Cheshire West and Chester Youth Partnership

Needs Assessment

May 2025

Cheshire West and Chester

youthfocus^{NW}

Contents

Appendices
a. Desktop needs assessment
b. Additional data

1. Introduction

Cheshire West and Chester Youth Partnership commissioned Youth Focus North West (YFNW) to undertake a Needs Assessment of the youth offer in Cheshire West and Chester (CWAC). The data and recommendations from the Needs Assessment will inform the CWAC Youth Partnership and CWAC Youth Service's response to the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) guidance for local authorities on their statutory duty to provide young people with access to youth work services and activities.

The statutory guidance imposes a duty on local authorities to meet the needs of young people by reviewing the current youth offer, consulting young people about their experience of the offer and finding out what they need from any future youth work offer. This includes consulting with the voluntary and community sector.

The borough of Cheshire West and Chester covers approximately 350 square miles and is the fourth largest unitary authority in the North West, covering a broad range of geography including the city of Chester, towns and rural villages. Around 365,061 people live in the borough, and over a quarter live in rural areas. 17.2% of residents are 0-15 years old; 21.6% are over 65; and 61.2% are between 16 and 64 years old.

A desktop needs assessment detailing the context of the borough can be found in Appendix A.

2. Methodology

A number of methods were used to gather views and insights from a range of voices, the CWAC Youth Partnership provided oversight and formed a Steering Group to meet regularly and guide the Needs Assessment.

2.1 Young People Engagement

Young People's Steering Group
Eight young people were engaged in the steering group, recruited by voluntary and community sector organisations and CWAC youth service. The youth steering group gave advice and guidance on data collection, supported focus group delivery and provided insights on data findings and analysis.

Focus Groups
During February and March 2025 eight focus groups took place with 73 young people aged 11-25. Focus groups were held in a range of places, including youth centres, community venues and locations across the borough to enable a variety of voices to be heard. Ensuring as far as possible that underrepresented and disadvantaged groups were included in the dialogue. Focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Survey
Between January and February 2025, 434 young people completed the survey to explore their engagement with the youth offer and activities in CWAC.

2.2 Parents and Carers Engagement

Survey
During February and March 2025, 44 parents and carers completed a survey to share the needs of young people in their care, their experiences of accessing youth services and activities and any needs and gaps they identified. In total 44 respondents cared for 59 young people.

2.3 Youth Services, Worker and Sector Engagement

Focus Groups
In March 2025, two focus groups were carried out with 13 professionals; these were held in Chester and Winsford. The focus groups explored the strengths and development areas of the current youth offer and the needs of young people. The focus groups were audio recorded, transcribed and analysed.

Survey
During February and March 2025, 20 youth sector organisations completed a survey to explore the services they deliver, the demands they have, challenges and priority needs of young people.
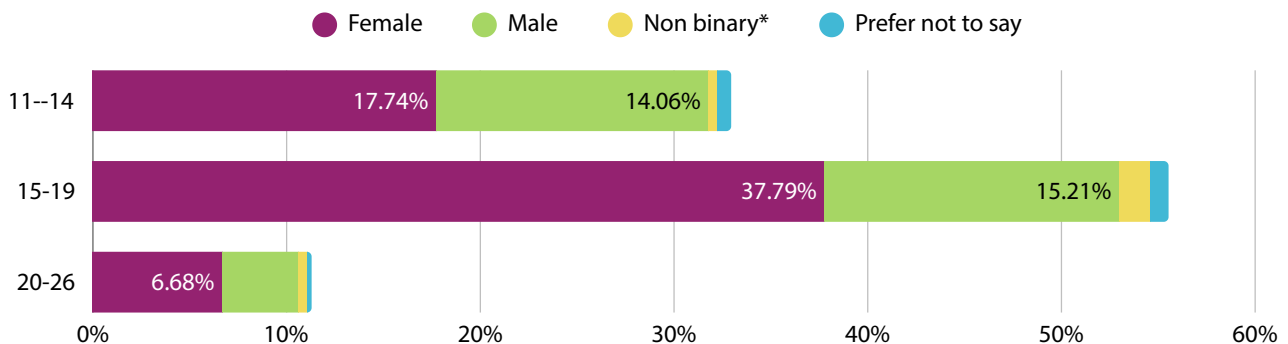
3.Findings

3.1 Young People's Survey and Focus Groups

Questionnaire responses
In total 434 responses were received, 63% of responses came from young people who identify as female, 35% from young people identified as male, 2% Non-binary. Highest response rates came from young women aged 15 - 19, and fewer responses from 11-14 year olds.

Fig: 1 Responses by gender and age

Responses were received from a wide geographic area, those with larger returns were CH1 16% (n.66) of responses, 12% (n.48) from CH65, 10% from CH66 (n.44) and CW8 (n.40).

Fig: 2 Responses by partial postcode data
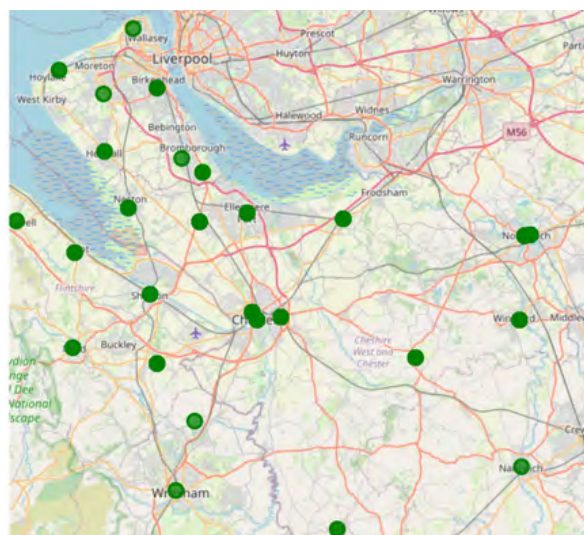
Characteristics and Ethnicity

Census data (2021) for Cheshire West and Chester shows 8.8% of the population in the borough were from ethnic minority groups. 87% of surveyed young people identified as white British, with 11% identifying as a minority group.
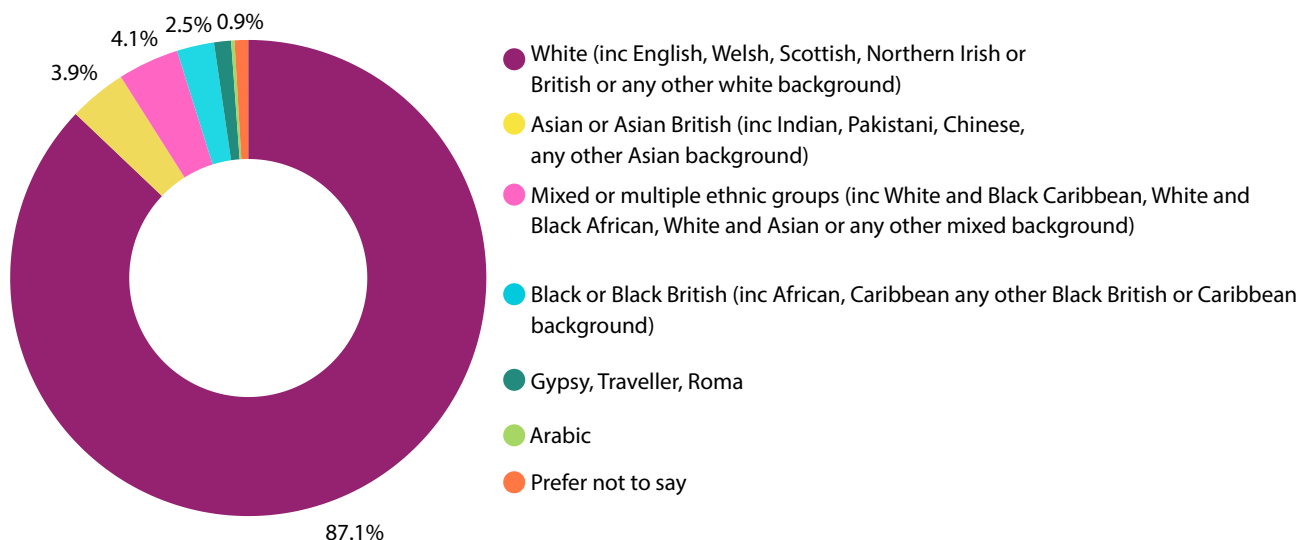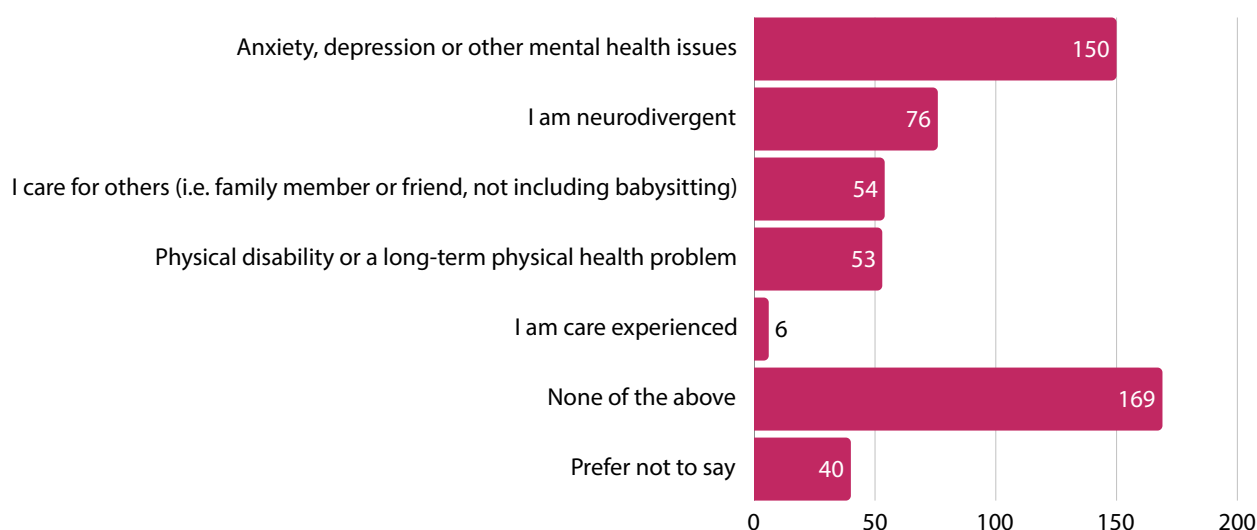
Fig: 3 Young people's ethnicity

- **White** (inc English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British or any other white background)
- **Asian or Asian British** (inc Indian, Pakistani, Chinese, any other Asian background)
- **Mixed or multiple ethnic groups** (inc White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Asian or any other mixed background)
- **Black or Black British** (inc African, Caribbean any other Black British or Caribbean background)
- **Gypsy, Traveller, Roma**
- **Arabic**
- **Prefer not to say**

Around 35% of young people identified that they had anxiety, depression or mental health issues, and around 17% identified as neurodivergent.

Figure 4. Young people's identities

Identity	Count
Anxiety, depression or other mental health issues	150
I am neurodivergent	76
I care for others (i.e. family member or friend, not including babysitting)	54
Physical disability or a long-term physical health problem	53
I am care experienced	6
None of the above	169
Prefer not to say	40

Young People's Focus Groups

Eight focus groups were carried out with 73 young people aged 11-25. 44% (n.32) of focus group attendees identified as male, 37% (n.27) as female, 1% (n.1) as gender neutral and 18% (n.13) did not disclose their gender. Young men aged 11-14 were the highest group to engage with the focus groups.

Fig: 5 Focus group by age and gender
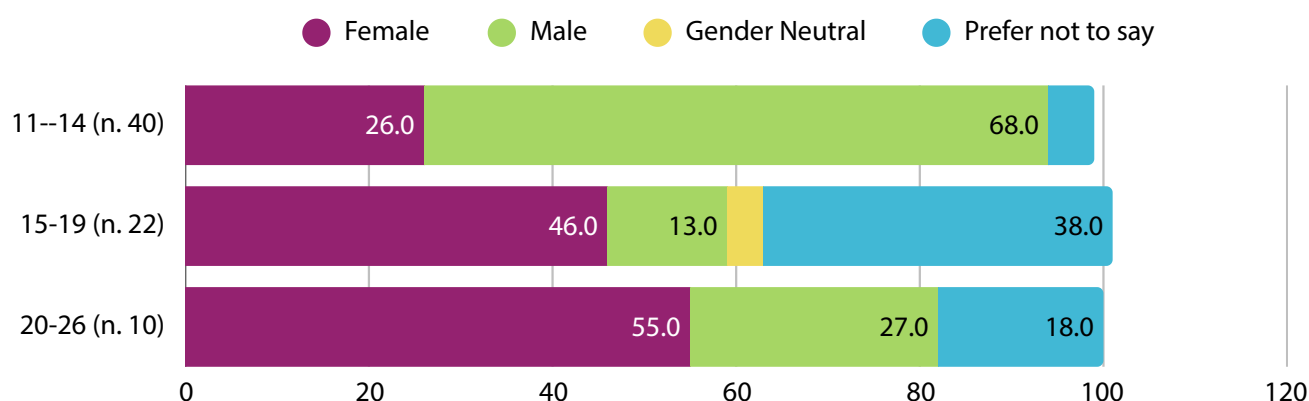
3.1.2 Participation in Youth Offer activities

Just under a third (29%) of young people regularly attended a youth club on a weekly basis, with the highest attendance from 11-17 year olds. Around a quarter (23%) of young people attend weekly youth groups. More than two thirds of young people have never met youth workers on the street (76%).

The most popular out of school activities were sport and athletics clubs, with over a third (39%) using on a weekly basis, with highest participation from 11–16 year olds.
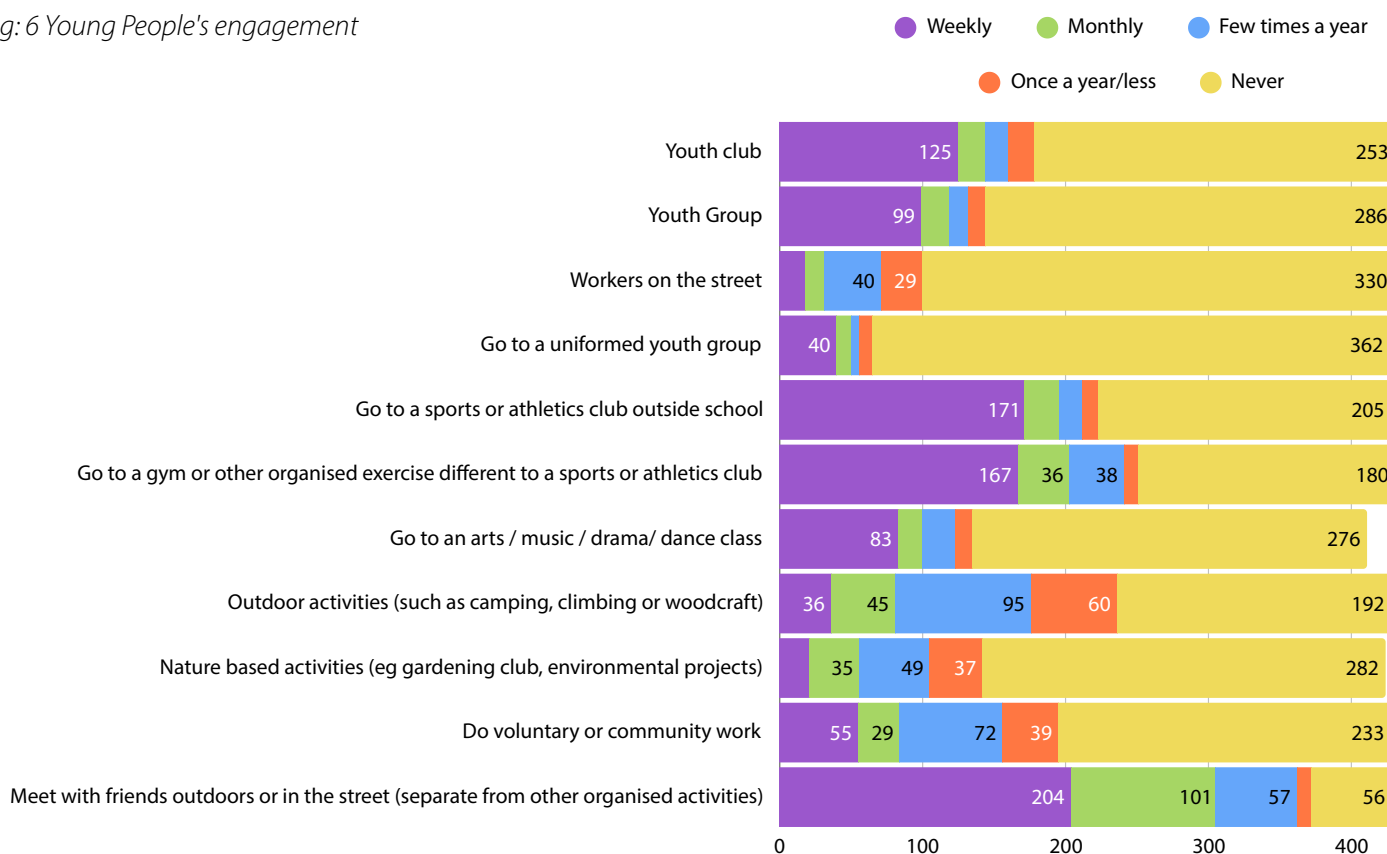
By far one of the most popular activities young people do on a regular basis was meeting friends outside or on the street, with only 13% of young people saying they never did this.

Uniformed groups such as cadets, scouts and guides were amongst the lowest attended activities with less than a quarter (23%) of young people attending weekly. Of those that did; there was a relatively equal gender split.

13% of young people took part in voluntary work on a weekly basis, with 17% carrying out voluntary and community work a few times per year. Sixteen and seventeen year olds are most represented in this activity with 41% volunteering a few times per year. 15-18 year olds were most engaged in weekly volunteering with 38% (n.28) of this age group taking part.
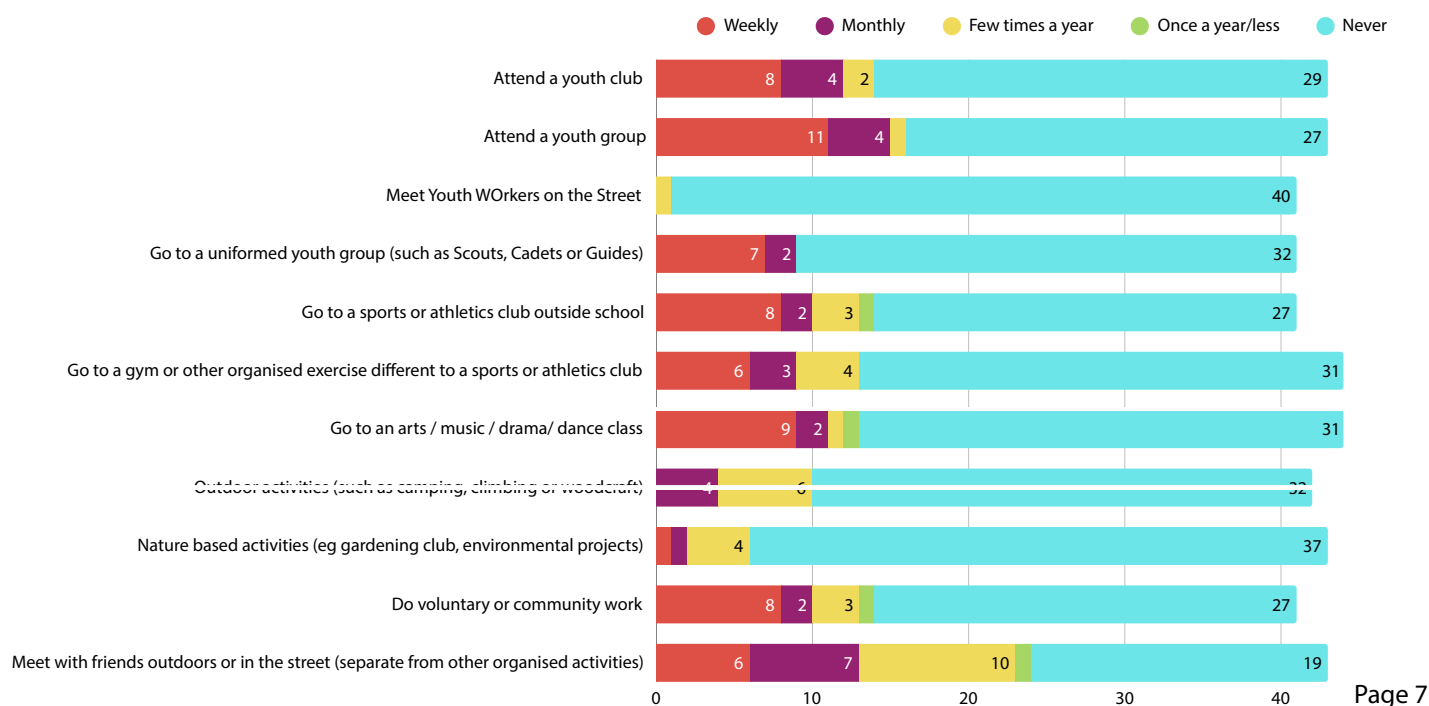
During focus groups young people discussed engaging in youth clubs and youth groups on a regular basis along with dance and sports activities.

Fig: 6 Young People's engagement

Legend: Weekly, Monthly, Few times a year, Once a year/less, Never

Activity	Weekly	Monthly	Few times a year	Once a year/less	Never
Youth club	125				253
Youth Group	99				286
Workers on the street			40	29	330
Go to a uniformed youth group	40				362
Go to a sports or athletics club outside school	171				205
Go to a gym or other organised exercise different to a sports or athletics club	167	36	38		180
Go to an arts / music / drama/ dance class	83				276
Outdoor activities (such as camping, climbing or woodcraft)	36	45	95	60	192
Nature based activities (eg gardening club, environmental projects)		35	49	37	282
Do voluntary or community work	55	29	72	39	233
Meet with friends outdoors or in the street (separate from other organised activities)	204	101	57		56

Parents and carers participating in a separate survey were asked how often their children and young people attended youth offer activities. Only a small proportion of parents and carers had children who currently access youth offer activities, with many never attending provision. A quarter (25%) of young people attended a weekly youth group, 20% attended a weekly arts class, 18% took part in weekly sports activity.

Fig: 7 Activities young people currently attend - Parent and Carer View

Legend: Weekly, Monthly, Few times a year, Once a year/less, Never

Activity	Weekly	Monthly	Few times a year	Once a year/less	Never
Attend a youth club	8	4	2		29
Attend a youth group	11	4			27
Meet Youth WOrkers on the Street					40
Go to a uniformed youth group (such as Scouts, Cadets or Guides)	7	2			32
Go to a sports or athletics club outside school	8	2	3		27
Go to a gym or other organised exercise different to a sports or athletics club	6	3	4		31
Go to an arts / music / drama/ dance class	9	2			31
Outdoor activities (such as camping, climbing or woodcraft)		4	6		32
Nature based activities (eg gardening club, environmental projects)			4		37
Do voluntary or community work	8	2	3		27
Meet with friends outdoors or in the street (separate from other organised activities)	6	7	10		19

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4.Reasons for using services

4.1 Safety and Belonging

In the focus groups, many young people said they felt safe and listened to when attending youth groups and centres; this was a key driver for them returning. Young people described the environment of the youth groups and centres as welcoming, kind and safe.

Socialising was repeatedly discussed, the chance to maintain and build social connections, interact with others and develop life skills were also important. Friends and peers attending the same activities were significant to ongoing attendance.

"I come to see my friends and get out of the house."

"I go twice a week…go because my friends go there."

4.2 Benefits of Trusted Adults

It was clear that young people have built strong relationships with youth workers and the way that they engaged with them. Many young people value relationships they have with staff, demonstrating the trust they place in the workers and identifying them as go-to adults in their lives when they have an issue or crisis to discuss.

"First adults I would go to would be the adults in this group"

Meeting youth workers in the community or in detached settings enabled young people to find out about centre based activities and youth groups.

**" Youth Workers who are out and about in the community, that really helps
like actually being around, not just in one place"**

Some young people said they missed the lack of detached provision in their area (Oasis) and would like to see this return.

4.3 Variety of Activities

Fun, food and the types of activities on offer were also frequently discussed as reasons why young people engaged and returned on a regular basis. They also highlighted the opportunities to take part in trips and other activities as a group as positive.

"It's fun. There's games like pool, football"

Young people also liked having time and space that wasn't as structured as school. Noting the choice, informal approach and increased freedom at youth groups and centres as a reason for attending.

"There's no structure… freedom"

"Feel like school is so organized we don't want to spend any more time at school"

4.4 Having a Voice

Young people in the focus groups were well engaged in their groups and centres, and felt listened to and heard. Some young people had suggestions about how their groups should run, which influenced what activities they did. They also saw more opportunities to be involved in shaping future services and wanted to be involved in things like staff recruitment.

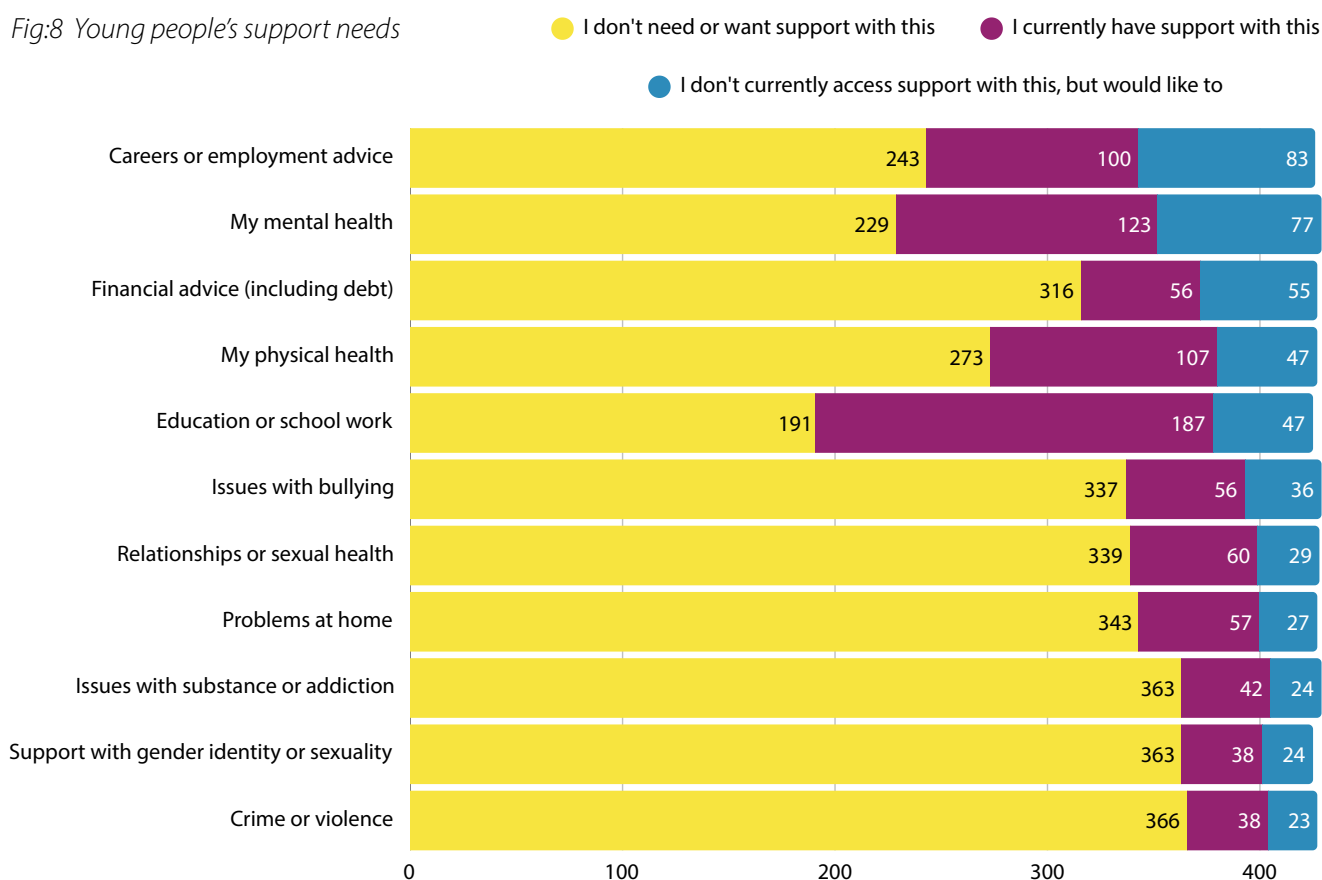**"we should be part of choosing new staff "They need to be funny, nice, not shouty"**

5. Barriers to Meeting Needs

5.1 Young People's Support Needs

Young people were asked about the areas that they currently need, receive or want support with. Figure eight, below shows that most young people already either have or do not need support. Although there are still some unmet needs amongst young people.
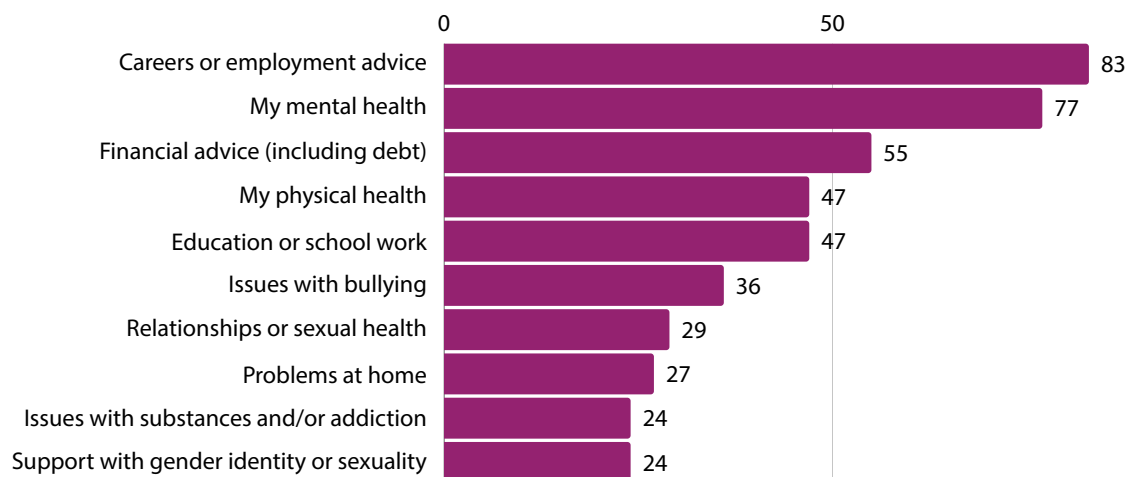
Just under a half of young people accessed support with school or education (43%), under a third (28%) are accessing support for their mental health and around a quarter (24%) for their physical health.

Fig:8 Young people's support needs

Legend: ● I don't need or want support with this   ● I currently have support with this   ● I don't currently access support with this, but would like to

| Category	I don't need or want support with this	I currently have support with this	I don't currently access support with this, but would like to
Careers or employment advice	243	100	83
My mental health	229	123	77
Financial advice (including debt)	316	56	55
My physical health	273	107	47
Education or school work	191	187	47
Issues with bullying	337	56	36
Relationships or sexual health	339	60	29
Problems at home	343	57	27
Issues with substance or addiction	363	42	24
Support with gender identity or sexuality	363	38	24
Crime or violence	366	38	23

The highest areas of need for young people who are not currently receiving support, but would like to, are careers and employment advice, closely followed by mental health and financial advice.

Fig:9 Support I would like

Support area	Value
Careers or employment advice	83
My mental health	77
Financial advice (including debt)	55
My physical health	47
Education or school work	47
Issues with bullying	36
Relationships or sexual health	29
Problems at home	27
Issues with substances and/or addiction	24
Support with gender identity or sexuality	24

Young people aged 16-17 year olds (36% n. 36) where highest group represented in needing support with careers or employment.

Fig 10. Comparison of support needed by age

Employment   Mental Health   Financial
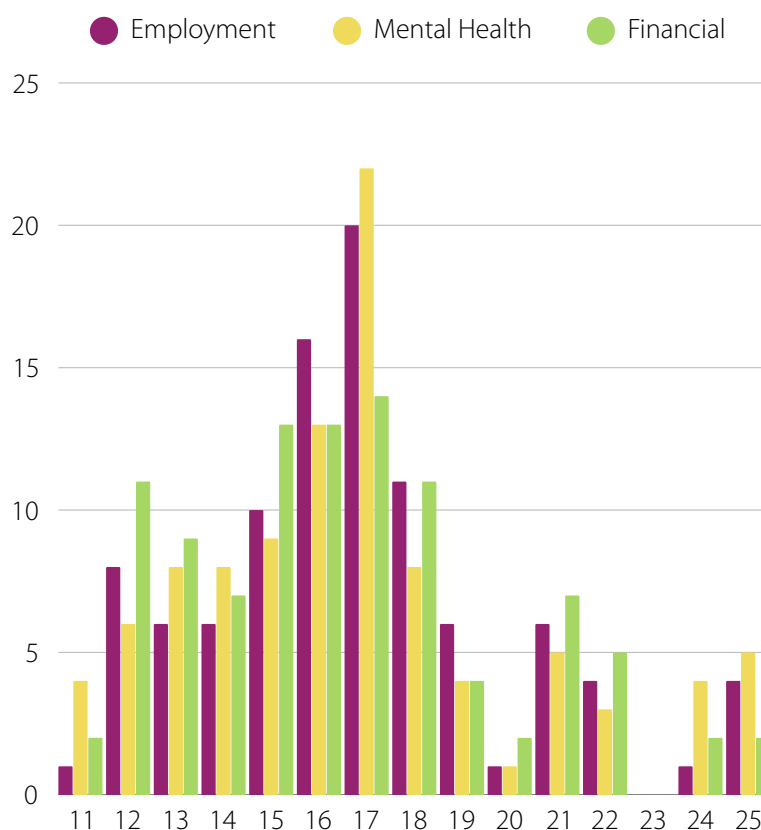
Similar priorities around Mental Health emerged during focus groups. Young people strongly emphasised the need for timely and accessible mental health support and this continued to be a dominant theme across all conversations.

Young people identified that since the covid pandemic wellbeing was an issue. Recognising increased levels of anxiety, particularly when accessing new activities without friends or not knowing the expectations of activities all made it intimidating and something that some young people needed extra support with.

"Need more support, like someone dedicated to helping you find those things. You know, having those services more accessible and more readily available"

It was clear throughout conversations that access to safe spaces and connections with trusted adults formed a safety net around young people that enabled them develop social connections.

Parents and carers also identified that their children and young people need support with careers and employment advice and mental health. These are very similar responses when compared to what young people said they needed support with.

"My child doesn't need support but plenty of children in the local area do and provision is shockingly scarce."

Fig 11. Comparison of what areas young people say they need support vs parents and carers
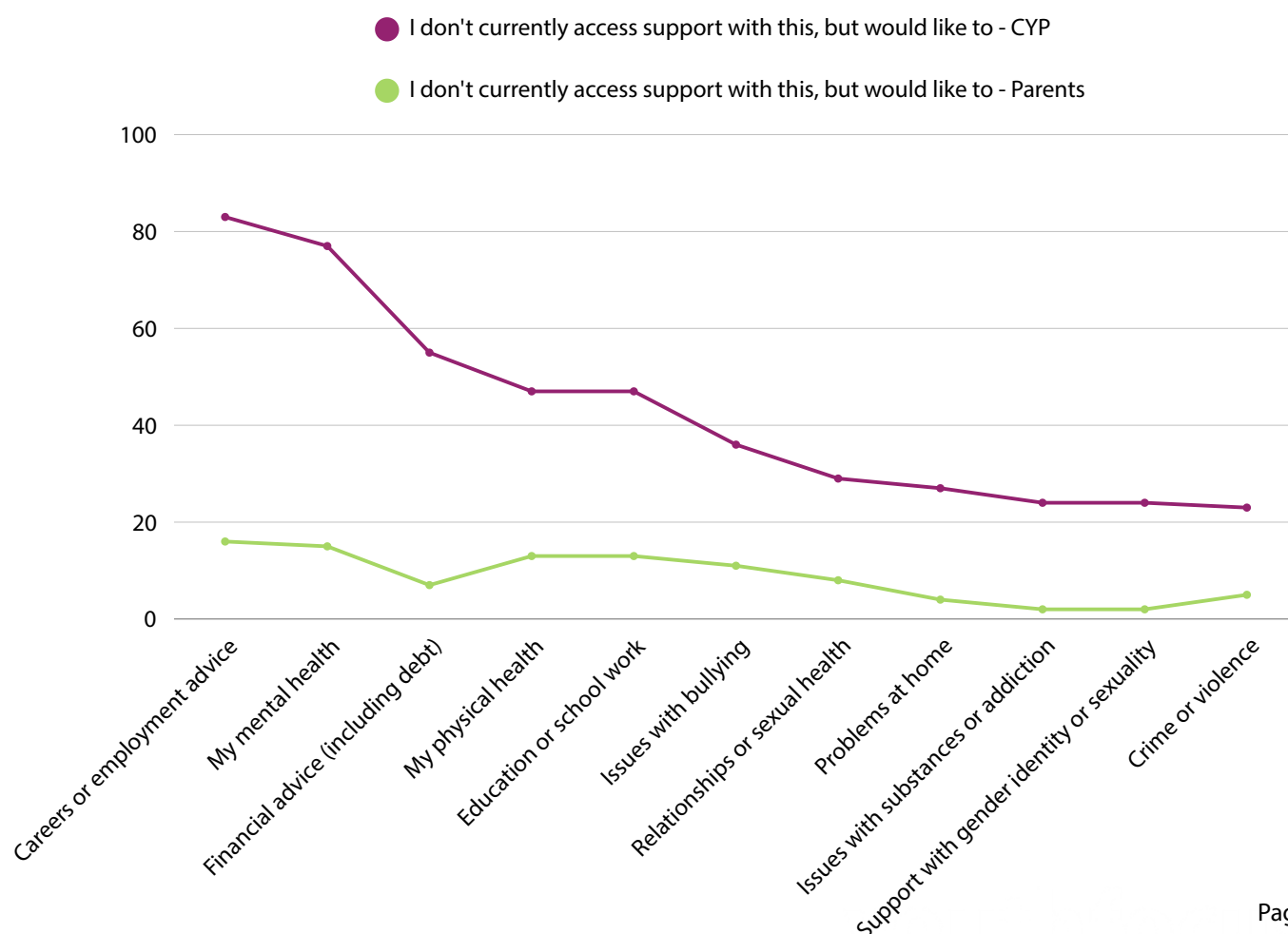
In survey for the Youth Sector, organisations expressed the priority needs they have been dealing with in the last year has been mental health, education and relationships. Which link to the areas highlighted throughout this needs assessment.

*Fig 12. Young People's priority needs - youth sector views*
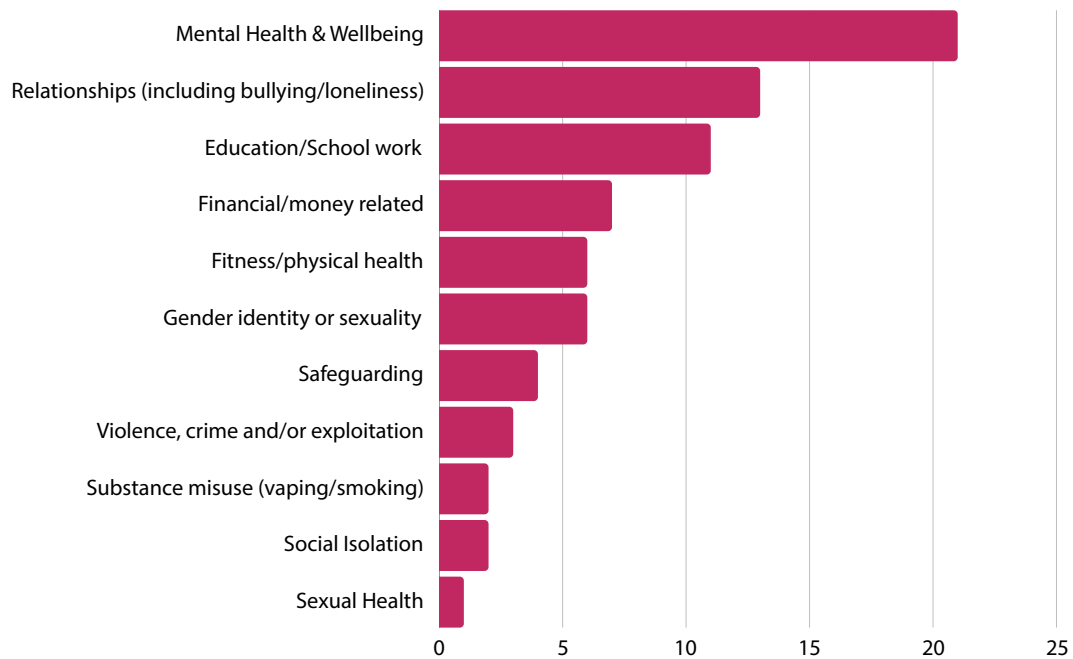
5.2 Barriers to using youth offer activities

5.2.1 Interest and availability

Over a third of young people named multiple barriers to accessing activities; lack of interest was the most frequent reason for not engaging (28%), followed by not having time and not knowing where to take part.

Fig 13. Barriers to engagement
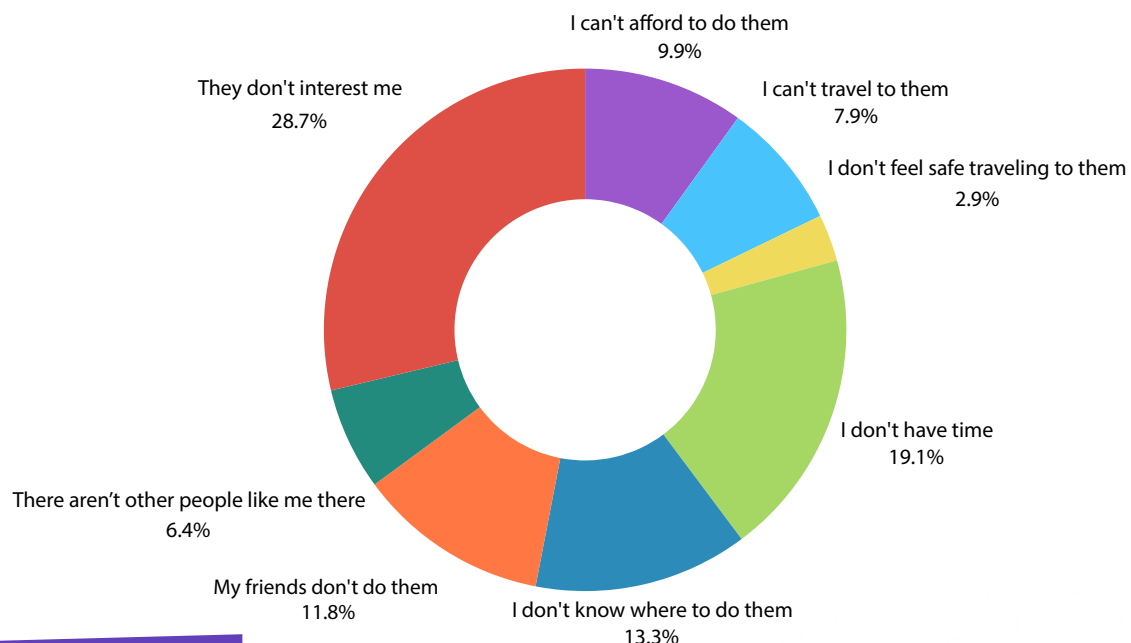
5.2.2 Transport

Transport was frequently discussed during focus groups. The cost and reliability of transport poses significant barriers for young people. Ranging from lack of accessible transport, or the time of public transport not matching the youth activities, meaning arriving too early or late or not having any public transport options at all.

"Where you're trying to go, the longer, the longer the journey. Ones are usually worse."

"Late buses are, like, quite unsafe. I've witnessed three fights in them already"

Some young people had specific activities which they travelled out of the borough to access such as farming, dog obedience, climate activism and ice hockey. Due to a lack of local options.

5.2.3 Accessibility

Accessible groups and activities for different age groups of young people were raised, with older young people feeling like there were less options available to them, and a need for accessible SEND activities. Young people identified that some geographic areas are better served than others for activities and would like more consistent options across all areas of the borough.

"I say Chester is well funded. It's got a good structure"

5.2.4 Current Youth Spaces

Some young people felt that current youth spaces weren't suitable for them, they described sessions as **" a bit overwhelming",** with lots of young people accessing at the same time and would like some choice of spaces.

Young people wanted youth spaces that were made for specifically for them, **"we need a better building" "a sports hall" "more rooms, quiet spaces to chill in" " need more pool tables" "air hockey table" "arts and crafts" "trampolines" "art room" " "smart tv" "open more nights" bigger building, "rave room" "dance room" "charger" and "a kitchen to make food, because most kids come here without eating their tea"**

Publicly available recreation spaces were in need of refurbishment and updating, skate parks were mentioned.

"I reckon they should definitely update some of the skate parks around."

5.2.5 Friends

Friends play a powerful role in engagement, with young people not attending activities because their friends don't. This was further reinforced during focus group discussions, with worries around going somewhere new without knowing anyone else.

5.2.6 Parent and Carers Views

Commonly, not knowing about activities and lack of friends taking part was mentioned most frequently. With transport, affordability, lack of safety and SEND also named as barriers.
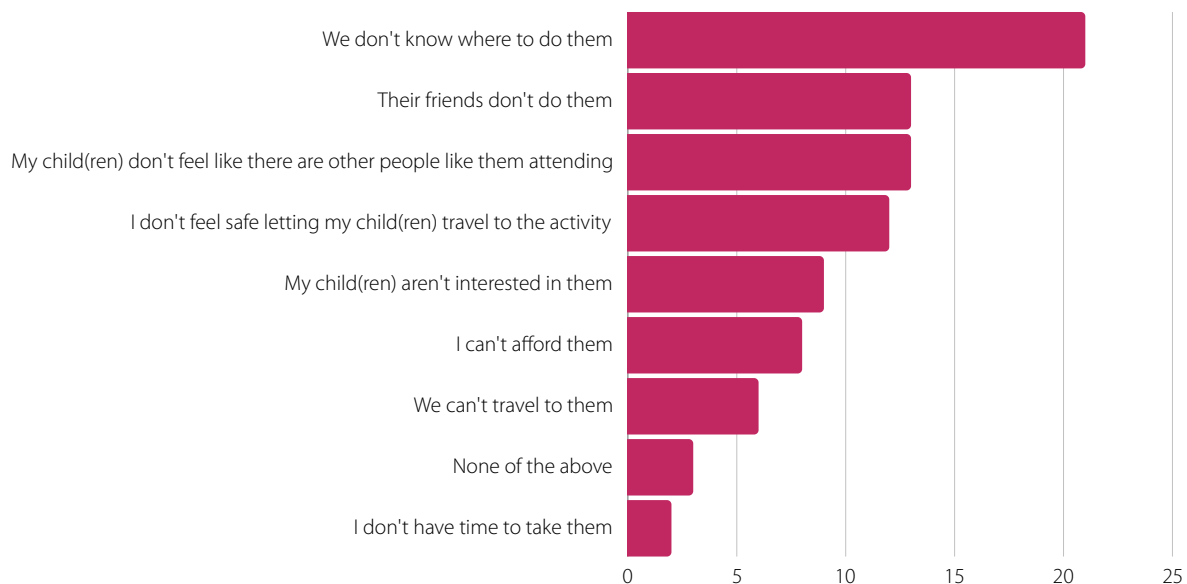
Accessibility and inclusion was a central barrier to parents and carers, with certain areas having nothing on offer. Parents and carers highlighted a lack of inclusive spaces that are equipped to offer options for all young people. Some parents and carers stated that feeling different or isolated was a barrier for their child.

5.2.6 Parent and Carers Views

Lack of knowledge about activities and lack of friends taking part was mentioned most frequently. With transport, affordability, lack of safety and SEND also named as barriers.

Accessibility and inclusion was a central barrier to parents and carers, with certain areas having nothing on offer. Parents and carers highlighted a lack of inclusive spaces that are equipped to offer options for all young people. Some parents and carers stated that feeling different or isolated was a barrier for their child.

"Just a place to chill where neurodiverse feel safe but where other children are not excluded."

"A proper Youth Club like The Hive in Birkenhead."

"No suitable provisions supporting young people with LD/autism"

Fig 14. Barriers to accessing activities - parental view

Barriers to accessing activities - parental view (approximate values):
- We don't know where to do them — 21
- Their friends don't do them — 13
- My child(ren) don't feel like there are other people like them attending — 13
- I don't feel safe letting my child(ren) travel to the activity — 12
- My child(ren) aren't interested in them — 9
- I can't afford them — 8
- We can't travel to them — 6
- None of the above — 3
- I don't have time to take them — 2

6. Youth Offer Gaps

6.1 Activities that young people would like to do but are unavailable

Young people highlighted activities that they would like to access in their area but they feel are not available to them. Broadly grouped into seven main categories:

Sport and Physical activity	Swimming, gym, horse riding. Go karting, Mountain biking, kickboxing, ice skating, basketball, squash, trampolining, Netball, outdoor sports, darts, pool, archery, padel, rugby league , boxing, athletics
Arts	Theatre, Arts, drama, dance, crafts, pottery, crafting, hip-hop, grime, music, ballet
Nature Based Activities	Camping, rock climbing , paintball, orienteering, litter picking, gardening
Wellbeing	Yoga and mindfulness, learn a language
Social spaces	More nights as youth club, more trips out, gaming, LGBTQ+ spaces,
Skills Building	Baking, makeup, hair, life skills , woodwork, volunteering, learning a trade

(A full postcode breakdown is available in appendix B.)

The desire for more activities to take part in was reflected in the focus group discussions with young people wanting diversity in what's available both in scope and in location. Within the responses there was a call for more activities for older age young people, spaces for LGBTQ+ and Neurodiverse young people.

Young people expressed frustration at wanting to attend sports or clubs that were not available. Some of this was due to unavailability in the area, other about age restrictions and costs to these particularly for gym memberships.

Young people wanted more variety in the activities available to them and some young people wanted more arts, book groups, music, and non-sport options. e.g. gaming clubs (Minecraft, Roblox, Mario Kart), "book clubs for teens", casual creative groups.

Young people reflected on issue based sessions that they had taken part in and wanted more of these focusing on sex, relationships, sexual health, period poverty. Young people also highlighted the need for more life skills.

"Talk about safety relationships, sex , protection, how you access free protection"

"Update on sexual stuff, what are your options if you get pregnant"

" we should learn how to cook, learn how to pay bills, use a washing machine, just normal everyday stuff no-one thinks to teach you"

Parents and carers highlighted that some young people are left without any "in-between" options, for example, services catering for young people who may have high SEND needs, or open access which was felt to be too broad, leaving some young people without the support they may need to enable them to access.

"Specific activities for SEN children."

"Groups for Girls with SEN in the area with similar ages."

As with responses from young people, there was a request for more varied choices in the youth offer, going beyond the usual activities to non-traditional creative activities such as woodwork, cooking sessions, gardening, makeup/nail courses, board games. In addition to this the chance for more recreational sport, that is non-competitive; this was highlighted as especially needed for neurodiverse or SEND young people.

Parents and carers suggested athletics without pressure, football for fun (not clubs), mountain biking, paddleboarding, kayaking, swimming, boxing. Safe places to cycle. Whilst some were concerned with having life skills, financial literacy navigating online risks and communication

6.2 Promoting the Youth Offer

Consistently across focus groups and survey responses featured uncertainty on what was on offer. Young people were often unsure of what was available to them to access, with a lack of awareness and information about youth activities. They highlighted the difficulty in navigating online information.

"The website's hard to navigate."

"Even if you filter, it still comes up with the wrong stuff."

Social media was the top method (30%) young people finding out information about activities, with school, parents and carers and word of mouth being the most common ways young people found out about the youth offer.

Fig15. Youth Offer promotion

Word of Mouth 16.2%
Other 6%
Parents/Carers 17.8%
Posters 6.4%
School 20.4%
Social Media 30.7%
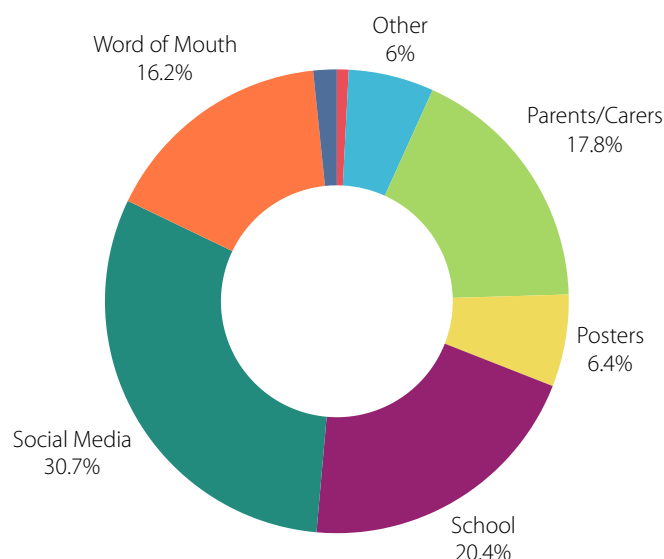
Young people suggested that having more promotion and visibility in schools would help to share information and also an online space or platform that could signpost activities.

For parents and carers social media was identified as the most common way to find out about what activities were available, other parents and by word of mouth were also high, with very few accessing via council or youth service websites.

7. Youth services, Worker and Sector Engagement

7.1 Sector Staff Focus Group and Survey Findings

Two geographical focus groups were undertaken with 13 professionals from the voluntary and community sector, Local Authority, Schools, further education, youth services and charitable organisations. A further 20 organisations completed a survey, of these 16 were from the voluntary and community sector. One was a funder of activity for young people in the areas, and three from local authority provision.

Just under half of the organisations surveyed provide targeted youth provision (9 out of 20), 40% (n.8) provide open access provision, with just two providing detached or street based work.

Fig 16. Types of service support
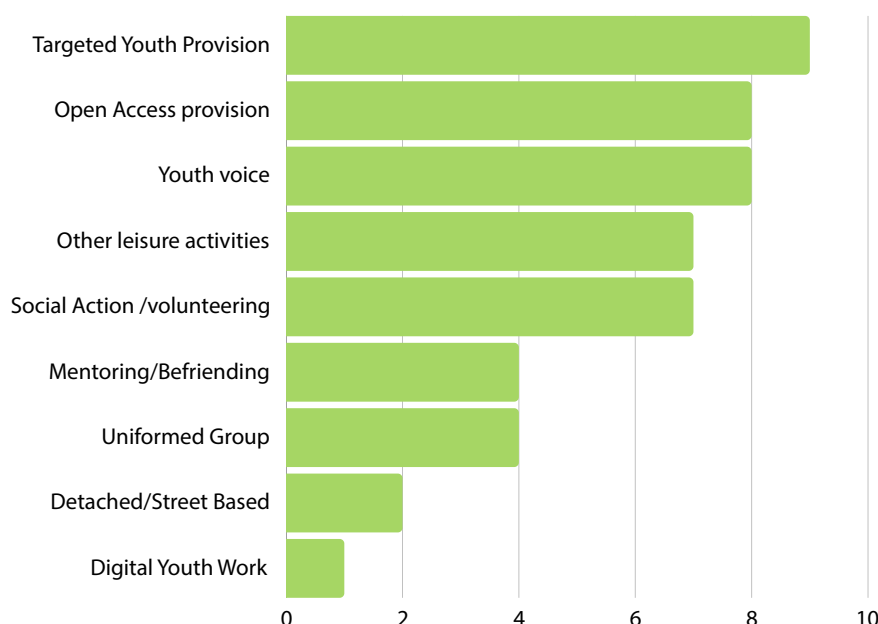
7.2 Understanding of the Youth Offer in Cheshire West and Chester

On exploring the strengths and areas for development in the current youth offer, a diverse range of youth offer activities are available in CWAC, with a mix of issue-based group sessions, open access youth clubs, short breaks, and school offers highlighted.

"The group side of youth work currently delivers issue-based sessions. Each youth club will deliver at some point in the year on healthy relationships or drugs and alcohol misuse, all of the kind of things that are kind of difficult for young people."

It was clear that there is a strong voluntary sector presence, which was positively recognised for filling gaps left by statutory service reductions and maintaining open-access clubs and targeted sessions.

7.2.1 Partnership Work

There were some good examples of collaborative partnerships and multi agency working, forums like the NEET panel, Community Safety Partnership, knife crime and boxing club. But also some reservations about partnership work feeling dependent on individuals.

"There are times when partnership work is really strong, but it only takes a few people to leave their posts for lines of communication to break down."

There was a desire for more emphasis on communicating over conversing with lots of emails and links shared but not enough description and conversations to go with it meaning things get ignored or missed in busy inboxes.

"I think we're better at working together when we've got a child in need plan, but we should do that level of joined-up work more broadly."

7.2.2 Distribution of Services

There was patchy awareness of what's available for young people to access, leading to duplication or missed opportunities. Many of the youth centres and group spaces currently available had limited facilities or no dedicated youth spaces so felt inadequate to meet all the requirements young people need, many are hosted in other venues like church halls.

In Chester, Storyhouse has been very popular and was spoken of positively, young people gather and use the space, but this has also presented challenges as it is not purely a space for young people. Highlighting a lack of safe, welcoming places for young people to gather.

"Very few dedicated youth spaces, there's a lack of investment... spaces aren't attractive or safe."

The disbursement of services and activities across the geographical landscape was also mentioned, with concerns about the equitable access of provision across all parts of the borough and avoidance of duplicated efforts.

"Sometimes, we don't really know what each other is doing at every point, especially around holiday periods."

"There isn't a true centre if you deliver a service, you've either got to split your workers, which reduces their capacity, or just focus on one area."

"lack of a central point for youth services in Cheshire West is a significant barrier, with young people often staying in their local areas"

There are some frustrations around ease of referrals and engaging with young people on the periphery of NEET, or disengagement, GDPR has been a barrier preventing services from effectively identifying and supporting young people, with information sharing prohibiting early intervention in some cases. Some of which could be resolved if there was more joined up working at a service design stage.

"We need to be more than stakeholders. We need to be partners at the table, especially when systems are being designed."
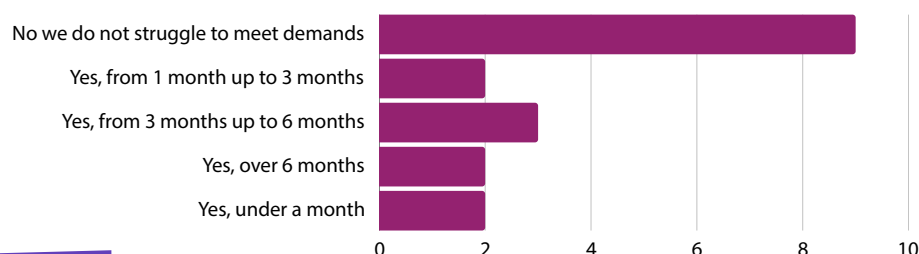
Survey responses indicated a balancing act of demand and delivery, organisations reported the number of young people they supported in 2024. 30% support 250 young people, with 15% supporting over 500 young people. 90% of services have seen an increase in demand, only 5% have seen a decrease in demand for services.

Fig 17. Service Demand

● Demand has increased
● Demand has decreased   ● No change
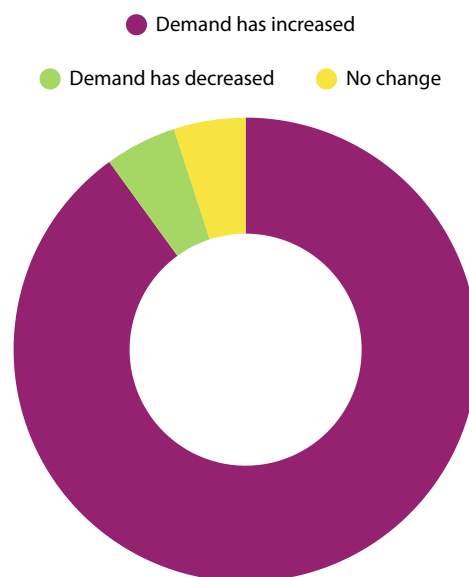
With 45% of services have some form of waiting list for their service ranging from under a month to over 6 months.

Fig 18. Service Demand

Category	Value
No we do not struggle to meet demands	9
Yes, from 1 month up to 3 months	2
Yes, from 3 months up to 6 months	3
Yes, over 6 months	2
Yes, under a month	2

7.3 Young people's needs and gaps in youth offer

7.3.1 Mental Health
Mental health difficulties have been identified as a challenge, the changing needs of young people post covid has seen a marked increase of young people reporting mental health issues. Young people being isolated and having increased levels of anxiety has resulted in difficulty reengaging with education, training and other youth activities.

"Mental health, social engagement, social anxiety. I think we've probably all seen massive increases in all those areas, expectations around attendance. I think it's all through primary, secondary, and college."

Delays in getting treatment, diagnosis and long waiting lists for services like CAMHS add further to the growing need. Additionally there was a feeling of young people's complexity increasing but static or shrinking service capacity to deal with the levels of demand.

"Young people have gotten more complex. There's more needs in a general setting, exploitation, online harm, violence."

Whilst many participants can see the value and importance of preventative and early intervention, the reality is that there is limited availability for early intervention or mentoring, with short term funding having a significant impact on providing early support for young people's mental health and thus impacting on their longer term outcomes.

For some target groups such as post-16 young people, care leavers, and those not engaging with education or work there was a lack of longer term mentoring support.

"We need assertive outreach, long mentoring processes. It's like relationship building and trust building, but services close cases if the young person doesn't answer the phone."

Keeping safe in online spaces has also become a priority for their organisations in recent years. With many seeing the majority of conflict originating online, usually over very little.

"We're seeing a rise in cases that involve online exploitation, image sharing and even among primary age."

"Youth service has responded to issues like online safety and contextual safeguarding, with a focus on early intervention"

Of the survey responses 40% (n.8) organisations offered targeted support to young people around their mental health and wellbeing, with 30% providing support on identity, employment and skills.

Fig 19. Types of targeted support
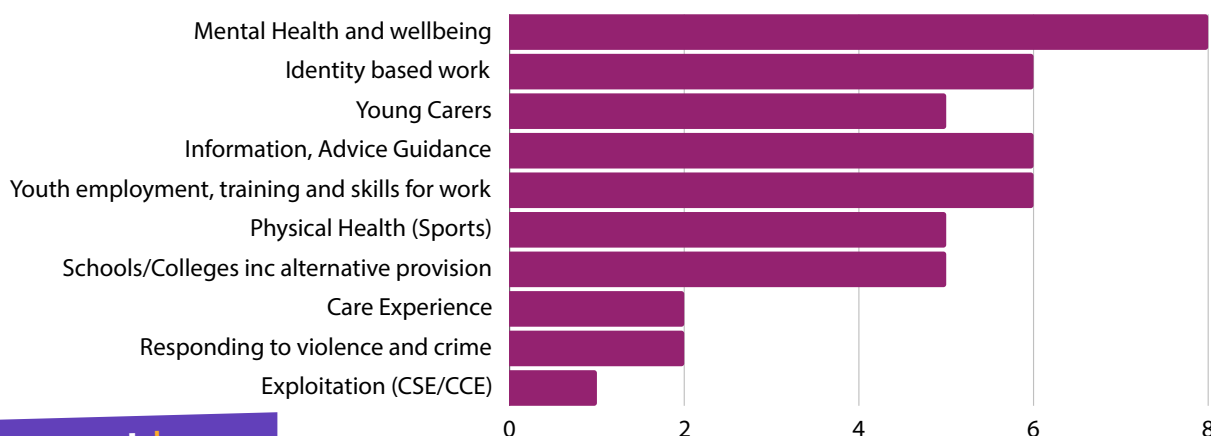
7.3.2 Diversity

There was reflection on the diversity of the area and lack of specialised services and spaces for global majority young people, who may need additional or tailored support, and a question about representation of staff and culturally competent services.

"We're not seeing anything specific in the area for young people from global majority backgrounds. If you're in the minority, you probably need more support."

7.3.3 Employability

Employability and work readiness was raised, particularly young people's understanding of the expectations that employers had around professional behaviour.

Whilst some employers are being more proactive in working closely with schools and colleges to provide pathways to work placements and opportunities, more work experience opportunities are needed, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds who have limited pathways into employment opportunities and these are often based on what their parents and carers do for a living.

"Employers are telling us young people aren't ready for the world of work – punctuality, behaviours, they just don't have it."

"At the moment it seems to be not very much out there to help children get to that point when they're ready to make applications for jobs and the confidence that they need to do that."

7.3.4 Accessibility

Older young people's needs were highlighted, especially regarding daytime activities for part-time students, NEET young people, and others not in school settings.

After-school and extracurricular activities for SEND young people were also mentioned as a gap in provision. Although personal care training for youth workers was praised, provision was still seen as under-resourced and over-subscribed. Consideration to make reasonable adjustments to other universal provision in order to enable SEND young people to have a choice in opportunities that they can access was suggested.

"There are very few opportunities if you have personal care needs, but youth workers are now being trained in personal care, I think that's fantastic."

"With that choice, then comes the opportunity for people to pick something that's more discrete, or, like you say, proper integration across the piece"

Survey responses indicated support is centred around young people aged 8-18. With a higher proportion of organisations supporting 13-18 year olds (n.17). Five organisations offer support to those under 8 years old. With around 50% offering support to young people aged 19-24 with additional needs.

Fig 20. Target age group
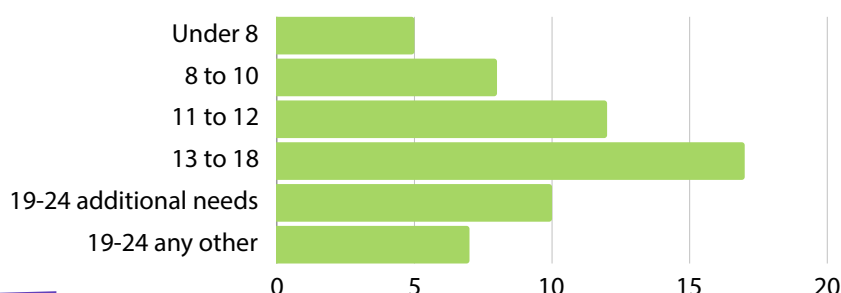
7.4 Barriers to accessing the Youth Offer

7.4.1 Transport
Echoing the response from young people, parents and carers, transport was highlighted as a significant theme when discussing barriers to accessing the youth offer. Limited transport and infrastructure reduced access to services. Lack of a central transport system, and young people often remain in "pockets" with limited movement.

"People in Winsford don't cross into the bridge, the community's split, and buses are unreliable."

"Transport is massive. You can't get from Winsford to Northwich reliably even though it's close."

7.4.2 Costs
The cost of taking part in activities can be a barrier, even those that are perceived to be free of charge, such as the clothes or shoes you need to participate or the cost to pay for transport to get there.

"Walking isn't free. If you've got one set of trainers or one set of shoes, you're not going to get them dirty, because you've got to wear them for school. If you've got one jacket and you offer free activities, you're just not going to take part, because it's going to get wrecked for school, and you just can't do it"

"Young people are aware of the lack of money in the household. They don't ask for things. That makes them more vulnerable to exploitation."

The reduction in access to programmes like Duke of Edinburgh schemes, was noted.

"you're looking between £250 -£ 350 just for the bronze award. It's not right. And now NCS has gone. That means all that cohort, the young people who were affected by COVID, have missed out on that week's residential"

"It's about widening participation, so kids in Lache, Blacon can all get involved and get that accreditation, not just for the middle class and the elite."

7.4.3 Geography
There was much discussion about the geography and landscape of the borough, the challenges that this brings and the differences that some young people experience, in some areas the mixture of rurality and affluence, creates issues of isolation and lack of positive activities to take part in. Further exacerbated by limited transport and infrastructure.

"When the parents are saying there's a fiver, they're just saving it, clubbing it, getting stoned and it's massive because there's nothing else to do."

"Parents can be like, Well, I've given you some money. Go and do what you want to do. And actually, when there's nothing for them to do, they find the most easiest, accessible thing to do, which always be at home, on computers, on their phones, on their tablets, or getting up to mischief."

Area boundaries and territorialism featured, with a strong divide between different areas within Cheshire West and Chester. Winsford feels particularly isolated compared to other areas of CWAC, transport acts as a key barrier to participation of young people from the area.

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7.5 Current Challenges

7.5.1 Funding
Funding and infrastructure is a challenge for the current youth offer. With many grassroots organisations operating on insecure or short-term funding. Whilst in some areas there is funding available such as Youth Opportunities Grants not being taken up.

"Winsford and Northwich, we got no applications at all for the Opportunity Fund grant. Something is going on across that side of the county."

"Some of the third sector are just being hammered, funding reviews, changes, and we will lose provision in the area."

In other areas competition for funding causes challenges with short lead in times and unsustainable outcomes. Three quarters of surveyed organisations had experienced multiple challenges in the last year, the most reported was increased in operating costs, followed by an increase in demand for services and reductions in funding and budgets.

Fig 21. Service Challenges
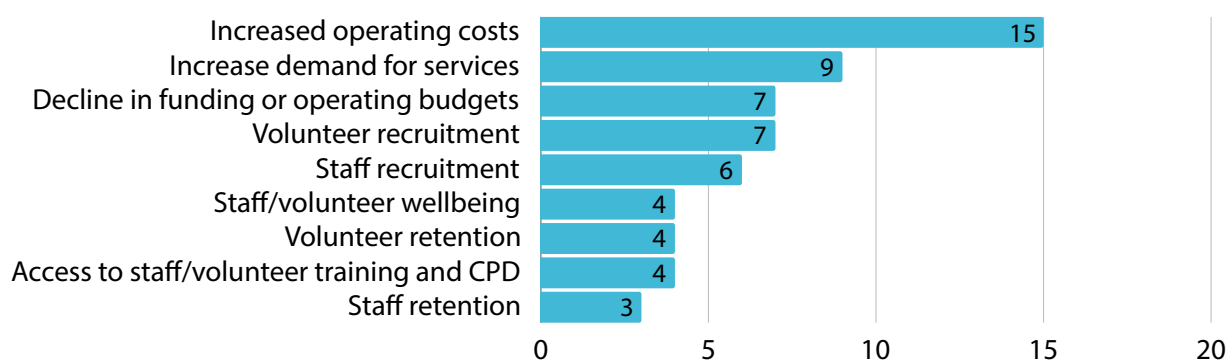
7.5.2 Workforce
The change in service delivery is also highlighted by the workforce, with changes post covid for young people needing more support, reductions in services and complexity of needs.

"We've had to completely change the structure of our service post-COVID more well-being staff, engagement roles, not just teachers anymore."

"Staff burnout is real. They're taking on work that would've been Tier 2 or 3 mental health support a few years ago."

With difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified youth workers, especially in voluntary sector roles due to low wages.

"Recruiting youth workers is a nightmare. We end up pinching off each other. The pipeline is broken."

Organisations surveyed reported that 27 of their youth work volunteers and staff had training in Youth Work. Eleven organisations reported none against the list of Youth Work qualifications. Two organisations had two staff with Level 6 JNC Youth Work qualifications. Nine organisations had staff/volunteers with Level 2 Youth Work and two organisations had Level 3 qualified youth workers.

7.5.3 Promotion

There was common agreement that promotion of the youth offer could be improved. Poor signposting, inaccessible websites, and lack of easy to navigate online platforms were named as issues to resolve. Having a clear centralised youth information hub was highlighted as a possible solution.

"There needs to be one central, youth-focused site that actually works. Right now, it's a mess."

"The website isn't easy to read. As an adult, I can't find what I'm looking for. A young person definitely won't."

There was also a call for non technical approaches to reach digitally excluded young people, regular updates and coordination across networks and bulletin boards, whilst word of mouth is a popular way to promote information, this can be inconsistent and sporadic.

"We assume young people can access digital info. But if they don't have the data or a phone that works properly, how can they scan a QR code?"

"Social media is good for young people. But we also need a way to reach adults and partners, maybe different campaigns."

While some called for youth workers to do more to promote themselves and the work that they do. As well as a way to measure the outcomes of the work they do to share the impact and make a case for sustainable funding.

"Youth workers aren't good at self-promotion. We're not naturally built to sell things but that's what's needed now."

8. Recommendations

The needs assessment highlights significant strengths in the current youth offer, and also provides useful insights for areas of improvement and growth.

It is important to recognise the context of instability of funding amidst rising costs to provide services and increasing demands for them. This overlaid with retention and recruitment of qualified youth workers adds to the complex picture of providing a sustainable youth offer across a large and mixed geography.

Undeniably a prevalent issue raised across all respondents is that of mental health, there are consistent concerns regarding access to timely support, careers and employment, transport, affordability, and the need for more diverse, age-appropriate, and accessible activities and spaces are recurring themes.

The findings underline the importance of robust promotion, improved partnership working, sustainable funding, and the importance of youth voice in shaping future provision.

8.1 Mental Health & Wellbeing
Mental health support was consistently highlighted as a priority area of unmet need identified by young people, parents and carers, and sector professionals. Delays in services, long waiting lists, and lack of early intervention were raised. Whilst some young people who need mental health support are receiving it, it remains evident that there are gaps in services that the current youth offer is not meeting.

Recommendations:
- Explore with partners how to collaborate to increase more resources to meet unmet needs
- Explore early intervention options
- Provide additional training and support for youth work and volunteers around mental health and wellbeing
- Develop initiatives to support the wellbeing and mental health of the workforce
- Identify how services can reach isolated communities and those in pockets of affluence
- Explore benefits of increased access to nature based and outdoor/residential activities for early intervention, prevention and development of social connections

8.1.2 Improving access and rethinking youth spaces
Barriers to accessing the youth offer appeared in the findings in a number of ways, from logistical needs of limited transport options, costs, community lines being drawn, lack of age appropriate and SEND accessible services and having buildings that are designed with and for young people.

Recommendations:
- CWAC Youth partnership to consider the modalities of access to services and how to widen these. For example more outreach and detached provision, mobile youth offers
- Invest in youth specific spaces that are codesigned with young people to reflect their diverse needs
- Review how DofE and similar schemes can be made more accessible and affordable for all young people
- Make youth voice central to service design

8.1.3 Youth Offer Promotion

Many young people, parents, carers and professionals didn't know what was available for young people to access. Existing channels of communication were seen as difficult to navigate and at times inconsistent.

Recommendations:
- Review and implement a communication strategy to support the promotion of youth offer activities
- Create a centralised youth offer information hub
- Provide offline options for digitally excluded groups
- Create more consistent engagement and communication with schools and community groups

8.1.4 Careers and Employment Support

Young people, parents and carers and sector professionals named careers and employment as priority need, with young people feeling unprepared for the working world, the gap between employer and employee expectations and a desire for young people to have better life skills and work readiness.

Recommendations:
- CWAC youth partnership broker and support the relationship and understanding between employers and young people
- Develop more diverse work experience pathways
- Build a curriculum of life skills, into existing youth offer activities

8.1.5 Funding, Workforce Development

Increasing operating costs, demand for services, reducing budgets and competition for funding streams, creates an unstable environment for youth offer activities and increasing pressure for delivery organisations. In a borough that is trying to provide services across a large geographic area it is important to protect existing provision and make the case for ongoing investment into youth work. Youth work can make a significant impact on preventative work with young people, enabling greater savings for future service demand. Retaining and renewing the workforce is a key part to ensuring future sustainability as well as a qualified and well trained workforce.

Recommendations:
- CWAC Youth Partnership to influence wider stakeholders, budget holders and commissioners on the importance of early intervention and prevention work and how youth work can impact this
- Promote the training and CPD opportunities available via regional youth work unit (YFNW) and National Youth Agency
- Explore any opportunities for backfilling smaller organisations in order to access training opportunities
- Promote Youth Work as a career
- Explore young leader schemes and grow your own youth workforce
- Protect existing workforce and review any wellbeing initiatives or training

8.1.6 Youth Voice

Young people have been engaged and forthcoming in sharing their views about how they would like the youth offer to look and feel. Building on this work it is imperative that young people are central to any new strategy. Young people have been clear about how involved they want to be with service design and staff recruitment. It would be useful to have this as a central strand to any youth participation strategy in the future and link it to a recognised rights based model.

Recommendations:
- CWAC youth partnership to look at how they can continue to have a youth voice central to the partnership
- Create a youth voice strategy underpinned by child rights framework such as Lundy model
- Embed youth participation in governance, recruitment, and commissioning processes

8.1.7 Partnership Working

Fragmentation and silo working was a source of frustration for organisations, building collaborative partnerships that are not solely based on individuals was mentioned as a challenge.

Recommendations:
- Promote the work of the CWAC youth partnership
- Look for more opportunities to bring others into the CWAC youth partnership
- Look at joint bids, collaborative agreements, and further opportunities to work together to avoid duplication and increase reach

8.1.8 Transport

Providing a youth offer across such a wide and varied geographic landscape will always be challenging, however transport is consistently raised as a significant block to young people, parents, and service providers, Including the costs and availability of transport options.

Recommendations:
- Youth partnership to coordinate with key stakeholders and young people for a travel initiative for young people in the borough
- Youth partnership to look at mobilised youth offers for more isolated areas or digital youth offer with consideration for those who may be digitally disadvantaged
- Review independent travel training availability across the borough
- Explore innovative solutions to transport isolation, look at other boroughs with similar geographies e.g Cumbria scooter scheme

a. Appendix - Desktop Needs Assessment

Introduction
Section 507B of the Education Act 1996 imposes a statutory duty on local councils in England to ensure young people have access to positive activities. This section specifically addresses the council's responsibility to provide youth services and activities that promote the well-being and development of young people.

A crucial component of this statutory guidance is the requirement for a needs assessment. This assessment is mandatory under this section of the Act and enables councils to tailor their services to better benefit the young people in their area.

Part of the needs assessment outlines the contextual characteristics of the area served by the local authority and identifies the strengths and weaknesses of existing provisions in various areas, including:
- Health and Physical wellbeing: physical health, diet and nutrition etc
- Education and learning: educational attainment, access to education and training etc
- Employment and income: current employment status, income level, skills needed for employability etc
- Social, family and carer relationships: family dynamics, relationship with peers etc
- Housing and environment: living conditions, access to safe and affordable housing etc
- Safety and Security: exposure to violence and crime etc
- Recreation and leisure: access to recreational activities and opportunities for personal development
- Civic engagement and participation: involvement in community activities etc
- Technology and digital literacy: access to technology and digital skills needed for participation in modern society

The following data has been primarily compiled from the Cheshire West and Chester State of the Borough data dashboard and the Office of National Statistics Census information for 2021.

Local Authority Youth Service
Cheshire West and Chester youth service is made up of two distinct arms, Prevention and Intervention. Prevention operates across the 4 districts; Chester, Ellesmere Port, Winsford and Northwich providing place based work consisting of open access, SEND, Youth Voice, LGBTQ+, detached and schools work.

Intervention is 1:1 specialists that support young people at risk of Child Exploitation and placement instability via professional referral. The team work across the borough and can support a young person who is placed up to 20 miles outside of the area.

The Youth Service is made up of 16 FTE's consisting of Senior Practice Leads, Qualified Youth Workers, Apprentice Youth Workers, Youth Inclusion Workers and Youth Support Workers. Youth Inclusion Workers and Youth Support Workers are the engine room of the service and are employed on 3, 6 or 9 hour contracts to enable delivery of evening based provision.

All CWAC Youth Service employees progress through a qualification route from unqualified through Level 2 and Level 3 for part time workers, then Level 6 apprentice through to qualified. Aligning to NJC terms and conditions but insist on a JNC recognised qualification for Youth Workers.

As part of EHP all employees have a role based training profile that ensures the correct training is in place on a rolling 12 month period.

Voluntary Sector

Cheshire West Voluntary Action's CYPF Alliance, brings together community sector organisations that support children, young people and families, currently it has 47 members. A recent State of the Sector Report, led by Voluntary Sector North West (VSNW), showed there were an estimated 3,132 community sector organisations and groups in Cheshire West. A survey conducted to support the report showed that nine per cent of groups worked with children, young people and families, equating to around 280 organisations and groups in Cheshire West.

1.Demographic and socio-economic characteristics of 13-19 years

In Cheshire West and Chester there are an estimated 98,100 children and young people aged 24 and under (2008 estimate).

The population size has increased by 8.4%, from around 329,600 in 2011 to 357,200 in 2021. This is higher than the overall increase for England (6.6%), where the population grew by nearly 3.5 million to 56,489,800.

At 8.4%, Cheshire West and Chester's population increase is higher than the increase for the North West (5.2%).
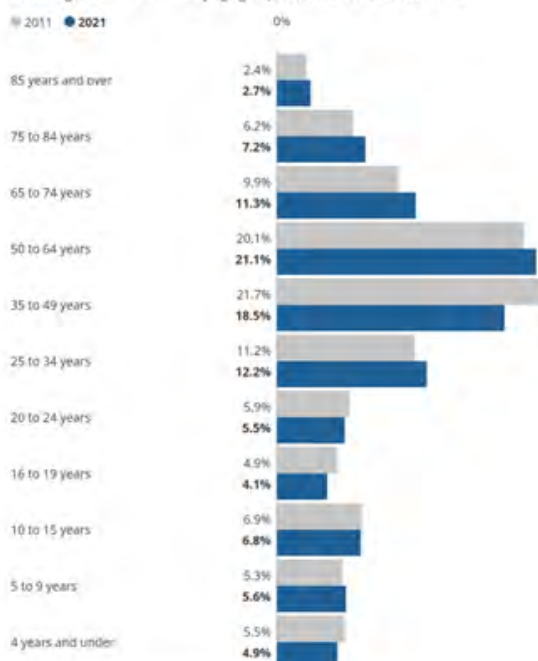
As of 2021, Cheshire West and Chester is the 10th least densely populated of the North West's 39 local authority areas, with around three people living on each football pitch-sized area of land.

There has been an increase of 24.2% in people aged 65 years and over, an increase of 4.4% in people aged 15 to 64 years, and an increase of 6.4% in children aged under 15 years.

The share of residents aged between 50 and 64 years increased by
1.0 percentage points between 2011 and 2021

Percentage of usual residents by age group, **Cheshire West and Chester** ∨

☰ 2011   ● 2021   0%

	2011	2021
85 years and over	2.4%	**2.7%**
75 to 84 years	6.2%	**7.2%**
65 to 74 years	9.9%	**11.3%**
50 to 64 years	20.1%	**21.1%**
35 to 49 years	21.7%	**18.5%**
25 to 34 years	11.2%	**12.2%**
20 to 24 years	5.9%	**5.5%**
16 to 19 years	4.9%	**4.1%**
10 to 15 years	6.9%	**6.8%**
5 to 9 years	5.3%	**5.6%**
4 years and under	5.5%	**4.9%**

Source: Office for National Statistics – 2011 Census and Census 2021

(https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censuspopulationchange/E06000050)

1.1 Ethnicity

According to the 2021 Census around 8.8% of local residents were from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, an increase on the 5.5% reported in 2011 but far lower than the 26.5% England average. Polish remains by far the most frequently spoken non-English language.

2. Physical and Mental health

The proportion of children who are obese is similar to the national average at reception age (9.7% compared to 9.6%) but better at year 6 (20.2% compared to 22.1%). Hospital admissions caused by unintentional or deliberate injuries are both higher (worse) in the borough than the England average.

Hospital admissions for mental health conditions in people under 18 has fallen significantly and is now better than the national average. Self-harm in those aged 10-24 years remains above the national average but has fallen significantly following a sharp increase in 2021/22 the reasons for which are not clear.

Mental health and self-harm admissions are both more prevalent for females, locally and nationally.

Children and young people mental health

Hospital admissions for mental health conditions in under 18s

Hospital admissions for self-harm, 10-24 year olds

Source: fingertips.phe.org.uk

The rate of hospital admissions for alcohol specific conditions in under 18s in the borough is similar to the England average, but the rate of substance misuse in 15-24 year olds is significantly worse than the England average.

After a falling trend, the under 18 conception rate increased between 2020 and 2021 across both CWAC and England.

Children and young people healthy behaviours

Under 18s hospital admissions for alcohol specific conditions

Hospital admissions for substance misuse; 15-24 year olds

Under 18 conception rate

Source: fingertips.phe.org.uk
*Updated data based on revised definition using a new set of alcohol attributable fractions (PHE (2020) Alcohol-attributable fractions for England)

3. Vulnerable Children and Young People

The rate of children in need has been increasing since 2020 and is now above the England average. The rate of under 18s in the borough living in care is also increasing and is significantly higher (worse) than the England average at 84 per 10,000 compared to 71 per 10,000 for England and has been increasing over the last few years. The rate of children identified as being in need is 353.6 per 10,000 population in 2024 (compared to 332.9 for England) and has been increasing over the last few years. The rate of under 18s on a child protection plan in the borough is 44.2 per 10,000 in 2023/24 (compared to 41.6 per 10,000 for England).

Vulnerable children and young people

Under 18s identified as being children in need
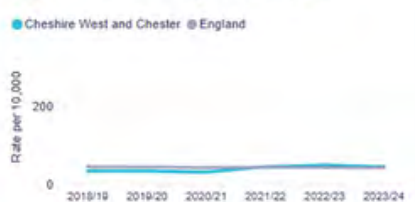
Under 18s on a child protection plan

Under 18s living in care

Source: Statistics: Children in Need and Child Protection, Department for Education

Source: Statistics: Children in Need and Child Protection, Department for Education

Source: fingertips.phe.org.uk

4. Education Attendance

Overall absence from school increased significantly in 2022, both locally and nationally. It reduced slightly in 2023, to 7.2% locally and 7.4% nationally, but both figures remain well above historic levels.
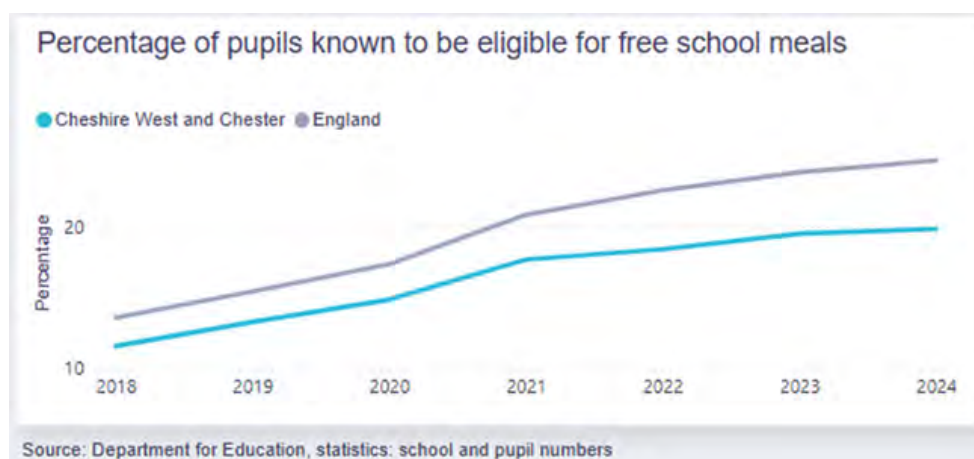
The local absence rate is slightly lower than the England average for special schools and primary age, but higher at secondary (9.2% in comparison to 9.0%).

The percentage of children achieving a good level of development in the early years foundation stage declined between 2019 and 2022, and despite improvement in 2023, remains below pre-pandemic levels. GCSE attainment 8 scores increased in 2020 and 2021 but declined in 2022 and 2023.

Percentage absence in Cheshire West and Chester spiked from 4.6% in 2021 to 7.8% in 2022 (compared to an increase from 4.6% to 7.6% for England) and although the rate reduced slightly to 7.2% in 2023 (compared to 7.4% for England) it remains well above pre-pandemic levels.

5. Free School Meals

The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is increasing both across Cheshire West and Chester and across England, the borough's rate remains lower than the national average, reaching 19.8% in 2023 compared to 24.6% for England.

Percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals

Cheshire West and Chester England

Source: Department for Education, statistics: school and pupil numbers

6. Exclusions

There has been a rise in suspensions and exclusions in recent years, with Autumn 2023/24 showing the highest levels across most indicators. Permanent exclusions rose overall, starting at 5 in Autumn 2021/22 and peaking at 38 in Autumn 2023/24.

'Suspensions and permanent exclusions - by geography' in Cheshire West and Chester between 2021/22 Autumn term and 2023/24 Spring term

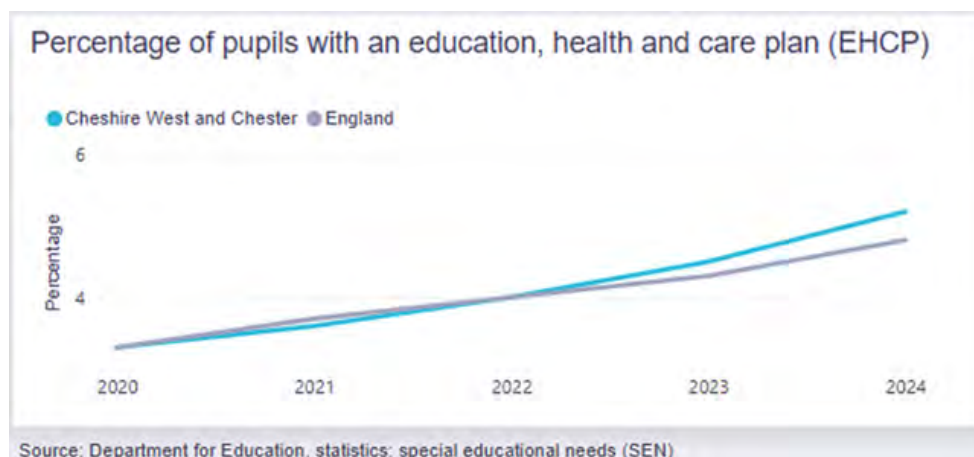|	2021/22 Autumn term	2021/22 Spring term	2021/22 Summer term	2022/23 Autumn term	2022/23 Spring term	2022/23 Summer term	2023/24 Autumn term	2023/24 Spring term
Headcount	51,071	51,432	51,678	51,408	51,847	52,095	51,221	51,614
Number of schools	159	159	158	160	159	159	159	159
Suspensions	826	901	846	1,146	1,289	1,486	2,197	2,018
Suspension (rate)	1.62	1.75	1.64	2.23	2.49	2.85	4.29	3.91
Permanent exclusions	5	21	17	16	13	25	38	18
Permanent exclusions (rate)	0.01	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.05	0.07	0.03
Pupil enrolments with one or more suspension	499	606	547	691	686	799	996	972
Pupil enrolments with one or more suspension (rate)	0.98	1.18	1.06	1.34	1.32	1.53	1.94	1.88

Source: Explore Education Statistics, Gov.Uk
For 2019/20 and 2020/21, while suspensions and permanent exclusions were possible throughout the academic year, pandemic restrictions will have had an impact on the numbers presented and caution should be taken when comparing across years.

7. Early Help

The percentage of pupils with an EHCP is increasing both nationally and in CWAC, but the rate of increase is higher in Cheshire West and Chester, increasing 1.9 percentage points between 2020 and 2024 compared to 1.5 percentage points for England across the same period.

Percentage of pupils with an education, health and care plan (EHCP)

Source: Department for Education, statistics: special educational needs (SEN)

A higher proportion of children with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) are in special school provision at 40.9% (34.8% national). (https://www.livewell.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/Information/Inclusion-matters)

8. Attainment

Average attainment scores at GCSE show that the attainment of non-disadvantaged pupils have dropped both locally and nationally, with the local attainment of 49.8 remaining slightly below the England average of 50.3.

GCSE - average attainment 8 score, all pupils and split by disadvantaged

Source: Department for Education, statistics: GCSEs (key stage 4)
Note: Disadvantaged are children eligible for free school meals, looked after or adopted from care
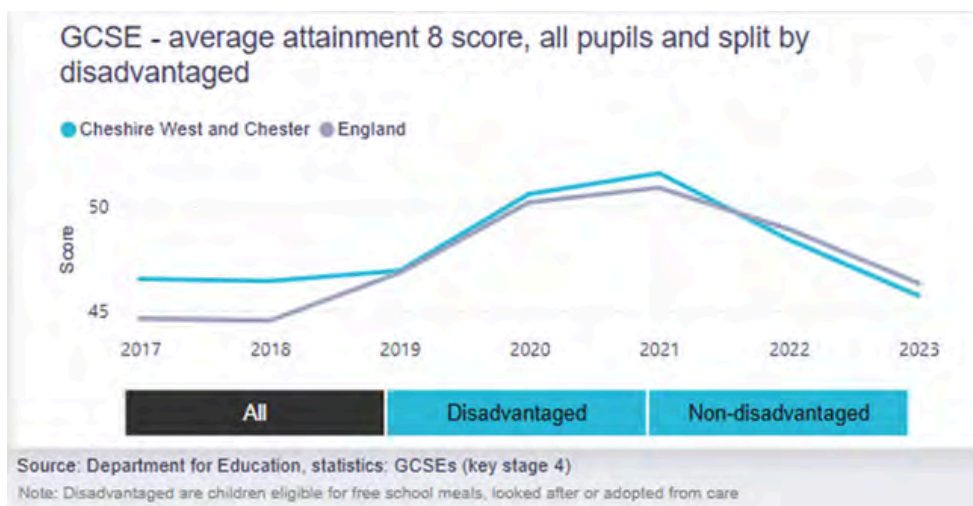
The attainment of disadvantaged pupils has also fallen both nationally and locally, with local disadvantaged pupils achieving an average score of 31.3 compared to 35.1 nationally.

9. Further Education

The number of 16-19 year olds starting further education fell between 2017 and 2021 but has since increased slightly. Achievement rates have increased between 2017 and 2021, but were lower in 2022 and 2023.
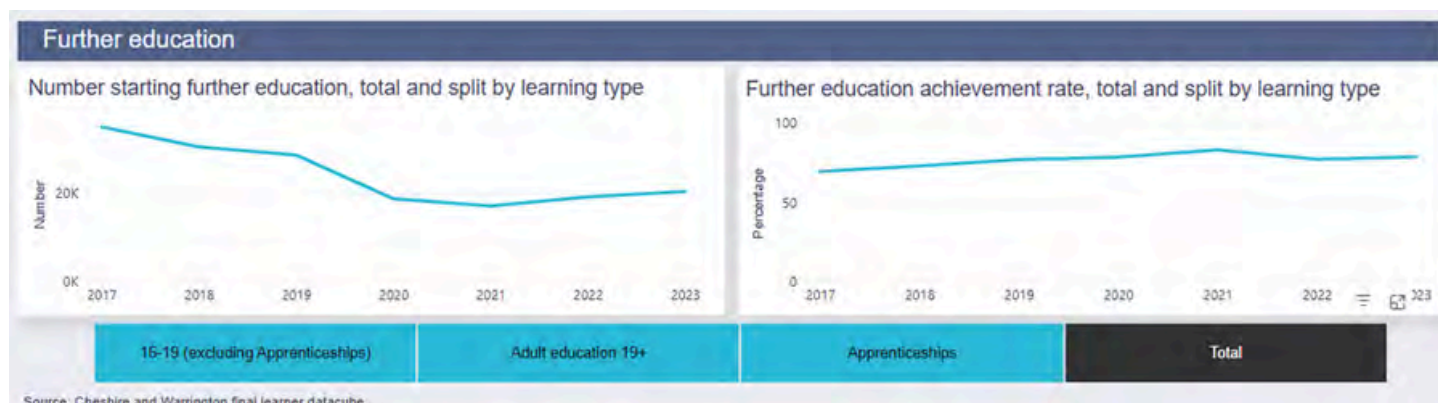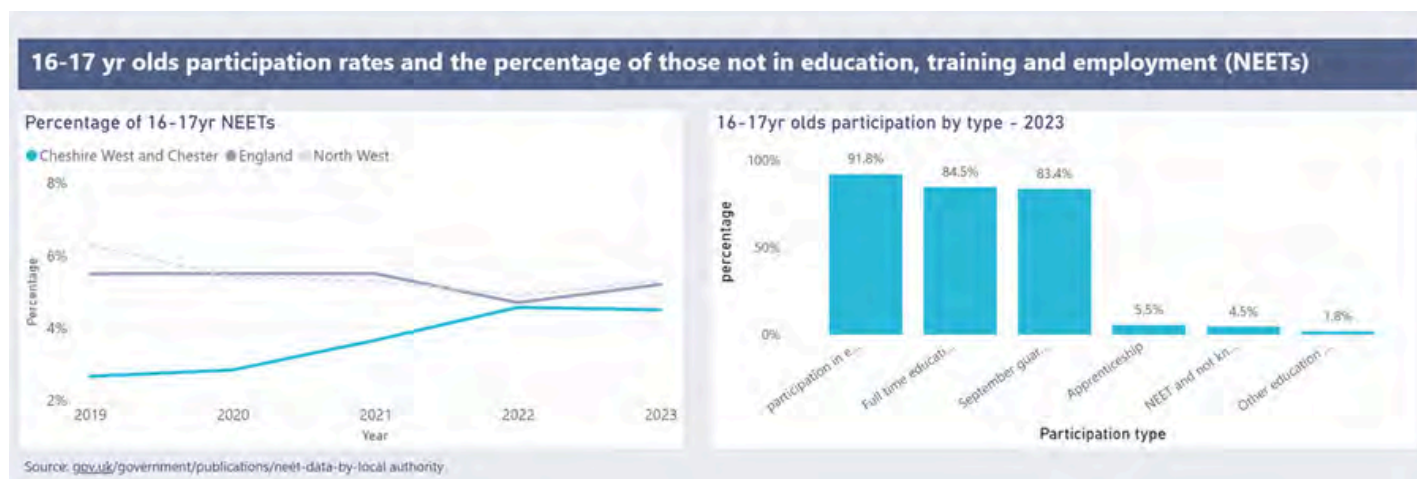
The number of 16-17 year olds starting further education declined from 35,153 in 2017 to 17,181 in 2021 (a decline of 51%) before increasing to 20,477 in 2023. A significant driver has been the decline in Adult education 19+ reducing from 22,006 in 2017 to 7,004 in 2021, slightly increasing to 8,644 in 2023

Further education

Number starting further education, total and split by learning type

Further education achievement rate, total and split by learning type

16-19 (excluding Apprenticeships) | Adult education 19+ | Apprenticeships | Total

Source: Cheshire and Warrington final learner datacube

10. Not in Education Employment or Training

The percentage of 16-17 year olds Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs) stood at 4.5% in 2023. The level of NEETs within the borough has been consistently lower than both the national and regional rates for the past 5 years. The key destinations for 16-17 year olds is full time education and training, with 84.5% entering education and 5.5% into apprenticeships post 16.

16-17 yr olds participation rates and the percentage of those not in education, training and employment (NEETs)

Percentage of 16-17yr NEETs

Cheshire West and Chester / England / North West

16-17yr olds participation by type - 2023

91.8%   84.5%   83.4%   5.5%   4.5%   1.8%

Source: gov.uk/government/publications/neet-data-by-local-authority

In 2021-2022
- 3.7% of 16–17-year-olds (universal) were Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET)
- 8.3% of 16–17-year-olds with an EHCP, were Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET)
- 8.7% of 16-17-year-olds with SEN Support were Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET)

(https://www.livewell.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/Information/Inclusion-matters)

11. Deprivation

Whilst Cheshire West is an affluent borough the overall picture masks stark gaps between areas of prosperity and deprivation. The median local household income is £37,800 per year but 20.0% of local households have an annual income of less than £22,700 compared to 19.8% nationally.

Some 26,731 local people live in neighbourhoods ranked in the most deprived 10% in England and the number of local children in low-income families has increased from 13.3% in 2020/21, to 17.3% or 10,796 children in 2022/23. 11.4% of Cheshire West and Chester households live in fuel poverty.

Around 17% (10,796) of children under 16 were living in low income families in 2023/23. This has increased from around 13% in 2020/21.

The proportion of children living in low income households, 17.3% (10,796) is lower in CWAC than England (20.1%). In three wards (Wolverham, Central & Grange and Blacon) in the borough 30% of children were living in low income households in 2022/23.

Percentage of children (aged under 16) living in low income families by ward (2022/23)

More recent information shows that visits to food banks have fallen from a high of 26,012 in 2022/23 to 23,126 in 2023/4.

12. Employment

Gathering precise employment data for 13 to 19 year olds is challenging. Most data sources begin at age 16, and even then, employment and income data for those aged 16 to 19 are often grouped with broader age ranges, such as 16+ or 16 to 24.

The local employment rate, which is collected by survey, fell to a low of 68.9% in 2023 but has since increased to 82.6%, better than both the England (75.7%) and the North West (73.0%). Model-based unemployment remains well below the national average, as do unemployment benefit claimant rates.

In April 2025 5,885 residents were claiming out of work benefits. 1235 of there were aged 16-24.

Claimant count by age - not seasonally adjusted (April 2025)

	Cheshire West And Chester (Level)	Cheshire West And Chester (%)	North West (%)	Great Britain (%)
Aged 16+	5,885	2.7	4.5	4.2
Aged 16 To 17	15	0.2	0.2	0.2
Aged 18 To 24	1,220	4.6	6.4	5.6
Aged 18 To 21	720	5.0	6.8	6.0
Aged 25 To 49	3,415	3.1	5.3	4.7
Aged 50+	1,240	1.6	2.9	3.1

Source: ONS Claimant count by sex and age
Note: % is number of claimants as a proportion of resident population of the same age

☐ view time-series ☐ compare other areas ☐ query dataset... ⊞

(https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157072/report.aspx#tabempunemp)

13. Housing

Of the 163,876 homes and dwellings in Cheshire West, 30.3% are rented, 31.2% are owned with a mortgage or loan and 37.1% are owned outright. 46,889 local people live alone. The average property price in the borough in February 2024 is £265,000. Across the North West, the average house price in February 2024 was £214,000. This means that, in February 2024, Cheshire West and Chester had the fifth-highest average house price in the North West.

On 1 May 2024, there were 6706 applicants registered on the housing waiting list, showing the extent of local demand for social rented housing.

Profile of Households Experiencing Homelessness
The family composition of households owned a prevention duty is detailed in the table below.
Households with children presenting at prevention stages have remained consistently between 43% and 46% for the last 3 years.

Household composition prevention duty	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Single	306	343	316
Couple/other	58	77	72
Households with children	275	352	320
Total	639	772	708

Source: HCLIC

The table below shows the age of the main applicant owed a prevention or relief duty over the last three years.

Age	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
16 - 17 years	17 (1%)	18 (1%)	14 (1%)
18 - 24 years	310 (18%)	376 (18%)	348 (18%)
25 - 34 years	528 (31%)	647 (31%)	545 (28%)
35 - 44 years	419 (25%)	548 (26%)	501 (26%)
45 - 54 years	239 (14%)	283 (14%)	266 (14%)
55 - 64 years	111 (7%)	145 (7%)	149 (8%)
65 - 74 years	53 (3%)	57 (3%)	69 (4%)
75+ years	18 (1%)	19 (1%)	21 (1%)

Source: HCLIC

The largest age group every year is those aged 25 – 34 years, followed by those aged 35 – 44 years. In 2023/24 people aged 18 – 34 years accounted for 46% of all customers. Younger people are more likely to struggle to find affordable housing options, particularly single under 35 years old who are subject to the shared room rate and lower Universal Credit entitlements.

In 2023/24 a total of 2,003 support needs were identified for 1,070 households, this accounts for 56% of households owed a duty having a support need. This is a decrease of 26% of households having a support need from 2022/23. At the time of writing this review, further investigation is being completed to identify the reason for the reduction, but initial evidence suggests that it is a processing error within the ICT platform. The nature of the identified support needs is detailed below.

Support Needs	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
History of mental health problems	965	942	468
Physical ill health and disability	584	596	340
At risk of / has experienced domestic abuse	440	387	190
Offending history	452	384	173
History of repeat homelessness	471	368	105
Drug dependency needs	206	170	99
History of rough sleeping	366	245	100
Alcohol dependency needs	173	151	90
Learning disability	330	249	62
Young person aged 18-25 years requiring support to manage independently	142	134	73
Access to education, employment or training	129	157	14
At risk of / has experienced abuse (non-domestic abuse)	235	160	42
At risk of / has experienced sexual abuse / exploitation	127	82	15
Old age	60	44	27
Care leaver aged 21+ years	58	55	24
Care leaver aged 18-20 years	20	25	16
Young person aged 16-17 years	22	22	15
Young parent requiring support to manage independently	33	24	21
Former asylum seeker	12	32	90
Served in HM Forces	42	50	17
Support needs-Difficulties budgeting	0	0	20
Support needs-Victim of modern slavery	0	0	2
Total	4,867	4,277	2,003

Source: HCLIC

(www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/asset-library/review-of-homelessness-june-2024-v1.pdf)

14. Safety and Security

The Crime rate has decreased in the borough over the last three years and has remained consistently below the rate in England in this period. 24,872 crimes where recorded in Cheshire West and Chester in the year ending June 2024.

Recorded crime in Cheshire West and Chester by offence type

During 2023 there has been a 31.4% decrease (555 fewer) in Youth Related Incidents recorded in Cheshire West and Chester.

Across the Force area in 2023 there has been a 33.2% decrease in Youth Related Incidents, which means Cheshire West and Chester has recorded a smaller percentage decrease. When comparing the volume of Youth Related Incidents by Local Authority, Cheshire West and Chester has recorded the second smallest percentage decrease when compared to 2022.

(https://www.westcheshire-csp.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Strategic-Assessment-2023.pdf)
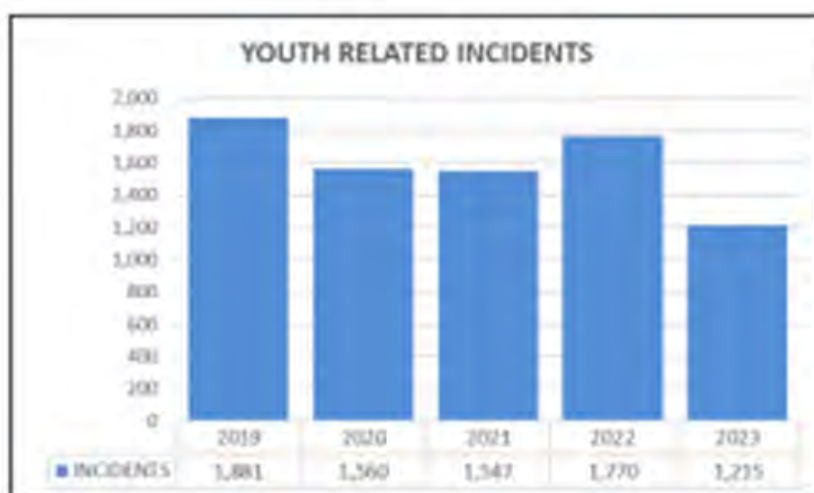
15. Recreation and Leisure
Satisfaction with the borough's public transport has declined to 47%, its lowest since 2015. 83% of the boroughs households have at least one car or van.

Brio Leisure operate 4 primary hub sites and 3 secondary hub sites.
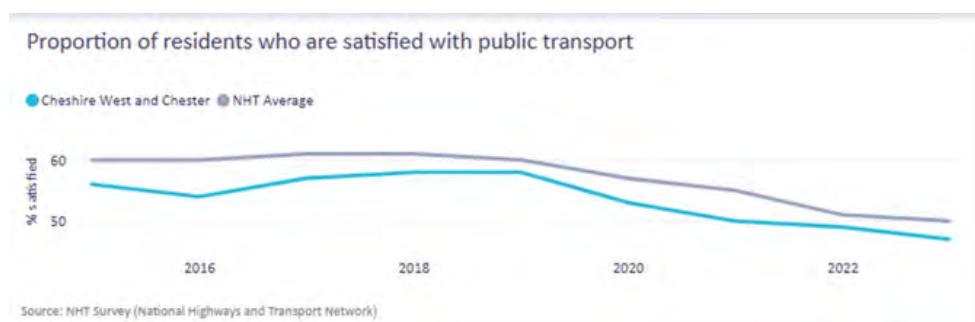
16. Civic Engagement and Participation

Young people from the borough took part in the United Kingdom Youth Parliament bi-annual Make Your Mark vote, to identify which issues were most important to them. Health and Wellbeing was identified as the most important issue for young people closely followed by Crime and Safety.

Local Council	Population age 11-18	Total Vote	Turnout %
Cheshire West and Chester	32,516	3,241	10.0%

	Health and wellbeing	Education and learning	Climate and environment	Crime and safety	Culture media sport	International relations	Jobs economy benefits	Rights equalities democracy	Transport	Youth work	Total Vote
Cheshire West and Chester	552	331	342	484	424	85	466	236	237	84	3,241

17. Technology

It is estimated that at least 25,000 residents in Cheshire West and Chester are at risk of digital exclusion, of these, it is believed that two thirds are older people and most are from less affluent backgrounds, the remaining third are younger people and families from more deprived areas.

b. Appendix - Additional Data Findings
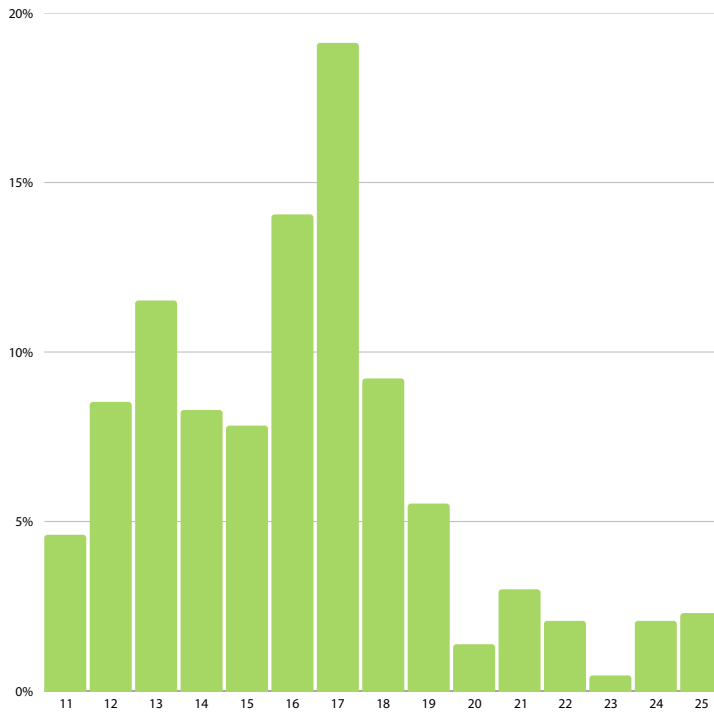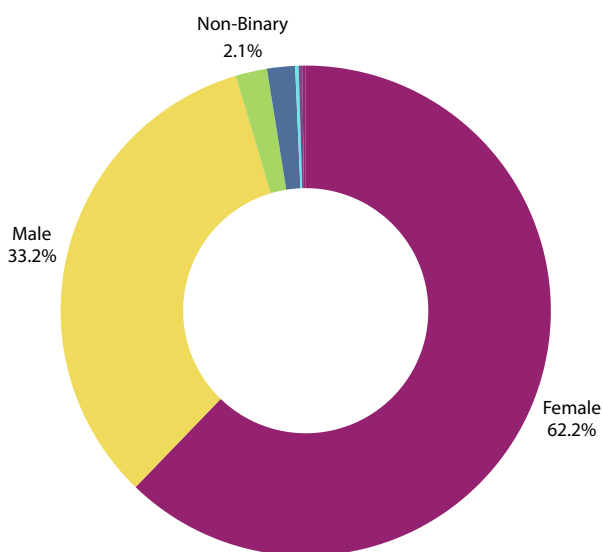
Fig: 1 Young people survey responses by age

Fig: 2 Responses by gender

Young People's Engagement in Activities

Arts and Creative
19% (n.83) of young people took part in weekly drama, art and music classes, 13 and 14 year olds and 16 and 17s were most engaged in this activity.

Outdoor activities (such as camping, climbing or woodcraft)
Only 8% (n. 36) of young people took part in outdoor activities on a weekly basis, with participation rising to 22% for those who participate a few times a year. Those who do participate a few times per year were in the 15-18 year old group, with 13 year olds also featuring highly, 44% (n. 192) stated they never take part in outdoor activities.

Nature based activities (e.g. gardening club, environmental projects)
Only 5% (n.21) of young people took part in weekly nature activities, participation rose slightly as frequency decreased, with 11% (n.49) of young people taking part a few times per year.

Parents and Carers Survey Responses

44 responses were received from parents and carers. 68% of respondents had one child or young person, 30% had 2 children, 2% had three children or young people.

Fig. 15 Number of children by age

Activities young people would like to access in their areas

CH1	Dance, Baking, Book club, Airsoft, Pottery class Camping, surfing , outdoor activities, bush skills Cultural activities (e.g. traditional handcrafts), book clubs, instrument lessons Bring a climbing hangar to Chester Girls football, Squash, Dodgeball, Rugby league, More sports clubs for beginners at our age More live music, enjoy more time in nature, Want a music club too please. Pilates, tree climbing, bingo, Paddle, Yoga Career fair Like to go fishing. Would like to do voluntary things. Want to do woodwork club. Learn how to play guitar, more trips Something for LGBT neurodiverse people
CH2	Gym, Rock climbing, Volleyball club, Hiking groups, Paddle, skiing at Chill Factore, More trips Photography club, Art, Drama , Hiphop/ grime/ dnb classes More activities related to animals/ farms
CH3	Camping Go to sports more, gym, Swimming, stuff like dirt biking etc Gardening club Pokémon tournament
CH4	Yoga and mindfulness, Swimming or gym group, Ju Jitsu Dog walking group Theatre group, Music Horse riding, escape rooms Litter picking Hair
CH5	Pottery D&D/ roleplaying games, any kind of gardening. Some kind of Neurodivergent socialising that can help make friends

Activities young people would like to access in their areas

CH6	Arts, drama, it's really difficult to get into these things because a lot of places only do them up to 16 and it's hard to find places that accommodate people 18+ Kick boxing, Mountain biking, Trampolining
CH7	Football
CH22	Access to music facilities such as recording studios, music lessons that are affordable Ballet
CH42	Just more things for us older teens Gaming in clubs , marvel club
CH45	Pilates
CH64	Beauty Groups
CH65	More nights at club, Music related activities, i cant find any anywhere!!! more drama based opportunities. sky diving, Basketball, badminton, Roller-skating, Rock climbing, Netball court, Outdoor sports courts, Sports hall play football in, tennis, yoga, swimming, Pool, darts, football Airsoft or paintball If there was a close area for music First aid lessons somewhere where I can learn a skill or hobby Volunteering in the community Somewhere to see friends Relationship advice, nature activities/gardening Coin collectors club, other group like Scouts Water park Learning about trades (plumbing, electrician etc) Woodwork

Activities young people would like to access in their areas

CH66	Bikes/Cycling, Rock climbing, Orienteering, boxing but can't afford and no time Collective revision groups Since its closure, there is nowhere to do Ninjitsu in the city. More just dance Outdoor sports outdoor gym Archery Go to a Youth Club or have space to hang out with other people my age. They don't exist in Ellesmere Port. Something like The Hive in Birkenhead would be great." Pool/billiards, Hockey, Rugby league, Water sports
CW6	Open drawing/art classes More mountain Biking Performing arts/Dance
CW7	Techno raves Horse riding, Tennis Learn how to build stuff like making chairs, Learn a different language Air hockey getting fixed Crochet, knitting, baking clubs Mountain biking Art group for kids with social difficulties I would like the wii fixed Go to the gym being 16 or under
CW8	More Horse Riding places that do Barrel Racing Pottery Painting Club, Art Club, Book Club Socials....like girls on the go Social groups for young adults, More craft clubs/groups for young adults More LGBTQ+ spaces Pool club, Rounders club, Archery, Skiing, Darts, Boxing, Athletics, Cross Country Mountain Biking, Running, water sports (not swimming) paddle boarding Club to do beauty treatments Life skills, cooking club Anime art classes, group gaming, Gaming on consoles Arcades or bowling

Activities young people would like to access in their areas

CW9	Makeup and hair Vr Climbing wall More central youth clubs Guitar LGBTQ youth group Zip lining, bungee jumping, Go ape Casual youth group
WA6	Cinema. Sports. Hanging out Ice skating Shooting group Cycling where there is no traffic or people. Gardening Play in a music band Darts

Cheshire West and Chester

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