



YMCA
GEORGE WILLIAMS
COLLEGE

"WHAT IS THE STATE OF YOUTH WORK IN SHEFFIELD?"

A COLLECTIVE ENQUIRY: PHASE 1

A BESPOKE ENQUIRY FRAMEWORK

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BACKGROUND

Sheffield Youth Alliance, Sheffield City Council and partners across the city are seeking to ensure that the needs and ambitions of all young people are met through an ambitious, high quality, well resourced, safe, supported and connected youth sector.

Key to delivering for all young people across Sheffield is a collective and evidence-driven understanding of the 'state of youth work' in the city, and a shared analysis of how the city can best use existing resources (including money, power and position) as well as drive new opportunities to secure the resources that children and young people in the city deserve.

YMCA George Williams College and Good Work With have undertaken a highly focussed piece of work during February and March 2025 to gather an initial understanding of the state of the youth sector in Sheffield.

This initial work has been illuminating, energising and hopeful, but, as was entirely expected, has also uncovered more questions that need to be answered in order to move the sector forward.

In this document we outline a bespoke framework for the city that provides the foundations, lines of enquiry, and practical steps towards answering the core question '*What is the state of youth work in Sheffield?*', encompassing core themes for the effective delivery of youth provision (as set out in the National Youth Work Curriculum).

PURPOSE AND APPROACH

Designed for all those in Sheffield who are passionate about creating a youth sector that works for children and young people, this framework provides the foundations and key questions to foster shared understanding and collective problem-solving. It offers a unifying language and approach to help organisations work together in addressing sector-wide challenges.

We believe this framework should act as a living 'strategy in action', enabling meaningful collaboration. The urgency of the issues we face means that neither children, young people, nor the sector itself can afford to wait for formal enquiries to conclude. Instead, action must happen alongside the enquiry; building on existing strengths, learning from each other, and shaping a system that is responsive, dynamic, and driven by the needs of those it serves. This is a call to action for all of us to work collectively, ensuring that solutions are not only envisioned but actively implemented in real time.

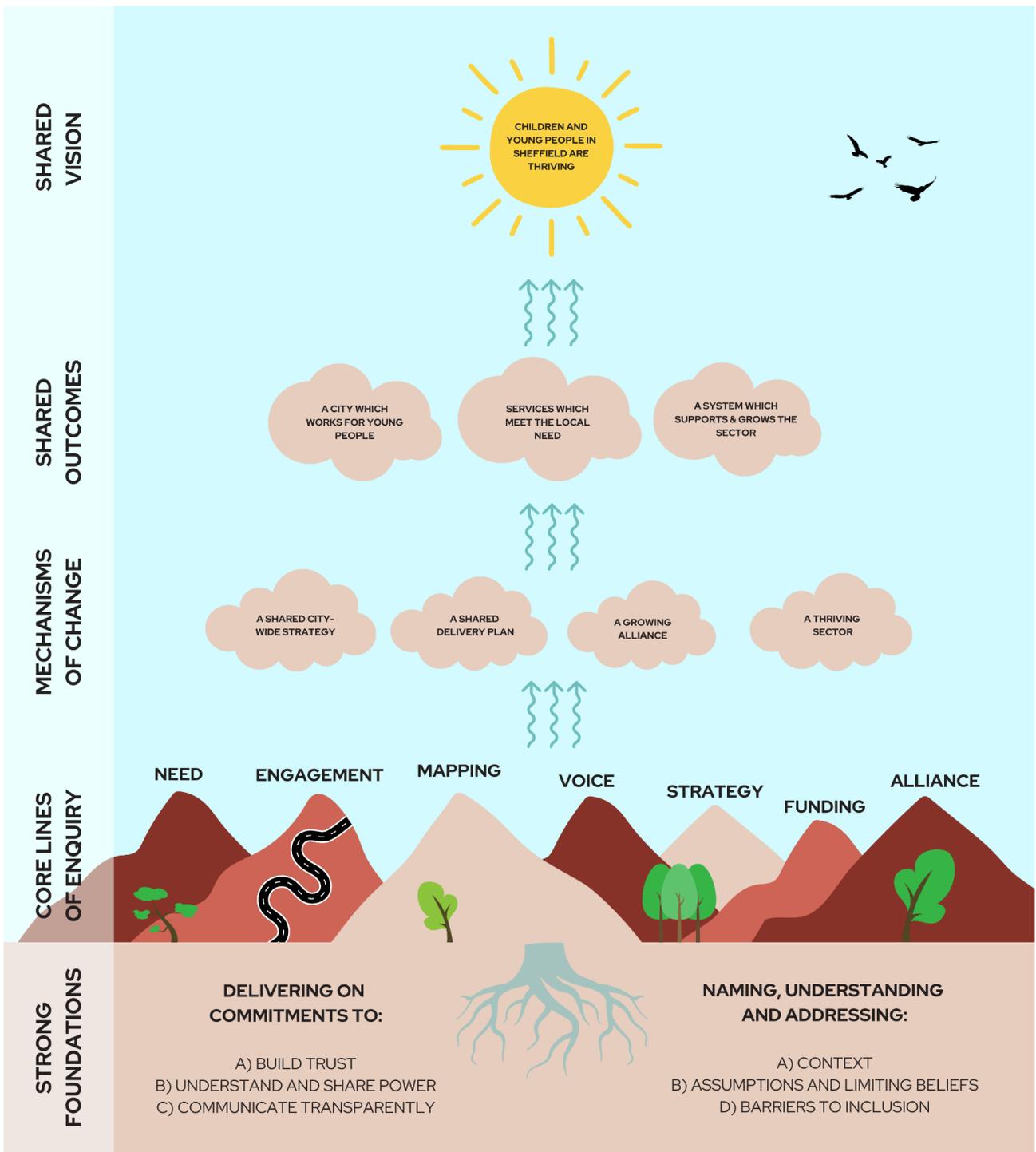
THE FRAMEWORK - ACTING DIFFERENTLY TOGETHER

The proposed framework operates across three key levels. At its foundation, we focus on building trust, unpacking power dynamics, and committing to act differently together—laying the groundwork for meaningful change.



At the top of the framework sits collective visioning, where we co-create a shared direction for the sector, ensuring that our work is not only responsive but transformative. It is this vision that will sustain long-term change, moving us beyond immediate problem-solving / deficit-based practice and towards a reimagined future for young people.

At the centre is the core enquiry—the critical questions the sector must answer to better serve young people. However, without strong foundations beneath it, and a vision above it, this enquiry risks becoming purely functional, reductive, and ultimately reinforcing the very system we seek to change.



COMPONENTS OF THE FRAMEWORK

1. STRONG FOUNDATIONS

Over the course of a second phase of an enquiry, partners and supporters of this work could undertake a range of activities and deliver a number of outputs which on paper represent good progress made and 'getting stuff done'.

We believe, however, that without work on some consistent and shared foundations this work will be undermined and not meet the ambitions of partners, and of the city as a whole.

Therefore, we are proposing that phase two purposefully and pro-actively seeks to do the following:

- Build trust
- Understand and share power
- Communicate transparently

Further, and in support of a shared desire to move forward whilst acknowledging history, we are also proposing that phase two seeks to name, understand and address:

- Context - in which work is happening now, informed by the past
- Assumptions and limiting beliefs - about Sheffield, work together and each other
- Barriers to inclusion - that may get in the way of moving forward

We are not proposing that further explicit activities are undertaken in these areas, but that they a) frame the work overall, b) cut across a range of other activities with partners and c) inform the approach taken to the development of the Alliance.

2. SHARED VISION

Just as we understand that foundational work is imperative to the strengthening and building of the ecosystem for young people, we likewise believe that it is important that the city is working towards a shared vision - with a specific and tangible shared outcomes and mechanisms of change which bridge the gap between activities and making the vision a reality.

We are proposing an initial framing of the vision in the diagram above, based on insights from engagement with partners in phase one.

Building commitment and support for this shared vision throughout the second phase of work may not require specific additional activities but could form part of communication and engagement strategies and alliance development.

3. SEVEN HILLS, SEVEN LINES OF ACTIVE ENQUIRY AND ACTION

The 'middle' of the framework is where the core of the practical, functional work of both understanding and progressing the sector sits. It is the middle where we pick up implementing the curriculum, exploring the statutory duty, and engaging with national agendas. This is the 'business' and busy-ness of work together.

We have identified seven lines of enquiry that are core to this framework and require exploration in order to fully understand the state of youth work in the city. We have titled them lines of enquiry for consistency, they could equally be called workstreams; in some cases there are clear questions to be answered, where in others there is development work that can be undertaken immediately to start to further progress collective endeavours.

Those lines of enquiry are

- **Need:** A full and comprehensive needs assessment that underpins and informs the city's strategy and plans for youth work in the city
- **Engagement:** A process of building relationships, collaboration, and communication between organisations, stakeholders, and partners. This is an active and dynamic line of enquiry, as well as asking questions, we would seek to be building and growing support and engagement through every encounter
- **Mapping:** An analysis of the key assets in the city in terms of provision, infrastructure and workforce
- **Voice:** An understanding how children and young people's voice and experience is shaping youth work in the city
- **Strategy:** A coherent, collective strategy that unites the sector's efforts and focuses on sustainable, long-term impact for children and young people in Sheffield
- **Funding:** A deep understanding of how current resources are being used, as well as the opportunities for building the resource available
- **Alliance:** A process of building collective working partnership and collaboration in the city

Relatedly, and in the spirit of mobilising for pace, inclusion and change, some activities undertaken in the next phase could cover multiple enquiry lines, for example in undertaking locality mapping we could also examine funding flows.

THE FRAMEWORK AND CORE QUESTIONS/ ACTIVITIES

The table below summarises the key lines of enquiry for a second phase of work. NB. **Appendix One** includes an expanded version of this table.

ENQUIRY LINE	DESCRIPTION	KEY QUESTION	SUB QUESTION
NEED	A full and comprehensive needs assessment that underpins and informs the city's strategy and plans for youth work in the city	<p>What are the key demographics of the young people we are seeking to serve?</p> <p>What are their aspirations, strengths and talents?</p> <p>What are their biggest concerns and struggles?</p> <p>What issues affect young people at ward level ? (e.g. mental health, education, employment, safety, social inclusion)</p>	<p>Do young people have access to youth work provision within a 15 minute walk from their home?</p> <p>What prevents young people from accessing services?</p> <p>What motivates or discourages them from participating in activities?</p> <p>What has changed? Are there emerging needs or motivations for this population that we don't yet understand?</p>
SECTOR ENGAGEMENT	<p>A process of building relationships, collaboration, and communication between organisations, stakeholders, and partners</p> <p>This is an active and dynamic line of enquiry. as well as asking questions, we would seek to be building and growing support and engagement through every encounter</p>	<p>What would it take to build a unified movement for children and young people in Sheffield?</p>	<p>What are the main barriers to deeper engagement between organisations?</p> <p>Who is currently engaged in collective activity?</p> <p>Who is missing?</p> <p>What activities do we need to undertake and what spaces do we</p>

			need to create to allow people to engage?
MAPPING	<p>A comprehensive mapping of all youth provision in the city including activity type, who accesses the provision and the funding source</p> <p>A comprehensive map of sector support and infrastructure</p> <p>A comprehensive map of the youth workforce in the city</p>	<p>What organisations, programmes, and services currently provide young people with youth work in the city?</p> <p>Where are these services located, and who do they serve?</p> <p>What is the balance of targeted and universal work?</p> <p>What modalities of youth work do we use?</p> <p>What facilities, community spaces, and informal youth hubs exist?</p> <p>How accessible and inclusive are existing youth programmes?</p> <p>What provision is there in the city for young people to be involved in social action?</p> <p>What provision is there in the city that helps meet the youth work curriculum?</p> <p>To what extent do we understand and embed the pillars that support the curriculum i.e. child rights approaches,</p>	<p>What youth work adjacent services exist for young people?</p> <p>What non youth-specific infrastructure could support our work?</p>

		<p>national occupational standards, quality practice and shared outcome frameworks?</p> <p>How do we measure and understand quality in youth work in Sheffield?</p> <p>What are the key infrastructure assets in Sheffield? What support do they provide and who do they reach?</p> <p>How many youth workers are currently active in Sheffield, and what are their roles?</p> <p>What training, qualifications, and experience do youth workers have?</p> <p>What professional networks and collaborations support youth workers?</p> <p>Where do youth workers access CPD opportunities?</p> <p>What resources (funding, policy frameworks, best practices) support workforce development?</p> <p>What recruitment or retention challenges exist in Sheffield's youth workforce? Are they the same as national challenges or are there things unique to here?</p>	
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		<p>What are the key skills and training needs for youth workers?</p> <p>How sustainable is the current youth workforce? (e.g. funding, job security, burnout risks)</p> <p>What emerging challenges or trends (e.g. digital youth work, mental health support) require workforce development?</p> <p>What does the deeper system look like in Sheffield, who holds power, who controls resources and who influences decision makers?</p>	
VOICE	An understanding of how children and young people’s voice and experience is shaping youth work in the city	<p>To what extent is youth work provision and practice shaped by children and young people’s voice and experience?</p> <p>How do young people’s experiences influence the development of youth work practices and policies?</p> <p>What mechanisms are in place to ensure that young people’s voices are central to the decision-making process at all levels in the city?</p> <p>What appetite is there for shared youth voice mechanisms across the public and</p>	What is the appetite for a shared library or database for children and young people's voice in the city?

		VCSE sectors, and collective advocacy work?	
STRATEGY	A coherent, collective strategy that unites the sector's efforts and focuses on sustainable, long-term impact for children and young people in Sheffield	<p>What would it take to develop a single collective strategy for youth work in the city?</p> <p>What should be the core unifying vision for youth work in the city?</p> <p>How can we make sure that Sheffield is on the youth work map, and on a national stage?</p> <p>What are the strategic priorities?</p> <p>How can a strategy, tactics and youth work offer plan best make use of the strategic context in which we are operating?</p>	
FUNDING	A deep understanding of how current resources are being used, as well as the opportunities for building the resource available	<p>What are the main sources of funding for youth work in Sheffield? (e.g. local authority, grants, philanthropy, corporate sponsorships)</p> <p>How much funding currently goes into youth services, and how is it distributed?</p> <p>What role do national funding bodies (e.g. National Lottery, charitable trusts) play in supporting youth work locally?</p>	What barriers exist in accessing funding for smaller or grassroots youth organisations?

		<p>How much reliance is there on short-term vs. long-term funding?</p> <p>How do organisations currently secure funding (grants, fundraising, social enterprise, contracts)?</p> <p>What new funding opportunities exist for youth work in Sheffield?</p> <p>How well is the case for youth work funding being made to policymakers and funders? What opportunities exist here for collective influencing?</p> <p>How can youth organisations work together to campaign for better long-term investment?</p>	
<p>ALLIANCE</p>	<p>A process of building collective working partnership and collaboration in the city</p>	<p>How do organisations and stakeholders in the city collaborate to strengthen youth work provision?</p> <p>What is the appetite for shared outcomes and an agreed approach to measurement?</p> <p>What would it take to ensure that partnership improves youth work provision in the city?</p>	<p>What would it take to expand engagement in the alliance to ensure that all are mobilised to support children and young people in the city?</p>

		<p>What examples of effective collaboration already exist in the area? What has made them successful?</p> <p>What commitments or principles should be agreed upon to support a long-term, joined-up approach?</p>	
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APPENDIX ONE

KEY QUESTION	SUB QUESTION	TO WHAT EXTENT ARE THE ANSWERS KNOWN	CURRENT DATA SOURCES	TOOLS AND REFERENCES
<p>NEED A full and comprehensive needs assessment that underpins and informs the city's strategy and plans for youth work in the city</p>				
<p>What are the key demographics of the young people we are seeking to serve?</p> <p>What are their aspirations, strengths and talents?</p> <p>What are their biggest concerns and struggles?</p> <p>What issues affect young people at ward level ? (e.g. mental health, education, employment, safety, social inclusion)</p>	<p>Do young people have access to youth work provision within a 15 minute walk from their home?</p> <p>What prevents young people from accessing services?</p> <p>What motivates or discourages them from participating in activities?</p> <p>What has changed? Are there emerging needs or motivations for this population that we don't yet understand?</p>	<p>Emerging</p> <p>Information is held by individual organisations, there is not yet a shared narrative for the city</p>	<p>Demographic data available through 'Sheffield local insight'</p> <p>Some LACS have completed surveys relating to children and young peoples needs.</p> <p>Individual providers have insight work</p>	<p>The NYA's toolkit on meeting statutory duty has a section on conducting needs analysis</p> <p>https://nya.org.uk/document/stat-duty-toolkit/</p>
<p>SECTOR ENGAGEMENT A process of building relationships, collaboration, and communication between organisations, stakeholders, and partners. This is an active and dynamic line of enquiry, as well as asking questions, we would seek to be building and growing support and engagement through every encounter</p>				
<p>What would it take to build a unified movement for children and young people in Sheffield?</p>	<p>What are the main barriers to deeper engagement between organisations?</p> <p>Who is currently engaged in</p>	<p>Developing</p> <p>Alliance meetings are well attended and an extensive contact list has been established</p>	<p>Engagement records from initial phase of the work</p>	<p>The VCS has extensive experience of asset based community development</p>

KEY QUESTION	SUB QUESTION	TO WHAT EXTENT ARE THE ANSWERS KNOWN	CURRENT DATA SOURCES	TOOLS AND REFERENCES
	<p>collective activity?</p> <p>Who is missing?</p> <p>What activities do we need to undertake and what spaces do we need to create to allow people to engage?</p>			<p>approaches. There are some references in the LGA piece below</p> <p>https://www.local.gov.uk/asset-based-approaches-local-authorities-leeds-experience</p>
<p>MAPPING</p> <p>A comprehensive mapping of all youth provision in the city including activity type, who accesses the provision and the funding source</p> <p>A comprehensive map of sector support and infrastructure</p> <p>A comprehensive map of the youth workforce in the city</p>				
<p>What organisations, programmes, and services currently provide young people with youth work in the city?</p> <p>Where are these services located, and who do they serve?</p> <p>What is the balance of targeted and universal work?</p> <p>What modalities of youth work do we use?</p> <p>What facilities, community spaces, and informal youth hubs exist?</p> <p>How accessible and inclusive are</p>	<p>What youth work adjacent services exist for young people?</p> <p>What non youth-specific infrastructure could support our work?</p>	<p>Emerging</p> <p>There are opportunities to strengthen provision mapping and information sharing</p> <p>Information is most likely to be held by individual organisations based on their referral routes. There will be some insight from commissioning and grant giving, though this is likely to give a partial picture</p>		<p>The NYA's toolkit on meeting statutory duty has relevant material</p> <p>https://nya.org.uk/document/stat-duty-toolkit/</p> <p>The youth work curriculum is here</p> <p>https://nya.org.uk/national-youth-work-curriculum/</p> <p>There is insight here</p>

KEY QUESTION	SUB QUESTION	TO WHAT EXTENT ARE THE ANSWERS KNOWN	CURRENT DATA SOURCES	TOOLS AND REFERENCES
<p>existing youth programmes?</p> <p>What provision is there in the city for young people to be involved in social action?</p> <p>What provision is there in the city that helps meet the youth work curriculum?</p> <p>To what extent do we understand and embed the pillars that support the curriculum i.e. child rights approaches, national occupational standards, quality practice and shared outcome frameworks?</p> <p>How do we measure and understand quality in youth work in Sheffield?</p> <p>What are the key infrastructure assets in Sheffield? What support do they provide and who do they reach?</p> <p>How many youth workers are currently active in Sheffield, and what are their roles?</p> <p>What training, qualifications, and experience do youth workers have?</p> <p>What professional networks and</p>				<p>on system mapping</p> <p>https://mojdigital.blog.gov.uk/2020/06/02/systems-mapping-a-brief-overview-of-what-why-and-how-part-1/</p>

KEY QUESTION	SUB QUESTION	TO WHAT EXTENT ARE THE ANSWERS KNOWN	CURRENT DATA SOURCES	TOOLS AND REFERENCES
<p>collaborations support youth workers?</p> <p>Where do youth workers access CPD opportunities?</p> <p>What resources (funding, policy frameworks, best practices) support workforce development?</p> <p>What recruitment or retention challenges exist in Sheffield's youth workforce? Are they the same as national challenges or are there things unique to here?</p> <p>What are the key skills and training needs for youth workers?</p> <p>How sustainable is the current youth workforce? (e.g. funding, job security, burnout risks)</p> <p>What emerging challenges or trends (e.g. digital youth work, mental health support) require workforce development?</p> <p>What does the deeper system look like in Sheffield, who holds power, who controls resources and who influences decision makers?</p>				

KEY QUESTION	SUB QUESTION	TO WHAT EXTENT ARE THE ANSWERS KNOWN	CURRENT DATA SOURCES	TOOLS AND REFERENCES
VOICE An understanding of how children and young people’s voice and experience is shaping youth work in the city				
<p>To what extent is youth work provision and practice shaped by children and young people’s voice and experience?</p> <p>How do young people’s experiences influence the development of youth work practices and policies?</p> <p>What mechanisms are in place to ensure that young people’s voices are central to the decision-making process at all levels in the city?</p> <p>What appetite is there for shared youth voice mechanisms across the public and VCSE sectors, and collective advocacy work?</p>	<p>What is the appetite for a shared library or database for children and young people's voice in the city?</p>	<p>Emerging</p> <p>Information is most likely to be held by individual organisations based on work undertaken with their participants</p>	<p>SF consultation data</p> <p>Chilypep data</p> <p>SCC YV&I data</p>	
STRATEGY A coherent, collective strategy that unites the sector’s efforts and focuses on sustainable, long-term impact for children and young people in Sheffield				
<p>What would it take to develop a single collective strategy for youth work in the city?</p> <p>What should be the core unifying vision for youth work in the city?</p>				

KEY QUESTION	SUB QUESTION	TO WHAT EXTENT ARE THE ANSWERS KNOWN	CURRENT DATA SOURCES	TOOLS AND REFERENCES
<p>How can we make sure that Sheffield is on the youth work map, and on a national stage?</p> <p>What are the strategic priorities?</p> <p>How can a strategy, tactics and youth work offer plan best make use of the strategic context in which we are operating?</p>				
<p>FUNDING A deep understanding of how current resources are being used, as well as the opportunities for building the resource available</p>				
<p>What are the main sources of funding for youth work in Sheffield? (e.g. local authority, grants, philanthropy, corporate sponsorships)</p> <p>How much funding currently goes into youth services, and how is it distributed?</p> <p>What role do national funding bodies (e.g. National Lottery, charitable trusts) play in supporting youth work locally?</p> <p>How much reliance is there on short-term vs. long-term funding?</p> <p>How do organisations currently secure</p>	<p>What barriers exist in accessing funding for smaller or grassroots youth organisations?</p>	<p>Emerging</p> <p>Information is most likely to be held by individual organisations</p>	<p>360 giving</p>	

KEY QUESTION	SUB QUESTION	TO WHAT EXTENT ARE THE ANSWERS KNOWN	CURRENT DATA SOURCES	TOOLS AND REFERENCES
<p>funding (grants, fundraising, social enterprise, contracts)?</p> <p>What new funding opportunities exist for youth work in Sheffield?</p> <p>How well is the case for youth work funding being made to policymakers and funders? What opportunities exist here for collective influencing?</p> <p>How can youth organisations work together to campaign for better long-term investment?</p>				
<p>ALLIANCE A process of building collective working partnership and collaboration in the city</p>				
<p>How do organisations and stakeholders in the city collaborate to strengthen youth work provision? What is the appetite for shared outcomes and an agreed approach to measurement?</p> <p>What would it take to ensure that partnership improves youth work provision in the city?</p> <p>What examples of effective collaboration already exist in the area? What has made them successful?</p>	<p>What would it take to expand engagement in the alliance to ensure that all are mobilised to support children and young people in the city?</p>	<p>Good understanding</p> <p>The first phase of the enquiry has provided an excellent understanding of current infrastructure and systems as well as the appetite for progress</p>	<p>Alliance records</p> <p>Reports on the first phase of enquiry</p>	<p>Outcomes Framework insight here:</p> <p>https://www.ymcageo.orgwilliams.uk/what-we-do/socio-emotional-skills-measurement-hub</p>

KEY QUESTION

SUB QUESTION

TO WHAT EXTENT ARE THE ANSWERS KNOWN

CURRENT DATA SOURCES

TOOLS AND REFERENCES

What commitments or principles should be agreed upon to support a long-term, joined-up approach?