

# Young People's Recreational and Educational Leisure-Time - a Health Needs Assessment



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## 1. Glossary

Term	Definition
Recreational and educational leisure-time activities	<p>These activities are not mutually exclusive. They include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sports and informal physical activities</li> <li>• cultural activities</li> <li>• outdoor residential, weekend or holiday-time activities</li> <li>• special interest clubs</li> <li>• volunteering activities</li> </ul> <p>Both types of activities, and related facilities, must be for the improvement of young people's wellbeing. Wellbeing, as defined in the 1996 Education Act, relates to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing</li> <li>• protection from harm and neglect</li> <li>• education, training and recreation</li> <li>• the contribution made by young people to society</li> <li>• social and economic wellbeing</li> </ul>
Care leavers	Care leavers are young people who have been in the care of the local authority for a period of 13 weeks or more after their 14th birthday, including some time after their 16th birthday <sup>1</sup> . Councils are expected to stay in touch with care leavers and provide support <sup>2</sup> .
Child criminal exploitation	Child criminal exploitation is defined as a form of child abuse where a child or young person is forced or coerced to engage in criminal activity or commit a crime <sup>3</sup> . This covers a range of areas including county lines and modern slavery <sup>4</sup> .
Children in need	Children in need (CIN) are a legally defined group of children (under the Children Act 1989) who are assessed as needing help and protection due to risks to their development and health. This group includes those on child in need or child protection plans, children looked after by local authorities, care leavers and disabled children. Children in need also includes young people aged 18 or over who continue to receive care, accommodation or support from children's services, and unborn children.
Children we care for	Under the Children Act 1989, a child is looked after by a local authority if they are provided with accommodation for a continuous period of more than 24 hours or subject to a care order (which will put them into the care of the local authority) or placement order (which gives the local authority the ability to place the child for adoption). A child ceases to be 'looked after' when they are adopted, return home or turn 18.

Disability	The Equality Act defines disability as a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.
Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index	The income deprivation affecting children index (IDACI) is a separate domain of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2019). The IDACI measures the proportion of children (0-15) living in income-deprived families in neighbourhoods in England.
Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019	English Indices of Deprivation <sup>5</sup> measures how deprived small areas are relative to others in England. The measure consists of seven domains including income, employment and education.
Lower Super Output Area (LSOA)	Lower layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are made up of groups of Output Areas (OAs), usually four or five. They comprise between 400 and 1,200 households and have a usually resident population between 1,000 and 3,000 persons. Output areas are made up of between 40 and 250 households and have a usually resident population between 100 and 625 persons.
Religion and belief	In the Equality Act (2010), religion refers to any religion including a lack of religion, and belief refers to any religious or philosophical belief and includes a lack of belief.
Sexuality	The Equality Act 2010 defines sexual orientation as a person's sexual orientation towards people of the same sex, people of the opposite sex, or people of either sex. Data on sexual orientation was gathered in the 2021 Census. This was the first time a voluntary question on sexual orientation among people aged 16+ was included.
Young carers	In Spring 2023, a category for young carers was added to the annual school census for state schools. Section 17ZA of the Children Act 1989 defines a young carer as 'a person under 18 who provides or intends to provide care for another person (which isn't a contract or voluntary work)'.
Young people in contact with youth justice services	The Youth Justice System deals with young people aged 10–17-year-olds who may have committed a crime.

## 2.Acknowledgements

There are many contributors to this piece of work, and our particular thanks go to those young people whose engagement shaped this needs assessment and provided feedback on the findings, including the West Sussex Youth Cabinet, Care Leavers Advisory Board, SEND young Voices Group and Chichester Youth Group.

Furthermore, we would like to thank the many young people, and practitioners, who participated in the survey and focus groups, providing essential insight into young people's experience of recreational and educational leisure-time activities in West Sussex.

We would like to thank all members of the Steering Group, listed below, for advising on and guiding this needs assessment, supporting data collection and facilitating focus group activities and working in partnership to deliver this needs assessment.

We would also like to thank the Family Information Service and Early Help Family Hubs for the collection of information for a rapid review of West Sussex activities.

The needs assessment was produced by a working group consisting of members of the West Sussex Public Health and Early Help teams.

**Authors:** Graeme Potter, Public Health Lead; Rea Painter, Early Help Service Manager; Samantha Taplin, Consultant in Public Health; Verity Pinkney, Principal Public Health Data Analyst; Elizabeth Vass, Public Health Analyst; Rachel Jevons, Public Health Lead; Tahmida Khanom, Local Authority Research Practitioner.

**Contributors:** Tim Martin, Principal Research Officer; Tasha Alderton, Programme Support Officer; Anna Murray, Public Health Registrar; Michelle Crowley, Senior Public Health Engagement Officer; Ikpemesi Olubor, Advanced Public Health Practitioner; Catherine Wells, Senior Public Health Research Officer; Robert Whitehead, Principal Research Officer; Toby Wilson, Voice and Participation Team Manager; Winifred Omuut, Advanced Public Health Practitioner; Claire Humphrey-Lewis, Team Manager Family Education Service; Polly Manners, Family Information Service Advisor; Craig Franklin, Public Health Officer; Tyla Shane, Programme Support Officer; Roma Forzani, Business Co-ordinator.

**Steering Group membership organisations:** Sussex Youth; Voluntary Action Adur and Chichester; Audio Active; Arun Church; Allsorts; Sussex Police; Chichester District Council, Adur and Worthing District Council, Crawley Borough Council, Horsham District Council, Arun District Council, Mid Sussex District Council, NHS Sussex, West Sussex County Council.

### 3.Foreword

Young people spend most of their waking hours outside of school and formal education.

Recreational and educational leisure-time activities during those hours help young people's mental and physical health and wellbeing, develop crucial social connections between young people, and support young people's futures.

We are very pleased to present to you the West Sussex Young People's Recreational and Educational Leisure-time Activities Health Needs Assessment, for ages 11 to 19, and those with learning difficulties and disabilities up to age 24.

We want all young people to benefit from opportunities to reach their full potential. Participation in leisure-time activities is an important part of that, both for long-term health and social wellbeing, and in the prevention of poor health and social outcomes now and later in life.

This makes leisure activities particularly important for disadvantaged or vulnerable young people who might need specific, additional, or early support.

Activities should meet the needs of young people from different backgrounds, cultures, genders and sexual orientation. Leisure activities should be safe, accessible, supportive and welcoming for all.

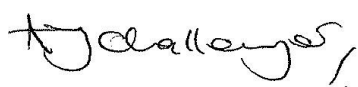
Working together with young people in planning these activities, and how they are run, will champion young people's voice and help young people to become active members of society.

This report is an invaluable part of shaping these activities in West Sussex. We hope it will be used by all those who plan and provide these activities in the county, informing high quality and equitable access and participation.

We extend our thanks to the young people involved in setting out the scope for this needs assessment and providing such valuable insight via the focus groups and survey - which greatly informed the learning in this report.

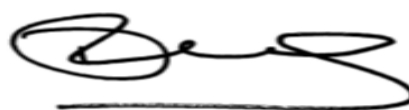
We will work collectively with our partners, to hold ourselves to account to you, the young people of West Sussex, in applying your feedback to what we do, reporting back to you on how we have done so, and giving you the opportunities to shape and develop recreational and educational leisure activities.

**Alison Challenger**



**Director of Public Health,  
West Sussex County Council**

**Daniel Ruaux**



**Executive Director of  
Children, Young People and  
Learning,  
West Sussex County Council**

## 4.Executive Summary

This young people's health needs assessment, with a specific focus on recreational and educational leisure-time activities, is part of the West Sussex Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). The JSNA is a statutory requirement for public health that looks at the current and future health, wellbeing and care needs of local populations to inform and guide the planning and commissioning of services. This may include strategies, action plans and frameworks for delivery.<sup>1</sup>

This needs assessment will be used to inform West Sussex County Council's statutory duty to, so far as reasonably practicable, secure access for all qualifying young people (13 - 19 years old or up to 24 for those with learning difficulties or disabilities) to a sufficient quantity of recreational and educational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of their wellbeing, and sufficient facilities for such activities.

This needs assessment relates to young people between 11 - 19 years of age and those with learning difficulties or disabilities aged 20 to 24 years, resident in West Sussex.

The objectives of this needs assessment are to describe in relation to recreational and educational activities in West Sussex:

1. Equity of opportunity across the county, using evidence-based frameworks
2. The places young people live in, the social and economic circumstances around them and the effect on health and wellbeing
3. What circumstances affect a young person's ability or desire to participate
4. What a young person friendly environment looks like
5. The population of young people (aged 11-19 years and aged 20-24 years with learning difficulties or disabilities) in terms of age, gender reassignment, sex, disability, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion, and sexual orientation in West Sussex
6. What accessing leisure-time activities looks like for young people in West Sussex in terms of cost, location, timing, age range, whether they are accessible or attractive for people who are protected under the 2010 Equality Act including transport links
7. How and where young people are engaged in planning and delivery
8. The motivators, challenges and solutions for young people in accessing
9. How young people's services relate to other services WSCC and our partners in District and Borough Councils provide for example; children's services, early help, education and skills, community safety, health and wellbeing, public health, community safety, parks and the natural environment

The scope of the needs assessment and how it was carried out, was designed and produced with a steering group of young people, community and voluntary

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<sup>1</sup> This needs assessment is not a strategy, action plan or framework for delivery.



sector youth sector providers, West Sussex County Council, District and Borough Councils, and Sussex Police.

Data collection was carried out by a needs assessment working group alongside sub-groups focussing on population and health data, a rapid review of leisure-time activities, and young people and professional voice. Data was collected from November 2024 to July 2025 and included:

- Prevalence and health data
- Reviews of national, regional and local policies
- Looking at guidance and strategies
- Looking at evidence for what a good neighbourhood that provides opportunity for participation looks like
- Mapping services and analysing how this looks in terms of accessibility
- A young people's leisure activities survey and young people and practitioner focus groups

Workshops were held with groups of young people, as well as with the steering group, to review and validate findings and develop the needs assessment 'areas for focus'.

### Health and wider social impacts of recreational and educational leisure-time activities

Adolescence is marked by significant developmental changes - biological, cognitive, psychosocial, and emotional, with personal relationships changing greatly during this period; all of which can influence resilience, recovery and long-term behaviours and health outcomes<sup>6,7</sup>.

Numerous health and wellbeing benefits are associated with attending recreational and educational leisure-time activities<sup>8</sup>, and these include improved mental health, wellbeing, cardiovascular risk, inflammatory markers, cholesterol, body mass index, weight, social wellbeing, safety, protection, educational and career aspirations, a reduction in the likelihood of risky behaviours, anti-social behaviour and crime<sup>9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19</sup>.

Risk factors or barriers to young people's participation in activities includes being of older age, body image, mental health and wellbeing, physical disabilities, online interaction prevalence, peer and family factors, availability of activities, awareness of activities, cost, safety concerns, travel challenges and discrimination<sup>20,21,22,23,24,25,26</sup>.

Addressing inequalities affecting young people requires a response to economic inequalities, social determinants (for example housing, employment), leisure activity access, inclusivity and experience, health behaviours and critical relationships such as with families and peers<sup>27</sup>.

### Young people in West Sussex, social determinants and health outcomes

West Sussex is a large county of almost 770 square miles, with coastal resorts, market towns, a New Town (Crawley) and large rural areas with smaller towns and villages. The population is estimated at just over 900,000 residents<sup>28</sup>. Of

those, around 9% are aged 11 to 18 years, a similar proportion to England, equating to approximately 84,000 young people in West Sussex. In the past 10 years, the population of young people aged 11 to 18 years in West Sussex has seen a larger percentage increase than the population overall.

19.9% of young people aged 10 to 19 years live in rural output areas<sup>29</sup>, and around 4% live in areas which take more than 30 minutes travel by road to reach a major town or city.

Some neighbourhoods within Arun and Crawley rank amongst the most deprived 10% nationally. In coastal areas of West Sussex, a higher proportion of children (under 16) live in relative low-income families compared to non-coastal areas or the county overall.

In West Sussex, less than half (48.2%) of secondary school pupils people meet recommended guidelines of physical activity, and participation in physical activity is higher outside than within school hours<sup>30</sup>. Around 3 in 10 children aged 10-11 are overweight or obese in West Sussex (35.8% nationally)<sup>31</sup>. Rates of new STI diagnoses among under 19s in West Sussex increased in 2023 (most recent data)<sup>32</sup>.

West Sussex has a higher proportion of 'young people where education, employment or training activity is not known' than England (14.5% were not known in West Sussex, compared to 2.2% nationally)<sup>142</sup>.

As of December 2024, there were 1,723 households in temporary accommodation arranged by local authorities in West Sussex - around half of these households had dependent children (868 households)<sup>34</sup>.

In Sussex, 42% of offenders and 39% of victims of serious violent crime are aged under 25<sup>35</sup>. There is a noticeable increase in victim and offender profiles around the age of 13 and peaking between the ages of 15 and 18<sup>35</sup>.

## Young people's characteristics

18.8% of young people in West Sussex aged 11 to 18 years are from a minority ethnic group - a lower proportion than England (32.4 %). There are differences within the county, with two-fifths of the youth population in Crawley from an ethnic minority background - a far higher proportion than the other district and boroughs within the county and higher than England<sup>36</sup>.

Around 7,530 (9.6%) young people aged 11 to 18 years and 6,870 (14.2%) young adults aged 19-24 years were disabled under the Equality Act in West Sussex<sup>36</sup>. There is geographical variation across the county in rates and numbers of young people in West Sussex who are disabled under the Equality Act.

In West Sussex, 7.8% of young people aged 16 to 24 identified with a lesbian, gay, bisexual or 'other' (LGB+) sexual orientation, similar to England (7.6%).

In 2023, there were 7,768 live births in West Sussex. Of those, 117 (1.5%) were among women aged under 20 years.

As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, 6,106 children in West Sussex were classed as in need<sup>37</sup>, equating to a rate of 341.1 per 10,000 children aged under 18.

As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, 906 children were looked after in West Sussex<sup>38</sup>, equating to a rate of 51 looked after children per 100,000 under 18 years. These children were predominantly older (41% aged 10-15 years and 30% aged 16 and over).

For the academic year 2024/25, 504 (0.8%) of pupils in state-funded primary schools and 625 (1.2%) of state-funded secondary school pupils in West Sussex identified as young carers (either by the school or disclosed by a parent or child themselves). This is higher than the known national rates.

## Recreational and educational leisure-time activities

The last 15 years have seen dramatic reductions in funding for youth work<sup>39</sup>. Nationally, operating costs have increased for a large proportion of the youth sector. Financial strain is exacerbated by widespread increased demand for existing and new services in the last year, experienced by most organisations.

Most leisure-time activities in West Sussex incurred some costs (78%). These can vary hugely, for example single entry to a youth club could cost 50p, whereas regular attendance at a sports club could include multiple costs to cover membership, subscriptions, kit and equipment. Activities were predominantly face to face, with a small amount of online provision apparent.

There is a mixture of formal and informal education and training opportunities. Formal opportunities, such as Duke of Edinburgh, Youth Action and Cadet Forces, are slightly less prominent in the information collected. Informal opportunities to learn new and transferable skills are much more prevalent.

Activities frequently identified with providing outdoor pursuits, more traditional youth clubs and sports or informal physical activities. Specific cultural activities (eg. performing arts, acting, singing and dance) were less frequently reported, at about 10% of the time. Least frequently reported were special interest activities such as science, music and cooking.

## Voice

Focus groups with young people, youth practitioners and other professionals, and a young people's survey were used as part of this needs assessment to build the picture of recreational and educational leisure-time activities in West Sussex.

There are examples across the county of safe and varied activities running at varied opening hours and opportunities for all ages to engage with activities. In West Sussex, young people like recreational and educational leisure-time activities because they are fun, help them to socialise and meet new people, enable them to take part in specific activities, enable them to make use their surroundings, and help them to be fit and keep active.

Youth practitioners and other professionals recognise the importance of these activities in creating safe environments for young people, having funded

activities throughout the school holidays, social connections, broadening horizons and ambitions for young people, and the benefits to young people of socialising in person verses digital.

The things that stop young people from attending recreational and educational leisure-time activities in West Sussex are that they don't like going by themselves, activities are at the wrong time, there isn't anything of interest / activities aren't close, environmental and structural barriers including cost, personal and social barriers, lack of accessibility and availability (including inconsistency), reduced rural access (exacerbated by travel barriers), travel options (including cost and safety), programme delivery issues (i.e. lack of attendance or staying open), lack of diversity and inclusion, poor awareness of activities on offer, perceptions around activities as being (not) 'friendly enough', concerns around group dynamics, and safety concerns.

To make activities easier to attend, young people and practitioners would like them to be cheaper or free, to be closer, for friends to attend also, to be able to get transport to and from activities, to know what's on, improved access and availability (both in activities running and at more convenient times), increased / improved diversity and inclusivity, listening and acting on young people's voice, quality assurance, equity in access, consistent funding, investment in workforce (including training such as in trauma, neurodivergence, de-escalation, SEND), coordination and communication between services, safety in place design and an increase in young people friendly environments.

There is a desire amongst young people to be involved in deciding which activities should be on offer. Young people report that often their opinions aren't put into action, or that they don't know whether they are put into practice.

### Areas of focus

To strengthen young people's access and experience of leisure-time activities, areas of focus have been developed using the data and evidence captured from this needs assessment. These areas have been further developed and validated with young people and professionals working within recreational and educational leisure-time provision, as part of validation workshops which ran in July 2025 (Appendix V). There are elements that cross over within these areas of focus.

Areas of focus:

1. Equity and quality
2. Youth friendly health promoting environments
3. Keeping young people safe
4. Accessibility and availability
5. Awareness of leisure-time activities
6. Young people's voice
7. Young people's future



## Equity and equality

This needs assessment has identified differences experienced between groups of young people in terms of their access to and participation of recreational and educational leisure-time activities. The following areas of focus are purposed to mitigate these differences in outcomes as a result.

1. Data on young people's health, wellbeing and wider determinants and population characteristics inform the provision of recreational and educational leisure-time activities.
2. Disadvantaged and vulnerable young people are placed at the heart of decision making.
3. Reduce / mitigate cost barriers of activities for young people and families.
4. Young people's environments and leisure activities embrace equity, diversity and inclusion, and promote respect for all. Inclusive policies support this.
5. Equity in access for young people with SEND, including neurodivergent friendly spaces, and leisure-time activities for 19–24-year-olds with learning difficulties and disabilities.
6. Activities and venues are accessible by and adaptable for young people with physical disabilities.
7. Development of a kitemark and/or framework which supports equity and quality (Appendix C), which includes a baseline for aspects such as training, infrastructure and safety.
8. Consider how understanding of quality can be balanced with softer outcome measures<sup>2</sup>, and how understanding and demonstration of impact of leisure activities can contribute to attracting investment (including longer term) in recreational and educational leisure-time activities (Appendix C).

## Youth friendly health promoting environments

A young person friendly environment is accessible, inclusive and safe for young people, prioritising their health, wellbeing and development, and creating a space where they feel welcome, supported and valued. It fosters social wellbeing, communication skills, involvement and learning, characterised by physical spaces, service interactions, communication strategies and policies that acknowledge and address the unique needs and interests of young people and provide resources and opportunities for them to thrive.

1. Development of informed adults to support trust and inclusion. This includes through training in areas to promote inclusive environments, including in gender equality and inclusion of LGBT+ young people, support with a trauma informed approach, understanding and supporting SEND including neurodivergence, mental health and emotional wellbeing, suicide

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<sup>2</sup> Soft outcomes tend to depend on subjective measurement (such as self-assessment of confidence or self-esteem). Hard outcomes tend to be objective and independently measured (such as employment or attainment).

prevention, and de-escalation, as part of leisure-time workforce development. Certificates in skills acquired are important. Existing training frameworks can be utilised to support this. Seek to support charities to attend.

2. The learning in this needs assessment around the importance of making and spending time with friends can be utilised to help design activities.
3. Bridge the gap for children who don't want to attend on their own. Examples of this include fostering social connections, providing opportunities to bring friends to help children to connect, considering the role of digital recreational and educational leisure provision, considering support for young people with SEND who may want to attend with a personal assistant or carer, considering options for supporting outreach workers to support attendance, and for parents to be present at activity which can act as a safety net and support networks with other parents.
4. Continue to support the planning and development of healthy and sustainable young people's leisure-time activities, including through inclusive young people friendly spaces and environments.

## Keeping young people safe

Safety in leisure activities is strongly reflected in national and local learning.

1. Promote guidance which supports leisure-time activities in developing their safety and safeguarding policies and practice.
2. Continue to develop and promote information for parents on how to make sure that their children will be happy and protected in after school and extra-curricular clubs and activities within the community.
3. Develop safe and inclusive spaces through planning and design, including outdoor places (e.g. parks and lighting), and utilising policies and planning in supporting young people to speak up, challenge practice and create safe environments (Appendix K).
4. Application of safe travel and community safety messaging, which is seen as beneficial in relation to getting to and from activities.

## Accessibility and availability

In West Sussex, factors which impact access to and availability of leisure-time activities include rurality, transport challenges, costs, weather dependency, running times and preference of activity.

1. Consider transport and travel (including in relation to rurality) in planning activities, including in relation to cost, accessibility and options for young people. Support active travel options including bike trails, public transport and rural public footpaths for young people. Provide information on transport for young people and families on getting to and from activities. Understand more about where young people travel to, whether young people are able to plan and book journeys effectively, and how to support accordingly (for example digital literacy for transport planning for parents and carers as well as young people). For young people with SEND and

their families, travel information is particularly important, for example providing the nearest bus stop and number.

2. Accessible travel options for young people with SEND. This includes accessible parking spaces.
3. Support year-round provision, i.e. activities run through the school holidays, outdoor and indoor activities.
4. Support a universal youth offer and flexibility in scheduling.
5. School venues are an asset for leisure-activities including wraparound clubs. There is value in setting up groups through schools.

## Awareness of leisure-time activities

West Sussex young people report low awareness of available activities - what is available, where, for whom and the cost of such activities. Providers of activities and other services, and parents, also report low awareness.

1. Increase awareness of young people's recreational and educational leisure-time activities and how to participate. Utilise communications through schools to let young people and families know what's going on. Use social media to spread awareness about available activities. Consider new and innovative ways to engage with young people. Consider who are the trusted adults that can help young people with SEND, into an activity. Recognise that not all young people engage through school, as part of communication plans.
2. Maximise communication routes to parents and communication of information on where their children are – this can help with young people's participation and encouragement.
3. Improve coordination, communication and collaboration across sectors and between services, such as Early Help, Youth Justice, Youth Emotional Support, and Community and Family Hubs, the CVS, wrapping around the whole school. This includes increasing awareness of leisure-time activities, planning and supporting delivery across sectors, to maximise the collective offer.
4. Continue to develop collaborative approaches to maintaining, developing and promoting information on the breadth of available activities. Consider how information on travel can be linked to this.
5. Consider how to better meet the communication needs of young people. For example, it can be helpful for young people with SEND to know what is going to happen at activities in advance.

## Young people's voice

Youth voice, participation and engagement is a fundamental right. Local authorities are required to engage, listen to and involve young people in the decision-making and service design.

1. Young people, particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable young people, at the centre of decision-making and planning.

2. Listen, co-design and co-produce with young people in the design and running of activities.
3. Use guides, checklists and strategies to effectively engage young people in policy and decision making and service design, developing youth-adult partnerships (e.g. NYA How to fulfil your statutory duty, NYA Hear by Right youth participation framework).
4. Report back to and demonstrate to young people on the difference that they have made, and evaluate whether the actions taken did what young people asked for.

## Young people's future

Recreational and educational leisure-time activities support the future health and social wellbeing of young people.

1. Maximise education, training, volunteering and transferable skills available through leisure-time activities, to help with education, employment and training opportunities. Consider and identify how to better embed leisure-time activities as part of plans to reduce young people not in education, employment or training.
2. Consider and develop the role of recreational and educational leisure-time activities in the support for young people affected by violence.

## Summary

Young people's participation in leisure-time activities has health, wellbeing, educational and wider social benefits. This needs assessment demonstrates the importance of, and places an emphasis on, understanding young people's health and wellbeing, population characteristics and inequalities when planning leisure-time activities in West Sussex, as well as responding to the risk and protective factors, and barriers and drivers affecting young people's attendance.

Having a shared understanding of available activities is seen as beneficial to West Sussex provision. There is a desire in West Sussex to "coordinate" across all levels of service provision; across the voluntary and community sector, police, health sector, and local authority.

As part of improving young people's access and experience of leisure-time activities, this needs assessment directs specific focus on equity and quality, youth friendly health promoting environments, keeping young people safe, accessibility and availability, awareness of leisure-time activities, young people's voice and looking ahead to young people's future (with links to employment and crime reduction).

This needs assessment should inform and guide the planning, delivery and commissioning of recreational and educational leisure-time activities for young people. This may include future strategies, action plans and frameworks.



## 5.Introduction

Every child has the fundamental right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to their age, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts<sup>40</sup>.

The social determinants of health – broadly defined as the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age, and people's access to power, money and resources – have a powerful influence on health and health inequities. A focus on participation in recreational activities when planning community public health interventions has been recognised as an approach to counter-balance social inequality in health<sup>16</sup>.

Young people's educational setting, where they grow up, and their socioeconomic background determine the type of activities that are available to them outside of the classroom, with a direct link between household income and participation for almost all extra-curricular activities<sup>13</sup>. Children from the poorest households have been seen to be much less likely to take part in any extra-curricular activity, and in particular music and sport<sup>13</sup>. In addition, without equity it can be argued that a service cannot be considered as achieving a marker of quality<sup>41</sup>.

Extra-curricular activities benefit young people's social skills and wellbeing<sup>8,13</sup> and play a key role in improving their health<sup>42</sup>. Local Authorities have a statutory duty to, so far as reasonably practicable, secure access for all qualifying young people (13 - 19 years old or up to 24 for those with learning difficulties or disabilities) to a sufficient quantity of recreational and educational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of their wellbeing, and sufficient facilities for such activities (section 507B of the Education Act 1996, Appendix A).<sup>3</sup>

Local authorities must determine what activities and associated facilities should be available to young people in their area. In doing so, local authorities should aim to improve the local youth offer and be mindful of the needs of young people facing particular barriers to accessing sufficient provision, such as disadvantaged young people and vulnerable young people.

Local authorities should<sup>8</sup> (Appendix B):

- put young people, particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable young people, at the centre of their decision-making and planning
- benchmark their approach and performance relative to other similar areas to identify how they might improve the breadth and reach of their offer
- secure or support an appropriate local workforce with the skills and qualifications to meet the needs of young people
- engage and coordinate with relevant actors, drawing on their support and challenge to encourage continuous improvement in local provision

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<sup>3</sup> This needs assessment focuses on responding to the statutory duty relating to the provision of recreational and educational leisure-time activities (section 507B of the Education Act 1996). The needs assessment is not designed to specifically inform the [planning of short breaks for carers or disabled children](#), although some information in this needs assessment can be of use from this perspective.

Local authorities should start by establishing what the needs of the young people in their area are through a needs assessment.

Local authorities have a duty to ensure their functions, and any services that they contract out to others, are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (Section 11 of the Children Act 2004) – this includes sport, culture and leisure services and youth services.

With regards to recreational and educational leisure-time activities, national policy, strategy and reports place specific emphasis on:

- Quality, equity and value<sup>43</sup>
- Young people's voice heard and acted upon<sup>43</sup>
- Youth-friendly health-promoting environments<sup>43</sup>
- The important value of youth work<sup>44</sup>
- The role of educational activities within the community on future employment<sup>45</sup>
- The diversionary role of these activities on crime and exploitation<sup>46</sup>

The West Sussex strategic vision and priorities for improving health and wellbeing and reducing inequalities, relevant to young people, is provided through the [West Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board Strategy 2025 - 2030](#), [West Sussex Children and Young People's Plan 2022 - 2025](#), [West Sussex Early Help Strategy 2022-25](#), [West Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership Business Plan 2023 – 2026](#) and [West Sussex SEND and Inclusion Strategy](#).

## 5.1 Needs assessment

A health needs assessment is a systematic approach to understanding the needs of a population, considering the social, economic, cultural and behavioural factors that influence health and wellbeing.

West Sussex County Council (WSCC) Public Health and Early Help have worked jointly to deliver a Young People's Health Needs Assessment with a specific focus on recreational and educational leisure-time activities. This work has been scoped and carried out with the expertise of a cross-sector steering group which included input from young people.

The needs assessment is in response to the Local Authority's statutory duty for young people and will inform strategy, processes, and partnerships, tailored to meet the duty for recreational and educational leisure-time activities in West Sussex.

## 5.2 Aim of this needs assessment

### Aim

To define the health needs, attitudes and behaviours, risk and protective factors, barriers and drivers, in relation to young people accessing recreational and educational leisure-time activities in West Sussex.

## Objectives

In relation to recreational and educational activities in West Sussex, describe:

1. Equity of opportunity across the county, using evidence-based frameworks
2. The places young people live in, the social and economic circumstances around them and the effect on health and wellbeing
3. What circumstances affect a young person's ability or desire to participate
4. What a young person friendly environment looks like
5. The population of young people (aged 11-18 years and aged 20-24 years with learning difficulties or disabilities) in terms of age, gender reassignment, sex, disability, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion, and sexual orientation in West Sussex
6. What accessing leisure-time activities looks like for young people in West Sussex in terms of cost, location, timing, age range, whether they are accessible or attractive for people who are protected under the 2010 Equality Act
7. How and where young people are engaged in planning and delivery
8. The motivators, challenges and solutions for young people in accessing and participation
9. How young people's services relate to other services WSCC and our partners in District and Borough Councils provide; for example; children's services, early help, education and skills, community safety, health and wellbeing, public health, community safety, parks and the natural environment

## 5.3 Governance for the needs assessment

This young people's health needs assessment is part of the West Sussex Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). The JSNA is a statutory requirement for public health that looks at the current and future health, wellbeing and care needs of local populations to inform and guide the planning and commissioning of services. This may include strategies, action plans and frameworks for delivery.

Governance for the needs assessment is through the West Sussex Children First Board, a 'WSCC Strategic Oversight Group', and a cross sector 'Young People's Needs Assessment Steering Group'. The needs assessment was further developed and the scope agreed with young people themselves.

## 5.4 Methods

This needs assessment relates to young people between 11 - 19 years of age and those with learning difficulties or disabilities aged 20 to 24 years, resident in West Sussex.

A needs assessment methodology<sup>47</sup> supported the evidence-based framework used in this needs assessment for understanding the links between recreational

and educational leisure-time activities and the health and wellbeing of young people in West Sussex.

A mixed methods approach was used with qualitative and quantitative data collection to answer the aim and objectives. Quantitative data was collected using population characteristic and health outcome data, a review of national and local policy, strategy, literature, existing data and evidence of effective practice, and a rapid review of activities in West Sussex. Qualitative data utilised a mixture of focus groups and surveys with professionals and young people.

Analysis used literature review methods with emphasis on established systematic research and national reports, and qualitative data analysis used an approach to draw out common themes.

Out of scope were non-recreational and educational leisure-time activities, and young people living outside of West Sussex.

Young people and young people's service providers were engaged on the scope and focus of the needs assessment, prior to conducting data collection (Appendix O, Appendix P). Data collection ran from November 2024 to July 2025.

The emerging themes from the engagement with young people and service providers was validated through partner workshops with young people and professionals in order to produce a set of focus areas which reflect the key learning from the needs assessment.



## 6. Health and wider social impacts of recreational and educational leisure-time activities

Addressing inequalities affecting young people requires a response to economic inequalities, social determinants, service access and experience, health behaviours and critical relationships such as with families and peers<sup>27</sup>. This chapter draws out the health and wider social impacts of attending, and not attending, leisure-time activities, demonstrating the role that recreational and educational leisure-time activities play in improving health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities affecting young people.

### Key messages

Adolescence is marked by significant developmental changes - biological, cognitive, psychosocial, and emotional, with personal relationships changing greatly during this period; all of which can influence resilience, recovery and long-term behaviours and health outcomes<sup>6,7</sup>.

Numerous health and wellbeing benefits are associated with attending recreational and educational leisure-time activities<sup>8</sup>, and these include improved mental health, wellbeing, cardiovascular risk, inflammatory markers, cholesterol, body mass index, weight, social wellbeing, safety, protection, educational and career aspirations, a reduction in the likelihood of risky behaviours, anti-social behaviour and crime<sup>9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19</sup>.

Non-participation in leisure-time activities (including due to the barriers preventing attendance) can negatively impact young people's health and wellbeing and wider life chances<sup>10,48,49</sup>.

### 6.1 Development in young people

Adolescence is a time of rapid change and development. Understanding the needs of young people going through these changes is key to providing good quality services<sup>50</sup>.

The UK has 12 million young people aged 10-24 making up 18% of the population. Whilst there has been a positive increase of focus on young people's health in the UK, vast gaps in understanding and service provision remain; good health for young people is central to their wellbeing, forming the foundation for good health in later life<sup>50</sup>.

During the ages of 11 to 15, young people undergo adolescence, a transitional phase from childhood to adulthood. This period is marked by significant developmental changes - biological, cognitive, psychosocial, and emotional, with personal relationships changing greatly during this period - which can greatly influence resilience, recovery and long-term behaviours and health outcomes<sup>6,7</sup>.

The World Bank World Development 2007 Report outlined five important transitions for young people:

- Learning: transition from primary to secondary schooling, and from secondary to higher education.
- Work: transition from education into workforce.
- Health: transition to responsibility for own health.
- Family: transition from family living to autonomy, early marriage, and parenthood.
- Citizenship: transition to responsible citizenship

During this developmental and life forming stage, recreational and educational leisure-time activities play a critical role in meeting the health, wellbeing and social needs of young people<sup>8</sup>.

Furthermore, a modernisation of UK democracy may see 16- and 17-year-olds able to vote in the next general election<sup>34</sup>; thus introducing a new era of social responsibility to this age group.

## **6.2 The health and wellbeing impacts of educational and recreational leisure-time activities for young people**

Over 85% of a young person's waking hours are spent outside of school and formal education. Recreational and educational leisure-time activities provided during those hours can have a significant effect on young people's development and wellbeing<sup>8</sup>.

Those activities can support young people to build their skills, improve trust and tolerance, help them become active members of society, and champion their voice<sup>8</sup>. Participation in youth service decision-making leads to better social skills (efficacy and empathy), and leadership or decision-making opportunities lead to greater feelings of ownership and empowerment<sup>51</sup>. Young people should not only be asked for their opinion, but they should be empowered to take on leadership roles<sup>52</sup>.

A review of spending on out-of-school youth programmes found that youth services are a vital part of the response to the current challenges young people face<sup>53</sup>. That review, as well as direct feedback from young people, highlighted the importance of prioritising regular clubs and activities, adventures away from home, and volunteering opportunities.

Young people's involvement in such activities can also make an important contribution to other objectives, such as economic, social and environmental improvements, community cohesion, safer and stronger neighbourhoods, better health and increased educational attainment and employment<sup>8</sup>.

Several studies have outlined the relationship between recreational and educational leisure-time activities and the health and wellbeing of young people. Longitudinal studies and rolling annual surveys demonstrate a clear association between participation in youth activities and positive short-term outcomes relating to physical health and wellbeing, pro-social behaviours and education, as well as strong evidence that these short-term outcomes are sustained over decades<sup>39</sup>.

Volunteering has been associated with reduced cardiovascular risk, inflammatory markers, cholesterol and body mass index in adolescents<sup>9</sup> and young boys who engage in sports and play musical instruments were shown to have a reduced risk of being overweight in later adolescence<sup>10</sup>. Similarly, sports and physical recreation involvement were found to improve activity and physical impairment outcomes for children and young people with physical disability<sup>54</sup>.

Young people with a low educational attainment level who participate in recreational activities, have been shown to be more likely to have an excellent/good quality of life and an excellent/very good self-rated health, compared to those who did not participate<sup>16</sup>.

Leisure-time activities have positive impacts on physical health in young people, with youth participation in activities such as sports associated with higher odds of engaging in that same activity in adulthood<sup>55,56,57,58</sup>.

## Mental health and wellbeing

A [public mental health needs assessment \(WSCC 2024\)](#) was conducted in West Sussex in 2024, which provides a comprehensive understanding of mental health needs across the life course and recommendations for change. Approximately 14,500 children and young people aged 5 to 16 years are estimated to have a mental health condition in West Sussex. Young people's parents and carers, as well as the wider community, have a significant impact on their mental health outcomes.

The Mental Health of Children and Young People in England survey<sup>59</sup> has shown an increasing number of children and young people have a probable mental health condition, and it is estimated that 1 in 5 young people aged 11 to 16 have a mental health condition. After a rise in prevalence, follow-up surveys suggest that rates may have stabilised.

The national survey<sup>59</sup> found that young people with a mental disorder were less likely to have participated in clubs in or outside of school and were more likely to have low levels of social support and smaller social networks. It also found that some groups of young people are more likely to experience mental health problems, such as young women, young people who identified as non-heterosexual, White British young people, and those living in lower income households.

Nationally, children with SEND have been recorded as more likely to experience mental health problems during their lifetime. In 2021, more than half of 6- to 16-year-olds with SEND had a probable mental health condition (56.7%, compared to 12.5% of those without). This was an increase from 43.9% and 8.2% in 2017, respectively<sup>60</sup>.

As much as 50% of mental health problems in adulthood begin before the age of 14 years<sup>61</sup>, making the early stages of life a particularly important opportunity to promote mental health and prevent mental health problems.

Young people's participation in sports has been associated with lower odds of depression<sup>11,12</sup>, generalised anxiety disorder, panic disorder and agoraphobia in

early adulthood<sup>62,63</sup>. Adolescents who do not regularly engage in sports / physical activity-based leisure-time activities are also more likely to have higher levels of anxiety and depression and display more social behavioural inhibition than young people who do engage in these activities<sup>48</sup>. Non-participation in leisure-time activities can therefore have an adverse impact on the mental and physical health and wellbeing of young people. Thus, young people's involvement in recreational and educational leisure-time activities can also impact their health in the long-term by increasing the likelihood of positive physical and mental health outcomes in later life.

In terms of mental health, these activities can improve outcomes in young people through promoting their mental wellbeing and resilience and by having a positive effect on their self-confidence and self-esteem<sup>64</sup>. Engagement in leisure activities that involve socialising and physical activity was also found to positively predict wellbeing in young people by promoting positive affect, mental health and flourishing (encompassing both positive feeling and functioning)<sup>14,15</sup>. Increased training in areas of mental health support for young people has often been voiced by youth workers, thereby suggesting that youth services can function as a means to increase mental health and wellbeing support for young people<sup>65</sup>.

Loneliness and social isolation are risk factors for mental health problems. Data from the West Sussex Health and Happiness survey indicated that in 2018, 13.5% of 10- to 11-year-olds in the county often felt lonely. This was higher for girls (16%) than for boys (11%)<sup>66</sup>. Adolescence and young adulthood have been identified as key life stages at which people may be more likely to experience loneliness. Engagement in leisure activities such as sports-based activities and youth groups may therefore serve as a protective factor to reduce loneliness in young people, helping to mitigate long-term poor health outcomes<sup>67,68</sup>.

### The impact of COVID-19

National lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic prevented young people's access to leisure-time activities, with young people and their parents reporting negative health and wellbeing outcomes such as missing out on opportunities, disrupted routines and increased loneliness<sup>69</sup>.

Whilst the national lockdowns forced non-participation in leisure-time activities, these factors can still apply to general non-participation, particularly to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who are less likely to engage with these activities and may therefore be more susceptible to the negative impact of this non-engagement<sup>70, 49</sup>. Thus, non-participation in leisure-time activities may also serve as a means to further enhance already existing health inequalities in young people.

This highlights the detrimental impact that non-participation in leisure-time activities can have on the mental and psychosocial wellbeing of young people, as reduced opportunities for social interaction, difficulty maintaining friendships, social isolation and subsequent anxiety around socialisation were also reported as consequences of lockdown limiting access to these leisure activities<sup>49</sup>.



## Impact of trauma in childhood

Research consistently identifies bullying as having consequences on the emotional health of children and young people <sup>71</sup> Victims of bullying often experience lack of acceptance in their peer groups, which results in loneliness and social isolation, which can consequently lead to low self-esteem and depression. Leisure activities may therefore serve as a protective factor from these negative mental health outcomes as they can provide a 'safe haven' from environments where the bullying occurred and also create a platform to educate young people about the impact of bullying <sup>72,73</sup>.

Children who have experienced abuse and neglect are at increased risk for a number of problematic developmental, health, and mental health outcomes, including learning problems (e.g., problems with inattention and deficits in executive functions), problems relating to peers (e.g., peer rejection), internalising symptoms (e.g., depression, anxiety), externalising symptoms (e.g., oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder, aggression), and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)<sup>74,75,76</sup>. Sports-related leisure activities can serve as a protective factor against these mental health outcomes in young people with adverse childhood experiences, through building resilience and reducing occurrences of suicidal ideation and self-harm<sup>77</sup>.

Additionally, the provision of facilities for leisure activities can provide dedicated spaces for young people that can cater to their specific wellbeing needs; youth clubs, for example, have been described as 'safe spaces' that provide safety and belonging, giving vulnerable young people shelter from adult responsibilities and the acceleration of societal demands<sup>78</sup>. Thus, leisure-time activities can serve as vehicles to facilitate social interactions which enhance young people's social support, provide spaces for identity exploration and affirm their sense of belonging in a community<sup>79,80</sup> ultimately helping their mental health and wellbeing.

Positive health and wellbeing outcomes have been shown with young people involved in Scout groups displaying a significantly higher level of conflict resolution skills than non-Scouts <sup>81</sup>. This highlights another positive impact of leisure activities on young people's wellbeing: these activities can encourage soft skill (especially social) development in young people to improve their self-esteem and support their transition into adulthood <sup>13,82</sup>.

Additionally, young people's involvement in leisure-time activities can be a means to develop their long-term educational and career aspirations; for example, participation in extracurricular activities such as religious classes and music lessons have been shown to increase further educational aspirations, with students (and their parents) recognising the value of these activities as a means to build stronger University and job applications) <sup>13</sup>. This demonstrates how these activities can positively impact the psychosocial wellbeing of young people.

## Inequalities, social mobility & housing

Significant work has been conducted over recent years on the importance of health inequalities <sup>83</sup>. Health inequalities impact on physical and mental wellbeing, and the life chances of individuals and groups. Taking action on health

inequalities improves the quality of lives of individuals and benefits the wider economy<sup>84</sup>. Alongside the individual human cost of inequities, disparities and inequalities impact on society as a whole<sup>84</sup>.

The last 15 years have seen dramatic reductions in funding for youth work<sup>39</sup>. There has been a shift in funding revenue for youth clubs, with the mid-1980s seeing a larger share of public funding compared to the mid- 2010s<sup>39</sup>.

Several academic articles identify specific inequalities in youth service/leisure service provision. These inequalities, while not an exhaustive list, include cost and time available to participate<sup>85</sup> educational attainment<sup>86</sup>, disparities between rural and urban regions<sup>87</sup>, differences in activity preference between children with intellectual disabilities and children with typical development<sup>88</sup>, and specific barriers to leading healthy lives faced by young people from ethnic minority backgrounds<sup>89</sup>.

Figure 1 provides a conceptual model of what health inequalities mean for young people<sup>27</sup> This model has particular relevance to recreational and educational leisure-time activities. It supports the identification of opportunities for intervention to reduce inequalities<sup>90</sup>.

Figure 1: A conceptual model of how health inequalities arise for young people<sup>27</sup>.



The overlapping effects of social class, school attended, gender, ethnicity and geography in shaping equal opportunities to take part in extra-curricular activities are therefore important considerations in the provision of leisure-time activities.

Social mobility is about ensuring that children and young people have the same opportunities to succeed in life regardless of who they are or where they live. The Social Mobility Index 2017 ranked local authorities on the prospects of disadvantaged people in their areas. In West Sussex, Arun, Chichester and Crawley were identified as social mobility “cold spots” – falling among the 20% lower ranked local authorities in England. Crawley was identified as a cold spot for the youth index and was the 7th worst in the country for school-age children<sup>91</sup>.

Young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) have higher risk of poor physical and mental health, as well as a higher risk of unemployment, lower quality of work and lower incomes in later life<sup>92</sup>. Young people’s participation in leisure activities has been associated with educational success; for example, participation in sport at age 16 has been associated with

higher educational achievement<sup>93</sup>. Extra-curricular activities are important in developing young people's soft skills, which can favour positive outcomes later in life such as employment and social mobility<sup>13</sup>. Socio-emotional skills are a key outcome for youth services<sup>8,94,95</sup>. Young people's participation in volunteering activities can enhance their career aspirations and support their future University and job applications<sup>13</sup>.

Research conducted with young people experiencing homelessness have shown that recreational activities can be used to help combat negative mental wellbeing outcomes by enabling young people to access safe social spaces, cultivate relationships, reconnect to previous passions and promote wellness<sup>96</sup>; this suggests that recreational activities can help to alleviate some of the negative impact of youth homelessness.

### Links or associations with risk

Leisure activities can provide an alternative to leisure boredom, which has been associated with both unhealthy and risky behaviours. For example, older adolescents have higher levels of non-participation in leisure activities compared to their younger counterparts, instead using their spare time to use social media and 'chill', both of which have been associated with declining mental health outcomes<sup>97</sup>.

Non-participation in leisure-time activities can impact the physical health of young people even in later adolescence, as shown in Lajunen's<sup>10</sup> study where young girls who are passive and solitary (i.e have little to no levels of leisure activity or interests) at 14 are more likely to be overweight by age 17.

Leisure boredom can also help predict substance use and adolescent risky sexual behaviour<sup>94,95,98</sup>, leading to Xia hypothesis<sup>99</sup>: "leisure satisfaction is positively correlated with psychosexual adjustment.". This is supported by research demonstrating that American adolescents residing in neighbourhoods with a greater proportion of 'idle' young people were associated with increased odds of sexual initiation and reduced likelihood of contraceptive use<sup>100</sup>.

Participation in voluntary organisations has also been associated with decreased levels of heavy episodic drinking in young women<sup>101</sup> and a reduced risk of teenage pregnancies<sup>102</sup>.

Young people who attend youth clubs have been found to be less likely to engage in anti-social behaviour and crime such as school truancy, taking illegal drugs (including marijuana use<sup>18</sup> or stealing<sup>19</sup>). Sports-based leisure activities have been used to target youth at risk of or involved in youth delinquency, by enabling young people to connect with their peers and positive adult role models, promoting a sense of acceptance and belonging and encouraging pro-social behaviour<sup>103</sup>, thus suggesting that leisure activities could serve as a protective factor against youth crime and violence. The 2025 NYA Youth Sector Workforce Survey highlights a rising demand for targeted support amongst young people, particular those affected by serious violence (Appendix I).

In the context of violence and exploitation, physical, recreational and vocational activities have been identified as an important way to keep people busy and

occupied, and professionals are in a position to facilitate young people's access to a wide range of leisure-time activities <sup>104</sup>. Diversionary findings can also extend to educational outcomes, including attendance, relationships with school staff and in some cases attainment <sup>105</sup>.

A recent West Sussex Youth Safety Survey was completed by 5,242 young people aged 11-18 years, together with 10 interviews with young people aged between 14-18 years old who were at risk, high risk or involved in serious violence <sup>106</sup>. In general, children and young people felt happy. Where young people were unhappy, in both the survey and the interviews, young people mentioned being bored and having nothing to do. This included nearly one in five looking for more youth clubs/places to socialise.

For both boys and girls, mental health and wellbeing have been reported as more favourable if they participated in extracurricular activities and reported less than (as opposed to more than) two hours of recreational screen time per day <sup>107</sup>.

Digital, online spaces can have both benefits to protect young people's mental health as well as the potential to cause harm <sup>108</sup>. The US Surgeon General's report published in 2023 highlights despite the widespread use of social media among children and adolescents, there is not yet enough evidence to determine if its use is sufficiently safe — especially during adolescence, a particularly vulnerable period of brain development. Children and young people are affected by social media in different ways based on their individual strengths and vulnerabilities and based on cultural, historical, and socio-economic factors <sup>109,110</sup>.

Leisure-time programmes can also be used as a mechanism for teaching young people about health and wellbeing; for example, performance-based arts programmes have been used to enable vulnerable young people to consider their sexual behaviour and its impact on themselves and others, with participants suggesting they understood the consequences of risky sexual activity following engagement with the programme <sup>111</sup>.

## Environments

A young person friendly environment is one designed to be accessible, inclusive and safe for young people. It prioritises their health, well-being and development, creating a space where they feel welcome, supported and valued. <sup>112,8</sup>. It fosters social wellbeing, communication skills, involvement and learning, characterized by physical spaces, service interactions, communication strategies and policies that acknowledge and address the unique needs and interests of young people and provide resources and opportunities for them to thrive <sup>112, 8</sup>.

"Young person friendly environments" can refer to i) Social Environments like schools, community centres, youth shelters, youth advisory councils, health and care services and homes. ii) Physical Environments like parks and green spaces, public libraries, museums, cultural centres, community gardens and volunteer opportunities, including whole communities like cities or towns iii) Digital environments like online learning platforms, social media and game development tools <sup>113</sup>.

The environment should embrace diversity, promote respect for all, and ensure that every young person feels valued and accepted <sup>114</sup>. Additionally, all young people, regardless of their background or circumstances, should have fair and equal access to opportunities and resources to thrive. This involves providing tailored support to address individual needs and barriers, promoting social justice and inclusion <sup>114</sup>.

### **6.3 Risk and protective factors relating to participating in recreational and educational leisure-time activities**

A focus on participation in recreational activities when planning community public health interventions has been recognised as an approach to counter-balance social inequality in health <sup>16</sup>. Wider, social determinants including education, environment, housing, income and employment have a huge impact on health and may manifest more so at times of transition <sup>115</sup>. Some groups of young people are more likely to experience poorer health outcomes than their peers (Appendix D). Example health inclusion groups include young people from ethnic minority communities, those living with disabilities, looked after children and care leavers, families at risk of homelessness and those in contact with the youth justice system, among other socially excluded groups <sup>37</sup>.

Youth work is recognised by young people as having a huge impact on their mental and physical wellbeing, confidence, how valued they feel and the contribution they make in their communities <sup>116</sup>. Recreational and educational leisure-time activities can provide safe space, support, educational opportunities and sense of community, as well as a 'hook' to engage young people in other services and support ([Youth Endowment Fund 2024 report on children, violence and vulnerability](#)). Young people who have been victims or perpetrators of violence are less likely to do activities such as team sports, but are more likely to do volunteering, wilderness activities and combat sports, and children directly affected by violence have been seen to be twice as likely to regularly go to a youth club compared to those who haven't <sup>117</sup>. For vulnerable young people in need of support, having an adult in their life who they can turn to can make a big difference. For some, this might be a family member, but others might feel more comfortable seeking help from someone outside their family or friends – for example, a youth worker, sports coach or more formal mentor <sup>117</sup>.

Lack of availability of youth club options is frequently reported amongst young people as a barrier to participation, as is lack of time and social anxiety<sup>116</sup>, (Appendix H). Long-term planning and funding, recruitment and retention of qualified staff, integration and collaboration across sectors and quality assurance pose further challenges<sup>178</sup>. Research in neighbouring local authorities has highlighted the need for greater representation and diversity in services, particularly for GMYP (global majority young people)<sup>118</sup> (Appendix J).

Protective, supportive factors, risk factors or barriers, which impact on young people attending or participating in recreational and educational leisure-time activities can be considered using a social ecological model at the individual, interpersonal, community and wider economic, environmental and societal level (based on the Dahlberg and Krug Model 2002).



See table 1 for a summary of the application of the available literature on recreational and leisure-time activity participation in young people to this model (full version of table in Appendix E).

**Table 1: Socio ecological model of the protective, supportive factors, risk factors or barriers, which impact on young people attending or participating in recreational and educational leisure-time activities**

Individual Level factors	<p><b>Risk / barrier</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Older age (older young people) <sup>119,20</sup></li> <li>• Body image worries <sup>22, 121, 21</sup></li> <li>• Mental health and wellbeing factors <sup>120,21</sup></li> <li>• Physical disabilities <sup>120,122,123</sup></li> <li>• Physical health issues <sup>22,21</sup></li> </ul> <p><b>Supportive / Protective</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skill in relation to available activities <sup>124</sup></li> </ul>
Interpersonal level factors	<p><b>Risk / barrier</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online interaction precedence <sup>97,20,23</sup></li> <li>• Parental alcohol use <sup>125</sup></li> <li>• Peer and family factors <sup>21,22, 120, 23</sup></li> </ul> <p><b>Supportive / Protective</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Familiarity with activity <sup>127,21</sup></li> <li>• Family factors <sup>97,23</sup></li> <li>• Peer factors <sup>115,22,120,20 ,128</sup></li> </ul>
Community level factors	<p><b>Risk / barrier</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of activities, including for young people with disabilities <sup>120, 23</sup></li> <li>• Awareness of activities, including amongst young people with disabilities <sup>120 21</sup></li> <li>• Financial <sup>23,21</sup></li> <li>• Homelessness <sup>129</sup></li> <li>• Inclusivity, including for children with disabilities <sup>22,120,130</sup></li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical accessibility <sup>120</sup></li> <li>Activities have restricted access <sup>31,21,120</sup></li> <li>Safety issues (of activities)<sup>132</sup></li> <li>Transport and travel challenges, including for young people with disabilities <sup>120, 25, 23</sup></li> </ul> <p><b>Supportive / Protective</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Awareness of activities through online <sup>22, 133</sup></li> <li>Good access to information about activities for young people with disabilities <sup>22</sup></li> <li>Inclusivity and flexibility of activities including for young people with disabilities<sup>22,120</sup></li> <li>Mentors (access to) at activities <sup>22,134</sup></li> <li>Strategies for engaging with parents of children with disabilities <sup>22</sup></li> </ul>
Wider economic, environmental and societal factors	<p><b>Risk / barrier</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discrimination, stigma and prejudice <sup>26, 23, 26</sup></li> <li>Policy and bureaucracy <sup>135</sup></li> <li>Poverty and low income<sup>136</sup></li> <li>Inhibitive environment for religious or cultural reasons <sup>26,21,126</sup></li> <li>Quality and accessibility of transport <sup>137,25</sup></li> </ul> <p><b>Supportive / Protective</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access to Green space <sup>138</sup></li> <li>Activities are safe <sup>21,127</sup></li> <li>Affordable activities <sup>97</sup></li> </ul>

## 7. Young people's population health and characteristics

### Key messages

#### Demography

West Sussex is a large county of almost 770 square miles, with coastal resorts, market towns, a New Town (Crawley) and large rural areas with smaller towns and villages. The population is estimated at just over 900,000 residents<sup>28</sup>. Of those, around 9% are aged 11 to 18 years, a similar proportion to England, equating to approximately 84,000 young people in West Sussex.

In the past 10 years, the population of young people aged 11 to 18 years in West Sussex has seen a larger percentage increase than the population overall. 19.9% of young people aged 10 to 19 years live in rural output areas<sup>29</sup>, and around 4% live in areas which take more than 30 minutes travel by road to reach a major town or city.

#### Wider determinants

Some neighbourhoods within Arun and Crawley rank amongst the most deprived 10% nationally. In coastal areas of West Sussex, a higher proportion of children (under 16) live in relative low-income families compared to non-coastal areas or the county overall. Children in deprived areas experience greater health inequalities earlier, including relating to mental health and obesity, and are often more at risk from social determinants including poorer health, education and employment opportunities<sup>139,140</sup>. West Sussex has a higher proportion of 'young people where education, employment or training activity is not known' than England<sup>33</sup>.

#### Health and wider outcomes

In West Sussex, less than half (48.2%) of secondary school pupils meet recommended guidelines of physical activity, and participation in physical activity is higher outside than within school hours<sup>30</sup>. Around 3 in 10 children aged 10-11 are overweight or obese in West Sussex (35.8% nationally)<sup>31</sup>. Rates of new STI diagnoses among under 19s in West Sussex have increased<sup>141</sup>.

West Sussex has a higher proportion of 'young people where education, employment or training activity is not known' than England<sup>142</sup>. Local services would benefit from stronger data to support an understanding of youth employment.

In Sussex, 42% of offenders and 39% of victims of serious violent crime are aged under 25<sup>35</sup>. There is a noticeable increase in victim and offender profiles around the age of 13 and peaking between the ages of 15 and 18<sup>35</sup>. In 2023, the rate of 10-to-17-year-olds receiving their first reprimand, warning or conviction in West Sussex was 83.5 per 100,000, significantly lower than England (143.4 per 100,000)<sup>143</sup>.

## 7.1 West Sussex demography, wider determinants and health outcomes

### Demography

West Sussex is a large county of almost 770 square miles, with coastal resorts, market towns, a New Town (Crawley) and large rural areas with smaller towns and villages. The population of West Sussex is estimated at just over 900,000 residents<sup>28</sup>. Of those, around 9% are aged 11 to 18 years, a similar proportion to England, equating to approximately 84,000 young people in West Sussex.<sup>4</sup>

In the past 10 years, the population of young people aged 11 to 18 years in West Sussex has seen a larger percentage increase (+13.9%) than the population overall<sup>144</sup>. The population of 11- to 18-year-olds has also experienced higher growth in West Sussex than England and our neighbours in East Sussex and Brighton and Hove.

Whilst the population of children and young people aged 11 to 18 is similar to England, West Sussex has a smaller proportion of young adults aged 19 to 24 (5.2% compared to 7.2% nationally). Between 2022 and 2032, the number of young people is projected<sup>5</sup> to stay the same in West Sussex (81,900)<sup>144</sup>.

Within West Sussex, the proportion of children and young people aged 11 to 18 varies across the district and boroughs (Table 2). Crawley has the highest proportion of young people (10.5%) and Arun has the lowest (8.0%). In absolute terms, Mid Sussex has the largest youth population (around 16,000 people aged 11-18), and Adur has the smallest (around 6,300 young people).

Crawley has a younger population profile than average and has seen significant growth in the percentage of 11- to 18-year-olds (+26.5% from 2013 to 2023, equating to 2,600 more young people) when compared to the county overall (+13.9%).

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<sup>4</sup> People staying in the UK for under three months do not have to fill out a census, but everyone else should be covered by one - including students and those who have gone abroad for under a year,

<sup>5</sup> ONS, [Subnational Population Projections](#) (2022-based). Subnational population projections are not forecasts. At the local level, population change is influenced by international migration, economic development and housing policies. These factors that are not included in these projections. Demographic assumptions for future fertility, mortality and migration are based on observed demographic trends. Resulting projections will differ to some extent from future releases of population estimates.



Table 2: Mid-year population estimate of young people (aged 11 to 24) in West Sussex, 2023

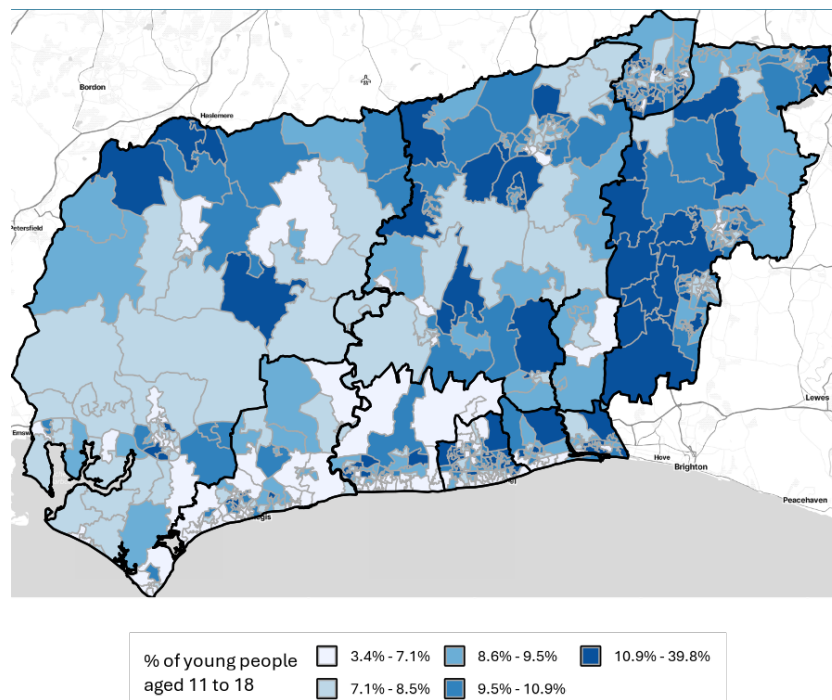
Area	Total: All ages	Population of young people (%)		Total: 11 to 24 yrs	% aged 11 to 24 yrs
		Age 11 to 18	Age 19 to 24		
Adur	64,685	6,295 (9.7%)	2,970 (4.6%)	9,260	14.3
Arun	168,010	13,465 (8.0%)	8,620 (5.1%)	22,085	13.1
Chichester	128,005	10,825 (8.5%)	8,405 (6.6%)	19,230	15.0
Crawley	120,545	12,605 (10.5%)	7,105 (5.9%)	19,710	16.4
Horsham	149,465	14,850 (9.9%)	6,560 (4.4%)	21,410	14.3
Mid Sussex	157,915	16,010 (10.1%)	7,105 (4.5%)	23,115	14.6
Worthing	112,240	9,985 (8.9%)	5,795 (5.2%)	15,780	14.1
West Sussex	900,860	84,030 (9.3%)	46,560 (5.2%)	130,590	14.5
South East	9,482,505	933,270 (9.8%)	607,485 (6.4%)	1,540,755	16.2
England	57,690,325	5,560,280 (9.6%)	4,133,925 (7.2%)	9,694,205	16.8

Source: ONS 2023 mid-year population estimate

Note: Due to rounding (nearest 5) totals may not be the sum of the individual cells.

The proportion of the West Sussex population aged between 11-18 years old is not evenly distributed throughout the County. Some small areas have notably higher proportions of resident young people. This tends to reflect locations of residential educational settings, such as Christ's Hospital in Horsham, Lancing College in Adur and student accommodation at the University of Chichester. See figure 2 for a map of the proportion of CYP living in each West Sussex Lower Super Output Area (LSOA).

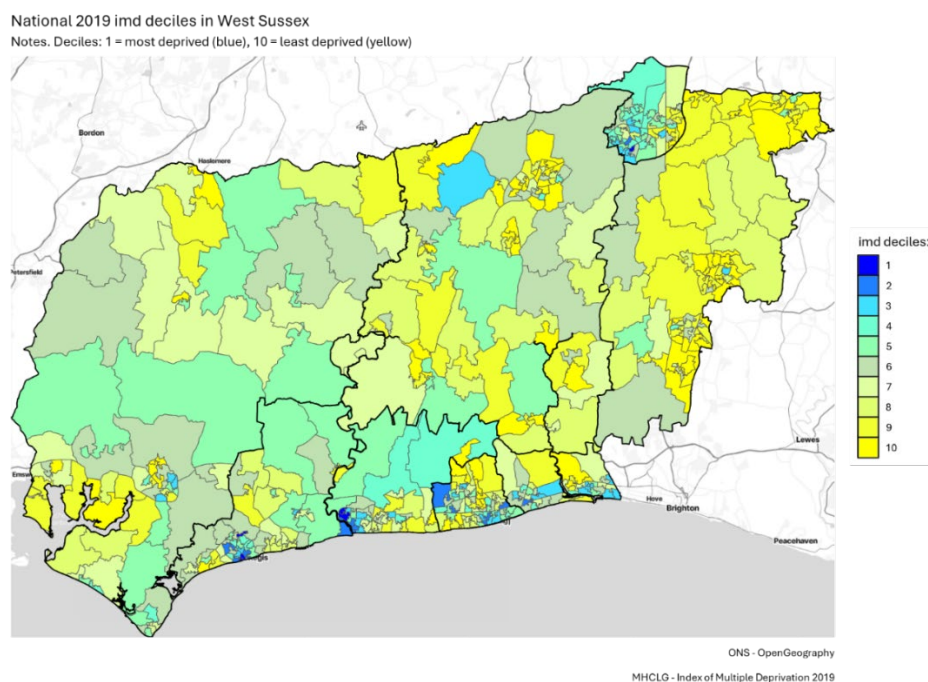
Figure 2. Proportion of young people (aged 11-18) in LSOAs of West Sussex, 2022 mid-year estimate.



### Wider determinants

West Sussex is one of the least deprived counties in England but some neighbourhoods within Arun and Crawley rank amongst the most deprived 10% nationally. Figure 3 shows the lower super output areas (LSOAs) by deprivation decile.

Figure 3: Lower Super Output Areas (2011) in West Sussex by national deprivation decile, Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019



## Rural urban classification

According to the 2021 Rural Urban Classification (RUC)<sup>6</sup>, 80.1% of neighbourhoods (defined as Output areas within the Census) within West Sussex are classified as urban (high density of residential addresses), and 19.9% are classified as rural. At district and borough level, Chichester and Horsham were categorised as majority rural.

10.3% of neighbourhoods across the county are classified as 'smaller rural' (intersecting with a built-up area with a population under 10,000 people), and 9.6% are 'larger rural' (intersecting with a built-up area with population greater than 10,000 people).

Using census 2021 population data, 19.7% of the resident population of West Sussex live in rural output areas. Among young people aged 10 to 19, 19.9% live in rural output areas (around 19-20,000 young people). A smaller proportion of young adults aged 20 to 24 live in rural areas (16.9%).

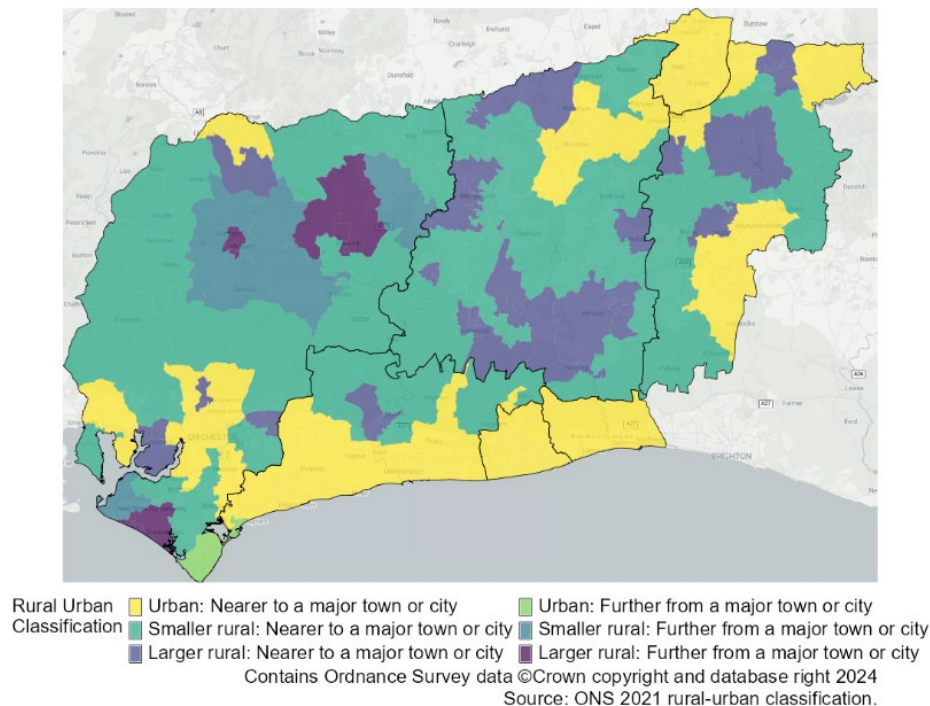
The RUC 2021 also uses estimated travel time by road (by private vehicle) to further split rural and urban categories into 'nearer to a major town or city' or 'further from a major town or city'. This is defined as output areas that can reach a built-up area with 75,000 usual residents or more within 30 minutes travel by road.

Around 4% (3-4,000 young people) of young people aged 10 to 19 live in areas that are further from a major town or city. These areas tend to fall within the

<sup>6</sup> [Rural/urban classifications - Office for National Statistics](#) – the classification systems used to produce a rural/urban view from government statistics

Chichester district, as seen in Figure 4. For young people living in these areas, ease of access to a range of youth provision may depend more so on availability of a private vehicle in the household, and/or suitable, affordable public transport. Figure 4 shows the Rural Urban Classification for West Sussex Lower Super Output Areas.

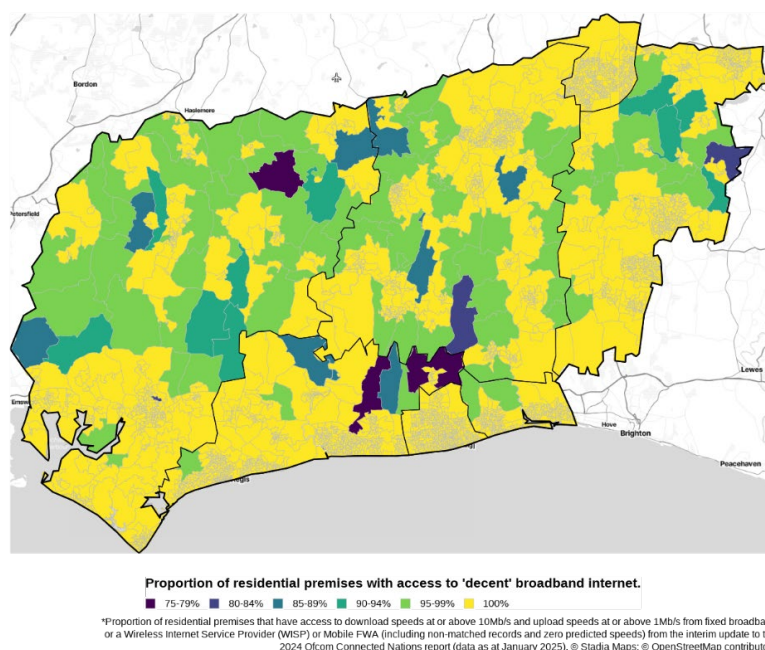
Figure 4: Rural Urban Classification 2021 for West Sussex Lower Super Output Areas



## Internet access

Figure 5 shows the proportion of residential premises in output areas of West Sussex with 'decent' broadband coverage. Rural areas appear to be more likely to have homes with poor quality internet connections. There are areas of the county (e.g. to the north of Chichester) that are both further from a major town or city, and more likely to have poor internet connection.

Figure 5: Proportion of residential premises in West Sussex output areas with access to 'decent' broadband internet



## Coastal inequalities

The 2019 ONS definition of coastal towns classifies built-up urban areas (BUAs) and built-up urban area sub-divisions (BUASDs) as coastal towns if they have populations between 5,000 and 225,000 and a direct coastal boundary<sup>5,182</sup>. Using this definition, there are seven coastal towns in West Sussex – four larger seaside towns (Bognor Regis, Littlehampton, Shoreham-by-Sea and Worthing) and three smaller seaside towns (East Wittering, Selsey and Southwick).

Whilst there are many advantages to living in a coastal area, the Chief Medical Officers' annual report highlighted the serious health challenges experienced by coastal communities, and the risk of preventable ill-health getting worse as coastal populations age<sup>145</sup>.

The West Sussex Public Health and Social Research Unit produced [a framework for reducing coastal inequalities](#) and a series of reports exploring economic hardship in coastal communities which included further analysis on the number and proportion of children living in low-income families (based on data released by the DWP). A higher proportion of children (under 16) in coastal West Sussex live in relative low-income families (14.8%), compared to non-coastal areas of West Sussex (12.3%) and the county overall (12.9%). The West Sussex research showed a lower rate (64%) of 10–11-year-olds in coastal communities were a healthy weight, compared to non-coastal communities (68%).

## Access to green space

In 2020, the Office of National Statistics (ONS), used Ordnance Survey (OS) data to highlight areas with limited outdoor access during the coronavirus lockdown. This accounts for public parks and playing fields, as well as any public and private gardens that people may have access to.



Caution is needed when using this data in rural areas with access to the countryside, as, although they may be a further distance from public gardens or playing fields, the areas will still have good access to open green spaces.

Residents in Adur, Worthing and Crawley had a shorter average distance to their nearest park or public garden than the England average (987m<sup>2</sup>).

A 300m buffer is widely used by World Health Organisation (2017) and Natural England (n.d.) as a measure of accessible green space. Across the district and boroughs in West Sussex, the percentage of postcodes living within a five-minute walk of a park, public garden or playing field, varied from 59.1% in Adur to 41.6% in Chichester.

## Housing

The 2021 Census provides data on the number of households with dependent children classed as overcrowded, based on their occupancy rating. A rating of -1 or less implies that a household's accommodation has fewer bedrooms than required (overcrowded), +1 or more implies more bedrooms than required (under-occupied) and 0 implies a household's accommodation has an ideal number of bedrooms<sup>28</sup>.

In West Sussex, approximately 8,250 households with dependent children (all ages) were overcrowded. This equates to approximately 8.2% of all households with dependent children in West Sussex, lower than England (11.6%). Crawley has both the greatest number (2,383) and proportion (15.2%) of overcrowded households with dependent children in the county.

Local authorities collect data on statutory homelessness, which is reported to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. In 2023/24, 1,476 households were in temporary accommodation across West Sussex<sup>7</sup>, equating to a rate of 3.8 (per 1,000 estimated total households). There is variation in the rate of households in temporary accommodation across the county. Crawley and Worthing had the highest crude rates of households in temporary accommodation within the county (9.6 and 7.8 per 1,000 respectively). Both rates were significantly higher than England (4.6 per 1,000).

The latest available data on households in temporary accommodation is from October to December 2024. As of December 2024, there were 1,723 households in temporary accommodation arranged by local authorities in West Sussex - around half of these households had dependent children (868 households).

## Deprivation

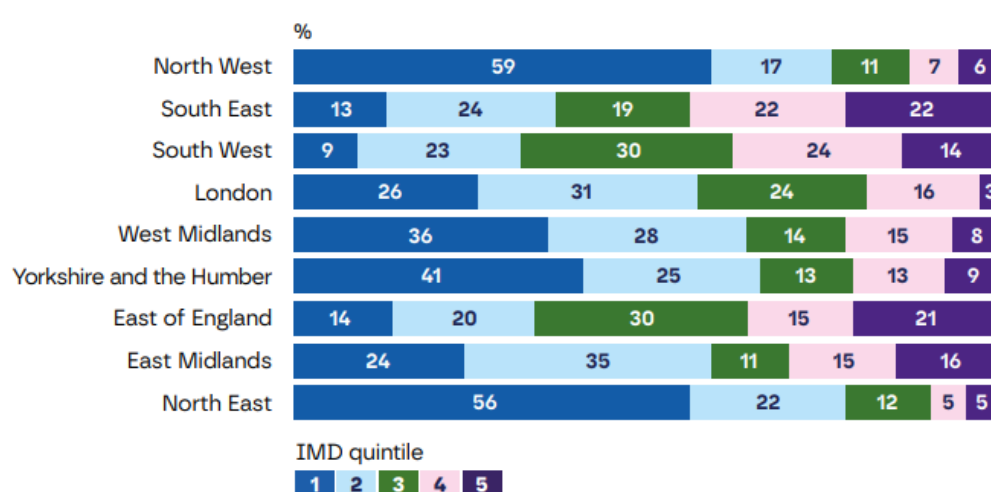
National longitudinal studies generate different portraits of the characteristics of young people engaging in youth provision<sup>39</sup>; suggesting a shift in predominant engagement from lower social class families in the mid-1980s to more affluent families in the mid-2010s<sup>39</sup>. Caveats in comparisons between datasets should consider the definition of how activities are described and funding changes<sup>39</sup>, with more recent definitions broader and covering recreational and educational

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<sup>7</sup> Figures for West Sussex have been aggregated from all known lesser geography values.

leisure-time activities, as opposed to older studies focussing just on 'youth clubs'. The funding landscape has changed over time from public funding to a mix of public, charitable, and commercial funding (alongside some financial contribution from participating families and volunteers)<sup>39</sup>. Nationally, the 2024 NYA Youth Census received twice as many responses from youth sector organisations operating in the most deprived areas, compared to the least deprived. However, this response rate does not appear to be reflected in the South of England data, with less organisations reflected in the lower IMD quintile in the South East (table 5). The National Youth Census (2024) notes that it is unable to ascertain how representative this is of the sector in its entirety and care should therefore be taken when interpreting the results<sup>146</sup>.

Table 5: Proportion of organisations in each IMD quintile per region (n=795) (taken from the National Youth Sector Census Summer 2024 Snapshot (NYA 2024))



## Employment

Nationally, the rate of 16 to 24-year-olds not being in education, employment or training (NEET) is increasing and higher now (12.2% across the UK) than in July to September 2022 (10.8%), and health-related issues are increasingly contributing to rising rates of young people not being in education, employment or training<sup>33</sup>.

West Sussex has a higher proportion of 'young people where education, employment or training activity is not known' than England (14.5% were not known in West Sussex, compared to 2.2% nationally)<sup>33</sup>. It is unclear why this is the case. Local services would benefit from stronger data to support an understanding of youth employment.

National guidance has been produced in 2025 on using 'Risk of NEET Indicators' (RONI) to support young people to participate in education, employment and training<sup>147</sup>.

## Health outcomes

### Physical activity

In West Sussex, less than half (48.2%) of secondary school pupils meet recommended guidelines of physical activity in West Sussex; nationally, this value was 49.0%<sup>30</sup>. Nationally, physical activity levels reported in the Sport England Active Lives Survey have remained similar for the past two years. The Active Lives survey also found that participation in physical activity is higher outside than within school hours, and that some children and young people are less likely to be physically active than others, with differences by age, gender, ethnicity and affluence identified.

In the 2023 Sport England survey, significant inequalities remained in activity levels, with Black (40%) and Asian (40%) children and young people, and those from the least affluent families (44%), still less likely to play sport or be physically active than the average across all ethnicities and affluence groups, and girls (44%) are less likely to be active than boys (51%)<sup>148</sup>.

### Healthy weight

Routine surveillance data indicates prevalence of healthy weight among children and young people generally compares favourably in West Sussex when compared to England<sup>31</sup>. Around 3 in 10 children aged 10-11 are overweight or obese in West Sussex (35.8% nationally). Inequalities in prevalence of excess weight have been well described nationally and locally, with consistently higher prevalence reported for boys, some ethnic groups and children resident in the most deprived areas<sup>31</sup>.

Analyses on trajectories throughout childhood (Reception to Year 6) have been conducted nationally and locally. Whilst most children who were a healthy weight in Reception year, stay a healthy weight, a substantial proportion move to a higher weight classification in later childhood. A social gradient is evident, with children in the most deprived areas more likely to move from a healthy weight to a higher weight classification by Year 6.

Among young people aged 12+, there is limited, recent data to describe healthy weight prevalence, related behaviours and attitudes in West Sussex.

### Sexual and reproductive health and relationships:

Locally, the breadth of data about sexual health among young people is strengthening, and includes information on service provision and use, detection and diagnosis of STIs, and prevention (screening, vaccines)<sup>141</sup>. Rates of new STI diagnoses among under 19s in West Sussex have increased (2023 data)<sup>32</sup>. In a 5-year period (2018 to 2022), around 10% of young people (aged 15 to 19) in West Sussex became reinfected with a new STI within 12 months<sup>32</sup>.

## Alcohol and substance use

Between 2020/21 and 2022/23, West Sussex recorded 575 hospital admissions for alcohol related conditions among individuals under 25 149. Overall, West Sussex had an admission rate of 82.4 per 100,000, lower than the South East's 93.0, but higher than the national average of 78.6, though these differences are not statistically significant. Arun's admission rate was the highest in the region at 124.4, while Mid Sussex recorded the lowest at 47.6. Both Arun and Chichester have maintained higher rates than West Sussex for the last decade. Over the past three years, admission rates have been declining in all districts, aligning with broader regional and national trends.

NHS Digital's Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use amongst Young People in England survey (2024) takes place in secondary schools across England and collects information on areas such as the prevalence of smoking, drinking and drug taking among young people aged 11-15 <sup>150</sup>. This survey reported a decrease in the prevalence of drug use amongst young people in 2023 (13%) compared to 2021 (18%). In addition, this survey indicated that cannabis was the most commonly used drug among pupils aged 11-15 in England in 2023, with 6% of students reporting use.

## Smoking

In the Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use amongst Young People in England survey, 11% of 11-15-year-olds were reported to have ever smoked (this includes having tried smoking), 3% were current smokers and 1% were regular smokers<sup>150</sup>.

The survey also reported that current e-cigarette use (vaping) remains at 9%, the same as in 2021, and 1 in 4 pupils (25%) reported ever having tried vaping. Of pupils who have ever tried vaping, 89% have never regularly smoked tobacco cigarettes, a further 6% reported starting vaping before smoking tobacco cigarettes but only 5% of pupils reported smoking tobacco cigarettes before using vapes.

There is limited local data on the nature and extent of young people's smoking. The What about YOUTH? (WAY) survey, a national youth survey conducted in 2014, reported that 7.1% of 15-year-olds in West Sussex classed themselves as a regular smoker (smoking one or more cigarettes per week), significantly higher than England (5.5%). 10.6% of 15-year-olds in West Sussex classed themselves as current smokers, and 3.5% of 15-year-olds classed themselves as occasional smokers.

Alongside the WAY survey, a Health and Happiness Survey was conducted in 2018 to collect information about the parental influences on Year 6 pupils' (10-11-year-olds) lifestyle and wellbeing in West Sussex<sup>151</sup>. Just under a quarter of children said at least one of their parents smoked. This is a predictor of children taking up smoking themselves<sup>152</sup>.

## Mental Health and Wellbeing

This is covered in more depth in Section 6.2.

## Young people in contact with youth justice

In 2023, the rate of 10-to-17-year-olds receiving their first reprimand, warning or conviction in West Sussex was 83.5 per 100,000, significantly lower than England (143.4 per 100,000)<sup>143</sup>.

## Child criminal exploitation

In Sussex, 42% of offenders and 39% of victims of serious violent crime are aged under 25<sup>35</sup>. There is a noticeable increase in victim and offender profiles around the age of 13 and peaking between the ages of 15 and 18<sup>35</sup>.

## 7.2 Population characteristics

### Key messages–population characteristics

Within West Sussex, the proportion of children and young people aged 11 to 18 varies across the district and boroughs. Crawley has the highest proportion of young people (10.5%) and Arun has the lowest (8.0%). In absolute terms, Mid Sussex has the largest youth population (around 16,000 people aged 11-18), and Adur has the smallest (around 6,300 young people).

Just under one-fifth of young people in West Sussex aged 11 to 18 are from a minority ethnic group. This varies geographically, with two-fifths of the youth population in Crawley from an ethnic minority background – a higher proportion than the other district and boroughs within the county and higher than England<sup>36</sup>.

Around 7,530 (9.6%) young people aged 11 to 18 were disabled under the Equality Act in West Sussex<sup>36</sup>. There is geographical variation across the county in rate and numbers of young people in West Sussex who are disabled under the Equality Act.

In West Sussex, 7.8% of young people aged 16 to 24 identified with a lesbian, gay, bisexual or 'other' (LGB+) sexual orientation, similar to England (7.6%).

In 2023, there were 7,768 live births in West Sussex. Of those, 117 (1.5%) were among women aged under 20 years.

As of 31st March 2024, 6,106 children in West Sussex were classed as in need<sup>37</sup> equating to a rate of 341.1 per 10,000 children aged under 18.

As of 31st March 2024, 906 children were looked after in West Sussex<sup>153</sup>, equating to a rate of 51 looked after children per 100,000 under 18 years. These children were predominantly older (41% aged 10-15 years and 30% aged 16 and over).

For the academic year 2024/25, 504 (0.8%) of pupils in state-funded primary schools and 625 (1.2%) of state-funded secondary school pupils in West Sussex identified as young carers (either by the school or disclosed by a parent or child themselves). This is higher than the known national rates.

The definitions of the following protected characteristics are taken from the equalities act, and are provided in the glossary.

### Ethnicity

18.8% of young people in West Sussex aged 11- to-18 are from a minority ethnic group - a lower proportion than England (32.4 %) (Figure 6). This equates to around 15,000 young people in the county. There are differences within the county, with two-fifths of the youth population in Crawley from an ethnic minority background – a far higher proportion than the other district and boroughs within the county and higher than England<sup>36</sup>.

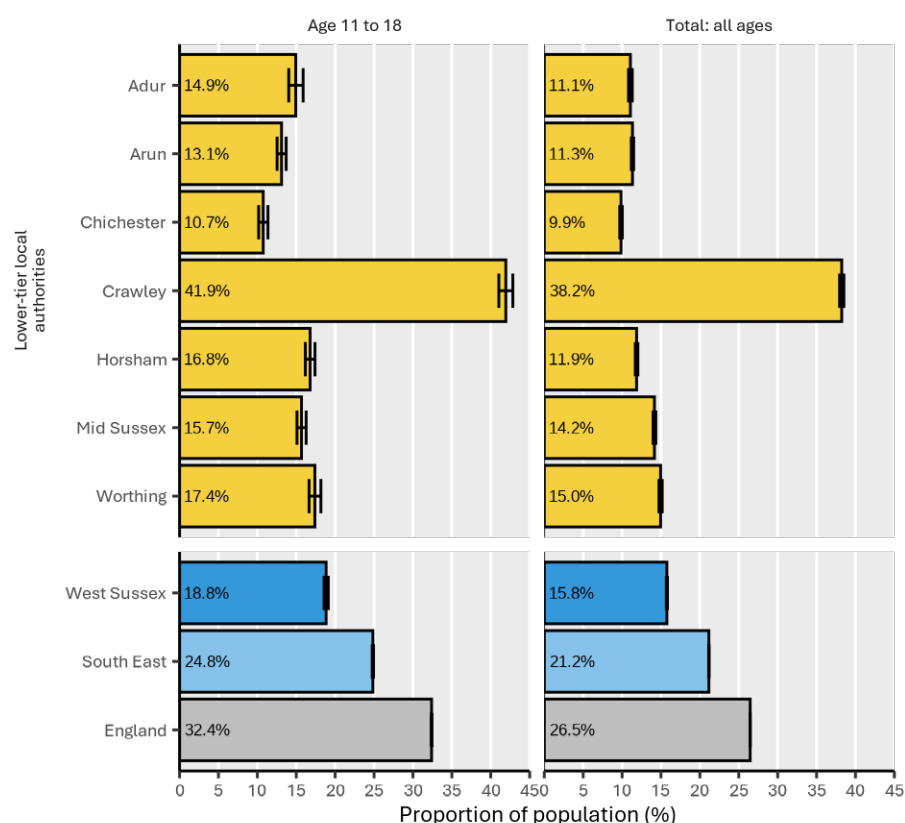


Among young people, the largest minority ethnic group is White: Other (4.3% of young people) in West Sussex. At lower-tier authority level, this is true for all areas except Crawley, where Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh: Pakistani is the largest group (7.2% of young people), followed by White: Other (6.9% of young people). Among the lower-tier authorities, Crawley has the highest proportion of young people from a White: Other background (6.9%), despite not being the largest minority group in that area.

Figure 6: Proportion of young people from a minority ethnic background in West Sussex; 2021 Census

Source: ONS, 2021 Census

Note. minority ethnic group is defined as any ethnicity other than White British



## Sex

Of the 11 to 18 population in West Sussex, 51.4% are male and 48.6% female<sup>154</sup>.

## Disability

Data from the census 2021 found that around 7,530 (9.6%) young people aged 11 to 18 were disabled under the Equality Act in West Sussex (9.6%)<sup>36</sup> (Table 3). Nationally, this figure was 9.8%. Across the county, the proportion of young people who were disabled ranged from 8.5% in Horsham and Mid Sussex to 11.6% in Adur. Of the district and boroughs, Arun had the highest number of young people aged 11 to 18 years who were disabled (1,330).

Table 3: Number and percentage of young people aged 11 to 18 years in West Sussex who are disabled under the Equality Act 2010

Area	Population aged 11 to 18	Disabled under the Equality Act 2010	
		Number	Percentage
Adur	5,730	670	11.6%
Arun	12,890	1,330	10.3%
Chichester	10,360	950	9.2%
Crawley	11,550	1,140	9.8%
Horsham	13,960	1,190	8.5%
Mid Sussex	14,680	1,240	8.5%
Worthing	9,550	1,020	10.6%
West Sussex	78,730	7,530	9.6%
England	5,287,490	519,640	9.3%

Source: ONS 2021 census. Note: counts rounded to nearest 10. Age-specific percentages.

In West Sussex, approximately 6,870 (14.2%) young adults aged 19-24 years were disabled under the Equality Act<sup>36</sup> (Table 4). In England, 13.1% of young adults were disabled. Across the county, the proportion of young adults who were disabled ranged from 11.9% in Crawley to 16.8% in Adur. Of the district and boroughs in the county, Arun had the highest number of young adults who were disabled (1,320).

Table 4: Number and percentage of young adults aged 19 to 24 years in West Sussex who are disabled under the Equality Act 2010

Area	Population aged 19 to 24	Disabled under the Equality Act 2010	
		Number	Percentage
Adur	3,160	530	16.8%
Arun	8,820	1,320	14.9%
Chichester	7,980	1,220	15.3%
Crawley	7,640	910	11.9%
Horsham	7,170	960	13.4%
Mid Sussex	7,400	950	12.9%

Area	Population aged 19 to 24	Disabled under the Equality Act 2010	
		Number	Percentage
Worthing	6,090	980	16.1%
West Sussex	48,250	6,870	14.2%
England	3,532,150	532,520	13.1%

Source: ONS 2021 census. Note: counts rounded to nearest 10. Age-specific percentages.

## Special Educational Needs

In 2024/25, 5.6% of pupils attending schools in West Sussex had an education, health and care (EHC) plan across all phase types (primary, secondary, special, AP school and independent), increasing from 4.1% in 2022/23.

Data is also available on the number and percentage of children receiving SEN support. This refers to support that is additional to, or different from, the support generally made for other children of the same age in a school. In 2024/25, there was a higher percentage of pupils receiving SEN support without an EHC plan attending state-funded primary (14.9%) and secondary schools (16.6%) across West Sussex compared to England (14.8% and 13.4% respectively).

## Sexuality

In West Sussex, 7.8% of young people aged 16 to 24 identified with a lesbian, gay, bisexual or 'other' (LGB+) sexual orientation, similar to England (7.6%)<sup>36</sup>. Across the county, the proportion of young people who identified with an LGB+ orientation ranged from 6.1% in Crawley to 9.8% in Chichester. Chichester also had the largest population of young people stating an LGB+ sexual orientation at just over 1,050 young people.

## Gender identity

Along with sexual orientation, the 2021 Census asked people about gender identity for the first time. This question was asked to provide the first official data on the size of the transgender population in England and Wales to support anti-discrimination duties under the Equality Act 2010. This was a voluntary question for people aged 16 years and over. People were asked: "Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?".

Of those who answered the question<sup>8</sup>, an estimated 0.97% of young people (aged 16 to 24 years) in West Sussex stated that their gender identity was

<sup>8</sup> There are caveats to be aware of when interpreting these estimates. For example, the statistical uncertainty with these estimates will be higher for relatively small population groups, and when broken down by geographical area or other characteristics such as age (e.g., 16-24 years). In addition, the ONS stated that there are patterns in the data which suggested that some respondents may not have interpreted the question as intended, notably those with lower levels of English language proficiency. This may result in an increase in estimates of trans population at smaller geographic levels, particularly where there are higher levels of non-English speakers.

different from their sex registered at birth. Nationally, this proportion was 1.08%.

## Religion and belief

In West Sussex, a higher proportion of young people aged 16 to 24 said they had no religious affiliation (60.1%) compared to England (51.3%)<sup>36</sup>. Crawley had a larger proportion of young people identifying as Muslim (12.6%) and Hindu (4.1%) than other areas in West Sussex.

## Pregnancy and Maternity

In 2023, the Age specific fertility rates (ASFR) for women aged under 18 in West Sussex was 1.3 live births per 1,000 women aged under 18, lower than England (3 live births per 1,000 women under 18). Crawley had the highest ASFR for women aged under 18 (4.1) in West Sussex.

In 2023, there were 7,768 live births in West Sussex. Of those, 117 (1.5%) were among women aged under 20 years. This is a lower percentage of live births among young women compared to England (2.3%)<sup>155</sup>.

## Marital / relationship status

In West Sussex, around 800 young people (16-24) were married or in a registered civil partnership (2021 Census)<sup>36</sup>, equating to 1.1% of the 16 to 24-year-old population. Crawley had a higher proportion of young people (16-24) who were married or in a registered civil partnership (2.6%). This is notably higher than other areas within the county (Arun had the next highest proportion at 1.0%).

## Child in need

As of 31st March 2024, 6,106 children in West Sussex were classed as in need<sup>38</sup>, equating to a rate of 341.1 per 10,000 children aged under 18. This rate is higher than England (332.9 per 10,000). In West Sussex, 669 (11%) of children in need had a disability recorded, compared with 13.6% for England.

## Children we care for

As of 31st March 2024, 906 children were looked after in West Sussex (Children Looked After in England 2024), equating to a rate of 51 looked after children per 100,000 under 18 years<sup>153</sup>.

In West Sussex, there were more male children who were looked after (58%) than female (42%). These children were predominantly older (41% aged 10-15 years and 30% aged 16 and over) and the majority were from a white ethnic

background (78%) compared to 8% from mixed ethnic groups. (Note, children with a child protection plan are omitted from this government dataset.)

In the Your Life, Your Care survey in 2023 <sup>156</sup>, 24% of West Sussex young people looked after reported that they did not get to do similar things to their friends, compared to 17% of young people looked after in other local authorities (reported as statistically significant).

### Care leavers

In 2024, there were approximately 660 care leavers aged 17-21 years in West Sussex<sup>38</sup>, with approximately 520 aged 22-25 years still in contact with the local authority. Three quarters of care leavers aged 17-18 in West Sussex were in education, employment or training.

### Young carers

For the academic year 2024/25, 504 (0.8%) of pupils in state-funded primary schools and 625 (1.2%) of state-funded secondary school pupils in West Sussex identified as young carers (either by the school or disclosed by a parent or child themselves)<sup>157</sup>. Nationally, 0.5% of pupils in state-funded primary schools and 1.1% of pupils in state-funded secondary schools were known to be young carers.

## 8. Recreational and educational leisure-time activities in West Sussex

This chapter provides a snapshot of recreational and educational leisure-time activities in West Sussex, using national youth census findings and a rapid review of West Sussex activities.

### Key messages

Nationally, operating costs have increased for a large proportion of the youth sector. Financial strain is exacerbated by widespread increased demand for existing and new services in the last year, experienced by most organisations.

Most services identified in West Sussex incur some costs (78%). These can vary hugely, for example single entry to a youth club could cost 50p, whereas regular attendance at a sports club could include multiple costs to cover membership, subscriptions, kit and equipment. Activities were predominantly face to face, with a small amount of online provision apparent.

There is a mixture of formal and informal education and training opportunities. Formal opportunities, such as via Duke of Edinburgh, Youth Action and Cadet Forces, were slightly less prominent in the information collected. Informal opportunities to learn new and transferable skills were much more prevalent.

Activities frequently identified with providing outdoor pursuits, more traditional youth clubs and sports or informal physical activities. Specific cultural activities (eg. performing arts, acting, singing and dance) were less frequently referenced in the review, at about 10% of the time. Least frequently referenced were special interest activities such as science, music and cooking.

Recreational and educational leisure-time provision includes a mix of local activities that are only available in West Sussex, and nationally provided activities that are available to all young people. National activities include some which may operate at specific locations in West Sussex, such as local Scout and Guide groups.

Countywide databases on community-based opportunities for participating in leisure and recreational activity include the Family Information Service, the Library Service CLIO3, the Local Offer and Your Space<sup>9</sup> within West Sussex County Council. CLIO3, the Local Offer and Your Space cover the whole life course (i.e. all ages) and capture activities locally available in West Sussex. The Family Information Service offers information to all families on childcare, as well as activities and services for 0-25 year olds.

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<sup>9</sup> Your Space in West Sussex provides a 'hub for teen life, from work to play and making an impact'.



## 8.1 National Youth Services

Nationally, there are several, universal providers of leisure and recreational activities for young people (see Appendix G for more information). These are predominantly well-established uniformed offers, such as Scouts and Guides, St John Ambulance and armed forces cadet branches. Many of these activities are delivered at locations across the country, including within or associated with educational settings. They may rely on a paid and/or voluntary workforce. Both factors impact on where and when these activities are available, and their sustainability in the long-term. In general, membership for most youth organisations have a financial cost, which can include costs for subscriptions, activities, and uniforms. Some may offer discounted or free aspects for young people whose families may not be able to meet these costs. With larger national organisations who are well established, they have significant infrastructure and communicate their safeguarding arrangements.

An example of a national programme running at a local level, the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme is fully funded by the Department for Education and offers children who are entitled to benefits related free school meals the opportunity to attend participating holiday activity clubs and have a free meal. Eligible children can attend their chosen HAF provision for a maximum of four days per week for one week at Easter, four weeks during the Summer and one week at Christmas.

**The National Youth Sector Census (NYA 2024)**<sup>146</sup> is an annual survey of youth sector provision across England. The Census was launched in 2021 to further understand where youth work takes place, how it is delivered and how it is funded. It has so far been particularly successful in identifying some of the challenges the sector faces:

**1. 'Coverage and engagement'**<sup>146</sup>: Youth work provision is available to young people aged from 8 to 24 years, with the majority of activities aimed at 13- to 19-year-olds. Organisations reflected in the youth sector vary in size and reach. In the 2024 NYA Youth Census Survey (NYA 2024), it was reported that on average, each organisation in the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) sector reaches fewer young people than a local authority does, but the VCS makes up the vast majority of youth sector providers. Cross-sector working is evident in almost all organisations, most commonly with the education sector. Upper Tier Local Authorities (UTLA) were reported as much more likely than VCS organisations to work alongside youth justice services.'

**2. 'Delivery and activities'**<sup>146</sup>: UTLAs are more likely to offer support to specific groups of young people. However, open-access youth work remains the most commonly delivered type of weekly provision, with the majority also providing targeted support every week. As in previous Census iterations (NYA 2024), mental health and wellbeing are the main areas that targeted support focuses on. Youth sector organisations in more deprived areas tended to deliver a wider range of services and activities, to a wider range of young people, than in less deprived areas. Direct delivery of youth work activities is the main role of almost all organisations, with UTLAs more likely to have responsibility for commissioning and infrastructural support.'

**3. 'Financial health'**<sup>146</sup>: Operating costs have increased for a large proportion of the youth sector, alongside a decline in operating budgets for many. Financial strain is exacerbated by widespread increased demand for existing and new services in the last year, experienced by most organisations. The majority of youth sector organisations receive funding from four or more sources. This could help prevent reliance on one source, but also may suggest organisations are being forced to diversify due to underfunding. Nearly half of VCS organisations report having insufficient reserves to operate beyond six months if their funding stopped. Organisations in more deprived areas are more likely to have shorter reserves. Capital expenditure for buildings or facilities is also needed by around half of organisations in the coming year. Again, this is more necessary in more deprived areas.'

**4. 'Staffing and workforce'**<sup>146</sup>: The vast majority of VCS organisations employ fewer than 10 paid staff and under 10 volunteers. VCS organisations tend to have more volunteers than paid staff. The majority of staff do not have a youth work qualification, especially amongst smaller organisations. Qualifications are much rarer amongst the volunteer workforce. Staff and volunteer recruitment is a challenge for around half of organisations, compounded by staff wellbeing and training challenges.'

## 8.2 West Sussex offer for young people

A rapid review of available recreational and educational leisure-time activities was conducted in West Sussex to provide an overview of youth provision in June 2025. This aimed to determine current provision of recreational and educational leisure-time activities in the local authority.

In line with the statutory duty, information has been collated to inform a view on cost, location, timing, safety, age range, protected characteristics, and accessibility of the facilities, including transport links. This was conducted as a rapid snapshot and will therefore have limitations in its completeness and temporality.

This analysis did not include mental health and wellbeing services for young people. This has been recently described in West Sussex in a public mental health needs assessment<sup>158</sup>.

In Spring 2025, the Family Information Service (FIS)<sup>10</sup> collected data on young people's recreational and educational leisure-time activities, (available to young people aged 11 to 18, and to 25 for young people with learning difficulties or disabilities) in West Sussex. This data was gathered from a combination of sources including:

- An existing directory held by the Family Information Service
- Direct contact with providers
- Mapping work conducted by Family Hubs in each district and borough
- Existing district and borough datasets from Chichester and Crawley

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<sup>10</sup> The Family Information Service (FIS) provided by West Sussex County Council offers free, impartial, up-to-date information to all families on childcare, as well as activities and services for 0-25 year olds.

- Manual research via public platforms such as google, Facebook and websites

Close working between the FIS and the Local Offer enabled some information held on the Local Offer to be included within FIS, and as such within this rapid review.

This is currently the most comprehensive list of youth provision in West Sussex.

This data did not include other services (e.g. health, education) available to young people.

The term 'providers' will be used to represent the information collected in this rapid review on provision of recreational and educational leisure-time activities.

### Caveats

This analysis represents a snapshot in time. The data collected includes a mixture of recreational and educational leisure providers, services and activities. In some cases a provider may appear as multiple records in the dataset, with each record representing a different service they provide; in others all services offered by a provider may appear in a single record. These caveats should be considered when making statements about quantity of youth provision in West Sussex. It is recognised that gaps may still exist.

Leisure-time activities tend to support young people across the age band, with the exception of the older 20- to 24 year age band. Activities offered to young people aged 20 to 24 years are for young people with SEND as per the scope of this rapid review, such as Footloose Disability Dance Group, Young Voices Youth Project and Stepping Stones - Life Skills Project. Some youth services in the county reach beyond age 18.

Some (particularly national providers) chose not to put information on local activities in the public domain because of safeguarding concerns.

Furthermore, there are local lists of leisure-time activities, such as Voluntary Action Adur and Chichester membership lists<sup>11</sup>, which have not been cross referenced, but reflect the breadth of different locations where information is available. Of note too is that after school clubs offered directly by schools weren't captured.

This rapid review data should therefore not be used to make definitive statements about geographic coverage within West Sussex as it is not considered complete at this stage.

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<sup>11</sup> [VAAC | Search our list of Membership Organisations](#)

## Findings

### What is the current picture of recreational and educational leisure-time provision for young people in West Sussex?

In total, the FIS identified 224 providers of recreational and educational leisure for young people in West Sussex. This includes a mix of:

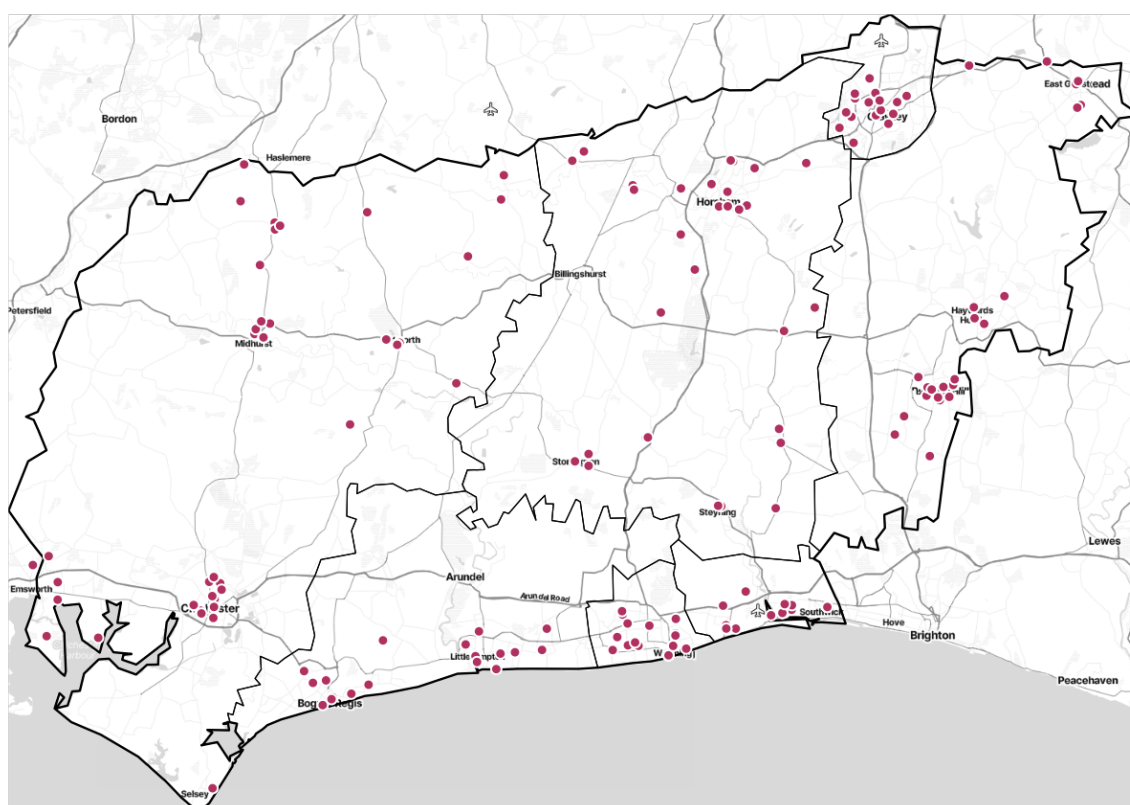
- Local providers: activities that are only available in West Sussex
- National providers: activities that are available to all young people, including some which may operate at specific locations in West Sussex, such as local scout and guide groups.

This also includes activities delivered face-to-face, online only, or a mixture of the two (hybrid). Of the 224 providers identified, 203 could be mapped geographically. Postcodes were not recorded for 21 providers. This was due to one of the following reasons:

- providers operate nationally with no specific local sites recorded (n = 11)
- providers operate within West Sussex, but postcode information was not available (n = 9)
- providers were online only so do not have a physical site (n = 1)

Figure 7 shows the locations of youth providers in West Sussex as identified by the FIS. Note that some points overlap (for example, where different providers use the same setting, or where a single provider offers different activities at the same setting).

Figure 7: Youth provision in West Sussex



© Stadia Maps; © OpenStreetMap contributors  
Source: Family Information Service, WSCC

### Cost (to young person attending)

Most services identified incur some costs (78%). These can vary hugely, for example single entry to a youth club could cost 50p, whereas regular attendance at a sports club could include multiple costs to cover membership, subscriptions, travel, kit and equipment. Table 6 shows the number of youth providers by cost to attend.

It is important to note that some providers do try to limit the financial burden on families on low-income (e.g. through discounts, awards/bursaries etc.) or with certain characteristics (e.g. sibling discounts), which is not reflected here.

Table 6: Number of youth providers by cost to attend (% of total providers where known)

Cost to attend	Number of providers	%
<b>Costs to attend</b>	172	78.2%
<b>Some costs*</b>	6	2.7%
<b>Free to attend</b>	42	19.1%
<b>Total</b>	220**	100%

Notes. \* such as voluntary contributions, or the provider may offer free elements. \*\*Cost was not recorded for 4 providers. Proportions given are of providers with cost known.

## Activity type

Activities offered in West Sussex were categorised into the following themes, which are broadly based on activities described by the statutory duty (detailed definitions given in Appendix F):

- Sports and physical activities
- Youth groups
- Cultural activities
- Outdoor pursuits
- Special Interest clubs
- Volunteering activities

Whilst many providers offer activities across multiple themes, this mapping exercise aimed to identify the core principle of each offer where possible. In some cases, a provider may still fall in more than one theme<sup>12</sup>. This data summarises the services/providers as identified through the mapping exercise and will be affected by the degree of detail captured (which is greater for some providers and activities than others).

Type of activity was recorded for 222 of the 224 providers identified (two<sup>13</sup> not known/record, equating to 0.9% of total). Proportions given in Table 7 are of the total number of youth providers where type of activity was recorded.

Table 7: Number of providers identified by the FIS by type of activity offered

Type of activity	Number	% (of 222)
Outdoor pursuits	90	40.5%
Youth groups	64	28.8%
Sports and informal physical activities	46	20.7%
Cultural activities	24	10.8%
Special interest clubs	16	7.2%
Volunteering activities	13	5.9%

<sup>12</sup> For example, performing arts groups offering dance classes would be captured in the themes 'sports and physical activities' and 'cultural activities'.

<sup>13</sup> The two services that were not classified focussed on practical aspects of gaining work experience, training and life skills (such as managing money). Other providers do also offer support with these aspects, such as Volunteer Police Cadets, St John Ambulance NHS Cadets and skills acquired through Duke of Edinburgh award.



Two-fifths of the services identified offered activities centred around outdoor pursuits. It should be noted that this high number reflects sometimes multiple data entries from national organisations. This group includes several local Explorer Scout and Young Leader Explorer Scout units, Air Training Corps Cadet squadrons, Army Cadet platoons and Combined Cadet Forces. It was noted that local Sea Cadets, Guides and Rangers groups (among others) did not feature in the provider list, although the national offers are captured. These types of groups tend to offer young people opportunities to spend time outside, including away from home (e.g. overnight stays, camps), participate in a wide range of outdoor activities (such as sports, camping, cooking, orienteering, flying, sailing etc.), and be part of a larger community or network. Many of these groups are run by youth organisations such as Scouts, Guides and Cadet forces, which may be more structured in format than traditional youth groups, encouraging regular participation, membership and uniforms.

More than a quarter of youth provision were traditional youth groups. These are primarily run in community centres, churches or some schools, by volunteers and youth workers. This also included offers for specific groups of young people, such as LGBTQ+ young people, girls or boys (e.g. Girls/Boys Brigade) and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The types of activities offered by youth groups vary, although many offer various recreational leisure activities such as arts and crafts, cooking, board games, music, religious studies etc. as well as informal games like ball games, table tennis and pool. A focus for many youth groups was ensuring young people are given the opportunity to socialise with peers in a safe, community space.

A fifth of services identified offer sport classes, clubs or activities. These tended to be instructor led classes/clubs for specific team and individual sports, such as football, dance, cricket, gymnastics or swimming. The focus of these clubs/classes varied, but many offer opportunities for young people to be physically active, develop peer relationships through team building, be part of a community or subculture, and improve confidence. Informal physical activities were a common offer across many providers - not just those within this type of activity.

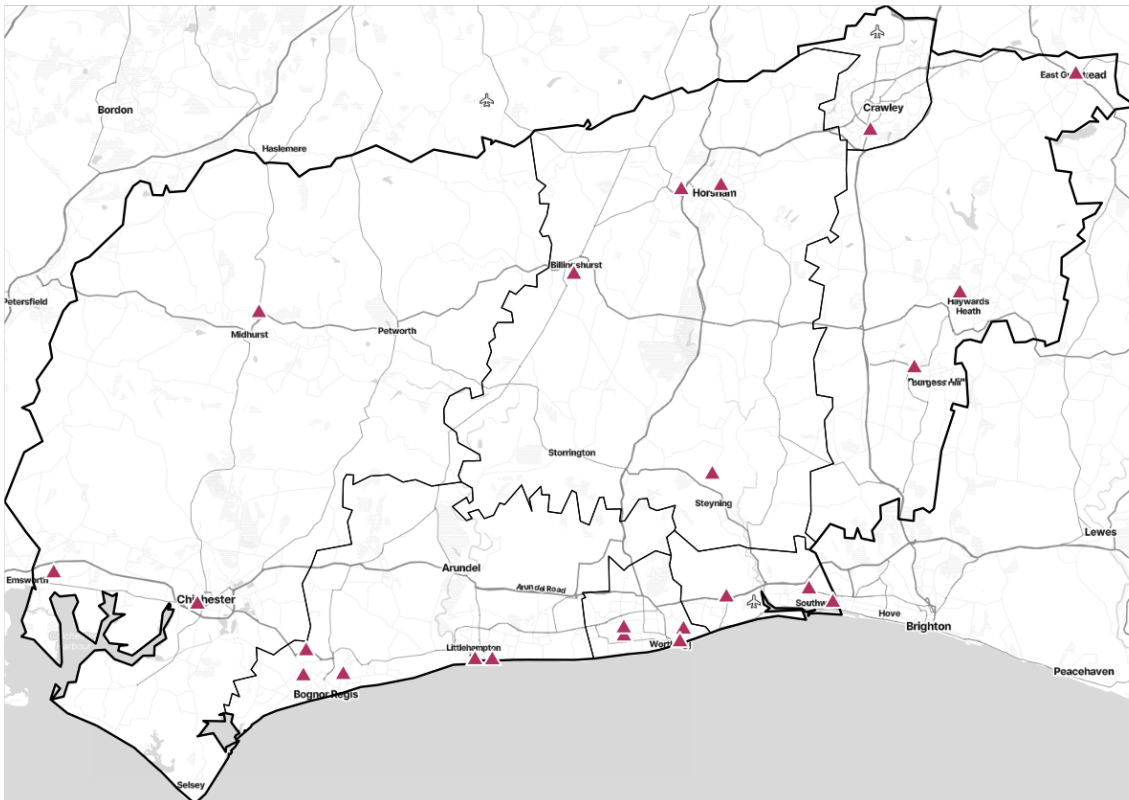
Around 10% of services were offering cultural activities. These focused mostly on performing arts such as youth theatres, acting, singing and dance clubs. These activities offer young people the opportunities to be creative, learn to act, dance and/or sing, boost confidence and teamwork.

Special interest clubs (e.g. science, arts and crafts, or cooking clubs) and volunteering activities (e.g. volunteer police cadets) were less frequently identified offers of support. It is recognised that many of the services categorised in other themes do also encourage and support young people to volunteer and participate in their communities (e.g. Scouts, Duke of Edinburgh). This means youth provision offering volunteering opportunities are likely to be underrepresented in this data.

## Sussex14

Leisure Centres running in the Horsham District).

Figure 8: Commissioned leisure facilities in West Sussex



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Source: WSCC and District and Borough websites

Providers offer different services for young people at their facilities. Examples of the types of offers available to young people include:

- A young person's hub called the Hangout at Worthing Leisure Centre, for 11- to 16-year-olds

<sup>14</sup> Information on leisure facilities commissioned by West Sussex District and Borough councils was sourced from the West Sussex County Council website on Leisure: [Leisure centre - West Sussex County Council](#), and local district and borough websites (Adur and Worthing: [Sport and Leisure Centres - Adur & Worthing Councils](#), Arun: [Leisure centres | Arun District Council](#), Chichester: [Leisure centres - Chichester District Council](#), Crawley: [Sport and leisure | Crawley GOV](#), Horsham: [Leisure centres | Horsham District Council](#), Mid Sussex: [Leisure Centres - Mid Sussex District Council](#))

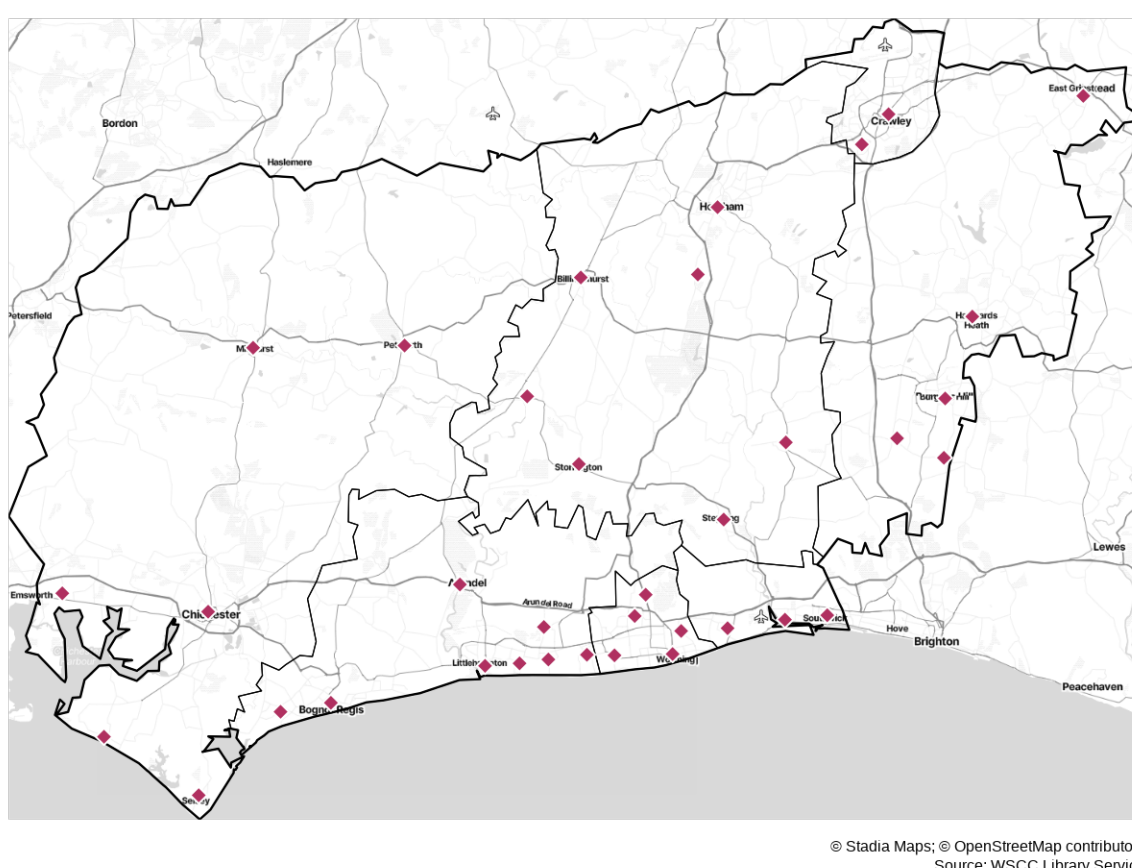
- Multi-activity sessions for young people aged 11 to 16 at Arun Leisure Centre
- A range of sports classes and clubs for children and young people, such as swimming, trampolining, climbing, racquet sports and athletics
- Junior gym sessions for young people
- Family swimming sessions
- Junior memberships

These are offered at various times and days throughout the week, including after school and on weekends.

## West Sussex Library Service

Open six days per week, the Library Service<sup>15</sup> is a universal service available to anyone living, working or studying in West Sussex. Libraries provide the comprehensive offer of book and other media loans, resources for those with special educational needs and disabilities, a study space, as well as a wide offer for the whole community. Figure 9 shows the location of West Sussex library services.

Figure 9: West Sussex Library Services



For children and young people, the Library Service offers specific membership, including child membership for 0–13-year-olds, teenage membership for 14–17-

<sup>15</sup> [Our Libraries - West Sussex](#)

year-olds, and adult membership for 18+. The service also offers facilities and activities for children, young people and their families. For example:

- Free story times for children and young people with additional needs
- Booklists for children and teens on specific topics (such as dyslexia, LGBTQ+, mental health and wellbeing)
- Free Wi-Fi, computers with internet access that are free to use
- Study spaces
- Free e-books and audio downloads
- Volunteer opportunities for young people aged 13+ years (relevant to young people's CV development), such as through the Summer Reading Challenge

The Library Service also maintains the Disability Register<sup>16</sup> for young people aged under 25 who have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The Register collects information about children and young people with SEND to help plan and deliver local services. By being on the Register, young people with SEND can receive regular eNewsletters about local events, activities and information, access discounts on local and national attractions, and help influence services and plan events.

Libraries are also a hub for those who may need help with health issues, including mental health and emotional wellbeing. Provision of self-help resources and signposting is a crucial function. Libraries are based in the heart of communities and their local knowledge allows them to direct people to other sources of help and support, through the Council and Local Information Online (CLIO) platform. Libraries also share spaces with other West Sussex services.

## Virtual Access

Of the youth provision identified in West Sussex, 217 (of 224, 96.9%) deliver recreational and educational leisure-time activities face-to-face. The remaining 7 offer a hybrid or online only service.

Whilst most youth provision in West Sussex is offered face-to-face, access to virtual youth provision (such as via video calling) is likely to require a 'decent' internet speed.

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<sup>16</sup> [West Sussex Disability Register - West Sussex Disability Register - West Sussex](#)

## 9. Voice: engagement, interviews and focus groups in West Sussex

This chapter provides an overview of the engagement activity carried out in West Sussex as part of this needs assessment.

### Key messages

Focus groups with young people, youth practitioners and other professionals, and a survey were used as part of this needs assessment to build the picture of recreational and educational leisure-time activities in West Sussex.

There are examples across the county of safe and varied activities running at varied opening hours and opportunities for all ages to engage with activities.

In West Sussex, young people like recreational and educational leisure-time activities because they are fun, help them to socialise and meet new people, enable them to take part in specific activities, enable them to make use their surroundings, and help them to be fit and keep active.

Youth practitioners and other professionals recognise the importance of these activities in creating safe environments for young people, having funded activities throughout the school holidays, social connections, broadening horizons and ambitions for young people, and the benefits to young people of socialising in person verses digital.

The things that stop young people from attending recreational and educational leisure-time activities in West Sussex are that they don't like going by themselves, activities are at the wrong time, there isn't anything of interest / activities aren't close, environmental and structural barriers including cost, personal and social barriers, lack of accessibility and availability (including inconsistency), reduced rural access (exacerbated by travel barriers), travel options (including cost and safety), programme delivery issues (i.e. lack of attendance or staying open), lack of diversity and inclusion, poor awareness of activities on offer, perceptions around activities as being 'friendly enough', and concerns around group dynamics and safety concerns.

To make activities easier to attend, young people and youth practitioners / other professionals would like them to be cheaper or free, to be closer, for friends to attend also, to be able to get transport to and from activities, to know what's on, improved access and availability (both in activities running and at more convenient times), increased / improved diversity and inclusivity, listening and acting on young people's voice, quality assurance, equality in access, consistent funding, investment in workforce (including training), coordination and communication between services, safety in place design and an increase in young people friendly environments.

There is a desire amongst young people to be involved in deciding which activities should be on offer. Young people report that often their opinions aren't put into action, or that they don't know whether they are.

### 9.1 Young People's Leisure-time Activities Survey

A survey of young people was undertaken to seek their views and experiences of leisure-time activities in the county. The survey was open to young people aged

11 - 19 years and those with learning difficulties or disabilities aged 20 to 24 years.

The survey ran from 18 June to 6 July 2025 and relied on promotion and sharing across system partners, including via the needs assessment steering group, communication through schools and local forums, and via networks across the districts and boroughs in West Sussex. Analysis was conducted by the West Sussex Public Health and Social Research Unit.

This survey was not designed to understand differences in responses by West Sussex geography, make data comparisons at protected characteristic level, or be representative of the wider West Sussex population in the target age range. This, however, is common in a time-limited, opportunity sampling strategy such as used here. Even so, the survey provides valuable insight into the subject matter from the perspective of young people.

In terms of breadth of responses, it perhaps is worth noting a higher number of responses from young people in the south of the county.

The data which informed the themes below are in Appendix L, and characteristics of respondents are provided in Appendix M.

## Results

Of the 516 completed responses which were received, 499 were completed using the general survey and a further 17 used the easy read version.

Due to the opportunistic and time-limited sample methods and a relatively small sample size, the findings have not been assumed to be fully representative of the whole population.

Characteristics of respondents:

- The largest proportion live in Arun (38%) and Chichester (30%).
- Most young people were in the age range of 13 to 15 years (56%)
- A higher proportion of females to males (59% v 36%)
- Most identified as heterosexual (74%), White British (76%) or White Other (10%)
- 23% reported having a disability or long-term illness
- 37% said they had a neurodiverse condition

## Young people taking part in leisure-time activities

A total of 500 young people answered the question about whether they took part in leisure-time activities, with 390 respondents (78%) saying they had taken part in activities.

## What do you **like** about leisure-time activities?

Some 360 young people responded, with the most frequently cited themes:

- Fun (143)



- Socialising (91)
- Taking part in specific (named) activities (58)
- Meeting new people (47)
- Fitness (33)
- Keeping active (32)

### Things that **stopped** young people going to leisure-time activities

Below are the four most frequently cited reasons for not attending leisure-time activities:

- I don't like going by myself (165)
- Activities are at the wrong time (118)
- There's nothing I'm interested in (116)
- Not close to me (106)

### What would make it **easier** for young people to attend leisure-time activities?

Of the 349 young people who responded the most frequently cited themes were:

- Cheaper or free activities (64)
- Closer (63)
- If friends also attended (46)
- Transport to or from activities (40)
- What's on information (39)
- More convenient times (33)

### Have young people been asked for their ideas and opinions to help plan local activities

A total of 498 young people responded, of these 137 young people (28%) said that they had been asked their ideas and opinions to help plan local activities.

### Further information

Responses with fewer counts, but still potentially of relevance, are provided in Appendix L.

## 9.2 West Sussex Focus Groups - Young People in West Sussex

The learning from young people was generated through focus groups held at the start of the needs assessment with the West Sussex Youth Cabinet, Care Leavers Advisory Board and SEND Young Voices Group (Appendix O, Appendix P), and through young people through six facilitated group discussion sessions

engaging with 100 young people in June and July 2025<sup>17</sup> (Appendix Q). Young people were invited to participate in these six sessions through their connection with West Sussex-based youth clubs/projects.

The themes from the focus groups were identified using thematic analysis (Appendix N).

### What young people **like** about leisure-time (recreational and educational) activities

Key themes identified:

- Seeing friends
- Key components of activities
- Having fun
- Having a range of types of activities
- Using their environment

### Most frequently cited **barriers preventing young people** from attending leisure-time activities

- Environmental and structural barriers including cost
- Personal and social barriers
- Lack of accessibility and availability
- Travel options, cost and safety
- Programme delivery Issues - cancellation and cost barriers
- Lack of diversity and inclusion

### How to address the challenges/barriers

Key themes drawn from analysis of the qualitative data captured on how challenges and barriers could be addressed are outlined in Table 8.

### Engagement with planning local activities

Responses to this question were mixed, however, there was a desire expressed amongst young people to be involved in deciding which activities should be on offer. Some young people reported that often their opinions are not put into action, or that they don't know whether they are put into practice. This aligned with a theme of some young people feeling overlooked and not genuinely listened to when their feedback is provided.

When young people had been consulted, a significant number mentioned being consulted on youth club activities. Other examples given included being

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<sup>17</sup> Four of the six facilitated group sessions were run at Horsham Youth Groups run and facilitated by Horsham District Council and two in Worthing run and facilitated by Allsorts Youth Project. Data provided by these six groups were thematically analysed as a whole due to the similarities in feedback provided, helping to strengthen the thematic learning from the groups. Information provided was not considered by protected characteristics such as age or sexual orientation, as this level thematic analysis could not be drawn out from the data.

consulted on planning holiday programmes, suggesting changes to the layout or structure of the youth club, and generally being asked for their opinions on the space and activities provided, with comments such as "You just ask, and (youth worker) helps you get it done.". Several young people commented that they are involved in volunteering and on the impact that this has on them and those that they help, with one such comment: "I love it it's so worth it".

Table 8. Themes identified from analysis of young people focus groups to address challenges and barriers to participation in recreational and leisure-time activities in West Sussex

<b>Awareness of activities</b>	<p>Knowledge and advertising of activities: this could be achieved via improved promotion and advertising.</p> <p>Schools and social media were identified as a good route to spread awareness about available activities.</p> <p>Maintaining a current database of available activities.</p>
<b>Cost and provision of free/low-cost activities</b>	<p>Provision of free / low-cost activities to reduce financial barriers.</p> <p>Free taster or trial sessions would help to encourage young people to try new things, allowing young people to try something before committing.</p>
<b>Accessibility and availability</b>	<p>Activities and facilities that enable all year-round participation.</p> <p>More alternative, non-sport activities (e.g. gaming, film, book, art/craft, comic/cartoon, baking &amp; painting).</p> <p>A greater variety in sports that aren't just football &amp; netball (e.g. rounders, badminton, non-team sports).</p> <p>Activities located within more physically accessible centres for young people.</p> <p>Flexibility in scheduling including open access as well as regularly scheduled activities to build routine and consistency.</p> <p>It is important to think about the safety of activities – including getting to and from activities – especially for young people with disabilities.</p>

	Young people with SEND may require a Personal Assistant (PA) to provide support for attendance.
<b>Diversity and inclusion</b>	<p>Activities that are facilitated to enable sensitivity to gender and participation</p> <p>Inclusive and accessible activities, including to young people with special educational needs and physical disabilities.</p> <p>Avoidance of discrimination</p> <p>Consideration of online or hybrid activities so everyone can attend.</p> <p>Detailed information about where services are, how to get to them, any changes to provision and local transport links</p>
<b>Quality</b>	Engaging activities being led by skilled and qualified individuals.
<b>Young people friendly environments</b>	The importance of having well-equipped, modernized environments that feel welcoming and foster a sense of ownership among young people.
<b>Travel</b>	<p>Improved bike trails to support safe and active travel, and more public footpaths, especially in rural areas, to improve walkability.</p> <p>More frequent public transport to improve accessibility.</p> <p>Grant funding should consider whether young people need support to travel.</p> <p>Young people with SEND can require longer to travel to activities.</p>

The West Sussex Autism all-ages Autumn 2024 (WSCC) consultation emphasised the need for more autism friendly environments and training for public facing staff, and this included in the context of recreational and educational leisure-time activities<sup>159</sup>. Transport and sports facilities were reported among the least friendly environments and places for young people with autism. Many young people with autism enjoyed visiting swimming pools, libraries and outdoor spaces, but many did not attend school clubs and parents of CYP said this was an area that needed improvement, as well as after school care.

### **9.3 West Sussex Focus Groups – Professionals**

Two focus groups were held in November and December 2024; one with a range of youth practitioners (Appendix R) and one with Public Health professionals (Appendix S). Furthermore, in December 2024, two engagement events were held with mental health professionals which produced information relating to educational and recreational leisure-time activities (Appendices W and X).

The Youth Practitioner focus group was analysed using inductive coding and analyst verification. The Public Health focus group data were analysed using thematic analysis to draw out the themes. The mental health engagement events used a rapid thematic analysis to group information provided into non-prioritised themes.

Table 9 provides an overview of themes drawn from these focus groups.



Table 9. Professional focus group themes

<b>What's working well</b>	<p>Varied opening hours and opportunities for all ages to engage with activities</p> <p>Arun was recognised for provision of accessible recreational and educational leisure activities for young people, with "varied open hours across 7-8 locations" and Arun Youth Projects (a community youth service) having a shop on the high street.</p> <p>Access to youth workers and mentoring, and emphasis on creating a safe space for them to "drop in and access support" e.g., Burgess Hill Youth Centre in Mid Sussex. East Clayton Farm was also recognised for the education and support they offer young people with additional needs.</p> <p>The variety of recreational and educational leisure-time activities on offer for young people, ranging from 'Audio Active' (which provides free music sessions) in Adur to boxing clubs in Lancing.</p>
<b>Importance of recreational &amp; leisure activities</b>	<p>Creating a safe environment for young people.</p> <p>Funded activities throughout the school holidays, such as the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme.</p> <p>Opportunities for young people to meet others in their area, build relationships and learn social skills, alongside getting outdoors.</p> <p>Broadening horizons and increasing young people's ambitions; providing stability and safe spaces for young people to develop, increasing physical health through guided activities and use of outdoor spaces; and awareness of services including sexual health.</p> <p>The benefits of reducing time socialising with digital media and getting out into physical environments.</p> <p>Safeguarding young people particularly as they leave education.</p>

<b>Challenges &amp; barriers</b>	<p>Inconsistency in the availability or offer of activities across the West Sussex geography and youth population. E.g. Reduced activities in rural areas – exacerbated by travel barriers.</p> <p>A paucity of “universal” or “open access” offers for young people.</p> <p>Service provision as “short-term firefighting”, rather than a consistent offer.</p> <p>Inconsistency in, and the short-term nature of, funding.</p> <p>Poor awareness amongst young people of available activities and cost.</p> <p>Perception of activities as “friendly enough” and concerns around group dynamics with, or the presence of, other young people.</p> <p>Concerns around young people “feeling safe” in accessing activities - safety concerns were related to harm from others and ranged from peer bullying to exposure to risks such as violence, grooming and drug dealing.</p> <p>Parents and carers of young people with SEND being supported to feel safe in sending their children to activities.</p>
<b>How to address the challenges/barriers</b>	<p>Listening to “young people’s voices” and acting on these perceptions.</p> <p>Involving and empowering young people in the design and running of activities. Suggestions included a youth-led “sufficiency audit” of services, co-design of activities and having organisations that are “run by young people”. Services should include a ‘kitemark’, such as the You’re Welcome quality assurance.</p> <p>Develop a “universal offer” of open access youth provision across West Sussex.</p> <p>Activities should seek equality in access, and ensure they are neurodivergent friendly.</p> <p>Consistent funding and investment in workforce, including training.</p>

	<p>Greater coordination and communication between services to strengthen awareness and understanding of local offers, and assets to facilitate provision and accessibility.</p> <p>Social prescribing models/services.</p> <p>Safety in place design was raised by several participants, including the lighting and design of outdoor places, such as parks and other green spaces.</p> <p>Co-design of mixed-use places strengthening the involvement of young people and their communities.</p> <p>Availability of green gyms, parks, and beaches.</p>
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## 10.Key themes and considerations

This needs assessment defines the health needs, attitudes and behaviours, risk and protective factors, barriers and drivers, in relation to young people accessing recreational and educational leisure-time activities in West Sussex. Local engagement activity has expanded on the national learning and enabled better articulation of factors impacting on young people's participation in leisure activities at a local level, as well as identifying areas on which to focus to improve young people's activities in West Sussex.

### Caveats and further research

The type of engagement activity in this needs assessment appeared to influence young people's responses in relation to how they are engaged in planning and decision making. For example, the majority of focus group participants reflected that they have been involved in planning and decision making, whereas the majority of survey respondents reported that they had not. A possible explanation of this is that many focus groups ran at youth groups, where engagement in planning may be more embedded than in other aspects of young people's leisure-time activities.

Time limitations and the initial scope for the needs assessment have meant that engagement has focussed predominantly on young people, and staff/ professionals. This approach was prioritised to align with the requirements within the national statutory guidance<sup>8</sup>. Future research in West Sussex may wish to consider engagement with parents and carers, particularly of more vulnerable or disadvantaged young people. This could give further depth to local understanding of needs and supplement the existing evidence base covering this area.

Research from Brighton and Hove<sup>118</sup> highlighted a need for greater representation and diversity in local activities, particularly for GMYP (global majority young people), including a call for more inclusive youth support services. National research identifies that participation in leisure-time activities can be inhibited for religious or cultural reasons<sup>21,26,126</sup>. Whilst the engagement work in West Sussex did not produce data specifically on cultural inclusivity, future work to understand the needs of young people in West Sussex in the provision of leisure-time activities should seek to better understand cultural diversity and inclusivity as part of leisure-time activities.

Care should be taken with studies and surveys exploring association of leisure-time activities with deprivation. National longitudinal studies have generated different portraits of the characteristics of young people engaging in youth provision<sup>39</sup>; reporting a shift from predominant engagement from lower social class families in the mid-1980s to more affluent families in the mid-2010s<sup>39</sup>. This comparison of longitudinal studies identifies caveats in making comparisons between datasets based on the definition in how activities are described and funding changes.

More recent definitions of youth services are broader, covering recreational and educational leisure-time activities, compared to older studies focussing just on 'youth clubs'. The funding landscape has changed over time from public funding to a mix of public, charitable, and commercial funding (alongside some financial contribution from participating families and volunteers).

Nonetheless, there is an association between deprivation and poorer health and wellbeing outcomes as described in this needs assessment, and deprivation is an important consideration in the context of needs led provision of recreational and educational leisure-time activities.

Other forms of inclusion groups haven't come through as strongly in the data, such as in relation to social care involvement, sexuality and gender. Whilst this needs assessment is a reflection of what has come through the data, it is important to note that a lack of evidence doesn't translate to a lack of need.

The majority of the research and learning from the needs assessment relates to face-to-face leisure-time activities. From the reviewed published literature and local engagement work, there was little in terms of understanding how young people participate digitally in educational and recreational leisure-time activities, including associated risks and benefits and what we mean by 'digital, online spaces' for these types of activities.

## Key themes

Principles for effective youth services include that they are youth-led, inclusive, foster equality, diversity and respect, are of high quality, are safe, support wellbeing, empower young people, foster positivity, create learning environments and foster partnerships<sup>160,161</sup>. Key themes drawn from the evidence identified and generated within this needs assessment are discussed below in relation to recreational and leisure-time activities in West Sussex.

## Inclusivity, diversity and accessibility

West Sussex focus groups emphasised the importance in ensuring activities reflect and embed inclusivity, diversity and accessibility. In the engagement work, there was support for inclusive and accessible activities, including to young people with special educational needs and physical disabilities. This includes for example ensuring activities are neurodivergent friendly, and cater towards people aged 18-24 with disabilities. Some young people in West Sussex focus groups reported not feeling welcomed or respected in many leisure-time spaces. Sports were reported as often split by gender, and this can create unfair justifications about ability levels. Inequalities relating to age, gender, ethnicity and affluence are identified in national data on sports participation<sup>30</sup>.

In West Sussex, many recreational and educational leisure-time activities offered provide opportunities for young people to socialise and develop friendships. This can include peer support among specific groups (such as groups tailored to young people with SEND, LGBTQ+, home educated young people, similar age groups etc.), as well as developing relationships within communities (including with young people from different backgrounds and experiences). Economic wellbeing is less clearly evidenced as a measurable outcome, with activities to support young people with issues like housing, finances and access to work infrequently mentioned in activity descriptions.

## Keeping young people safe

This is about creating safe spaces, including safety within activities and safety in place design, lighting, green space and travel. Parents of young people with SEND need to feel safe in sending their children to leisure-time activities.

The mapping exercise of West Sussex leisure-time activities provided limited information on how providers protect the young people they support. In West Sussex, some activity descriptions mention offering young people safe and secure environments, free hot food and access to appropriate, trained adults (such as youth or support workers, DBS checks etc.). Opportunities to learn how to 'keep safe' were also noted in some cases, such as safety training in sports, first aid training, and a provider offering life skill classes for young people with SEND with topics on online safety, kitchen safety and independent travel. National work has included a focus on improving safety and safeguarding standards in leisure-time activities<sup>180,181,183</sup>.

The importance of creating a safe environment for young people was frequently mentioned in professionals and young people's focus groups in West Sussex. Concerns were expressed around "feeling safe" in accessing activities, encompassing both safety in travel to activities, and at the activities themselves including relating to harm from others. Although most comments referred to whether the young person feels safe, the need for parents of young people with SEND to feel safe in sending their children to activities was also raised.

### Listening and responding to young people's voice

Young people in West Sussex want to attend activities where their friends go. They value fun and enjoyable activities, that build confidence, enable them to learn new things and see activities supporting employment. In West Sussex, we must ensure the voice of young people is heard and listened to and that young people know that they are being heard.

When looking at the contribution of young people to society in West Sussex, most information provided about activities tends to focus on opportunities to engage young people in volunteering and community projects; more so than young people's voice shaping plans and services. A few service descriptions note how young people are actively encouraged to shape the local activity offer, such as Young Voices Projects for young people with SEND.

Young people in West Sussex want to be involved in deciding which activities to offer (West Sussex Focus Groups). However, they sometimes don't feel or don't know whether they are listened to. Some young people reported that often their opinions aren't put into action, or that they don't know whether they are put into practice. This aligned with a theme of some young people feeling overlooked and not genuinely listened to when their feedback is provided.

Principles to shape culture around youth leadership include embracing diversity, addressing inequities, nurturing an inclusive and representative staff team, supporting lived experience, recognising and helping young people to build and use their power, and developing resilience<sup>162</sup>.

### Young people friendly environments (social, physical and digital)

Young people friendly environments should be embedded and promoted across leisure-time activities, spatial and environmental design. Indoor and outdoor spaces should form part of leisure-time activity design for young people, to enable choice and year-round participation. Young people in West Sussex report that they do not like going to leisure activities by themselves.

There are good examples in West Sussex of flexible, safe and varied leisure-time activities (Focus Groups, Chapter 9). Staff and young people in West Sussex recognise the value of leisure-time activities in creating social skills and connections, wellbeing, resilience, life



skills, and healthy outcomes, broadening young people's horizons, enabling young people to see friends and have fun, providing a range of activities and enabling young people to use their natural environment (Focus Groups and Survey, Chapter 9).

It is of value to note that the primary drivers for participation amongst young people (seeing friends, having fun, taking part in named activities) were noticeably different to the benefits perceived by practitioners/professionals (safety, getting outdoors, young people's futures, as well as social aspects).

Young people friendly environments foster social wellbeing, communication skills, involvement and learning, and are characterised by physical spaces, service interactions, communication strategies and policies that acknowledge and address the unique needs and interests of young people and provide resources and opportunities for them to thrive<sup>112,163</sup>.

## Learning and training

In West Sussex, activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh, Concordia Youth Action, Cadet forces, support young people to develop skills for future employment or education. St John Ambulance NHS Cadets, Police and MoD Cadet forces and some local youth charities for example, offer relevant training, work experience and/or qualifications to support young people with an interest in a future profession or sector (although these are not for the purposes of recruitment). Many sports providers offer training, competition, achievements and qualifications in specific individual or team sports and activities. Providers like Scouts and Guides also encourage young people to achieve specific proficiencies, skills and awards. A few providers support learning through specific interests (like science and engineering clubs, or music clubs). Some also describe supporting young people to develop wider life skills that can be applied in future education and employment settings.

## Safe and supported travel

Travel to and from activities should be safe and supported/more affordable for young people. Young people in West Sussex report difficulty in accessing activities outside of the immediate area especially when transport is needed, and difficulty in getting to activities due to walking distance and lack of parent/carer availability. More frequent public transport would help to improve accessibility, and grant funding could consider whether young people need support to travel.

Some rural areas appear more likely to have homes with poor internet connection. This may require consideration in using digital means to raise awareness of leisure-time activities, or in terms of digital access to leisure-time activities, particular where poor internet access is combined with further distance to travel to reach activities.

Active and safe travel is supported by young people, including aspects such as improved bike trails, and more public footpaths, especially in rural areas, to improve walkability.

## Availability / inconsistency in offer

This is about provision varying by location, such as a reported lack of activities in rural areas. It also relates to a lack of "universal" or "open access" activities for young people, as well as timings of activities - how late or early they are (especially considering time it takes to travel). Short term funding is associated with these challenges.

Whilst there are caveats in understanding the geographical provision of recreational and educational leisure-time activities, young people in deprived areas experience greater health inequalities, and are more at risk from social determinants including poorer health, education and employment opportunities<sup>139,164</sup>. Geographical deprivation and health and wellbeing outcomes are important considerations in provision of activities.

Activities in West Sussex frequently identified with providing outdoor pursuits, more traditional youth clubs and sports or informal physical activities, and were reported as sometimes being too sports oriented and with not enough variety. Cultural activities (e.g. performing arts, acting, singing and dance) were less frequently reported, at about 10% of the time. Least frequently reported were specific special interest activities such as science, music and cooking. Young people in West Sussex focus groups said they would value more alternative, non-sport activities (e.g. gaming, film, book, art/craft, comic/cartoon, baking & painting).

### Awareness of activities

This relates in part to a lack of up-to-date information about what is available, where, for whom and the cost of such activities. Young people and practitioners in West Sussex felt that improved promotion and knowledge of available activities would help young people in taking up activities. Schools and social media were identified as a good route to spread awareness about available activities. Young people felt an up-to-date database of available activities would be helpful. Increasing awareness of leisure-time activities in West Sussex includes working collectively to raise awareness of activities, how to get to and from activities, increasing the information provided by activities on their safety practices, and developing strategies for engaging with parents. Safe transport and travel should be factored into communication of activities.

### Conclusion

Young people's participation in leisure-time activities has health, wellbeing, educational and wider social benefits. This needs assessment demonstrates the importance of, and places an emphasis on, understanding young people's health and wellbeing, population characteristics and inequalities when planning leisure-time services in West Sussex, as well as responding to the risk and protective factors, and barriers and drivers affecting young people's attendance and participation.

Having a shared understanding of available activities is seen as beneficial to West Sussex provision. There is a desire in West Sussex to "coordinate" across all levels of service provision; across the voluntary and community sector, police, health sector, and local authorities.

As part of improving young people's access and experience of leisure-time activities, this needs assessment directs specific focus on equity and quality, youth friendly health promoting environments, keeping young people safe, accessibility and availability, awareness of leisure-time activities, young people's voice and looking ahead to young people's future (with links to employment and crime reduction).

This needs assessment has been completed to inform the local authority statutory duty to, so far as reasonably practicable, secure access for all qualifying young people (13 - 19 years old or up to 24 for those with special educational needs), to a sufficient quantity of recreational and educational leisure-time activities and facilities<sup>165</sup>.

This needs assessment should inform and guide the planning, delivery and commissioning of recreational and educational leisure-time activities for young people in West Sussex. This may include future strategies, action plans and frameworks.

## 11. Areas of focus for West Sussex

To strengthen young people's access and experience of leisure-time activities, areas of focus have been developed using the data and evidence captured from this needs assessment. These areas have been further developed and validated with young people and professionals working within recreational and educational leisure-time provision, as part of validation workshops which ran in July 2025 (Appendix V). There are elements that cross over within these areas of focus.

Areas of focus:

1. Equity and quality
2. Youth friendly health promoting environments
3. Keeping young people safe
4. Accessibility and availability
5. Awareness of leisure-time activities
6. Young people's voice
7. Young people's future

### 11.1 Equity and quality

This needs assessment has identified differences experienced between groups of young people in terms of their access to and participation of recreational and educational leisure-time activities. The following areas of focus are purposed to mitigate these differences in outcomes as a result.

1. Data on young people's health, wellbeing and wider determinants and population characteristics inform the provision of recreational and educational leisure-time activities.
2. Disadvantaged and vulnerable young people are placed at the heart of decision making.
3. Reduce / mitigate cost barriers of activities for young people and families.
4. Young people's environments and leisure activities embrace equity, diversity and inclusion, and promote respect for all. Inclusive policies support this.
5. Equity in access for young people with SEND, including neurodivergent friendly spaces, and leisure-time activities for 19–24-year-olds with learning difficulties and disabilities.
6. Activities and venues are accessible by and adaptable for young people with physical disabilities.
7. Development of a kitemark and/or framework which supports equity and quality (Appendix C), which includes a baseline for aspects such as training, infrastructure and safety.
8. Consider how understanding of quality can be balanced with softer outcome measures<sup>18</sup>, and how understanding and demonstration of impact of leisure activities can contribute to attracting investment (including longer term) in recreational and educational leisure-time activities (Appendix C).

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<sup>18</sup> Soft outcomes tend to depend on subjective measurement (such as self-assessment of confidence or self-esteem). Hard outcomes tend to be objective and independently measured (such as employment or attainment).

## 11.2 Youth friendly health promoting environments

A young person friendly environment is accessible, inclusive and safe for young people, prioritising their health, wellbeing and development, and creating a space where they feel welcome, supported and valued. It fosters social wellbeing, communication skills, involvement and learning, characterised by physical spaces, service interactions, communication strategies and policies that acknowledge and address the unique needs and interests of young people and provide resources and opportunities for them to thrive.

1. Development of informed adults to support trust and inclusion. This includes through training in areas to promote inclusive environments, including in gender equality and inclusion of LGBT+ young people, support with a trauma informed approach, understanding and supporting SEND including neurodivergence, mental health and emotional wellbeing, suicide prevention, and de-escalation, as part of leisure-time workforce development. Certificates in skills acquired are important. Existing training frameworks can be utilised to support this. Seek to support charities to attend.
2. The learning in this needs assessment around the importance of making and spending time with friends can be utilised to help design activities.
3. Bridge the gap for children who don't want to attend on their own. Examples of this include fostering social connections, providing opportunities to bring friends to help children to connect, considering the role of digital recreational and educational leisure provision, considering support for young people with SEND who may want to attend with a personal assistant or carer, considering options for supporting outreach workers to support attendance, and for parents to be present at activity which can act as a safety net and support networks with other parents.
4. Continue to support the planning and development of healthy and sustainable young people's leisure-time activities, including through inclusive young people friendly spaces and environments.

## 11.3 Keeping young people safe

Safety in leisure-time activities is strongly reflected in national and local learning.

1. Promote guidance which supports leisure-time activities in developing their safety and safeguarding policies and practice.
2. Continue to develop and promote information for parents on how to make sure that their children will be happy and protected in after school and extra-curricular clubs and activities within the community.
3. Develop safe and inclusive spaces through planning and design, including outdoor places (e.g. parks and lighting), and utilising policies and planning in supporting young people to speak up, challenge practice and create safe environments (Appendix K).
4. Application of safe travel and community safety messaging, which is seen as beneficial in relation to getting to and from activities.

## 11.4 Accessibility and availability

In West Sussex, factors which impact access to and availability of leisure-time activities include rurality, transport challenges, costs, weather dependency, running times and preference of activity.

1. Consider transport and travel (including in relation to rurality) in planning activities, including in relation to cost, accessibility and options for young people. Support active travel options including bike trails, public transport and rural public footpaths for young people. Provide information on transport for young people and families on getting to and from activities. Understand more about where young people travel to, whether young people are able to plan and book journeys effectively, and how to support accordingly (for example digital literacy for transport planning for parents and carers as well as young people). For young people with SEND and their families, travel information is particularly important, for example providing the nearest bus stop and number.
2. Accessible travel options for young people with SEND. This includes accessible parking spaces.
3. Support year-round provision, i.e. activities run through the school holidays, outdoor and indoor activities.
4. Support a universal youth offer and flexibility in scheduling.
5. School venues are an asset for leisure-activities including wraparound clubs. There is value in setting up groups through schools.

## 11.5 Awareness of leisure-time activities

West Sussex young people report low awareness of available activities - what is available, where, for whom and the cost of such activities. Providers of activities and other services, and parents, also report low awareness.

1. Increase awareness of young people's recreational and educational leisure-time activities and how to participate. Utilise communications through schools to let young people and families know what's going on. Use social media to spread awareness about available activities. Consider new and innovative ways to engage with young people. Consider who are the trusted adults that can help young people with SEND, into an activity. Recognise that not all young people engage through school, as part of communication plans.
2. Maximise communication routes to parents and communication of information on where their children are – this can help with young people's participation and encouragement.
3. Improve coordination, communication and collaboration across sectors and between services, such as Early Help, Youth Justice, Youth Emotional Support, and Community and Family Hubs, the CVS, wrapping around the whole school. This includes increasing awareness of leisure-time activities, planning and supporting delivery across sectors, to maximise the collective offer.
4. Continue to develop collaborative approaches to maintaining, developing and promoting information on the breadth of available activities. Consider how information on travel can be linked to this.
5. Consider how to better meet the communication needs of young people. For example, it can be helpful for young people with SEND to know what is going to happen at activities in advance.

## 11.6 Young people's voice

Youth voice, participation and engagement is a fundamental right. Local authorities are required to engage, listen to and involve young people in the decision-making and service design.

1. Young people, particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable young people, at the centre of decision-making and planning.
2. Listen, co-design and co-produce with young people in the design and running of activities.
3. Use guides, checklists and strategies to effectively engage young people in policy and decision making and service design, developing youth-adult partnerships (e.g. NYA How to fulfil your statutory duty<sup>166</sup>, NYA Hear by Right youth participation framework<sup>167</sup>).
4. Report back to and demonstrate to young people on the difference that they have made, and evaluate whether the actions taken did what young people asked for.

## 11.7 Young people's future

Recreational and educational leisure-time activities support the future health and social wellbeing of young people.

1. Maximise education, training, volunteering and transferable skills available through leisure-time activities, to help with education, employment and training opportunities. Consider and identify how to better embed leisure-time activities as part of plans to reduce young people not in education, employment or training.
2. Consider and develop the role of recreational and educational leisure-time activities in the support for young people affected by violence.



## Appendices

### Appendix A. Section 507B of the Education Act 1996

Local authorities in England have a legal duty, so far as reasonably practicable, to secure for qualifying young persons (13 - 19 years old or up to 24 for those with special educational needs) in the authority's area access to:

- a) sufficient educational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of their wellbeing, and sufficient facilities for such activities; and
- b) sufficient recreational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of their wellbeing, and sufficient facilities for such activities.

These relate to out-of-school hours and settings.

Local authorities must secure access to sufficient services; however, this can take the form of different models that suit the local area. Local authorities may directly organise, provide, or fund services, but may also coordinate or assist provision and funding of services by voluntary, community, educational or private providers and practitioners. Local authorities should determine what is reasonably practicable based on their resources, capabilities, and priorities, as well as that of other organisations that offer services to young people in the area.

Local authorities must consult with young people on current provision, the need for additional activities and access to those activities. Local authorities should start by establishing what the needs of the young people in their area are through a needs assessment.

### Appendix B. Recreational and educational leisure-time activities statutory definitions (DCMS 2023)

Recreational and educational leisure-time activities are not mutually exclusive. They include, but are not limited to:

- sports and informal physical activities
- cultural activities
- outdoor residential, weekend or holiday-time activities
- special interest clubs
- volunteering activities

Both types of activities, and related facilities, must be for the improvement of young people's wellbeing. Wellbeing, as defined in the act, relates to:

- physical and mental health and emotional well-being
- protection from harm and neglect
- education, training and recreation
- the contribution made by young people to society
- social and economic well-being

Educational leisure-time activities include sufficient activities which are for the improvement of young people's personal and social development. These are the types of activities traditionally provided through youth work, which for instance:

- connect young people with their communities, enabling them to develop a strong sense of belonging and contribute actively to society
- champion them to have a voice in decisions which affect their lives
- take place in local and fit-for-purpose environments in which they can socialise safely with their peers, spend time with people from different backgrounds and develop trusting relationships with adults
- offer opportunities to take part in a wide range of activities through which young people build skills for life and work and the capabilities they need to make a successful transition to adulthood
- raise young people's aspirations in education, training, or employment, encouraging them to realise their potential
- help disadvantaged and vulnerable young people, as well as young people at risk of not realising their full potential, informing their decisions and thereby reducing risky, anti-social behaviours

Provision parameters of recreational and educational leisure-time activities (DCMS 2023):

- Activities that are run or funded by the local authority as well as services run or funded by others.
- Cost, location, timing, safety, age range, protected characteristics, young people's perceptions of the offer, accessibility of the facilities, including transport links.

## **Appendix C. Quality and Equity models and frameworks**

### **National Occupational Standards for Youth Work** (NYA 2020)

Outlines how the National Occupational Standards for Youth Work are applicable in England, specifically within the context of English Youth Work policy, training and professional standards, and practice.

### **Overview and scrutiny committee guide for involving young people** (LGA, not dated)

Helps overview and scrutiny committees to understand the context and rationale for involving young people in decision making and highlights the opportunities to involve young people throughout the whole scrutiny cycle.

### **Health equity domains in implementation determinant frameworks**<sup>168</sup>

Adapted an existing implementation determinant framework with health equity domains to create the Health Equity Implementation Framework. Recommends integrating three health equity domains to existing implementation determinant frameworks: (1) culturally relevant factors of recipients, (2) clinical encounter or patient-provider interaction, and (3) societal context (including but not limited to social determinants of health). This framework was developed for healthcare and clinical practice settings.

### **A framework of outcomes for young people**<sup>169</sup>

This Framework of Outcomes for Young People is designed to highlight the fundamental importance of social and emotional capabilities to the achievement of all other outcomes for all young people. It seeks to help to address the key challenges in measuring impact on the lives of young people, and support confidence in evidencing impact for providers and commissioners of services.

## **The National Youth Work Curriculum**<sup>170</sup>

A flexible framework which allows youth workers to identify how their interventions and activities can be used to support the personal, social and political development of young people.

## **NYA Quality Mark**<sup>179</sup>

A reflective tool which enables organisations to develop a culture of learning and growth.

## **Appendix D. Vulnerable children and young people**

There is no commonly used definition of 'vulnerable children', but in 2020, Public Health England defined vulnerable children as being at greater risk of experiencing physical or emotional harm and/ or experiencing poor outcomes because of one or more factors in their lives<sup>164</sup>. The statutory duty (DCMS 2023<sup>8</sup>) references that particular barriers to recreational and educational leisure-time activities are faced by:

- Disadvantaged young people and vulnerable young people.
- Young people from different backgrounds, cultures, genders and sexual orientation.
- Young people who require specific or additional engagement, including articulation of safe, supporting and welcoming environment.
- Young people aged 20-24 with learning difficulties or disabilities

The Office of the Children's Commissioner<sup>171</sup> categorised groups of vulnerable children into nine domains based on the type of vulnerability which are: 1. Safeguarding concerns or in local authority care; 2. Health and/or disability; 3. Economic circumstances; 4. Family circumstances/characteristics; 5. Educational engagement; 6. Involvement in offending and/or anti-social behaviour; 7. Experience of abuse/exploitation; 8. Missing and absent children; 9. Minority populations.

Public Health England<sup>164</sup> went on to quantify data at a national level on Children in care, Young Carers, Teenage pregnancy, Children in the criminal justice system, Violence and serious violence, Smoking, alcohol and drug use, Housing, Access to outdoor play and green spaces, Worklessness, Poverty, Adverse childhood experiences.

The Department for Education<sup>172</sup> provide [guidance on vulnerable children and young people](#) including a list on vulnerable children who may need to be prioritised for face-to-face provision for during an emergency.

## **Appendix E. Wider social determinants**

Literature describing which factors serve as risks or barriers, and supportive or protective factors for participating in leisure-time activities, are summarised below under a social ecological model of individual level, interpersonal level, community level and wider economic, environmental and societal level factors. Note, not all risk and protective factors necessarily apply to all forms of recreational and educational leisure-time activity.

## Individual Level factors

Risk / barrier	<p><b>Physical disabilities</b></p> <p>Physical disabilities can prevent some children from accessing play and leisure activities<sup>120,122,123</sup>.</p> <p><b>Physical health issues</b></p> <p>Physical health issues, including long-term conditions, such as pain, tiredness and breathlessness can prevent some children from accessing play and leisure activities<sup>21,22</sup>.</p> <p><b>Body image</b></p> <p>Body image may prevent young people from engaging in leisure-time activities<sup>21,121</sup>, with 36% of girls and 24% of boys reported to avoid taking part in activities like physical education due to worries about their appearance<sup>121</sup>.</p> <p><b>Mental health and wellbeing</b></p> <p>Other mental health and wellbeing related factors which deter young people from participating in leisure-time activities include anxiety, fear of embarrassment<sup>21,22</sup>, loss of interest or motivation, fatigue and low self-esteem, previous negative experiences and fear of hurting oneself and feeling unsafe in public spaces<sup>21</sup>.</p> <p><b>Age</b></p> <p>Participation in recreational leisure-time activities has been seen to diminish with age for both boys and girls<sup>20,119</sup>.</p>
Supportive / Protective	<p><b>Skill</b></p> <p>Young people with above average motor fitness are more likely to participate and maintain participation in organised sports-based leisure activities, compared to those with average motor fitness<sup>124</sup>.</p>

## Interpersonal level factors – relationships and interactions between people

Risk / barrier	<p><b>Peer and family factors</b></p> <p>There are multiple peer and family factors including lack of family and parental support<sup>21</sup> and negative attitudes (e.g., stigma and bullying), which can either restrict participation and/or lead to changes in choice of activities<sup>22,126</sup>.</p> <p>Both parents of and adolescents with disabilities identify that extra time is needed to plan ahead in order to address environmental barriers<sup>22</sup>.</p> <p>Parents sometime discourage participation in physical activity, and impose constraints on freedom during leisure-time on grounds of safety, culture and gender<sup>23</sup>. Furthermore, parental attitudes</p>
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	<p>towards girls independent mobility can act as a barrier for young girls' involvement in active leisure activities<sup>21</sup>.</p> <p><b>Parental alcohol use</b></p> <p>Having parents who are susceptible to alcohol misuse can serve as a risk factor against accessing leisure and recreational activities, as this can increase the difficulty of arranging transport, finances and obtaining parental permission to participate in these activities<sup>125</sup>.</p> <p><b>Online interaction taking precedence</b></p> <p>Online social interaction can promote healthy socialisation among teens, including during times of stress or social isolation<sup>173</sup>. However, social media usage has been linked to reducing the likelihood of young people engaging in physical or active leisure activities, with older adolescents in particular having higher levels of non-participation in leisure activities compared to their younger counterparts, instead using their spare time to use social media<sup>97</sup>. Furthermore, growth of computer games and internet use, have led to increases in sedentary activity and reductions in outdoor play, walking or cycling to school and active leisure pursuits<sup>20,23</sup>.</p>
Supportive / Protective	<p><b>Peer factors</b></p> <p>Peer-related factors play an important role in young people attending leisure-time activities. Friendships may increase young people's motivation to engage in physical activity<sup>115</sup>, including young people with disabilities by drawing on emotional and physical support from peers and classmates<sup>22</sup>. Young people in friendship groups that are physically active are more likely to be active themselves<sup>20</sup>, and non-competitive activities can increase the likelihood of girls' participation in leisure activities<sup>128</sup>.</p> <p><b>Familiarity</b></p> <p>Being in a place young people are familiar with can encourage leisure activity participation<sup>127</sup>, especially among young girls<sup>21</sup>.</p> <p><b>Family factors</b></p> <p>Parental participation in leisure activities increases likelihood of adolescents engaging in the same activities<sup>97</sup> (Wanka 2025). Family-related factors can play a protective role in young people with disabilities accessing activities – this includes family preferences for recreation and family involvement in enabling participation<sup>22</sup>.</p> <p>There is a lack of research on activities which alleviate parental concern around safety, which may be beneficial to promoting young people's leisure-time attendance<sup>23</sup>.</p>

## Community-related factors

Risk / barrier	<p><b>Financial</b></p> <p>Unemployment and low wages, cost, and lack of financial resource can affect the ability to afford leisure-time activities<sup>21,23</sup></p> <p><b>Physical accessibility</b></p> <p>Lack of building physical accessibility can prevent participation amongst young people with physical disabilities<sup>22,120</sup>.</p> <p><b>Restricted access</b></p> <p>Restricted access to opportunities for participation such as active play, variety or preferred activities, low cost/free activities<sup>21,131</sup>.</p> <p><b>Lack of support from activities</b></p> <p>Lack of support from service providers in terms of personal assistance and information factor as barriers for young people with disabilities<sup>22</sup>.</p> <p><b>Awareness of activities</b></p> <p>Young people many not know what types of activity are right for them or their condition<sup>21</sup>.</p> <p><b>Safety</b></p> <p>There are issues around children feeling safe in spaces they might use for leisure activities<sup>132</sup>.</p> <p><b>Transport and travel</b></p> <p>Limited access to transport or infrastructure and safety concerns, and parental work commitments may prevent young people (including with disabilities) from attending activities<sup>23,25,120</sup>.</p> <p><b>Availability</b></p> <p>A lack of community programs can impact participation of young people with disabilities<sup>120</sup>, and a lack of opportunities to participate in leisure-time activities has been recorded as a cause for frustration, particularly in young males<sup>23</sup>.</p> <p><b>Homelessness</b></p> <p>Young people living in temporary accommodation may be less likely to engage in leisure-time activities<sup>129</sup>.</p> <p><b>Inclusivity</b></p>
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	Non-inclusive policies are a barrier to young people with disabilities in participating in leisure activities <sup>22,120</sup> . Examples include segregation of children with and without disabilities <sup>22,130</sup> .
Supportive / Protective	<p><b>Mentors</b></p> <p>Availability of role models and informal/formal mentors support young people's participation<sup>134</sup>.</p> <p><b>Awareness of activities through online</b></p> <p>Increased usage of technology and social media amongst young people provides platforms to promote available leisure / physical activity opportunities in a manner that appeals to young people; this can also be used to educate young people about the physical, mental and social benefits of physical activity<sup>133</sup>. Parental education about home and community-based recreation programs can support attendance by young people with a disability<sup>22</sup>.</p> <p><b>Inclusivity and flexibility</b></p> <p>Availability of inclusive educational programs and community recreational activities supports participation of young people with disabilities<sup>22,120</sup>.</p> <p><b>Strategies for engaging with parents</b></p> <p>To support participation, staff across the health and social care system can explore strategies with parents for supporting young people with disabilities to attend, with specific exploration of barriers, routines, habits, time management, negative attitudes and social support<sup>22</sup>.</p>

### Wider economic, environmental and societal factors

Risk / barrier	<p><b>Poverty and low income</b></p> <p>Young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds report lower levels of health-promoting behaviours, poorer health outcomes, and less social support<sup>174</sup>. Young people with a lower familial socioeconomic status are less likely to access leisure activities<sup>136</sup>.</p> <p><b>Experience of discrimination, stigma and prejudice</b></p> <p>Discrimination and prejudice can act as leisure barriers that prevent ethnic minorities from participating in recreational and leisure activities<sup>26</sup> and socio-cultural tensions (e.g. racial prejudice and violence) have been seen to impose on young people's freedom and opportunities for leisure<sup>23</sup> (Shepherd 2022).</p> <p>Young girls are less likely to participate in sports and physically active leisure activities due to gender stereotypes that consider these activities to be 'masculine'<sup>126</sup>.</p>
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	<p><b>Religious and cultural</b></p> <p>Lack of suitable environment for religious or cultural needs may inhibit physical activity<sup>21,26</sup>. Cultural expectations and language may also be a barrier for young people attending leisure-time activities<sup>21,126</sup>.</p> <p><b>Quality of and accessibility to transport</b></p> <p>Transport availability has a huge impact on the life-choices young people make and access to transport is key to defining the options that young people have. For many young people, transport can steer decision making that is crucial to the course that their lives take. Transport availability has a huge impact on the life-choices young people make<sup>137</sup>. Accessible transport provision is key in facilitating young people's participation in leisure and recreational activities. This is particularly evident in young people with disability who are less likely to participate in leisure activities in general, partly due to issues with finding specialised transport, parental / carer chauffeuring availability, embarrassment and feeling burdensome to ask for transport support and tension between dependence on others for mobility support and a growing need for independence in older teenagers<sup>25</sup>.</p> <p><b>Policy and bureaucracy</b></p> <p>Budget cuts<sup>135</sup>, and policies affecting participation of young people with disabilities<sup>22</sup> are barriers to the provision of leisure-time activities.</p>
Supportive / Protective	<p><b>Exposure to green space</b></p> <p>Exposure to green space has a variety of positive impacts on young people's health including enhanced mental health and resilience and increased physical activity and reduced risk of obesity<sup>138</sup>. Access to green space is also likely to enhance other intervention to improve mental health, including physical activity, mindfulness and problem solving<sup>175</sup>.</p> <p><b>Safety</b></p> <p>Provision of female-only classes or facilities (including female supervisors / staff) reduces the 'unease' girls feel in accessing active leisure settings that are often mixed (especially around puberty), thereby increasing participation<sup>21,127</sup>.</p> <p><b>Socio-economic</b></p> <p>Young people with a higher socio-economic status are more likely to access a range of leisure activities<sup>97</sup>.</p>

## Appendix F. Mapping tables

Definitions to determine the type of support offered

Type of Support	Definition	Examples
Sports and physical activities	Places to participate in physical activity, including to reduce physical inactivity, such as active play, team sports, sport clubs, and walking groups. These activities tend to be instructor or trainer led and focus on developing in a single (e.g. football or swim clubs) or a group of related sports (e.g. racquet sports).	Football, martial arts, swimming, walking, cycling, dance, climbing, fitness classes, activities provided by leisure centres.
Youth groups	Groups for young people, often organized by a church, school, or community centre, to take part in recreational, or educational activities. These groups typically provide a safe space for young people to interact, develop social and life skills, and participate in shared activities.	Youth groups, groups offering mixed activities (e.g. cooking, games etc.), community groups, religious groups  Can be for specific cohorts (e.g. LGBTQ+)
Cultural activities	Activities that allow for community involvement to promote creativity, the performing arts and enjoy social interaction.	Singing, choir, museums, libraries, music, dance, performing arts, theatre.
Outdoor pursuits	Leisure or recreational activities that are done outside of the home which focus on outdoor pursuits. These can involve overnight stays away from home, such as camps. These activities typically take place on the weekend or during holiday periods and are usually activity-based trips, but can include weekly sessions (such as Scouts, Guides).	Outdoor orienteering, Duke of Edinburgh, swimming camp, sailing camp, climbing, football camp, hiking, fishing, DIY projects and confidence building through outdoor pursuits, i.e. canoeing, rock climbing, surfing, sailing, bushcraft and more.
Special Interest clubs	Organized clubs that connect people who have similar interests or a shared hobby. This is a group activity that is not usually teacher led. They can take part in activities, events or discussions based on the shared interest. These could take place at a school, workplace or community centre. These clubs tend to focus on one subject area rather than a range of various activities.	Sports interests (e.g. fantasy football), gaming, arts and crafts, chess, dungeon and dragons club, Pokémon club, book groups, photography clubs, cooking classes
Volunteering activities	Unpaid activities that benefit a person, group of people or community. This can include programmes that develop young people's leadership roles to	Environmental clean-ups, assisting at community groups (food banks, cooking for a homeless shelter), manning a support line, Age UK, volunteer

	participated in delivering groups/classes to other young people.	at charity shop, animal shelters, youth leaders.
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Our interpretation of the wellbeing themes described in the Statutory Guidance, and examples of evidence from service descriptions

Wellbeing theme	Description	Examples
Physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing	Physical health is the overall condition of the body and its ability to function. Mental health is a person's emotional, psychological and cognitive wellbeing. Emotional wellbeing is the ability of a person to manage their emotions effectively and maintain positive relationships.  All three aspects are interconnected and contribute to a person's overall health and quality of life.	E.g. Sports clubs, fitness classes, support groups  Services that: "aim to improve confidence" "are completely inclusive" "for young individuals to... unwind" "learn ways to take care of our mental health and wellbeing so we can thrive"
Protection from harm and neglect	Safeguarding individuals from physical, emotional or psychological harm. Taking measures to avoid physical injury, emotional distress or psychological damage. Ensuring individuals receive care which can include food, shelter, medical and emotional support.	E.g. Food banks, shelters, refuges, helplines  Services that: "opportunity to eat something hot" "never turn a child away" "safe spaces" "life skills focussing on... online safety"
Education, training and recreation	Gaining knowledge, skills and understanding through teaching or research. Training is developing specific skills for a particular profession or activity. Practical knowledge is focused on workplace skills, technical expertise or personal development. Recreation involves activities done for enjoyment or leisure.  The three elements contribute to personal growth, career development and overall wellbeing.	E.g. Training, apprenticeships, work experience, further education, qualifications  Services that: "pathways into employment, education and training" "hands on work experience" "gain qualifications useful for career choices" "gain skills that will help in a workplace"
The contribution made by young people to society	The impact or actions that young people (under the age of 18 years) make to improve communities, cultures and economies. This can include volunteering, inventing new technologies, advocacy, teaching or participating in youth groups.	E.g. Volunteering, tutoring, human rights, student councils, youth parliaments  Services that: "provide relevant voluntary work experience" "young leaders"

	This can also include services that are actively shaped by young people.	"support your community" "make a positive impact in your community" "youth committee membership" "children should be involved in planning, researching, decision making, fundraising and running of their club" "young people are given regular opportunities to be involved in planning future sessions..."
Social and economic wellbeing	Ability of a person to live a life where they can build strong social connections and have access to cultural and recreational activities. Economic wellbeing is more focused on financial stability and having access to economic opportunities such as employment and affordable housing.  Social and economic wellbeing ensures that people can thrive in society and have opportunities for growth.	E.g. Employment, training, apprenticeships, life skills, social connections  Services that: "offer money management" "independent living skills" "opportunities for socialising"

## Appendix G. Examples of national recreational and educational leisure-time activities running in West Sussex

### Scouts

Scouts is a youth movement that focuses on supporting children and young people in their personal development through outdoor activities, teamwork and personal growth. Provision ranges from 4-to-25-years and is structured by age. The current strategy includes aims for Scouts to grow membership and be more 'youth shaped', such as by:

- Increasing numbers of young people attending Scouts and Young Leaders
- Increasing the influence young people have in defining what happens in Scouting locally
- Increasing the number of skilled young people to run Scouting activities for others

### Guides

The Guide Association is the UK's largest youth organisation dedicated completely to girls. Guides focuses on empowering young girls in their personal development, through fun, friendship challenge and adventure, covering ages 4-18. The current Girlguiding strategy Girls can do anything: 2025 to 2035 includes aims to:

- Expand the ways in which girls aged 11+ can take part in Girlguiding, to make it more attractive and suited to older girls' needs, and is better connected to girls' future interests and life prospects
- Increase representation of girls and volunteers from different backgrounds

## St Johns Ambulance

St John Ambulance have a range of youth programmes which offer children and young people aged 5-25 years, activities, education and some training. St John Ambulance also support Youth Team Volunteers (aged 18+) to help or lead in Badger and Cadet programmes. Young people can complete their Duke of Edinburgh's Award with St John Ambulance.

## Ministry of Defence cadet Forces

The Ministry of Defence sponsors five cadet forces for young people. Each force aims to offer challenging and enjoyable activities for young people, from the ages of 9 to 18 years, supporting them to play an active part in the community and developing life skills. Cadets can gain qualifications as part of their involvement, which may help in future education and career.

## Appendix H. NYA Youth Survey 2024

Sample of 1170 young people, aged between 16-19 years, completing the national survey in early April 2024. Key findings:

1. Majority of respondents think that there are not enough youth club options in their local area
2. Respondents most wanted to see fun activities or activities supporting employment
3. Building confidence, enjoyment and to learn new thing are the top reasons given for engaging
4. The biggest impact that youth work has had on respondents is a feeling of value and inclusion
5. Top barriers to engaging with youth work are lack of time and social anxiety / shyness

## Appendix I. Youth sector workforce survey<sup>176</sup>

The 2025 NYA Youth Sector Workforce Survey highlights the need for investment in the youth sector, specifically focussing on a rising demand for targeted support amongst young people, particular those affected by serious violence. The report highlights the consequences of unmet demand on early prevention of serious violence, poor mental health and exploitation. The report highlights increasing provision of youth support through the voluntary sector (69%) and a decline in youth workers on Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) terms. Further key findings from the survey highlight:

- Over half of youth workers regularly work in an educational setting, 30% in a local authority/council (typically alongside social care services), 24% in a health setting and 23% in a sports setting.
- Youth workers were having to spend more time than in previous years responding to the impact of poverty, in particular meeting food, hygiene and clothing needs.
- Nearly a third (29%) of the youth work jobs (143 in all) were temporary roles or 'zero hours contracts', typically lasting 6 – 12 months.
- Almost half (49%) of advertised roles did not require a specific youth work qualification.

## Appendix J. Audio Active Activate Report 2024 – Brighton and Hove

Young people were asked what can be done to improve or change services in the city, with several themes emerging. Themes highlighted the need for greater representation and diversity in services, particularly for GMYP (global majority young people). This included prioritising the needs of GMYP, providing more funding for youth music programs, and “creating spaces for young people of colour to showcase their creativity”. There was also a call for more inclusive youth support services. Community engagement and events were seen as vital for communication and connection, with suggestions for more diverse food markets, mixed venues, and creative activities. Additionally, there was a desire for more free community spaces for young people across different age groups, ensuring accessibility and inclusivity. There was a call to create more opportunities for discussions about race and racism, both within educational settings and in the community, to promote understanding and address systemic issues.

## Appendix K. Voices of Resilience – Peer Power – 2024<sup>177</sup>

Within this report on amplifying youth voice and a call for change in Sussex, young people co-created a set of recommendations that address the voices of young people. This included that “The system isn’t built to encourage young people to speak up. There are barriers which block or push back developments in youth voice. Statutory service providers, local authorities, local MPs, and councillors should actively engage with youth organisations to identify and eliminate barriers to youth voice, and create independent local governing bodies that integrate the insights and leadership of young people”. Recommendations also included that “All services, statutory or otherwise, should make a clear pledge to challenge discriminatory practice, and share how young people can challenge these practices if they experience it. Young people need to know the correct complaints processes for organisations and support services to ensure their voices are listened to and actioned.”

## Appendix L. Comments which informed survey themes

Table 10: What do you like about leisure-time activities?

Theme	Typical comments
Fun	<p>‘They are fun and enjoyable.’</p> <p>‘That they can be relaxing and you can make friends or have fun.’</p> <p>‘They are fun and always something to do – it motivates me.’</p> <p>‘It interests me and I have a great amount of fun doing the activity.’</p> <p>‘All the activities like football are fun and it helps relieve stress after a hard day’s work at school.’</p>



Theme	Typical comments
Socialising and meeting new people	<p>'It's fun. I get to meet people that don't go to my school. It has helped my confidence a bit.'</p> <p>'It allows me to feel a sense of community with a whole range of people and it's refreshing being able to socialise in an environment that isn't school.'</p> <p>'They are a great way to stay active and connect with people. They can be enjoyable in any size of group but my favourite is team sports!'</p> <p>'They give me something to do and I get to meet lots of people.'</p>
Taking part in specific (named) activities	<p>'I love football. I enjoy being part of a team.'</p> <p>'Sailing, skating, gym, swimming, cycling, badminton.'</p> <p>'I like dancing and drama. It is fun. I would like to do more art.'</p>
Fitness and keeping active	<p>Keeping fit</p> <p>'They keep me physically fit and let me do things I like doing like drama.'</p> <p>'They keep me exercising and healthy and they're also fun.'</p> <p>'Meeting up with friends and enjoying the exercise they provide.'</p> <p>Being active</p> <p>'Keep me active and happy throughout the day.'</p> <p>'It gives the opportunity to meet new people and have an excuse to keep active.'</p> <p>'They keep me active and I meet lots of people through matches and tournaments.'</p> <p>'Nice to stay active and have a bit of exercise.'</p>

### Things that stopped young people going to leisure-time activities

For this question, young people were invited to pick up to three reasons that stopped them from going to leisure-time activities.

The main reason that young people reported was that they didn't like going by themselves. This was by far the most popular reason given with 165 young people saying this.

The second most prominent reason was that activities were running at the wrong time for young people to attend with 118 saying this. This was closely followed by those who could not find anything that interested them (116).

For others, it was location, with 106 saying that there was nothing close to them.

Figure 11: Things that stopped young people going to leisure-time activities

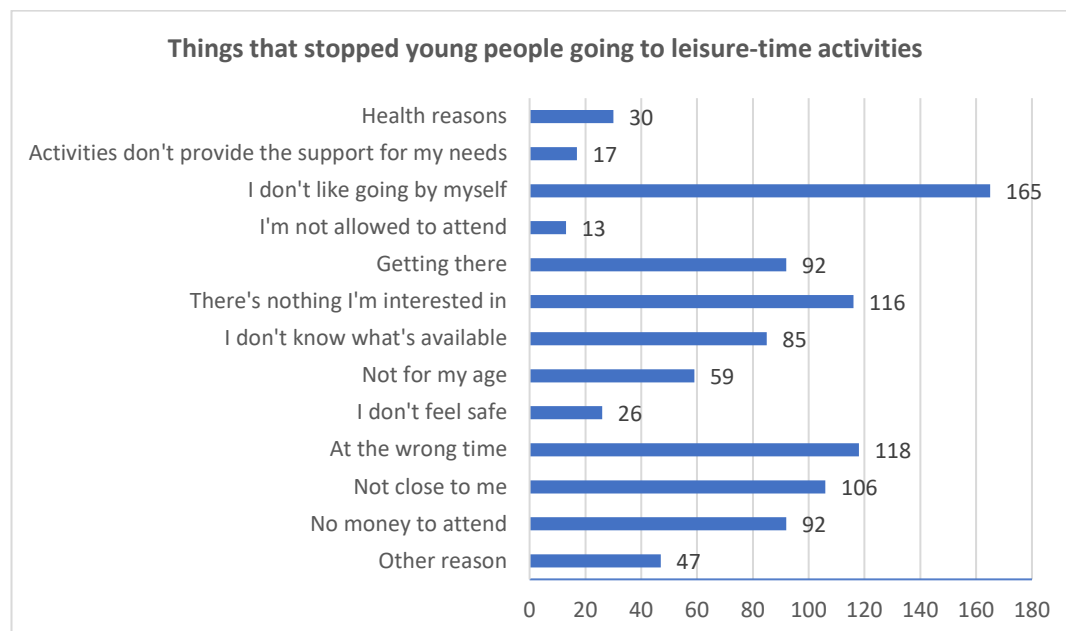


Table 11: What would make it easier for young people to attend leisure-time activities

Theme	Typical comments
<b>Cheaper or free activities</b>  The main thing was the cost – young people would like activities to be cheaper or free if appropriate with 64 reporting this. A few (6) noted that they, or their families, could not afford activities.	'If they were cheaper then I would do them because I can only do one club that you have to pay for at a time because I don't have enough money for multiple.'  'Less expensive groups and clubs.'  'Offer one or two free sessions so youth can try the activity without committing financially upfront.'  'Offer lower rates when siblings or multiple family members sign up together, or discounts for signing up for multiple sessions at once.'
<b>Closer</b>  The cost of activities was followed the location of activities. Young people said if they were closer, they would be more likely to attend. A total of 63 said this.	'Close to the area I live in.'  'Having one closer to me.'  'If they were in my village and I could walk to them.'  'More local.'

Theme	Typical comments
<p><b>If friends also attended</b></p> <p>The third thing that would encourage young people to attend activities would be if they had friends with whom they could go. There were 46 young people who said this, implying that they would feel more comfortable not attending by themselves. Allied to this, 20 indicated that it was an issue of confidence.</p>	<p>'If friends wanted to go with me.'</p> <p>'Having somebody I know.'</p> <p>'If people I knew attended the activities.'</p> <p>'If my friends were to join me because I hate doing things by myself and get very anxious.'</p> <p>'Possibly if someone who I am friends with and such is there it would make it easier for someone such as me to actually try to be motivated and do something...'</p>
<p><b>Transport to or from activities</b></p> <p>As noted above, some young people would be likely to go to leisure-time activities if they were closer. Others were happy to travel further but noted that transport and getting there was the issue. This was a key thing that they felt would help them take part in activities with 40 young people saying this.</p>	<p>'Close by or has easy travel like trains.'</p> <p>'Transport to make it easier.'</p> <p>'...every time I try to do an activity at school the buses are like 20 minutes later, making me late to home.'</p> <p>'An easy and safe way to get there and back.'</p>
<p><b>What's on information</b></p> <p>A total of 39 young people highlighted the need for being better informed about what activities are on (and details about timings, etc).</p>	<p>'Making it clear when and where the activities are.'</p> <p>'Knowing what's going on.'</p> <p>'More advertising for them so people know what's going on.'</p> <p>'Use social media, text messaging, or apps to let youth discover programs, register online, and get automated reminders.'</p>
<p><b>More convenient hours</b></p> <p>The times that leisure-time activities are held could be make it easier for some young people to attend. A total of 34 said this was something that would make it easier for them. A further 4</p>	<p>'Having them at the right times for me.'</p> <p>'If it was at times and days I could go.'</p> <p>'Offer evening and weekend slots (and even some drop-in times) to fit around school, work, and family duties.'</p>

Theme	Typical comments
said they should be more school-time friendly.	'If they had a more varied time schedule, running clubs multiple times a week instead of one.'

### Further comments

Young people were asked whether there was anything else that they would like to tell us about leisure-time activities. No new themes came from these comments that hadn't already been mentioned in earlier questions. Instead, it is likely that the comments confirmed the importance of the earlier themes that were generated in response to previous questions.

Table 12: Additional survey comments on leisure-time activities

Theme	Comment
<b>Range of activities/specific activities</b>  In this, the most popular theme, young people tended to list the things that they would like to do. This may have been because the activities were not available but may also suggest that either there was nothing local to them or they did not know if this existed as an activity in the county.	'[For] there to be a more local wider range.'  'It would be nice for ones like rounders.'  'That there should be more creative clubs like art club, pottery club, crochet club.'  'Not really but if there can be more activities that cover more interests and sports that aren't football or netball that would be great and more appealing.'
<b>Cheaper or free activities</b>  The theme of cost was reiterated again in this open comment section, suggesting that it is an important issue for young people (and their parents/carers).	'...having things that are free or don't cost very much money is really important.'  'It would be good if there was more free stuff as not everybody has money for stuff.'  'WHY DO THEY ALL COST MONEY??? The only leisure-time activities I can attend are those at school.'  'If there was more accessibility money and travel wise i think more people would be willing to attend which would greatly encourage young people to get out and socialise.'
<b>Fun</b>	'They are fun.'

Theme	Comment
As noted earlier in this report, when young people were asked what they most liked about leisure-time activities they said it was the 'fun' aspect (143 said this). This was again highlighted in the open comment section.	<p>'Well it's very fun and you can do a lot of things.'</p> <p>'I think leisure-time activities should be inclusive and fun and you shouldn't feel guilty about not attending the odd day because you don't feel like it or you simply can't make it.'</p>
<b>Accessibility/inclusive</b>  Although inclusivity and accessibility didn't come out among the top themes when young people were asked about what might help them attend activities, there were enough comments across the whole survey on this theme for comments to be noticeable (14 noted this in the 'what would help you' question). However, it is not always possible to ascertain what is meant when the words 'accessible' or 'inclusive' are used in isolation.	<p>'Why aren't there more activities available for older people with autism like me.'</p> <p>'Difficult to access things like football that I want to do as I'm not good enough.'</p> <p>'Some places are not disability friendly. Some places are too loud for me.'</p>

Table 13: 'Ideas book' from survey

Throughout the survey, young people suggested ideas for the planning, promotion and delivery of activities. As these did not always appear in the main themes of the survey, they are listed here in the form of an 'ideas book'.

Theme	Ideas
Offering cheaper or free activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free trial.</li> <li>• I think every child under the age of 18 should be able to swim for free and be able to attend one club per week for free.</li> <li>• I think every child should get to go for free to a club.</li> <li>• I think every child under the age of 18 should be able to swim for free.</li> <li>• Offer family discounts or package deals.</li> <li>• Things like tennis and rackets clubs, are expensive. Cheaper off-peak sessions maybe.</li> <li>• Hold activities in free or low-cost locations like public parks, libraries, or school gyms to avoid rental fees.</li> <li>• Allow families to pay based on ability and offer full scholarships or waivers for low-income youth.</li> <li>• Encourage friends to sign up together with reduced "bring-a-friend" rates.</li> </ul>

Theme	Ideas
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grants for youth programs, apply for local, state, or national grants aimed at increasing youth engagement in sports, arts, or cultural activities.</li> <li>• Offer lower rates when siblings or multiple family members sign up together, or discounts for signing up for multiple sessions at once.</li> <li>• Equipment libraries.</li> <li>• Request donated items like snacks, uniforms, or art supplies from businesses or individuals in the community.</li> <li>• Offer one or two free sessions so youth can try the activity without committing financially upfront.</li> </ul>
Advertising and promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better advertising, more interesting activities, transport for there and back.</li> <li>• If someone spoke to me and told me what is there for me to do.</li> <li>• Use social media, text messaging, or apps to let youth discover programs, register online, and get automated reminders.</li> <li>• Flyers or email blasts into routine school communications (newsletters, morning announcements).</li> <li>• If there was lists of them in different places, and we could meet someone outside the first time we go there.</li> </ul>
Involving young people in planning and running activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asking students what they want.</li> <li>• Peer ambassadors.</li> <li>• Involve young people in designing activities.</li> <li>• I feel really strongly about giving young people the chance to organise and run their favourite activity. I am in a club which gets cancelled quite often, but I feel that if I were left in charge, I would be a good supervisor and would try my hardest to do what's best for everyone.</li> </ul>
Relevant activities and range of activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That there should be more creative clubs like art club, pottery club, crochet club.</li> <li>• There can be more activities that cover more interests and sports that aren't football or netball that would be great and more appealing.</li> <li>• They're close by and they are easy money and there's fun things to do there like making slime and stress balls and you can make bracelets with the people who work there and they are funny and also they like to talk to you about how your weeks gone and they make you feel safe and that's at the young people's shop in Chi in town and its really fun to go to.</li> </ul>

Theme	Ideas
Age-related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More spaces for older teens who are under 18 because lots of under-18 activities are aimed towards high school and primary students, so college kids and sixth formers are left out.</li> <li>• Ease restrictions on certain leisure centres only allowing under-16s to go to the gym at certain hours.</li> <li>• Actual relevant activities for example yoga, boxing for 14 and 15 years olds I am in the age bracket where lots of things are too young for me and the things I am interested in don't allow my age group to attend.</li> </ul>
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A train card that lets me get to Chi and back for free from Barnham.</li> <li>• Provide free or subsidized bus passes, bike-share programs, or organized carpools so teens without cars can get where they need to go.</li> </ul>
Hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer evening and weekend slots (and even some drop-in times) to fit around school, work, and family duties.</li> <li>• More weekend opportunities.</li> </ul>
Activities that young people said they would like more of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fencing, water sports, swimming, non-sports activities, sports activities other than football/netball, rounders, crafts, cooking, running clubs, padel, crochet, yoga, writing, piano, guitar, photography, horse-riding, board games, trampolining, pottery, art.</li> </ul>

## Appendix M. Characteristics of survey respondents

The numbers below are based on the number of young people responding to each question. Discrepancies in percentages are due to rounding. Those aged 12 years and under were only asked their age and where they lived. These questions were optional, so respondents did not have to complete them if they did not wish to do so.

Table 14: Characteristics of survey respondents

### Area

-	Number	Percentage
Adur and Worthing	82	17
Arun	184	38
Chichester	148	30
Crawley	11	2



Horsham	26	5
Mid Sussex	17	3
Don't know	22	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>100</b>

## Age

-	Number	Percentage
12 and under	137	27
13-15	279	56
16-18	60	12
19-24	25	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>501</b>	<b>100</b>

## Sex

-	Number	Percentage
Female	201	59
Male	123	36
Prefer not to say	19	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>343</b>	<b>100</b>

## Sexual orientation

-	Number	Percentage
Heterosexual	154	74
Gay or lesbian	10	5
Bisexual	23	11
Prefer not to say	21	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>100</b>

## Disability or long-term illness

-	Number	Percentage
Yes	83	23
No	253	70
Prefer not to say	27	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>363</b>	<b>100</b>

## Neurodiverse condition

	Number	Percentage
Yes	133	37
No	200	55
Prefer not to say	29	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>362</b>	<b>100</b>

**Further tables are available giving breakdowns of respondents by protected characteristics.**

## Appendix N. Summary of West Sussex Focus Groups - Young People in West Sussex

Themes identified from young people through focus groups have been taken from six facilitated group discussion sessions engaging with 100 young people in June and July 2025, and from focus groups held at the start of the needs assessment with the West Sussex Youth Cabinet, Care Leavers Cabinet and SEND Young Voices Group. In June and July, these young people were invited to participate through their connection with West Sussex-based youth clubs/projects (Appendix Q).

### What young people like about leisure-time (recreational and educational) activities

Key themes identified:

1. Seeing friends
2. Key components of activities
3. Having fun
4. Having a range of types of activities
5. Using their environment

## Seeing friends

Whilst a distinction was made between paid and free activities, young people enjoy a mixture of the two. By far, the biggest reason for participation was spending time with friends, and this was true for both paid and free activities. Young people spoke of seeing friends as the purpose for leisure-time activities, much more so that the type of activity they attended. The price for attending activities was associated with a price for spending time with friends.

## Key components of activities

Being physically active, trying new things, having a wide range of interests represented, being away from other pressures or supervision, being outdoors and being on the move were also reasons given for participation.

## Having fun

In terms of paid activities, young people enjoy leisure-time activities that are on offer and find them fun. Young people referenced a range of activities which they enjoy including for example playing in a football team, music lessons, going swimming, gymnastics, trampolining, cricket, rugby, kayaking, dry-ski slopes, paddle boarding, golf, martial arts, youth club, volleyball, dance, acro (trampolining), gym, Army Cadets, athletics, bowling, Duke of Edinburgh, running, rugby.

## Having a range of types of activities

Young people also recognise the value of creative or alternative themed activities, including for example book clubs, film clubs, crafts, cartoon/comic sessions, baking and painting.

## Using their environment

In terms of free leisure-time activities, young people hang out in the town, go to the local Park, go to youth spaces in the forest, go to the museum, mountain bike, go to the pump track, dance, play dungeons and dragons, volunteer, go to the skate park, go to the beach, listen to / create music, stay at home gaming, and go to Church activities.

## Barriers preventing young people from attending leisure-time activities

### Environmental and Structural Barriers including cost

Weather was the most frequently mentioned barrier, particularly because many preferred outdoor activities and noted a lack of accessible indoor alternatives. Lack of outdoor and indoor spaces for young people to gather or participate in activities was a recurring concern. Limited access to free or low-cost venues was also highlighted, with affordability being a significant underlying issue. Young people reported being put off by activities that don't offer free taster sessions, as they don't want to commit to paying before knowing whether they like it.

### Personal and Social Barriers

Several young people cited social anxiety, nervous about going somewhere they didn't already know somebody, and mental health challenges as major obstacles to participation. Time constraints due to school commitments and homework pressure were also commonly

mentioned. Young people reported not wanting to attend school groups due to feeling tired after a day at school, and also potentially not getting on with people at school.

### Lack of Accessibility and availability

Lack of availability and options for local activities was a strong theme, and this included availability of activities for different age groups and choice of activities in general. Availability of sports clubs were reported to often cater for boys or mixed groups, but not enough for just girls. It was sometimes felt that activities are too sports oriented, with not enough variety in activities. Young people report it difficult to access activities outside of the immediate area, especially when transport is needed. Young people don't want to ride an hour on a bus/train if the session isn't very long itself, as this feels like wasted time. The timings of activities - how late or early they are (especially considering time it takes to travel) - were reported as barriers to attending. Some activities were reported difficult to get to due to the walking distance and lack of parent/carer availability.

### Travel options, cost and safety

Poor public transport options made it difficult for those in more remote areas to attend. The cost of public transport on top of the activity young people want to undertake had also prevented young people from taking part, and this was expanded to include references to there not being enough activities locally and the need to travel to activities. This also included a lack of footpaths near rural homes, making it unsafe or impractical to walk to activities. Safety of travel was also interwoven within this theme, with girls feeling physically unsafe, including experience of load public, sexually suggestive, threatening or harassing remarks.

### Programme Delivery Issues – cancellation and cost barriers

Some young people expressed frustration that activities were cancelled due to low attendance, which discouraged future participation. Membership or participation costs were also cited as a barrier that stopped many young people engaging in activities, with some activities noted as being very expensive. Whilst young people enjoy paid activities, they can't do them as often as we would like.

### Lack of Diversity and inclusion

Young people report not feeling welcomed or respected in many spaces. This includes young people receiving verbal insults in the context of sexual orientation or gender identity. Sports were reported as often split by gender, and that this can create unfair justifications about ability levels. Young people reflected that there are very little activities (apart from day centres) to cater towards people aged 18-24 with disabilities and that this can leave young people feeling quite isolated.

### How to address the challenges/barriers

#### Awareness of activities

A lot of young people felt they did not know what would make it easier for them to attend additional activities, with busy schedules and lack of time impacting on young people knowing what was available. However, knowledge and advertising of what was out there would help young people in taking up activities, and specifically this could be achieved via improved promotion and advertising of available activities. Young people felt it particularly helpful to be made aware of other groups existing in their local community. Schools and

social media were identified as a good route to spread awareness about available activities. Young people felt maintaining a current database of available activities would be helpful.

### Cost and provision of free/low-cost activities

There was a strong theme around the provision of free / low-cost activities to reduce financial barriers. Free taster or trial sessions would help to encourage young people to try new things, allowing young people to try something before committing. Young people

### Accessibility and availability

More activities for young people that were not reliant on the weather would help year-round participation, including multi-use games areas, and regardless of the weather more indoor halls and spaces to accommodate activities. Young people would also value more alternative, non-sport activities (e.g. gaming, film, book, art/craft, comic/cartoon, baking & painting). A greater variety in sports that aren't just football & netball (e.g. rounders, badminton, non-team sports) would help with participation. Activities located within easier reach would make attending leisure activities easier, as this would create less reliance on transport or being dropped off by parents/carers. It is especially difficult for disabled young people to access activities which require a lot of walking).

Flexibility in scheduling including open access so you don't have to book was felt to be beneficial to participation, as well as regularly scheduled activities to build routine and consistency.

### Diversity and inclusion

Young people reported that a variety of sports which ensure boys girls and boys feel comfortable participating are important. Of consideration as part of this, is that young people reported that splitting activities by ability or experience, instead of gender, would make them easier to attend.

Young people expressed an interest in more inclusive and accessible activities, including to young people with SEND. Avoidance of discrimination was wrapped up in this discussion. This also included the importance of thinking about the 'surroundings' of the place. This includes that consideration be given to online or hybrid activities so everyone can attend. Several participants highlighted in particular the importance of detailed information about where services are, how to get to them, including local transport links to ease anxiety around what's on offer so that neurodiverse people know what to expect. It is important to give reasonable notice of any changes, and that changes are even harder to manage when they are not known about. It is important to think about the safety of activities – including getting to and from activities – especially for young people with disabilities.

Groups/clubs are reliant on grant funding. Young people raised that grant funding should consider whether young people who need support to travel, either with someone or independently, can access them. Young people may need to use a Personal Assistant (PA) as part of their PA care package. Young people wanted to raise awareness that young people with SEND require a longer period of time to travel to activities.

### Quality

A theme around quality of leisure activities emerged. For young people, this translated to engaging activities being led by skilled and qualified individuals, who are relatable and easy going.

## Young people friendly environments

A theme emerged around the importance of spaces dedicated to young people. For example, the idea of introducing more activities such as arcades was suggested. This led to a broader conversation about youth spaces specifically, the importance of having well-equipped, modernized environments that feel welcoming and foster a sense of ownership among young people.

## Travel

Active travel was supported, with themes around improved bike trails to support safe and active travel, and more public footpaths, especially in rural areas, to improve walkability. Better and more frequent public transport to improve accessibility was further mentioned.

## Impact of recreational and educational leisure-time activities – what's working well

The existing provision of inclusive and accessible spaces for young people was recognised by participants, with the benefits of varied opening hours and opportunities for all ages to engage with activities in their area a particular strength. For example, Arun was recognised for provision of accessible recreational and educational leisure activities for young people, with “varied open hours across 7-8 locations” and Arun Youth Projects (a community youth service) having a shop on the high street.

Alongside the number of open and available spaces, participants commended the provision of support available for young people in their area, such as having access to youth workers and mentoring, and emphasis on creating a safe space for them to “drop in and access support” e.g., Burgess Hill Youth Centre in Mid Sussex. East Clayton Farm was also recognised for the education and support they offer young people with additional needs.

The variety of recreational and educational leisure activities on offer for young people were identified as a strength by participants, ranging from ‘Audio Active’ (which provides free music sessions) in Adur to boxing clubs in Lancing.

## Most important aspects of recreational and educational leisure activities for young people

The importance of creating a safe environment for young people, ensuring recreational and educational leisure activities take place in spaces which are warm, free from drugs and have appropriate outdoor lighting, were frequently mentioned by participants. In addition, many responses also mentioned the importance of providing funded activities which are available for young people throughout the school holidays, such as the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme.

In relation to the types of activities on offer, participants recognised the importance of creating opportunities for young people to meet others in their area, build relationships and learn social skills, alongside getting outdoors.

Participants provided examples of specific recreational and educational leisure activities for young people within their area which they felt were important, such as bowling, boxing and the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme.

Predominant themes focussed on the value in supporting emotional wellbeing, resilience and self-esteem; improved social development and inclusivity which translate into important life skills; the need for being equitable in design to reduce structural inequalities;

and the opportunity to embed healthy lifestyles and behaviours, from mental health, through exercise, nutrition, and cooking, and reducing negative influences around sexual health and substance use.

Whilst of slightly less strength, further clear themes emerged on their value in broadening horizons and increasing young people's ambitions; providing stability and safe spaces for young people to develop, increasing physical health through guided activities and use of outdoor spaces; and awareness of services including sexual health.

Finally, some reference was also made to the benefits of reducing time socialising with digital media and getting out into physical environments; and in terms of safeguarding young people particularly as they leave education and are no longer under the daily observation of professionals.

### Challenges around recreational and educational leisure activities for young people in West Sussex

Inconsistency in the availability or offer of activities across the West Sussex geography and youth population was described, with participants frequently describing access to activities as a challenge. Provision was seen to vary by location – such as a lack of activities in rural areas – with access further affected by young people's ability to travel to activities. Participants also described a lack of "universal" or "open access" offer for young people, with one expressing the view that "young people [are] only seen as deserving when in crisis".

Service provision as "short-term firefighting", rather than a consistent offer, was described, whilst participants also raised inconsistency in, and the short-term nature of, funding as further challenges.

In discussing the perspectives of young people themselves, although one participant believed that young people "want and ask for more access" – indicating a demand for activities – another described young people as "not taking up the offer" of activities, indicating the existence of barriers to access, or a possible mismatch between young people's preferences and existing provision.

Poor awareness amongst young people of available activities was raised by participants, which was related by some to a lack of up-to-date information about what is available, where, for whom and the cost of such activities.

Young people's perceptions around whether activities are "friendly enough" and concerns around group dynamics with, or the presence of, other young people, and negative feedback from others was thought to create unfavourable expectations, resulting in a "reluctance" to access services.

Concerns around young people "feeling safe" in accessing activities were frequently described, encompassing both safety in travel to activities and at the activities themselves. Safety concerns were related to harm from others and ranged from peer bullying to exposure to risks such as violence, grooming and drug dealing.

Although most comments referred to whether the young person feels safe, the need for parents of young people with SEND to feel safe in sending their children to activities was also raised.



## How to address the challenges/barriers around recreational and educational leisure activities for young people in West Sussex

Listening to “young people’s voices” and acting on these perceptions was viewed as a key solution to the challenges identified around recreational and educational leisure activities (as previously described). Many participants emphasised the importance of young people “[believing] they are being listened to” or “heard”, with a need to build trust with young people underlying this.

Involving and empowering young people in the design and running of activities and services was also raised, with suggestions including a youth-led “sufficiency audit” of services, co-design of activities and having organisations that are “run by young people”, such as an existing Community Coffee Shop. Services should include a ‘kitemark’, such as the You’re Welcome quality assurance.

Developing a “universal offer” of open access youth provision across West Sussex was seen as important in supporting young people, with some participants additionally expressing the view that “all young people should have access to a youth worker”. Activities should seek equality in access, and ensure they are neurodivergent friendly.

Consistent funding was frequently mentioned as a facilitator for youth provision, with several participants highlighting the importance of “long-term funding” commitments. Investment into the workforce was also raised, including the importance of diversity and training within the workforce. Highlighting the complementary roles of paid youth workers and volunteers, participants expressed a training and development need for skilled youth practitioners who are able to “manage group dynamics and navigate risks”, alongside “community development to support local adults” to deliver youth activities.

Greater coordination and communication between services were frequently described as important facilitators to overcome the challenges around recreational and educational leisure activities for young people. Having a shared understanding of the available provision and “talking with others, other services” was seen as beneficial. To support this shared understanding, a “mapping” exercise of existing provision across the county was suggested. Leisure-time activities should wrap around the whole school, and can benefit from social prescribing models/services.

Participants further expressed a desire to “coordinate” across all levels of service provision, from county and district/borough councils through to the voluntary and community sector, including diverse services such as Early Help, Youth Justice, Youth Emotional Support, and Community and Family Hubs, alongside charities. As part of this coordination, participants described existing community assets and spaces, which participants thought could be shared and utilised across services. Examples included utilising Family Hubs during the evenings, alongside expanded use of colleges and youth clubs, as a “familiar environment for young people”, throughout the day.

Safety in place design was raised by several participants, including design of outdoor places, such as parks and other green spaces. Lighting, in particular, was viewed as important in creating safe and welcoming places, alongside well-maintained and open spaces.

Co-design of mixed-use places was also raised, with the involvement of young people and their communities.

Participants also commented on the importance of activities that provided opportunities for young people to access outdoor space, such as the availability of green gyms, parks, and beaches within their area. Hove was recognised for the regeneration of their seafront and new wheeled sports area.

## **Appendix O. Focus Group with West Sussex Youth Cabinet and Care Leavers Advisory Board on 17th March 2025**

Seven young people attended this focus group. A presentation on the needs assessment was followed by facilitated discussion against four questions. Discussion points were captured using a mixture of Mentimeter and note-taking. The feedback given was thematically grouped. Participant information sheet provided in advance to attendees, covering purpose, confidentiality and creating a safe space. When offering activities for young people, it is important to think about:

### **Cost Barriers**

- Address cost barriers that may prevent participation in higher-quality activities.

### **Inclusive and accessible**

- Include a variety of sports and ensure both boys and girls feel comfortable participating.
- Ensure activities are accessible to everyone, including those with additional needs, and avoid discrimination.

### **Youth Input and engaging with young people**

- Involve young people in deciding which activities to offer to ensure they feel included.
- When engaging with young people on health and wellbeing, it is best to ask indirect and open-ended questions, use simple language, ensure of anonymity, clearly explain the importance of health and wellbeing, use quick and easy surveys, be sensitive to the topic, and ask about barriers and how to overcome them.

### **Qualified Facilitators**

- Ensure activities are led by skilled and qualified individuals.
- Have facilitators who are relatable and easy-going.

### **Engaging and Affordable**

- Offer activities that are engaging and not boring, while keeping costs low. Examples include sports, simple walks, and interactive games like Blooket or Kahoot.
- Keep activities engaging rather than lecture-like.

### **Effective Publicity**

- Publicize activities well to ensure young people are aware of them.
- Use schools and social media to spread awareness about available activities.
- Maintain a current database of available activities.

## Safety

- Public safety relating to time of day (especially early or late), girls feeling physically unsafe (including when in school uniform and experience of 'catcalling'), boys feeling pressured to appear 'manly'

## Isolation

- Isolation and not getting out enough, with possible causal links with technology.

## Appendix P. Focus Group with West Sussex SEND Young Voices Group on 24 April 2025

Young people on the West Sussex SEND Young Voices Group joined a focus group on 24th April 2025 to help focus the lines of enquiry and inform the design and approach taken within the needs assessment. The session was facilitated by Public Health in the county council. Emerging themes were thematically grouped as below.

### How to best engage with young people

- A number of shared suggestions were made by the focus group, including:
  - Being out and visible in town centres and asking people
  - Asking people if they wish to join focus groups either in person or online surveys
  - Use Makaton to help people
  - Keep the questions broad
  - Ask questions about lifestyle related factors such as eating and smoking
  - Use to give prompts to young people to help them answer the questions
  - Use short, clear introductions

### Availability of activities for 18-24 year olds with disabilities

The group reflected that there are very little activities (apart from day centres) to cater towards people aged 18-24 with disabilities and that this can leave young people feeling quite isolated. When provided activities, it is important to think about the 'surroundings' of the place.

### Accessibility of activities for 16-24 year olds with disabilities

This includes the location of the activity and whether it is accessible to all. It was suggested that consideration be given to online or hybrid activities so everyone can attend. The majority of participants in the focus group agreed that it is hard to get to activities, and they were not always accessible. Several participants highlighted in particular the importance of detailed information about where services are, how to get to them, including local transport links to ease anxiety and what's on offer so neurodiverse people know what to expect. It is important to give reasonable notice of any changes, and that changes are even harder to manage when they are not known about.

## Safety

Furthermore, it is important to think about the safety of activities – including getting to and from activities.

## Funding

Groups/clubs are reliant on grant funding. The grant funding should consider whether young people who need support to travel, either with someone or independently, can access them. Young people may need to use a Personal Assistant (PA) as part of their PA care package.

## Travel

If young people don't have a train station near to an activity this may mean they can't attend. SEND young people need a longer period of time for activities.

## Appendix Q. West Sussex young people's focus groups running in June and July 2025

- 24 June 2025, 60 young people, Forest Youth Wing, Horsham
- 24 June 2025, four young people, Work experience group, Horsham
- 24 June 2025, three young people, Horsham Youth Forum, Horsham
- 26 June 2025, nine 11-15 year olds, Sidney Walter Centre Worthing
- 26 June 2025, four 16-21 year olds, Sidney Walter Centre Worthing
- 4 July 2025, 20 young people, Southwater Youth Project, Southwater

## Appendix R. Focus Group with West Sussex Youth practitioners on 5th November 2024

Youth Practitioners from various organisations in West Sussex attended a focus group to explore their views and experiences regarding health challenges for young people and educational and recreational leisure-time activities available to young people in West Sussex. The focus group was conducted as part of a Youth Practitioner Networking Event in Worthing, organised by the Sussex Violence Reduction Partnership. The event was for front-line practitioners working with young people across West Sussex, with a focus on topics including safeguarding, exploitation and serious violence. A convenience sample of youth practitioners attending the networking event were invited to participate in the focus group via e-mail and word-of-mouth on the day.

Participants were from a variety of backgrounds and organisations across West Sussex, such as the charity and voluntary sector, education and residential (e.g., children's care homes). Participants worked with a broad range of young people; characteristics were not specified.

An information sheet and topic guide, which consisted of five main questions, was used to guide the focus group discussion, covering:

1. What is good about recreational and educational leisure activities for young people in your area? Please say which geographic area of West Sussex you are referring to (e.g. ward / town / city / borough / district).
2. What do you feel are the most important recreational and educational leisure activities for young people in your area?
3. What are the biggest challenges or problems about recreational and educational leisure activities for young people in your area?
4. How can we solve these challenges?

The notes taken by focus group facilitators, alongside written responses to the five main questions from participants, were analysed by the Public Health and Social Research Unit, using inductive coding and analyst verification. Themes were written into a narrative, with illustrative quotes used to highlight themes where possible.

Two to four themes were identified for each topic of interest. These are presented in table 15 and described below with illustrative quotes.

**Table 15: Theme development from youth practitioner focus group**

Topic	Themes
Strengths of recreational and educational leisure activities for young people	Strengths of recreational and educational leisure activities for young people
	Offer of activities for young people
Most important recreational and educational leisure activities	Creating a safe environment
	Opportunity for connection
	Variety of activities
Challenges around recreational and educational leisure activities for young people in West Sussex	Availability and access
	Awareness and expectations
	Safety
Addressing the challenges around recreational and educational leisure activities for young people in West Sussex	Engaging with, and involving, young people
	Consistency in provision and funding
	Coordination and communication between services
	Designing safe and welcoming places

Headline themes were as follows:

### **Social connections and safety**

Activities that support young people in building social connections and in their personal development.

## Safety

Safety was a recurrent theme and multi-faceted. As a community issue, fostering 'safe' environments that young people feel comfortable travelling to and being in was seen as important, as were physical features to facilitate this, such as lighting and warmth. Safety as an emotional need of young people – i.e., "feeling safe" – was also raised. A safe, inclusive and accessible environment, were seen as important functions of recreational and educational leisure activities.

## Equity

Equity, via funded places for activities during the school holidays, was encompassed within this.

## Asset based approaches

Various local assets, including the natural and built environment and a range of clubs, centres and services on offer, were highlighted as valuable existing examples.

## Access

Access to activities and services was frequently raised. Although discussions around access mostly related to unmet needs and inconsistencies in activity provision across the county and youth population, opportunities to coordinate across services and to share existing assets and knowledge were highlighted.

## Young people's voice

Seeking young people's views and perspectives, both to inform service/activity provision and to build trust with young people, was viewed as a clear facilitator to overcome challenges in young people's activities, including barriers such as low confidence in, and reluctance to use, services.

The narrative from which the key themes are drawn is provided below.

## Strengths of recreational and educational leisure activities for young people

The existing provision of inclusive and accessible spaces for young people was recognised by participants, with the benefits of varied opening hours and opportunities for all ages to engage with activities in their area identified as a particular strength. For example, Arun was recognised for their provision of accessible recreational and educational leisure activities for young people, with "varied open hours across 7-8 locations" and Arun Youth Projects (a community youth service) having a shop on the high street.

Alongside the number of open and available spaces, participants commended the provision of support available for young people in their area, such as having access to youth workers and mentoring, and emphasis on creating a safe space for them to "drop in and access support" e.g., Burgess Hill Youth Centre in Mid Sussex. East Clayton Farm was also recognised for the education and support they offer young people with additional needs.

The variety of recreational and educational leisure activities on offer for young people were identified as a strength by participants, ranging from 'Audio Active' (which provides free music sessions) in Adur to boxing clubs in Lancing. Participants also commented on the importance of activities that provided opportunities for young people to access outdoor

space, such as the availability of gyms, parks, and beaches within their area. Hove was recognised for the regeneration of their seafront and new wheeled sports area.

### Most important recreational and educational leisure activities for young people

The importance of creating a safe environment for young people, ensuring recreational and educational leisure activities take place in spaces which are warm, free from drugs and have appropriate outdoor lighting, were frequently mentioned by participants. In addition, many responses also mentioned the importance of providing funded activities which are available for young people throughout the school holidays, such as the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme.

In relation to the types of activities on offer, participants recognised the importance of creating opportunities for young people to meet others in their area, build relationships and learn social skills, alongside getting outdoors.

Participants provided examples of specific recreational and educational leisure activities for young people within their area which they felt were important, such as bowling, boxing and the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme.

### Challenges around recreational and educational leisure activities for young people in West Sussex

Inconsistency in the availability or offer of activities across the West Sussex geography and youth population was described, with participants frequently describing access to activities as a challenge. Provision was seen to vary by location – such as a lack of activities in rural areas – with access further affected by young people's ability to travel to activities. Participants also described a lack of "universal" or "open access" offer for young people, with one expressing the view that "young people [are] only seen as deserving when in crisis".

Service provision as "short-term firefighting", rather than a consistent offer, was described, whilst participants also raised inconsistency in, and the short-term nature of, funding as further challenges.

In discussing the perspectives of young people themselves, although one participant believed that young people "want and ask for more access" – indicating a demand for activities – another described young people as "not taking up the offer" of activities, indicating the existence of barriers to access, or a possible mismatch between young people's preferences and existing provision.

Poor awareness amongst young people of available activities was raised by participants, which was related by some to a lack of up-to-date information about what is available, where, for whom and the cost of such activities.

Young people's unfavourable expectations of activities were also seen as a barrier. This included young people's perceptions around whether activities are "friendly enough" and concerns around group dynamics with, or the presence of, other young people. Negative feedback from others was further thought to create unfavourable expectations, resulting in a "reluctance" to access services.

Concerns around young people "feeling safe" in accessing activities were frequently described, encompassing both safety in travel to activities and at the activities themselves.



Safety concerns were related to harm from others and ranged from peer bullying to exposure to risks such as violence, grooming and drug dealing.

Although most comments referred to whether the young person feels safe, the need for parents of young people with SEND to feel safe in sending their children to activities was also raised.

Addressing the challenges around recreational and educational leisure activities for young people in West Sussex

Listening to “young people’s voices” and acting on these perceptions was viewed as a key solution to the challenges identified around recreational and educational leisure activities (as previously described). Many participants emphasised the importance of young people “[believing] they are being listened to” or “heard”, with a need to build trust with young people underlying this.

Involving and empowering young people in the design and running of activities and services was also raised, with suggestions including a youth-led “sufficiency audit” of services, co-design of activities and having organisations that are “run by young people”, such as an existing Community Coffee Shop.

Developing a “universal offer” of open access youth provision across West Sussex was seen as important in supporting young people, with some participants additionally expressing the view that “all young people should have access to a youth worker”. Consistent funding was frequently mentioned as a facilitator for youth provision, with several participants highlighting the importance of “long-term funding” commitments.

Investment into the workforce was also raised, including the importance of diversity and training within the workforce. Highlighting the complementary roles of paid youth workers and volunteers, participants expressed a training and development need for skilled youth practitioners who are able to “manage group dynamics and navigate risks”, alongside “community development to support local adults” to deliver youth activities.

Greater coordination and communication between services were frequently described as important facilitators to overcome the challenges around recreational and educational leisure activities for young people. Having a shared understanding of the available provision and “talking with others, other services” was seen as beneficial. To support this shared understanding, one participant suggested a “mapping” exercise of existing provision across the county.

Participants further expressed a desire to “coordinate” across all levels of service provision, from county and district/borough councils through to the voluntary and community sector, including diverse services such as Early Help, Youth Justice, Youth Emotional Support, and Community and Family Hubs, alongside charities. As part of this coordination, participants described existing community assets and spaces, which participants thought could be shared and utilised across services. Examples included utilising Family Hubs during the evenings, alongside expanded use of colleges and youth clubs, as a “familiar environment for young people”, throughout the day.

Safety in place design was raised by several participants, including design of outdoor places, such as parks and other green spaces. Lighting, in particular, was viewed as important in creating safe and welcoming places, alongside well-maintained and open spaces.

Co-design of mixed-use places was also raised, with the involvement of young people and their communities.

## **Appendix S. Focus Group with Public Health officers on 13 December 2024**

Public Health officers in West Sussex attended a focus group on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2024 to explore the views and experiences of factors affecting young people's health and wellbeing in West Sussex, and the associated role of educational and recreational leisure-time activities. Thematic learning was as follows.

### **Factors which promote and protect young people's health and wellbeing in West Sussex**

The factors most strongly supported from the feedback in particular emphasised the importance of social connections / social skills, parents and family members (and their role in establishing health lifestyles), physical and accessible outdoor spaces and leisure activities, strategies and policies which provide structural and service driven-solutions.

There were also emerging themes around the importance of confidence, resilience and self-esteem; trusted adult role models; social media and safety; sexual health and access to free screening and contraception; financial stability and housing security; increasing awareness of community support services; engaging with young people; utilisation of community and voluntary sector services; and healthy food and nutrition.

### **Barriers impacting on young people's health and wellbeing in West Sussex**

Predominantly the group recognised the significant impact of financial barriers and relative deprivation; lack of security/stability/safety; the influence of parents and family; stigma faced by social minorities including race, religion, ethnicity, English language comprehension, sexuality and gender, learning difficulties and physical disabilities, and the needs for female sex only opportunities; lack of awareness of opportunities that exist for young people, the need to engage more directly in designing services; and accessibility of service considering geographical location, transport, time of day and transitional years.

Slightly less strong, but still prevalent themes emerged around funding for afterschool clubs and activities; the need to safeguard and support those who have experienced domestic abuse and guideline, mental health. Reference was also made to the importance of supporting young carers.

### **The most valuable role that recreational and educational leisure-time activities have or could have in health and wellbeing**

The most predominant themes under this question focussed on the value in supporting emotional wellbeing, resilience and self-esteem; improved social development and inclusivity which translate into important life skills; the need for being equitable in design to reduce structural inequalities; and the opportunity to embed healthy lifestyles and behaviours, from mental health, through exercise, nutrition, and cooking, and reducing negative influences around sexual health and substance use.

Whilst of slightly less strength, further clear themes emerged on their value in broadening horizons and increasing young people's ambitions; providing stability and safe spaces for

young people to develop, increasing physical health through guided activities and use of outdoor spaces; and awareness of services including sexual health.

Finally, some reference was also made to the benefits of reducing time socialising with digital media and getting out into physical environments; and in terms of safeguarding young people particularly as they leave education and are no longer under the daily observation of professionals.

## **Appendix T. West Sussex Mental Health Needs Assessment workshop**

Workshop on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2024 with range of professional stakeholders on delivering the West Sussex Mental Health Needs Assessment. Relevant priorities for 5-15 year olds accessional recreational and educational leisure-time activities:

### **Access and communication of offer.**

Provide access to a diverse, inclusive range of sport, leisure, youth services, community and faith groups, music, drama etc, with normalised drop-ins, including libraries. It is important for young people and practitioners to know what's out there and utilise a social prescription model. Develop a whole community approach that wraps around the whole school approach.

### **Service design**

The offer should promote belonging and connection, having fun, utilising strengths-based approaches and celebrating success. Activities should be neurodivergent friendly – and we need to provide information across the board about how to support this to happen. Work with local councils around stat provision of leisure for young people – including leisure centres, skate parks, park spaces. Embedding side by side activity inc. multi-generational – ie: parent child bike workshops.

### **Quality**

Services should include a kitemark – such as You're Welcome quality assurance. Implement plan and monitor impact (measurable outcomes) to know whether and how we have made a difference, however, this does not always require a physical or mental health outcome.

### **Workforce**

Young people's workforce should normalise mental health and wellbeing, and promotion of that.

### **Voice**

Young people and communities need to lead approaches and design services, reflecting the diversity of West Sussex. Activities need to be youth-led, placing young people central to design based on different funding criteria. Embed youth lead approach across strategy, commissioning and design. Embed young person involvement across the design of social determinants, including play/parks/phone charges/music.

## Appendix U. West Sussex Mental Health Needs Assessment workshop

Workshop on 12 December 2024 with range of professional stakeholders on delivering the West Sussex Mental Health Needs Assessment. Relevant priorities for 16-25 year olds accessional recreational and educational leisure-time activities:

### Communication of offer

Tailer to stages not ages. Wellbeing fairs for CYP about what is there in communities. Keep parents up to date on community support.

### Employment

Increase paid work experience opportunities. This includes a programme of opportunities and activities, peer support roles, working with local employers. Need to increase focus on and prioritise young people not in employment, education or training. Seek joint initiatives with DWP and volunteering opportunities.

### Voice

Work with young people to find solutions.

### Breadth of leisure-time offer

Support leisure-time activities for this age group, including music and other activities. Including free access to free sports and leisure facilities for CYP.

### Safeguarding

Need to counter exploitation.

### Service design

Need to create sense of belonging. Equality in access to youth services. Peer support CYP Neurodiverse friendly services. Bringing together autistic children/communities – research – we know that autistic children are able to communicate well with other autistic children. Include intergenerational offers.

## Appendix V. Validation/ Recommendation Workshops

16<sup>th</sup> July 2025 – West Sussex Young People's Health Needs Assessment Steering Group – 18 attendees (not including organisers/ facilitators)

16<sup>th</sup> July 2025 – West Sussex combined Youth Cabinet, Care Leavers Cabinet, and local youth group – 13 attendees (not including organisers/ facilitators)

17<sup>th</sup> July 2025 – West Sussex SEND Young Voices Group – 8 attendees (not including organisers/ facilitators)

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