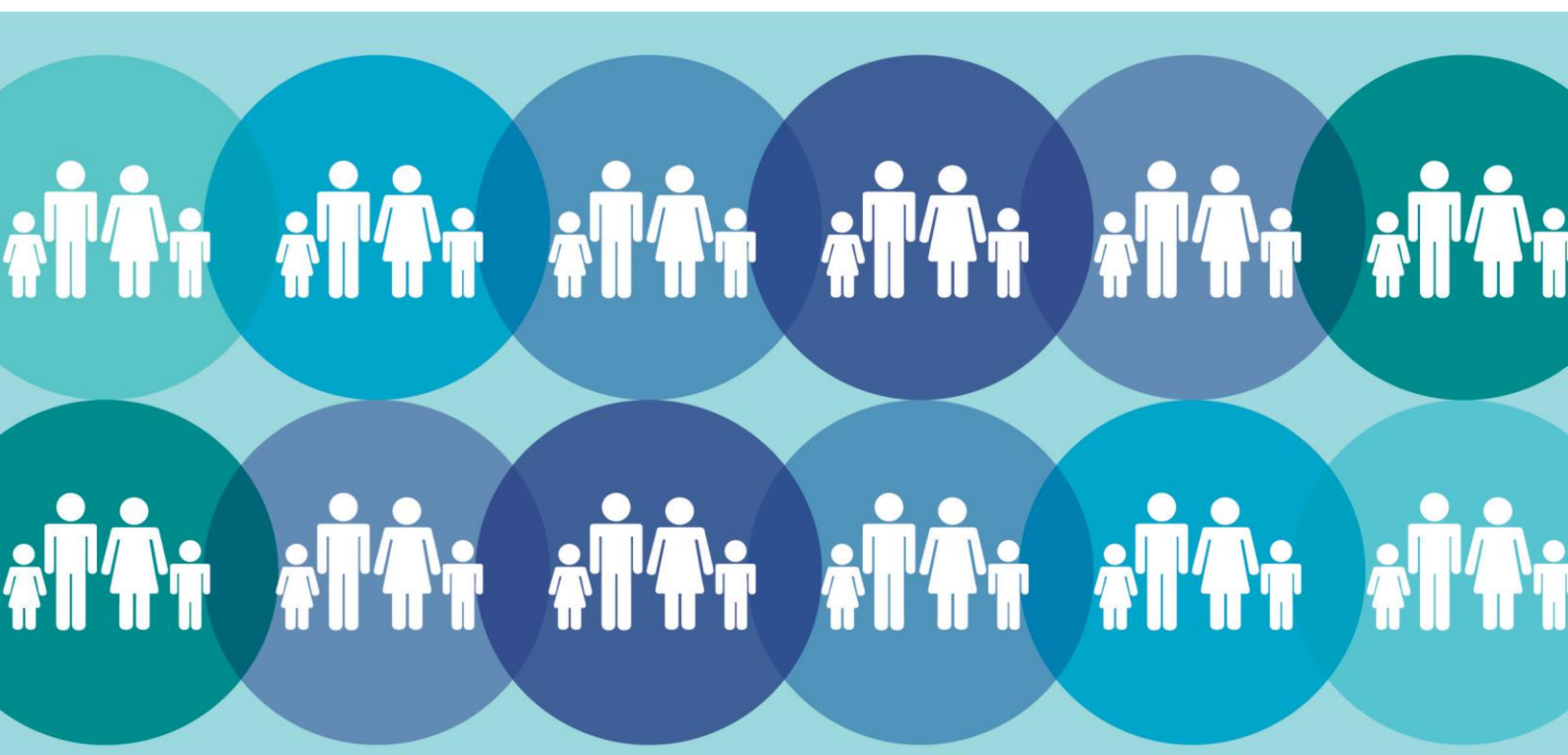


# Children's Communities final evaluation report

August 2020



# Children's Communities final evaluation report

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August 2020

# Acknowledgements

A commitment to evaluation and learning is central to a Children's Community, and this evaluation has been shaped by a strong ethos of co-production shared between the evaluation team, Save the Children UK and the local teams in the Children's Community areas. We are very grateful to all those who have participated in fieldwork, provided access to evidence, data and documentation and facilitated the attendance of evaluation team members at meetings and events. We are also grateful for the many conversations about how best to evaluate the difficult and complex process of systems change, and for advice, support and challenge in relation to the development of new tools and resources which have helped us to navigate this journey.

There are many who have contributed to the evaluation, but particular thanks are due to members of the local Children's Community teams: Claire Reindorp, Felicity Hunt and Jason Davis in Pembury; Julie Wilson, Nick Chesterton and Rachel Garbutt in Smallshaw Hurst; and Paula McCormack, Emma Peak and Darren McGee in Wallsend. Thanks are also due to Rachel Parkin and Beth Stout and former colleagues Paul Perkins, Jane Lewis, Francesca Pagni and Chris Wellings at Save the Children UK. Valuable support and guidance was also provided by the Children's Communities Evaluation Advisory Group.

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# Summary

This is the final report of the Children's Communities programme evaluation carried out between 2016 and 2020 by Sheffield Hallam University.

A Children's Community is a long-term, placed based approach to improving outcomes for children and young people. Children's Communities are based on the understanding that children's lives are shaped by complex ecologies in which a series of interact to directly and indirectly affect outcomes. They are based on a specific disadvantaged **neighbourhood** within which local services commit to a **shared vision** with an **integrated and holistic approach**. They work over the **long term**, and are driven and led by **the voices of local people**.

The **Pembury Children's Community** is led by Peabody, Hackney Council and local residents, aiming to significantly improve the lives of the 1,000 children and young people and their families living on and around the Pembury estate in Hackney and to be a model for neighbourhood transformation.

The **Smallshaw-Hurst Children's Community** is a partnership project between Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council, Save the Children and JIGSAW Housing Group, situated in an area of Tameside is home to over 5,000 children and young people, with a total population of just under 16,000.

The **Wallsend Children's Community** covers the NE28 postcode of North Tyneside, and comprises around 40,000 people, nearly 30% of whom are under 25, living in - and adjacent to - four local authority wards. All Wallsend schools have worked in partnership for many years, and it is this partnership that was the initial driving force behind the Wallsend Children's Community. Building on the schools partnership, the Children's Community incorporated a range of other partners.

In this evaluation, a Children's Communities Local Systems Change Analytical Framework (LSCAF) has been developed to understand and the chart progress of the Communities at three system levels: strategic direction; operational management; and services and programmes.

Looking across the communities, in summary, over the course of the evaluation **changes in the strategic direction** of the Children's Communities have included:

- Increasing involvement of residents as partners in the Children's Community and efforts to build local capacity to enable co-produced solutions to local challenges.
- The development of sustainable governance structures which have progressed from widespread engagement to focused collaboration with a core group of key stakeholders.
- Using theory of change tools to plan and review the direction and strategic goals of each Community.
- A focus on the 'whole child' and on orienting the system towards prevention and early intervention which is shared between stakeholders and is increasingly informing wider strategies and approaches.

The **changes in operational management** that we have seen have included:

- The development of communication strategies which focus on engaging partners and residents in the work of the Children's Communities.
- The use, evaluation and development of theories of change approaches to guide strategies and plans for delivery.
- Consolidation of the core teams in each Children's Community, and their roles in providing capacity, skills and momentum for local systems change.
- Development of approaches to data, evidence and shared learning, although in all Communities there is further work to do to strengthen this further.

In relation to **services and programmes**:

- Children's Communities have brought service partners and stakeholders together to develop innovative responses to local community need which are rooted in local evidence and knowledge.
- The interventions that have been developed have proved important mechanisms for building relationships and credibility and learning to inform future service development.
- There is improved collaboration and trust between service providers, and an increased appreciation of, and appetite for, working together to support vulnerable children and families.

In relation to **outcomes for children, young people and families**, there is inconsistent data available at this stage through which to assess the direct impact of Children's Communities across the programme.

However, drawing on the evidence across the evaluation period, there are a set of areas in which the Children's Community approach has made a key difference against indicators for potential impact as follows:

- The Children's Community core teams have been crucial in providing **capacity and resources** energising a diverse range of groups and people to work together to improve the life chances of children and young people.
- A relentless commitment to bringing people together, **building relationships and connections**, and facilitating collaboration has been crucial to this approach. Key to this have been the 'hooks' for engagement including community events, working with agencies to support shared agendas and providing evidence and challenge.
- The Children's Community teams have invested heavily in **using data and evidence** to understand their areas. Two of the Children's Community teams have dedicated analytical support and this has been important in supporting partners to share and analyse data, and is a model which could usefully be replicated elsewhere.
- The Children's Communities have **modelled different ways of working**, providing provided and mechanisms for service innovation. Their focus on joining up stakeholders with influence across a child's life, supports services to be preventative rather than run the risk of being reactive and helps services to see the bigger pictures, not just their own delivery.
- The Children's Communities have **promoted community voice**, which can be missing from local systems change. Community involvement provides legitimacy and ensures that the Children's Communities are more likely to be resilient and sustainable in the longer term.
- Finally, the Children's Communities have strengthened capacity and appetite for **shared learning in local systems**. They provide a 'safe space' for services to think about how they work and where they fit in the wider system.

A set of wider learning points derive from this study.

- Firstly, the Children's Communities have recognised the **importance of working with local people to change the way that systems work**. **For policy** this means prioritising the involvement of local people in systems change initiatives, and providing resources accordingly. **For practitioners** it means involving local people from the outset in co-producing systems change.
- Secondly, there is clear evidence from the Children's Communities that **a long-term approach is needed**. **For policy** this means a commitment to commissioning and resourcing long-term change programmes. **For practice**, there is a need to respond to the challenge of maintaining interest, particularly amongst early engagers.
- Thirdly, the goal of emergent, longer term system-led change is not realistic without **dedicated staff** - seen to be independent from particular services - to move things forward. **The policy implication here** is that there is a need for ongoing resourcing for capacity for system stewardship.
- Fourthly, the Children's Communities have demonstrated the importance of access **to data and evidence** as enablers of discussion and challenge and as a hook to stakeholders who want to understand more and respond to the issues and challenges identified. **Policy makers** should ensure that there are resources and capacity at senior levels to 'unlock' relevant public service data. **Practitioners** should seek to gather multiple sources of data.
- Finally, the central importance of **relationships as the drivers of change** is clear. **For policy**, this means reframing of the outcomes of place-based approaches in terms of relationships and system behaviours. **For practitioners** there is ample evidence from the Children's Communities of useful practice in building positive relationships, in this report and previously.

# Introduction

This is the final report of the Children's Communities programme evaluation carried out between 2016 and 2020 by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR), and the Centre for Development and Research in Education (CDaRE), both at Sheffield Hallam University. The Children's Community programme is a place-based systems change initiative supported by Save the Children UK involving three Children's Communities in England:

- The Pembury Children's Community in Hackney.
- The Smallshaw-Hurst Children's Community in Tameside.
- The Wallsend Children's Community in North Tyneside.

The evaluation of the Children's Community programme is guided by a set of research questions which seek to understand the development and impact of Children's Communities and the ways in which they are working in local systems to improve services and outcomes for children, young people and families. These include:

- How and to what extent are Communities embodying the key principles of the Children's Communities model?
- Is there evidence of Children's Communities working towards long term systems change?
- How effective are leadership and governance arrangements?
- How are the Communities progressing with developing and operationalising the local strategic vision and theory of change?
- What evidence is there of impacts within services and systems?
- What evidence is there of impacts for children and young people and families?

The evaluation has adopted a mixed-methods approach, drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data. Central to this has been the development of a local systems change analytical framework (LSCAF) as a tool to analyse change in the three different Children's Communities, working in different contexts and at different spatial scales. The LSCAF is discussed further at Chapter Three, and additional detail on the evaluation approach and methods is contained in Appendix One of the Year Two evaluation report. This report draws on evidence from all data sources to provide a summative assessment of the programme. Earlier reports have assessed progress at earlier stages for the programme and each individual Children's Community, and can be accessed [here](#).



The remainder of this report is as follows:

- Chapter Two summarises the Children's Community model and provides brief detail on the three Children's Communities included in this evaluation.
- Chapter Three outlines our approach to understanding place-based systems change in the Children's Communities and provides an assessment of progress in each Children's Community over the period of the evaluation.
- Chapter Four discusses changes in outcomes for children, young people and families across the Children's Communities.
- Chapter Five provides an assessment of the contribution that the Children's Communities have made to change in their areas.
- Chapter Six presents conclusions, and draws out learning to inform the future direction of the three Children's Communities and the development of other place-based local systems change programmes which aim to improve outcomes for children and families.

# The Children's Community Programme

## 2.1. The Children's Community model

A Children's Community is a long-term, placed based approach to improving outcomes for children and young people. Children's Communities are developed in response to evidence that families living in deprived areas can face multiple challenges which impact across children and young people's lives. Many initiatives and interventions have been implemented to address these challenges but, despite some successes, poorer outcomes for children and young people in disadvantaged communities persist. Children's Communities are based on the understanding that children's lives are shaped by complex ecologies in which a series of 'systems' (which include family, school, neighbourhood, social and cultural contexts) interact to directly and indirectly affect outcomes. Initiatives which address only one aspect of these ecologies will have limited impacts, and a Children's Community aims to deliver integrated and holistic support across all aspects of children and young people's lives (from cradle to career).

Whilst each Children's Community is different, in terms of spatial scale, context, service landscape and core priorities they share a common set of characteristics which define the model:

- **A NEIGHBOURHOOD:** Children's Communities are located in disadvantaged places with a history of partnership working for children and a collective commitment to take this to the next level.
- **A SHARED VISION:** Local services develop and implement a coordinated plan for helping children thrive, based on a shared vision for children and a shared analysis of children's needs.
- **INTEGRATED AND HOLISTIC:** Children's Communities work across children's lives and throughout each stage of childhood.
- **GENERATIONAL:** Children's Communities work over the long-term. They tackle presenting symptoms and underlying causes simultaneously.
- **POWERED BY LOCAL VOICES:** Children's Communities are driven and led by local people who are best placed to identify strengths, harness the power of local networks and find solutions within their communities.
- **NATIONALLY EVALUATED:** The Children's Community project is underpinned by a body of research and evidence and is being nationally evaluated by Sheffield Hallam University.

## 2.2. The Children's Communities

There are three Children's Communities supported by Save the Children:

- The Pembury Children's Community in Hackney.
- The Smallshaw-Hurst Children's Community in Tameside.
- The Wallsend Children's Community in North Tyneside.



Below, we outline the focus and key developments in the three Children's Communities. Further information about the Children's Community areas is contained in the recent programme review, ['Learning from the Children's Communities'](#).

### ***Pembury***

The Pembury Children's Community grew out of concern to develop a co-ordinated and effective response to the needs of children, young people and families living on the Pembury estate. It was launched in 2015. Led by Peabody, Hackney Council and local residents, the Pembury Children's Community aims to significantly improve the lives of the 1,000 children and young people and their families living on and around the Pembury estate in Hackney and to be a model for neighbourhood transformation.

In the Year Two evaluation (2019) we reported on some key area-level data for Pembury. These included early years development outcomes, which had improved and were strong relative to both the borough and national benchmarks. Children's outcomes at Key Stage Two were also improving, although they were still behind those for Hackney and England. Key Stage Four outcomes for the area are consistently strong, and above those for the borough and England. Levels of childhood obesity were high at both Reception and Year Six, and although rates were falling, they

remained and significantly higher than averages for Hackney and England. There were also high levels of in-work poverty on the estate.

The programme is governed by a multi-agency board of senior leaders from the local authority, Peabody, schools and early years, voluntary and community sector organisations. Three working groups comprising managers and practitioners in local agencies and an active resident steering group steer the strategy and drive the day to day implementation of programme priorities and are supported by a small staff team at Peabody.

The Pembury Children's Community has together with residents developed a **vision that in 2025 Pembury will be:**

- A neighbourhood where people are proud to live.
- A community where people from all backgrounds come together, where everyone matters and there are opportunities for all.
- A place where young people are encouraged, inspired and empowered to get the best out of life.

Eight associated goals for 2025, set out the ambitions of the Children's Community:

- Pembury children are more ready for school.
- Pembury children and young people are in education, training and employment and on their way to achieving their ambitions.
- Pembury families experiencing poverty are on a long-term route out of poverty and more able to manage financial difficulties.
- Both young people and parents are more connected to informal support networks that create opportunities and meet needs.
- Pembury children feel healthy and happy and Pembury families experience positive wellbeing.
- Pembury children and young people are safe and secure.
- Service providers can demonstrate that services are more accessible and joined up across children's home, school and community lives.
- The Children's Community has developed a model that can transform children's outcomes and their neighbourhoods.

The Pembury Children's Community's theory of change is articulated through three-year plans which aim to work in partnership with services and the local community to build individual and collective capacity for sustainable change in four areas:

1. **Pembury children and more ready for school:** increasing access to childcare and early years support; building relationships between early years providers and schools; supporting primary school transition and facilitating family learning and home-school engagement
2. **Pembury children and young people are in education, training and employment and on the way to achieving their ambitions:** delivering estate-based youth programmes and one-to-one support for vulnerable young people; working with local secondary schools and Young Hackney to support young people at risk of exclusion; co-ordinating support for children and young people across home, school and community.

3. **Routes out of poverty for Pembury families:** supporting vulnerable families to reduce rent arrears, manage debt and be financially more secure; facilitating peer support networks for parents and help for parents to get into work through employment and training support.
4. **The Pembury community is empowered to develop supportive networks, drive the Children's Community forward and shape wider policy and practice locally:** supporting the resident's steering group as a forum for shaping the priorities of Children's Community and partner agencies; co-hosting community events and activities which bring the community together and build networks and resources; support for community groups to develop peer-led responses to community priorities; development of a service hub in the Pembury Community Centre to provide accessible facilities and resources to local residents.

### ***Smallshaw-Hurst***

Smallshaw-Hurst (SSH) Children's Community is a partnership project between Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council, Save the Children and JIGSAW Housing Group which have long recognised that children and young people growing up in deprived areas consistently have poorer outcomes when compared to children from more affluent areas. In Smallshaw-Hurst there has historically been additional investment to the area, improvements to services, and targeted funding and interventions. Although these efforts have resulted in some short-term improved outcomes, there have been no long-term improvements and poorer outcomes for children and young people and families persist.

The Smallshaw-Hurst area is situated in Tameside and is home to over 5,000 children and young people, with a total population of just under 16,000. It is made up of three distinct neighbourhoods and sits within the Greater Manchester conurbation; one of the country's most successful city-regions.

A range of challenges for children, young people and families living in the area were identified at the outset of the Children's Community, some of which were exacerbated by the poor quality of local services. These included: high levels of poverty, with more than half of the population of Smallshaw-Hurst are living within the most deprived 10 per cent of neighbourhoods in England (Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2015); many children in schools in the area attaining a good level of development (GLD) in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS); low levels of attainment and school engagement evidenced by a high proportion of the population with no qualifications and local primary and secondary schools in the area having some of the highest fixed term and permanent exclusion rates in England (Department for Education, 2019); youth unemployment at nearly double the national level; considerably higher than the national rates of crime and anti-social behaviour: and poor health outcomes a lower life expectancy than the national average and high rates of hospital stays for alcohol-specific conditions in under 18s and substance misuse amongst young people. Tameside also has high child admissions for mental health and youth hospital admissions for self-harm (NHS Digital, 2019).

The project team was set up in June 2017 and since this date has engaged with a range of local stakeholders including local schools, police, health providers, local businesses, voluntary and community groups, and resident groups, to develop a local partnership. By acting together, these partners can oversee a powerful coordinated strategy for improving children's outcomes, acting more cohesively than would be possible if they operated as wholly separate organisations or services.

A key thread of activity in Smallshaw-Hurst Children's Community has been engaging and consulting with the local community to find out their views and ensure that parents and families feel a joint ownership of the Children's Community from the start.

The **Smallshaw-Hurst Children's Community's vision** is that:

- Children from Smallshaw-Hurst have the same life chances as children from more affluent areas.
- Children from Smallshaw-Hurst have the best possible start in life.
- Every young person in Smallshaw-Hurst can be confident of reaching their full potential.
- Children grow up healthy, in a safe and vibrant community.
- The Children's Community is sustainable beyond Save the Children funding/staffing.
- There is an efficient and effective local system in Smallshaw-Hurst.

The current Smallshaw-Hurst Children's Community's theory of change and strategic plan aims to work in partnership with services and the local community to build individual and collective capacity for sustainable change in three areas:

**Early years:** increasing access to childcare and early years support; building relationships between early years providers and schools; supporting primary school transition and facilitating family learning and home-school engagement.

**Education attainment and employability:** supporting better integration and partnership working between schools so they increase sharing of best practice and resources; increasing levels of attainment and attendance in schools; improving the aspirations of young people by providing volunteering opportunities and expanding horizons; and improving the employability of young people to reduce the level of young people in the area who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).

**Health:** increasing links and partnerships between schools, health and voluntary and community sector agencies; supporting communities and families to do more for themselves; increase the involvement of young people in more activities; and supporting residents to live healthy lifestyles with lower levels of young people with mental health issues and engaging in unhealthy behaviours.

### ***Wallsend***

The Wallsend Children's Community covers the NE28 postcode of North Tyneside, and comprises people living in the four local authority wards of Wallsend, Howdon, Northumberland and Battle Hill as well as residents living on the boundaries of the wards of Riverside, Chirton, Collingwood, Killingworth and Valley. Around 40,000 people live in this postcode area, making it the largest of the three Children's Communities at the time of writing. Nearly 30% of the population of the Wallsend Children's Community are aged under 25 years of age.

All Wallsend schools have worked in partnership for many years, and it is this partnership that was the initial driving force behind the Wallsend Children's Community. Building on the schools partnership, the Children's Community incorporated a range of partners including children's centres and pre-school settings, health services, key local authority services, the police, youth providers, local churches and local charities.

The initial Wallsend Children's Community theory of change saw the fundamental cause of the area's problems as the loss of heavy industry, and the cultural dislocation

which has followed from this. This was seen to underlie many of the presenting problems for children and young people locally in terms of language development, educational achievement, youth unemployment and poor health.

**The Original Wallsend Children’s Community Vision:** In response to the area’s challenges, local leaders have set out an ambitious vision to build, over a generation - **by 2030 - a Wallsend where all local children and young people have access to exactly the same high-quality chances as those in more advantaged areas.** Wallsend’s children will be doing well across health, education, well-being, softer skills (such as confidence and self-esteem) and employability. All these outcomes are interrelated and so in Wallsend we will do whatever it takes to give children the best possible start across their entire lives.

The original goals associated with these outcomes originally included:

- Educational progress at all key stages for pupils in line with the best achieved elsewhere in the country including for the most disadvantaged pupils; and the achievement gap between the poorest and better off groups removed.
- Key health indicators including childhood obesity, dental health, and mental health in line with the best achieved elsewhere in the country.
- Young people in Wallsend leaving education will have the same levels of entry to employment, and at the same skill level, further education and higher education, including the most prestigious institutions and courses, as other areas of the country.

The area has many community assets which can be used to deliver these goals. The Wallsend Children’s Community Theory of Change is to meet the challenges outlined above, utilising community assets, focused initially on three strands of action:

- Early intervention to support children's learning – getting children on a positive pathway rather than address deficits later.
- Ensuring that children are ‘Fit for Life’ – making sure children are healthy (physically and mentally) and can engage with opportunities.
- Realising aspirations – empowering the community to support children to achieve their potential and behave in new ways.

A change in strategic leadership of the Children's Community brought a review and change in direction in 2018, with a focus on capacity-building for local systems change, driven by the leadership of the Executive Lead and the recently appointed members of the core team. The end of Y2 report noted that the then-newly created core team worked hard to create more focussed collaboration, built around an agreed three year plan, developed in tandem with a refreshed governance structure. There was systematic engagement with local services and organisations, focussed on communicating the aims of the Children's Community, and understanding how services can improve outcomes through a collaborative approach.

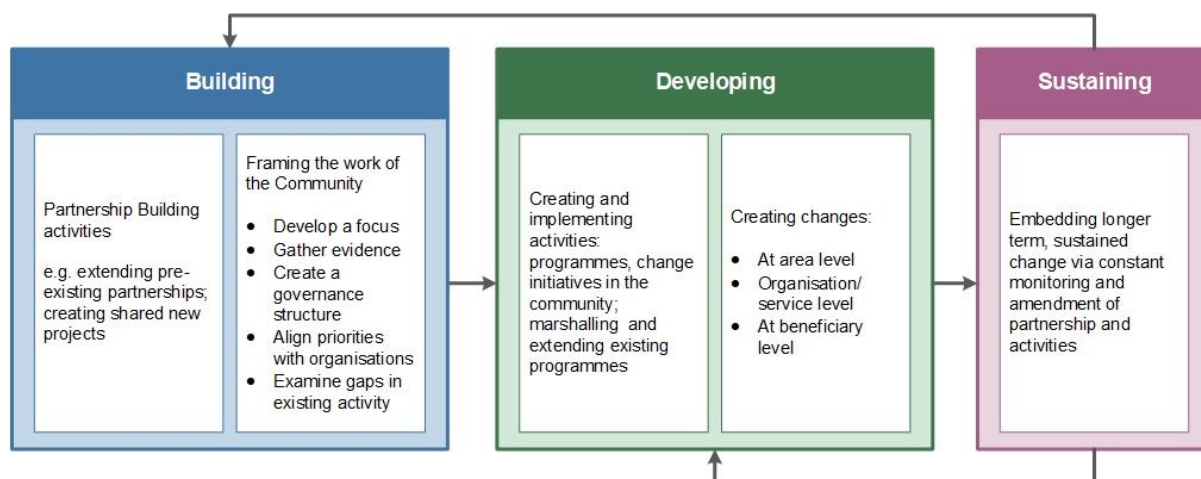
# 3

## Understanding place-based systems change in the three Children's Communities

As outlined in the Chapter above, Children's Communities are a place-based approach to systems change, with the objective of improving outcomes for children living in disadvantaged areas. As such, they are working across multiple agendas and aspects of children's lives. They are also long-term, and premised on a clear evidence base that improving the life chances of children in deprived neighbourhoods requires many years of concerted effort, as indicated [here](#). The evaluation reported on here covers only the first phase of the Children's Community approach as the work is in design long term, and as such much of the evidence available is process-based, and concerned with how Children's Communities are re-orienting local systems to improve outcomes for children and young people. Whilst there are some encouraging early signs of improvements in outcomes (which we discuss in Chapter Four) showing indication of future impact, much of this evidence is likely to emerge outside of the timeframe for this evaluation.

In this evaluation, a Children's Communities Local Systems Change Analytical Framework (LSCAF) has been developed to understand and the chart progress of the Communities at three system levels: strategic direction; operational management; and services and programmes. This framework allows judgements to be made in relation to whether the Children's Community in question is at the initial *building* stage; at the intermediate *developing* stage or at the more developed *sustaining* stage. This is represented schematically in Figure 3.1 below.

**Figure 3.1: Schematic Maturity Model for the Children's Communities**





Data for this framework has been gathered through interviews with representatives of Children's Community governance groups (including local resident representatives), partner organisations and core teams, as well as through observations and documentary analysis. Full details of the LSCAF can be found in the [Year 2 report](#).

In the remainder of this Chapter we summarise the progress in each Children's Community over the period of the evaluation.

It is important to note that the LSCAF was designed after the first year of the evaluation, drawing on learning from these early stages and from wider local system change literature. Therefore we use early project evidence to make an estimate of baseline for the start of the evaluation period, and in relation to the first year, indicated by the star\* after Y1 in the table below.

First of all, here, we provide a simple representation of progress made from their respective starting points in each Children's Community area.

**Table 3.1: Summary of Progress against the Analytical Framework**

	BUILDING	DEVELOPING	SUSTAINING
<b>Pembury</b>			
Overall		Y1* Y2	Y3
Strategic Development		Y1* Y2	Y3
Operational Management		Y1* Y2	Y3
Programmes & Services		Y1* Y2	Y3
<b>Smallshaw Hurst</b>			
Overall	Y1* Y2	Y3	
Strategic Development	Y1* Y2	Y3	
Operational Management	Y1* Y2	Y3	
Programmes & Services	Y1* Y2	Y3	
<b>Wallsend</b>			
Overall		Y1* Y2	Y3
Strategic Development		Y1* Y2	Y3
Operational Management		Y2	Y3
Programmes & Services	Y1* Y2	Y3	Y3

KEY: Y1\*=estimated starting point Y2=Year 2 judgement of progress Y3=Year 3 judgement of progress

### 3.1. Strategic Direction

All three Children's Communities have recognised the importance of setting, monitoring, sharing and adjusting strategic direction, with the role of governance groups crucial here. The Children's Communities have established sustainable structures for governance in their areas. There has been a common process for engagement: focusing in the early stages of the Children's Communities on widespread engagement with organisations and working with children and families to build the profile of the Children's Communities, share the Children's Community vision, and build networks and identify allies to support the development and implementation of the vision going forward. In each Community, this process of widespread engagement has subsequently narrowed down to focus on a smaller group of individuals in key organisations with a focus on driving forward strategic direction through Children's Community Boards and operational focus through theme groups and working groups. This process of engagement is time consuming, fragile and in need of constant renewal as individuals move on and organisations shift; and in early reports we described how Children's Community core teams had invested substantial effort and resources into partnership building.

In **Pembury**, following a first year of development, review and consolidation of governance structures in 2017, a more focused and purposeful approach developed in the second year, 2018. Even at this point, as we noted in the 2018 report, there was widespread recognition of the Children's Community as a driver of change and a high level of 'buy-in' from key local agencies, with a recognition that other areas such as children's health needed to be brought on board and shared accountability developed. A second three-year plan was developed at this point, aiming to set out clear delivery milestones and targets which link to the achievement of longer-term goals. As in other Children's Community areas, at this point, there was a recognition of the importance of and need for evidence and data, and to strengthen the use of evidence and data to inform decision making, but there were issues in relation to data-sharing – associated partly with the introduction of GDPR, and no dedicated data, evaluation and impact role in the core team.

By the end of the evaluation, in mid 2020, the Children's Community had continued to progress. The governance board continued to develop its strategic functions, benefitting from consistency in membership and strong representation from most relevant parts of the local authority, schools and the voluntary sector. The theme groups that were introduced at an early point developed well and were acting as drivers for service development and innovation. New relationships were being developed with health service providers to reflect the importance of physical and mental health issues for children, young people and families in the area. In the final evaluation year, there was renewed emphasis on working in partnership with local residents with the recruitment of a Community Development Worker and the resident's group continuing to be an important social resource, as well as becoming more influential in informing the activities and priorities of the Children's Community.

#### **Working with local residents: Pembury Residents Steering Group**

Building capacity in the community for mutual support and self-help is central to the Children's Community model in Pembury. The Residents Steering Group is a key mechanism for bringing local people together and for supporting the development of local groups and activities. The group also informs the strategic direction of the Pembury Children's Community Board, either through identifying issues which are raised by the core team, or through attendance and presentations at Board meetings from steering group members. Membership of the steering group is open and fluid, and there is representation from across the estate. The group has grown in numbers and activity, moving recently to monthly meetings from quarterly. This has required a high level of resourcing and support from the community development worker.

By the end of the evaluation period, there was an ongoing commitment to shared accountability for outcomes for the Children's Community, which was evident at board and operational levels. The Children's Community in Pembury was increasingly reflected in place-based strategies and plans, with a growing recognition of the transfer of valuable learning from the Children's Community to other place-based initiatives in both Hackney and other Peabody estates. A commitment to shared measurement and evaluation continued to be a priority for future work.

### **Building a model for neighbourhood working: Pembury Children's Community**

One of the ambitions of the Pembury Children's Community is to develop a model for neighbourhood working which can be rolled out more widely and which influences place-based working beyond the estate. Over the past twelve months this ambition has started to be realised and the key features of the Pembury model have informed the development of place-based working across Peabody Community Foundation and Hackney Council. Aspects of the Pembury model which have been identified by local stakeholders as particularly important include:

- Local data and evidence – understanding the needs of local people as central to the development of activities and services.
- Co-production – a commitment to residents in the lead, and associated structures and resources to support the collaborative steering of the Children's Community vision with local residents.
- Support and engagement from strategic leaders in the area.
- Consistency and persistence – wider strategic influencing is only possible when there is a track record of joint working (and some successes) on which to build credibility.

In **Smallshaw-Hurst**, the first two years of the evaluation showed a focus on developing collaborative working, with the establishment in 2018 of a governance structure, comprising operational professionals and leaders in local organisations and service areas, with the next stage identified as engaging system leaders. Much work in the first two years was also spent on building mutual responsibility for outcomes, aiming to create a high degree of commitment to a shared accountability approach. The original Children's Community themes (parents, early years and learning; aspirations, education and employability; and being healthy, safe and supported) aligned with relevant Neighbourhood Plans and organisational targets, with the aim of integrating the Children's Community into local place-based strategies adopted by partner organisations including housing providers and the local authority.

In the final year of the evaluation, in 2019/20, work to develop a governance structure and strategic direction in Smallshaw Hurst started with an intensive process of relationship building to establish a 'coalition of the willing' by casting a wide net to provide an opportunity for all stakeholders in the area to be involved and targeting senior leaders (for example head teachers and leaders in the local authority). During 2019, the Children's Community established its governance board, chaired by the Principal of the local sixth form college alongside a wider network of other vital partners through its theme groups. It is important to note that a local community representative on the governance board is a vital step on the way to enable representation of local residents. A Smallshaw-Hurst Children's Community Strategic Plan was developed towards the end of 2019, containing principles to improve how local systems work, trial innovation and test and enable collaboration and setting the following priority areas for children and young people: early years; education, mental health and emotional wellbeing; and addressing challenges for teenagers.

In **Wallsend** the second evaluation year saw the creation of a new core team with a new Executive Lead strongly focussed on system change. An action-focused governance group was developed building on a new three year strategic plan. The Children's Community is built on a long-standing educational partnership and in the 2018 report, the evaluators noted there was a recognised need to move beyond education to focus on all outcomes. Throughout the evaluation, leadership of the Children's Community was felt to be strong, with good alignment with local and national

policy agendas (e.g. devolution). In 2018, there was a recognition of the need to proactively share leadership and shared accountability.

In 2019/20 clear strides forward were made. In relation to governance, a new Accountable Body was formed moving shared leadership and accountability to the fore, with the role of the community in setting the direction much clearer, with the work of the Story of Place team crucial here (see next Chapter), and the new Accountable Body structure gives a clear and sustainable way forward for the next stages of the Community. Education and schools remain at the heart of the Wallsend Children's Community: that is a key strength, and in Y3 the strategic leaders worked hard to build a focus that is inclusive of organisations working across public and third sector organisations and services, to engage them in understanding Wallsend as a system, within which all services and organisations have a part to play. The work of the Executive Lead, Community Coordinator and latterly the Data, Impact and Evaluation Officer continued to be very important to the development of the community, well respected across services.

The new Accountable Body with its MoU and structure provides a strong focus for the future; this needs to be monitored to ensure this provides a sustainable platform for development, in relation to meeting its purpose, membership and engagement of members. The overhaul of the strategic direction of the community developed by the Executive Lead has ensured that the place-based planning and strategy develops in line with local needs, and clear goals are now in place. These need to be continually reviewed and developed for the Children's Community to be sustainable in the longer term. There continues to be a commitment to shared measurement, and evaluation and evidence is a strong focus.

### **Building System Leadership Capacity in Wallsend**

Building capacity for system leadership has been a focus in the Wallsend Children's Community where there has been a strong strategic focus on building collective understanding amongst stakeholders of the local system through gathering and analysing evidence from a range of sources. The 'River' or 'Riverbank' analogy was developed and elaborated during 2019 by the Wallsend Community Coordinator to enable individuals and organisations to understand their place in the local system supporting children and families. In brief, the metaphor draws on a story in which villagers rescue and take care of children they find floating down a river towards them, ultimately understanding some of them need to go upstream to try to prevent it happening. The story is elaborated to enable organisations to consider their role [if the river is the local system] and thereby understand how services and how they work together to make the local system work.

In summary, over the course of the evaluation, changes in the strategic direction of the Children's Communities have included:

- Increasing involvement of residents as partners in the Children's Community and efforts to build local capacity to enable co-produced solutions to local challenges.
- The development of sustainable governance structures which have progressed from widespread engagement to focused collaboration with a core group of key stakeholders.
- Using theory of change tools to plan and review the direction and strategic goals of each Community.

- A focus on the 'whole child' and on orienting the system towards prevention and early intervention which is shared between stakeholders and is increasingly informing wider strategies and approaches.

### 3.2. Operational Management

In **Pembury** in second year of the evaluation in 2018, it was evident that the core team which had been leading the Community since its inception were seen to have been very effective at facilitating coalition and partnership building and engaging with the local community. A multi-layered approach to communications making good use of strong community links benefiting from the visibility of afford by the presence of the Children's Community presence in the Pembury Community Centre.

At the time of the 2018 report, a new three-year plan was in development on the basis of a review of progress against the first three year plan and in the context of the overall theory of change. At that stage there was some progress on data sharing, albeit slow.

At the end of the evaluation period in mid-2020, the core team continued to play a critical role in supporting, convening and facilitating capacity for wider systems change. However, the increasing focus on joint working at operational level, particularly through the theme groups, brought additional capacity to the Community, aligning with organisational priorities and bringing together resources. The presence in the Community Centre continued to enable the Children's Community to be visible, and a strong focus on relational working has also been important, leading to a sense that residents get to know, and value positive relationships with, individuals who are working at the community centre and across the estate.

Like the other communities, Pembury undertook a number of iterations of plans and its theory of change before settling into a degree of consistency, and a theory of change that is relevant and is used to inform the operational management of the Children's Community. Shared measurement was an area of significant activity in 2019/20, with ongoing surveying of residents and the development of a new survey tool to inform evaluation going forward.

At the end of the evaluation period, the core team continued to provide effective support for the Community. Going forward, it is useful to consider the inclusion of a role dedicated to evaluation and data as this will continue to be a priority for the Community and is currently undertaken only as part of other roles.

In **Smallshaw-Hurst**, the first two years form (2017-2018) marked a period of building the agenda (in terms of the pace and focus for change, and in relation to foci of the Community) largely led by the Children's Community core team. By Year Two, theme working groups were set up and a governance structure was forming, with a developing recognition amongst local stakeholders of the Children's Community and what it aims to achieve. Engagement was stronger in some service areas than others due to organisations facing their own internal pressures. At this point, there was no formal communication strategy in place; this was to be developed once the governance structure is in place.

In this early period the core team developed links with data controllers as part of data and asset mapping. It was noted that two original core team members left at the end of Year Two, so there was a period of rebuilding (as in Wallsend), and - as in Wallsend - the continuity of the lead was important to maintain stakeholder relationships and local knowledge.

In the final evaluation year, 2019/20, the core team focussed on the need to develop community involvement to give it legitimacy and ensure it is resilient and sustainable

in the longer term. There has also been a feeling that the community voice is often missing from the system, meaning that services do not match need and are reactive to problems, rather than tackling root causes. The core team held back from engaging the community until it had established relationships with local services and organisations. In the third year, this engagement included the collection of 'community voices' to deepen the Community partnership's understanding of what it is like to live and bring up children in Smallshaw-Hurst, gathering evidence informed by and linked to Wallsend's work to survey and speak to residents to get their 'Story of Place.' In relation to informing services the core team has worked closely with local stakeholders, building willingness in local services to take a longer term perspective, and helping them to see different ways of working. This recognises that in many parts of the system the delivery of services has a short-term reactive focus, which can be characterised as 'fire-fighting'. By providing capacity to take a longer-term perspective, the Children's Community has embedded local understanding that the system can re-imagined to better understand and target root causes.

### **Involving local residents: Smallshaw-Hurst Pop-Ups**

Pop-up events were held in local communities to support the gathering of baseline data on community needs in Smallshaw-Hurst. These were very informal and crucially organised by a local community worker as a known and trusted individual in the area. The pop-ups provided an opportunity for sharing information about the Children's Community via local community workers to residents, and for residents to discuss and raise issues to help inform the future planning of the Children's Community.

The events were popular with residents. A local, and family-friendly approach meant that they were accessible, with no travel costs or need to find alternative care for children (free activities and gifts for children were provided). They also provided an opportunity for the Children's Community to identify opportunities to support local groups and activities and help with access to funding.

In **Wallsend** the first year of the evaluation (2017) could be characterised by a focus on coalition and partnership building; and in 2018 the focus was on building a smaller more tightly focussed governance group linked to a new three-year plan looking to foster system change. And although recognised as an issue previously, communications and engagement were prioritised recently in the plan, alongside the engagement of children and families now being prioritised via ethnographic 'Story of Place' study and a cross-Wallsend survey of children and young people in all schools.

### **Understanding the experiences of local people: The Story of Place**

The 'Story of Place' is a good example of how the Children's Community recognised the need to develop approaches to understand the experiences of local people. Funded by the Ballinger Trust, and supported by researchers at Sunderland University, two local residents were employed to use ethnographic techniques to understand the lived experiences of local children and families. Learning from this work was applied to help shape local services, and this proved particularly important in during the lockdown period in Spring 2020 when many services struggled to engage with local people. This approach was mirrored in Smallshaw-Hurst.

System capacity and system building were priorities for the core team over the second and third years of the evaluation with the goal expressed by the Executive Lead in the 2018 report of aiming for partners to move beyond seeing their local system from their operational perspective and "to move beyond lenses and look at the system as a whole." The River metaphor (see boxed summary in previous section) has proved a helpful way to enable this to occur. Communications and engagement were another focus of the Children's Community core team throughout the tenure of the current Executive Lead. Following recommendation in the 2018 report, a communications plan was developed and put in place. The Story of Place ethnographic initiative supplemented by a range of surveys undertaken and supported by the evaluation lead, proved vital in the current Covid-19 emergency in helping services and the Children's Community partnership identify needs, and support the provision to help meet these needs.

Shared measurement and evaluation was a further area of intense activity, since the recent arrival of the new Data, Impact and Evaluation Officer. In the 2018 report, evaluators noted that there was unanimous agreement that the current core team had the right skillset and competencies for their roles, and this has deepened, with the development of system approaches. The recognition - especially from the Community Coordinator - of a shift from a frontline role to having a key role in enabling other system partners to do their frontline work more effectively, collaboratively and in an informed way - is a crucial shift in moving to a sustaining community.

In summary, the changes in operational management that we have seen have included:

- The development of communication strategies which focus on engaging partners and residents in the work of the Children's Communities.
- Use, evaluation and development of theories of change approaches to guide strategies and plans for delivery.
- Consolidation of Children's Community core teams, and their roles in providing capacity, skills and momentum for local systems change.
- Development of approaches to data, evidence and shared learning, although in all Communities there is further work to do to strengthen this further.

### **3.3. Organisation and Services**

In **Pembury**, as well as having strong visibility amongst residents there was, by the second year of the evaluation in 2018, widespread recognition of the Children's Community amongst local services and agencies. At this stage, the Community was building examples of collaborative working in key areas: early years and pre-school; supporting young people; supporting families - and evaluation and learning from these initiatives was informing development of new approaches within the Children's Community and more widely across the borough.

### **Getting it right early: Pembury early years group**

The Pembury early years group addresses the Pembury 2025 goals of ensuring that children in Pembury are ready for school and that Pembury children feel happy and healthy and Pembury families experience positive wellbeing. The group includes representatives of services which include early years, schools, community development and family support. The focus of the group is on working with the 'triangle' of services, parents and the Children's Community to change the way that local services work with each other and the community, and to develop service models which can be rolled out to other areas. Interventions have included Ready for School, an innovative approach to improving home-school relationships and primary school transition through the employment of an estate-based teacher, and Playbox, which provides resources to support vulnerable families and early years development.

A focus on learning from interventions is key, and has identified that the factors that support systems change include interventions as a mechanism for relationship and trust building, data sharing, and being visible in the area – which was seen as supporting people to trust the Children's Community, and to know that there are people here who can help.

At the end of the evaluation period, in mid-2020, there was growing recognition, informed in part by the work of the theme groups, of the value of service collaboration, leading to the active seeking of opportunities for collaborative approaches to service development and delivery. Relationships between the Children's Community and early years providers and schools has strengthened over this period.

Service innovation and development continued to be an important focus for the Children's Community, working within the three theme groups and informed by the priorities of the local community. The 'triangle' of local services, residents and the Children's Community team was seen (in Pembury and the other Communities) as a useful and sustainable model for innovations which can be tested on the estate and rolled-out elsewhere or scaled up via the Board. A focus on interventions as a mechanism for relationship and trust building and shared data and learning were important in supporting systems change. By the end of the evaluation, the Children's Community had firmly embedded collaboration and a focus on the whole child and family into models of service delivery in the area. The emphasis for the future is on sustainability and ensuring that the trust of residents and stakeholders in the permanency of the Community is maintained.

In **Smallshaw-Hurst**, the first two years were focussed on building relationships with strategic stakeholders rather than delivery associated with the work of the Children's Community. This was because, although there is a growing recognition of the Children's Community amongst local stakeholders, at this stage there has been very limited action leading to change in local organisations and services. However strategic stakeholders and the core team recognised the key challenges of access to local services and the need to coordinate them, and the need to maximise strong local leadership of services to the benefit of the Community.

In the third year of the evaluation, significant work was undertaken with the aim of changing the local service culture and provide space for partners to collaborate to improve their offer to children, young people and families. Through its engagement activity and working groups the Children's Community provided many opportunities for new connections to form between services and to deepen and improve how they work together. For example, for the first time Ashton Sixth Form College developed links to early years providers, primary schools and the secondary school in the area. The



College had identified that challenges in the aspirations of its students from the Smallshaw-Hurst area held back their attainment and post college destinations but involvement in the Children's Community enabled leaders to meet representatives of its feeder schools, and to discuss ideas and spur on engagement activity such as creating volunteering opportunities for its students in local schools.

### **Growing Well in Tameside: Social Prescribing for young people**

Growing well in Tameside aims to address a lack of interventions targeted at improving the health of young people in Smallshaw-Hurst. The approach is based on a social prescribing model which is unique in the area where this type of intervention has previously only been used to support adults and older people. Central to the initiative are close relationships across services and detailed awareness of each other's services to enable cross referrals and signposting. This is intended to support a more holistic, whole person and long-term approach, as opposed to a particular provider focussing solely on the single issue that they have presented with.

The Smallshaw-Hurst Children's Community Team developed an evidence-base, drawing on data and local intelligence to identify issues and inform the development of a solution. This was then used as the basis for a series of conversations with key services and organisations that led to the development of the social prescribing model, intended for roll out in the coming phases of the Children's Community.

The key enabling factors for initiating this approach were identified as including:

- The role of the Smallshaw-Hurst Children's Community team in providing the capacity and resources to keep the development of the intervention progressing and to facilitate the engagement of services and agencies.
- The evidence base developed by the Children's Community was important in ensuring the intervention was rooted in data.
- Developing relationships between organisations that had previously worked in silos with limited knowledge of others.
- A focus on changing the system to be being more preventative, as opposed to reactive, and looking to develop interventions in an area where there was a clear gap.
- Building a test and learn culture, in which there was no 'fear of failure' for services.

In **Wallsend** in the first two years, from 2017 to 2018, there was limited knowledge amongst local service frontline staff of the Children's Community and their role within it, and in some cases there was no change over this period. However, in the second year the increased oversight of the new core team indicated that this was beginning to change. The core team and especially the Executive Lead were seen very positively by those involved in the evaluation, particularly in relation to facilitating cross-service working, which laid the foundation for this to change.

Engagement with key organisations and services was a strong focus in the final evaluation period, 2019/20, with both the Executive Lead and Community Coordinator working hard on this. A wide range of practitioners and frontline staff were being engaged with, and this was an ongoing focus as the Children's Community developed.

In summary, Children's Communities have brought service partners and stakeholders together to develop innovative responses to local community need which are rooted in local evidence and knowledge. The interventions that have been developed have

proved important mechanisms for building relationships and credibility and learning to inform future service development. There is improved collaboration and trust between service providers, and an increased appreciation of, and appetite for, working together to support vulnerable children and families.

# 4

## What changes have we seen for children, young people and families in the Children's Communities?

As outlined in the earlier sections of this report, the Children's Community approach is premised on the assumption that providing capacity and enabling support will allow local systems to work more effectively and preventatively to meet the needs of children, young people and families. In the longer term these changes to systems are anticipated to contribute to improvements in outcomes for children and young people growing up in the Children's Communities. In the Chapter three we outlined the changes that we have seen in services, relationships and systems which have characterised the period to which this evaluation relates. There is strong evidence that Children's Communities are acting as drivers for services, community organisations and residents to come together to identify and develop innovative solutions to local needs. The evaluation covers only the first phase of the development of the Children's Communities however, and we would anticipate further changes in local systems as the Communities progress.

This Chapter discusses evidence in relation to improved outcomes for children, young people and families. The evaluation has developed an impact and outcomes framework which intended to evidence both long term (area level) and progression (individual level) outcomes for children, young people and families. The framework identifies a set of core and progression indicators, which are populated respectively with publicly available secondary and administrative data, and data collected through surveys and interviews with service users in each area. Appendix 1 provides more detailed information about the development of the framework and the chosen indicators.

Thus far Children's Communities have been instrumental in facilitating improved co-operation and collaboration between services. However less evidence emerged regarding outcomes for children, young people and families, particularly at an area level. It is important to reflect on the reasons why this is the case. Firstly, it is important to acknowledge that there is some evidence of positive impacts from seed corn project evaluation especially in Pembury, and these have the potential to lead to wider potentially population-wide impacts within the Children's Community. Secondly, the Children's Community programme is a long-term change process. At this stage system outcomes are likely to be the main effects of the Children's Communities, which in turn should provide demonstrable impacts for children, young people and families.

## 4.1. Area-level outcomes

Before considering area-level outcomes it is worth reflecting that these indicators are unlikely to be particularly responsive to the small scale systemic and organisational changes which have been the early focus of the Children's Communities, at least in the short-term. It is also true that area-level indicators will be influenced by wider policy and societal changes which are outside the influence of local Children's Community systems, such as welfare reform or more recently, the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic (discussed further at Chapter 5).

Early years development outcomes in Pembury have been strong relative to both the borough and national benchmarks, reflecting its focus on early years. In Pembury<sup>1</sup> 73% of children achieved this standard, compared with 71% in both Hackney and England. Children's outcomes at Key Stage Two are behind those for Hackney and England, although they have improved in the three years 2015/16 to 2017/18 which indicates that the focus on school transition is appropriate. Levels of childhood obesity in Pembury are the highest in all of the Children's Communities at both Reception and Year Six and significantly higher than averages for Hackney and England. Furthermore, although levels of obesity amongst Reception age children in Pembury have fallen between 2008/9 and 2016/17 they have increased for Year Six children in the same period. This is not an area of focus for the Children's Community at present, but the data trends suggest that this should be an issue for future consideration.

In Smallshaw-Hurst outcomes data at this point data should be seen as baselines to build on. Early years outcomes are significantly lower than for Tameside and England, indicating that a focus here is appropriate. The data for 2017 show 63% of children achieved a good level of development, compared to 66% in Tameside and 71% nationally. At Key Stage Two there is a mixed picture amongst local schools with some schools performing very well, and others being closer to the national average. However, the picture is improving over time and all schools performed at or above the national average in 2017/18. Outcomes at Key Stage Four are also varied, with one local school consistently performing significantly below Tameside and national benchmarks and another performing consistently above. Levels of childhood obesity at Reception stage are above the national average and have increased slightly between 2008/9 and 2016/17. However, over the same period levels of obesity at Year Six have fallen substantially and in 2016/17 were below the national average.

In Wallsend Children's outcomes at Key Stage Two vary considerably depending on which school they are attending, although the majority of primary schools in Wallsend were at or above the national average in 2017/18. However, Key Stage Four outcomes are below North Tyneside and national averages and falling between 2013/14 and 2017/18. Obesity levels for children in Wallsend are slightly higher than those in England at Reception stage (although falling over time) and higher than nationally (and increasing) at Year 6. The proportion of unemployed people in Wallsend is above that for North Tyneside and England. This indicates a continuing need to address these issues which form the focus of several Children's Community initiatives, and associated more established programmes.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that school-based outcome measures at EYFS and KS2 in Pembury are for a single school, the Mossbourne Parkside Academy, as this is the primary school accepting the largest number of children living on the Pembury estate. Other local schools contain very small numbers of pupils.

## 4.2. Individual-level outcomes

For this reason, the evaluation team has sought to gather where possible data from children, young people and families, either through conducting interviews and focus groups or working with the Children's Communities to develop local data collection through surveys. We have also spoken to children and families participating in projects supported through Children's Community seed funding. It is important to note however, that it has not been possible to gather this data systematically across all the Children's Communities. As discussed at Chapter Three they are at different stages in their engagement with local residents, and in Smallshaw-Hurst and Wallsend in particular, the Children's Community teams have been careful to ensure that developing relationships with local communities have not been affected by data gathering processes for the programme evaluation. Nevertheless, a key recommendation outlined at Chapter Seven is for the Children's Communities going forward to prioritise a more a more consistent and systematic approach to capturing data which allows them to assess the impact of their actions on children, young people and families living in their areas. This is a significant gap in the evaluation and with hindsight, it would have been beneficial for the Children's Communities to have developed specific plans for the collection of this data from the outset of their programmes.

There is then inconsistent data available at this stage through which to assess the impact of Children's Communities on outcomes for children, young people and families across the programme. In Pembury, where the Children's Community has been able to collect local data and where the evaluation team has conducted a large number of interviews with residents who are involved in the governance of the Children's Community and with parents, children and young supported through Children's Community interventions there is strong evidence that the Children's Community is very well regarded locally and is a valued source of support and resources for local residents. In turn, people's perceptions of what it is like to live, and grow up on the estate are generally positive, and improving over the period of the evaluation.

*The community is very very good. Everybody seems to know everybody and everybody is very friendly. I think it's the general way the community feels that they're there to assist each other. I think everyone is in a similar boat so everyone is very friendly and willing to assist each other.*

*You know you're in a safe environment being in an estate is good.*

In other areas we have not been able to collect extensive evidence, but interviews that have been conducted suggest that there is not yet widespread recognition amongst local communities that Children's Communities are impacting positively on their lives. There are important implications here for future initiatives: the early engagement of residents, and a shared commitment to the systematic collection of local data through which to gather the views of local people on the impact of the programme, would have supported a more robust assessment of the impact of the Children's Community programme on outcome for children, young people and families.

# 5

## The Children's Community response to the Covid-19 pandemic

This Chapter considers the learning to emerge for the role of the Children's Communities in their local responses to the Covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 has provided a unique lens to highlight the work of a Children's Community and the benefits that a whole systems approach can bring. The points to emerge are drawn from a period of condensed fieldwork undertaken approximately three months after the lockdown was implemented. It involved focus groups with participants working in the three communities, including the core teams, as well as written evidence submitted by those who were unable to attend.

Although much learning emerged it is worth reflecting that the longer term, mainly secondary, effects of the pandemic are still emerging and evolving. These are likely to be long lasting and dynamic over time. At the time of writing, how local, national and indeed international communities will respond to the pandemic is very uncertain. Nevertheless, the evidence summarised in this section indicates that the Children's Communities will continue to be an important element of the responses in their locales.

Looking across the three Children's Communities, there is great commonality in their impact and learning. Evidence from respondents working across Children's Community and other local areas indicates that the whole systems approach has contributed to a quicker and more effective response to the changing environment in the three areas. Although changes are rarely so dramatic as in the case of Covid-19, this ability for systems to adapt efficiently and effectively has more general importance.

Underpinning this response lies the following features of the Children's Communities:

- An **established evidence base about the community** and the agencies working in the area. For example, sharing of practical knowledge developed through the Children's Community networks and services, such as access to benefits, Free School Meals, school resources and foodbanks, was particularly important in enabling a system-wide approach. As well **knowledge of the issues facing the respective communities** came both from direct experience of professionals and - crucially - survey and community engagement from the different Children's Communities teams, as well as careful use of social media (for example Facebook pages). This revealed the importance of Children's Communities as **a trusted source of information and support** which is able to shape local responses. In Wallsend, stakeholders with experience of working in the Children's Community area and outside it (e.g. a headteacher with schools both in and outside Wallsend; LA representatives) note that the response in Wallsend enabled more informed strategic responses and learning from Wallsend was being used in other areas to inform their response.

- **Existing relationships of trust with the community**, and networks with local services, enabled an almost immediate organisation of support to vulnerable people. For example, in Smallshaw-Hurst, the Children's Community brought together agencies, 3<sup>rd</sup> sector and local community actors and organised activity to ensure a co-ordinated response with activity that complimented one another and provided a single point of contact. In Wallsend and Pembury, these responses linked to key organizational 'homes' - in Pembury, the Community Centre; in Wallsend, the schools. Prior to the Children's Communities, these relationships tended to have weak ties and/or siloed into sectors. As such, the speed of the response in the three areas would not have been same without the Children's Communities.
- **Agencies who are committed to collaboration**: working together flexibly to identify and fill the gaps in services, whilst avoiding duplication. For example, in Pembury Children's Community having a lead in key local organisations – a housing association and a local authority – working together to coordinate the response at an estate level meant that responses were joined up across services. That this buy-in to collaboration and systems working lay in senior executives also meant that the Communities has swift access to critical decision making.
- Facilitating community action so that those who can are able to come together, with support, to develop their own response to the challenges facing the areas. This included work by the Children's Communities to increase their community's capacity for mutual aid and **establishing infrastructure to support resident-led responses** which has facilitated a rapid mobilisation of community. For example, Smallshaw-Hurst Children's Community has been able to establish a voluntary workforce of over 20 residents to collate and distribute activity packs, designed to reduce stress and engage children and families in positive activities, to nearly 200 families.
- When needed the core teams have coordinated and **added additional capacity and utilised targeted investments from Save the Children UK** (see box below) to support the community and the work of agencies. As the Executive Lead articulated: "Save the Children repurposed its funding, and invested £10k in emergency response grants, supporting families struggling financially. Grants were for families needing refuge, or going from refuge to a house, e.g. needing furniture, clothes. Schools are working directly with families".

#### Utilising Covid-19 emergency funding

Save the Children UK and the Children's Community funders provided two types of repurposed funding to the Children's Communities:

- Firstly, Children's Communities direct funders agreed to change how those funds were used to directly address Covid-19 in each locality.
- Secondly, Save the Children UK undertook a wider repurposing exercise which brought £1M of funds to an emergency response grant programme.

Wallsend and Smallshaw-Hurst each used £10K of their repurposed funding to be used as grants in their locality. Additional funding secured through a UK appeal to increase the number of grants that can be delivered in the UK also included additional grants (beyond the initial £10K) for each Children's Community. Of the in-area repurposed funding, Smallshaw-Hurst, also put £15K towards data and devices for families in the area. Through funding applications, Smallshaw-Hurst has also brought in an additional £25K to support the community through Covid-19. At the time of writing in summer 2020, the grants were due to be made available to Pembury.

The response of the Children's Communities to Covid-19 has accelerated change, and demonstrated the value of the Children's Community approach, leading to some key learning points for the future, principally to:

- Draw out and communicate clearly to local services' the explicit benefits of the whole systems approach to promote further buy-in.
- Use this period of purposeful joint working to stimulate further medium and longer-term planning for the development of the whole systems approach across the Children's Community partnerships.
- Continue to engage with local families and children to help inform service delivery, cementing the evidence/intelligence gathering sharing role of the Children's Community, particularly as the nature of the issues facing communities evolve.
- Support further community action so that there is a growing culture within the neighbourhood of people looking out for each other.



# 6

## What difference have the Children's Communities made?

Chapters three and four outline the evidence that it is possible to present at this stage in relation to the changes that we have seen in Children's Communities. As discussed, at this stage these have been primarily around changes in systems and services, although where we have been able to collect data from local residents there are strong indications that the Children's Community model is contributing to positive change for children and families. As the Children's Communities develop, we would anticipate that further evidence of outcome change will emerge. In this context, this chapter focuses on the role of Children's Communities in effecting change in local systems to identify what difference the Children's Community approach has made.

### 6.1. Providing capacity

The Children's Community core teams have been crucial in providing capacity and resources to facilitate change, and there was consensus across all the Children's Communities (including interviews with partners and stakeholders) that without the catalyst of the Children's Community teams. The teams have generated momentum, brought together services and residents, developed evidence and data, and crucially have energised a diverse range of groups and people to work together to improve the life chances of children and young people.

### 6.2. Connecting and facilitating

A relentless commitment to bringing people together, building relationships and connections, and facilitating collaboration has been crucial to this approach. It has taken a significant amount of time in all the Communities to get the necessary people on board from the community through to those delivering services, and this process is ongoing. Key to this have been the 'hooks' for engagement including community events, working with agencies to support shared agendas and providing evidence and challenge which is pertinent to the objective to achieve better life opportunities for children and young people in the Children's Community areas. The role of metaphor - for example, the 'Riverbank' in Wallsend (see boxed example in Chapter 3) - has been fruitful in enabling partners to understand their role in the system.

The focus in Children's Communities on building organically through strong relationships (as opposed to specific funding streams) is likely to ensure that the Communities are more resilient and sustainable over the longer term and contrasts this approach with other partnership working which is often tied to a funding stream and breaks down when funding ends. For example, the establishment of strong relationships between Children's Communities and local schools have enabled the development of joint community and school responses to the needs of local families across a range of agendas which include early years, home-school engagement, and exclusion, and which provide a firm foundation for continued collaboration.

### **6.3. Using data and evidence**

The Children's Community teams have invested heavily in getting to know their areas, and this has also been time and resource intensive. Two of the Children's Community teams have dedicated analytical support and this has been important in supporting partners to share and analyse data, and is a model which could usefully be replicated elsewhere. Using data as a catalyst for conversations around the needs of local communities has been beneficial: collection and analysis of data by the Children's Community teams through for instance the 'Story of Place' in Wallsend (see boxed examples in Chapter 3) and other ethnographic work in Pembury and Smallshaw-Hurst have enabled discussion and challenge about what services look like, what is there, the language that is used and what it means. Data has hooked in stakeholders who want to understand more and respond to the issues/challenges it raises.

### **6.4. Modelling different ways of working**

The Children's Communities have provided resources (through seedcorn funding) and mechanisms for service innovation. Their focus on joining up stakeholders with influence across a child's life, supports services to be preventative rather than run the risk of being reactive and helps services to see the bigger pictures, not just their own delivery.

There are examples of successful projects which have improved educational transitions and outcomes, and are improving physical and mental health services for children and families in the Children's Community areas. But it has also been important to acknowledge that innovation can often involve small practical initiatives that have the potential to make a significant difference. Examples include a football boot exchange (which enables children who have grown out of their boots to swap them for a pair that someone else has grown out of) developed with a local community sports club in Smallshaw-Hurst and joint working between schools and the Children's Community in Pembury to provide meals to vulnerable families in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **6.5. Building relationships with children, young people and families**

The Children's Communities have promoted community voice, which can be missing from local systems change. They have emphasised the importance of being led by people living and working in the area. Community involvement provides legitimacy and ensures that the Children's Communities are more likely to be resilient and sustainable in the longer term. The Children's Community teams have added capacity to enable community engagement and capacity building.

## 6.6. Learning and reflection

Finally, the Children's Communities have strengthened capacity and appetite for shared learning in local systems. They provide a 'safe space' for services to think about how they work and where they fit in the wider system. The emphasis on developing communities of learning and test and learn approaches means that there is no fear of failure or dependence on achieving metrics, which might characterise mainstream approaches. An example is the work of the early years theme group in Pembury on the Playbox initiative which supports early years development. The Community faced challenges in identifying children approaching the age of two living on the estate as Peabody, the local Children's Centre and the area health visitors all had different data sets. Time spent analysing this data to see if any children were missed suggested that most were connected to services in some way, but has also led to the redesign of data collection processes in the Children's Centre and the identification of health visitor engagement with families at 27 months as a good opportunity to link the Peabody family support offer and promote engagement with Playbox. Thus, the analysis of data which was collected initially for the purposes of measuring engagement, has been used to inform a collaborative approach to wider service access.

## Conclusions and Learning

The insights outlined in the preceding sections present a rich picture of systems change in the Children's Communities, outlining both the distance travelled thus far and priorities for future direction. There are implications for wider policy and practice to emerge from this learning, highlighting considerations or actions for policy makers, partner organisations, funders, and other systems change actors wishing to support future systems change in the Children's Communities. These are summarised below:

The Children's Communities have recognised the **importance of working with local people to change the way that systems work**. Involving local people as partners in systems change in the Children's Communities has brought a range of benefits:

- Bringing residents and organisations together to better understand local systems and open up opportunities for change.
- Identifying problems and solutions which are embedded in the 'lived experience' of residents.
- Developing and sustaining networks of local people helping each other and building social capital.
- Bringing assets in the forms of skills, ideas, energy and resources to support systems change.
- Testing and refining models of co-production which can be adopted more widely in areas or by agencies not directly involved in systems change.

Place-based approaches are now widely used and funded, however they can suffer from a lack of engagement and loss of momentum due to being led from outside the local community and accountable primarily to agendas that are not felt to link to local priorities. The Children's Communities provide strong evidence that a local approach, led from and by the community and addressing local issues is a powerful approach, with much stronger likelihood of being embedded in the locale rather than falling by the wayside. However there are continuing discussions across all three Children's Communities around how and when the representation of local communities should be addressed, including the consideration of how local voices and priorities are heard by governance groups. There are principled reasons for limiting or delaying the engagement of local people (including not wishing to over-promise what cannot be delivered, and a lack of capacity or focus for the engagement) but if systems behave in ways which are both more relational, and asset based, then the inclusion of residents in place-based systems change processes from the outset is critical, not least because in the absence of the early involvement of local people, power imbalances between service providers and residents are less likely to be challenged.

**For policy this means prioritising the involvement of local people in systems change initiatives, and providing resources accordingly.** There is scarcely an initiative focussed on the local that does not highlight the importance of engaging local people. The Children's Communities initiative provides valuable learning on how to avoid common pitfalls. Policy makers and funders need to ensure that a civic approach is outlined at the start with accountability to local people as a central principle and involving real commitment to action. This is in most cases a long term commitment, particularly in areas where the community feels marginalised.

**For practitioners it means involving local people from the outset in co-producing systems change.** This means engaging local people in defining the approach, as well as in implementation and reflection. There needs to be a real commitment to addressing the issues that matter to local people, even if they are uncomfortable for professionals. Areas like those served by the Children's Communities have a history of community consultation events which in the end are felt to lead to little. By carefully considering what is possible, and committing to action, it is possible to move forward. Similarly, community representation on project boards and steering groups is welcome but needs to be more than tokenistic.

There is clear evidence from the Children's Communities that **a long-term approach is needed**, and realistic timescales for change are required: early expectations might include initiatives becoming established as locally recognised and supported agents of change. In the medium term there may be growing momentum and the early signs of changes in system behaviours. Sustained systemic change will take longer.

**For policy this means a commitment to commissioning and resourcing long-term change programmes**, and acknowledgement that visible activities and 'hard' outcomes might take several years to materialise.

**For practice, there is a need to respond to the challenge of maintaining interest**, particularly amongst early engagers and in the absence of events which provide visible demonstrations of things 'happening'. This was done in the Children's Communities through attention to targeted and ongoing updates, and attention to small practical changes as well as bigger strategic initiatives. Projects - local interventions designed to make tangible change and draw together partners in the community - are a useful element here and time and resource to draw down funding for specific, galvanising projects can help to build momentum.

The promise of emergent, longer term system-led change - led by advocates in the system - is the goal for sustainable local change interventions. Yet this is not realistic without **dedicated staff** - seen to be independent from particular services - to move things forward. System leadership is complex and even a small 'core team' using a 'stewarding' approach is crucial; alongside explicit and real commitment to leading with accountability to the local community. **The policy implication here is that there is a need for ongoing resourcing for capacity for system stewardship.** It is helpful for dedicated staff to be hosted by key partners; but equally they need to be very clearly seen to be independent from the interests of any specific partners alone. This can be managed by clarifying this in staff job descriptions and review processes, and may be reinforced by external or shared resourcing of posts.

Changes in direction and emphasis are an inherent part of the process of reflection and learning. Issues that may initially be identified as priorities can become less pressing, and new priorities emerge, as systematic enquiry takes place. The Children's Communities have demonstrated the importance of access to data and evidence as enablers of discussion and challenge and as a hook to stakeholders who want to understand more and respond to the issues and challenges identified. **Data is important. Policy makers should ensure that there are resources and capacity**

**at senior levels to 'unlock' relevant public service data.** National and sometimes local Policy makers can be far more helpful in supporting local data sharing for positive ends, in line with privacy and data protection laws, by setting expectations.

**Practitioners should seek from an early stage to gather multiple sources of data** to help inform and evaluate the activities of the Children's Community. By this we mean there are a range of valid sources of knowledge which include children and families, communities and services as well as 'formal' sources such as research and evaluation. There may also be a need to equip local communities with the means to engage with and use high quality external evidence, which is now increasingly accessible (e.g. Early Intervention Foundation Guidebook, Education Endowment Foundation Toolkit etc) but may require support in application in context.

Finally, there is a strong narrative from our early experience of the Children's Communities of the central importance of **relationships as the drivers of change**. For policy, the recognition of the centrality of relationships as an organising principle for systems leads to a reframing of **reframing of the outcomes of place-based approaches in terms of relationships and system behaviours**. An appropriate approach is to consider impacts in relation to changing behaviours (individual/micro level), changing organisational approaches and cultures (meso level) and changing the wider local context (macro level), with interactions between these identified, and intermediate outcomes clarified. This leads to a policy focus on ensuring communities pay particular attention to collaboration, setting expectations of approaches aligned with these discussed in relation to practice (accountable and reciprocal; equitable and trusting), but also for policy makers (and funders and commissioners) to explicitly model and adopt core behaviours identified here: curiosity, openness, respect, trust and collaboration; and a process of definition of approach, investigation and then redefinition.

For practitioners there is ample evidence from the Children's Communities of **useful practice in building** positive relationships:

- Recognise that the process of getting people together around an issue takes time and plan accordingly. Particularly in the early stages, it is crucial to work with those enthused by the approach embodied by Children's Communities: local advocates are vital. A focus on deep rather than broad engagement, especially at the outset, implies a smaller number of highly engaged advocates, working on a clear, shared agenda.
- Build in lots of opportunities for informal contact and discussion which can lead to spin offs, new ideas and connections. This has been done through meetings and events, and using relevant 'hooks' to bring people into the conversation.
- Focus conversations on evidence (which might include 'hard' data, as well as local intelligence and experience) as a catalyst for thinking around what can be done. Collection and analysis of data in the Children's Communities has supported discussion and challenge about services and to engage stakeholders who want to understand more and respond to the issues/challenges it raises.
- Provide 'safe spaces' in which stakeholders can come together to think about how they work in the context of the wider system. Take a 'no fear of failure' approach which prioritises the development of a community of learning over delivery against a pre-determined set of metrics.
- Keep relationships, partnerships and collaborations under constant review. Aim to explicitly model what collaboration should look like in your practice. The key building blocks of empathy, equity, reciprocity, trust form the basis, and moving from the transactional to the truly invested, accountable to the local community.

- Think about data capture from the start. In particular, early sharing of data with residents can empower residents to make informed decisions, and for the Children's Communities to be co-produced on an equally informed basis.

In summary, this three-year evaluation indicates the range of positive outcomes, especially in relation to service collaboration and engaging, and working to meet the needs of local families. System change involves periods where there can seem to be little - or at least incremental - progress, which can feel disheartening. Yet there are times where things change rapidly and tipping points can emerge, and Covid-19 appears to have created one of these points. Communities need to use this as a one-off opportunity to deepen the Children's Community partnerships, using the clear and tangible benefits that have afforded services to meet residents' needs to learn and build on their role in their local responses to the Covid-19 pandemic to work local families, children and young people at the heart of each community.

# Appendix 1: Children's Communities Impact and Outcomes Framework

The Impact and Outcomes Framework is intended to evidence outcomes for children and young people. Because Children's Communities are long-term change initiatives it is important that the evaluation identifies beneficiary outcomes that are likely to emerge in the short and medium term as well as the longer term impacts.

This is being done in two ways in the context of this evaluation:

- A set of **core indicators** for the Children's Community programme has been identified to evidence area-level change over time. These indicators are populated with secondary and administrative data which is available at the small area level.
- In addition a set of **progression indicators** is being used to assess outcomes for beneficiaries of Children's Community interventions which may indicate progress towards the core indicators. These include indicators of 'perception' and 'satisfaction' change in the Children's Communities for which data is collected through surveys and interviews with children, young people and families.

## Core indicators

The first stage of developing the core indicators sought to identify commonalities in the three Children's Community's Theory of Changes.

The following common themes emerged:

- Ready for school.
- Provision and access to services.
- Progression and attainment.
- Post-16 destinations and employment.
- Wellbeing.
- Health.
- Safe and secure.
- Poverty/deprivation.



A range of potential indicators under each theme were identified, paying particular attention to the degree to which each indicator meets a set of criteria aimed at ensuring the chosen indicators are relevant and that data is accessible:

- Strongly correlated with improved outcomes for children and young people (evidence-based).
- Relevant to the work of Children's Communities working in different areas and contexts.
- Sensitive to change over the lifetime of the programme (10 years plus), with a reasonable degree of confidence that data will continue to be available over the duration of the intervention.
- Amenable to analysis at small area level (LSOA) or available for individuals.
- Available to Children's Communities and partners.

The emergent **potential** indicators are outlined at Table A1.1.

**Table A1.1: Potential core Indicators**

Theme	Indicator	Source
Ready for School	EYFS 'good level of development'	National Pupil Database
Progression and Attainment	KS4 Attainment	National Pupil Database
Post-16 outcomes	18-24 unemployment/UC rate (or NEETs)	DWP benefit data
Health	Obesity at Reception and Year 6	The National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP)
School engagement	School attendance	National Pupil Database
Safe and secure	First time entrants to the Criminal Justice System	Police National Computer
Wellbeing; Mental health, depression and anxiety	Mental health services referrals and care contacts for children and young people aged 0-18	NHS digital
Provision and access to preschool services	Number of Childcare and Early year providers in the area	Ofsted and NPD
Household poverty/deprivation	Income deprivation affecting children or eligible for Free school Meals	DWP benefits data or NPD
Safe and secure	Troubled Families	Local Authority
Safe and secure	Children in Need	NPD/Local Authority

The four indicators shaded in grey were identified by the Children's Communities, but it is questionable the degree to which their activities will affect these indicators in the face of wider external and structural factors. The likely low base size may also affect the meaningfulness of change.

Further discussion and refinement resulted in a final set of seven core indicators, across five themes, for which data can be collected across the programme. It should be noted that limitations in each of these indicators was acknowledged.

**Table A1.2: Children's Community Core Indicators**

Theme	Indicator	Rationale
Early Years	Early Years Foundation Stage Profile 'good level of development' (GLD)	Best available indicator of early development and school readiness. Whilst there is an acknowledged challenge associated with differences in practitioner-led assessment prior to and following transition to primary school the measure is consistent across different contexts.
Progression and Attainment	KS2 Attainment KS4 Attainment	KS2 attainment as an indicator of middle-childhood development and progress towards KS4 outcomes.  Strong correlation between KS4 outcomes and later life opportunities.
Post-16 outcomes	School retention post KS4 18-24 Unemployment (Job Seekers Allowance/ Universal Credit claimants)	School retention as an indicator of post-16 educational outcomes.  Unemployment rate 18-24 years as an indicator of young people's labour market attachment.
Health	Obesity at Reception and Year 6	Widely available measure of children's health.
School engagement	Unauthorised absence	Reliable proxy for other outcomes including attainment, wellbeing and safety.

### Progression outcomes

Progression outcomes are those which we might take as indicators of short to medium term impacts of the Children's Communities but also as indicators of progress towards the core indicator outlines above. A set of theme areas has been derived from the Children's Community Theories of Change and reviews of children and/or young person wellbeing frameworks.<sup>2</sup> The impact and outcomes framework draws on these multiple sources because none of those reviewed fully reflected the Theories of Change underpinning the Children's Communities. The themes are:

- Overall wellbeing/life satisfaction.
- General health.
- Relationships with family and friends.
- Satisfaction with the neighbourhood.
- Being ready for school.
- Doing well at school.
- Satisfaction with school/education establishments.
- Having the skills and competencies to be ready for work.
- Provision of support for schooling, education and employment that is available.
- The provision of leisure and social activities that are available.

<sup>2</sup> These include: the Education Endowment Foundation's measuring essential skills framework; the Every Child Matters framework; the Measuring National Wellbeing database; the Good Childhood index; and the OECD Child Well-Being Data Portal.

## **Measuring progression outcomes for beneficiaries**

The data for progression outcomes is intended to be collected via primary surveys because they (or similar equivalent measures) are not available via routinely collected secondary and administrative data collections. Additional data will also be gathered through qualitative work with residents and service users in the Children's Community areas.