



MANCHESTER
CITY COUNCIL

Youth, Play and Participation Commissioning Framework

1st April 2026 – 31st March 2029



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1. Introduction by Councillor Julie Reid

Manchester City Council's ambition is to provide high quality youth, play and participation services (YPPS) and sustainable outcomes for children and young people, practitioners and leaders. Our approach to deliver high quality services to children and young people is intended to promote and celebrate the diversity of the city, secure the active participation of children, young people and those working with them and capture other benefits such as community cohesion, reducing carbon emissions, civic pride, skills development, volunteering opportunities, and improving health and well-being. Manchester is proud of its diverse population and the city Council is committed to providing opportunities to connect young people from different backgrounds and help people learn about each other through a range of activities in various settings.

Our priority is to continue to meet the needs of our children and young people as well as youth and play providers. Our unique population enables our grants to take on a tailored approach in responding to diverse and sometimes sporadic needs. In meeting the needs of children and young people, we will continue to deliver a range of grant-aided services to assist in their development to thrive in the city.

The approach and funding investment demonstrates the Council's commitment and ability to work in partnership with the voluntary, community, faith, and social enterprise sector (VCFSE) to support children and young people via the provision of good-quality youth and play work. It provides informal education that focuses on the personal, social, and political development of participants. This increases youth participation, enabling children and young people to develop their voice and influence decision-making in a meaningful way, helping to build our young community.

The YPPS Grants Programme 2026-2029 aims to assist organisations financially so they can deliver the desired outcomes, by building on the assets of the VCFSE, promoting enterprise and social value. We expect applications to the fund to show very clearly how their proposals will help achieve the outcomes and their implementation of youth work and/or play principles and values.

It should be noted that the key principles and indeed the framework were developed from and have been built upon learning and reflection of our most recent grant funding of youth & play in the city, from January 1st 2024 – March 31st 2026.

The aims of this funding and the YPPS include but are not limited to: a) fulfil our Statutory Youth Duty 507b; b) contribute to the achievement of our ambition to become a UNICEF UK 'Child Friendly City' and c) fulfil the priorities identified in the Our Manchester Strategy 2025-35.

I want to thank every individual and organisation working hard to develop Manchester's children and young people.

Councillor Julie Reid

Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education

2. Important note

Following a high volume of applications in the previous round, we anticipate strong interest in this upcoming funding cycle. Given the potential for applications to exceed the available funds, it is likely that some applicants may not receive the full funding requested. While we strive to support as many applicants as possible, we encourage you to plan accordingly and consider alternative funding options where feasible.

This framework sets out Manchester City Council's (MCC) vision and commitment for commissioning youth and play services for children and young people. It is aimed at and will inform potential service providers, residents, colleagues and Elected Members of our commissioning approach. Hereafter the term commissioning is changed to the grants programme, given the money to be distributed will be in grant form.

3. Strategic context

National context

Updated in September 2023 Section 507B of the Education Act 1996 places a statutory duty on local authorities to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, that young people aged 13 to 19 (and up to 24 for those with learning difficulties or disabilities) have access to sufficient leisure-time activities and facilities for their well-being and personal development. The duty also becomes the responsibility of MCC funded youth and play organisations to jointly achieve sufficient and effective implementation of the duty:

- Service Delivery - Providers must deliver youth services that align with the local authority's vision and meet the needs of young people.
- Collaboration - Work closely with local authorities to ensure services are integrated and complement other local youth provisions.
- Monitoring and Reporting - Regularly report on service outcomes and effectiveness to the local authority.

There are nine essentials of the 507B local youth offer outlining the key components that local authorities and funded partners must work together to ensure a comprehensive and effective youth and play service. These are:

- I. Needs Assessment - Conduct regular assessments to understand the needs and preferences of young people in the area.
- II. Inclusivity - Ensure services are accessible to all young people, including those with disabilities and from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- III. Quality Assurance - Maintain high standards in service delivery through regular monitoring and evaluation.
- IV. Youth Participation - Involve young people in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of services to ensure they meet their needs.
- V. Partnership Working - Collaborate with other organisations, including schools, health services, and voluntary groups, to provide a coordinated approach.
- VI. Provision of Information - Make information about available services easily accessible to young people and their families.
- VII. Safe Environments - Ensure that all activities and facilities are safe and welcoming for young people.
- VIII. Sustainability - Develop services that are financially and operationally sustainable in the long term.
- IX. Review and Adaptation - Regularly review the local youth offer and adapt it to changing needs and circumstances.

These essentials help local authorities create a supportive and engaging environment for young people, promoting their well-being and personal development.

These responsibilities aim to create a supportive environment that fosters the personal and social development of young people, helping them to become active and engaged members of their communities.

Working to deliver the above via granting funds to local providers and collaboration work will enable the Council to fulfil its statutory youth duty.

Providers should be aware and familiarise themselves with the emerging National Youth Strategy.

Local context

Manchester is on a journey to become a UNICEF UK-recognised Child Friendly City. This initiative aims to ensure that children and young people have a meaningful say in and benefit from the decisions, services and spaces that shape their lives. Key aspects of Manchester's plan are:

- Children's Rights - Training for local politicians, council staff, and partners on children's rights
- Community Involvement - Engaging children and young people in decision-making processes
- Action Plan - Developing a detailed plan to address the identified priority areas over the next two to four years

The voluntary sector plays a crucial role in this initiative by:

- Providing Support Services - Offering essential services such as mental health support, educational programs along with youth and play activities
- Advocacy and Representation - Ensuring the voices of children and young people are heard and considered in policymaking
- Collaboration - Working with the council and other partners to implement the action plan and achieve goals set by children and young people

By working together, Manchester aims to create a city where all children and young people feel safe, heard and able to flourish.

The new Our Manchester Strategy 2025-35 please visit [Our Manchester Strategy 2025-35 | Our Manchester Strategy 2025-35 | Manchester City Council](#) outlines the city's priorities for the next decade, shaped by the ambitions of thousands of residents. It focuses on five key themes:

- A thriving and sustainable city – Supporting a diverse economy that creates jobs and opportunities.
- A highly skilled city – Developing world-class and homegrown talent to sustain economic success.
- A progressive and equitable city – Unlocking the potential of communities and ensuring inclusivity.
- A liveable and low-carbon city – Making Manchester a desirable place to live, work, and visit.
- A connected city – Enhancing infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth.

The strategy builds on the successes and challenges of the past decade, including population growth, economic development, and cultural investments. It was developed through extensive engagement with over 10,000 responses from residents across the city.

Further, Manchester's strategic approach to working with children and young people is guided by the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP). The latest plan, covering 2024-2027, focuses on several key priorities:

- Safety and Well-being: Ensuring children and young people are safe, happy, and healthy.
- Education and Skills: Providing high-quality education and opportunities for skill development.
- Inclusion and Equality: Promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion, addressing poverty, and ensuring children's rights are upheld.
- Environmental Sustainability: Integrating environmental issues and zero-carbon targets into decision-making processes.

These priorities aim to create a thriving, sustainable city that meets the needs of all its children and young people.

Successfully funded youth and play providers are expected to plan and link the local and national priorities in their delivery of varied services by using youth and play work principles.

4. National curriculum for youth work

The next section explains the principles that can be applied to deliver on a variety of priorities, interests and issues pertaining to children and young people.

The National Youth Work Curriculum can be found here [National Youth Work Curriculum - National Youth Agency](#)

Particular attention should be paid to the 10 youth work curriculum outcomes.

5. Play work principles

Please visit the Play England website for further information visit, [Play England](#)

The principles are linked to UN Rights of the Child read more on: http://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/UNCRC_summary-1_1.pdf

All potential VCFSE organisations seeking funds are expected to utilise and demonstrate the national curriculum for youth work and the play work principles to assist in their delivery to meet children and young people's needs.

6. Funding Priorities

When assessing applications for funding, it will be essential to ensure that projects align with key priorities that support meaningful, high-quality youth and play work. The following priorities will guide the evaluation process, ensuring resources are allocated effectively to projects that meet critical needs and deliver lasting impact:

- Quality – Ensuring high standards in project delivery in relation to play work principles and the national youth work curriculum that is safe and welcoming.
- Collaborative Work – Work in partnerships that strengthen outcomes for children and young people and provide access to other services.
- Youth Voice – Delivering regular activities that amplify and enable children and young people to participate in decision making forums, social action and volunteering.
- Value for Money – Demonstrating cost-effectiveness and impact.
- Targeted Delivery – Focusing on areas of greatest need, particularly those identified through deprivation indices and areas with limited or no existing provision.
- Inclusivity – Promoting accessibility and equity for all children and young people. Including those with protected characteristics and meets the aims of the [Equality Act 2010](#)

Commitment to young carers

As part of our commitment to young carers, all successfully funded organisations must meet one of the following criteria:

Option A – Already a Young Carer Aware Organisation and have achieved or are working toward the FREE Manchester Young Carers Award. We will request evidence for this including: A brief outline of your current approach, and the name and email address of your Young Carer Champion.

Option B – A commitment to become a Young Carer Aware Organisation. You agree to work with the Manchester City Council's Young Carers Operational Lead to develop this awareness and practice. To do this, please complete this [Expression of interest form](#).

Organisations will be asked about the two available options during the second stage of the application process (see page 8 under the heading of Key dates for information on the two-stage process).

Use of libraries

Providers are encouraged to build links with their local library (funding is not dependent on this). This can include sessions when only young people are allowed in the library – for example at times outside the library's usual opening hours. If you would be interested in using a library for some of your session delivery, please indicate this in your response including the name of the library where possible, and we will assist you to link into the library service. Visit the Manchester City Council website for the list of libraries <https://www.manchester.gov.uk/directory/14/libraries/category/1957>

Costs that can be funded

The programme can fund core and delivery costs associated with delivering your activities, including but not limited to:

- Direct delivery of sessions and projects including residentials
- Salaries
- Volunteer costs
- Management and administrative costs – no more than 10% of the total delivery costs
- Premises costs
- Utilities and overheads
- Equipment for delivery
- Partnership project costs

This programme will not fund:

- Sports and activities that do not **effectively/explicitly demonstrate** youth and play work outcomes and principles.
- The purchase of vehicles, land or buildings and major refurbishment.
- Projects where the main aim is research/evidence gathering.
- Promotion or affiliation to a specific religion or religious activity.
- Promotion of political parties, political campaigning or lobbying activities.
- Exclusion or discrimination against any group based on belief, background, or identity.
- Costs of activities taking place outside Manchester local authority boundaries except for residentials, exchanges and project work where the sole purpose is for the development of children and young people via direct face to face delivery.
- Any spend on capital investment (equipment costs will be capped at £500 per item).

7. Available funding

The grants programme will commence from 1st April, 2026 for up to 3 years to 31st March 2029 (subject to yearly Council funding availability). We appreciate that effective provision for children and young people is best delivered via long-term grants over a period of years enabling consistency and certainty for providers and children and young people.

Grant amounts

The total available in this funding programme is £1.62million per year. Applicants can apply for a small single year or multiple year grant as listed below:

Funding Level	Amount
Small Single Year Grant only	Under £10,000
Multiple Year Gant	Over £10,000

Small single year grants will be available for applicants on an annual basis. If you are awarded a multiple-year grant, you **cannot apply** for a small single-year grant.

Organisations cannot apply for more than 50% of their annual turnover. In line with Councils financial regulations applicants cannot apply for more than £500,000 over a period of three years.

Key dates

The funding round covers a 36 -month period from 1st April 2026 to 31 March 2029. This is subject to Council funding being available each year.

This funding round follows a two-stage process to ensure fair and efficient allocation of resources. This process ensures that only the most suitable candidates proceed, making the application process more streamlined:

- Expression of Interest (EOI) – In the first stage, applicants complete an EOI form. This serves as an initial screening to assess eligibility based on predefined criteria. It helps determine whether applicants meet the fundamental requirements before moving forward.
- Full Application – Those who successfully pass the EOI stage will be invited to submit a detailed application. This second stage allows applicants to provide more comprehensive information about their project, objectives, and how they intend to utilise the funding. If successful, and as in previous years it is highly likely that a final stage of negotiation will be required to finalise grant amounts.

The timeline for the application, evaluation and award process is:

Stage 1: Launch & Information

The Youth, Play & Participation Service will host two webinars and one in-person meeting for potential applicants. These sessions will provide essential context, rationale, and details, along with a Q&A segment to address any areas requiring clarification. These will take place on:

- In person meeting - Tuesday 10th June from 15:30 to 16:30 at Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester, M2 5NS – visit Eventbrite to book on to this session <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/meet-the-funders-youth-play-work-grant-information-tickets-1376175711599?aff=oddtcreator>
- First webinar - Thursday 12th June 2025 from 10:30 to 11:30 - visit Eventbrite to book on to this session <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/meet-the-funders-youth-play-work-grant-information-am-tickets-1376043837159?aff=oddtcreator>
- Second webinar - Thursday 12th June 2025 from 18:00 to 19:00 – visit Eventbrite to book on to this session <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/meet-the-funders-youth-play-work-grant-information-pm-tickets-1376165661539?aff=oddtcreator>

Stage 2: Application period

- EOI information advertised week beginning 26th May 2025.
- Closing date for EOI at noon 27th June 2025.
- Appraisal of EOI applications week beginning 30th June 2025.
- Applicants will be notified of the outcome by 11th July 2025. If your EOI is successful, you will receive an invitation to submit a full application. The full application form will be sent electronically.
- Full applications to be submitted by Sunday 17th August 2025.
- Applicants will be notified of the outcome of their full application during week commencing 15th December 2025. If we can notify you earlier, we will do so. The time between submission and notification is due to the Council's approval and committee review processes.

Stage 3: Due diligence

Due diligence will be conducted for applicants progressed beyond the EOI stage.

The following evidence and documents will be collected at the application stage or when notified of successful EOI.

- Your governing document (constitution, articles of association, etc.).
- Safeguarding policy (including your named safeguarding lead).
- Health and safety.
- Data protection.
- Equal opportunities.
- Financial overview.
- Copies of your insurance cover certificate. You must have £10M liability cover.
- Your annual accounts/report for at least the last 12 months

Stage 4: Decision-making and grant award

If you are currently receiving funds from the YPPS, your current monitoring and statistical data will be used in the assessment of your application.

- The grant making panel will meet and assess applications from 17th August 2025.
- Applicants informed of decisions week beginning 15th December 2025 subject to approval and committee processes.
- Delivery will be expected to commence on the 1st of April 2026.

8. Workforce development

Our approach recognises the importance of the VCFSE in providing services for children and young people in Manchester. To support and enhance delivery the YPPS aims to support the sector to develop their workforce, we will work with the sector to address key areas including but not limited to:

- A commitment to increasing the number of professionally recognised youth & play workers. The YPPS will separately fund levels 2&3 Joint Negotiating Committee's (JNC) youth work qualifications. We will also fund accredited level 2 Play work practice qualifications.
- Continuous professional development (CPD): safeguarding, issue-based, capacity building, organisational development.
- Support to enhance quality assurance: peer (workforce) review training, monitoring, recording and evaluation, young ambassadors training etc.

9. Quality assurance

The need for funds granted and the resulting procurement activity to be undertaken within a quality assurance framework is critical to achieving success and continuous improvement and to ensuring that resources are targeted effectively.

In terms of this funding, we will use a standardised performance management framework for all funded youth and play providers; this will involve the setting of clear targets and the use of Views as the data system to monitor performance and measure impact. All successful organisations will be provided with training and be provided with a license to use Views.

Views will be a:

- a) Record keeping system of children and young people's information, engagement with provision and evidence of their learning. Views can help measure the real impact of provision on young people's lives, including measuring learning outcomes/accreditations/Duke of Edinburgh's Award & other qualifications.
- b) Provision for qualitative data which MCC can access, providers can share this information anonymously.
- c) Provision for quantitative data and demographics.

Additionally, quality assurance, impact and monitoring processes will be carried by using a supportive, transparent and a developmental approach. Providers successful in their applications and in receipt of funds are expected to:

- a) Be visited by the YPPS – Informal process with the aim of collaborative learning. Visits will be carried out to all funded providers during session times. YPPS staff will have a document to complete during the visits which explores; management of sessions, activities on offer, implementation of youth work and play work principles, safeguarding and feedback from children and young people in attendance.
- b) Be visited by Young Ambassador – Trained young people to conduct announced visits to assess session delivery from their perspectives.
- c) Provide timely updates to the Views system for monitoring. The YPPS service may request further information based on the monitoring submitted.
- d) Give evidence on the 8 play work principles and on the national youth work curriculum.

This information will be collated into an annual report and shared with provider organisations.

10. Value for money

There will be close links with procurement and contracting colleagues within the council and other bodies to ensure that all services are contracted in accordance with local standing orders and procurement regulations.

The Local Government Information Association defines contestability as being "the process of considering different supplier options, rather than just considering changing the management, method or processes of the existing supplier". Promoting a mixed market in the delivery of public services is a key component of the government's public service reform agenda. Ensuring grant makers, users, and funders of public services get the best value for money from a mixed pool of providers is crucial to service improvement and sustainability. The Council's approach supports the need to work to the principle of contestability in terms of

widening the market to create more suppliers of youth and play services. The procurement approach will utilise several principles that will be applied to secure value for money. These are as follows:

- Cost effectiveness without compromising quality.
- Competition will be sought.
- Required rather than desired outputs and outcomes.
- Added value through innovation and creativity.
- Accountability and transparency.
- All viable sourcing options will be considered.
- Transactions will be streamlined to ensure efficient use of resources.
- Administrative processes kept to a minimum to avoid bureaucracy.
- Continuous improvement and learning from experience through ongoing relationships and the joint effective management of the relationships.
- Focus on improving services for the future rather than maintaining services of the past.

Proof of good value for money is in concluding that the services received were worth the price paid. For services for children and young people this will be increasingly measured by their outcomes achieved in relation to the budgets committed.

As outlined above, to demonstrate value the points above will become established procurement practice within the grants to deliver youth and play services.

Real living wage plans

Manchester City Council is dedicated to promoting fair pay across all sectors, including the VCFSE, which is based on the cost of living rather than the government's minimum wage. The Council's funding programmes, such as the Our Manchester Voluntary & Community Sector (OMVCS) Fund including the YPPS Fund, require applicants to outline their progress towards paying the Real Living Wage. This initiative ensures that funded providers are aligned with the city's commitment to fair wages and helps support the sustainability and well-being of their employees.

We would also encourage you to use Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) rates set by the National Youth Agency for those members of staff who are JNC qualified youth workers. There are two grades within the JNC framework, youth support worker and professional youth workers. The JNC rates can also be applied for qualified play workers.

Diversifying income

We recognise that local, national, and international factors can impact funding availability and applicants may not always have guaranteed financial support. Additionally, we understand that many organisations often rely heavily on a limited number of funding sources. As strong advocates for the youth and play sector, we are committed to supporting you. If your application is successful and you require assistance, our service will collaborate with you to develop and implement a strategy to enhance your financial resilience by diversifying your income streams.

11. Who can apply

Individual organisations from the VCSFE sector who meet the listed criteria are eligible to apply:

- Registered charity.
- Charitable incorporated organisation.
- Community-interest company limited by guarantee.
- Community-interest company limited by share (schedule 2 with 100 per cent asset lock only).
- Community-benefit company registered as an industrial and provident society.

In addition to the above, **your organisation must:**

- Be applying for funding to deliver open-access, universal youth & play work for children and young people aged 5 to 19 (up to 25 for care leavers and those with additional needs and/or disabilities). Demonstrate clear and effective implementation of youth voice throughout your organisation and your planned activity.
- Be based in the city of Manchester and be a registered organisation.
- Have staff delivering provision who are suitably qualified. Organisations applying to deliver youth work or play work **must have youth work or play work qualified staff in place to manage/deliver it.**
- **This funding must only be used to deliver services to children and young people who are residents of the City of Manchester.**
- Be constituted and have a bank account in the organisation's name.
- Have at least three trustees or directors (who are not related to each other and are not paid shareholders).
- Have a set of objectives that allows you to undertake the activities you're proposing. The objectives of your organisation must relate to youth and play work or positive activities for children and young people. This will be cross referenced against the information available via the Charities Register.
- Be value-driven, for the social good.
- Demonstrate a commitment to reducing carbon emissions.
- Comply with the Council's statutory obligations under the Equality Act 2010.
- Provide services or activities that are not religious or party-political in nature (please note that faith groups can apply but not for activities related to worship or the promotion of a particular faith).

Applicants will be asked to confirm they meet these requirements at the expression of interest stage, which will then be confirmed at due diligence should you submit a subsequent successful application. Any organisation not able to provide evidence during due diligence will be unsuccessful in receiving funding.

Individual & partnership applications

The YPPS will prioritise applications from partnerships, but individual applications are still welcomed and will be considered on their own merit. They must demonstrate local collaboration with other organisations/services.

Organisations can apply on an individual bases to deliver youth & play work city wide, area/district wide or in smaller geographical areas. If organisations chose to submit applications on an individual basis, **they cannot be included within any partnership applications elsewhere**, this decision has been made in the interest of ensuring funds are distributed as effectively as possible across the city.

An organisation **cannot apply as a lead partner in more than one application** but may also be a named partner from other partnerships in different areas. Named partners can be present in multiple partnerships across the city.

Organisations can apply in partnership to deliver youth and play services city wide, area wide or in certain geographical areas.

Where a partnership wishes to apply to the grants programme, one organisation must complete the application on behalf of the partnership, known as the lead partner. Other organisations in the partnership application are known as named partners. There must be at least three organisations in a partnership application (**lead plus at least two named partners**) and all partners must be involved in the delivery of provision in order to submit a partnership bid. A maximum of 10% management/administrative costs can be claimed by the lead partner.

Lead partners will be expected to:

- Confirm that all partner organisations named on the application meet the fund's eligibility requirements and undertake due diligence on partners.
- Take responsibility for distribution of funds to partner organisations.
- Confirm how any conflicts in the partnership are to be resolved.
- Be responsible for the timely submission of monitoring information on behalf of the partnership.

Partnerships will be expected to have an agreement in place that includes (but is not limited to) how they will work together to deliver activities, keep people safe (in terms of health and safety and safeguarding), monitor the work and pass on The EOI funding.

All formal partners will be expected to take part in the due diligence process. Officers will undertake due diligence of the partnership arrangements.

Who cannot apply

We will not accept applications from the following:

- Private limited companies.
- Profit making organisations.
- Organisations unable to demonstrate at least 3 years of operation in Manchester (does not apply to small grants applicants).
- Organisations not offering open access universal provision (i.e. provision requiring referral or provision based in a school limited to its own students).
- Organisations charging more than a nominal fee for entrance.

12. How to apply

Applications must be submitted online via: the smart survey, click the link to submit the online application www.manchester.gov.uk

A word document copy of application questions is also available to assist with your completion of the application – please email youth_team@manchester.gov.uk to receive a copy.