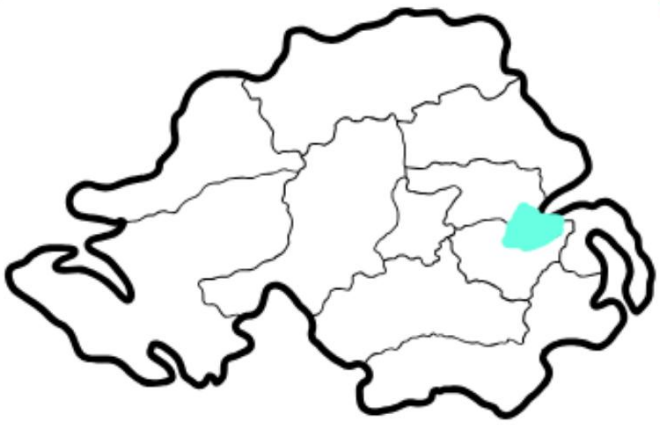
Education Authority

2026 - 2029



SOUTH & WEST BELFAST

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 South and West Belfast area. It brings together data, evidence and local insight to help identify the needs and barriers children and young people in South and West Belfast area 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 South and West Belfast area. 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 410 children and young people responded from South and West Belfast area.

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. 7 focus groups, involving 55 participants were completed in South and West Belfast area.

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 South and West Belfast area 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

Stakeholder focus group engagement took place with the following groups:
South and West Belfast Area Youth Work team; Collin Youth Strategy Group; South Belfast Local Advisory Group; West Belfast Local Advisory Group; 3 focus groups with young people from ethnic minority backgrounds involving 25 young people aged 8 – 17 years.

In October/November 2024 a local survey to identify needs of children and young people was sent out to funded groups in South Belfast. 19 groups involving 324 young people responded.

Council in Numbers

The following Area Profile statistics cover the whole of the city of Belfast and are not available in districts:

The population of Belfast local government district is 348,005 people.

118,083 children and young people are aged 0-25 years live in Belfast.

102,524 children and young people are aged 4-25 years live in Belfast.

Age bands population

- 15,553 aged 0 – 3 years
- 21,120 aged 4 – 8 years
- 21,645 aged 9 – 13 years
- 19,632 aged 14 – 18 years
- 40,127 aged 19 – 25 years

In Belfast 62,583 children and young people aged 0-25 years (53%) live in deprivation.

0 children and young people live in a rural community in Belfast.

38% of children and young people aged 0-24 years old in Belfast come from a lone parent family (census21).

5,021 Newcomers attend schools in Belfast (7.6%) – NI Average 5%.

127 Irish Traveller children and young people.

25,458 (45.6%) of all pupils in Belfast are eligible for Free School Meals. 2023/24. (NI average 28%).

13,857 pupils (23%) who attend school in Belfast 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 maths in Belfast in 2022/23 is 82% compared to the NI average of 76.1%.

The percentage of school leavers who are unemployed and/or unknown in Belfast in 2022/23 is 5.8% (NI average 4.7%).

6.4% 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 Belfast in 2022/23 is 20.3% (NI average 20.4%).

The proportion of Year 8 pupils identified as obese or overweight in Belfast in 2022/23 is 26.5% (NI average 26%). This represents 27.2% of girls (NI 26.2%) and 25.9% of boys (NI 25.8%).

Suicide rates in Belfast recorded 49 suicides in 2023. This is a 21% decrease from 62 suicides in 2020. The suicide rate has continued to fall this past 2 years in Belfast.

There were 319 incidents with a sectarian motivation in Belfast in 2023/24.

There were 635 incidents with a racist motivation in Belfast in 2023/24. This is a 14% increase from the previous year of 557 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 5,485 domestic abuse crimes in Belfast in 2023/24. This is a 5% decrease from the previous year. The average rate for domestic abuse crimes in Belfast DEAs is 549 (NI average 250).

There was a total of 13,390 anti-social behaviour incidents in Belfast in 2023/24. This is a 5% decrease from the previous year. The average for anti-social behaviour incidents in Belfast DEAs is 1339 (NI average 567).

South and West Belfast Multiple Deprivation Measures 2017 (NIMDM)

The South and West Belfast area consists of 87 Super Output Areas:

- 44% of SOAs in West Belfast are in the top 10% most deprived in Northern Ireland in terms of multiple deprivation.
- 2 Super Output Areas in West Belfast are ranked in the top 10 most deprived in terms of **Education, Skills and Training**.
- 5 Super Output Areas in West Belfast are in the top 11 most deprived in terms of **Health & Disability**
- 3 Super Output Areas in West Belfast are in the top 20 most deprived in terms of **Employment**
- 1 Super Output Area in South Belfast is in the top 5% most deprived in terms of **Income**
- 7 Super Output areas in South Belfast and 1 in West Belfast are in top 11 most deprived in terms of **Living Environment**
- 3 Super Output Areas in South Belfast and 3 in West Belfast are in the top, most deprived in terms of **Crime and Disorder**

Neighbourhood Renewal Area (NRAs)

A Neighbourhood Renewal Area is defined as an area in the most top 10% deprived areas of Northern Ireland based upon the Multiple Deprivation Measures as identified by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). There are 15 such areas in Belfast, seven of which are in the South and West Belfast Areas:

- Andersonstown
- Colin
- Falls/Clonard
- Inner South Belfast
- Outer West Belfast
- South West Belfast
- Upper Springfield/Whiterock

Key Trends and Highlights in Belfast:

1. **Age Distribution**: The population of young people is spread across various age bands, with notable numbers in each group. In future years the number of children aged 4-8 years is expected to decrease, while the number of 14 –18-year-olds is projected to increase, indicating a shift in the demographic that will require adjustments in Youth Services.

2. **Deprivation and Family Structure**: Over half of the young population (53%) lives in deprivation, and 38% come from lone parent families. South and West Belfast are particularly affected by multiple deprivation, with several areas ranked among the most deprived in terms of education, health, and employment.

3. **Education and Special Needs**: A significant portion of pupils (45.6%) are eligible for Free School Meals, and 23% have Special Education Needs or Disabilities. Despite these challenges, 82% of school leavers achieve at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C, including English and Maths, which is higher than the Northern Ireland average.

4. **Employment Challenges:** 5.8% of Belfast school leavers were unemployed or their status unknown in 2022/23, exceeding the Northern Ireland average of 4.7%. Among young people aged 20-24, 6.4% were not employed and lacked qualifications, again significantly higher than the NI average of 4.9%.

5. **Health and Well-being**: Obesity rates among young people are concerning, with 20.3% of Primary 1 pupils and 26.5% of Year 8 pupils identified as obese or overweight. Additionally, although the suicide rate remains high, it has decreased by 21% since 2020, indicating progress in mental health interventions.

6. **Ethnic Diversity and Inclusion**: There are 5,021 newcomer students and 127 Irish Traveller children in Belfast schools, highlighting the need for inclusive educational programmes.

7. **Crime and Safety**: Domestic abuse and anti-social behaviour incidents remain very high at more than double the NI average. There is an increase in racially motivated incidents, which rose by 14% in the past year. These figures suggest growing concerns around racial tensions within the community. The average number of anti-social behaviour incidents in Belfast DEAs, at 1,339, remains significantly higher than the NI average of 567, highlighting the ongoing challenges in tackling this issue.

The Findings

Emotional Health and Wellbeing

Key facts

13,857 pupils (23%) who attend school in Belfast 2022/23 have a Special Education Need or Disability Stage 1-3. (NI average 19%).

Approximately 23,616 children and young people aged 0-25 years have a mental health need.

Rates per '000 with an emotional, psychological or mental health condition:

- Age 0-15 years: Collin 42.8, Court 44.4, Black Mountain 35.6, Balmoral 12.8, Botanic 9, NI Average 13.9
- Age 16-24 years: Collin167.8, Court 253.5, Black Mountain 235.2, Balmoral 104.3, Botanic 361.2 NI Average 84.2

7,414 children and young people aged 0-24 years have autism.

The proportion of Primary 1 pupils identified as obese or overweight in Belfast in 2022/23 is 20.3% (NI average 20.4%).

The proportion of Year 8 pupils identified as obese or overweight in Belfast in 2022/23 is 26.5% (NI average 26%). This represents 27.2% of girls (NI 26.2%) and 25.9% of boys (NI 25.8%).

21.7% of children and young people aged 0-24 years have a long-term health condition (NI 19.8%).

There was 9.81 births per 1,000 births to young mothers aged under 20 years (NI average 5.83%).

There was 1.86 births per 1,000 births to young mothers aged under 17 years (NI average 0.75%).

According to the most recent census, 3,499 young people aged 16-24 years old identify as LGBTQI+.

Suicide rates in Belfast recorded 49 suicides in 2023. This is a 21% decrease from 62 suicides in 2020. The suicide rate has continued to fall this past 2 years in Belfast.

Stakeholder input/feedback

In the Regional Assessment of Need, 85% of young people reported having access to opportunities for physical activities, while 85% of respondents expressed confidence in accessing support for their emotional health when required. Additionally, 87% stated they feel cheerful and in good spirits more than half of the time, and 71% reported feeling calm and relaxed during many of their days.

However, the data also reveals an area of concern. Almost 48% of respondents indicated they do not wake up feeling fresh and rested, suggesting potential issues related to sleep quality, stress levels, or other factors impacting their overall wellbeing.

Focus group discussions with young people and stakeholders provided deeper insights into some of the health challenges affecting young people. Mental health emerged as a critical theme, with stress, anxiety, depression, and self-harm highlighted as significant concerns. One young person remarked, *"Anxiety is a big issue and has a big impact on my day-to-day life."* Stress related to school was a major concern; young people reported feeling under immense pressure from teachers to perform, particularly when they struggled to engage with their education. They identified that mental health problems were closely linked to experiences in school, the home environment, trauma, and poverty. A need for positive relationships and someone to confide in when facing worries or problems was emphasised.

Young people and stakeholders also highlighted the detrimental effects of drugs, alcohol, vaping, poverty, and bullying on their wellbeing. The impact of addiction, including addiction to substances, vaping, gambling, and pornography, was discussed in detail. Sexual health awareness was identified as another area requiring attention.

Discussions further explored the influence of trauma associated with paramilitaries, interface violence, gender-based violence, and abuse. Concerns were raised about increasing anxiety due to changes in local communities, with young people expressing feelings of powerlessness to affect these changes. Feedback additionally revealed rising anxieties surrounding global issues and the possibility of world wars within their lifetimes.

The importance of establishing spaces dedicated to mental wellbeing was emphasised, enabling young people to talk openly and access support. They expressed the need for more outdoor activities to enhance overall wellbeing. Concerns about the adverse impact of excessive screen time on emotional health were brought to light.

Young people and stakeholders with SEND discussed the need for structured extracurricular programmes to promote mental and physical wellbeing. One participant shared, *"I feel like we need more spaces to swim or relax because it helps with stress."* Stakeholders advocated for opportunities that ensure young people with SEND can take part in physical activities and address mental health challenges, including anxiety.

Access to play and Leisure

Key facts

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

88% of teachers agree that children are happier after playing outdoors.

86% of teachers agree that playing outdoors gives children a better understanding of the environment.

There are 14 council registered playparks in West Belfast and 20 in South Belfast.

There are 7 council-managed leisure and recreational centres in South and West Belfast.

There are 12 GAA clubs in South and West Belfast along with a wide range of football clubs and leagues.

Stakeholder input/feedback

According to the Regional Assessment of Need (RAON) Survey, 70% of respondents believe there are safe spaces for young people to socialise. However, this leaves almost one-third (30%) feeling that such spaces, where they can safely meet friends, are lacking. Additionally, 54% of individuals reported there are insufficient fun activities available in their area.

Young people and stakeholders emphasised the significance of social spaces where they could interact with peers outside of school settings. They felt these spaces should be safe, warm and dry and available at times that suit them. They highlighted the value of youth centres as welcoming places for young people to meet and feel at ease.

Focus groups with young people and stakeholders revealed the positive impact of sporting and physical activities, which help individuals remain fit, active, and boost their overall wellbeing. They expressed a need for safe and inclusive spaces dedicated to recreational activities, recommending a wider variety of offerings such as creative workshops, music and arts programmes. Concerns were raised regarding the cost of some activities, which can prevent participation, stressing the need for affordable activities accessible to all.

Some participants shared their desire for better access to outdoor activities, suggesting that outdoor spaces should be utilised in innovative ways to provide creative and other physical activities as well as sport.

Feedback from young people and stakeholders with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) highlighted their need for safe, accessible spaces for play and leisure where they feel secure. Participants also raised issues with private venues, noting accessibility challenges and the lack of suitable transport options. Furthermore, they pointed out that accessible sessions in many facilities are often scheduled at inconvenient times, preventing many children and young people from participating.

Focus groups of young people from ethnic minority backgrounds revealed numerous barriers to accessing play and leisure facilities. These include a lack of awareness of what is available, limited knowledge of available Youth Services, and perceptions of these services as being inaccessible or unsafe due to their location. Consequently, there is a need for greater knowledge and awareness of Youth Services, particularly with minority communities such as newcomer young people.

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 maths in Belfast in 2022/23 is 82% compared to the NI average of 76.1%.

The percentage of school leavers who are unemployed and/or unknown in Belfast in 2022/23 is 5.8% (NI average 4.7%).

6.4% of young people 20-24 years old are not in employment and do not have a qualification. (NI average 4.9%).

5,021 Newcomers attend schools in Belfast (7.6%) – NI Average 5%.

127 Irish Traveller children and young people.

25,458 (45.6%) of all pupils in Belfast are eligible for Free School Meals. 2023/24. (NI average 28%).

13,857 pupils (23%) who attend school in Belfast 2022/23 have a Special Education Need or Disability Stage 1-3. (NI average 19%).

1,179 children and young people were suspended from school in Belfast.

The attendance rate for post-primary schools was 92.2%. (NI average 96%).

According to the most recent census, 3,499 young people aged 16-24 years old identify as LGBTQI+.

Stakeholder input/feedback

In the Regional Assessment of Need survey, 76% of young people identified Youth Work programmes as a valuable source of learning, while 70% acknowledged the opportunity to gain qualifications through these initiatives. However, 58% of young people reported feeling held back by barriers, and 30% expressed a need for greater support during significant transitions, such as moving schools.

Both young people and stakeholders highlighted the importance of young people recognising the value of education and recognising the opportunities that schools and learning can provide. Low aspirations were identified as a key issue affecting the area, contributing to reduced school attendance among many young people.

Young people and stakeholders also emphasised the importance of equipping young people with life skills, qualifications, and opportunities to ease their transition into adulthood and employment. Support with making choices regarding education along with wider education and training programmes to prepare young people for work or further education were deemed essential. It was noted that young people should broaden their horizons by learning about life outside their youth centres and neighbourhoods. A focus group stressed the significance of providing opportunities for non-traditional qualifications and learning experiences to ensure inclusivity and relevance for diverse learners. Young people with newcomer backgrounds and ethnic minorities discussed the need for additional support as parents cannot provide this due to language barriers and their own educational experience/attainment. Practical skills along with opportunities to build experiences were identified as key areas of need.

The rapid advancement of technology was also recognised, highlighting the importance of digital awareness and the effective use of artificial intelligence. LAG stakeholders emphasised the need for young people to understand its opportunities, benefits, and risks.

Stress from schoolwork, coupled with limited access to Wi-Fi and essential IT equipment, was noted as a significant obstacle to effective learning.

Feedback highlighted the importance of opportunities for different learning experiences, such as international travel and the skills, and knowledge young people gain from these.

Feedback from young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) revealed that developing social skills, communication, and confidence are transformative aspects of their educational journey. Limited access to accessible transportation posed challenges for many young people with SEND. Anxiety associated with transitions between school years, adapting to new schedules, and moving to further education colleges was also highlighted.

Concerns also extend to life beyond school, where a lack of age-appropriate facilities leaves young people with few opportunities for social interaction with peers. It was emphasised that education should support the transition to adulthood and independence by providing skill development and clear pathways to employment for young people with additional needs.

Living in safety and stability

Key facts

In Belfast 62,583 children and young people aged 0-25 years (53%) live in deprivation.

0 children and young people live in a rural community in Belfast.

According to the most recent census, 3,499 young people aged 16-24 years old identify as LGBTQI+.

38% of children and young people aged 0-24 years old in Belfast come from a lone parent family.

There were 319 incidents with a sectarian motivation in Belfast in 2023/24.

There were 635 incidents with a racist motivation in Belfast in 2023/24. This is a 14% increase from the previous year of 557 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 5,485 domestic abuse crimes in Belfast in 2023/24. This is a 5% decrease from the previous year. The average rate for domestic abuse crimes in Belfast DEAs is 549 (NI average 250).

There was a total of 13,390 anti-social behaviour incidents in Belfast in 2023/24. This is a 5% decrease from the previous year. The average for anti-social behaviour incidents in Belfast DEAs is 1339 (NI average 567).

Suicide rates in Belfast recorded 49 suicides in 2023. This is a 21% decrease from 62 suicides in 2020. The suicide rate has continued to fall this past 2 years in Belfast.

Stakeholder input/feedback

In the Regional Assessment of Needs Survey, 52% of young people in South and West Belfast expressed concerns about crime in their area, with 34% stating that they do not feel safe in their local community. The survey also revealed that 42% of young people feel under pressure to engage in dangerous activities, while 41% believe social media has a negative impact on them. Furthermore, 68% of respondents highlighted concerns regarding the safety of women and girls in their area.

Youth and stakeholder focus groups indicated that young people in South and West Belfast are particularly worried about risk-taking behaviours, including drug and alcohol use, interface violence and rioting, paramilitary activities, vandalism, and bonfires. An increase in racist attacks on homes and hate crimes (relating to race, religion, and homophobia) was also raised as a significant concern.

Many young people spoke of feeling unsafe in their local communities. This sentiment is partly attributed to the presence of individuals under the influence of drugs, knife crime, and the activity of drug gangs. Such fears have even extended into their school life. Discussions in focus groups highlighted violence, organised fights, and aggression from males (toxic masculinity). Young people also reported feeling unsafe walking at night and stressed the need for safer community spaces. Concerns were also raised about the misuse of bikes and scramblers.

The safety of women and girls was a recurring theme, with domestic violence, sexual exploitation, toxic relationships, and friendships identified as key issues. Additionally, the impact of bullying, both in schools and on social media, was a major topic of concern.

Young people from newcomer and ethnic minority backgrounds have expressed concerns about feeling unsafe when walking alone in their local area. This is attributed to knowledge and experiences of racist comments, graffiti, riots, physical altercations, and hate crimes. Additionally, they report feeling unsafe in online spaces.

Young people and stakeholders with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) also highlighted risks associated with social media and internet usage. They expressed worries about the online bullying of vulnerable young individuals, who, due to their desire to form friendships, may be more at risk. Concerns were raised about the safety of young women, especially regarding preparation to socialise with others safely. Furthermore, SEND participants discussed safety issues within their communities, such as transportation challenges and the risks of littering on their mobility around the area.

Economic and environmental stability

Key facts

In Belfast 62,583 children and young people aged 0-25 years (53%) live in deprivation.

0 children and young people live in a rural community in Belfast.

The percentage of school leavers who are unemployed and/or unknown in Belfast in 2022/23 is 5.8%. (NI average 4.7%).

6.4% of young people 20-24 years old are not in employment and do not have a qualification. (NI average 4.9%).

25,458 (45.6%) of all pupils in Belfast are eligible for Free School Meals. 2023/24. (NI average 28%).

Stakeholder input/feedback

According to the findings of the regional assessment of need survey, 88% of young people believe poverty is increasingly impacting children and youth in their communities. Among them, 28% report that their families are unable to afford opportunities for them to engage in desired activities, highlighting the direct effect of economic hardships on their aspirations and well-being.

Additionally, 27% express a lack of confidence in future career options, and 44% feel unprepared to apply for and secure a job in the future.

Climate change is another area of concern, with 68% of young people worried about its effects and 67% believing that current measures to address climate change are inadequate. Furthermore, 35% of respondents say they lack access to education about climate change.

Young people and stakeholders emphasised their concerns about poverty, stressing the importance of providing warm shelter, food, and comfortable environments for young people. They noted that many young people are now required to help support their families, often at the expense of formal and informal educational opportunities. They shared how poverty impacts their self-esteem, leaving them feeling ashamed and low self-worth. They emphasised the importance of being able to openly discuss these challenges.

Feedback from young people and stakeholders reiterated the need for better preparation for adulthood, further education and employment. They emphasised the importance of providing young people with opportunities for experiences and access pathways to employment, along with developing practical life skills. They voiced concerns about accumulating debt if they pursued further education and they worried about their limited understanding of financial management. It was also reported that many young people have low aspirations for their future.

Young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) expressed apprehension about the types of jobs they could do due to their disabilities and whether they would be able to find employment at all. They reported concerns about their future and their transition into adulthood, how this will impact on their social opportunities with peers and what their living arrangements will be.

Feedback highlighted a need to increase awareness of the impact of climate change, alongside more opportunities to learn about respecting the local environment and engaging in positive environmental actions. Concerns were raised about littering, pollution, fires on the mountain, and the lack of recycling facilities at youth centres. The need for enhanced environmental education was widely noted.

Young people with SEND also highlighted the recurring impact of climate change on their physical and emotional well-being. They raised concerns about accessing outdoor spaces with and without wheelchairs due to the impact of litter on paths and dog fouling on their mobility. They expressed unease over harsh weather conditions and the wider effects of climate change.

Making a positive contribution

Key facts

The attendance rate for post-primary schools was 92.2%. (NI average 96%).

5,021 Newcomers attend schools in Belfast (7.6%) – NI Average 5%.

127 Irish Traveller children and young people.

1,179 children and young people were suspended from school in Belfast.

According to the most recent census, 3,499 young people aged 16-24 years old identify as LGBTQI+.

Stakeholder input/feedback

According to the Regional Assessment of Need Survey, 63% of respondents feel they have opportunities to make a meaningful difference in their schools and communities. Furthermore, 79% believe that young people possess the power to bring about positive change. However, a significant challenge remains, as 50% feel their voices are not heard or taken seriously.

Young people and stakeholders highlighted a strong desire among young people to deepen their connections within the community and engage in actions that deliver tangible benefits. They identified the need for greater opportunities for young people to make positive contributions. Increased support for youth-led campaigns, along with opportunities for volunteering within their communities, was also discussed. It was strongly advocated that community planning must include the voices of children and young people.

Youth and stakeholder focus groups identified the lack of young people feeling listened to as a top priority. One group reported heightened anxiety caused by the impact of changes in the local infrastructure of their area, such as the closing down of businesses and facilities along with the physical layout of their area. They note changes in their community's demographics and needs and feel a sense of powerlessness to influence these changes.

Feedback from young people and stakeholders with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) revealed feelings of not belonging to their communities. Many of these young people expressed that they do not feel they have a voice in decision-making processes.

Respect for young people's rights

Key facts

According to the most recent census, 3,499 young people aged 16-24 years old identify as LGBTQI+.

Approximately 23,616 children and young people aged 0-25 years have a mental health need.

In Belfast 62,583 children and young people aged 0-25 years (53%) live in deprivation.

5,021 Newcomers attend schools in Belfast (7.6%) – NI Average 5%.

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25,458 (45.6%) of all pupils in Belfast are eligible for Free School Meals. 2023/24. (NI average 28%).

13,857 pupils (23%) who attend school in Belfast 2022/23 have a Special Education Need or Disability Stage 1-3. (NI average 19%).

Stakeholder input/feedback

The regional assessment of need survey for South and West Belfast revealed that 79% of young people feel their rights are respected within youth work programmes. However, 32% are not aware of their rights, 28% say they would not be able to fight for their rights if they had to and 52% expressed that they do not feel listened to, valued, or respected.

These points were reflected by the Youth and stakeholder focus groups who identified that young people have a lack of understanding or awareness of rights. They identified the need for young people to have more education on their rights and how they can exercise them. Rights of girls and young women and girls were emphasised with support needed to be able to break out of stereotypes and be empowered to advocate for themselves.

Young People and stakeholders noted the need for young people to be valued and listened to.

Feedback from young people from ethnic minority backgrounds discussed how often newcomer young people do not know what their rights are in N. Ireland. They know little about NI political structures and their rights as a young person living within Belfast.

Feedback from young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) emphasised the importance of teaching about rights in schools or classrooms, complemented by ongoing access to information about their rights as needed.

Irish-speaking young people and stakeholders stated they often feel overlooked and advocated for minority language rights.

Good Relations and equality

Key facts

There are 13 interface areas in Belfast.

0 children and young people live in a rural community in Belfast.

5,021 Newcomers attend schools in Belfast (7.6%) – NI Average 5%.

127 Irish Traveller children and young people.

25,458 (45.6%) of all pupils in Belfast are eligible for Free School Meals. 2023/24. (NI average 28%).

13,857 pupils (23%) who attend school in Belfast 2022/23 have a Special Education Need or Disability Stage 1-3. (NI average 19%).

In Belfast 62,583 children and young people aged 0-25 years (53%) live in deprivation.

According to the most recent census, 3,499 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

Regional Assessment of Need survey findings reveal that 53% feel children and young people are not treated equally, and 57% believe not everyone is included in their community. Additionally, 58% report a lack of respect among peers for those who are different.

Discussions with young people and stakeholders have brought attention to several significant concerns. These include sectarianism, interface violence, and hate crimes based on race, religion, and homophobia, as well as a broader lack of diversity and understanding of LGBTQIA+ identities. There are also worries regarding the limited community acceptance of newcomers and minority ethnic groups. Young people and stakeholders from newcomer backgrounds and ethnic minorities shared how they feel that migrants and refugees are blamed for a lot of issues, this is further exacerbated with online abuse and exclusion. One focus group of young people from newcomer backgrounds and ethnic minorities spoke of the need for greater understanding and awareness about different cultures and the global impact of war and political circumstances that have led families to relocate to Northern Ireland.

Some stakeholders have suggested that sectarian or hate-driven behaviours may stem from boredom and a desire for excitement. They propose that fostering positive activities, alongside promoting understanding and respect for diversity, could help mitigate such behaviours. Additionally, gender equality and LGBTQIA+ support have been identified as key areas requiring attention.

Stakeholders have also highlighted the specific needs of young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). They emphasise the importance of ensuring access to safe, inclusive spaces that cater to these young people's needs. Trained staff and appropriate, well-designed programmes are necessary to prevent tokenistic approaches and to ensure these individuals are not disadvantaged. Stakeholders advocate for opportunities that enable young people with SEND to engage in enriching experiences, participate in physical activities, address mental health and anxiety issues, and build stronger links with their community.

Summary Conclusion of Needs across Strategic Themes

Health and wellbeing

Health and Wellbeing is highlighted as need for South and West Belfast. Physical health is priority with over a quarter of year 8's being identified as obese or overweight. Concerns are expressed about drugs, alcohol and vaping by children and young people. There is the need for education and signposting regarding addictions to gambling, porn, drugs and vaping. Young people also need to have enough rest and sleep to have a positive wellbeing. Mental health emerged as a critical theme, with stress, anxiety, depression, trauma and self-harm highlighted as significant concerns.

Access to play and Leisure

Social places for play and leisure where children and young people can interact with peers is identified as a clear need. This includes access to safe indoor and outdoor spaces, along with warm, dry facilities open later in the evenings and weekends. A wide variety of social, physical and creative activities is required to involve a range of children and young people. Outdoor activities and innovative use of outdoor spaces are also identified as key resources for children and young people. Young people with SEND need access to safe accessible spaces where they feel secure and supported. There is a need for greater knowledge and awareness of Youth Services, particularly with minority communities such as newcomer young people.

Learning and achieving

The need to raise aspirations of young people was emphasised as a key need. This is having impact on school attendance, engagement, value placed on education, self-belief, and confidence. Education to support the transition from adolescence into adulthood has been identified as a key need with young people needing to gain more life skills, vocational training, preparation for employment and training for leadership. This is also linked for young people to opportunities to build experiences. Support for young people during transitions and decision making over education choices was identified alongside learning about the new technologies such as artificial intelligence.

Living in safety and stability

The importance of ensuring that young people feel safe within their communities is strongly emphasised. Key priorities include education, raising awareness, and safeguarding young people from risk-taking behaviours, interface violence, rioting, involvement in paramilitary activities, hate crimes, and vandalism. Equally significant is focussing on violence against women and girls, as well as supporting young people with the negative impacts of social media misuse and bullying.

Economic and environmental stability

Poverty is reported to have a significant impact on children and young people, both physically and emotionally. There is a need to support children and young people, their self-esteem and self-worth as they experience these challenges.

A key priority identified is preparation for adulthood and employment. This includes providing young people with opportunities to gain volunteering experience, access pathways to employment, and develop practical life skills to raise aspirations.

Climate change has also been widely recognised as a pressing issue, highlighting the need for education and greater awareness of environmental matters.

Making a positive contribution

A strong need has been highlighted to deepen connections between young people and their communities, with support to volunteer, campaign and be listened to.

Respect for young people's rights

The need for young people to have more education on their rights and how they can exercise them as identified as an important need. Rights of girls and young women and girls were emphasised along with other minority and disabled groups.

Good Relations and equality

The need to create awareness and promote understanding and acceptance of others is a key need. Support for newcomers, children and young people from other ethnicities, LGBTQIA, young people with SEND and gender equality are identified as priority.

The findings – Identification of priorities/DEA profiles

DEA Balmoral

Key facts

- There is 6,876 children and young people aged 0 -25 years old in Balmoral DEA.
- 2,846 fall within the key Youth Service priority aged bands of 9-13 years and 14-18 years.
- 4.0% of young people 20-24 years old are not in employment and do not have a qualification (NI average 4.9%).
- 4.9% of young people 18 – 24 years have never worked/low level of qualifications (NI average 5.6%)
- The percentage of school leavers who are unemployed or are unknown in 2022/23 is 3.9% 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 Maths in 2022/23 is 84.4% (NI average 76.1%).
- 104.3 per '000 aged 16-24 years have an emotional, psychological or mental health condition (NI average 84.2).
- 12.8 per '000 aged 0-15 years have an emotional, psychological or mental health condition (NI average 13.9).
- 358 newcomer pupils in Balmoral DEA primary and post primary schools in 2023/24.
- There were 34 incidents with a racist motivation in 2023/24. This is a 100% increase from the previous year of 17 racial motivated incidents.
- 57.2 per '000 aged 0 – 24 have Autism or Aspergers syndrome (NI average 49.0) (self-assessment Census 2021).
- 21.5% of children and young people aged 0-24 years old in Belfast come from a lone parent family.
- There are 8 playgrounds in the Balmoral DEA.

Stakeholder input/feedback

Young People and stakeholders from across Balmoral shared their perspectives and several key themes have emerged, reflecting the priorities and concerns of this group.

While many reported positive emotional states, significant areas of concern emerged, shedding light on challenges that should not be overlooked.

Over half of young people surveyed in the Regional Assessment of Need (56%) revealed that they wake up feeling fresh and rested less than half the time. 17% shared that they lack knowledge about how to access support for their emotional health and well-being needs, highlighting a gap in awareness and resources. A similar percentage (17%) pointed to limited opportunities for physical activity, underscoring a need for accessible and inclusive programmes to promote healthy lifestyles.

Despite these concerns, most respondents expressed resilience and positivity. An impressive 91% reported feeling cheerful and in good spirits, and 78% stated that they felt calm and relaxed more than half the time. These findings suggest that while challenges exist, many young people maintain an optimistic outlook on life.

Youth and stakeholder focus group discussions delved deeper into some of the issues affecting young people's health. Mental health is highlighted as a prominent theme, with stress, anxiety, and self-harm identified as critical concerns. One young person said that “Anxiety is a big issue and has a big impact on my day-to-day life”. Young people discussed stress from school is a major concern, they feel under a lot of stress from teachers to perform when they struggle to engage with the teaching. Participants also highlighted the impact of drugs, alcohol, vaping, poverty, mobile phone use and bullying on their well-being. They discussed their lack of adequate sleep due to coursework, social media and gaming and highlighted the need for physical health.

The youngest participants, aged 5 to 8, emphasised physical health, exercise, and bullying behaviour as their primary concerns.

Access to play and leisure facilities plays a vital role in the well-being and development of young people. Within the Regional Assessment of Need Survey, 87%, believe there are safe places for young people to socialise. However, 35% of individuals feel there is inadequate access to these play and leisure spaces.

Through focus group discussions, some young people expressed a desire for greater access to outdoor activities. This feedback highlights the importance of outdoor play and leisure, as well as the need to explore creative ways to utilise outdoor spaces to accommodate the diverse interests and needs of young people. Insights from young people from ethnic minority backgrounds revealed numerous barriers to accessing play and leisure facilities. These barriers include a lack of awareness of affordable options, limited knowledge of available Youth Services, and perceptions of these services as being inaccessible or unsafe due to their location. Consequently, this highlights the need for improved knowledge and awareness about Youth Services that are accessible and inclusive for diverse communities.

Feedback from young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) reflect on their need for a safe and accessible place to meet for play and leisure. They discussed barriers about going to many private venues as not accessible or no access to appropriate transport.

Within the Regional Assessment of Need survey 91% of young people recognise Youth Work programmes as a source of valuable learning and 83% acknowledge the opportunity to gain qualifications through these initiatives. A notable 44% of young people feel held back by barriers, and 17% express a need for more support during major transitions, such as moving schools.

Young people and stakeholders reveal that stress from schoolwork, combined with limited access to Wi-Fi and essential IT equipment, are key obstacles to effective learning. Furthermore, low aspirations among young people emerge as a pressing concern.

One focus group identified the importance of providing opportunities for non-traditional qualifications and learning experiences, ensuring inclusivity and relevance for diverse learners.

Feedback from young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) further underscores the value of education beyond academic qualifications. They report that learning social skills, communication, and building confidence are meaningful and transformative aspects of their educational journey. Limited access to accessible transportation poses challenges for many young people with SEND. Additionally, transitions between school years, new schedules or moving to further education colleges are sources of anxiety. Concerns also extend to life beyond school, where a lack of age-appropriate facilities leaves young people with few opportunities for social interaction with peers.

In the regional assessment of needs survey: 39% of young people express worries about crime in their area. The survey also shows that 39% of young people feel pressure to engage in dangerous activities. 39% of respondents believe that social media negatively affects them. The survey also reveals that 69% of respondents are worried about the safety of women and girls in the area.

Youth focus groups have indicated that young people in Balmoral area are concerned about risk taking behaviour, hate crime (race, religion and homophobia), interface violence and rioting, bonfires and domestic violence. Young people also discussed the impact of bullying behaviour, both in school and on social media/the internet. Feedback from young people from ethnic minority backgrounds highlighted that they often do not feel safe walking on the streets or getting the bus. They avoid certain locations due to behaviour of others towards them.

Young people with SEND discussed the risks linked to social media and use of the internet. They also discussed risks for young women and preparation for keeping safe when they would go out to socialise with friends etc.

As reflected in the findings of the regional assessment of need survey, 96% of young people believe that poverty is increasingly affecting children and youth in their communities. Of these, 22% report their families cannot afford opportunities for them to pursue activities they desire, revealing the direct impact of economic hardships on their aspirations and well-being.

Young people in focus groups shared how poverty impacts their self-esteem, leaving them feeling ashamed and low self-worth. They emphasised the importance of being able to openly discuss these challenges.

One focus group expressed their anxiety about making the right decisions for their future after school. They voiced concerns about accumulating debt if they pursued further education and they worried about their limited understanding of financial management. This highlights the need for transitional support as they move into adulthood.

Young people also indicated concern about climate change, with 69% of young people expressing worry about its effects. 87% believe that current measures to address climate change are insufficient. Furthermore, 30% of respondents state they lack access to education about climate change.

Within the focus group feedback young people expressed concern about littering and pollution and the lack of recycling facilities within youth centres. They highlighted the need for more environmental education and to be able to have a voice on this theme.

Feedback from young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) discusses how the young people are nervous of the type of job they can do due to their disabilities or if they will even get employment. They expressed worry about their transition from school and the home into the community and concerns where they can socialise with peers.

In relation to the outdoors and the environment, young people with SEND are concerned about getting outside with wheelchairs or going for a walk due to the impact of litter on paths and dog fouling on their mobility. They worry about the harsh weather conditions and climate change.

Young people are enthusiastic about making a meaningful difference in their schools and communities, with 83% of respondents in the Regional Assessment of Need Survey indicating they feel they have opportunities to do so. Furthermore, an inspiring 87% believe that young people hold the power to effect positive change. However, a significant challenge remains, as 43% feel their voices are not heard or taken seriously. Young people and stakeholders revealed a strong desire among young people to deepen their connections within the community and to engage in actions that bring about tangible benefits.

The regional assessment of need survey revealed that 96% of young people feel their rights are respected within youth work programmes, and 87% are aware of their rights. However, 30% expressed that they do not feel listened to, valued, or respected.

Feedback from young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) emphasised the importance of teaching rights in schools or classrooms, complemented by online resources to ensure ongoing access to information about their rights as needed.

Feedback from young people from ethnic minority backgrounds discussed how often newcomer young people do not know what their rights are in N. Ireland. They know little about NI political structures and their rights as a young person living within Belfast.

Survey findings reveal that 26% of young people feel they are not treated equally, and 35% believe not everyone is included in their community. Additionally, 30% report a lack of respect among peers for those who are different. Young people and stakeholder discussions identify key concerns such as sectarianism, hate crimes related to race, religion, and homophobia, as well as a lack of diversity and understanding of LGBTQIA+ identities. Limited services for young people with additional needs and disabilities are also highlighted. However, a positive finding is that 91% of young people recognise youth work as open and accessible to all.

Feedback from young people from ethnic minority backgrounds highlighted the need to plan things around Ramadan, as young people are tired, find things harder and often withdraw at this time. They identified inequality and how this can take form in prejudice and discrimination.

Summary

Summary of identified needs for Balmoral DEA

- Mental health including stress, anxiety, and self-harm.
- Knowledge and awareness about the impact of drugs, alcohol and vaping on well-being.
- Physical health, exercise and wellbeing.
- Affordable access to play and leisure along with access to outdoor activities.
- Greater knowledge and awareness of Youth Services, particularly with minority communities.
- Safe and accessible places for young people with SEND to meet for play and leisure.
- Raise aspirations among young people.
- Alternative and creative learning experiences to meet needs of diverse learners.
- Support for transition from school into further education or employment and adulthood.
- Safe places for young people in local communities.
- Education and knowledge of safe behaviours with awareness regarding risk taking behaviour, hate crime (race, religion and homophobia), interface violence and rioting, bonfires, violence against women and girls and domestic violence.
- Education and knowledge regarding bullying behaviour, both in school and on social media/the internet.
- Environmental awareness and climate action opportunities.
- Greater resilience, self-esteem and self-worth for those young people impacted by poverty.
- Effective opportunities for young people's voices to be heard and taken seriously.
- Increased connections between young people and their local communities.
- Greater knowledge and awareness regarding rights of young people.
- Respect and understanding for those who are different with particular focus on race, religion, and LGBTQIA+ identities.

DEA Botanic

Key facts

- There is 23,558 children and young people aged 0 -25 years old in Botanic DEA.
- 3,955 falls within the key Youth Service priority aged bands of 9-13 years and 14-18 years.
- 2.6% of young people 20-24 years old are not in employment and do not have a qualification (NI average 4.9%).
- 13.1% of young people 18 – 24 years have never worked/low level of qualifications (NI average 5.6%).
- The percentage of school leavers who are unemployed or are unknown in 2022/23 is 5.1% 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 Maths in 2022/23 is 72.2% (NI average 76.1%).
- 25% households with dependent children have no adults in employment (NI average 16%).
- 747 Domestic Abuse crimes in 23/24 (NI average 260).
- 1,209 newcomer pupils in Botanic DEA primary and post primary schools in 2023/24.
- There were 218 incidents with a racist motivation in 2023/24. This is a 4% decrease from the previous year of 227 racial motivated incidents.
- 20.8% pupils with SEN stage 1-3 in 22/23 (NI average 19%).
- 65.0 per '000 aged 0 – 24 have Autism or Aspergers syndrome (NI average 49.0) (self-assessment Census 2021).
- 361.2 per '000 aged 16-24 years have an emotional, psychological or mental health condition (NI average 84.2).
- There are 12 playgrounds in the Botanic DEA.

Stakeholder input/feedback

Young People and stakeholders from across Botanic shared their perspectives and several key themes have emerged, reflecting the priorities and concerns of this group.

In the Regional assessment of need 91% of young people report having access to opportunities for physical activities. Emotional wellbeing is also highlighted well, as 96% of respondents feel confident that they can access support for their emotional health when needed. 82% say they feel cheerful and in good spirits more than half the time, while 78% report feeling calm and relaxed during most of their days.

However, the data also uncovers an area of concern. Almost 41% of respondents report not waking up feeling fresh and rested. This indicates potential issues related to sleep quality, stress levels, or other factors that may be affecting overall wellbeing.

Youth and Stakeholder focus groups identified physical health and exercise, poverty and hunger and bullying behaviour as key concerns. Sexual health, drugs, alcohol and vaping, mental health, anxiety, depression and self-harm were also named. They discussed there being a need for young people to have positive relationships and someone to talk to when worried or have a problem.

Access to play and leisure facilities plays a vital role in the well-being and development of young people. Within the Regional Assessment of Need Survey, 76%, believe there are safe places for young people to socialise. However, 35% of individuals feel there are not enough fun things to do in the Botanic area.

Young people and stakeholders highlighted the need for warm and dry play and leisure facilities at times that suit them. It was noted that many play and leisure activities are only accessible if you have money and can afford it, therefore a need for affordable opportunities is required.

Feedback from young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) stressed their need for accessible play and leisure spaces. They advocated that many Youth Services are unable to cater to the needs of many children and young people with additional needs, and those with autism.

Within the Regional Assessment of Need survey 92% of young people in Botanic recognise Youth Work programmes as a source of valuable learning and 70% acknowledge the opportunity to gain qualifications through these initiatives. A notable 72% of young people feel held back by barriers, and 15% express a need for more support during major transitions, such as moving schools.

Youth and stakeholder focus groups identified low aspirations and stress from schoolwork as key issues. The need to learn life skills, gain qualifications and have opportunities to support their transition to adulthood and employment was identified. The need for access to IT facilities and internet were also discussed as a concern. The need for young people to value education and raise aspirations was highlighted as many young people have poor school attendance and bad relationships with teachers.

Feedback from young people and stakeholders with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) highlights the need for skills development with pathways to employment for young people with additional needs.

In the regional assessment of needs survey: 67% of young people in Botanic express worries about crime in their area with 47% stating they do not feel safe in their area. The survey also shows that 65% of young people feel pressure to engage in dangerous activities. 60% of respondents believe that social

media negatively affects them. The survey also reveals that 77% of respondents are worried about the safety of women and girls in the area.

Youth and stakeholder focus groups have indicated that young people in Botanic area are concerned about risk taking behaviour, hate crime (race, religion and homophobia), interface violence and rioting, paramilitary activities, bonfires and domestic violence. Young people discussed how they feel unsafe in their local area. This is partly due to those under the influence of drugs in their area, knife crime, drug gangs and feeling like their community is under attack (interface violence and pre-arranged fights). The focus groups discussed violence and aggression from males and how they feel unsafe walking at night.

Young people with SEND expressed concern regarding online bullying of vulnerable young people (as they can be so in need to make friendships, they are more at risk).

As reflected in the findings of the regional assessment of need survey, 45% of young people in Botanic believe that poverty is increasingly affecting children and youth in their communities. Of these, 49% report their families cannot afford opportunities for them to pursue activities they would like to do.

55% are not confident of career options for them in the future and 43% do not feel equipped to apply for and get a job in the future.

Young people also indicated concern about climate change, with 77% of young people expressing worry about its effects. 62% believe that current measures to address climate change are insufficient.

Within the Youth and stakeholder focus groups feedback young people discussed the impact of poverty and how being hungry impacts their concentration in school and their mental health. They indicated that many young people must leave education to go to work as the family rely on their income. They also discussed how young people feel hopeless due to limited job opportunities and the need to develop skills to help them prepare for employment and living independently.

Concern was raised about the environment regarding litter, pollution, lack of use of green spaces along with not enough opportunities to recycle in youth centres. It is felt there is a need for more environmental awareness among young people.

Some young people expressed the need to learn about global issues and how these impact us both regionally and locally.

Feedback from young people and stakeholders with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) discussed how limited employment opportunities impacts their confidence levels. They report their opportunities to gain life skills as they transition into adulthood as very limited.

Young people are enthusiastic about making a meaningful difference in their schools and communities, with 57% of respondents from Botanic in the Regional Assessment of Need Survey indicating they feel they have opportunities to do so. Furthermore, 61% believe that young people hold the power to effect positive change. However, a significant challenge remains, as 49% feel their voices are not heard or taken seriously.

Youth and stakeholder focus groups identified the lack of young people feeling listened to as a priority. One group reported heightened anxiety caused by the impact of changes in the local infrastructure of their area, such as the closing down of businesses and facilities along with the physical layout of their

area. They note changes in their community's demographics and needs and feel a sense of powerlessness to influence these changes.

The regional assessment of need survey for Botanic DEA revealed that 91% of young people feel their rights are respected within youth work programmes. However, 46% are not aware of their rights, 41% say they would not be able to fight for their rights if they had to and 40% expressed that they do not feel listened to, valued, or respected.

These points were reflected by the youth and stakeholder focus groups who identified that young people have a lack of understanding or awareness of rights.

RAON survey findings reveal that 42% of young people in Botanic feel they are not treated equally, and 45% believe that not everyone is included in their community. Additionally, 58% report a lack of respect among peers for those who are different. However, a positive finding is that 71% of young people recognise youth work as open and accessible to all.

Youth and stakeholder focus group discussions identify key concerns such as limited services for young people with additional needs and disabilities, sectarianism, hate crimes related to race, religion, and homophobia, as well as a lack of diversity and understanding of LGBTQIA+ identities are also highlighted.

Key concerns were highlighted about the lack of community acceptance for newcomers/minority ethnic groups and the need for belonging and respect. Young people and stakeholders from newcomer backgrounds and ethnic minorities shared how they feel that migrants and refugees are blamed for a lot of issues, this is further exacerbated with online abuse and exclusion.

Feedback from young people and stakeholders with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) highlight that young people with additional needs and autism need support, social settings and help with anxiety and mental health.

Summary

Summary of identified needs for Botanic DEA

- Mental health including stress, anxiety, depression and self-harm.
- Knowledge and awareness about the impact of lack of sleep drugs, alcohol and vaping on well-being.
- Physical health, exercise and wellbeing.
- Access to warm, dry play and leisure facilities that are available at times that suit them.
- Safe and accessible places for young people with SEND to meet for play and leisure.
- Raise aspirations and increase the value of education among young people.
- Support for transition from adolescence into adulthood with opportunities to learn life skills, gain qualifications and prepare for employment and further education.
- Safe places for young people in local communities.
- Greater knowledge of safe behaviours with awareness regarding risk taking behaviour, hate crime (race, religion and homophobia), interface violence and rioting, paramilitary activities, bonfires, violence against women and girls and domestic violence.
- Increased knowledge and awareness regarding bullying behaviour, both in school and on social media/online.
- Greater resilience, self-esteem and self-worth for those young people impacted by poverty.
- Environmental and global awareness.
- Effective opportunities and structures for young people's voices to be heard and taken seriously.
- Knowledge and understanding regarding rights of young people.
- Respect and understanding amongst young people for those who are different with particular focus on race, religion, disability and LGBTQIA+ identities.
- Belonging and inclusion for newcomers/minority ethnic groups.

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DEA Black Mountain

Key facts

- There is 12,107 children and young people aged 0 -25 years old in Black Mountain DEA.
- 4,711 falls within the key Youth Service priority aged bands of 9-13 years and 14-18 years.
- 8.1% of young people 20-24 years old are not in employment and do not have a qualification (NI average 4.9%).
- 20.6% of young people 18 – 24 years have never worked/low level of qualifications (NI average 5.6%).
- The percentage of school leavers who are unemployed or are unknown in 2022/23 is 8% 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 Maths in 2022/23 is 67.9% (NI average 76.1%).
- 507 newcomer pupils in Black Mountain DEA primary and post primary schools in 2023/24.
- There were 46 incidents with a racist motivation in 2023/24. This is a 70% increase from the previous year of 27 racial motivated incidents.
- 632 Domestic Abuse crimes in 23/24 (NI average 260).
- 45% households with dependent children have no adults in employment (NI average 16%).
- 117.3 per '000 aged 0 – 24 have Autism or Aspergers syndrome (NI avg 49.0) (self-assessment Census 2021).
- 26.6% pupils with SEN stage 1-3 in 22/23 (NI average 19%).
- 50% of children and young people aged 0-24 years old in Black Mountain come from a lone parent family.
- 235.2 per '000 aged 16-24 years have an emotional, psychological or mental health condition (NI average 84.2).
- 35.6per '000 aged 0-15 years have an emotional, psychological or mental health condition (NI average 13.9).

Stakeholder input/feedback

In the Regional assessment of needs survey 73% of young people in Blackmountain say they have opportunities to engage in physical activities. When it comes to emotional health, 73% of individuals feel they can access help when needed. The survey also highlights a sense of positivity among young people, with 87% reporting they feel cheerful and in good spirits more than half the time. Additionally, 69% say they feel calm and relaxed more than half the time. However, this also means that 31% of individuals experience feelings of calm less frequently.

One area of concern emerges around rest and recovery. A significant 35% of respondents report not waking up feeling fresh and rested. This points to potential underlying challenges, such as stress, sleep disorders, or lifestyle factors, which may be impacting the quality of life.

Youth and stakeholder focus groups emphasised the need to address critical challenges faced by young people, including stress and anxiety management, body image concerns, and building mental resilience. Mental health issues were strongly associated with experiences in school, home environments, trauma, and poverty. Additionally, drug and alcohol use emerged as a significant concern impacting young people in the area.

Young people with SEND discussed the need for access to structured extracurricular programmes to encourage both mental and physical well-being.

According to the Regional Assessment of Need (RAON) Survey, 67% of respondents believe there are safe spaces for young people to socialise. However, one-third (33%) feel there are no such spaces where they can safely meet with friends. Furthermore, 66% of individuals reported that there are insufficient fun activities available in the Black Mountain area.

Youth and stakeholder focus groups highlighted the positive impact of sporting and physical activities. They identified a demand for safe and inclusive spaces for recreational activities, along with increased access to music and arts programmes. The need for safe and inclusive recreational spaces for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) was also discussed.

Within the Regional Assessment of Need survey for Blackmountain, a notable 71% of young people feel held back by barriers, and 50% express a need for more support during major transitions, such as moving schools. However, 63% of young people recognise Youth Work programmes as a source of valuable learning and 67% acknowledge the opportunity to gain qualifications through these initiatives.

Youth and stakeholder focus groups revealed the need for young people to value education and school and the opportunities they can bring. School attendance can be low for many young people. Low aspirations are noted as a key issue for the area with the need for education and training programmes to help prepare for employment of young people. They discussed the need for young people to broaden their horizons and learn about life outside of their youth centre and neighbourhood. It was recognised that technology is now changing, and young people need to learn how to effectively use Artificial Intelligence, and understand about the opportunities, benefits and risks.

Feedback from young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) highlights the need for education to support the transition to adulthood and independence, this includes the need for awareness on cooking, budgeting and practical everyday knowledge.

In the regional assessment of needs survey for the Blackmountain DEA: 55% of young people express worries about crime in their area. The survey also shows that 34% of young people feel pressure to engage in dangerous activities. 40% of respondents believe that social media negatively affects them. The survey also reveals that 71% of respondents are worried about the safety of women and girls in the area.

Youth and stakeholder focus groups have indicated that young people in Blackmountain area are concerned about risk taking behaviours, fighting, bullying, drugs, alcohol, and vandalism. They have also highlighted safety of women and girls, domestic violence and sexual exploitation as key issues along with toxic relationships and friendships. An increase of racist attacks on homes/hate crime was discussed as a concern.

Young people with SEND discussed concerns about safety in their local communities, including issues relating to transportation and littering.

As reflected in the findings of the regional assessment of need survey for the Blackmountain DEA: 93% of young people believe that poverty is increasingly affecting children and youth in their communities. Of these, 41% report their families cannot afford opportunities for them to pursue activities they desire, revealing the direct impact of economic hardships on their aspirations and well-being. 61% are not confident of career options for them in the future and 39% do not feel equipped to apply for and get a job in the future.

Young people also indicated concern about climate change, with 71% of young people expressing worry about its effects. 73% believe that current measures to address climate change are insufficient. Furthermore, 44% of respondents state they lack access to education about climate change.

Youth and stakeholder focus groups highlighted the impact of poverty as a key concern. They also identified the need to support young people into employment. Concerns were raised about the environment, and particularly the fires being lit on the mountain.

Feedback from young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) detailed that climate change and its impact on their lives, both physically and emotionally are recurring concerns. They discussed the need for good public transport and to reduce litter.

87% of respondents from Blackmountain in the Regional Assessment of Need Survey believe that young people hold the power to effect positive change. However, only 57% indicate they feel they have opportunities making a meaningful difference in their schools and communities. Furthermore, 43% feel their voices are not heard or taken seriously.

Feedback from young people and stakeholders with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) discussed that young people feel a lack of belonging to their communities and not all feel they have a voice in decision making.

The regional assessment of need survey for the Blackmountain DEA: revealed that 73% of young people believe they are aware of their rights. However, 63% expressed that they do not feel listened to, valued, or respected.

Youth and stakeholder focus groups identified the need to promote and learn about the rights of girls and young women and the need for young people to be empowered to advocate for themselves.

Survey findings for the Blackmountain DEA: reveal that 67% of respondents feel that children and young people are not treated equally, and 72% believe not everyone is included in their community. Additionally, 57% report a lack of respect among peers for those who are different.

Youth and stakeholder focus groups identify key concerns such as the need to build relationships with others from different ethnic groups and religions. Racial discrimination was discussed as a growing concern in the area. A focus group of young people from ethnic minority backgrounds expressed that they have experienced racist behaviour. They believe there is a lack of understanding and awareness about different cultures and the global impact of war and political circumstances that have led families to relocate to Northern Ireland.

Stakeholder groups identified the need for gender equality and advocated for the needs for provision for young people with SEND.

Summary

Summary of identified needs for Black Mountain DEA

- Mental health emerged as a prominent need with stress, anxiety, body image, the impact of trauma, addiction along with mental resilience.
- Knowledge and awareness about the impact of lack of sleep drugs, alcohol and vaping on well-being.
- Support for young people going through transitions, and preparation for adulthood, further education and employment.
- Greater knowledge of young people on emerging digital trends.
- Raise aspirations and increase the value of education among young people.
- Increased knowledge of safe behaviours with awareness regarding risk taking behaviour, hate crime (race, religion and homophobia), violence including against women and girls, bullying, exploitation and social media.
- Safe and inclusive places for young people with SEND to meet for play and leisure.
- Safe spaces for recreational activities, with increased access to creative programmes.
- Greater aspirations, confidence, self-esteem and self-worth for those young people impacted by poverty.
- Effective opportunities and structures for young people's voices to be heard and taken seriously along with opportunities to make meaningful contributions.
- Greater knowledge and awareness regarding rights of young people.
- Greater knowledge and awareness about climate action and the environment.
- Respect, knowledge and understanding amongst young people regarding race, ethnicity and gender.

DEA Collin

Key facts

- There is 12,425 children and young people aged 0 -25 years old in Collin DEA.
- 5,059 falls within the key Youth Service priority aged bands of 9-13 years and 14-18 years.
- 7.4% of young people 20-24 years old are not in employment and do not have a qualification (NI average 4.9%).
- 15% of young people 18 – 24 years have never worked/low level of qualifications (NI average 5.6%).
- The percentage of school leavers who are unemployed or are unknown in 2022/23 is 6.6% 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 maths in 2022/23 is 70.4% (NI average 76.1%).
- 91 newcomer pupils in Collin DEA primary and post primary schools in 2023/24.
- There were 27 incidents with a racist motivation in 2023/24. This is a 20% increase from the previous year of 34 racial motivated incidents.
- 62.9 per '000 aged 0 – 24 have Autism or Aspergers syndrome (NI average 49.0) (self-assessment Census 2021).
- 44.5% of children and young people aged 0-24 years old in Belfast come from a lone parent family.
- 26% of households with dependent children have no adults in employment (NI average 16%).
- 507 Domestic Abuse crimes in 23/24 (NI average 260).
- 167.8 per '000 aged 16-24 years have an emotional, psychological or mental health condition (NI average 84.2).
- 42.8 per '000 aged 0-15 years have an emotional, psychological or mental health condition (NI average 13.9).

Stakeholder input/feedback

In the Regional assessment of needs survey 87% of young people say they have opportunities to engage in physical activities. When it comes to emotional health, 79% of individuals feel they can access help when needed. The survey also highlights a sense of positivity among young people, with 87% reporting they feel cheerful and in good spirits more than half the time. Additionally, 81% say they feel calm and relaxed more than half the time. A significant 68% of respondents report not waking up feeling fresh and rested. This points to potential underlying challenges, such as stress, sleep disorders, or lifestyle factors, which may be impacting the quality of life.

Young People and stakeholders identified the impact of addiction on health and wellbeing. This includes addiction to drugs and alcohol, vaping, gambling and porn. They emphasised stress and poor mental health as significant issues affecting children and young people. They highlighted the importance of creating spaces dedicated to mental wellbeing, where they can talk openly and access support. Additionally, they expressed the need for more outdoor activities to enhance overall wellbeing. Concerns were also raised about the impact of excessive screen time on the emotional health of young people. Furthermore, sexual health was identified as another key area of concern.

According to the Regional Assessment of Need (RAON) Survey for Collin, 64% of respondents believe that there are safe spaces for young people to socialise. However, just over a third (36%) feel that there are no such spaces where they can safely meet with friends. Furthermore, 57% of individuals reported a lack of fun activities in the Collin area.

Young People and stakeholders highlighted the importance of social spaces where they could interact with peers that they do not attend school with and the need for safe outdoor areas to enable play during the evening. They also emphasised the need for physical fitness, which will help both their physical and emotional health. They spoke of the need to involve both those interested in sport but also those who would prefer alternative and creative methods. There was concern that the cost of some of these activities exclude some from taking part, therefore there is a need for affordable activities to be accessible to all.

Limited access to these activities for young people with ASD were also discussed. It was noted that that these are often scheduled for inconvenient times that will exclude many children and young people from being able to participate.

Within the Regional Assessment of Need survey for Collin, a notable 52% of young people feel held back by barriers, and 36% express a need for more support during major transitions, such as moving schools. However, 69% of young people recognise Youth Work programmes as a source of valuable learning and 52% acknowledge the opportunity to gain qualifications through these initiatives.

Young People and stakeholder's discussions reveal that more support is required to help young people prepare for adulthood, employment and further education. Opportunities to gain practical skills and soft skills were identified as important.

Feedback from young people and stakeholders with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) identified the lack of learning support for young people with SEND, and the need for education in areas such as Mental Health.

In the regional assessment of needs survey: 45% of young people express worries about crime in their area. The survey also shows that 35% of young people feel pressure to engage in dangerous activities. 46% of respondents believe that social media negatively affects them. The survey also reveals that 69% of respondents are worried about the safety of women and girls in the area.

Young People and stakeholders expressed the need for safer community spaces. Concerns about use of bikes/scramblers, violent behaviours along with drugs and gambling were raised. Bullying, use of social media, violence against women and girls with harassment were indicated as key issues.

As reflected in the findings of the regional assessment of need survey for the Collin area, 81% of young people believe that poverty is increasingly affecting children and youth in their communities. Of these, 19% report their families cannot afford opportunities for them to pursue activities they desire, revealing the direct impact of economic hardships on their aspirations and well-being.

40% are not confident of career options for them in the future and 43% do not feel equipped to apply for and get a job in the future.

Young people also indicated concern about climate change, with 69% of young people expressing worry about its effects. 56% believe that current measures to address climate change are insufficient. Furthermore, 36% of respondents state they lack access to education about climate change.

Young People and stakeholders reiterated the need for preparation to adulthood and employment. They emphasised that young people need opportunities for volunteering experiences and pathways to employment along with practical life skills. Furthermore, digital awareness with use of AI was prioritised. Additionally, it was reported that many young people have low aspirations for their future. Poverty was also highlighted as a major concern with young people now having to help provide for their families, often causing them to miss formal education opportunities.

91% of respondents from Collin in the Regional Assessment of Need Survey believe that young people hold the power to effect positive change. However, only 51% indicate they feel they have opportunities making a meaningful difference in their schools and communities. Furthermore, 52% feel their voices are not heard or taken seriously.

Young People and stakeholders identified more opportunities for young people to make positive contributions are required. More support for youth led campaigns were discussed along with opportunities for youth volunteering into their communities. It was advocated that community planning needs to include the voices of children and young people.

The regional assessment of need survey for the Collin DEA: revealed that 71% of young people believe they are aware of their rights. However, 55% expressed that they do not feel listened to, valued, or respected. 76% of young people do feel their rights are respected within youth work programmes.

Young People and stakeholders identified the need for young people to have more education on their rights and how they can exercise them. Rights of young women and girls were emphasised with support needed to be able to break out of stereotypes.

Survey findings for Collin reveal that 67% of respondents feel children and young people are not treated equally, and 57% believe not everyone is included in their community. Additionally, 62% report a lack of respect among peers for those who are different.

Young People and stakeholders' discussions highlighted the need for equal access for all regardless of background, however in particular they felt a need for LGBTQIA+ support groups and more inclusive spaces. Increased support for SEND young people was identified as a need. It was emphasised that there needs to be more respect and understanding for minority communities and young people with ASD.

Summary

Summary of identified needs for Collin DEA

- Mental health emerged as a prominent need with stress and excessive screen time as key concerns.
- Knowledge and awareness about the impact of lack of sleep, drugs, alcohol, vaping and gambling on well-being.
- Awareness of physical health and wellbeing along with sexual health.
- Access to play and leisure spaces and the outdoors for social interaction at an affordable cost.
- Support for young people going through transitions, and preparation for adulthood, further education and employment.
- Increased knowledge of safe behaviours with awareness regarding risk taking behaviour, violence including against women and girls and harassment, misuse of social media and gambling.
- Greater knowledge of young people on emerging digital trends.
- Young people need to be supported to understand their views and use their voice effectively.
- The need was identified for young people to make positive contributions in their local and wider communities.
- Greater knowledge and awareness regarding rights of young people including the rights of women and girls.
- Greater knowledge and awareness about climate action and the environment.
- Respect, knowledge and understanding amongst young people regarding race, ethnicity, identity and gender.
- Inclusive and equal access with support for young people who are LGBTQIA+, young people with SEND, and minority communities.
- Greater aspirations, self-esteem and self-worth for those young people impacted by poverty.
- Raise aspirations and increase the value of education among young people.

DEA Court (West)

Key facts

- Overall, there is 11,314 children and young people aged 0 -25 years old in Court DEA.
- In Court West 3,388 children and young people are aged 0 – 25 years old.
- In Court West 1253 children (4,437 in Court) fall within the key Youth Service priority aged bands of 9-13 years and 14-18 years.
- In Court 10.6% of young people 20-24 years old are not in employment and do not have a qualification (NI average 4.9%).
- In Court The percentage of school leavers who are unemployed or are unknown in 2022/23 is 8.5% compared to the NI average of 4.7%.
- In Court The percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C including GCSE English and maths in 2022/23 is 60.5% (NI average 76.1%).
- In Court 482 newcomer pupils in Court DEA primary and post primary schools in 2023/24.
- In Court there were 86 incidents with a racist motivation in 2023/24. (This is a 68.6% increase from the previous year).
- In Court 36% households with dependent children are unemployed (NI average 16%).
- In Court 736 reports of Domestic Abuse in 23/24 (NI average 260).
- 67.6 per '000 aged 0 – 24 have Autism or Aspergers syndrome (NI average 49.0) (self-assessment Census 2021).
- 57.5% of children and young people aged 0-24 years old in Court come from a lone parent family.
- 253.5 per '000 aged 16-24 years have an emotional, psychological or mental health condition (NI average 84.2).
- 44.4 per '000 aged 0-15 years have an emotional, psychological or mental health condition (NI average 13.9).

Stakeholder input/feedback

In the Regional assessment of needs survey 90% of young people who responded from the Court DEA say they have opportunities to engage in physical activities. When it comes to emotional health, 90% of individuals feel they can access help when needed. The survey also highlights a sense of positivity among young people, with 76% reporting they feel cheerful and in good spirits more than half the time. Additionally, 83% say they feel calm and relaxed more than half the time. One area of concern emerges around rest and recovery. A significant 46% of respondents report not waking up feeling fresh and rested.

Young People and stakeholders feedback indicate that emotional health and wellbeing is still one of the top priorities for children and young people in Court West. Drug, alcohol and vaping awareness along with signposting for those who may wish to give these up were emphasised. Mental, physical and sexual health were also discussed as priorities.

According to the Regional Assessment of Need (RAON) Survey, 65% of respondents believe that there are safe spaces for young people to socialise. However, just over a third (35%) feel that there are no such spaces where they can safely meet with friends. Furthermore, 32% of individuals reported a lack of fun activities in the Court area.

Young People and stakeholders highlighted the importance of access to places for young people to meet and feel comfortable and they rated access to play and leisure as one of their priorities.

Within the Regional Assessment of Need survey for Court, 36% of young people feel held back by barriers, and 37% express a need for more support during major transitions, such as moving schools. However, 68% of young people recognise Youth Work programmes as a source of valuable learning and 70% acknowledge the opportunity to gain qualifications through these initiatives.

Young People and stakeholders spoke of the needs of young people to be supported in preparation for adulthood, employment and further education.

In the regional assessment of needs survey for Court: 33% of young people express worries about crime in their area. The survey also shows that 25% of young people feel pressure to engage in dangerous activities. 22% of respondents believe that social media negatively affects them. The survey also reveals that 55% of respondents are worried about the safety of women and girls in the area.

Young People and stakeholders have indicated that young people in Court West area have identified the need for safe spaces for young people. They discussed risk taking behaviours and violent behaviours (including interface violence) and toxic masculinity of young men. They identified the need for girls and young women to feel safe together with the issues of domestic violence and hate crime.

As reflected in the findings of the regional assessment of need survey for the Court area, 83% of young people believe that poverty is increasingly affecting children and youth in their communities.

27% do not feel there will be career options for them in the future with 28% do not feel equipped to apply for and get a job in the future.

Young people also indicated concern about climate change, with 69% of young people expressing worry about its effects. 56% believe that current measures to address climate change are insufficient. Furthermore, 36% of respondents state they lack access to education about climate change.

Young People and stakeholders emphasised their concern about poverty and discussed the need for warm shelter, food and comfortable environments for young people. They expressed there needs to be increased awareness of the impact of climate change and have more opportunities to learn about respecting the local area and carry out positive actions for the environment.

71% of respondents from Court in the Regional Assessment of Need Survey believe that young people hold the power to effect positive change. 65% indicate they feel they have opportunities making a meaningful difference in their schools and communities. However, 44% feel their voices are not heard or taken seriously.

Young People and stakeholders discussed the importance of opportunities for young people to volunteer and contribute to the community.

The regional assessment of need survey for the Court DEA: revealed that 70% of young people believe they are aware of their rights. However, 59% expressed that they do not feel listened to, valued, or respected. 80% of young people do feel their rights are respected within youth work programmes.

Young People and stakeholders noted the need for young people to be valued and listened to.

Survey findings for Court reveal that 49% of respondents feel children and young people are not treated equally, and 42% believe not everyone is included in their community. Additionally, 61% report a lack of respect among peers for those who are different.

Young People and stakeholders highlighted the need for awareness of discrimination, racism and sectarianism. They identified there should be a particular focus on understanding immigration and more awareness of young people with disabilities. They highlighted the need for access for young people with SEND to Youth Services.

Summary

Summary of identified needs for Court West DEA

- Emotional health and wellbeing emerged as a prominent need.
- Knowledge and awareness about the impact of lack of sleep, drugs, alcohol and vaping on well-being.
- Awareness of physical health and wellbeing along with sexual health.
- Access to play and leisure spaces along which offer social places and enjoyable activities.
- Access to warm shelters and comfortable environments for young people.
- Increased knowledge of safe behaviours with awareness regarding risk taking behaviour, interfaces, violence including against women and girls and positive masculinity.
- Greater knowledge, awareness and respect for the local environment and climate change.
- Support for young people going through transitions, and preparation for adulthood.
- Greater knowledge of young people on emerging digital trends.
- Young people need for their voices to be heard more effectively, valued and taken seriously.
- Greater engagement of young people with the community and opportunity for positive actions.
- Increased self-confidence, self-worth and support for young people impacted by poverty.
- Respect and understanding of young people who are different from themselves.
- Knowledge and awareness amongst young people of discrimination, racism, homophobia, sectarianism and disability identity and gender.
- Access for young people with SEND to Youth Services.