emotional health, including drugs, drinking, smoking, poor diet and the lack of free sports activities. Bullying, social media and school-related pressures were also highlighted as significant influences on their emotional health. Many young people said they tend to seek support from youth leaders, youth clubs and wellbeing teams in schools, often avoiding discussing their concerns with family members.

Safety remains a considerable concern, with young people highlighting risks such as violence, drugs and peer pressure and the influence of organised crime groups. It was expressed that issues also have

a broader impact, affecting siblings and family members who may experience additional stress or fear for safety of their relatives. Young people expressed fears of being targeted by people under the influence of drugs or alcohol and feeling unsafe due to organised fights. Stakeholders agreed with these concerns and reported that measures are needed to address these safety issues. Young people highlighted the importance of having a strong sense of safety, security and trust in their surroundings to thrive. They stressed the need to feel safe at home, in school and within their communities, as well as the value of building trusting relationships with adults, peers and support systems.

When discussing their future, some young people felt hopeful, while others expressed concerns about not getting qualifications or finding employment. Stakeholders reported that poverty is a key factor affecting young people's aspirations, with many stating that it can drive motivation but also lead to feelings of inequality, especially when comparing possessions with peers. Additionally, Young people also highlighted that exam stress, lack of local opportunities and the widespread presence of drugs and alcohol are barriers that may prevent them from reaching their full potential.

There continues to be signs of prejudice and discrimination in Lurgan DEA, particularly in how young people are treated based on their age, appearance and background. Some young people shared that they are not taken seriously by adults. Stakeholders also stated that efforts are needed in promoting respect and better relationships between communities and they supported the implementation of more inclusive community initiatives.

Finally, the cost of living is becoming an increasing concern, with young people reflecting on how it impacts their everyday lives and future opportunities. Many voiced worries about rising costs, particularly for education and essential needs, which creates additional stress as they strive for independence. This financial strain is often linked to growing concerns about crime rates in their communities, as some believe economic hardship can lead to higher levels of criminal behaviour. Additionally, young people also expressed concerns about how the increasing cost of living and the effects of climate change may make their futures more difficult.

Lurgan Summary

- Low educational attainment and limited support for learning, especially among those facing disadvantage
- Lack of clear, accessible pathways into employment, training and skills development
- Poor mental health and emotional wellbeing, impacted by stress, bullying and limited support networks
- High levels of youth crime, anti-social behaviour and school suspensions linked to unmet social and emotional needs
- Experiences of racism, prejudice and exclusion among minority ethnic and newcomer young people
- Exposure to domestic abuse, violence and unsafe environments at home and in the community
- Poverty and financial hardship restricting access to essentials, opportunities and long-term aspirations
- Limited availability of safe, inclusive spaces where young people feel heard, supported and connected
- Ongoing peer pressure and substance misuse with few positive alternatives or protective influences
- Lack of trusted relationships and consistent adult support to help navigate challenges and transitions

Cusher

Key facts

There are 8,808 children and young people aged 0 -25 years old in Cusher DEA.

3,604 fall within the key Youth Service priority aged bands of 9-13 years and 14-18 years.

3.6% of young people 20-24 years old in Cusher DEA are not in employment and do not have a qualification (NI average 4.9%).

The percentage of school leavers in Cusher DEA who are unemployed and/or are unknown in 2022/23 is 2.6% compared to the NI average of 4.7%.

The percentage of school leavers in Cusher DEA achieving at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C including GCSE English and Math in 2022/23 is 76.7% (NI average 76.1%).

744 (14.9%) primary and post primary pupils have a Special Education Need 1- 3 The NI average for pupils with a SEN 1- 3 Statement is 19%.

There are 85 newcomer pupils in Cusher DEA primary and post primary schools in 2023/24.

There was 1 incident with a racist motivation in Cusher DEA during 2023/24. This is the same as the previous year.

There were14 Youth Justice Referrals in Cusher DEA during 2022/23 (NI Average 17).

There were 127 (1.7%) children and young people aged 4-24 whose main language is not English in Cusher DEA - 2021 (NI Average 4.1%).

30 pupils were suspended in the 2022/23 academic year – (NI Average 65).

Cusher DEA is below the Northern Ireland Average with 152 Incidents recorded with a Domestic Abuse Motivation and Crimes Recorded with a Domestic Abuse Motivation (NI Average 260) 2023-2024.

Cusher Stakeholder input/feedback

The data from Cusher DEA, home to 8,808 children and young people aged 0-25, highlights both unique challenges and opportunities in supporting its youth population. Of these, 3,604 fall within the key Youth Service priority age bands of 9-13 years and 14-18 years. Statistically, Cusher DEA presents a more positive outlook compared to the wider Northern Ireland (NI) region, particularly in terms of employment and qualifications. Also, only 3.6% of young people aged 20-24 are neither employed nor qualified, significantly lower than the NI average of 4.9%. Moreover, the percentage of school leavers in Cusher who are unemployed or whose status is unknown stands at just 2.6%, in stark contrast to the NI average of 4.7%. These figures indicate that Cusher's educational and employment landscape is relatively stable compared to other DEAs across Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon, a point stakeholders have identified as an encouraging sign for the area.

Educational achievements in Cusher also align closely with the regional averages. In 2022/23, 76.7% of school leavers in Cusher DEA achieved at least five GCSEs, including English and Math, which is slightly above the NI average of 76.1%. This suggests that educational attainment in the area is strong, and young people are generally achieving the qualifications needed to move forward in life. Stakeholders agreed, however, that there is still room for improvement, particularly for those who may not have access to support outside the home or school environment.

The area is also home to a relatively low number of newcomer pupils, with 85 enrolled in primary and post-primary schools during the 2023/24 school year. This contributes to the area's cultural diversity but also presents challenges for integration and language support. Despite this 1.7% of young people aged 4-24 speak a language other than English, which is below the NI average of 4.1%. Furthermore, Cusher reported only one incident with a racist motivation in the 2023/24 year. This is a low number compared to other DEA's and therefore reflecting a more inclusive atmosphere among children and young people in the area.

Youth Justice referrals in Cusher are notably lower than the NI average. There were 14 referrals in 2022/23, well below the NI average of 17, reflecting a relatively low incidence of youth crime in the area. Stakeholders also reported that this could be attributed to the community's relatively strong support networks and preventive measures, which have likely contributed to a decrease in antisocial behaviour. Similarly, the number of suspensions in local schools in 2022/23 stood at just 30, far fewer than the NI average of 65. This is an encouraging statistic, with stakeholders agreeing that the positive environments in Cusher may be linked to strong community support.

When it comes to domestic abuse, Cusher DEA is below the NI average in recorded incidents with a domestic abuse motivation. In 2023/24, there were 152 such incidents, compared to the NI average of 260. This lower prevalence of domestic abuse may suggest a relatively safer environment for children and young people in Cusher.

However, stakeholders pointed out that this figure should be understood in the context of potential underreporting or cultural factors that may influence the recognition and reporting of such issues. Some stakeholders also noted the importance of ensuring that young people have the necessary support and education to identify and deal with domestic abuse issues when they arise.

The consensus among young people was that engaging in play and leisure activities not only brought them happiness and excitement but also served as an important stress reliever. Stakeholders

expressed that these activities are essential for both physical and mental health, offering a much-needed break from the pressures of daily life. Children and young people expressed the need for recreational activities and spaces where they feel safe and valued, a point strongly supported by the young people themselves during focus group sessions.

On the theme of safety, young people reported that while they had safe spaces to socialise, including at youth clubs, schools and churches, public spaces such as parks were not always perceived as safe, particularly for socialising.

Looking ahead, children and young people in Cusher DEA shared a mixed outlook on their future. While many expressed hopefulness and an understanding that their futures could change in positive ways, participants also mentioned feeling apprehensive about what lies ahead. Despite some uncertainties, young people feel confident in their ability to live independently in the future, though they acknowledged that achieving their full potential might be complicated by challenges like bullying, social media pressures and issues at home.

The issue of poverty also emerged as a concern. Young people in Cusher noted how poverty could impact the lives of their peers, leaving some excluded from social activities due to a lack of access to branded clothes or the ability to go on educational visits. This social exclusion can contribute to bullying, further underlining the need for support to address the broader socio-economic factors that influence young people's experiences.

Cusher Summary

- Limited access to safe, welcoming public spaces for socialising and recreation
- Lack of inclusive, affordable leisure opportunities that support wellbeing and reduce stress
- Social exclusion linked to poverty, affecting participation in school and community life
- Bullying and peer pressure influenced by appearance, status and social media comparison
- Uncertainty about the future, with some young people lacking confidence in reaching their potential
- Gaps in cultural integration and language support for newcomer children and young people
- Limited opportunities to explore identity, independence and personal development in supportive settings
- Concerns about feeling safe in public spaces despite strong community and school-based support

Craigavon

Key facts

There are 10,137 children and young people aged 0 -25 years old in Craigavon DEA.

4,214 fall within the key Youth Service priority aged bands of 9-13 years and 14-18 years.

5.3% of young people 20-24 years old in Craigavon DEA are not in employment and do not have a qualification (NI average 4.9%).

The percentage of school leavers who are unemployed and/or are unknown in Craigavon DEA 2022/23 was 6.5% compared to the NI average of 4.7%.

The percentage of school leavers in Craigavon DEA achieving at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C including GCSE English and Math in 2022/23 is 68.7% (NI average 76.1%).

1008 (16.4%) primary and post primary pupils have a Special Education Need 1- 3 The NI average for pupils with a SEN 1- 3 Statement is 19%.

There were 911 newcomer pupils in Craigavon DEA primary and post primary schools in 2023/24.

There were 17 incidents with a racist motivation in Craigavon DEA - 2023/24. This is a 10% decrease from the previous year of 19 racial motivated incidents.

There were 530 (6.1%) children and young people aged 4-24 whose main language is not English 2021 (NI Average 4.1%).

217 pupils were suspended in the 2022/23 academic year (NI Average 65).

There were16 Youth Justice Referrals in 2022/23 (NI Average 17).

Craigavon DEA is above the Northern Ireland Average with 295 Incidents recorded with a Domestic Abuse Motivation and Crimes Recorded with a Domestic Abuse Motivation (NI Average 260) 2023-2024.

Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (NRAs) are neighbourhoods identified as experiencing the most severe multiple deprivation and received support under the Department for Communities People and Place Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. In total 36 neighbourhoods have been identified to received support. There is one NRA in the DEA area of Craigavon.

Young people living in NRAs tend to have lower educational outcomes that their peers who do not live in renewal areas.

Craigavon Stakeholder input/feedback

The data from Craigavon DEA, home to 10,137 children and young people aged 0-25, with 4,214 falling into the key Youth Service priority age groups of 9-13 years and 14-18 years, highlights the need for opportunities to address the diverse needs of this population. Stakeholders confirmed that the large cohort of children and young people in Craigavon DEA requires services that focus on supporting educational, social and personal development.

Approximately 5.3% of young people aged 20-24 in Craigavon are not employed and lack qualifications, slightly higher than the Northern Ireland (NI) average of 4.9%. This statistic highlights the ongoing challenge of supporting young people in attaining qualifications and securing employment. Additionally, 6.5% of school leavers in Craigavon were either unemployed or their status was unknown in 2022/23, higher than the NI average of 4.7%. This highlights a disconnect between education and employment, suggesting challenges like a mismatch between the skills young people develop and the needs of local businesses.

The percentage of school leavers in Craigavon DEA who achieved at least five GCSEs at grades A*-C, including English and Math, is 68.7%, which is below the NI average of 76.1%. Stakeholders communicated that more support is needed to improve educational outcomes in the area, particularly for young people who may lack external academic support or face personal challenges that hinder their success. These insights have been repeatedly raised by stakeholders, emphasising the importance of this issue faced by young people.

Craigavon is also home to 911 newcomer pupils in 2023/24, comprising 9% of the student population and 6.1% of young people in the area speak a language other than English, compared to the NI average of 4.1%. This diversity presents both opportunities and challenges for young people. Stakeholders confirmed the need for inclusive opportunities that promote diverse cultural backgrounds. While the number of racially motivated incidents decreased by 10% from the previous year, it was still recognised that racism remains an issue in the area.

In the 2022/23 academic year, Craigavon DEA recorded 217 school suspensions, far higher than the NI average of 65. Additionally, there were 16 youth justice referrals, which align with the NI average, pointing to the need for continued efforts to address youth crime and challenges experienced by children and young people in their community.

The area also recorded 295 incidents with a domestic abuse motivation in 2023-2024, above the NI average of 260. This statistic suggests that children and young people in Craigavon DEA are affected by social challenges that impact their safety and wellbeing. Stakeholders highlighted the need for ongoing support services to address the emotional and psychological effects of domestic abuse on young people, ensuring that they have access to support services when required.

Young people in Craigavon DEA have highlighted the need for more opportunities to enhance both their physical and mental health. Many are already participating in a diverse array of recreational activities, such as football and swimming as well as arts like Irish dancing and music.

Safety concerns were a significant topic of discussion among young people. Many expressed fears about walking home at night due to poor lighting and the risk of encountering dangerous situations. Broken glass in public areas, along with issues like underage drinking and drug misuse also raised concerns.

Young people from Craigavon have expressed a desire for more opportunities related to their future, they also discussed the importance of life skills and independence. Stakeholders acknowledged that the transition from education to the workforce is a challenging period for young people.

In terms of citizenship, young people stated that they need more opportunities to get involved in their communities and would like to see more inclusive activities that celebrate diversity. This is important to young people because it promotes a sense of belonging, helps build stronger community connections and empowers young people to be active, informed citizens who can contribute positively to society.

Many young people are unaware of their rights, especially in relation to learning difficulties and autism. They expressed a need for a clearer understanding of their entitlements, which would empower them to better navigate challenges and advocate for themselves. This noted that this knowledge would not only help them access the support they need but also promote greater self-confidence and independence in managing their personal and educational experiences.

Equality remains a concern for young people in Craigavon DEA, with many expressing a desire for more opportunities for social participation. Poverty, underage drinking, drug use, and a lack of awareness about the challenges faced by young people from different backgrounds were all highlighted as barriers to equality.

Emerging issues, such as concerns about road safety, have also been raised. Young people have expressed fears about falling on footpaths or encountering dangerous drivers, particularly during busy school times. Stakeholders have highlighted that safety concerns for young people in Craigavon, including risks from scramblers, are an escalating issue with growing dangers.

Craigavon Summary

- Low educational attainment and barriers to academic success among school-aged young people
- Lack of accessible and relevant pathways into employment, training, and further education
- Poor mental health and emotional wellbeing, influenced by stress, isolation, and lack of support
- High rates of school suspensions and behavioural challenges linked to unmet social and emotional needs
- Experiences of racism, discrimination, and exclusion among newcomer and minority ethnic young people
- Exposure to domestic abuse and unsafe home environments impacting wellbeing and stability
- Limited access to inclusive, safe, and welcoming spaces for connection, support, and recreation
- Safety concerns in public spaces due substance misuse and antisocial behaviour
- Lack of awareness of rights and entitlements, particularly among young people with additional needs
- Inequality in access to opportunities, driven by poverty, social exclusion and community division

Lagan River

Key facts

There is 8,022 children and young people aged 0 -25 years old in Lagan River DEA.

3,374 falls within the key Youth Service priority aged bands of 9-13 years and 14-18 years.

3.4% of young people 20-24 years old are not in employment and do not have a qualification (NI average 4.9%).

The percentage of school leavers who are unemployed and/or are unknown in 2022/23 is 5.3% compared to the NI average of 4.7%.

The percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C including GCSE English and Math in 2022/23 is 81.7% (NI average 76.1%).

688 (15.0%) primary and post primary pupils have a Special Education Need 1- 3 The NI average for pupils with a SEN 1- 3 Statement is 19%.

48 newcomer pupils in Lagan River DEA primary and post primary schools in 2023/24.

There were 3 incidents with a racist motivation in 2023/24. This is a 40% decrease from the previous year of 5 racial motivated incidents.

11 Youth Justice Referrals 2022/23 (NI Average 17).

Lagan River DEA is below the Northern Ireland Average with 211 Incidents recorded with a Domestic Abuse Motivation and Crimes Recorded with a Domestic Abuse Motivation (NI Average 260) 2023-2024.

76 (1.1%) children and young people aged 4-24 whose main language is not English 2021 (NI Average 4.1%).

Number of pupils suspended in the 2022/23 academic year – 30 (NI Average 65).

Lagan River Stakeholder input/feedback

The data from the Lagan River District Electoral Area (DEA) reveals that there are 8,022 children and young people aged 0-25 years, with 3,374 in the priority age bands of 9-13 years and 14-18 years. Through consultation, children and young people have expressed concerns about mental health issues, including anxiety, depression and stress from schoolwork. The percentage of school leavers unemployed or whose status is unknown in 2022/23 is 5.3%, higher than the Northern Ireland average of 4.7%, suggesting challenges in transitioning to work or further education. However, the unemployment rate among young people aged 20-24 in Lagan River is 3.4%, which falls below the Northern Ireland average of 4.9%.

Young people living in rural areas like the Lagan River face several challenges. Limited access to education and career opportunities often requires long distances, while the lack of public transportation forces reliance on personal vehicles. Social isolation is common due to fewer recreational spaces and activities which can contribute to mental health challenges.

Children and young people continue to report experiencing bullying, with body shaming and concerns related to self-esteem being issues. Many express feeling pressured by societal expectations of appearance and the constant comparisons seen on social media, which can affect their mental health. These issues not only contribute to feelings of isolation and anxiety but also impact their sense of self-worth, leading to a lack of confidence and difficulties in forming healthy relationships.

Substance misuse, particularly vaping, smoking and drug use, is rising among young people. Young people reported peer pressure to engage in these behaviours. Children and young people have also shared concerns about the availability of drugs on the streets and the risks involved.

Sexual health is another area of concern raised. Teenage pregnancy remains an issue and young people report a need for more information on consent, protection and sexually transmitted diseases. This is important because sexual health is closely linked to both physical and emotional well-being.

Family issues, including domestic abuse, affect many young people. In 2023-2024, there were 211 incidents with a domestic abuse motivation across the area, below the Northern Ireland average of 260. These experiences often contribute to mental health challenges.

Children and young people in Lagan River DEA also expressed concern about dangerous and careless driving, particularly among their peers. They have highlighted the need for more education on safe driving practices, especially when it comes to responsible driving and substance misuse. This concern is even more pronounced in rural areas, where they feel that the risks of unsafe driving are due to the fewer traffic regulations and the isolation of rural roads.

Lagan River Summary

- Mental health challenges and emotional distress, fuelled by anxiety, depression and the pressures of academic life
- Bullying, body shaming, and low self-esteem affecting confidence and healthy relationships
- Limited access to education, training and career opportunities due to rural isolation
- Lack of safe, inclusive spaces for support, connection and non-judgmental guidance
- Limited public transport restricting participation in activities and services
- Rising substance misuse, including vaping, smoking, and drug use, linked to peer pressure
- Lack of accessible, youth-friendly sexual health education and support
- Impact of family issues and domestic abuse on young people's stability and wellbeing
- Road safety concerns and exposure to unsafe driving practices in rural communities
- Social isolation and reduced opportunities for recreation and peer connection in rural communities

Portadown

Key facts

There is 10,869 children and young people aged 0 -25 years old in Portadown DEA.

4,456 falls within the key Youth Service priority aged bands of 9-13 years and 14-18 years.

5.6% of young people 20-24 years old are not in employment and do not have a qualification (NI average 4.9%).

The percentage of school leavers who are unemployed and/or are unknown in 2022/23 is 6% compared to the NI average of 4.7%.

The percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C including GCSE English and Math in 2022/23 is 68.9% (NI average 76.1%).

1,119 (18.2%) primary and post primary pupils have a Special Education Need 1- 3 The NI average for pupils with a SEN 1- 3 Statement is 19%.

1,141 newcomer pupils in Portadown DEA primary and post primary schools in 2023/24.

There were 26 incidents with a racist motivation in 2023/24. This is a 18.2% increase from the previous year of 22 racial motivated incidents.

18 Youth Justice Referrals 2022/23 (NI Average 17).

1,054 (11.4%) children and young people aged 4-24 whose main language is not English 2021 (NI Average 4.1%) Highest across all DEA areas.

Number of pupils suspended in the 2022/23 academic year – 15 (NI Average 65).

Portadown DEA is above the Northern Ireland Average with 401 Incidents recorded with a Domestic Abuse Motivation and Crimes Recorded with a Domestic Abuse Motivation (NI Average 260) 2023-2024.

Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (NRAs) are neighbourhoods identified as experiencing the most severe multiple deprivation and received support under the Department for Communities People and Place Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. In total 36 neighbourhoods have been identified to received support. There is one NRA in the DEA area of Portadown.

Young people living in NRAs tend to have lower educational outcomes that their peers who do not live in renewal areas.

Portadown Stakeholder input/feedback

The data from Portadown DEA reveals several key challenges that children and young people in the area face, particularly regarding education, employment, health, safety and overall well-being.

Young people have expressed concern over the relatively low educational outcomes, with only 68.9% of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C, including English and Maths, compared to the Northern Ireland average of 76.1%. This suggests that many young people in the area are not receiving the support they need to reach their full potential. Alongside this, 5.6% of young people aged 20-24 are unemployed and lack qualifications, which is above the NI average of 4.9%. Additionally, 6% of school leavers are either unemployed or have an unknown status, higher than the NI average of 4.7%, which impacts young people by limiting their opportunities for financial independence and long-term career prospects. This uncertainty can contribute to feelings of instability and frustration, making it harder for them to build a secure future. Additionally, 1119 (18.2%) primary and post-primary pupils in the DEA have a Special Education Need (SEN 1-3), which aligns with the Northern Ireland average of 19%. This highlights that a significant proportion of young people in the region face challenges that may affect their ability to reach their full educational potential.

Furthermore, the area has a notable percentage of young people whose main language is not English, with 11.4% of the youth population in this category, much higher than the NI average of 4.1%. With 1,141 newcomer pupils in the area. Young people noted that this language barrier often leads to feelings of isolation and frustration, as young people struggle to keep up with their peers academically. It can create a sense of disconnection, where they feel left behind, unable to fully participate in discussions or extracurricular activities. They explained that this affects their self-esteem and confidence, which in turn may hinder their long-term educational progress and social integration young people have stated the need for more support to feel fully included and engaged in their communities, ensuring they are not left behind due to language barriers.

Safety and well-being are also concerns for young people in Portadown DEA. The area records a significantly higher number of domestic abuse incidents (401 in 2023-2024) compared to the NI average of 260. This highlights the vulnerability of many young people to domestic abuse, which can have severe and lasting effects on their mental health, stability and sense of security. For those living in homes where violence or abuse is present, the impact can extend beyond just the immediate dangers, affecting their ability to trust others, form healthy relationships and cope with stress. The trauma of witnessing or experiencing domestic abuse can interfere with their emotional well-being and academic performance, leaving them at greater risk of developing long-term issues.

The increase in racially motivated incidents, with an 18.2% rise in 2023, points to a growing concern about racial tensions and discrimination within the Portadown DEA. Young people have expressed the need for greater inclusivity and safety, particularly for those from minority ethnic backgrounds. They have shared that the experience of discrimination and racism not only creates a hostile and unwelcoming environment but also affects their sense of belonging and personal security. Feeling unsafe in their own communities can lead to social isolation, lower self-esteem and a reduced ability to participate fully in community life. Young people from minority ethnic backgrounds have highlighted how these incidents hinder their opportunity to thrive, impacting their emotional well-being and confidence. For them to feel secure and respected, it is essential that inclusive practices and initiatives are prioritised to foster an environment where all young people can thrive regardless of their ethnicity.

Additionally, young people from Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (NRAs) are disproportionately affected by poverty and deprivation, which further exacerbates the challenges they face in education and life outcomes. These young people tend to have lower educational achievements compared to their peers, and poverty often limits their access to opportunities. The impact of these barriers often leads to feelings of exclusion and frustration, as many young people find themselves unable to fully engage in opportunities that could help them build skills and confidence.

Mental health and emotional well-being are pressing concerns for young people in Portadown, with various issues contributing to heightened stress and anxiety. Bullying, whether in-person or online, remains a significant challenge, often leading to feelings of isolation, low self-esteem and depression. Peer pressure also plays a critical role, as many young people feel compelled to conform to social expectations or engage in risky behaviours to fit in. They noted that this pressure is often increased by the influence of social media, where the constant comparison to others can create unrealistic expectations and intensify mental health issues. Additionally, the use of substances such as vaping, drugs, and alcohol has become a coping mechanism for some, further impacting their emotional well-being. These factors combined create a complex web of challenges that can have long-term effects on young people's mental health, potentially leading to issues such as anxiety, depression and substance dependence.

It is also important to acknowledge that Portadown has a Peace Line, and while progress has been made in improving relations and creating a more peaceful environment, ongoing work is still required to ensure lasting peace. Despite improvements, challenges related to community tensions and division remain and continued efforts are necessary to foster a truly cohesive, peaceful community where all young people feel safe and valued.

Portadown Summary

- Low educational attainment and disengagement from learning
- Lack of accessible pathways to employment, training and skills development
- Poor mental health and emotional well-being
- Isolation and exclusion of newcomer young people due to language barriers
- Experiences of racism and discrimination among minority ethnic young people
- High levels of domestic abuse impacting young people's safety and stability
- Limited opportunities for young people to have a voice and influence decisions
- Bullying, peer pressure and negative impact of social media
- Poverty and financial hardship affecting access to activities and essentials
- Ongoing community division and need for peacebuilding
- Exposure to substance use and lack of positive alternatives