

Wigan Council (with Partners) Child Health Engagement Coordination Project: Deep Listening

A Summary Report

22 DECEMBER 2025

What's Important?.....	2
Key Messages	3
Honouring the Commitment to Listen and Keeping Good Principles	4
1. Who did the listening?	5
2. How did we start?.....	5
The Technical Bit	5
Working Together (Co-Design)	6
Agreeing our Questions.....	9
3. What did we do?.....	11
1. Face to Face Listening.....	11
2. A Desktop Review	13
3. Focus Groups with Parents and Practitioners	13
4. AI-Led Digital Engagement with Schools	14
Additional Engagement Activity	14
4. Who we engaged with?	14
Social Value	16
5. What we found out?.....	16
Outdoor green spaces & parks.....	16
The range and availability of activities	16
Services	17
Family, friends, neighbours and community.....	18
Improving tolerance, vibrancy, creativity and diversity.....	18
Being and feeling heard	19
Feeling unsafe.....	20
Feeling in between, excluded, unwelcome, judged	20
Anxiety and lack of confidence	21
Environmental degradation and infrastructure challenges	22
Towns, estates, spaces that feel forgotten	22
'Causes of the Causes': What might be the opportunities to action 'the great' and the 'not great'?	23
Acknowledgements.....	24

What's Important?

We know that some people are healthier and happier than others — not always because of the choices they make, but because they don't always get the help, support, or chances they need.

We want to understand what life is really like for children and young people in Wigan (borough) and —what's going well, what's tricky, and what could be better?



Credit: Avanti West Coast

Key Messages

What's **GREAT** about growing up in Wigan?

1

Access to great **green spaces**, parks, walks, and things to do in **nature**

2

Chance to try out **organised sports, clubs, get togethers, and celebrations**

3

Access to lots of **services** like **shops, work placements, libraries, doctors, buses...**

4

Safe and stable connections in **families, neighbourhoods, and communities**

6

Chance to **be heard** and have our say in Wigan and **influence decisions**

5

Wigan as a **welcoming, accepting, and changing place** where we feel safe and optimistic

What's **NOT GREAT** about growing up in Wigan?

1

Feeling **physically unsafe** in some parts of Wigan

2

Feeling in-between, **unwelcome, unfairly judged, and stereotyped**

3

Feeling **anxious, unconfident** and **worried about the future**

4

Feeling embarrassed and angry about **litter** and **run down** parts of Wigan

5

Feeling nobody cares about some of our **estates or neighbourhoods**

Honouring the Commitment to Listen and Keeping Good Principles

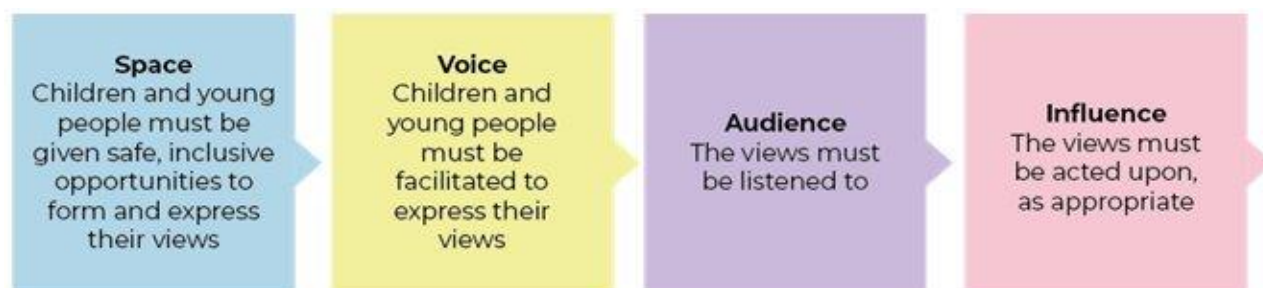
Wigan Council (and its partners) created an exciting and comprehensive engagement project that was designed to support three key objectives for the Council:

- **To help understand the health experiences of children and young people**, family and communities including seldom heard voices and those who are disproportionately impacted by health inequalities.
- **To support the identification of improvements to families, children's and young people's lives** via the development of a framework for Child Health in Wigan.
- **To help uncover both the risks and opportunities** related to child health, recognising the potential for positive interventions that focus on community empowerment and whole system changes.



The engagement project was aimed at gathering opinions and experiences to complement the facts and the data already presented in Wigan's Children's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA).

Our engagement approach was guided by the principles of the **Lundy Model of Participation** and **Wigan Council's Participation Standards** for children and young people and the **missions in the Wigan Borough Progress with Unity Plan**.



1. Who did the listening?

In June 2025 **Consortium24** (a collaboration of like-minded, values-based provider organisations) was commissioned by Wigan Council to deliver a 'Child Health Engagement Coordination Project' focused on deep listening.

2. How did we start?

Detailed consideration was given to agreeing a clear scope for the project, based on knowing that Wigan has a sizeable population of children and young people (over 70,000 individuals) and that this project could not reach everyone.

The Technical Bit

Based on '*a priori* power analysis' using the '*G*Power programme*' a 'reach target' of a minimum of 231 children and young people was proposed, focusing on:

Children and young people living in Wigan who:

Across the age groups:
0-5 years
6-10 years
11-19 years
**Up to 25 years (those
with SEND)**

Are most impacted by
inequalities and **poor
health outcomes**

Have certain **needs or
experiences** and go to
certain **schools, clubs,
organisations, and
activity days**

Colleagues working in public health and business intelligence teams were asked to consider the numbers of children and young people to be targeted by the project and to confirm the priority 'groups'.

It was agreed that a minimum of 231 face to face engagements undertaken primarily in the places where children who experience the greatest inequalities was the required focus of the project. Only the age and ethnicity of children and young people engaged would be captured, where this was possible.



Working Together (Co-Design)

The project was built on the principle of partnership throughout - this naturally starts with collaboration. Two sets of priority stakeholders were engaged to make sure that the project was focused on:

- a) hearing about **what children and young people think is important**
- b) ensuring that **children and young people were engaged**



Wigan Youth Cabinet co-designed the engagement approach with us to ensure that the experience of challenges and opportunities in children and young people's lives was at the heart of the listening process.

Wigan Council Public Health Leads provided a list of stakeholders who were to be invited to make a co-design contribution to the project approach. 42 stakeholders from across health, social care and community services were contacted for their input.



Wigan Council

All the fantastic inputs from working together at the outset were gratefully received. They were used to help inform next steps including how to construct the right questions and where to hold engagement sessions.



Wigan Youth Cabinet gave us invaluable guidance on the best use of language, questions, target places and spaces etc., i.e.



Listen to our view of actions that make a difference for children and young people – acknowledge that life is very different now in communities than in the past – focus on children and young people in the now.

Meet children and young people in their situations or environments that are safe – comfortable.

Please don't be tokenistic – build trust – share what is being learned and acknowledge what the challenges are – report progress.

Ask what's working and not working.

Where you listen is important.

Build individual's confidence and trust to keep working on the challenges and learn how to find the solutions.

Have creative ways to support what children and young people can say that might not be in the session or with others.

Perhaps a way that some individuals can contribute before or after sessions in a way that works for them – an example might be language or translation.

Get it right for all ages – make sure that ages are matched with project approach – artists, questions etc.

Please consider age transitions – for some age groups, having the support and guidance of families, teachers and community members can be helpful but for other age groups – moving into Adulthood, this approach would not work.

Use children's and young people's REAL life experiences about what they enjoy and experience of their community to plan what could help.

Check back when listening – what did you hear?

Be honest of what can be done – achieved – or what is not within this specific project.

Give feedback and have a space for receiving feedback – everyone's voice matters.

Make use of buddies and mentors to build trust and confidence in advance.

Accommodate how people communicate – art, technology, buddy groups who can translate.

Sit with people and ask how they would like to work before you start.

Make sure the voice of the person is heard and acknowledged.

We know that there are no quick fixes! No consultations and then no action or feedback please. Our group would like information on the progress of the project.

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.

Agreeing our Questions

Using the expert inputs outlined above we were guided to creating 3 open questions as the framework for the engagement with children and young people, these were:



Wigan Youth Cabinet also helped us create 8 themes to prompt (not dictate) discussion, they were:



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?

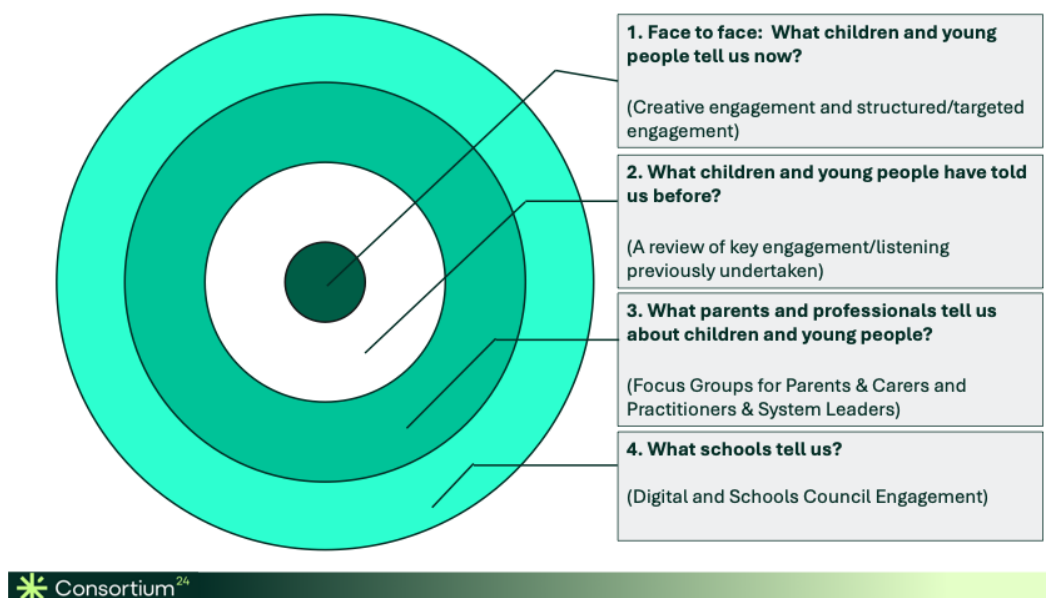
Fairness and Respect

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?



3. What did we do?

We started by agreeing the following '4 ways of listening':



Face to Face Listening

Understanding what Children and Young People want to tell us now about growing up in Wigan and Leigh, through creative engagement and semi-structured interviews.

a) Creative Engagement - commissioned by Curious Minds and delivered by Teaching Artists skilled in creative community engagement. Artists used a range of creative approaches including poetry, drama games, and large-scale physical mapping activities.

Curious Minds and media artists recorded their work in photographs, film and audio culminating in the production of a short creative reel (which is at this present time being expanded into a video production for the Public Health Annual Report).

**Curious
Minds**



b) Semi-structured interviews – delivered by various members of the Consortium24 team and Wigan Youth Zone.

Team members attended a range of organised events, sessions and groups.

They met with children and young people, parents, grandparents and carers to ask questions and discuss answers.

c) Wigan Youth Zone interviewed children and young people attending on site for organised sports and activities.



A Desktop Review

Understanding what children and young people have said before about their experiences and/or priorities.

Consortium24 staff reviewed the 24/25 Wigan Council Annual Participation Report looking at all references to consultations or engagements undertaken with children and young people in the previous year.

We also analysed all 600+ responses to the consultation on the future of Family Hubs.



Focus Groups with Parents and Practitioners

Hearing from parents and practitioners/leaders responsible for providing health and care services to children and young people.

Colleagues from Pathways CIC ran 3 Focus Groups; 1 with parents, 1 with practitioners (from statutory and Voluntary Community Faith and Social Enterprise VCFSE organisations) and 1 facilitated round table discussion with managers and leaders. The aim of the sessions was to hear from people personally or professionally responsible for supporting or caring for children and young people regarding what they thought was important to them.



AI-Led Digital Engagement with Schools

Hearing from primary and secondary school children (ensuring children and young people could contribute views if they did not get chance to or preferred not to through organised sessions).



Colleagues from insight Genie ran an AI informed digital engagement exercise targeted at primary and secondary schools and ensuring that children and young people who had not had chance to contribute views through organised events, or who did not want to engage in person, had an opportunity to share views digitally. Findings from the BeeWell Digital Dialogue with schools were also reviewed.

Additional Engagement Activity

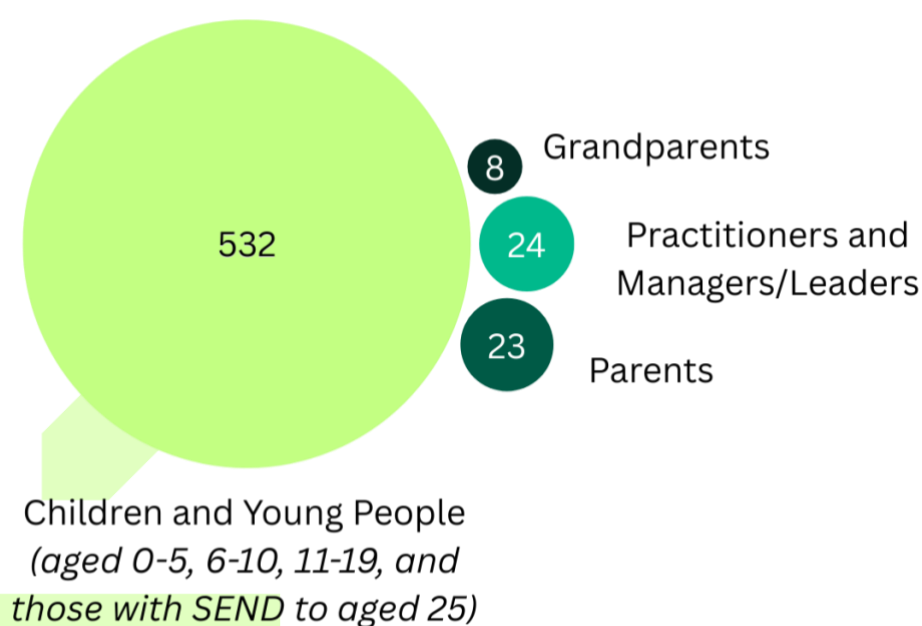
In addition to the work above colleagues in public health ran a graffiti wall at the Healthy Schools Event where school children were encouraged to write their contributions on post it notes.

Connections were also made with the faith sector through the Gather Movement as well as into the Kings Trust, and Groundwork.

4. Who we engaged with?

We aimed to achieve statistical relevance in this project by engaging with 231 children and young people but our team reached even more individuals surpassing 231 and engaging with 532 children and young people.

During June to October 2025, we engaged:



We attended sessions in the following places, ensuring a presence, where possible, in areas of high health inequalities:



In the creative engagement specifically, we targeted children and young people who are most likely to experience the greatest health inequalities.



at least **68%** of participants
were in receipt of free school
meals



at least **31%** had special educational needs



16% were of global majority or mixed ethnic backgrounds

Social Value

We remunerated organisations where children and young people made significant contributions to the process, funding Wigan Youth Zone with £250 to enable 50 subsidised annual memberships for children and young people and supporting Wigan Youth Cabinet with a £220 contribution to enable a group activity chosen by children and young people and organised by Be Well.

5. What we found out?

We were privileged to hear exceptionally insightful and powerful thinking from all the children and young people we engaged with. We heard lots of views about Wigan and its neighbourhoods.

A video has been created by Curious Minds which captures children's voices directly. This video is available as the Children's Theme Public Health Annual Report (PHAR) (2025).

In pulling all the contributions together we focused on grouping comments about what was great and what was not.

What's **great** about growing up in Wigan:

1. Outdoor green spaces & parks

Lots of children and young people who we engaged with told us that the availability of and access to great green spaces was really important to them. They valued parks, walks, nature, greenery, outdoor spaces with things to do, either all the time or through one off events, as well as peaceful spaces. High quality outdoor spaces helped children and young people be active, be connected and be proud.

2. The range and availability of activities

The availability of organised sport, clubs, groups, festivals, open days, child friendly settings (e.g. Wigan Youth Zone, Youth Centres and Clubs etc.), organised get togethers and celebrations was also important to children and young people in helping with trying new things, feeling purposeful and staying occupied.

Lots of things to do gave children and young people an alternative to feeling bored, and for parents, grandparents and carers, access to activities gave reassurance, structure and confidence in Wigan.



3. Services

Despite known challenges in accessing and receiving services (e.g. waiting times) many children and young people really valued a wide variety of services including:

Access to services, whilst understood to be tricky sometimes, was something that children and young people knew was both possible, available and meaningful to their sense of being supported in a community that could, mostly, provide what they need when they need it.

Services included:



4. Family, friends, neighbours and community



Children and young people spoke frequently about the value of solid, reliable, trusting and caring families, and kind friendships, neighbours and communities. The sense and importance of stability was a key theme with psychological wellbeing seeming as important as, if not more important than, physical health.

5. Improving tolerance, vibrancy, creativity and diversity



Wigan, specifically is seen by some children and young people (and their families) as a place where tolerance, vibrancy and diversity has improved over the years and is still improving. Opportunities created to be 'safely different' were welcomed, valued and celebrated and they gave children and young people hope and happiness.

6. Being and feeling heard

The children and young people we engaged with were passionate and mobilised by opportunities to be heard. Initiatives creating a sense of value, visibility, and influence included:



Noting that so many external factors can lead children and young people to feeling and being excluded and exploited the ‘insulating’ impact of feeling positively seen and heard, especially by adults, cannot be under estimated as a key contributor to thriving.



What's **not great** about growing up in Wigan:

1. Feeling unsafe

Many children and young people reported feeling unsafe and being unsafe was both a perception AND an experience. Factors that made children and young people feel unsafe include:

- Wigan town centre
- The bus station
- Adults with a lack of respect
- Adults behaving inappropriately to and around children and young people (taking drugs, drinking too much alcohol, fighting, expressing hate or verbal abuse, catcalling young people, expressing stigma, expressing sexism and misogyny (especially to young women and girls), exposing children and young people to age inappropriate experiences, adults “being weird”)
- Older teenagers carrying or talking about knives or being anti-social/inconsiderate/unsupportive/unkind to younger children or young people they knew to be vulnerable.



For some young people periods of feeling physically unsafe in Wigan were both unavoidable and routine.



2. Feeling in between, excluded, unwelcome, judged

Some older children, teenagers and young adults were both feared and fearful which was a regular state of dissonance.

Pre-teens and young teens might be ‘in between’ criteria for access to assets and opportunities and that made families and individuals fearful of vulnerability to the ‘streets or the wrong crowd’.

Young people talked about the risk of being misjudged and unwelcome if they came together as a group and being apprehensive of physical togetherness in social groups or networks unless permission and context was clear.

Young children and adults talked about fearing groups of teenagers as likely to be threatening and verbally abusive.

Perceptions about knife crime, social media, the lack of meaningful occupation and the lack of work opportunities for teenagers were cited as issues on children and young people’s minds.

3. Anxiety and lack of confidence

Not feeling able, welcome or confident were feelings expressed by some children and young people as important in the reasons why it can be hard to thrive. A sense of ‘superficiality’, ‘façade’ or ‘inconsistency’ to the good stuff above was conveyed when children and young people talked about their levels of confidence outside of ‘comfort zones’. Examples included:



A sense of ‘fragility’ in things that children and young people rely on for wellbeing was raised by lots of children and young people (and families) for whom life is not perceived as ‘straight forward’ in Wigan. Not being able to be ‘true to self’ all the time or having to wrestle with dissonance felt stressful to some children and young people.

Some young people talked frankly about a growing sense of generational divide in Wigan describing ‘a pressure cooker’ of things that were not specific to Wigan but that were felt in Wigan nonetheless. Being ridiculed as a young person was expected and for some young people it consolidated a feeling of apathy or ‘numbness’ to being valued or protected.

Confidence in being able to secure a safe and affordable place to live, work and an income that would enable managing bills and costs, and a future in Wigan was raised by many young people who talked about a feeling that they might not find what they need to survive and thrive as independent adults in Wigan.

4. Environmental degradation and infrastructure challenges

Whilst lots of comments reflected pride and positivity about local spaces and places litter, pollution, climate change, pigeons, dog poo, run down buildings, lack of trees and too much emphasis on screen time and use of screens were raised by some children and young people who seemed to feel that there was a divide between the quality of urban and green space and an overall lack of care about Wigan and the future of the environment by residents.

Traffic congestion, parking pressures and a perceived lack of infrastructure (lack of safe crossings, lack of safe cycling, lack of accessible/adjusted information, lack of financial help etc.) were also identified by children and young people as challenges that impacted inclusion and optimism.



5. Towns, estates, spaces that feel forgotten

Our engagement did not just focus on 'Wigan'. Lots of comments from children and young people were expressed about the difference between Wigan and its constituent towns. The view of Leigh as 'forgotten' in terms of investment, services, appeal and access came across from lots of children and young people as did the feeling of 'good and bad' places from which to come from across and within the area.

‘Causes of the Causes’:

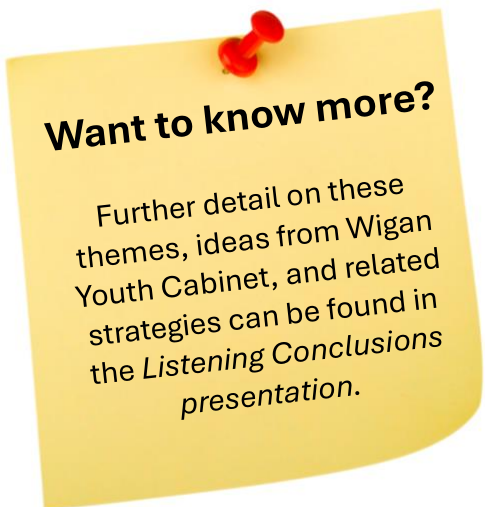
What might be the opportunities to take action on ‘the great’ and the ‘not great’?

Professionals sometimes find it hard to make good use of listening evidence because it can feel ‘contradictory’ both from one view to the next and to other kinds of data or ‘facts’.

We feel that children and young people are expressing a sense of the richness of their views and experience detailing ‘and/both’ in many of their feelings about ‘what’s great?’ and ‘what’s not great?’ about growing up in Wigan. It is important to understand, acknowledge and respect the value and complexity of all the views provided.

We know that Wigan Council and its partners are committed to listening in a way that informs the future. We have therefore summarised children and young people’s views, in context of what the Council might want to think about when it comes to strategy, priorities and opportunities for next steps. This summary is available in the “Listening Conclusions” slides.

We hope that this is helpful for ensuring that all the deep listening undertaken supports further thinking about onward improvement and positive change.



Want to know more?

Further detail on these themes, ideas from Wigan Youth Cabinet, and related strategies can be found in the *Listening Conclusions* presentation.

Acknowledgements

Consortium24 would like to express sincere thanks to every single child and young person (and carer, relative and professional) who took the time to engage with our team.

We were bowled over by your enthusiasm, thoughtfulness and spirit!

It was such a privilege to meet you and hear what you had to say so thank you for making it so worthwhile.

