



Newcastle Director of Public Health
Annual Report 2024/25



It takes
a city
to raise
a child



Newcastle
City Council 



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Foreword

What Does this Mean for the Next Generation?

I feel incredibly privileged to be presenting my first annual report as the Director of Public Health for Newcastle, the city in which I was raised.

I arrived in the city aged just two years old when my parents relocated from Nigeria in West Africa. Newcastle is all I ever knew growing up. I had a fabulous childhood and have many happy memories of balmy sunny summers, with some of the best beaches in the world, and the ice-cold North Sea, a quick metro ride away. I remember snowy winters rolling snowballs up and down the street to make giant carrot nosed snowman.

I loved the freedom of playing out in the back lanes and in our incredible local green spaces, fishing for sticklebacks in Exhibition Park, taking to the stage with the Young People's Theatre, playing the trumpet (very badly), running on the track at Heaton Manor School and swimming as part of the Newcastle Swim Team. As with everyone, my life was not free from challenge and adversity, but Newcastle made sure I had what I needed to succeed.

I know this is not the same for everyone and certainly was not the same for all my friends.

In our city, the life expectancy of two babies born just streets apart can differ by as much as 12 years, determined entirely by the circumstances into which they were born. Even more concerning, children from the most disadvantaged areas of the city can expect to live 18 years of their already shorter life, in ill-health. I am sure we can all agree this disparity is deeply unjust and cannot be allowed to continue.

Despite decades of dedicated efforts across health and care services, inequalities in entirely preventable diseases remain stubbornly persistent. Alarming, in recent years, these inequalities have begun to widen. Our robust Geordie spirit has helped us endure countless challenges in recent years, but it is our youngest residents who have borne the brunt of these hardships.

Looking back, a child turning 18 in 2024 was born on the brink of a global financial crisis. They grew up during a period of stark government austerity, which meant that vital support and services were stretched thin or, in many cases, removed altogether. Alongside this came a sweeping programme of welfare reform, leaving many families worse off financially. During the Covid-19 pandemic, while children and young people were thankfully at lower clinical risk, they made some of the greatest sacrifices to protect older and more vulnerable members of society. At the time, these measures were deemed necessary, but we are still uncovering the long-term impacts of such significant disruptions to their formative years. And as if that weren't enough, they have faced the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, which has placed even greater strain and stress on overstretched parents, public services, and the voluntary and community sector.

In March 2024, Dame Sara Khan published a report titled *Societal Threats and Declining Democratic Resilience: The New Extremism Landscape*, which highlighted the high levels of tension and polarisation gripping the nation. The report linked frustrations and perceived injustices surrounding the cost-of-living crisis, growing societal divisions, and the rise of conspiracy theories to a decline in both societal and democratic resilience in Britain. It further identified increasing inequality as a key factor contributing to this erosion of resilience.

This observation reminds us that reducing health and social inequalities is not merely an issue of social justice - it is essential for the well-being of society as a whole. Evidence shows that inequalities harm social cohesion and diminish well-being across all levels of society, regardless of one's position. In countries with high levels of inequality, social problems are more prevalent, including reduced civic participation, increased household debt, and lower levels of child well-being.

"It takes a village to raise a child" is an African proverb that emphasises the vital role of collective community effort in nurturing a child and enabling them to thrive.

Its message is clear: raising a child is a profound responsibility that resonates beyond the parents and immediate family. In this report, the proverb serves as a call to action, a call for our own “village” to step forward and actively support the next generation. This includes extended family, friends, educators, policymakers, youth workers, community leaders, and others, all playing their part in shaping a child’s future.

The purpose of my report is to highlight the opportunities and challenges for today’s generation of children and young people living in our city. Childhood shapes the adults of the future and the society we live in. If we want our city to flourish and grow, we need to ensure we are focused on ensuring all children and young people equitable access to opportunities. Every decision we make must be guided by the single question, what does this mean for the next generation? We also need to be bold in aligning resources more effectively with the needs across our city. True equity doesn’t mean giving everyone the same, it means ensuring a consistent and focused effort to address inequalities and support those who need it most.

Children and young people have collaborated with me, through the help of a local artist, to share what truly matters to them, and their voices are woven into this report. The children we engaged with are not asking for much. They simply want supportive relationships, comfortable homes, enough food to eat, and friends to play with. When we encouraged them to dream about their futures, their aspirations remained modest: good jobs, a nice home, and close friends. However, when we asked what barriers they face, they expressed concerns and fears about safety and the rising cost of food. These simple yet profound insights remind us of the importance of addressing their basic needs and aspirations.

The future of our amazing city is only temporarily entrusted to us. As the current custodians it is vital that the decisions, we make to shape our city are driven by a clear vision, one that focuses on improving the lives of all people across the city while actively addressing and reducing the persistent and unjust inequalities that many still endure.

As we move forward in 2025, striving to build collective action toward becoming a Marmot City, we must continually ask ourselves: What does this mean for the next generation? The future of our incredible city rests in our hands for only a short time, but the decisions we make now will have a lasting impact on generations to come.

Alice Wiseman,

Newcastle Director of Public Health



Introduction

We are from Newcastle

We are from burgers, chocolate, spaghetti and Sunday Dinner,

Chicken nuggets, pierogi, shawarma and chippy chips

We are from pencils, paper, phones and people,

Roblox, playstations, tooth brushes and footballs

We are from school, home, shops and East End,

We are from rubbish, gangs, vandalism and homelessness,

We are from bridges, beaches, parks and family,

We are from anxiety, happiness, sadness and love

We are from Newcastle

- Byker Primary School



Newcastle can be an amazing city to grow up in - it is packed with opportunity. Many children fill their childhoods with trips around town, visiting museums and art galleries, picnicking in parks and going to see Fenwick's window at Christmas. Often voted one of the friendliest places in the country, Newcastle has a strong and proud sense of community, uniting through good and challenging times.

As much as Newcastle can be an amazing place to grow up, not all children will recognise the description of the city outlined above. Their lives may look and feel a bit different. They may not get to enjoy the opportunities that living in Newcastle can bring, and they may feel those places are for other kids, not for them.

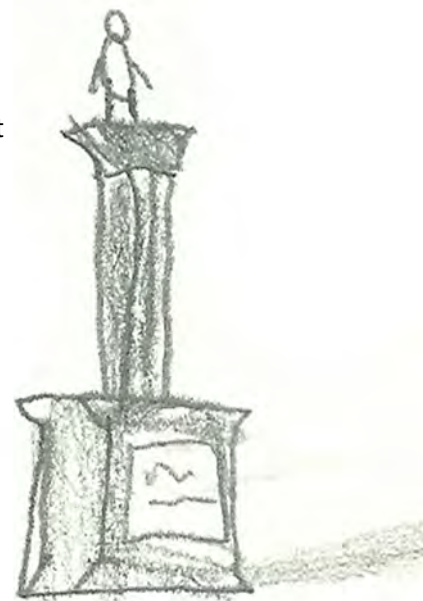
The advantages experienced by some children should be experienced by all. That's not just fair, but it benefits all of us in the long term.

Why is this important?

It is well-established that the foundations for virtually every aspect of human development – physical, intellectual, emotional – are laid in early childhood.

It's why the term "best start in life" has become a common term for professionals working with babies, children and young people. But what does a "best start in life" look like in practice?








When children feel safe, loved, and have the chance to play and explore, they grow up with confidence, resilience, and curiosity. It's during these early years that children learn how to handle emotions, make friends, and develop the skills they'll use throughout their lives. When children are happy and healthy, they're set up to tackle life's challenges head-on, make positive choices, and ultimately lead fulfilling lives. It's like planting a tree—the stronger the roots, the better it can grow.



Class of 2024

Babies, children and young people are amongst our most creative, funny and bright residents; their lives are rich and complex. It is impossible to capture their sense of character in statistics alone, but we present here our Class of 2024. If we imagined all babies, children and young people as 100 residents this is what we would expect to see. The purpose of presenting data like this is to present in a simple way what the population of our youngest residents look like in 2024 – their size, their diversity and some of the specific challenges they are facing.

If Newcastle's CYP (0-19) population were a class of 100 children...

Variable	How many out of the 100?
Age structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 22 aged 0-4 • 33 aged 5-11 • 19 aged 12-15 years • 26 aged 16-19 years
Ethnicity 	14 Asian or Asian British; 6 Black, Black British, Caribbean or African; 5 Mixed or Multiple ethnicities; 4 other ethnicities; 71 White
Sex 	51 Males 49 Females
Main language 	73 main language English. 26 language other than English 1 main language unknown
Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) 	5 children with an Education, Care and Health Plan (EHCP) 14 with Special Educational Needs (SEN) support without an EHCP
Free School Meals 	40 school-aged known to be eligible for free school meals
Poverty 	30 children aged between 0-16 years living in poverty , after accounting for housing costs

The population of babies, children and young people in Newcastle has changed over time. According to Census data, between 2011 and 2021, the overall population increased by 7.1% from 280,200 residents to 300,2000 residents. The number of children grew even more (8.1%) during this time, and the rate in Newcastle was higher than the rate in England (6.6%) as a whole.

Newcastle's population has also become more diverse between the 2011 and 2021 census. The city has a higher percentage of Asian and Asian British people compared to the national average for England. Young people in Newcastle, especially those aged 0-19, are even more diverse than the city's population as a whole.

Reflecting some of the pressures facing families and professionals working with children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, the proportion of children who have an Education, Health and Care plan has also increased significantly – by 102% in the five years between 2017 and 2023.

Living in Newcastle
is like

Amazing

beautiful

Rainy
Scary

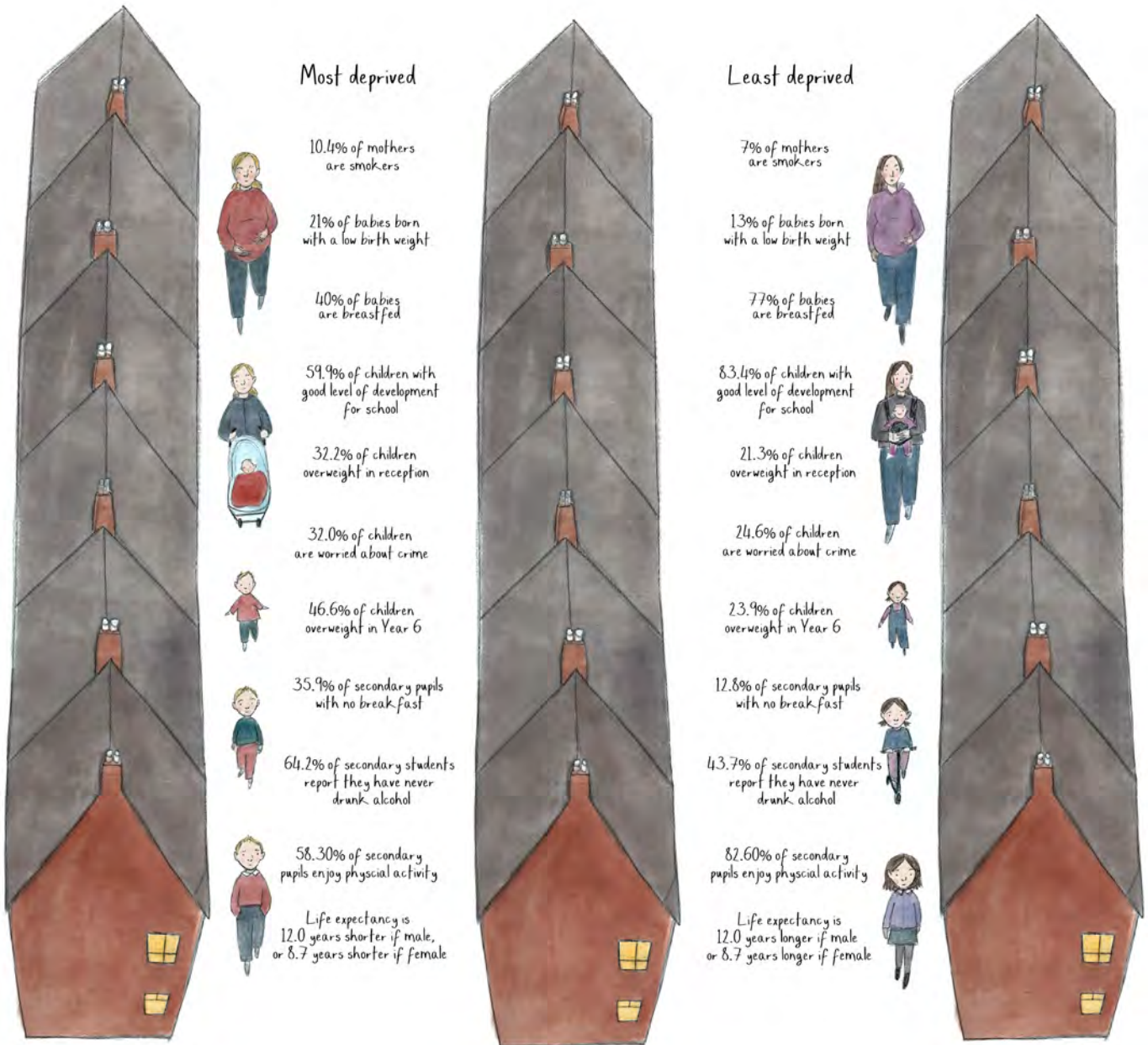


Two Streets, One City

Imagine two babies born just streets apart in the same city; you'd think they'd grow up with similar opportunities, but that short distance can mean starkly different futures.

Their different futures can be caused by many different factors, such as the quality of their parents employment, the standard of their home, their access to green spaces in which to play and how safe they feel in their home and community.

These early inequalities aren't just bumps in the road; they set paths that can be hard to change, creating lifelong gaps in health and wellbeing. These differences are unfair and avoidable – where you're born shouldn't define your chances, and tackling these gaps is key to building healthier, fairer communities for everyone.



What we will do in this report

By giving this report the title, 'It takes a city to raise a child', we hope to convey the many ways in which all of us have a role to play in supporting our babies, children and young people in Newcastle.

It is a report shaped by our children and young people. To support this work, we commissioned an artist/illustrator to work with young people across the city. The artwork produced in these sessions is woven throughout the report and takes many different forms. From creating a 'prescription for the city', to producing protest placards to designing a 'New Newcastle', children and young people had the opportunity to illustrate what growing up in Newcastle looks and feels like for them and how they would like things to be.

We specifically wanted to hear from those children and young people who we may not always hear from. While this engagement won't represent the views of every child and young person, we approached a broad range of youth groups and organisations to hear a range of voices. Our fantastic Youth Council have also provided valuable feedback and contributed to the development of our Call to Action.

Further to this, we have also used findings from our Health-Related Behaviour Questionnaire (HRBQ), a bi-annual school survey that covers a wide range of questions about children's health and wellbeing. Almost 6,000 students completed the survey in 2024, answering questions related to both their physical and mental health, as well as broader influences on their health, such as safety at home, in the community and online.

Finally, we consulted with the broad range of professionals that comprise the Newcastle Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, using their expertise to inform the report's development.

Marmot City

The Marmot Review (2010) [\(16\)](#) and its follow-up (2020) highlighted significant health inequalities in England and outlined actions to address them. The reports, led by Professor Sir Michael Marmot and the Institute for Health Equity, are structured around eight policy objectives aimed at reducing unfair and preventable health inequalities.

We have structured the report around these eight policy objectives and for each we will consider:

1. Why is this important to the health and wellbeing of babies, children and young people?
2. What does our data and intelligence tell us about this?
3. What do children and young people tell us about this?



Give every child the best start in life

Enable all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives

Create fair employment and good work for all

Ensure healthy standard of living for all

Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities

Strengthen the role and impact of ill-health prevention

Tackle discrimination, racism and their outcomes

Pursue environmental sustainability and health equity together

A Marmot Place is a network of places and areas working to tackle health inequalities and improve health outcomes for all. It aims to achieve the eight Marmot policy objectives. Newcastle City Council has committed to working toward becoming a Marmot City. The findings from this report will help to influence this important work, ensuring the voice of children and young people is heard.

Before we get into the main body of the report, let's first focus on some of the essential components of childhood development. Understanding some of the concepts explained here will help us to see the importance of getting the best start in life.

Understanding Childhood Development

The framing and metaphors in this chapter are adapted from work developed by Frameworks UK (Sweeland, 2024), (21) NSPCC (2021) (18) and the Royal Foundation Centre for Early Childhood (2023): (20)

The babies, children and young people of Newcastle are invaluable members of our community. They are curious, fun, creative and inspiring, amongst many other things. Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, they have the right to be nurtured, be educated and be protected from harm. They are also the leaders, innovators and caretakers of the future. Helping them to reach their potential benefits all of us and helps to preserve our strong Geordie spirit.

Developing brain

The human brain is amazing. Our brains are built through a process that begins before birth and continues into adulthood. Like the construction of a house, the building process happens in a sequence – first laying the foundations, shaping the rooms, and later wiring the electrical system.

We are all born with billions of nerve cells in our brains, but during early childhood, connections between these cells form faster than any other time in our lives. From pregnancy to age five, around **one million connections** are formed **every second**. Together with the unique genes we are born with, it is the regular interactions with the people that surround us that shape our long-term brain structure and function.

Building a solid foundation in the early years supports our lifelong learning, behaviour, and health. We talk a lot about the importance of the early years and, while that is true, it is never too late to support strong brain development. Negative experiences in early life do not set a child on a path that cannot be altered.

Developing relationships

A baby is born vulnerable and entirely dependent on their parents and carers for survival and care. One key brain system that kicks in early therefore is our ability to form close relationships or ‘attachments’ with the people around us. This provides a feeling of emotional and physical safety and helps us to buffer against stress and adversity.

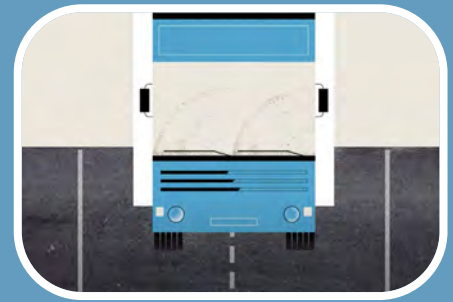
The interactions between a young child and the people around them is also important. Like kicking a football back and forwards, young children naturally reach out for interaction with adults through, for example, babbling and mimicking facial expressions. This process helps them to build important language, cognitive and social skills and actively builds a child’s brain. If repeated over time, a lack of response from adults can interrupt healthy development.

Support network

Having established that parents and caregivers play in laying strong foundations for future health and development, we must then pay attention to their physical and mental wellbeing. Being a parent can be one of the most rewarding and fulfilling roles in a person’s life; it can also be one of the hardest. The sleepless nights, the tantrums and the worries about friendships and exams are just a few examples. But when you add in the burden of stresses like poverty or insecure work and housing, then it becomes even harder.

We know that when a lorry carries too much weight, it can be overloaded to the point of breaking down. So, when parents are burdened with additional stresses, these problems can overload their mental and emotional capacity to take care of their children's basic needs. Over time, carrying and managing heavy burdens puts a strain on people and can weaken their ability to care for their children. When an especially large burden is loaded onto a person who is already overloaded – such as the loss of a job – it can cause a breakdown in care.

To help reduce the burden on parents and caregivers, we can provide social support that offloads sources of stress and helps improve their capacity to care for their children.



Overloaded Parents | NSPCC (18)

Adversity, trauma and resilience

Learning how to cope with adversity is an important part of healthy child development. It can support a young person to know how to cope with life's inevitable ups and downs.

We do know, however, that exposure to certain adversities, such as abuse, neglect and family adversities (e.g. domestic violence and abuse; parental mental ill health and parental issues with substances) can have a lasting impact if timely support is not available. These issues generally do not exist in isolation, and there is growing evidence that poverty plays a powerful role in amplifying and intensifying the clustering of adversities (Adjei et al, 2022). (1)

Trauma is one possible response to adversity. This may have lasting negative effects on a person's physical or mental wellbeing, but resilience is possible with timely support. That last bit around timeliness is key – we know that the more adversities experienced by a child, the more likely they are to suffer from things like heart disease and diabetes, poor academic achievement and issues with substances later in life (Centre on the Developing Child, 2024). (6)

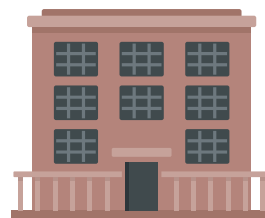
People who have experienced four or more adverse childhood experiences when compared to another person who has no such experiences, were found to be:



almost **4 times** more likely to **smoke**



almost **4 times** more likely to **drink heavily**



almost **9 times** more likely to experience **incarceration**



some **3 times** more likely to be **morbidly obese** (Bellis et al, 2013) (4)

Building resilient communities

By working together to prevent adversity, address trauma and promote our recovery, we can build and maintain our resilience and wellbeing.

Prevention is always better than a cure, so our system efforts should centre around preventing ACEs happening in the first place. This can happen by helping people meet their basic needs and providing other support to reduce the sources of stress in people's lives.

Early intervention and support are key to preventing further escalation and potential crisis points. It includes addressing the root cause of a presenting need, not just the symptom – for example, a parent may be using substances as a way of self-medication for other issues in their life.

As childhood adversity is common, many of our services, from childcare to policing, are **adopting 'trauma-informed' approaches**. The idea is these services can play a part in preventing adversity, addressing trauma, and restoring wellbeing. It helps professionals working with families to realise that trauma can affect individuals, groups and communities; recognise the signs, symptoms, and widespread impact of trauma; and prevent re-traumatisation.

We all have a shared aspiration that the next generation of Geordies will be the happiest and healthiest ever. We believe these underpinning principles around childhood development and adversity, trauma and resilience are central to this goal. Now we have established this, we will move onto the main body of this report where we will consider each of the eight Marmot policy objectives in turn.



1. Give every child the best start in life

Why is this important?

Our childhoods shape us into the adults we become. A child's early relationships, environments and experiences can either support or get in the way of healthy development.

What happens in these early years can have an impact on how well a child does at school and have a lifelong impact on their health and wellbeing. There is good evidence that areas as far ranging as obesity, heart disease, mental health, educational achievement, and economic status are impacted from experiences in the early years of life, starting in the womb.

But there are inequalities in good foundations being laid in the early years, particularly between children living in the most and least deprived areas. Later interventions, whilst important, are considerably less effective where good early foundations are lacking (Marmot et al, 2010). (16)

What do children and young people tell us?

In our creative sessions with children and young people they were first asked to think about what a plant needed to grow well. They were then asked the same question again, but this time to think about what they needed to grow well – in other words, what the best start in life looked like for them.

There was a consistent message that to grow well, it was the simple building blocks that were most important. Whether that was supportive relationships with family and friends or meeting basic needs like access to good food, clean water, and a home. Education and the opportunities to have things to do that they enjoyed also came through.

There can be a tendency to overthink what is needed, but it is the simple things that count – and we all have a role to play in this.



What does our data and intelligence tell us?

• Low birth weight

- Newcastle has a higher proportion of term babies born with low birth weight (3.7%), compared to the North East (3%) and England overall (2.9%) in 2022. This is important because being born at a low birth weight is like starting a marathon with a bit less fuel in the tank which can make things harder as a baby grows and develops.

• Breastfeeding

- Good infant nutrition is critical in ensuring babies get the best start in life, laying the foundation for health and development. Breastfeeding has many benefits for both mum and baby. The proportion of infants in Newcastle (48%) breastfed at 6-8 weeks is higher than for the North East (36%) but lower than for England overall (49%) in 2021/22. Newcastle's breastfeeding rate is lower than most of the other English Core Cities.

• School readiness

- A child who is ready for school has a good foundation for their future learning. The proportion of children who reached a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage was lower for Newcastle (64%) than for the North East (66%) and England (67%) in 2022/23.

Case studies

Children and Families Newcastle

Being a parent is a tough job, and sometimes we all need a bit of help.

For many families, this support comes from what we call a 'universal service', for example a family's health visitor, family hub, GP or school. While Newcastle benefits from many outstanding individual services, we know that our residents face a range of challenges which can result in poorer health outcomes and health inequalities.

Recognising that not one single agency can solve these challenges, organisations, children and families came together in 2021 to develop a new, collaborative approach. Under the banner of Children and Families Newcastle, organisations, such as Newcastle City Council, Newcastle Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, local Primary Care Networks, the voluntary and community sector and community groups, have come together with the shared goal of supporting children and families to thrive and meet their full potential.

Prevention and early intervention are at the heart of this approach. Our Early Help offer aims to identify and address family needs early on, offering coordinated support before issues become more challenging. This offer combines universal services as well as targeted support for those families who need extra help.

Our city-wide commitment aims to bring about the following outcomes:

- **Catch things before crisis**
- **'Work with' children and families not 'doing' to them**
- **Make it easy to get help**
- **Ensure smooth journeys through services so families only have to 'tell their story once'**
- **Recognise and build on community strength**

Dad's champion work

Historically, mums were seen as the main carers for babies, meaning that support services were designed around their needs. But today, dads are more involved in childcare. Despite this, support services have not always adapted to reflect this change. This can lead to dads feeling left behind and unsure about how to access support they may need.

To address this, Newcastle City Council partnered with Barnardo's to create a network of 'Dad's Champions.' These are professionals working across various services trained to engage and support dads. There are 53 Champions across Newcastle working in settings like early childhood services, healthcare and community centres to connect with dads and ensure they feel included.



One of the key successes so far comes from the 0-19 service. They have updated their record management system to link dads to their child's records, giving them direct involvement from pregnancy onwards. This shift is a major step toward fully integrating dads into family support services and helping them stay engaged through early parenthood.

2. Enable all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives

Why is this important?

A good education can help put together the building blocks of a healthy and fulfilling life – securing good jobs, making friends and developing an ability for lifelong learning and problem solving.

Schools play a critical role, not just in teaching but in providing an environment that supports wellbeing – supportive school policies, providing a nutritious meal, and finding and nurturing passions. But, just as many of the influences that impact health are outside the control of the NHS, we need to look beyond schools if we are to tackle inequalities in educational outcomes. It's about schools, families and the wider community working together.

Rates of school absences have risen sharply since the pandemic, driven largely by escalating mental health problems, rising child poverty and longer waits for support (Centre for Mental Health, 2024) ⁽⁷⁾. Tackling the underlying causes for school absence is key to enable students to reap all the benefits of education.

What do children and young people tell us?

In creating the artwork and discussions with young people about getting a good education, the costs associated with attending school cropped up regularly – spanning areas like access to free school meals, equipment for school or period poverty. Access to free opportunities and things to do outside of school was also important. Young people recognised escalating mental health challenges within students and made a case for more mental health support.

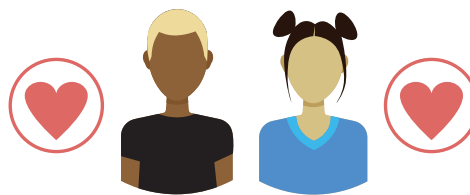


In our bi-annual Health-Related Behaviour Questionnaire (HRBQ) we heard that:



Feeling listened to in school:

The proportion of primary and secondary students who report feeling listened to in school has decreased since 2013. Secondary students in particular do not feel listened to (**16% in 2024** versus **46% for secondary in 2013**).



Life satisfaction:

Generally, the proportion of pupils reporting that they are **very happy/quite happy with life** has **decreased from 2019 to 2024**. Girls in particular were less likely to say that they feel happy than boys, for both primary and secondary.



Relationships:

When asked about behaviour that is “always wrong” in a relationships:

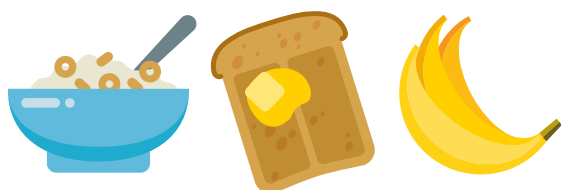
- **82% of boys** and **92% of girls** thought ‘hitting’ was always wrong
- **66% of boys** and **81% of girls** thought ‘telling you who you can and can’t see’ was always wrong
- **85% of boys** and **94% of girls** thought ‘forcing you to do what you don’t want (e.g. having sex)’ was always wrong
- Gap between boys and girls widened for majority of behaviours between 2022 and 2024



Online safety:

95% of secondary pupils reported using social media; **36%** of those who use social media have received a message that scared or upset them. Higher for girls (44%), transgender (47%) and ‘other’ gender (52%) students than for boys (24%); **41%** reported chatting to people they don’t know in real life. **78%** chat to ‘friends of friends’ online.

28% have had a hurtful/nasty message posted or sent to them. Higher for girls (33%) than boys (22%).



Nutrition to support learning:

Proportion of primary and secondary pupils reporting having nothing to eat for breakfast has increased from **15% in 2011** to **20% in 2024**. Children in more deprived areas more likely to report having had nothing to eat for breakfast.

What does our data and intelligence tell us?

In Newcastle in 2022/23, Average Attainment 8 score, which measures a pupil’s performance across 8 GCSE-level qualifications, was 42.6. The average attainment 8 score for pupils eligible for Free School Meals was 31.7. This is a 10.9 percentage point gap.

Case studies

Team Around the School

Recognising that schools cannot tackle inequalities in education alone, a system-wide approach is needed to make sure children and families get the right help at the right time. The “Team Around the School” (TAS) approach offers regular meetings to connect services that support children and families in secondary schools. Attendance and mental health are a key focus.

A range of partners are involved including:

- School Nursing
- Early help
- Voluntary and community organisations
- Education psychologists
- Education team

TAS offer advice and guidance on what is available to schools and children. This collaboration has created a clear directory of mental health support and services, making it easier for partners to identify and refer children to the right support. By improving access to these services, TAS reduces the long-term impact of mental health challenges on school attendance.

Attendance research - Health Determinants Research Collaborations (HDRC)

Being in school is important for children’s academic achievement, wellbeing and wider development. Since the Covid pandemic, there have been concerns about increased absence from school. Overall absence rates in Newcastle are the highest in the North East.

The Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) are leading a research project to address the issue of school absence in Newcastle. Working with a range of schools from across the city, talking to children and families, as well as school staff, they are exploring the issues underpinning absence rates in further detail.

A review of existing studies and information on this topic has been completed. That has shown us that although schools are generally doing all they can to support attendance, challenges persist. We will therefore also be conducting interviews with wider partners, to understand how they can work together with schools and the Local Authority to improve attendance for those who regularly aren’t attending school.

Our aim is to develop a practical toolkit for schools to use, supporting children across the city to increase their attendance, and ultimately improving their outcomes for later life.

Mental health lead training

Schools play an important role in promoting and supporting the mental health and wellbeing of students. Professionals working in these settings need to have the right training and tools to support young people.

In 2023 and 2024, professionals from Public Health, School Nursing and Educational Psychology collaborated to deliver Senior Mental Health Lead Training to 29 settings in Newcastle. The purpose of the training is to develop a network of Mental Health Leads to provide a whole school approach to promote wellbeing.

Evaluation feedback was gathered immediately after the training and in the following year. Participants valued the supportive environment and the opportunity to share ideas, network and learn about evidence informed approaches to understand and support wellbeing. Participants said that they felt more confident to carry out the role of the Mental Health Lead immediately afterwards and in the following year, due to course content and staying in touch with course facilitators and participants. Evaluation feedback at both time points suggests that participants most valued learning about ways to support staff wellbeing and how this is the foundation for supporting others.



Living in Newcastle is great because there's not much crime and that there's good jobs.

The library is good because you can read books here.

3. Create fair employment and good work for all

Why is this important?

A fulfilling future looks and feels different for every child. All young people should be supported to take their next steps into adulthood, whether they continue in education or take up training or employment.

Young people who spend more time not in education, employment or training (NEET) are at increased risk of experiencing poor mental and physical health as well as a higher risk of unemployment and lower quality work and lower incomes later in life (RCPCH, 2021). (19)

Being in good employment is good for your health. It can bring with it better incomes, financial stability, security and a greater sense of purpose. In turn, this can lead to higher living standards, healthier lifestyles, and better mental health (The Health Foundation, 2024) (11). The quality of work matters: those with fewer qualifications and skills are more likely to experience poor working conditions, as well as worse health. Creating better quality jobs will help reduce inequalities.

Good employment for parents also matters. It can be a struggle for some parents, particularly women, to get back into work because of the costs associated with childcare. After having children, what parents value in a job changes. As well as flexibility around childcare, parents are looking for job security, job control, support from managers and financial security (e.g. living wage) (Kings College London and Working Families, 2021) (10).

What do children and young people tell us?

When asked to create an image of their dream future, children and young people showed us they have big dreams and aspirations for their lives. These dreams are also achievable ones – getting a job they love, securing a house, building a family and having friendships.

For some the pursuit and achievement of these dreams will be more straightforward than others.

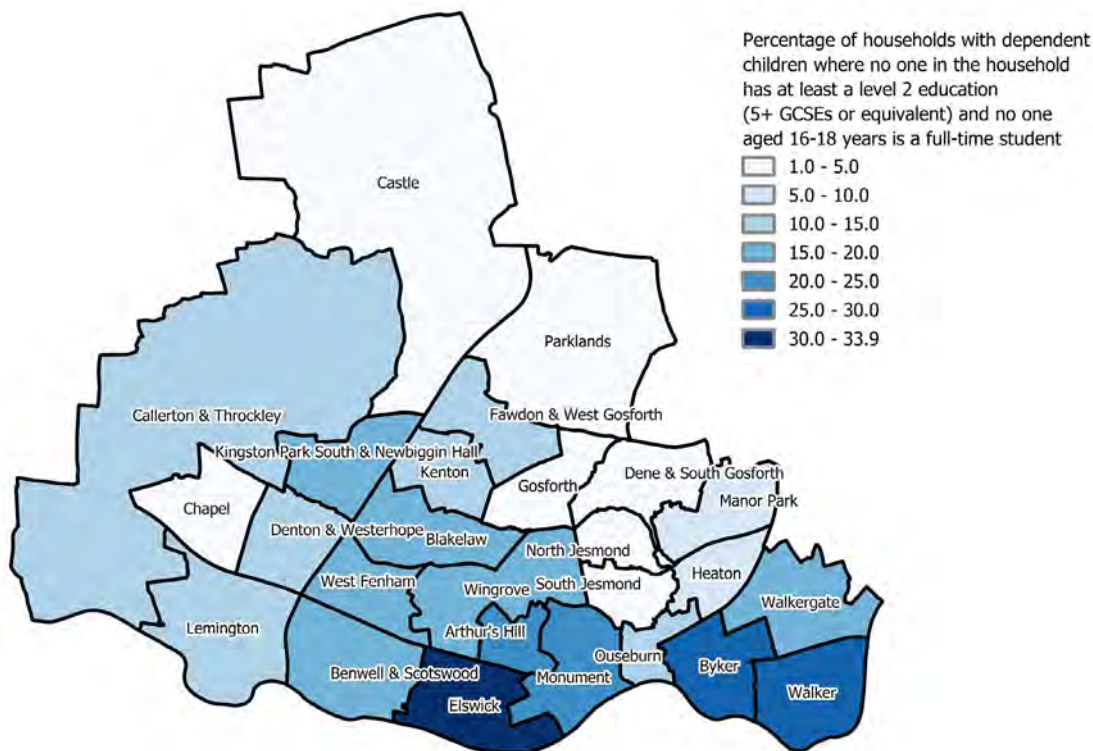
Getting help so they were ready for their next steps was identified as being important.

Young people need to see that, with the right support, many futures are possible. That could mean visits to local universities to break down any barriers or misconceptions about who higher education is for.

It's also about getting high-quality work experience to help develop skills, build confidence and shape aspiration.

The employment of their parents was important too – some children expressed a desire to get their parent back to work or wished people had better paid jobs.





Education map by ward

- Data Source: ONS Census 2021
- Map shows the proportion of households with dependent children resident where the household is classified as 'deprived in the education dimension' at time of Census 2021. This means that no one in the household has at least a level 2 education (5 or more GCSEs or equivalent) and no one resident in the household aged 16-18 years is a full time student.
- Shows inequalities across Newcastle.

What does our data and intelligence tell us?

For parents:

- In the UK, 76% of mothers with dependent children were working in April-June 2021, compared to 92% of fathers. Rate for fathers has plateaued and continues to increase for mothers.
- Women in the UK were more likely to report having flexible working arrangements (33%), compared to fathers (24%)
- In Newcastle, 14.6% of households with dependent children were deprived in the education dimension, which means that no person had at least a Level 2 qualification (five or more GCSE passes (Grade A* to C or grade 4 and above) or equivalent qualifications), and no one aged 16-18 years old was a full-time student. This was higher than for the North East (10.9%) and for England overall (10.1%). This indicator also varied substantially across different wards in the city: from 1.8% of households with dependent children in both Parklands and Gosforth, to almost 1 in 3 households (33.9%) in Elswick.

For children:

- Newcastle has a higher proportion of children not in education, employment or training (NEET) or whose activity is not known than England overall in 2022/23 (7% vs 5%). Being NEET, even for a short period of time, can impact on a young person's projected future earnings and is associated with regular unemployment later in life and lower job security. Studies have shown being NEET can have a detrimental effect on young people's physical and mental health and have long-term impacts on skills, confidence, and future aspirations. Being NEET is also associated with engaging in unhealthy behaviours such as drugs and alcohol misuse.

Case studies

EVRY

Evry is the city's mission to ensure every baby, child and young person can feel:

- Happy and healthy
- Safe
- Ready for their next steps

A network of Evry partners has been developed including businesses, academic, sporting and cultural institutions across the city to support the mission. Young people have told us that fair access to exciting and meaningful work experience matters to them. This is fundamental to feeling ready for their next steps.

Good quality work experience provides young people with the opportunity to explore possible career options. It helps gain key skills and attain practical experiences for future applications and CVs.

In July 2024, Evry Partners, including the Council, Stagecoach, NEI and Newcastle United Foundation supported students with work experience placements. We worked with Jesmond Park Academy to offer 35 placements to young people who may otherwise miss out on work experience opportunities. A further three students from Newcastle sixth forms were also offered the opportunity to join the placements.



HAF Uni

As part of the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme, Newcastle City Council has joined forces with our local universities to provide exciting opportunities for teenagers. The HAF programme provides support to children and young people who are eligible for free school meals during holiday periods. This summer, teenagers had the opportunity to use some of the fantastic facilities at Newcastle University and Northumbria University.

They took part in a range of free and fun activities and workshops, which ranged from physical activities, cooking, CV writing and work with St John Ambulance around the effects of street violence. The traditional HAF offer hasn't always appealed to teenagers and feedback from this refreshed approach is positive. We aim to build on this to further grow the offer and provide opportunities for teenagers to make friends, have fun and feel comfortable in university spaces.

Family Hubs - Supporting Families Employment Advisors

A team of Supporting Families Employment Advisors (SFEAs) play a pivotal role in the city in removing barriers to sustainable employment or training for families. Employed by Job Centre Plus and based across city-wide Family Hub buildings, the team work as a part of the integrated Community Family Offer (CFO) team (see Chapter 1).

Working in close collaboration with Job Centre teams, they are a crucial link identifying what support may be needed to overcome barriers to employment. This might include children who are struggling to attend school, caring responsibilities, insecure or poor housing and undiagnosed or unsupported special educational needs.

The team also train practitioners to help them understand and help families navigate the benefits system, as well as increasing their awareness of wider employability services. This helps to build crucial capacity across the system to support individuals to move closer to the job market and into employment.

Since their introduction in January 2024, the SFEA have assisted 20 individual people into employment, 97 individual people into work related activity and have identified and rectified benefit underpayments to families to the sum of £184,000.



You should be able to get 2 months Carer's Leave so you can keep looking after someone if you get a job. 5 days a year isn't long enough.

There should be more help for young people to get jobs. You need experience to get experience.



4. Ensure a healthy standard of living for all

Why is this important?

Having enough money to lead a healthy life is central to reducing health inequalities. From conception, the conditions you are born into impact on life opportunities throughout the life course. In Newcastle, levels of child poverty are stubbornly high.

Poverty can affect every aspect of a child's life, from growing up in cold and damp homes to going without a warm winter coat and being left behind when there are school trips (CPAG, 2024) ⁽⁸⁾. Children growing up in poverty are less likely to do well in school, which impacts on job opportunities and income into adulthood. Poverty is linked to food insecurity and poor-quality diets, with children living in the most deprived areas approximately twice as likely to be obese than those living in the least deprived areas (Baker, 2023) ⁽²⁾.

What do children and young people tell us?

Children and young people frequently raised their concerns around cost-of-living pressures. The increased cost of food was raised in many of the sessions. Understanding that these concerns have filtered down to children provides a reflection of how difficult it has been for some families. It is a challenge to us all that some children hold these worries at a young age, and an inequality that there are other young people across the city who are unburdened with concerns like this.

What was inspiring from the artwork produced by children and young people is how much they clearly care about people who are struggling in their community. There were particular concerns for people who are homeless. Some of our young carers were also concerned about the costs of medical equipment for their loved ones.



What does our data and intelligence tell us?

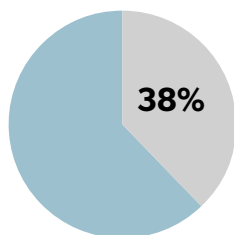
In the UK, 71% of children living in poverty are living in a household where at least one adult works. This has increased six percentage points in a year. This is not felt equally across the population, with children from minority ethnic communities more likely to live in poverty in the UK, and children in larger families also more likely to be experiencing poverty.



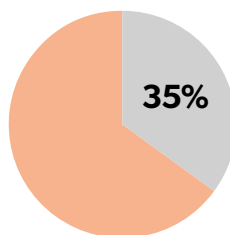
It makes me sad to see so many homeless people and not be able to help them. Everyone should have somewhere to live.

In 2021/22 in Newcastle, **38% of children** were living in poverty after housing costs.

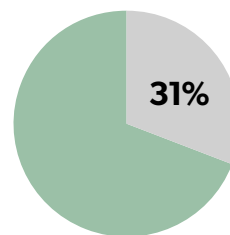
This is higher than for the **North East (35%)** and **England overall (31%)**.



Newcastle



North East



England

Case studies

Anti-Poverty Strategy

We want to make sure that Newcastle is a fair and inclusive city where everyone can live fulfilling and happy lives free from poverty and inequality. Currently, 38% of children in Newcastle live in poverty, highlighting the urgent need for action. Poverty and rising hardship negatively impact physical and mental health, lower educational attainment and reduce healthy life expectancy.

Many Newcastle residents have faced poverty long before the recent challenges, such as COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis which have only deepened this issue and widened inequalities. Recognising this, Newcastle City Council launched its Anti-Poverty Strategy in 2023 and is currently developing an Anti-Poverty Action Plan. This plan includes 10 key focus areas, one of which is “supporting children out of poverty”.

It sets out how the council is working with residents and partners across the city to reduce poverty and create opportunities, enabling all residents to lead fulfilling and happy lives.

Welfare Advisor for children and families

Many families miss out on income they are entitled to, with an estimated £1.33 billion in unclaimed benefits each year in our region. The system can be difficult to navigate and can generate feelings of embarrassment or shame that mean many people delay or do not start a claim. Ensuring access to these funds would provide essential support to families.

A Welfare Rights Officer has been employed to work with professionals who are supporting children and families. Their role is to help families understand their rights and entitlements, and challenge decisions where needed. They also support professionals working with children and families to understand the complexities of the benefits system to ensure families receive accurate guidance on available benefits and entitlements, helping to secure financial support that can improve stability and quality of life for children and families.

Since 2013, over 2,000 families have been supported, generating £7.3 million additional annual income, an average of £3,000 per family per year.

5. Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities

Why is this important?

Communities can mean different things to different people – it can be defined by where you live or by shared characteristics, beliefs or interests. Whichever way you look at it, communities shape childhoods. The impact of community on inequalities is far-reaching – whether you have safe, easy access to playgrounds and green spaces; can move around on accessible public transport systems; live next to a high street with multiple fast-food outlets and whether you feel able to access fun and affordable things to do.

Fostering social capital - where communities are cohesive and have a strong sense of belonging – is important. In areas with high social capital people can talk to and trust their neighbours; they have friends they can call upon to help out; parents feel secure their children can play out safely and people organise and participate in community activities (Waterston, 2004) (22). Research tells us that areas with higher social capital have better child health outcomes (Klocke and Stadtmuller, 2018) (15).

What do children and young people tell us?

Young people care about the community they are growing up in – of all the policy objectives, the creative work designed by young people related to this one the most.

For many, being from Newcastle was a big part of their identity. Some of the city's landmarks feature heavily – from the Tyne Bridge, to Grey's Monument to the river Tyne itself.

For many, feelings about the city were mixed. Newcastle was “amazing, beautiful, rainy, scary”.



Safety

On that last point, safety was a major concern that came up in repeated sessions in different localities. Some of the artwork produced is eye-opening. There are children who are very familiar with language and imagery depicting serious violence, including knife crime and gangs. Concerns were also raised around safety in parks, with many feeling unable to play because they were afraid of 'scary men', or fireworks being set off. It is perhaps unsurprising that girls in particular felt unsafe going out after dark.



This correlates with our most recent HRBQ survey data where only half of primary pupils (53%) and 64% of secondary pupils report feeling safe going out after dark in their local area. Further, 6% of pupils surveyed said that in the last 12 months they have been the victim of violence or aggression in the area where they live.

Play and access to nature

There is a tendency to stereotype children in 2024 as sitting at home spending big chunks of their leisure time online. While that may be the case for some children and young people, it certainly wasn't the case for all.

Children and young people told us that playing out was still important to them, but that issues in their local area sometimes prevented them from doing this. Exploring questions about nature was interesting in the sessions with young people.

It was a struggle for many to think about what 'nature' means to them. It doesn't have to be visiting the countryside but could be an everyday experience in the city. Some children felt uncomfortable talking about this subject and didn't see it as being something that was for them. When asked to draw what they thought was nature, there was one example of a large supermarket and another of a fast-food restaurant.



Importance of brands

As much as the Tyne Bridge formed part of a young person's identity, there was no escaping the power of commercial brands on their identity too. Ranging from fast-food brands, like McDonalds, Greggs and Taco Bell; retail brands like Primark and Sephora or supermarkets like Aldi and Tesco, children and young people wanted to talk about these. A lot. When asked to dream up a 'new Newcastle', for some young people the dream was having a city centre shop on their local high street.

One prescription to 'relieve Geordie boredom' was to have all day pasties. It is difficult to overstate the importance of this for the children and young people involved in the production of this report and the power of brands over our youngest residents. It is clear that brands are shaping the lives of our children and young people, so we need to consider what protection we offer from this influence.



Getting around the city

Being able to move around the city easily is important for accessing and enjoying the many opportunities living in Newcastle can bring.

In several sessions, children raised concerns about public transport – in particular buses. There was a strong feeling for many that the current system was not set up to help them to get around.



Case studies

Newcastle Youth Panel

Having things to do where you live helps to build passions, make friends and develop confidence. Young people are best placed to know what good looks like in their communities.

Based on this principle, the Newcastle Youth Fund is an innovative youth-led model of delivering youth provision, giving young people a direct say in services delivered. The Fund supports a wide range of youth projects delivered across the city in organisations that can clearly demonstrate that they have involved, listened to, and responded to the needs of young people.

Decisions are made through an established Youth Panel of 30 young people aged 13-19 (up to 25 years with SEND). The panel is a diverse and representative group, including young people who are care experienced, asylum seekers, homeschooled and young people with SEND and neurodiversity.

In the last three years the Newcastle Youth Fund has allocated over £1.5 million to youth projects. This includes Hat-Trick who use sport sessions as a hook to help young people develop and become more confident and the West End Women and Girl's Centre who deliver group sessions to give women and girls the opportunity to meet, have fun, learn skills, look at issues relevant their lives and generally build confidence in a safe and supportive environment.

Youth panel members have also benefitted from support with training, volunteering opportunities and some have either returned to education or started Further Education.

EPiC (Empowering People in Communities)

EPiC's aim is to rebuild community confidence by working with residents, businesses and partners collectively to tackle issues and concerns that are important to the community and involving them directly in decisions and implementation.

EPiC focusses on making sure the voices of the residents, including young people, are heard, involving them in making decisions and delivering interventions into disengaged parts of the community, ensuring that services are meeting the needs of the community as well as identifying gaps in provision and creating new initiatives.

The projects are building trust with our communities and equipping them with the necessary tools and funding opportunities, empowering them to contribute towards creating better, safer and sustainable neighbourhoods.

Social community cohesion is a key objective as we want to empower people to engage in the development of ideas on dialogue and community building. EPiC are actively working with all members of the community, including young people, who are wanting to have a more active role in making their communities better and a safer place to live in. Through engagement with people and listening to what they want to see on their estates we are designing projects specifically for people to take ownership of, empowering them to feel valued in the community.

Healthy Food Supplementary Planning Document

The number of hot food takeaways in the city has increased from 407 in 2017 to 483 in 2023. There is a growing concern about their impact on health, particularly for children. There are also environmental considerations, for example around packaging and potential litter or smells. Everyone deserves to live in communities where good quality healthy food is accessible and affordable. In places where there are lots of takeaways, it can be difficult for families to find healthy options that help them stay well.

The Council is responding to these concerns through the Healthier Food Environments Supplementary Planning Document, which aims to prevent new takeaways near schools or in places where there are already too many. This policy comes after community actions like the "Stop the Whoppa" campaign, which successfully blocked a drive-through Burger King on West Road. By listening to local voices, the Council is working to create a healthier food environment for everyone."



Teenagers keep wrecking the parks. Everything is gone. There should be more police around.

I live on the worst street in Byker.
It's just depressing because of the gangs and the fighting.
We need to have safer places to play.



To get opportunities you need good transport.
You need to be able to afford to get around.

6. Strengthen the role and impact of ill health prevention

Why is this important?

Many of the key behaviours that are linked to the development of chronic disease follow the social gradient: smoking, obesity, lack of physical activity and nutrition. There is also evidence that attitudes and habits formed in childhood – for example, around healthy eating and physical activity – can ‘track’ into adulthood. Laying good foundations during these early years is therefore needed to improve outcomes and reduce inequalities.

Parental health behaviours can have a direct impact on child health. For example, smoking in pregnancy is associated with a range of poor health outcomes, such as increased risk of stillbirth, low birth weight and Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI). Children are also influenced by what they see at home, for example children with obese parents are themselves more likely to be obese.

The conditions in which people are born, grow and age can make it difficult to make healthier lifestyle choices. It requires all parts of the system surrounding children and families to work together to unpick the complex web of factors that drive these behaviours.

What do children and young people tell us?

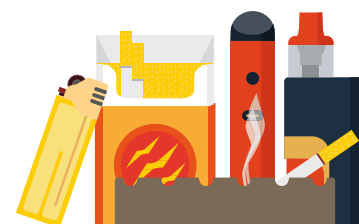
Enjoyment of physical activity

- In our HRBQ survey, older students were less likely to report enjoying physical activity than younger children. Variation also by gender, with boys more likely to report enjoying physical activity than girls, transgender pupils, or pupils describing their gender in some other way. This was also evident in the artwork produced by children, with calls for more opportunities for sports for girls.



Smoking

- In our HRBQ survey, around 1 in 4 pupils reported that their parents smoke. Second-hand smoke from parents can be harmful to health. Children whose parents smoke are also around four times more likely to start smoking themselves. Since our 2011 HRBQ survey, the proportion of students who have never smoked a cigarette has continued to increase.



Alcohol

- Since 2013, the proportion of students reporting they have never drunk alcohol has increased. For primary pupils, there was an increase from 77% in 2013 to 88% in 2024 and an increase from 40% in 2013 for secondary to 58% in 2024. Despite the downward trend, a recent report by the World Health Organisation (WHO) indicated that England has some of the highest rates of children drinking in Europe (WHO, 2024) (23). We know that brain development continues until a person is in their 20s, so we need to protect children from the harm created by this toxic product (Institute for Alcohol Studies, 2024) (14).



What does our data and intelligence tell us?

Smoking in pregnancy

- Newcastle has seen improvements in the proportion of mothers known to be smoking at time of delivery, from 18% in 2010/11 to 11% in 2022/23. Newcastle still has a higher proportion than England overall (9%) and the second highest of the English Core Cities behind Nottingham (13%).

NCMP

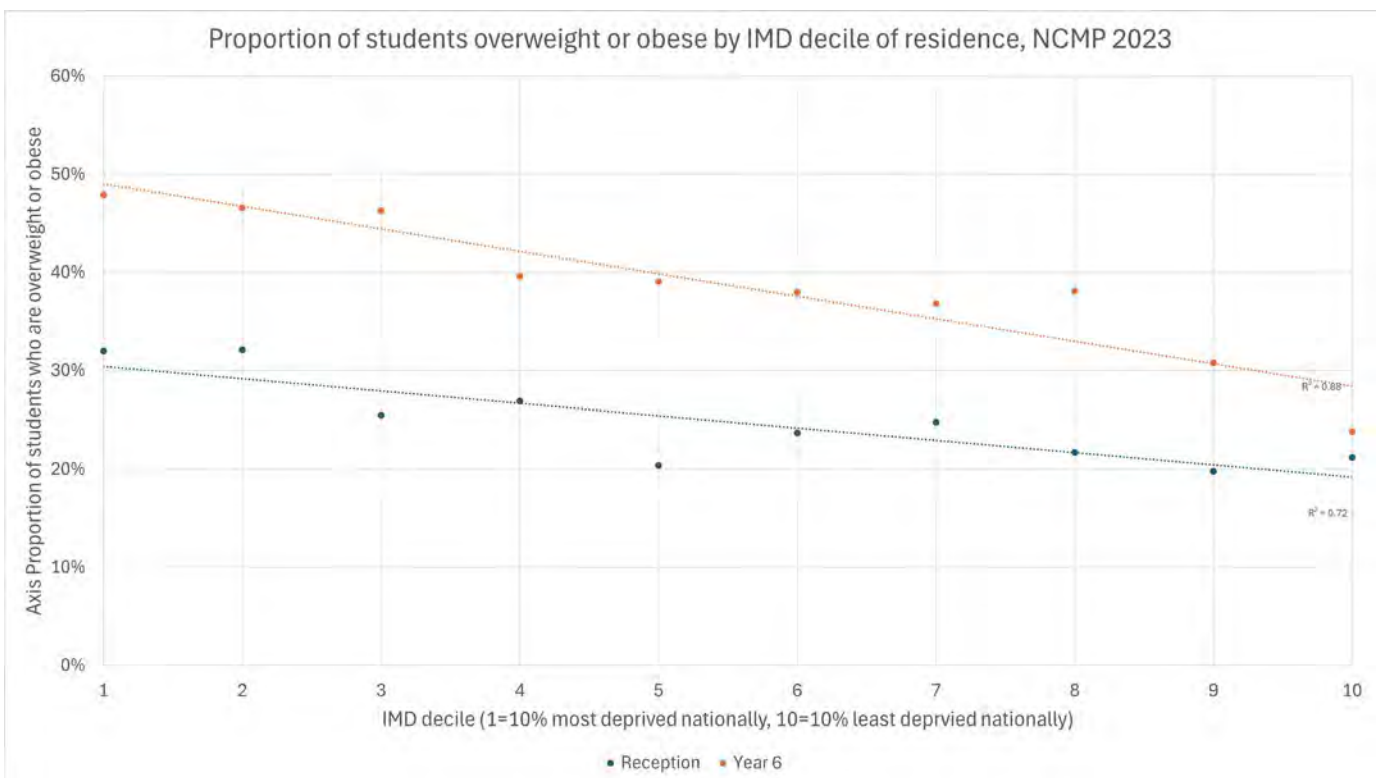
The National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) is a nationally mandated public health programme. It provides the data for the child excess weight indicators in the Public Health Outcomes Framework and is part of the government's approach to tackling child obesity.

As part of the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP), Reception children (aged 4-5 years) and Year 6 children (aged 10-11 years) have their weight and height measured to determine their body mass index (BMI) at school. This helps identify any gaps in provision of services by the local authority and the NHS, and ensures that necessary steps are taken to promote the overall health of children.

The World Health Organization define overweight as a BMI greater than or equal to 25 and obesity as a BMI greater than or equal to 30. Ref: Obesity and overweight

While maintaining a healthy weight partly depends on what we choose to eat and drink, and how many calories we burn it is not that simple. Our choices are shaped by the environment in which we live and a whole systems approach is needed.

The map below shows that there are inequalities in overweight and obesity by deprivation, with students living in the most deprived decile being more likely to be overweight or obese than those living in the least deprived decile (with strong correlations noted for both Reception and Year 6 children).



Case studies

NE Girls

We know that girls are less likely to be physically active than boys. In Newcastle, our bi-annual school HRBQ survey highlighted that girls enjoy physical activity less than boys, and this gap grows as they get older. Several barriers prevent girls from accessing physical activity, including a lack of safe spaces, positive role models, caring responsibilities, and other socioeconomic factors. The NE Girls programme aims to enable and empower girls to access more physical activities that work for them. Hat-Trick, a local sports-based social project, have worked closely with girls to understand what limits their participation and to offer different opportunities depending on their interests.

Hat-trick have a strong focus on supporting girls access to workforce, volunteering, and young leadership opportunities. There is a real benefit from girls learning from other staff who have similar life experiences and have made the journey from being participants to volunteers to paid employees.



Swap to Stop Maternity Pilot

Smoking during pregnancy carries significant risk for both mum and baby. To help support pregnant smokers to quit, there are specially trained midwives within maternity services at Newcastle Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. The team provide a range of stop smoking options, including traditional nicotine replacement therapies and behavioural support. Since April 2024, vapes have also been available to support pregnant women to quit smoking.

Staff report that vapes have helped to engage women in the Tobacco in Pregnancy Treatment Service as they are interested in using vapes to quit smoking.



So far, 38 out of 73 (52%) pregnant smokers offered vapes as a quit aid have continued to work with the service.

One service user said,

"She offered me different options of quitting aids to support me, (gum, the nicotine inhalator) none of which I felt I particularly enjoyed, the vape was probably the best 'replacement' for the habit."

For those who do not continue to work with the service, community midwives continue conversations about stopping smoking throughout pregnancy.

Alcohol Free Childhood

Alcohol use is harmful and is a significant cause of health inequalities. Despite its well-documented harms, alcohol consumption remains a normal feature of everyday life. The North East of England has adopted a vision of working towards an alcohol free childhood for every child growing up in the region to help de-normalise alcohol in families and communities.

In Newcastle, a tool called the Alcohol Data Matrix has been developed which shows alcohol-related harm across the city's 26 wards. This tool is used when reviewing alcohol license applications, helping the licensing authority make responsible decisions in areas where alcohol harm is already high. This strengthens public health input as there is not a dedicated public health licensing objective (an area being lobbied nationally – alongside Minimum Unit Price). The tool adds a focus on an Alcohol-Free Childhood to the city's licensing policy.

Expected outcomes include:

- Less alcohol exposure for children
- Lower rates of underage drinking
- Healthier, safer communities

These efforts of the licensing authority tackle the major drivers of alcohol related harms – accessibility, affordability and availability - supporting safer, alcohol-free environments, promoting long-term health and well-being for young people.



7. Tackle discrimination, racism and their outcomes

Why is this important?

Racism and discrimination can appear in many forms. Research shows us that coping with systemic racism and everyday discrimination can activate stress response systems in children. This is important because we know that when these response systems stay activated for a long time that it can have a wear-and-tear effect on their developing brains and biological systems. This can have a lifelong effects on learning, development and behaviour (Center on the Developing Child, 2023).⁽⁵⁾

Young people from Black, Asian, and ethnic minority backgrounds, LGBTQ+ groups, and other vulnerable groups are disproportionately affected by these challenges. For example, Black young people are ten times more likely to be referred to CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) through social services rather than through a GP, compared to White young people. Examples like this highlight there can be barriers to access and distrust of services, racism, discrimination, and stigma.

What do children and young people tell us?

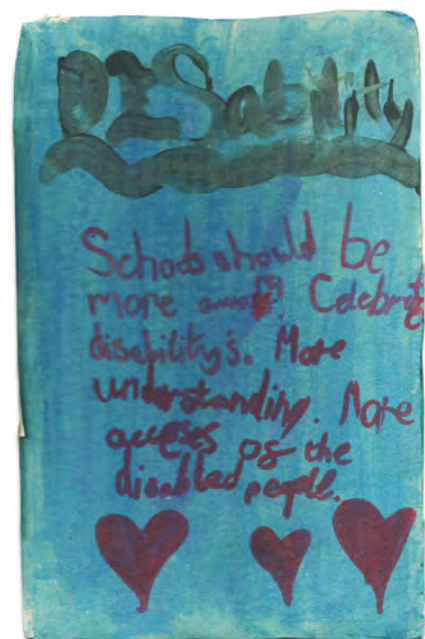
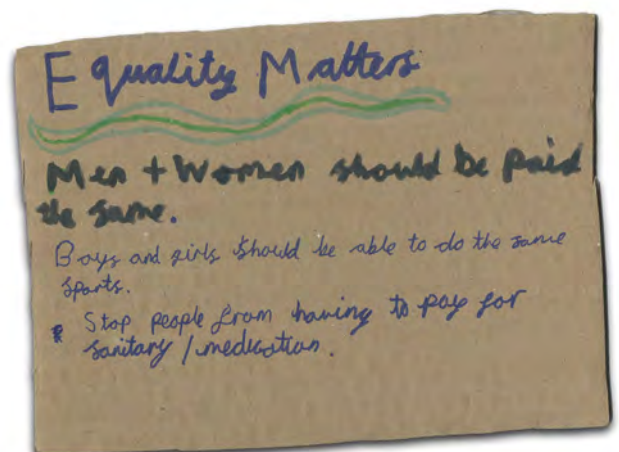
Social justice was clearly important to young people. As well as care for more vulnerable populations, such as those who are homeless, there was a focus on equality as demonstrated in some of the protest placards produced. 'Equal rights', 'equality matters'.

Equality for girls also came up in different ways, for example around girls' access to sport, period poverty and concerns about feelings of safety as a girl.

Children wanted to be heard. There was an enthusiasm from many of the children and young people who contributed to this report to be creative and think critically about what they wanted in their city. It suggests they enjoy having opportunities to have their voices heard, particularly if this is done using creative and engaging methods.

From our HRBQ survey:

- Girls are less likely than boys to feel that their views and opinions are **listened to in school**. For students from non-White backgrounds, they are generally less likely to feel their views and opinions are listened to in school, for both primary and secondary pupils.
- Girls, transgender pupils are students who describe their gender in some other way are more likely to report **feeling not at all safe/ not very safe going out after dark** compared to boys. Children who identify as an ethnicity other than White are also more likely to report not feeling safe going out after dark in the area where they live.



Case studies

City of Sanctuary

Newcastle has been welcoming people seeking sanctuary for many years. While those seeking asylum have no choice over where in the UK they are dispersed to, we take great pride in the fact that so many refugees chose to settle here once their claim for asylum has been determined.

As a city we are committed to doing what we can to welcome those seeking sanctuary and to help rebuild lives.

We are honoured to be a recognised City of Sanctuary; part of a network of towns and cities throughout the country that are proud to be places of safety, and which include people seeking sanctuary fully in the lives of their communities.



Newcastle City of Sanctuary

- 0-19 Service of Sanctuary

Our 0-19 service in Newcastle, delivered by Newcastle Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, were proud to be the first in the country to be awarded 0-19 Service of Sanctuary award in 2024. Research shows that Refugee and Asylum Seeking (RAS) families have lower rates of immunisation, poor dental health, poor nutrition and general developmental delay. These health needs can be complex and are often made worse by trauma. All of this has a negative impact on physical and mental health, and the family's ability to form trusting relationships with professionals. The 0-19 service support RAS families in need, whether that's helping them to access GP appointments, get specialist equipment for children with additional needs and supporting families to apply to specialist schools for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

- School of Sanctuary

A School of Sanctuary is a school committed to welcoming and supporting people seeking sanctuary, including those who are refugees or asylum seekers. Several schools in the city have achieved status as a School of Sanctuary, including Byker Primary School.

Byker Primary School serves a diverse community of 444 pupils speaking 28 languages. As a School of Sanctuary, they vow to offer continued support and guidance for families new to the country and area, often seeking refuge.

Despite being one of the most deprived primary schools in Newcastle, it has an ambitious curriculum that inspires, is active and engaging, develops character and offers life opportunities to all children and families. There are no limits on what pupils can achieve regardless of background or circumstance.



Angelou Centre

The Angelou Centre is a Black feminist charity dedicated to supporting Black and racially minoritised women and children. The Angelou's Ma Simba project supports children and young survivors of domestic abuse, sexual abuse, and harmful gender-based practices across Northeast England. Led by and for Black and racially minoritised communities, Ma Simba offers bilingual counselling, therapeutic play, and advocacy services to help children process trauma, restore safety, and build resilience. The project offers personalised therapeutic sessions, interactive workshops, peer-led group work, and trauma-informed advocacy. This holistic, intersectional approach prioritises emotional well-being, strengthens family relationships, and develops coping skills for navigating common imposed barriers that affect child and young survivors and experiences such as housing changes, school transitions, legal proceedings, and social anxiety.

Key Impacts:

- Enhanced physical, mental, and social wellbeing
- Increased confidence, resilience, and stress management
- Strengthened relationships with non-perpetrating mothers and siblings
- Improved feelings of safety



The best thing about Newcastle is the diversity.
The worst thing is the lack of diversity.

8. Pursue environmental sustainability and health equity together

Why is this important?

The health effects of climate change are, like many other determinants of health, not felt universally. People living in areas of higher deprivation – who are often burdened by additional inequalities – face greater exposure to environmental hazards like air pollution which can increase a child's risk of developing illness and chronic respiratory disease such as asthma. Families living in areas of high deprivation are also affected more by adverse weather conditions, with poorer housing infrastructure and household income not being able to withstand events such as floods, colder weather, and food insecurity.

Environmental challenges in communities interact with other factors that influence our health, for example active travel schemes can support physical and mental health outcomes while at the same time mitigating the harmful effects of climate change. Climate anxiety is also becoming more widespread amongst children and young people who are becoming increasingly worried about their future.

What do children and young people tell us?

Climate anxiety: Children and young people in Newcastle are worried about the environment. 33% of primary pupils in our HRBQ reported being worried 'quite a lot' or 'a lot' about the environment. This was a decrease from 2022 (40%) but worrying about the environment has generally increased from 2011 (24%). In 2024, it was the biggest worry for primary pupils.

Taking action: As part of the creative sessions with children and young people, demands for action on climate change emerged in the artwork. There were also some participants who reported litter and cleanliness as an issue in their environment.

Active travel: Active travel can have benefits for health and the environment. When surveyed as part of the HRBQ, 42% of primary and 35% of secondary pupils reported travelling to school by car. Clearly more action is required to make other means of getting to school – walking, cycling, scooting or public transport – more convenient and attractive.



I've seen one butterfly.
Maybe if there were more leaves
then there'd be more caterpillars
and then there'd be more butterflies.



They should stop cutting down trees.
Now the birds hardly have anywhere to live.

Case studies

Youth Climate Summit:

Every year since 2021 Newcastle City Council has hosted a unique Youth Climate Summit for students from across the city to have their say on the Council's climate action work. The first summit in 2021 began engaging with young people on climate change in the city. The second summit in 2022 allowed students to create a Youth Climate Mandate that focused on their key climate issues for the Council to adopt. The 2023 summit focused on the key findings of the Youth Climate Mandate, in particular the Council's progress on energy, transport, waste, food and biodiversity.

This year's Youth Climate Summit had over 100 students attend and focused on climate change education with 10 different workshops ran in the morning by over 40 local organisations and seven green career panel sessions ran in the afternoon. We were awarded the UN FAO Green Cities Award for Youth Engagement because of our annual Youth Climate Summit.

Northumberland Wildlife Trust

Northumberland Wildlife Trust's Eco Influencers is a youth-led initiative for young people aged 10-18 to design and deliver their own environmental social action project. Research tells us that participating in environmental social action and connecting with nature has many benefits. It can support improved wellbeing, address health inequalities and tackle loneliness.

Groups are supported to use their personal interests to design and deliver nature-related social action projects, which included nature walks, making bird feeders and bug hotels, re-wilding planting areas and litter picks.

ACANE, a community project in Byker, highlighted that litter in their local community was a big issue. They organised a silent disco community litter pick and all agreed to make a pledge to not litter as they recognised that change starts with their own behaviour.

Their work has been shared at a regional level at the North East Youth Symposium, raising awareness of their work and boosting confidence in the positive action they can take.

Call to Action

As part of our work with children and young people, they were asked to think about what actions they wanted to see in their city. This is their 'call to action':

CALL TO ACTION

by the children and young people of Newcastle



Recommendations

Through the Call to Action and voices captured in the development of this report we have gathered information on what matters to children and young people in Newcastle. The following recommendations set out how we will embed this information into our work as a city:

Health in all Policies and Marmot City

Health in all Policies is a collaborative approach that aims to improve the health of people by considering health in everything we do. We will commit to listening to the children and their Call to Action to influence our local approach, both internally and with our partners.

We will make sure the voices of children and young people are heard as we work towards becoming a Marmot City, using what we have already learnt whilst continuing to get input as the project develops.

Getting our core offer right

The things that children have said they need to grow well and the aspirations for their future lives are all the simple things: they need love and they need support. We need to make sure all families can access the help and support they need to help their children, and them, to thrive. We will do this through our partnerships within Children and Families Newcastle. Prevention and early intervention are fundamental to the approach, as is the development of strong relationships built on mutual trust and respect. We need to ensure our offer, and resources, are targeted towards those who need us most. Getting these principles right is key to supporting parents, lightening the load to improve outcomes and reduce inequalities.

Commercial Determinants of Health

Throughout this work we have seen the significant and pervasive influence of big brands on our children and young people. A recent investigation in the British Medical Journal revealed the extensive influence of food and drink brands in schools and nurseries, for example through breakfast clubs, nutrition guidance and healthy eating campaigns. Experts are calling for increased scrutiny and pushback to industry tactics (Wilkinson, 2024) ⁽²⁴⁾. We will use the levers we have as a Council to protect children from the influence of brands that are especially harmful to health, for example foods high in fat, salt and sugar. Linked to the ongoing normalisation of alcohol in childhood, we will also continue our work around creating and sustaining Alcohol Free Childhoods.

Healthy and Safe Communities

We will ensure the voice of children and young people shapes the development of our next Local Plan, a plan which is central to guiding future development in Newcastle. We want to build healthy and safe communities which support current and future wellbeing and the Local Plan consider areas as varied as housing, employment and retail.

As part of our cross-sector work around community safety, improving community cohesion and reducing anti social behaviour and violence will support people, including children and young people, to feel confident, connected and safe in their areas. This includes activities that prevent issues escalating, prevent crisis, break cycles of marginalisation and support recovery.

Amazing for all

We have seen and heard repeatedly that some of the things that make Newcastle such a great city to grow up in are not felt by some children as being 'for them'. Whether that's access to some of our fantastic cultural institutions or our beautiful parks, playgrounds and nature. We call on those who have responsibility for these places in our city to consider equity of access to ensure all children have the chance to enjoy them.

We are also calling on organisations to unite around Evry, our plan to bring together partners in the city to create transformative change with babies, children and young people. There are lots of different ways to be involved, from offering free activities, supporting travel and offering work experience.



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