

Growing Up in Wigan

Using Deep Listening to Strengthen Goals and Plans

“Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. If, however, they are left on society’s margins, all of us will be impoverished.”

– Kofi Annan

Deep Listening



Deep listening in health engagement research includes hearing not just what children and young people say, but appreciating the meaning, emotions, and experiences behind what they share. Alongside input and support from Wigan Council and partners, Curious Minds, Pathways CIC, Fit2Care, Paula Worthington Coaching, and Wigan Youth Cabinet, we engaged with children and young people in safe and engaging spaces and through a wide range of creative, face to face and digital methods so that their thoughts, concerns and opinions were respected, heard and taken seriously.

Committing to deep listening:

- Builds trust and strengthens relationships,
- Ensures that services and support are genuinely influenced by people's voices,
- Identifies real needs affecting population health and wellbeing.

Our approach to engaging with the children and young people of Wigan honoured the *Lundy Model of Participation*, was guided by *Wigan Council's Participation Standards* for children and young people, and the missions in the *Wigan Borough Progress with Unity* plan.



Lundy Model of Participation

The Importance of Listening to Children and Young People

New technologies and evolving social settings bring challenges and opportunities for all of us, and navigating this ever-shifting world as a child or young person can be especially daunting. As the world shifts around young people, so too do the tools needed to support their development and prosperity.

Furthermore, children and young people have rich insight to share on topics from climate change to town planning. We simply cannot afford to ignore young voices. Today's decisions affect younger generations for the rest of their lives.

The Local Context

There is an opportunity to improve the health and wellbeing of children and young people growing up in Wigan by tackling social and health inequalities linked with overall child health and wellbeing.

Wigan stakeholders were determined to gain a *deeper understanding* of the experiences of children, young people, their families and their communities. This comprehensive engagement project aimed to develop insight into **why** certain challenges are happening for children and young people, and **what** system partners can do to resolve them.

Progress in improving health outcomes for children and young people has already been made across Wigan, with significant positive outcomes across childhood immunisation, level of development at 2½ years old, educational attainment, training and employment, and health admission outcomes including mental health and self-harm as presented in the data summary of the Wigan's *Children's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)*.

The deep listening project aimed to complement that progress, informing plans and priorities for an even greater focus on improvements.

Co-Production: Setting Up for Success

To help the borough in its mission, we co-designed a deep listening approach with children and young people across Wigan to engage with them, on their terms. Collaborating with like-minded, values-based provider organisations with expertise in community, youth, and digital engagement ensured that our deep listening was both accessible and meaningful.

22 children and young people representatives and 26 service partners were invited to help us inform next steps of carrying out deep listening research. Among these, prominent local organisations Wigan Youth Cabinet expertly guided us on how to engage with their peers – other children and young people growing up across the borough.

Guidance included:

Starting with an open-ended question, ‘what’s it like living in Wigan?’ and use the topic headings to listen and prompt. Understanding that children and young people will be interested in any topics.

Don’t wear uniforms that make you look professional.

Accepting that all topics are important and will be of more or less importance to different children and young people and this is ok.

Not prioritising themes as this might inadvertently filter what children and young people might want to share.

Focusing on fun or creative ways children and young people can share their thoughts and ideas? Play etc.

Change style if a good outcome is not being achieved.

Going to where children and young people are to make the engagement easy; clubs, festivals, groups.

From Wigan Council (with Partners) Child Health Engagement Coordination Project: Deep Listening: A Summary Report.

Members of Wigan Youth Cabinet shaped the questions to ask of their peers into 8 themes.

 Your Neighbourhood

What do you love about where you live? What would make it even better for you and your friends? Tell us about what you do there? Who do you do that with?

 Food and Feeling Well

What helps you eat well and feel healthy? What gets in the way? Is the amount of sleep you normally get enough for you to feel awake and concentrate? Where do you get help if you are poorly?

 Getting Around

How do you travel to places like school, clubs, or friends' houses? What helps you get where you need to go?

 Learning and Education

What's great about your school, college, or learning at home? What would help you learn and grow even more?

 Support and Wellbeing

Who do you talk to when you're feeling sad, worried, or unwell? What makes it easier (or harder) to get help? If you had just moved to Wigan what would be the most help?

 Family and Home Life

What makes you feel safe and cared for at home? What matters most to you there? Would money struggles make things harder?

 Friendships and Safety

Do you feel safe and respected in your friendships, school, and neighbourhood? What helps you feel included? How would you get help if something was up?

 Fairness and Respect

Do you feel like your needs and ideas are listened to? What helps you feel things are fair and unfair? What do you feel proud of?

Wigan Youth Cabinet were instrumental throughout the project, from design to dissemination. They reviewed our outputs and critiqued draft reports, strengthened our accountability and proposed solutions to challenges posed by young people.

Scientific Sampling

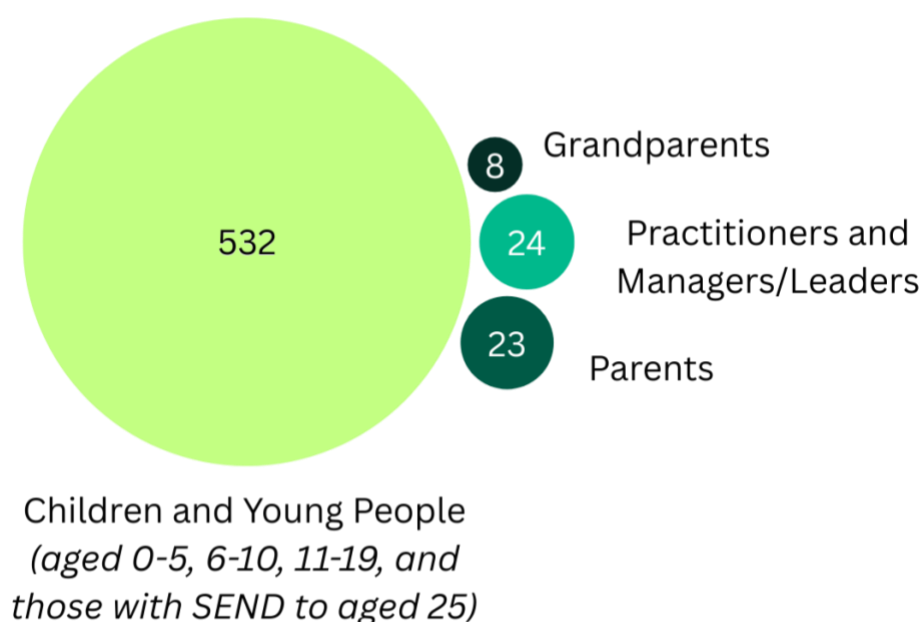
With over 76,000 children and young people growing up across Wigan, it was imperative that we reached enough participants to ensure that the deep listening outputs were reliable and credible.

Our project specifically focused on reaching children and young people:

- Experiencing deprivation, who are most impacted by inequalities and poorer health outcomes,
- With specific needs, including reaching out to young people up to 25 years old living with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND),
- From minority groups (LGBTQIA+, young carers, from ethnic minority groups, in care and care leavers, etc.)

By conducting an ***a priori* power analysis**, a deductive process to determine whether a result is statistically significant, we concluded that a minimum 231 participants would give us 95% confidence that the voices of young people across Wigan were represented.

During the window of our engagement, we went above and beyond our sampling target:



We spoke with 532 children and young people aged 0-18 (and up to 25 years with SEND) and a further 55 others with specific insights. From Wigan Council (with Partners) Child Health Engagement Coordination Project: Deep Listening: A Summary Report.

Deep Listening: A Dynamic and Varied Engagement Approach

Throughout the engagement project, we reached participants through a variety of means: face-to-face, focus groups, a review of previous responses, and AI-led digital engagement.

Sessions were hosted directly at targeted community events and celebrations. Meetings, interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, play and chat enabled the dynamic capture of a diverse range of viewpoints.

Curious Minds delivered creative forms of engagement commissioning local creative artists to engage with children and young people through poetry, drama, play, video and media, games and large-scale physical mapping activities. Media artists recorded their

work through photography, film and audio, culminating in a creative reel that tells stories visually, with young people and professionals contributing together.

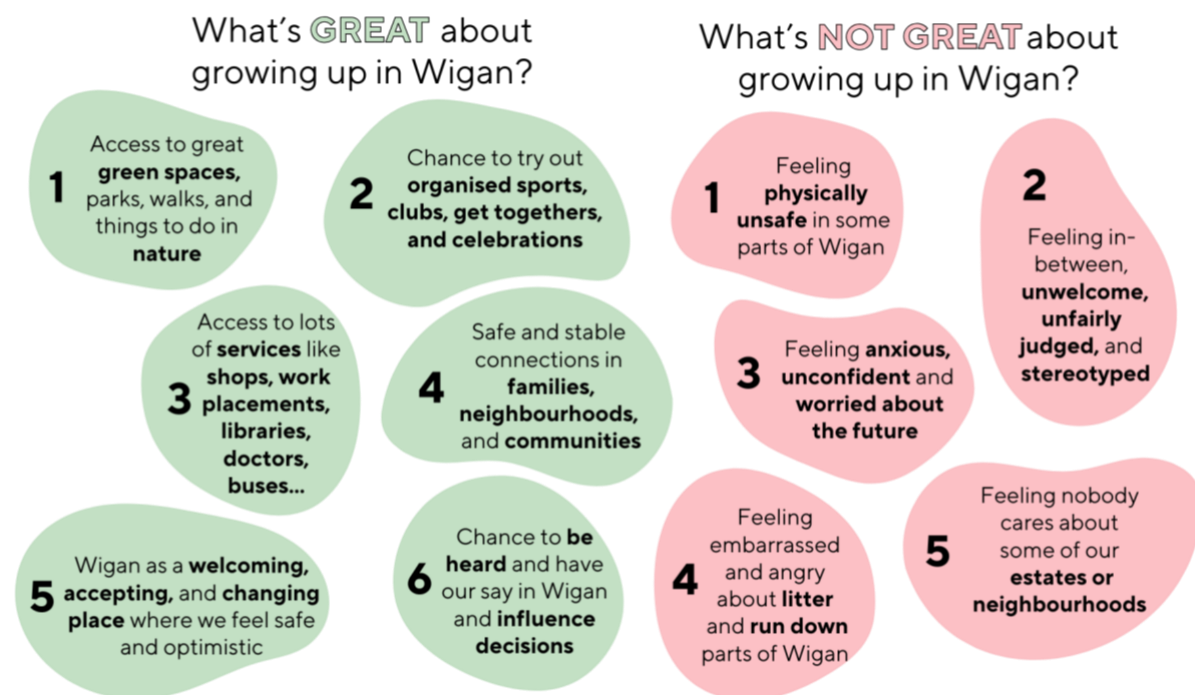
Colleagues from Pathways CIC ran focus groups with parents, grandparents and practitioners & managers to hear about what it's like to support and care for children and young people and what mattered the most to them.

Finally, our partners at Fit2Care used 'Insight Genie' to run an AI-informed digital engagement research exercise gaining engagement views from Wigan primary and secondary schools. This ensured that children who were unable to reach our face-to-face engagement or preferred to share their thoughts online still had an opportunity to share their views for an AI-based evidence trawl.

What We Found and What It Means

Children and young people across the borough were very welcoming and open to sharing their views, feelings and experiences, as they felt acknowledged and respected. To turn the qualitative insights we gained from deep listening into a definitive strategy, we conducted sentiment analysis to draw out 11 key themes from the engagement — 6 of which were positive and 5 had room for improvement.

Often in research using semi-structured and open-ended interview techniques, evidence can seem contradictory: certain key themes overlap, but this represents the richness of young people's experiences and how their individual lived experiences may have contributed to their opinions.



Themes drawn out from deep listening engagement research: 6 as positive and 5 as showing room for improvement. From Wigan Council (with Partners) Child Health Engagement Coordination Project: Deep Listening: A Summary Report.

What's Great?

Children and young people shared with us about how highly they value accessible, high-quality **outdoor spaces**, helping them to stay active, stay connected, and feel proud of their neighbourhoods. The availability and variety of **organised clubs** helped young people develop their confidence as well as giving them a sense of structure and purpose. **Access to services** which are largely available and accessible, and the knowledge of how to receive support when they need it, was important to young people. Solid, reliable **relationships** and community stability was a key theme in children's psychological wellbeing, connected with the opportunity to be 'safely different' across a **vibrant and diverse** borough and the sense that **their voices feel heard**.

What Could Improve?

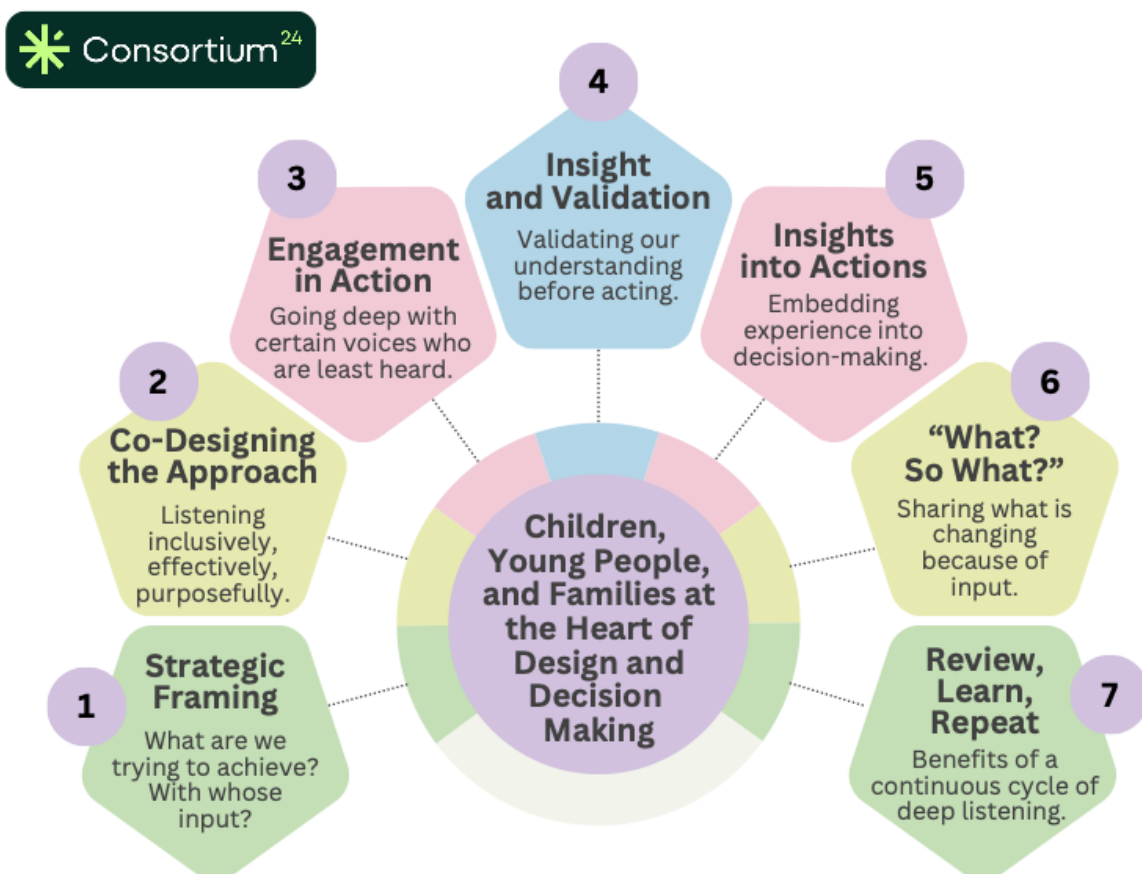
Feeling unsafe around Wigan was both an experience many young people shared and a perception of certain places and spaces in the borough. Also based in experience and perception, some older children felt they were both **feared and fearful**, causing some dissonance. Sometimes, children and young people expressed **anxiety** around the sense of a welcoming community was superficial and their experiences went against others' more positive descriptions of life in Wigan. Feeling proud and positive about their

neighbourhoods often depended on **environmental factors**, from litter to infrastructure to road safety, and specific neighbourhoods and constituent **towns felt ‘forgotten.’**

What's Next?

These themes allowed us to discover broad trends in how children and young people view growing up in Wigan and informed upcoming priority actions. In partnership with Wigan stakeholders, we developed a toolkit focused on enabling the implementation of these actions.

This toolkit takes the 11 themes and provides a guide as to how strategies and intentions can deliver for children and young people. It turns the steps for co-production into the steps for co-action, ensuring that children and young people remain involved throughout the process of deep listening research, engagement, decision-making and specific results of their input. The toolkit is now being actively utilised by participation and research groups in Wigan.



Overview of Co-Production in Decision-Making Toolkit.

Benefits and Opportunities

Our work generated deep, practical insight from children and young people, which has been shared with Wigan Council, its partners, delivery champions, stakeholders, leaders and Wigan Youth Cabinet. Listening to so many young people has strengthened the understanding of **what** matters to them about growing up in Wigan and **how** they and their peers can help drive meaningful, lasting change across health, social care, community, environmental, economic and infra structure priorities, based on hearing what the share and respecting what they know.

Exploring **what comes next** for involving young people in these conversations, and **how** systems can research and act in a genuinely co-produced way, can strengthen wider goals and support lasting change for future generations across the region.

Interested in how you can improve your meaningful outreach and co-production? Get in touch with Managing Partner, Julie Haywood, to see how we can work with you.