



Cheshire West & Chester Council

# Public Health Annual Report 2025

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Cheshire West  
and Chester

## Public Health Annual Report 2025

### 1. Foreword

Welcome to my third Public Health Annual Report as the Director of Public Health for Cheshire West and Chester. This year's report focuses on – and celebrates - youth voice - the perspectives, experiences and insights of our children and young people - and how we, as a system, are working collaboratively to support them to live their healthiest, happiest and most fulfilled lives.

Across the borough, our partners have demonstrated a strong and sustained commitment to ensuring that local voice and lived experience shape everything we do. We have collectively recognised that understanding the real challenges faced by our residents - and equally, recognising where things are working well - is essential to designing services that truly meet local needs. Over the past year, there has been a marked shift towards embedding resident voice into service design, strategy development and investment decisions. At the heart of this approach is a simple truth: if we want to enable and empower the people of Cheshire West and Chester to live the healthiest lives possible, their voice must remain front and centre in the decisions we make.

While this commitment spans all generations, I am particularly proud of the progress we have made in elevating youth voice. As this report highlights, we have exceptional young people across our communities stepping into leadership roles and contributing their insight across a range of key areas - from local democracy and climate action to community safety, healthier food environments, and more. Their energy, passion and clarity of purpose remind us that young people are not only the leaders of tomorrow; they are shaping meaningful change today.

This work has only been possible through strong collective leadership and partnership. Our schools, youth organisations, voluntary and community groups, health services, and local authority teams have come together with a shared purpose: to improve the lives of young people by involving them directly in shaping the policies and services that affect their everyday experiences. This collaborative commitment is something we should all be proud of. It demonstrates what can be achieved when we place trust in our young people and value their lived experience as a form of expertise.

As you read this report, I hope you are inspired by the voices within it. Their contributions not only enrich our understanding of the issues that matter to them but also strengthen our ability to create a fairer, healthier borough for all.

Together, we will continue to build a system that listens, values and acts on youth voice - because when we involve young people meaningfully, we create better futures for everyone.

**Professor Helen Bromley**

**Director of Public Health**

**Cheshire West and Chester Council**

## 2. Progress on past recommendations and priorities from the 2024 report

1

Increase the supply of homes within Cheshire West and Chester, in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework 2024. To achieve this, the property sector must collaborate closely with Cheshire West and Chester Council to best understand local needs, ensuring the most effective use of community assets and guarantee an equitable process throughout.

### 2.1

- 2.1.1 In 2024-25 1202 new homes were completed in Cheshire West and Chester, against a 1100 annual target in the Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan
- 2.1.2 Housing and Planning colleagues have worked closely together in response to the new national Standard Method Housing Target of 1,928 units per year and changes to the National Planning Policy Framework, to provide feedback to developers on pre-applications and planning applications for around 15,000 units between December 2024 and December 2025.
- 2.1.3 A Borough Housing Needs Assessment was commissioned in November 2025 to identify the mix and type of new homes required, including affordable and specialised accommodation to inform the planning process.

2

Cheshire West and Chester Council should continue to work with registered providers, private landlords and developers to maximise opportunities to enhance the existing housing stock available and ensure that any existing and future stock meets relevant housing and planning legislation. Efforts should be made to minimise number of 'non-decent' properties across the borough, with a particular focus on Council owned dwellings.

### 2.2

- 2.2.1 The Council continues to offer Safe and Warm Grants and Decent Home Loans for owner occupiers on low incomes to address disrepair and bring homes up to the Decent Homes Standard.
- 2.2.2 In the private rent sector, the Council's Housing Standards Team have Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in the following areas.
  - Resolving 85% of serious damp and mould hazards identified at inspection, within six months.
  - Returning 200 long term empty properties back into use each year.
- 2.2.3 All of these KPI targets are not only being achieved but are consistently exceeded, which is through effective communication with landlords and, where necessary, taking swift enforcement action.
- 2.2.4 The Housing Standards Team are responsible for licensing larger houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), which are inspected at least every five years. Good relationships have been established with landlords of HMOs, resulting in disrepair being addressed quickly with minimal need for formal enforcement action.

- 2.2.5 The Council offer empty property grants to landlords and have recently brought two long term empty properties back into use, providing affordable accommodation for two families, and have also approved a further two grant applications.
- 2.2.6 The Housing Standards Team have a good relationship with Registered Providers (social landlords) and direct communications with their repairs teams, which enables reports of serious disrepair to be investigated urgently.
- 2.2.7 There is a requirement for the Council to ensure that its housing stock meets the Decent Homes Standard. From 1 April 2026 the housing management service will be insourced and managed directly by the Council. Monitoring will be carried out via a new key performance framework covering compliance measures such as disrepair, decency, gas and electrical safety.

3

In collaboration with the NHS and third-sector organizations, Cheshire West and Chester Council should continue to support initiatives that enable vulnerable individuals such as those with disabilities to maintain independence and remain in their own homes for as long as possible. This can be achieved through financial assistance such as the Disabled Facility Grants, home improvement loan schemes, or through the provision of other practical advice and tailored support.

2.3

- 2.3.1 Housing and Occupational Therapy Services work together with the Home Improvement Agency to provide adaptations for older and disabled people, to enable them and their families to live as independently and safely in their homes as possible.
- 2.3.2 As well as statutory Disabled Facilities Grants, the Council offers Urgent Works Grants for high-risk situations, and Relocation Grants to help people to move to a property that better meets their needs.
- 2.3.3 Housing and Occupational Therapy Services work in partnership with Registered Providers to make best use of existing adapted housing stock and improve outcomes for social housing tenants requiring adaptations.
- 2.3.4 Under the Council's Housing Assistance Policy, the Council offers Safe and Warm Grants and Decent Home Loans to owner occupiers on low incomes to fund essential repairs and home improvements and remove serious hazards.
- 2.3.5 The Home Improvement Agency service supports individuals applying for the range of financial assistance available for adaptations and repairs. It also delivers the Minor Adaptations service, installing smaller measures such as grab rails and stair rails which improve safety and reduce the risk of falls.

4

When allocating temporary accommodation, the specific health needs and impacts on individuals must be considered carefully, particularly for families with young children or vulnerable adults. The Council should work with healthcare providers and charities to minimise the barriers faced by these individuals when accessing education and employment and where possible ensure essential amenities such as cooking and laundry facilities are provided.

2.4

- 2.4.1 Health and vulnerability factors are routinely considered when allocating temporary accommodation, prioritising families and vulnerable adults to ensure the best use of the provision available.
- 2.4.2 Where possible, the Council allocate temporary accommodation with cooking and laundry facilities to families.
- 2.4.3 Joint working with support providers helps to minimise barriers to education and employment for households placed in temporary accommodation, including, when needed, supporting families to minimise any impact on education.
- 2.4.4 Additional work is underway as part of the 2026 inhouse transition to strengthen pathways, improve suitability of temporary accommodation, and ensure earlier identification of health-related accommodation needs. The Housing Options Team informs Early Help and Prevention Services when a family is placed in temporary accommodation, enabling timely support and ensuring appropriate assistance is in place.

5

Continue to use co-production methods when developing future strategies and workplans such as the Housing Strategy and the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. This will enable us to learn from, and capitalise on, the wealth and variety of lived experience available across the borough. This will ensure joint decision-making is at the heart of our future policy decisions and frameworks.

- 2.5
  - 2.5.1 Co-production has been embedded throughout the development of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, with insight gathered from people with lived experience, staff, and members of the Homelessness Reduction Board.
  - 2.5.2 Lived experience feedback continues to shape service redesign work, including the 2026 in-house transition of homelessness support services.
  - 2.5.3 A service user survey and focus groups have helped to inform the development of the Home Improvement Agency service.
  - 2.5.4 A co-produced Housing Prospectus was released in September 2025 to communicate the type and volume of housing required locally to adult social care providers and housing developers. The goal is to deliver over 400 new units of specialist accommodation for people with learning difficulties and mental health needs over the next decade.
  - 2.5.5 It is a requirement of the Regulator of Social Housing that all services are co-produced with tenants and that tenants are placed at the heart of everything the service does. From August 2026, a new tenant scrutiny panel will be set up to enhance the opportunities for tenants to help shape services they receive.

### **3. Your Voice, Your Future: Youth voice and supporting young people to live their best, healthiest, most fulfilled lives**

3.1 In recent years, there has been an increased focus on local voice across Cheshire West and Chester, acknowledging that by contributing their knowledge, skills and experiences, our residents can play a significant role in co-creating actionable change.

3.2 Young people have a unique perspective and often see the world in different ways to adults. Yet many young people feel their concerns are ignored in policymaking and often lack access to opportunities and activities due to cost, transport, and safety concerns<sup>i</sup>. In Cheshire West and Chester, we are looking to change that.

3.3 Partners from across Cheshire West and Chester have been working hard to incorporate youth voice into their work, using the lived and living experiences of young people to shape services, develop programmes of work, identify areas that work well, where things need to improve, and to advocate for change.

#### **3.4 What do we mean by youth?**

3.4.1 When we talk about ‘young people’ and ‘youth’ there is no clear definition, although generally ‘young people’ are classed as those between the age of 11 and 18 (up to 25 for those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) and ‘youth’ defined as those between the ages of 15 and 24<sup>ii</sup>. In this report, we focus on those between the ages of 11 and 18 (25 for those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities), in line with the Youth Service offer in Cheshire West and Chester.

#### **3.5 What is important to youth in Cheshire West and Chester and how are they being supported and championed to make change?**

3.5.1 During 2025, a lot of work took place to understand what is important to young people in Cheshire West and Chester, where they feel they need more support, what needs to change to improve their lives, and where they feel that they can contribute and add value.

3.5.2 As you would expect, some of the insight has focussed on the individual and their mental and physical health, however many of the themes identified were much broader than this, those factors which are often termed as the wider determinants of health.

3.5.3 The wider determinants of health relate to the foundations of good health, including access to good-quality homes, education, employment and safe spaces in which to play, exercise and socialise. These all determine how long we are likely to live and the quality of that life.

3.5.4 Insight for this report has been gathered from a range of sources and themed into broad categories. The sources include a Needs Assessment of the Youth Offer in Cheshire West and Chester<sup>iii</sup> (funded by The Westminster Foundation and undertaken by Youth Focus North West); insight from a series of Fairer Futures consultations with the Youth Senate, the Youth Service, and Primary and Secondary Schools; a youth volunteering project led by Cheshire West Voluntary Action and funded by the Westminster Foundation; workshops delivered by national advocacy organisation Bite Back; and interviews with young people.

3.5.5 The young people spoke about many topics, which, for the purpose of this report, have been broadly themed into those detailed below. Mental health and access to services and support was a common theme for our young people, and whilst it runs through the

other themes of this report, it was decided that a short case study could not do it justice. Mental health is a key priority in the new Cheshire West and Chester Youth Strategy, and it has been proposed as a potential topic for a future Public Health Annual Report.

### 3.6 **Themes**

- Listening to youth voice, enabling and empowering young people to advocate for change
- Careers and employment
- Education, training and opportunities for volunteering
- Tackling Poverty
- Feeling safe
- The local environment
- Healthy affordable food

#### **Listening to youth voice – youth voice matters**

Young people in Cheshire West and Chester said: “It is important to listen to different voices and opinions”, “for young people to be listened to”. They want “just to be included in decisions”. They feel “it is important to challenge the point, not the person, and to walk in other people’s shoes”, and that young people need “skills for debating and advocating for themselves”.

What the data says:

National data indicates that only 22% of children and young people (6–17 year olds) believe that people who run the country listen to what they have to say, reflecting a significant gap in the representation of youth voices in decision-making processes.<sup>iv</sup>

The 2025 Youth Voice Census<sup>v</sup> reveals that young people express concerns about their wellbeing, career options, and the need for better support systems. The report highlights challenges such as anxiety and a lack of confidence in their future, indicating that many young people feel unheard or unsupported.

In Cheshire West and Chester:

The 2025 Youth Needs Assessment explicitly reports that young people want greater involvement in decision making. The findings highlight the need for young people to have “a real say in decisions that affect them”.

#### **Case Study: Youth Activism and Democracy**

##### **Amy, Youth Councillor**

Amy is 17 years old and from Chester.

“I am a member of Youth Parliament for Cheshire West and Chester. Over the last three years, I have been a member of the Youth Senate, where I have gained the platform and confidence to use my voice for change.

“During my time as a youth councillor, I was encouraged to go for the North West Net Zero youth steering group. In the project I ran workshops to gather information about green jobs and economy to analyse and create suggestions. These suggestions were then put forward at a conference where I got to sit with Metro Mayors in front of 300 business people to show the importance of youth voice in the climate crisis. This opportunity led me to further speak surrounding the climate crisis. I now sit on the Council’s climate taskforce, I am a member of

the For Planet steering group, which is a team developing an app to alleviate climate anxiety, and have spoken at various conferences surrounding this topic.

“I got to speak at the Labour Party Conference in September 2024 on a panel with two ex-shadow ministers surrounding young people’s health, with me having a focus on my work between climate change and poor mental health within young people as well as education’s impact on young people’s mental health. I have since had the opportunity to return to speak regarding votes at 16 and the importance of young people in decision making.



Image details: Amy pictured outside the House of Lords (left) and at the West Cheshire Action on Climate and Nature event, Chester Zoo (right)

“This was only the beginning of my activism journey; I have since had the opportunity to use my voice to represent young people at so many conferences and be able to educate young people on so many issues through workshops. This is so important as young people aren’t the future they are here today. They have experience and insights in areas that others don’t. We are the most informed people in our own lives so should have seats in the conversation rather than be spoken for.”

### Careers and employment

Young people in Cheshire West and Chester said that there needs to be “more job opportunities for young people”, “fairness in job and applicant selection”, “work experience that is paid”, “programmes and opportunities available for everyone to access”.

What the data says:

- Nearly one million young people (one in eight) in England aged 16–24 are not in education, employment, or training (NEET)<sup>vi</sup>

- Young people say that lack of work experience and local jobs are major barriers to employment, alongside mental health and anxiety<sup>vii</sup>

In Cheshire West and Chester:

- 5.5% of 16–17-year-olds were considered NEET in 2023-24, compared to 5.4% across England. For Cheshire West and Chester this equates to 405 young people<sup>viii</sup> and has increased from the previous year.

### **Case Study – Turning a hobby into employment**

#### **Evie Mallinson, Brio Leisure**

Evie joined Brio Leisure as a Rising Star volunteer, before going on to train as an Assistant Swimming Teacher and Level 2 Swimming Teacher.

Evie wrote:

“I’ve been part of Brio just over a year, first as a Rising Star, then as a Level 1, and have recently qualified as a Level 2 Swimming Teacher. Swimming has always been something I’ve enjoyed, and after seeing the Rising Star volunteering advertised at our local Brio site, it seemed like a fantastic opportunity.

“I felt immediately welcomed by the Brio team, and during my volunteering everyone was incredibly helpful and understanding. Making friends with members of the team of a wide range of ages has been something I’ve found really valuable, and it’s lovely to have a job that has such a vital impact on people’s lives.

“Throughout my time here, I’ve been encouraged to grow as a teacher, and Brio have supported me every step of the way, particularly through opportunities to shadow other teachers and take courses. Assisting in lessons is something I look forward to doing every weekend, and so this job doesn’t just help those learning to swim, but is thoroughly rewarding for us teaching it too, and I would absolutely recommend it to anyone who likes swimming and teaching!”



Image details: Evie in her Brio uniform after completing her swim teacher training.

## Education, training and opportunities for volunteering

Young people said that there should be “more job opportunities”, “fairness in jobs and applicant selection”, “paid work experience”, “volunteering which interests me and is meaningful”, and “work experience which will turn into a job”.

What the data says:

- Across England many young people leave school at 16 with poor qualifications, especially in English and Maths, leaving them unprepared for work. About 80,000 young people each year achieve very low grades (below level 2)<sup>x</sup>
- Socio-emotional skills (communication, resilience) among 15–16-year-olds in England rank below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average, which may harm employability<sup>x</sup>
- Nationally, volunteering participation is lower among young people, with trends suggesting a persistent decline<sup>xi</sup>

In Cheshire West and Chester:

- The Council has recognised the need to provide free maths and English courses through the Essential Skills project as well as mental health, resilience and life-skills support for young people.

### **Case Study: How do we make volunteering fit for a younger generation? Michael Mitchell, Cheshire West Voluntary Action (CWVA)**

CWVA act as the voice of the voluntary sector in Cheshire West and Chester.

The Cheshire West Vision for Volunteering (2025-2030) first identified the need to boost rates of volunteering among younger people, specifically 14-25 year olds.

Through funding received from the Westminster Foundation, the project explored how volunteer-involving organisations need to change and adapt their volunteering programmes to better suit a younger generation of volunteers. This included volunteer management best practice, how to empower younger volunteers, and how to create meaningful roles which provide space for development and growth of existing skills.

CWVA ran five initial codesign workshops, working with four different organisations – 2Engage; Live!; YouthFed; and Grosvenor Hart Homes – to reach groups of younger people. These groups included care leavers, university students, those with neurodivergence, and those from low-income families.

Overwhelmingly, the young people fully understood the benefits of volunteering – giving back to the community, gaining valuable experience, staying physically active, doing something positive, providing structure and routine, making new social connections, and supporting mental wellbeing. Others directly cited the ‘five ways to wellbeing’ principles without prompt, pointing out that volunteering could apply to pretty much all of them.

However, the reticence to follow up and find a volunteering role comes from the lack of meaningful opportunities available. Those involved felt volunteering ‘wasn’t for them’, with roles designed by an older generation who do not fully understand the skills and interest of their younger peers. Many felt as though they had much to offer local charities – digital skills, influencing, art, creativity – but lacked the ability to influence organisational structures and cultures.

Using the feedback and comments from the younger people involved in these workshops, the project enabled CWVA to co-produce a range of training materials and learning resources intended for volunteer managers. These resources, led and shaped by the voices of younger people, focus on how volunteer managers can better support and accommodate the next generation of volunteers.



Image details: Workshop to understand how volunteering can support young people.

## Tacking Poverty

Young people in Cheshire West and Chester said that “if I had more money, I would help my mum to pay her bills”. “I think everyone should have at least enough money for food and a drink...they should have a roof over their head and be warm”. Young people feel that “school uniform is expensive”, “we should have a choice in what we wear”, “there should be a uniform exchange for the senior school, and more affordable options”.

What the data says:

- In 2023/24, 31% of children in the UK (4.5 million) lived in relative poverty. England’s child poverty rate rose to 31%, up from 30% the previous year.<sup>xii</sup>
- Among households with children, 72% in poverty have at least one working adult.
- 14% of children faced deep material poverty (unable to afford at least 4 of 13 essentials) in 2024.
- Adolescents aged 11–18 in England are experiencing poverty at record levels, roughly one in three lives in relative poverty.
- Across England for the academic year 2023/24 the average total expenditure on school uniform and PE kit combined was £381.926. There were higher levels of expenditure

for children in secondary schools than in primary schools (£442.25 v £343.28), and within both phases, for girls (secondary: £454.31; primary: £357.28) than boys (secondary: £430.40; primary: £330.78)<sup>xiii</sup>.

In Cheshire West and Chester:

- Latest figures show that 10,772 children aged 0–16 were in relative low-income families in 2022/23, increasing to 11,164 in 2023/24 (a 4% rise)<sup>xiv</sup>.
- In 2023/24, 68% of children in poverty were from households with at least one working adult, an increase from 64.7% in 2022/23<sup>xv</sup>.
- In Cheshire West and Chester 20,137, children and young people were estimated to be living in poverty after housing costs, 27.8% of all children and young people (Local Indicators of Child Poverty After Housing Costs statistics 2025)<sup>xvi</sup>.

### **Case study: Addressing financial barriers related to the school day** **Sharon Marshall, The Tackling Poverty Team**

School uniform and the cost of the school day have been recurring topics of conversation with families, parents, carers, young people, and partner organisations. Concerns include affordability, inclusivity, and the environmental impact of uniform and sports kit, the role of uniform policies in supporting dignity and equality, and sanctions and lost learning for young people due to school uniform.

To address these issues, a multi-stakeholder working group was formed and together, they developed a series of actions to achieve a co-created ambition that:

*“Every school has a clear policy which promotes access and choice to quality affordable uniform in a way that supports inclusivity, dignity, and is mindful of the environment.”*

The work highlighted the need to gain insight by speaking to young people about what ‘good’ looks like from their perspective and hear some of the challenges around uniform affordability, special educational needs and as the impact and consequences of uniform policies.

Through the conversations young people have said “school uniforms are good to have and give people an equal playing field”. They like that they are “smart and everyone looks the same”. Equality and fairness is something the young people spoke about a lot and how as young people they are not seen as equal.

The link between learning and uniform was also important with an agreement that learning is the most important priority for everyone, as one young person said “*my hair colour doesn’t affect my learning, but being in isolation due to hair colour will*”. Practical issues also came up within some girls noting that they don’t have a useable pocket to be able to carry pens or money throughout the day.

Coming up with lots of suggestions, in one school we sat down with the school council and head to talk through their ideas of what ‘good’ looks like. Discussions around why things may not be possible as well as listening to things that could be changed or made better.

As a result of all this work, funding was made available to run a pilot project for enhanced support for families in hardship to meet the essential costs of school uniform. To date, this pilot has already supported 400 children across the borough through enhanced partnership working with voluntary, community, faith-based, and social enterprise (VCFSE) organisations.



- Fears around knife crime, weapon-carrying, and gang presence drive avoidance behaviours and reduce independence.

In Cheshire West and Chester:

- All crime across the Cheshire West and Chester area reduced by 4% in 2024. 1,013 less offences were recorded which resulted in a total of 24,828 offences, which is the lowest volume over the 5 year period<sup>xvii</sup>.
- Whilst most crime types reduced in Cheshire West and Chester, a number of crime types increased, these were Cyber Crime (+29%), Harassment (+27%), Drug related Crime (+15%) and Hate Crime (+12%).

### **Case study – How being listened to has helped me feel safer**

#### **Axl, Young Person representing the Safeguarding Partnership**

Axl is now 19 years old, they have recently left their college course mid-way through their final year and when they first engaged with the Youth Service were feeling very low with no enthusiasm or structure to their life. Axl struggles with mental and physical health difficulties, they identify as male and prefers the pronouns him/they. Axl has had a difficult childhood moving between parents and grandparents but is now settled in supported youth accommodation.

Axl decided they wanted to start attending the Youth Senate and started attending online and in person meetings. Axl soon started to put themselves forward for other activities, in January they attended Cheshire West Safeguarding Partnership Board where they openly discussed how unsafe they feel as a trans young person in the community, on public transport and the difficulties they face daily.

They said “almost 2 years ago on the way to Chester Pride on the bus I was faced with homophobic language towards me by a grown man because I was carrying my Trans flag. This made me very uncomfortable I had just turned 17 and he was in his 40’s.’ ‘I always feel paranoid when I go out walking, turning around to check I am not being followed’ ‘it doesn’t matter if it’s day or nighttime but it is always worse at nighttime”.

Axl said, “I appreciate being listened to, I am glad that safeguarding is being looked at, it felt amazing to be listened to and to help other young people in general”.

At this time Axl also started attending Youthforia North-West (day long youth conferences organised by Youth Focus Northwest) where they started attending different workshops and making friends with other young people around the region. These activities have helped Axl with their confidence, and they feel accepted by their peers for being themselves.

Axl is part of the Community Cohesion Scrutiny Group with Cheshire Police which reviews arrest footage to discuss how improvements can be made. Being involved with this makes Axl feel like they are contributing to positive change in how young people are both treated by and view the police. Axl said “this is such a good idea to involve young people in helping to improve how the police handle situations”.

Working with various departments both in and out of the Council, Poverty Truth, DWP (Department of Work and Pensions), the Council’s commissioning team, Brio, Cheshire Police etc are all building Axl’s self-confidence, improving their belief in themselves and that they have something to say which can make life better for not only themselves but other people too.

Axl says “because of the opportunities that the Youth Service have provided I have made really good friends locally and in other areas of the Northwest who I know I will always be able

to rely on. I feel really supported and less lonely so I always have someone to talk to and know I will not feel as low as I did before”.



Image details: Axl is pictured with Lisa and Mike at The Greenhouse following completion of the barista course (left image) and with Sharon Marshall, Tacking Poverty Team, Cheshire West and Chester Council outside the Council Chambers (right).

## The local environment

Young people said they want to “feel safe in our community”, they said that “residents should be taking responsibility for litter, graffiti etc”, they would like “cleaner parks and green spaces, and somewhere to grow plants and food.”

What the data says:

- Keep Britain Tidy’s surveys<sup>xviii</sup> show that an overwhelming majority of people (including young individuals) believe litter is a serious problem, reporting that 60% notice graffiti, and 64% say litter is a major issue in their local area.
- The Children’s People and Nature Survey<sup>xix</sup> (2023) asked children and young people between the ages of eight and 15 years of age what environmental actions that take part in – the report shows that ‘picking up litter’ is among the top environmental actions young people engage in, alongside recycling and energy-saving initiatives.
- Visible signs of disorder—such as litter and graffiti—can influence youth to see rule-breaking behaviours as more acceptable<sup>xx</sup>.
- Conversely, involving youth in beautification efforts (e.g., murals, youth hubs) fosters ownership and care for local environments.

In Cheshire West and Chester:

- Litter is seen as a civic issue - young people actively participate in clean-up events<sup>xxi</sup>, feel they’re making a difference, and are part of borough-wide movements to keep their environment tidy<sup>xxii</sup>.

## Case study - Youth Voice Driving Environmental and Community Change

**Lisa Morgan, Youth Inclusion Worker, Youth Service, Cheshire West and Chester Council**

“As a Youth Inclusion Worker, I support young people who want to make a difference in their communities. Many feel frustrated by issues like litter and unsafe streets, and they’ve come together to take action. These projects show how youth voice can lead real change for both people and the planet”.

Northwich Youth Zone – Heat Blanket Campaign

Young people at Northwich were tired of seeing litter everywhere. They didn’t just want to clean up—they wanted to turn waste into something useful. After researching, they discovered that empty crisp packets can be recycled into heat blankets.

Together, they collected, cleaned, cut, and ironed crisp packets into blankets, which were donated to those in need. Their litter-picking efforts were noticed by staff at the local health centre, who came over to say thank you. One young person wrote: “I felt very proud when you said thanks”.

This project not only reduced waste but also supported people experiencing hardship—a perfect example of environmental action with social impact.



Image details: Connor and Alvie at Northwich Youth Zone with the heat blanket they made from discarded crisp packets

Ellesmere Port Youth Zone – Anti-Litter Campaign

Young people here wanted to tackle litter in a different way. They designed and printed anti-litter posters to encourage people to keep the streets clean. One young person said: “Something has to change, litter is everywhere.”

The group also mapped out areas with high litter and discovered that a lack of bins was making the problem worse. They are now campaigning for more bins to make it easier for everyone to dispose of waste responsibly.



Image details: Young boys litter picking in Ellesmere Port

### Healthy affordable food

Young people in Cheshire West and Chester say, “it is too expensive to eat healthy foods”, “the adverts for unhealthy food are persuasive and you associate the jingle with it”, “Pepsi use footballers to promote their product because young people look up to them” and “influencers promote junk food”.

What the data says:

- The National Diet and Nutrition Survey shows that only 9% of 11–18-year-olds meet the “5 A Day” target—among the lowest of any age group; fruit and vegetable consumption has declined even further post-pandemic and amid rising living costs.
- Further to this, 91% of children exceed the  $\leq 5\%$  energy guideline for free sugars and 85% of children exceed the recommended 10% of energy from saturated fats.
- When asked, young people report concerns about the prevalence of fast food and its promotion in their local environments; they reference structural issues, like

affordability, outlet density, and advertising, all seen as major barriers. Young people feel underrepresented in planning processes and want genuine youth involvement<sup>xxiii</sup>.

- Peer and social dynamics, along with independence and convenience, strongly shape food choices<sup>xxiv</sup>.

#### In Cheshire West and Chester

- Young people identified financial constraints as a major challenge. A “Food for All” report, based on eight focus groups with 70 young people and families, highlighted that rising costs, especially for meat and fish, make it hard to access healthy food.
- Many young people fear stigma when using foodbanks and struggle to consistently secure nutritious meals<sup>xxv</sup>.

### **Case study: Young people advocating for healthier food environments**

#### **Young advocates**

In early 2025, Bite Back (a national charity who advocate for food system change), in partnership with the Public Health Team at Cheshire West and Chester Council, were successfully awarded a grant from the Westminster Foundation to work with young people living in the borough to advocate for better food environments.

Through the development of the project scope, it was collectively decided that the work would focus primarily on the vending offer across settings routinely used by children and young people, whilst also capturing insight into any wider food issues the young people wished to highlight and address.

In late October 2025, 15 young people participated in a two-day interactive workshop with Bite Back and Council Colleagues (Youth Service and Public Health). The young people were supported to acknowledge and recognise the challenges they and their peers face in accessing healthy and affordable food, to maintain a healthy diet in Cheshire West and Chester.

The young people were from across the borough and all attend a range of youth service provisions, including those supporting young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), those with complex needs, those who attend an LGBTQ+ provision, as well as the open access offer.

On the second workshop day the young people visited sites with vending machines in two Brio leisure centre sites (Ellesmere Port and Neston) and two NHS Trust sites (The Countess of Chester Hospital and Bowmere Hospital). During this time, the young people were supported to take part in an interactive video, photography and data collection to audit vending machine contents and other onsite food and drink offers. The findings of this study will be developed into both a written report and video capturing the young people’s views, and will help to shape the future vending offer across these sites.

The young people said:

1. Healthy options are hard to find in leisure centres and hospitals

Young people said it was strange that places meant for health mostly sell junk food. Vending machines and cafes are full of chocolate, ice creams, and fizzy drinks, while water and fruit are either expensive or hidden away.

“The most healthy thing in the vending machine is water but it’s still expensive”.

“Lots of sugary things and no healthy options in the hospital café”.

“It’s weird that they only have unhealthy food options in the leisure centre where people come to exercise and be healthy.”

## 2. Advertising and branding push unhealthy choices

The young people noticed how adverts, sponsorships, and influencers make unhealthy food seem fun and normal. Footballers, video games, and social media all promote fast food and sugary drinks, making it hard for young people to ignore.

“Dominos advertise their pizza in video games”

“The adverts for unhealthy food are persuasive”.

## 3. Unhealthy food is the easiest and cheapest choice

Healthy food often costs more and takes more effort to find. Young people said it’s unfair that unhealthy options are cheaper and more convenient everywhere in both leisure centres and hospitals.

“It’s too expensive to eat healthier foods”.

“All fruit options in the shop at the hospital were at the bottom of the shelf and not fully stocked”.

“Some of the healthier food is more expensive than healthier food in the leisure centre vending machines”.

## 4. Young people want change in their local spaces

The young people said food in their local area should be healthier and easy to access. They want local spaces like leisure centres to set a good example and offer more affordable healthy options. They suggested having free water fountains and free fruit available.

“Something needs to change- a new McDonalds has opened in Chester and now it is where everyone goes after school”

“There should be a fruit bowl in reception of the leisure centres”

“Why don’t we just ask the leisure centres to sell healthier food?”

“I didn’t realise that so many people, like Bite Back and the Council, are doing things to help to make things better for us, such as the people here (Bite Back and Council)”

You can take a look at the video produced by Bite Back and the Young People [here](#). The full report can be found here (enter link).



Image details: Hazel taking part in an audit of vending machines as part of the Bite Back project

## **4. Recommendations**

4.1 My 2025 Public Health Annual Report has examined the various ways in which young people have been empowered and enabled to make positive change and support their and others health and wellbeing. During the compilation of this report, we developed a series of recommendations to enhance our efforts in improving how we work with, listen to and support young people across the key themes identified.

### **4.2 Listening to youth voice, enabling and empowering young people to advocate for change**

Recommendation 1: To make sure young people's voices are heard across different sectors, celebrate their involvement and strengthen their civic engagement by building lasting ways for them to influence decisions.

### **4.3 Careers and employment**

Recommendation 2: to carry out focussed work to reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training at Year 12, by:

- a. Focused workers for our young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and who are care experienced starting at year 9/10 as these numbers continue to increase
- b. Explore mobile youth provision that could act as a drop in / delivery site for NEET work in the rural areas
- c. Increase capacity with youth service to offer more day time opportunities

### **4.4 Education, training and opportunities for volunteering**

Recommendation 3: to embed careers advice, and integrate life skills and leadership programmes into youth settings. Build work experience and volunteering pathways, and promote inclusive volunteering and social participation.

### **4.5 Tackling poverty**

Recommendation 4: Continue to engage with children and young people across the Borough to understand what poverty means to them, enabling them to be part of the drive to reduce poverty.

### **4.6 Feeling safe**

Recommendation 5: Work with young people to understand how they would like the youth spaces to be designed .Understand, define and monitor "safe spaces". Work in partnership to progress a coordinated development of safe spaces across the borough.

#### **4.7 The local environment (litter, graffiti etc.)**

Recommendation 6: Engage young people in opportunities from them to improve their local environment, providing them with the tools and resources to help them to make a difference.

#### **4.8 Healthy affordable food**

Recommendation 7: Continue to work with young people from across the borough to shape a healthier food environment for themselves and other residents.

### **5. Conclusion**

5.1 The youth of today are truly wonderful - brimming with creativity, compassion, and a fierce determination to build a better world. They navigate rapid change with resilience and curiosity, embracing diversity and championing causes that matter, from mental health and inclusivity to safer streets and climate action. With their openness to learning and their instinct for collaboration, they continuously challenge old assumptions and inspire fresh ideas. Perhaps most importantly, they care deeply - about their communities, about fairness, and about shaping a future that is kinder and more inclusive for everyone. We adults have much to learn from our young people.

5.2 I would like to finish by thanking the young people who feature in this Public Health Annual Report, their contribution is very much appreciated and I hope you agree, inspiring too. I would also like to thank colleagues and partners who have contributed to this report directly. This includes Clare Watson, Cathy McGee, Lisa Morgan, Bethany Bodin and Matthew Pilling from the Youth Service; Sharon Marshall and Cath Fletcher from the Tackling Poverty Team; Brio, Cheshire West Voluntary Action and Bite Back; and of course members of my team including Donald Read, Gillian Cowan and Alex Holt.

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