



YMCA
GEORGE WILLIAMS
COLLEGE

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

A COLLECTIVE ENQUIRY: PHASE 1

LANDSCAPE AND OPPORTUNITIES

Gin Gregg-Auriac and Justin Watson, March 2025

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Sheffield is a 'core city' that, despite the constraints of austerity and national agendas, has continued to support and invest in youth work over recent years. Leadership from the Sheffield Youth Alliance and the wider sector, as well as renewed national focus, provides the opportunity to elevate current work in order to deliver the best possible system for children and young people to thrive.

Key to the future success of a collective approach to supporting children and young people to thrive in the city will be Sheffield's ability to both steward existing resources and mobilise new resources and opportunities, including funding.

This short briefing provides an overview of the strategic and operating context in which Sheffield sits, including key considerations at local, regional and national levels.

We have primarily focused on splitting local, regional and national using geographical boundaries, whilst acknowledging that often these boundaries don't reflect how things work in reality, nor the experiences of children and young people.

We also note the 'global context' in which this work is being developed, and the need to consider implications of economic uncertainty, migration and climate change on young people and their families within a comprehensive assessment of the landscape of Sheffield.

At this stage, we aim to provide a starting point for further exploration during a second phase of work, which would deliver a detailed and thorough analysis of the context in which youth work can thrive in Sheffield.

Initial reflections provided are based on desk research and the insights and opportunities shared by partners during engagement in workshops and 121s.

The context in which this work is being undertaken is complex, and shifting dramatically, with hugely positive developments locally (e.g. a new Culture Strategy) and nationally (a new national Youth Strategy), alongside significant challenges which will directly impact on the lives of children, young people and their families in Sheffield (e.g. welfare reform) and risk uncertainty in the short term (e.g. development of infrastructure at national and regional levels in the youth sector).

Consideration of this context, and the role that 'youth work' and the sector plays in a variety of spaces, will be critical to moving forward and ultimately to the long term sustainability and growth of youth work in Sheffield.

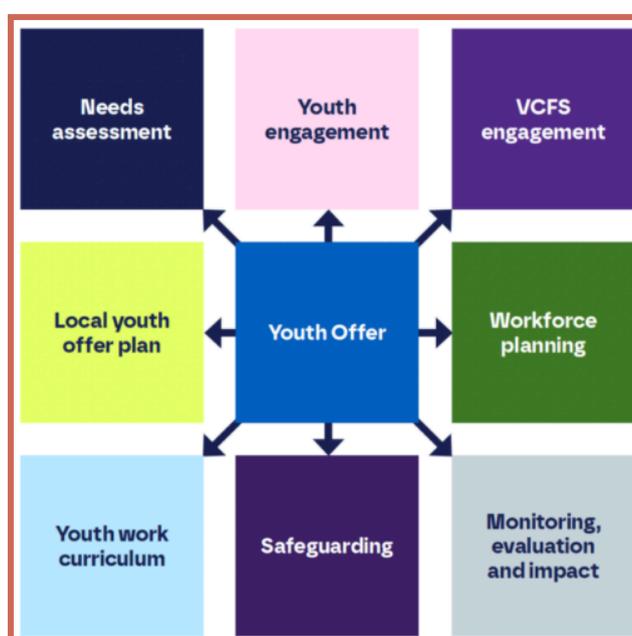
LOCAL

Note: for the purpose of this paper, we define 'local' as the Sheffield local authority area, and areas within the Sheffield local authority area.

Local Authority - Youth Services

With revised and strengthened guidance on the [statutory duty](#) (and a [toolkit](#) from NYA), there is now a clear mandate, and supporting resources, for local authorities to support youth services locally, directly and indirectly.

The 'nine essentials of a local youth offer' provide a strong foundation for development of work in Sheffield.



Further, the role of partnership is critical in delivering this duty - it cannot be delivered in isolation, and local authorities are strongly encouraged to maximise the assets and resources across a local area for the benefit of children and young people.

One of the most effective ways we have seen this done is through partnership, and establishing formal partnerships which can drive forward shared ambitions for an area. Local authorities such as Warrington, Westminster and Medway are seeing partnership as the primary mechanism through which they can deliver on their statutory duty and meet the needs of local children and young people.

Work by [YPF Trust](#) has outlined the role that partnerships can play in delivering the statutory duty.

Public sector - beyond youth services

Alongside clear and effective leadership on youth services within a local authority, we've seen the value of ensuring that youth work, and organisations supporting children and young people, are embedded across the local authority, and the wider public sector.

Where this works well, we see local authorities funding youth work from a variety of sources as a direct response to a range of local needs, with a focus on early intervention and prevention.

This includes:

- Community Safety Partnerships
- Education
- Early Help
- SEND and the Local Offer
- Public health
- Mental health and wellbeing

Collective approaches across local authorities (and wider public sector partners) has enabled greater cohesion in those services, and in their engagement with the VCSE sector.

Sector infrastructure

We've heard that Sheffield has a 'strong community spirit', and that supporting each other is a core part of the city and the sector.

We have also heard that this needs to be resourced adequately, and that a clear offer of support is well communicated - awareness of what is going on will be important. Examples we are aware of include:

- VAS provides a core offer for the VCSE sector, providing a range of services targeted at community and voluntary organisations as well as taking a leadership role in representation of the sector in key spaces.
- StreetGames provide a support offer to 'Locally Trusted Organisations in Sheffield, increasing their capacity to deliver doorstep sport to children and young people.'
- Some funders offer infrastructure / capacity building support to individual projects and organisations.
- A children and young peoples network, led by the VCSE, though not formally resourced and not explicitly focussed on youth work

With the development of Sheffield Youth Alliance ('the Alliance'), it will be critical to ensure the alignment of support and services, and the clarity of the 'offer' to local groups and organisations working with children and young people. Whilst not having enough support is a significant challenge, equally risky is having an offer that is difficult for organisations to navigate .

Drivers for the city

Our initial work in Sheffield has highlighted a rich tapestry of organisations, programmes and initiatives which seek to support the growth of the city and the positive impact that it has in the lives of residents.

Whilst not exhaustive, a number of initiatives have been raised through discussions with partners - we share them here as starting points for further exploration and to highlight the opportunity but also the risk if these initiatives do not align and are not mutually supportive.

A second phase of this work would seek to understand a core set of 'drivers' of the future of the city - and how youth work (and the Alliance itself) connects to them, aligns strategy and practice, and seeks to collectively influence the future of the city.

Examples include:

- [Sheffield City Goals](#), and specifically work to support young people to shape the future of the city through the City Goals (led by [Opus](#))
- Sheffield's [Culture Strategy](#) for 2035 (with strong focus on young people's access to and participation in the arts, and funding of the sector) and the development of [Create Sheffield](#), 'Forging connections to arts & culture for every young person'
- Implementation of the [Race Equality Commission](#), including a number of critical issues impacting on young people in the city (housing, crime and justice, education, inclusion)
- Youth voice and sharing power in the city, including initiatives to support young people to shape their city e.g. [Your City Your Voice](#), local authority [voice services](#), and work across the VCSE sector
- Leisure and sport, and investment in active and healthy lifestyles including through [Active Partnerships](#) and key city partnerships e.g. Street Games
- Sheffield as a [City of Sanctuary](#) and its history of being a welcoming city for all, creating spaces and opportunities for people from a range of backgrounds and experiences e.g. Sheffield Mela, Sheffield Pride, Sheffield Caribbean Carnival

REGIONAL

The boundaries between local and regional continue to evolve, especially with new plans for devolution in England [under consideration](#) and the further evolution of services through Integrated Care Boards, Active Partnerships and Violence Reduction Units.

Infrastructure

Regional infrastructure within the youth space primarily comes from [Yorkshire and Humber Youth Work Unit](#), often through specific opportunities around youth work training, impact, youth voice or regional networking.

As both the government and the youth sector at a national level considers the future of youth work, infrastructure will be critical, especially at a regional level as the sector seeks to bridge the gap between local and national.

The development of the Alliance provides an opportunity for a collective approach to, and influencing of, work at a regional level – providing collective clarity on Sheffield’s needs and ambitions, and how regional infrastructure can best add value to work in the city, and ultimately benefit the young people of Sheffield.

Drivers at a regional level

As with our proposals at a local level, a full enquiry would seek to understand the regional landscape in detail, and seek to position work in Sheffield to make the most of opportunities and to be on the front foot in influencing work at a regional/devolved level and how it lands in Sheffield.

Key opportunities include:

- Local Growth Plans – South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority’s [Plan for Good Growth](#) outlines the region’s plans for growth, and in line with a number of areas across the country is seeking to ensure that growth benefits residents and communities.
- Child poverty – alongside national work (see below), a range of stakeholders are collaborating across the region, sharing approaches and learning and seeking collective approaches (including through a [recent conference](#) led by Save the Children UK in Sheffield).
- Violence Reduction – the [South Yorkshire VRU](#) has a strong presence in Sheffield, supporting collaborative work and directly funding community initiatives and organisations. Supporting work with and for children and young people will be a key driver of further work and investment, locally, regionally and nationally.

NATIONAL

The picture for youth work, and wider work with and for children and young people, is shifting considerably at a national level. There is real energy and enthusiasm across the sector due to a renewed interest from the government, and a strong commitment to engagement in the future of this work through the national Youth Strategy and wider work.

Timing is critical – Sheffield must be a visible presence in this work, collectively as well as through the work of individual partners who are already in key spaces (e.g. Youth Futures Hubs).

A shared strategy for engagement and influencing needs to be a priority in any future work, and in place before the summer.

Key areas include:

- Youth Strategy – a new National Youth Strategy will be launched in the ‘spring’, with consultation underway through the [‘Deliver You’](#) campaign, including consultation events and ‘hacks’ across the country.
- Wellbeing – the [Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#) is currently going through the House of Lords, and will have implications across education, local authorities and wider services for children and young people. A range of organisations are seeking to influence this work, including seeking to have a [national wellbeing measure](#).
- Young Futures Hubs – work continues across government and the sector to shape [‘Young Futures Hubs’](#), supported by Youth Access, a coalition of sector partners and the [#FundtheHubs](#) campaign. Local partners are well placed to support and influence this work, including Youth Access member Sheffield Futures.
- Welfare Reform – The Spring Statement outlined the government’s plans on welfare reform, with more than 3 million families set to lose out financially as a result of cuts to welfare benefits by 2030, impacting families directly and those supporting them. Andy Pitt, head of charities at Rathbones, has said the changes “will undoubtedly place increased pressure on the UK’s charity sector”.
- Child Poverty – the government has promised a new [Child Poverty Strategy](#) in the ‘spring’, bringing child poverty back into the centre of government policy and practice for the first time since the last Labour government.

We also note national guidance and frameworks relating to work with children and young people which will be key to a further phase of work – this includes national guidance, standards and best practice from [NYA](#), [UK Youth](#), [YMCA George Williams College](#) and others.

CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR A FULL ENQUIRY

1. Data, insights and need

A full and clear understanding of the needs, and ambitions, of young people and the sector will be vital to ensuring that the alliance (and the sector as a whole) is well positioned to secure support and investment, and influence locally, regionally and nationally.

2. Local alignment and coordination

With a number of local initiatives and programmes focusing on young people in the city, it will be critical to ensure that the enquiry, and the Alliance itself, are aligned to wider developments and can add value (e.g. provide direct connections to young people and communities through their services) as well as influence strategies, policies and practice.

3. Influencing and engagement

The full enquiry needs to make recommendations on a full Influencing and Engagement Strategy for the city, ideally delivered in partnership through the Sheffield Youth Alliance.

However, timing is critical and we would recommend that coordinated approaches to influencing at all levels are prioritised by the Alliance immediately, allowing the city to inform and influence critical developments especially at a national level.

It will also be key to outline what Sheffield can bring to regional and national spaces - including expertise and experience on specific issues where relevant.

4. Partnership development

As highlighted across this work, reflected in this paper and the Reflections report, we believe that development of the local youth partnership is critical - and partners should seek to align development of the Sheffield Youth Alliance to a full enquiry.

This will require time, capacity and resources - and the Alliance (led by the Steering Group) should consider how effective and timely partnership development can be supported and resourced.