Arrivo | Consulting

Planet Youth in Scotland

PILOT EVALUATION

March 2023 - March 2025

Arrivo Consulting

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

braw data
altruistic analytics

Winning Scotland Preface

Welcome

I would like to thank everyone who has taken this journey with us - local partners, schools, services, parents and carers - and to Arrivo Consulting, our independent evaluator, for a thoughtful, rigorous assessment not only of the work under the Scottish Government funded two year National Pilot, but also – retrospectively – the previous two years as we began this work.

We especially want to acknowledge the six local pilot areas - Highland, Angus, Clackmannanshire, Argyll and Bute, Dundee and West Dunbartonshire - who faced challenges head-on and were honest and brave: not only in doing the work, but in sharing their experiences so that others can learn.

Why Winning Scotland

Winning Scotland exists to build the conditions in which Scotland's young people can thrive by equipping the adults around them - families, schools, services and communities - with the confidence, skills and evidence to act upstream. Planet Youth aligns squarely with that purpose. We became involved to help translate prevention from principle to practice: convening partners, stewarding investment, and making robust local data usable so communities can strengthen the protective factors that matter most.

As an agile, collaborative and pioneering charity, our role is to be a practical backbone - bridging policy and practice, amplifying community voices, and turning insight into action - while sharing learning openly so others can adopt and adapt what works. We work with adults (not directly with children) because sustainable change comes when the culture, relationships and everyday environments surrounding young people improve.

Our involvement in Planet Youth is therefore both strategic and values-led: a commitment to upstream, evidence-informed, whole-system change that helps make Scotland an even better place to grow up.

About this evaluation

This may be a more candid evaluation than is sometimes published; that feels important if we are serious about learning at country scale. If Scotland wants to do hard things, we must face hard truths.

Systems are complex and dynamic. We often talk about "systems" as if they are fixed and tidy; in reality, they are made of people - and people change, care, get tired and move on. Whole-system change happens when we work with reality, not just with theory.

Our hope is that the honesty in this report is received in good faith, as a call for change and an invitation to join us. We are sharing our journey, warts and all, and we look forward to working with everyone who is striving to make Scotland an even better place to grow up.

What Planet Youth brings

Planet Youth is a primary-prevention methodology rather than a single intervention. It mobilises coalitions to strengthen protective factors in the family, school, peer and leisure domains, guided by robust, repeatable population-level survey data. The ten-step process emphasises community-led action, long-term effort and fidelity to core principles backed by high-quality, locally meaningful data. In short: Planet Youth is a vehicle for making prevention practical, visible and accountable.

Our highlights

- *Pilots established and expanded from 5 areas to 6*
- *The number of participating schools rose from 13 (across 5 areas) in 2021 to 24 (across 6 areas) in 2023 with an average participation rate of 80%. This year, we will hear from 8,000 – 10,000 15-year-olds from 40 high schools.*
- *Co-designing a robust theory of change with our communities which clearly lays out a roadmap and how we can measure success.*
- *Every pilot strengthened its implementation structures in Phase 2 involving more people, using data more widely, leveraging more investment in prevention and focussing on using data to drive change for children and young people.*
- *Partners in four pilot areas have committed local funding to secure continuation of Planet Youth locally.*
- *A wide range of successful local and national events, increasing awareness of both the approach, the data insights, and primary prevention across Scotland.*
- *Strong peer-learning and support across pilot areas.*
- *Continued support and investment at government level.*
- *Global interest in the Scottish pilot, with learning and insights shared from and with colleagues across the world.*

We've learned

- *Systems change is hard. It's much easier to put on activities and start projects than it is to change the underlying structures and systems, overcoming inertia and overwhelm in a system that already feels full.*
- *Upstream prevention is a challenge for systems and people dealing with crises right now.*
- *Prevention takes time and patience, generational change requires a long enough runway for changes to take root. Prevention spend must be valued and reported on to ensure it isn't lost in tough times.*
- *Families and children are ready for change and there are people, services and organisations energised to do things differently.*
- *There is nothing new in the Planet Youth model, much of the component parts have already been proven to work in Scotland but having a unified model, underpinned by robust data, brings people together under an umbrella of actionable hope.*

Concluding thoughts

The Scottish Planet Youth journey has already delivered substantial progress: stronger coalitions, wider data coverage, clearer practice, and growing local ownership. Most importantly, it has put primary prevention on the agenda - nationally and locally - and equipped partners with a method and a narrative for acting together on what matters most for children and young people.

The next step is not to "do more of the same", but to consolidate the learning into a Scottish Prevention Approach that keeps Planet Youth's data-driven strengths, speaks fluently to Scottish governance and funding realities, and makes it easier for services, parents and communities to play their part. With that shift - and modest national infrastructure – we believe Scotland can move from promising pilots to a confident, sustainable, prevention-first system.

Zahra Hedges

Winning Scotland, CEO

Executive Summary

Overview

Planet Youth is a primary prevention approach, based on the Icelandic Prevention Model which is designed to foster environments that help to prevent youth substance use by enhancing protective factors and reducing risks in the social environment.

Winning Scotland began working with five local authority areas in Scotland to pilot the Planet Youth approach in 2021. In March 2023, the Scottish Government provided funding of £1.5 million over two years to test the viability of the Planet Youth model for Scotland, and to explore the conditions needed for successful implementation and scaling. Six local authority areas piloted Planet Youth in this second phase of the pilot from April 2023 to March 2025.

Overall, while it is premature to judge Planet Youth's viability for Scotland at national scale, the National Pilot has made an important contribution to progressing a shared national ambition for prevention. The introduction of Planet Youth to Scotland successfully brought a focus to primary prevention, as a means of improving the lives of young people, and the pilot has provided rich learning and further momentum to develop future approaches to prevention in Scotland.

Key Findings

The evaluation highlights the distinctive added value of Planet Youth: its data-driven approach which provides unique insights into the risk and protective factors shaping young people's wellbeing, which supports locally tailored, evidence-based prevention strategies. By contrast, many of the principles and processes that underpin the Planet Youth approach - whole-system working, collaborative planning, and community involvement - are accepted, if not yet embedded, in Scottish policy and practice.

While progress in implementation across the pilot areas has varied, short timescales and a lack of shared understanding of the model resulted in weaknesses in the design of local approaches, which reduced fidelity to the core Planet Youth model and resulted in challenges in implementation. Consequently, the pilots have not yet demonstrated the model's full capacity in practice.

Although there are still unknowns about the transferability and viability of Planet Youth, the pilot phase has generated rich learning that is highly valuable for shaping Scotland's future approach to prevention.

This evaluation suggests that the future lies not in wholesale adoption of the Planet Youth model, but in using its principles to inform the design of a Scottish Prevention Approach tailored to the Scottish context. Delivering the Scottish Prevention Approach would require action at the national level to provide leadership for prevention and address the known structural barriers. This includes strong national leadership to embed prevention across government, work to build a shared understanding of primary prevention, and to raise public and professional awareness of protective factors.

Learning from the pilots
In Phase 2, challenges in converting the funding opportunity meant that the delivery window was shorter than anticipated. Despite these challenges, the Scottish Government's investment significantly boosted local implementation capacity:

- The number of schools that participated in the second round of data collection in November 2023 increased to 24 schools across six pilots. Scotland-wide participation averaged at the required 80%.
- Phase 2 saw an increase in implementation strengths: there were increased levels of activity to raise awareness and engagement, improved dissemination of data insights and improved use of data.

The development of implementation models in Phase 2 demonstrates the challenges of balancing local adaption with fidelity to the Planet Youth model, and while local approaches have varied, the implementation of the pilots has highlighted both enabling factors and barriers to inform future prevention approaches.

Enablers:

- Visible leadership and alignment with existing local strategies (e.g. prevention and wellbeing agendas) provided legitimacy and encouraged buy-in.
- Strong pre-existing partnerships and trust between agencies were critical, with areas that had an established collaborative culture able to mobilise more effectively.
- Skilled and trusted local leads - particularly those with community development and facilitative leadership skills - helped to foster engagement and ownership.
- Additional staff capacity, supported by national investment, accelerated progress, especially when dedicated co-ordinators were in place.
- Delivering tangible prevention activities, even at a small scale, built credibility and sustained momentum.

- **Key Challenges:**
  There was limited or absent multi-agency commitment to Planet Youth, and the lack of system wide leadership has been a key constraint on the capacity of the pilots to deliver system level change.
- Local coalitions lacking strategic authority or mandate for system change.
- Lack of effective governance structures, leaving lead organisations without the authority or mandate for system change.
- Limited capacity of partners to engage in the work of the coalition.
- Siloed, crisis-oriented and short-term funding models limited flexibility to resource prevention.
- Short-term funding enabled pilots but undermined stability, long-term planning, and community trust.
- Stakeholders faced pressure for quick results, which reduced focus on upstream prevention and weakened partner engagement.
- Years of disinvestment in community infrastructure eroded local capacity.
- Differing interpretations of primary prevention and a lack of national leadership for prevention left local areas without support to overcome systemic obstacles.

Conclusions and Key Recommendations
While the pilots faced significant challenges, they also generated valuable insights for continued momentum. Key recommendations from the evaluation include;

- There is a need for sustained national leadership to raise the profile of prevention, build shared understanding, clarify roles and manage expectations.
- Building a shared understanding of primary prevention, moving beyond Iceland examples to locally grounded examples and narratives from Scotland.
- Consider identifying an organisation with greater capacity to provide national leadership and take the Scottish Prevention Approach to the next stage.
- The cost of data collection/analysis is not sustainable at the Scotland level under the current model, scoping national offers and options to deliver on this must be considered.

At the implementation level there is a need to:

- Assess prevention capacity - at the strategic and implementation level – prior to implementation,
- Develop effective governance systems and specify how they integrate with existing planning/decision-making.
- Develop effective monitoring and reporting systems that feed improvement at the local level and evaluation at the programme level.

Scotland is now well-positioned to build on this learning to develop a Scottish Prevention Approach that is both evidence-informed and culturally tailored. With stronger national leadership, sustained investment, and clearer implementation support, Scotland can create the conditions for a world-leading prevention system that improves the lives of young people for generations to come.

Planet Youth Evaluation – Arrivo Consulting with Braw Data

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the evaluation

Planet Youth is a primary prevention approach, based on the Icelandic Prevention Model which is designed to foster environments that help to prevent youth substance use by enhancing protective factors and reducing risks in the social environment.

In 2020, following a period of scoping and development with local partners, Winning Scotland, a Scottish charity that seeks to improve outcomes for children in Scotland through innovation and catalysing change, made the decision to support the development of Planet Youth in Scotland. Winning Scotland engaged Planet Youth (Iceland) on a five-year license agreement to support the implementation and development of the programme in Scotland. Winning Scotland is the lead organisation in Scotland and manages and co-ordinates the programme support from Planet Youth (Iceland).

Winning Scotland began working with five local authority areas in Scotland to pilot the Planet Youth approach in 2021. In March 2023, the Scottish Government provided funding of £1.5 million over two years to test the viability of the Planet Youth model for Scotland, and to explore the conditions needed for successful implementation and scaling. Six local authority areas piloted Planet Youth in this second phase of the pilot from April 2023 to March 2025.

1.2 Purpose of the evaluation

Winning Scotland has developed a phased approach to the evaluation of Planet Youth in Scotland.

In the first phase, covering the period April 2021 – March 2023 (referred to as Phase 1), the evaluation retrospectively focused on exploring the early development of Planet Youth in Scotland to understand the progress in implementation in the period preceding the National Pilot, and to understand the issues and challenges which had affected progress in implementation and fidelity to the Planet Youth approach.

The second phase of the evaluation focuses on progress and learning during the National Pilot period, i.e., April 2023 – March 2025 (referred to as Phase 2). This phase of the evaluation builds on the learning from phase 1 to assess how the implementation has developed during the Phase 2 pilot, examining process, effectiveness, and outcomes, and emerging lessons to inform future delivery and policy, and with a view to informing the question: Could a Planet Youth approach work in Scotland, and under what conditions?

1.3 Method

This evaluation draws on a number of primary and secondary data sources.

- Desk research and secondary analysis of project documents and monitoring information held by Winning Scotland
- Collection of an online survey of coalition members across local areas, distributed by Winning Scotland to the coalitions
- Partner interviews conducted with key stakeholders, both in the coalitions and nationally

1.4 Limitations of the evaluation

The evaluation faced several challenges. The slower-than-anticipated pace of implementation across the pilot areas has influenced the evaluation design. Some elements of the original methodology, particularly those aimed at exploring programme impact, could not be delivered. The original brief changed, and the research methodology was adapted to reflect both the stage of progress and the capacity of partners.

Two recurring themes identified in this report are the limited capacity for local-level implementation and the lack of multi-agency involvement in delivering Planet Youth. These factors also influenced participation in the evaluation, contributing to mixed levels of partner engagement in interviews and the coalition survey. Where participation was limited, this has constrained the evaluation's ability to present a full picture.

While we have made every effort to reflect the information provided, we recognise that it can only reflect the perspectives of those who participated.

- Partner engagement in the evaluation

Some areas demonstrated strong collaboration and input to the evaluation while others had more limited input. As a result, the depth of information differs between pilot areas, which has inevitably influenced the level of analysis possible for each.

- Coalition survey

We disseminated a survey to coalition members to gather perceptions of progress and impact at the local level. We received 41 responses from five areas (and no responses from one area). More detail on the survey can be found in Appendix Two.

We received the largest numbers of responses from Argyll and Bute (19) and from Highland (12) where there are multiple local coalitions, and fewer responses from areas with only a single coalition.

Some coalitions are in the early stages of involvement with the Planet Youth process, resulting in more frequent "don't know" responses, reflecting limited exposure to the approach and resulting lack of knowledge and understanding of the principles and processes.

Among more established coalitions, responses to factual questions varied widely, indicating differing levels of familiarity with the process and plans, as well as varying degrees of engagement.

In some cases, survey findings differed from qualitative interview results; these differences are noted in the report.

- Limited monitoring information

The available monitoring information provided limited insights for the evaluation. It provided some information on activity at the local level but is not sufficiently detailed to fully inform key aspects of the analysis. That said, much of the 'work' in developing Planet Youth has been about building relationships and influencing. It is challenging to capture the activity and the outcomes of this work.

2.Introduction to Planet Youth

The Planet Youth model was developed from the Icelandic Prevention Model, a theory-based approach, developed by the Icelandic Centre for Social Research and Analysis (ICSRA) which demonstrated effectiveness in reducing substance use among teenagers in Iceland over a ten-year period, with those low levels sustained in the 10+ year period since then.

Planet Youth (Iceland) is an independent research consultancy based in Iceland that supports communities across the world to implement the Icelandic Prevention Model. Planet Youth Iceland now supports the roll-out of the model across 18 countries worldwide.

2.1 What is Planet Youth?

Planet Youth is not an intervention, but an improvement methodology to develop and deliver change in the social environment and in services via community-led action, data-driven decision-making and policy change.

A central theme in the approach is community engagement and collaboration to foster an environment that is resistant to substance use, assuming that the risk of substance use initiation among children and adolescents grows out of the social environment.

It is therefore a bottom-up community-building collaborative approach supported by top-down policy interventions where appropriate that seeks to deliver long-term action and change.

It is based on five guiding principles:

1. Society is the patient: It applies a primary prevention approach designed to enhance the social environment

2. Meaningful connection: It aims to enhance the connectedness between children and their families, the connectedness between parents, schools and other community organisations to create a supportive environment around young people.

3. It engages and empowers communities to make practical decisions using local, high-quality, and accessible data

4. It integrates researchers, policy makers, practitioners and community members in programme teams to develop solutions

5. It emphasises an authentic assessment of the problem and advocates the need for long-term intervention and adequate resources to address the problems.

The Planet Youth approach aims to improve health and wellbeing, including reducing substance use by strengthening the protective factors and reducing risk factors at the community level to create a positive environment for young people.

Surveys in schools provide data on the risk and protective factors in each community. Planet Youth Iceland supports the data collection. It advises on development of the survey and on data collection. The data is analysed by Planet Youth Iceland who produce reports for each school and community (or region) that identify the prevalence of substance use and other risk-taking behaviours and the risk and protective factors

The data helps communities understand their unique needs and challenges and is used to inform the development of interventions that increase the protective factors and reduce the risk factors across four domains:

- family,
- peer group,
- leisure (out-of-school) time, and
- school.

2.2 The Planet Youth implementation process

Planet Youth Iceland has developed an implementation model and a Guidance Programme to support implementation of Planet Youth. Through the Guidance Programme Planet Youth Iceland provides support and training to local areas to implement the process.

The implementation model is a 10-step process that guides communities annually (or biennially) through community capacity building, implementation, reflection and repetition. The core 10 steps are informed by the five guiding principles.

While Planet Youth Iceland recognise that there will be some variation in how individual communities implement each step, Planet Youth Iceland emphasises the importance of fidelity to the model, and that each step in the model should be addressed sequentially.

- Steps 1 to 3 focus on building the capacity for implementation: building engagement of partners, building a coalition, securing resources and raising awareness with schools and communities
- Steps 4 to 6 focus on implementing a rigorous system of data collection, processing, dissemination, and translation of findings.
- Steps 7 to 9 are designed to maximise community engagement in creating and sustaining the required changes in the social environment. This includes setting goals based on the data insights, then implementing actions designed to reduce the risk factors/increase protective factors, and levering changes in policy and practice to support the local goals.
- Step 10 is **Repeat.** The Planet Youth model is a long-term approach, and the intention is that the 9 steps are repeated annually to build the structures and processes which are required to change the social environment around young people.

3. Planet Youth in Scotland

Winning Scotland has played a pivotal role in introducing the Planet Youth approach in Scotland and in supporting implementation and development of the programme.

This chapter summarises the development and implementation of Planet Youth in Scotland. The timeline is visualised in Figure 1 on page 27 below.

3.1 Development of Planet Youth in Scotland

This section summarises the history of the development of Planet Youth in Scotland between 2018 and March 2025, describing the key milestones.

2018 – 2019: Research and scoping

Winning Scotland first started to explore the Icelandic Prevention Model (now known as Planet Youth) in around 2018.

During this period, awareness of the approach was growing in Scotland and local teams in Highland and Dundee were also exploring the potential of the Icelandic Prevention Model for their areas.

In 2019, Winning Scotland engaged external expertise to assess the scope for delivering the Icelandic Prevention Model in Scotland.

2020 – 2021: Development phase

In 2020, following a period consultation and planning with potential partners, Winning Scotland was successful in securing commitment from partners in five local authority areas to participate in the early piloting of Planet Youth. These areas were:

- Argyll and Bute
- Clackmannanshire
- Highland
- Dundee
- West Dunbartonshire

In April 2021, Winning Scotland engaged Planet Youth Iceland on a five-year license agreement to support the implementation and development of the programme in Scotland. Winning Scotland is the lead organisation in Scotland and manages and co-ordinates the programme support from Planet Youth Iceland.

Each of the local areas paid a £10,000 contribution towards service delivery and co-ordination support by Winning Scotland for implementation.

Winning Scotland secured funding from Baillie Gifford to support the development of Planet Youth in Scotland during 2021 - 2023. The funding allowed Winning Scotland to employ a Development Manager to co-ordinate the links with Planet Youth (Iceland) and support implementation in the pilot areas. The Development Manager was appointed in March 2022.

April 2021 - March 2023: Phase 1 of the Planet Youth pilot

With very limited staff resources, Winning Scotland supported the five pilot areas through the early stages of implementation, with a strong focus on building capacity for data collection.

- Co-ordinated the development of the pupil survey with the pilot areas
- Supported local areas to engage with schools and prepare them for data-collection
- Co-ordinated the training input from Planet Youth Iceland
- Provided advice and support on developing local infrastructure to support implementation of Planet Youth

- **First Data Collection: September/October 2021**

The first pupil survey took place in September/October 2021. Engagement with the pupil survey was very successful. 13 schools in the 5 areas participated and achieved a very high response rate.

- **National Development Manager post: March 2022**

With funding from Baillie Gifford, Winning Scotland was able to employ a dedicated staff member to support the development of Planet Youth in Scotland.

The additional post gave Winning Scotland the capacity to:

- Co-ordinate inputs/project manage the relationship with Planet Youth Iceland
- Provide facilitation and support to local areas to develop knowledge of the Programme and their capacity to implement.

While the data collection exercise was successful, progress in engaging partners and the wider community in the Planet Youth approach developed more gradually during this period. This was influenced by limited dedicated resources in the pilot areas and the need for greater focus on the early stages of coalition building (steps 1–3 in the model).

April 2023 – March 2025: Phase 2 – The National Pilot

In spring 2023, Winning Scotland secured investment from the Scottish Government of £1.5 million (£750k per annum over two years) to support a robust pilot of the Planet Youth approach in Scotland.

The funding enabled Winning Scotland to make an allocation of funds to each of the pilot areas to support implementation over the period from April 2023 to the end of March 2025.

- £525,000 was allocated to the five pilot areas in each year to support local implementation. This funding was to provide staffing/resources to support the development of the implementation structures, not for the delivery of activities or interventions for young people.

It also enabled Winning Scotland to increase its own capacity to drive implementation, and provide a more robust approach to programme management, development and evaluation.

- £225,000 was allocated for core programme development. This included national stakeholder engagement, a national conference, extended data sharing, policy and influencing, project management, evaluation and governance.

The funding also sought to expand the Planet Youth approach in Scotland, with a target to extend the approach into further areas and schools. This enabled the expansion of the number of schools involved in the second data collection exercise in October 2023.

3.2 Supporting implementation of Planet Youth in Scotland

Implementation of Planet Youth approach in Scotland has been supported by Winning Scotland and by Planet Youth Iceland.

- Winning Scotland
  - Winning Scotland is the national co-ordinator for Planet Youth in Scotland, co-ordinating the input from Planet Youth Iceland
  - Winning Scotland also provides support, training and guidance to the pilots in Scotland, as well as providing opportunities for shared learning and development for pilots.

- Planet Youth Iceland
  - Planet Youth Iceland has developed a Guidance Programme to support application of the Icelandic Prevention Model in other countries. The Guidance Programme includes support for data collection, analysis of the data, and provision of implementation guides, support material and training programmes to guide implementation.
  - In 2021, Winning Scotland engaged Planet Youth Iceland on a five-year license agreement to deliver the Guidance Programme in Scotland.

Winning Scotland has also supported the strategic development of Planet Youth in Scotland through targeted activities to increase awareness and commitment to the approach with national and regional stakeholders, and to secure further funding for continuation of the approach in Scotland.

3.2.1 Support for implementation of Phase 1

With no additional staffing, Winning Scotland drew on its existing staff team to develop and design the pilot and provide crucial support to the five pilot areas during the early stages of implementation.

- Co-ordinated the development of the pupil survey with the pilot areas
- Supported local areas to engage with schools and prepare them for data-collection
- Co-ordinated the training input from Planet Youth Iceland
- Provided advice on developing local infrastructure to support implementation of Planet Youth

In 2021, Winning Scotland secured funding from Baillie Gifford to employ a manager to support the implementation of the pilot. The post was filled in March 2022.

The post holder gave Winning Scotland a resource to provide:

- co-ordination of the inputs from Planet Youth Iceland and
- some support to the pilot areas to carry out awareness raising of Planet Youth and early development of the implementation structures.

3.2.2 Support for implementation of the National Pilot

The investment from the Scottish Government enabled Winning Scotland to build a support team to drive implementation, and provide a more robust approach to programme management, development and evaluation

- **Building the capacity of the Winning Scotland team**

In June 2023, Winning Scotland recruited a Programme Director to oversee the implementation of the National Pilot:

- The post was responsible for the governance of the funding arrangements and reporting to the Scottish Government.

In January 2024, Winning Scotland also augmented the central team.

- 2 new posts were recruited to support the strategic and operational development of Planet Youth in Scotland.
- One of these posts absorbed the role of the National Development Manager post (originally funded by Baillie Gifford) which ceased in February 2024.

As at March 2024, the new team consisted of:

- a Programme Director,
- a National Delivery Co-ordinator (co-ordinating and supporting implementation in the pilot areas) and
- a Strategic Development Manager (strategic development of Planet Youth in Scotland and developing future strategy around upstream prevention work).

The intention behind increasing the staffing of the central team in Winning Scotland was to increase Winning Scotland's capacity to support implementation of the Planet Youth in the pilot areas, and to extend its role in leading strategic developments around upstream prevention.

In Spring 2024 (the end of year 1 of the National Pilot) the Strategic Development Manager and the Programme Director moved on from Winning Scotland.

At the start of year 2 of the National Pilot, Winning Scotland used the change in the staffing complement to review the needs of the pilots and the programme development requirements. This led to:

- Expansion of the support available to local areas to strengthen implementation in year 2 of the pilot.
- An increased focus on strategic development of the programme.

- **Expansion of support to the pilots**

Based on learning from the first year of the pilot, the new National Delivery Manager has streamlined the reporting requirements and developed more relational and learning-based approach to reporting. The National Development Manager:

- convenes monthly meetings where 'leads' report on progress but also share challenges and learning,
- provides one-to-one support where required and brokers access to training etc in response to need,
- has also convened face-to-face learning events for leads to meet and consider shared challenges and opportunities.

In response to needs identified by local leads (challenges in engaging at the strategic level), Winning Scotland commissioned two external consultants (with senior level experience in public health and education) to provide additional 'on-demand' support and coaching in to local leads in developing strategic support and buy in to Planet Youth at the local level.

3.2.3 Implementation support: Learning and opportunities

This section identifies the key issues in the provision of support and how this has impacted on implementation.

Short-term funding of the central support team

Short-term funding of the central team (initially through an independent trust and subsequently through the Scottish Government) has meant that responsibility for Planet Youth has shifted within Winning Scotland. These transitions have contributed to some variation in interpretation of the guidance and have introduced discontinuities in the programme's development.

Change in Winning Scotland's role from 'partner' to funder

Previously, Winning Scotland's role with the local pilots could be characterised as co-ordination and facilitation. The Scottish Government funding has driven a shift in the role of Winning Scotland from 'partner' to fund-manager.

- Accountability to the Scottish Government for financial reporting has driven the need for more formalised reporting procedures.

- Accountability for the delivery of outcomes resulted in a greater drive from Winning Scotland to increase the pace of implementation and standardise the implementation approaches across the pilots (to better reflect the Planet Youth approach).

The pressure to increase the pace of implementation (set against the limited capacity of leads/pilots), the drive to standardise the implementation procedures and the increased level of reporting was challenging for leads/pilot areas and put a strain on relationships for some time.

There was also a shift in the power dynamic. Winning Scotland is a small national charity with existing relationships with many of the partners through its other work. As a funder, the relationship with some partners shifted as there was a tension between the desire for independence from local partners and Winning Scotland's desire to co-ordinate a coherent pilot

However, the development of the central team in Winning Scotland, and in particular the role of the National Delivery Manager (started Jan 2024) has improved Winning Scotland's capacity to provide support and to manage the relationships with the pilots. The postholder has driven significant improvements in the internal processes for monitoring, and has increased the level of support available for leads at the local level.

Nature and Level of Support from Planet Youth Iceland

Scotland was a relatively early adopter of the Planet Youth Guidance Programme delivered by Planet Youth Iceland. The nature and level of support have evolved over time, with new products and new guidance being developed to respond to emerging needs of Planet Youth adopters. However, as early participants in the Programme, there have been some gaps and inconsistencies in the support available to pilots in Scotland.

Winning Scotland's CEO describes the situation as "they are building the bridge as we are walking over it."

The gaps have also resulted in some duplication of effort for Winning Scotland as they have developed some support to fill gaps (e.g. Winning Scotland had developed templates for collection of qualitative data/case studies before Planet Youth Iceland proposed to do the same).

Gaps in support which have influenced effectiveness of implementation in Scotland include:

- Lack of capacity assessment

There was no official capacity assessment of new pilot areas when they adopted the Planet Youth approach. Lack of capacity of local areas to deliver the approach has been identified as a limiting factor in the success of the approach at the local level.

A Prevention Capacity Assessment[1] has been developed more recently but as early adopters of Planet Youth, this was not available to Planet Youth in Scotland.

Winning Scotland addressed this gap to some extent when inviting new areas to join the pilot in Phase 2. Based on the learning of Phase 1, Winning Scotland set new criteria for which aimed to ensure multi-agency involvement in local approaches.

- Capacity to adapt the approach for local contexts

While Planet Youth Iceland are the recognised experts in the Planet Youth approach, they have limited knowledge of the planning and decision-making structures in Scotland so cannot advise on how the approach fits (or needs to be adapted) in the Scottish context.

This has given rise to different interpretations of the role and positioning of coalitions and tensions over the 'fidelity' to the Planet Youth approach.

- Lack of clarity of guidance

Certain elements of the guidance provided by Planet Youth Iceland have lacked clarity, and the organisation's own interpretations have at times been inconsistent. This inconsistency introduces additional uncertainty and increases the risk of uneven or inconsistent application of the Planet Youth approach at the local level.

Poor take up of support

Although Winning Scotland has worked to improve the level and quality of support to pilots, there has been a low level of take up of the support available (this includes support available from Winning Scotland and training/support provided by Planet Youth Iceland.

This is linked to the capacity of the local leads. As previously reported the pilots are under-resourced and 'lead officers' are not dedicated posts.

There is an expectation from Planet Youth Iceland that all coalition members attend training to embed understanding of the Planet Youth approach, but (based on available monitoring information) the participation in training by coalition members has been low.

The concentration of training on a small number of staff in each area means that there are mixed levels of understanding of the Planet Youth approach at the local level.

Effective monitoring and reporting

The primary mechanism for collecting monitoring information from local pilots is the Process Follow Up (PFU) which is a monitoring form developed by Planet Youth Iceland.

[1] The Prevention Capacity Assessment (PCA) is a service offered to communities that supports the implementation of the Planet Youth Guidance Program. https://planetyouth.org/pca/

- The Process Follow Up (PFU) was designed to help Planet Youth partners to track progress in relation to the 10-step process.
- Area leads complete a report every six months which is submitted to Planet Youth Iceland.
- The data is analysed to create a 'scorecard' which aims to demonstrate the extent to which the area is progressing along the 10-step process and identifies the areas for development.

The reporting process is time consuming and perceived as burdensome by local partners. The commitment to reporting and quality of reporting by pilot areas has been mixed. The burden of reporting was increased in Phase 2. Winning Scotland developed a duplicate of the PFU to enable them to report on progress to the Scottish Government, (although this additional layer of reporting was stopped more recently as it added limited value).

Furthermore, the data collected through the PFU has not proved useful in providing information for tracking implementation in Scotland. Neither Winning Scotland nor the local areas routinely use the assessment report (scorecard).

Winning Scotland collects further information on implementation through monthly meetings with lead officers (and one-to-one meetings). Winning Scotland has also developed other tools to support reporting (e.g. case study templates). The limited capacity of leads means that additional requests for programme management information are often perceived as burdensome.

3.2.4. Opportunities for improving support for implementation

Developing effective monitoring and reporting systems.

The primary mechanism for collecting information on processes and outputs from local pilots is via a monitoring form developed by Planet Youth Iceland.

As previously noted, the data collected through this mechanism has not proved useful in tracking progress in implementation at the local level or to assess the effectiveness of the approach at a local or national level.

There is a need for effective monitoring and reporting systems that will feed improvement at the local level and evaluation at the programme level.

Developing a bespoke support package for implementation in the Scottish context

While Planet Youth Iceland provide expert support on the Planet Youth approach, generic and inconsistent guidance has influenced implementation. There is a need for guidance that is consistent and contextualised to the Scottish context.

For future development of the programme in Scotland, Winning Scotland should consider the development of a bespoke support package which provides clear and consistent guidance for use in Scotland.

There has also been some overlap and confusion over the role of Winning Scotland and Planet Youth Iceland in the delivery of support. There is also a need to clarify the roles and responsibilities of Planet Youth Iceland and Winning Scotland in the provision of training and support, as each offer differing expertise. This will ensure clarity and reduce duplication of effort.

There is a need to augment the training offer to support a whole system approach to prevention. Training is focused on understanding and delivering elements of the Planet Youth approach, but the evaluation has highlighted that a key gap in Scotland is training for:

- understanding primary prevention
- understanding the roles different partners play in primary prevention
- understanding whole system approaches /leadership of whole system approaches

3.4 Building National support for Planet Youth

In addition to its key role in supporting the local implementation of Planet Youth, Winning Scotland has also provided strategic leadership and contributed to the wider development of Planet Youth in Scotland.

In the second year of the pilot, Winning Scotland directed additional resources to the strategic development of the programme - raising awareness of, and commitment to prevention among decision-makers - with the aim of securing longer-term support for Planet Youth.

A pivotal element of the strategic approach was recognising the lack of consensus on primary prevention in Scotland. In response, Winning Scotland revised its movement-building strategy, placing greater emphasis on promoting the value of prevention itself rather than solely advocating for Planet Youth.

The activities aimed at building awareness and understanding of prevention have included:

- Winning Scotland convened a 2-day session involving a group of leaders from across different sectors to come together to "consider [their] role as individual and organisational changemakers in creating a country that prioritises prevention."

- Commissioning of a public affairs agency to develop strategic messaging to build the narrative around the role and importance of prevention in Scotland.

- Events to engage partners in practical and insightful discussions on the importance of prevention in Scotland.

- Placing articles in the Scottish press to raise awareness of Planet Youth and prevention.

- Briefings and meetings with senior civil servants and MSPs to raise awareness of Planet Youth and its contribution to prevention.

At the same time, Winning Scotland also commissioned a consultant to build connections with other national and local organisations with an interest in the prevention agenda to raise awareness, build collaboration across sectors, build allies and build the capacity of the movement for collective action to influence policy and practice.

While it is difficult to measure the impact of this work, stakeholders report that through the introduction of Planet Youth to Scotland, Winning Scotland has brought a focus to primary prevention at the national and local level.

Winning Scotland's continued advocacy for prevention has also resulted in securing further funding from the Scottish Government which will support continued development and testing of Planet Youth.

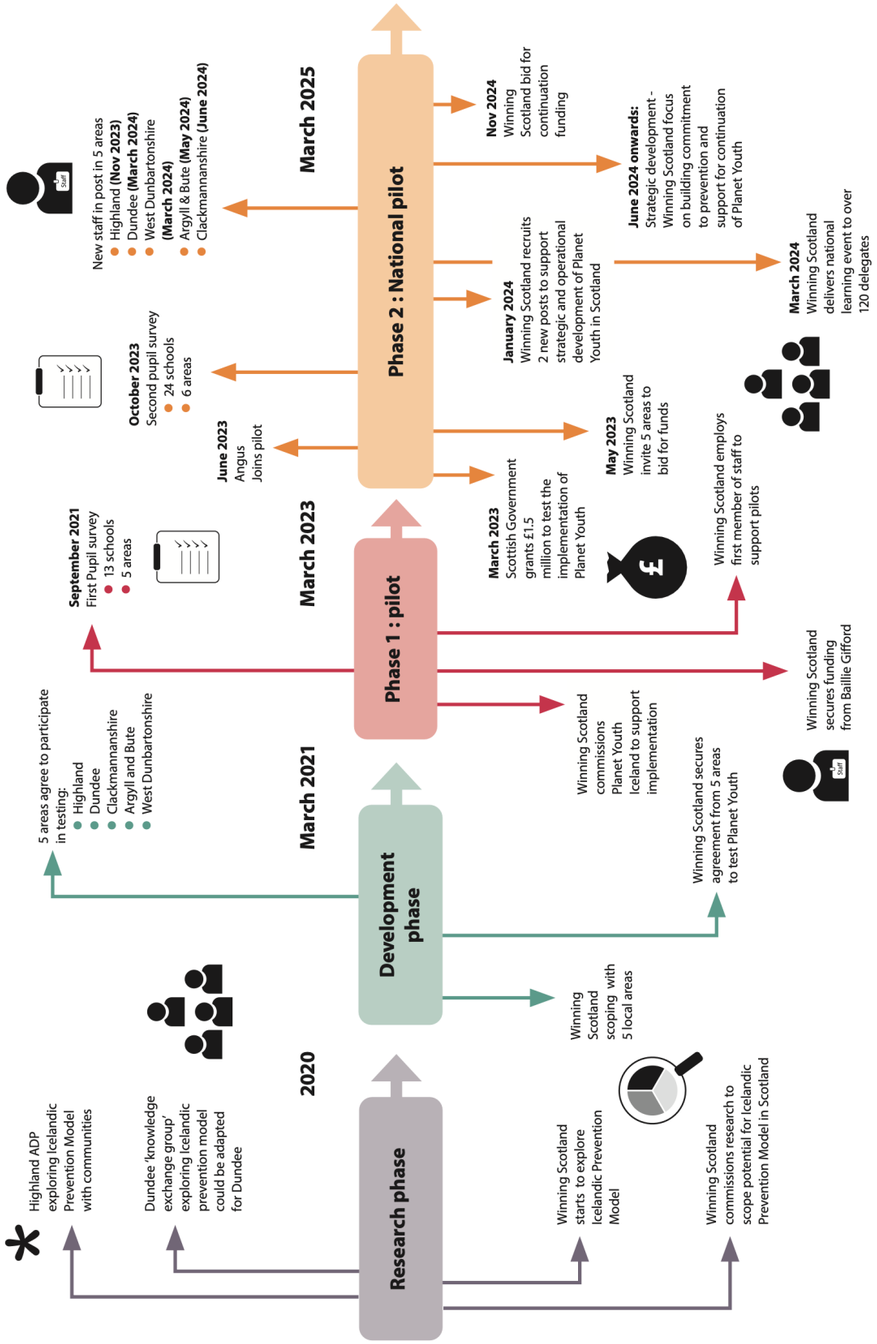

Figure 1: Timeline of Planet Youth in Scotland

4. Learning from Phase 1 of the Pilot

While the focus of this evaluation is on learning from the National Pilot (Phase 2), it is important to note that the development of Planet Youth in Scotland began before the Scottish Government–funded pilot.

This chapter summarises progress during Phase 1 of the pilot (April 2021 – March 2023) and explores the learning from the issues and challenges that shaped the development of local implementation models.

Weaknesses in some models not only limited progress during Phase 1 but also reduced capacity for implementation in Phase 2.

4.1 Implementing Planet Youth in Phase 1

4.1.1 Development of Local Implementation Structures

Five local authority areas participated in Phase 1:

- Argyll and Bute
- Clackmannanshire
- Highland
- Dundee
- West Dunbartonshire

Implementation was led by different agencies in each area. Structures evolved in distinct ways, reflecting local differences in infrastructure and capacity, as well as the approaches of the 'lead partner'. In all areas, a 'lead officer' was appointed, but this role was added to existing responsibilities rather than being a dedicated full-time post.

Table 1 identifies the lead agency in each of the pilot area and summarises the development of the implementation structures in Phase 1.

Table 1 Lead bodies and progress in developing implementation structures (Phase 1 2021 - 2023)

Pilot area	Lead body	Progress in coalition development
Argyll and Bute	Planet Youth was initially adopted by Argyll and Bute ADP, but lead role was taken by Argyll and Bute Council Education Department due to capacity to engage schools. During Phase 1, NHS Highland (Public Health) resumed involvement and is now a 'joint lead' alongside Education.	Very limited progress in development of coalition structures in Phase 1. • Minimal pre-adoption partner engagement led to low awareness and lack of strategic buy-in. • Early attempt to develop strategic coalition stalled. Leads began forming coalitions in two school communities, but progress was slow due to limited capacity of leads and lack of awareness across schools, communities, and agencies.
Clackmannanshire	Clackmannanshire Council (Education Department).	Adopted a single coalition model covering all three school communities. • Development hindered by inconsistent lead partner support due to frequent staffing changes and understaffing. • Partner engagement remained limited.
Dundee	Dundee City Council (Children and Families Department).	Established a two-tier model: (1) a strategic oversight group to build multi-agency buy-in, co-ordinate prevention work, and align planning/funding; (2) a community implementation group. • The strategic group was established with multi-partner involvement • Progress in development of the community implementation group was slow due to capacity limits within the lead body and limited partner engagement.

	Highland ADP had built awareness and partner support for two years before joining the pilot. Highland entered the Phase 1 pilot with strong buy-in and progressed rapidly, establishing a Highland-wide coalition covering all five participating school communities.	Did not create a new coalition; instead, tasked an existing group (Substance Use Prevention Strategy Implementation Group, a sub-group of the ADP) with responsibility for Planet Youth. This integrated Planet Youth into existing decision-making structures in West Dunbartonshire but limits wider involvement to enable community-led decision making.
	Highland ADP / NHS Highland (Public Health).	West Dunbartonshire HSCP, Health Improvement Team.
	Highland	**West Dunbartonshire**

4.2 Issues and challenges in implementation in Phase 1

As a new approach in Scotland, Planet Youth was implemented with limited prior knowledge and incomplete understanding of its core principles. This created weaknesses in local implementation models, slowing progress and reducing fidelity to the Planet Youth approach.

Lack of preparedness

Many areas lacked sufficient understanding of how to integrate core principles into their local models. This resulted in variable fidelity and missed opportunities to embed the approach effectively.

For example, the principle of building connectedness between schools, parents, and communities — with the school as a hub — was not fully factored into resourcing plans. Similarly, **Principle 5** (long-term intervention and adequate resources) was often overlooked, despite guidance recommending at least one funded post and a five-year commitment.

Even in areas with some prior knowledge, limited delivery experience created challenges:

> "We needed greater clarity of roles in the partnership – like whose role is it to do the parental engagement – that shouldn't all sit with the schools." (Strategic lead)

> "There was a lack of understanding — no strategic approach to how it would be implemented." (Lead officer)

Limited resources

No pilot area had a dedicated, full-time implementation role. Responsibilities were absorbed into existing posts, without additional capacity or senior leadership to drive the work forward.

Early focus on data collection

Onboarding focused heavily on data collection rather than coalition-building. In many areas, early steps in the 10-step Planet Youth process — securing multi-agency support, identifying resources, and building coalition capacity — were skipped.

Where there was little partner engagement before data collection, awareness and multi-agency support were low, slowing coalition development:

> "We should have set up our multi-agency partnership before we started." (Strategic Leader)

> "You need to get agreement at the start that this is the way to focus collective work." (Planet Youth lead)

Poor use of the data in Phase 1 contributed to lack of traction.

> "We need to translate the findings into action—without an action plan at the local level, Planet Youth will have credibility issues."

Limited strategic leadership
Several areas lacked strong strategic leadership in planning and implementation. Without senior leaders to confer legitimacy, influence, and convening power, Planet Youth struggled to secure strategic-level engagement from partners. Lead officers lacked the access and authority to fill this role. Lack of leadership also left implementation largely in their hands without clear strategic direction.
The absence of strong leadership support has influenced perceptions of Planet Youth's status, making it appear more as a local project than a shared strategic priority, and limiting the capacity of local approaches.

4.3 Learning from implementation in Phase 1

Weaknesses in early implementation structures meant overall capacity to deliver Planet Youth in Phase 1 was limited. While the pace of progress varied across areas, progress in Phase 1 was slower than anticipated across most areas.

Limited use of data for planning
The early emphasis on data collection, before effective coalitions were in place, restricted the ability to use survey findings for planning. Common issues included:

- No shared plans for how or where to disseminate /use the data.
- Sensitivities about negative press coverage.
- Concerns that school-level reports might reflect poorly on individual schools.

There is some evidence of limited use of data to inform actions within schools.
However, in some areas, data from the first cycle was not shared beyond the school (and in some cases not even within it) and in many areas, there was limited use of the data from the first pupil survey. Highland was the main exception, where the coalition identified actions in all four domains informed by survey insights.

Engaging schools
While schools were engaged in data collection, many areas struggled to involve them in data dissemination and implementation. This reflected:

- limited strategic buy-in from Education in some areas to drive engagement, and
- resource constraints within schools, (even where Education was the lead agency).

Engaging communities
Parent and community engagement was limited across Phase 1.

- The early focus on data collection also meant that there was minimal focus on awareness raising of Planet Youth and engaging communities in the early stage of implementation.
- The implementation structures did not have the resources required to engage with parents and communities.

5. Phase 2: Implementation of the National Pilot

In 2023, the Drugs Policy Unit at Scottish Government committed £1.5 million to support the development and testing of Planet Youth in Scotland over a two-year period (April 2023-April 2025). This was as part of their response to the Report of the Drugs Deaths Taskforce.

Scottish Government funding formalised the status of the Planet Youth pilot. A condition of the funding was to test the viability of the Planet Youth model for Scotland and to explore the conditions needed for successful implementation and scaling, shifting the focus from a largely self-paced, self-directed approach to one with clear accountability.

This chapter summarises the progress in implementation of the Planet Youth approach during the National Pilot.

5.1 Use and impact of the funding

The Scottish Government announced its £1.5 million investment in Planet Youth in March 2023. This funding enabled:

- an expansion in the number of pilots,
- an increase in the implementation capacity of pilots (each of the five pilot areas was allocated £100,000 in each of the s of the Scottish Government funded pilot to build their implementation capacity) and
- scaling up existing pilots.

5.1.1 Expansion in the number of pilots

On announcement of the Scottish Government funding in 2023, three local authority areas approached Winning Scotland with a view to joining the pilot.

Based on the learning from the first phase (the need for multi-agency buy-in to the model at the local level) Winning Scotland created a condition for entry; that new areas had to demonstrate multi-agency support and have sign off from three different organisations in the area. Angus was the only area able to meet this criterion.

Angus joined the pilot increasing the number of pilots to six.

- The pilot in Angus was jointly led by Angus Council, Vibrant Communities Dept and NHS Tayside, Public Health.
- Two schools participated in the data collection.

Angus joined the pilot after the Scottish Government investment was agreed and was not included in the original investment package. Winning Scotland made £25,000 available to Angus in the first year.

5.1.2. Increase in implementation capacity of the pilots

Winning Scotland invited pilot areas to develop proposals to increase their staffing/implementation capacity in May 2023. While funding was welcomed, the short lead-in time and the short-term nature of the funding has impacted on the effectiveness of the funding.

Key challenges

- **Funding readiness**

The slow progress in the development of the implementation structures in the first phase of the pilot meant that some of the pilot areas lacked capacity to respond to the funding opportunity.

In some areas, coalitions were still at an early stage of development and didn't have clear plans for implementation.

The short lead-in time gave little time to pilots to plan strategically for the use of funds. In some cases, proposals were driven by the funding opportunity rather than by long-term strategies or community need.

- **Recruitment challenges**

In most areas (except West Dunbartonshire who chose to commission a third sector organisation) increasing staffing capacity meant recruiting to public sector organisations, where recruitment processes are slow and inflexible.

Local job market challenges and difficulties in recruiting staff to fixed term contracts further hindered recruitment. When it became clear that recruitment would be delayed locally, Winning Scotland offered to recruit and/or host posts on behalf of partner organisations. This offer was not taken up, potentially due to considerations around local control of the staff resource.

The challenges in converting the funding opportunity and in recruiting staff have meant that new staff did not take up posts in most areas until Spring/Summer 2024, (except in Highland where staff were in post in November/December 2023).

As a result, the 'delivery window' has been significantly reduced, leaving most pilots with less than a year (Spring 2024 -Spring 2025) to progress in implementation during the National Pilot

- **Staffing models (building implementation capacity)**

The pilot areas developed different proposals for increasing their implementation capacity.

In all areas except Highland (where posts were filled in Oct/Nov 2023), posts were filled in March-July 2024, reducing the duration and impact of the investment.

Area	Staffing model	Timescale
Angus	Note that Angus received only £25,000 in the first year of the pilot. The coalition decided not to recruit part-time staff, but use funds to commission community awareness raising and engagement events (via third sector providers)	Delivered in May 2024
Argyll and Bute	Argyll and Bute is led jointly by Argyll and Bute Council (education) and NHS Highland (Health Improvement) The staffing model: • One full time (FTE) Health Improvement Advisor employed by NHS Highland (Health Improvement) • 0.4 FTE Attendance and Engagement Officer employed by Argyll and Bute Council (Education)	Started May 2024 Started June 2024
Clackmannanshire	2 FTE posts recruited to Education Department.	Started June/July 2024
Dundee	2 posts recruited to Dundee Council (Children and Families) • 1 FTE post with community engagement/development skills • 1 FTE post with public health skills	Started March 2024
Highland	Posts recruited to Public Health (NHS Highland) • 1 FTE Health Improvement Senior • 2 Part - time Health Improvement Advisors	In post October/ November 2023
West Dunbartonshire	Commissioned a local third sector organisation to deliver the community lead role. • 2 new posts were created in the third sector organisation, but the posts have wider responsibilities with the organisation and are not fully dedicated Planet Youth posts.	In post April 2024

The challenges in converting the funding opportunity and the delays in getting staff in post resulted in a significant underspend in the first year of the National Pilot. (See Table 2)

Table 2: Year 1 Grant allocation and spend in each pilot area

Area	Year 1 Grant Allocation	Out-turn spend	Underspend
***Angus**	£25,000	£25,000	£0
Argyll and Bute	£100,000	£18,400	£81,600
Clackmannanshire	£50,000	£22,600	£27,400
Dundee	£100,000	£19,900	£80,100
Highland	£100,000	£100,000	£0
West Dunbartonshire	£100,000	£25,000	£75,000
Total	**£475,000**	**£210,900**	**£264,100**

Table 3 shows improved take-up of allocated funds in Year 2 of the pilot.

Table 3: Year 2 Grant allocation and spend in each pilot area

Area	Year 2 Grant Allocation	Out-turn spend	Underspend
***Angus**	£25,000	£17,241	£7,759
Argyll and Bute	£100,000	£72,674	£27,352
Clackmannanshire	£97,279	£97, 279	£0
Dundee	£100,000	£100,000	£0
Highland	£100,000	£100,207	£0
West Dunbartonshire	£100,000	£100,000	£0
Total	**£525,000**	**£210,900**	**£34,887**

5.1.3 Scaling up existing pilots

The funding from the Scottish Government enabled a scaling up of some of the existing pilots:

- In the first phase of the pilot, 13 schools across five local authority areas participated in the data collection (September/October 2021)
- 24 schools across six pilot areas participated in the second round of data collection in November 2023

As well as two additional schools in Angus, the increase in the number of schools resulted from:

- An increase from two to five schools in Argyll and Bute
- An increase from two to four schools in Dundee
- An increase from one to five schools in West Dunbartonshire
    - West Dunbartonshire had initially planned to roll out the survey to all 7 schools but two schools withdrew at a late stage.

Table 4 shows the number of schools and the participation rate achieved in each pilot area over the two rounds of data collection.

The data shows a drop-off in engagement of schools between the first and second round of pupil surveys:

- four of the five pilot area saw a drop in participation rate in the second round of data collection, and
- three of the pilot areas did not achieve the recommended 80% threshold for participation in the pupil survey. (Planet Youth Iceland recommend a minimum 80% participation rate for a valid sample.)

A further breakdown of the participation rates by school shows:

- In Clackmannanshire, none of the 3 schools achieved an 80% response rates.
- In Highland, one school achieved only a 50% response rate, (which reduced the average response rate across the region)
- In Dundee, the 2 schools that had been involved in the first phase of the pilot achieved less than 80% response rates,
- the two 'new schools' that joined the pilot in the National Pilot achieved participation rates significantly above 80% ensuring that the threshold rate of 80% was achieved across the four schools.

In some cases, low engagement was linked to limited capacity in schools; in others, it reflected a lack of visible use of the 2021 survey data.

> "It feels like we started working on this two years ago, but nothing's really happened. I'm a bit disappointed" (School lead)

Table 4 Data collection from schools in 2021 and 2023

	Data collection 2021		Data collection 2023	
	Number of schools	**Participation rate**	**Number of schools**	**Participation rate**
Angus	N/A	N/A	2	90%
Argyll and Bute	2	94%	5	76%
Clackmannanshire	3	81%	3	66%
Dundee	2	84%	4	83%
Highland	5	87%	5	72%
West Dunbartonshire	1	83%	5*	91%

Scotland	13	**84%**	24	**80%**

*This includes 2 schools/programmes for young people with additional support needs.

5.2 Progress in implementation

This section summarises the development of the implementation structures in each pilot area in Phase 2 (and fidelity to the Planet Youth model) and provides a summary of progress in implementation.

For more detailed information on the structures and progress in implementation, see the profiles for each pilot area at Appendix 1. While this section draws on the coalition survey, we acknowledge the limitations of the survey data (see Appendix 2) and advise caution in its interpretation.

Two key issues influenced progress in implementation in Phase 2

- weaknesses in the foundations of models developed in Phase 1
- the challenges in converting the funding opportunity, giving most pilots less than a year with additional staff capacity to progress implementation during the National Pilot.

However, the increased capacity has accelerated the development of implementation structures and progress in implementation.

5.2.1 Progress in development of implementation structures

All areas in Phase 2 developed their implementation structures compared to Phase 1.

- Highland and Argyll and Bute developed local coalitions to engage local communities in planning
- Highland also developed a strategic coalition and Argyll and Bute at early stage of development of Authority-wide coalition
- Clackmannanshire increased partner engagement in the coalition and embedded the coalition within the governance structures of the Family Wellbeing Partnership

Dundee and West Dunbartonshire have further embedded Planet Youth into Community planning structures in Phase 2

- In Dundee, the Planet Youth strategic oversight group has been disbanded and responsibility for Planet Youth at the strategic level now sits within the remit of the Child Poverty and Inequalities Strategic Leadership Group. This is one of the three Strategic Leadership Groups (SLGs) of the Dundee Partnership
    - A Delivery Group has been established. This is a senior officer group (rather than strategic group) tasked with driving implementation.
    - At the local Level, the local implementation group has been disbanded and responsibility for community level engagement, planning and response has been integrated into the existing Local Community Planning Partnership (LCPP) structures.

West Dunbartonshire did not develop a coalition in Phase 1: responsibility for Planet Youth sat within a sub-group of the ADP. In Phase 2, the governance of Planet Youth has been transferred to another multi-agency sub-group : the Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing Subgroup.

Angus, a new pilot in Phase 2, developed a strong coalition with good multi-agency engagement, built on a pre-existing multi-agency group focused on responding to high levels of vaping, with strong relationships and history of collaborative work.

Common strengths:

- Multi-agency engagement in implementation structures has improved in most areas with coalitions
- Strategic alignment has improved in many areas, with improved links to broader prevention or wellbeing agendas
- Embedding commitment to Planet Youth into local strategies:
    - Most areas have worked to embed commitment to Planet Youth strategic plans (Integrated Children's Services Plans, ADP strategies etc).

Common weaknesses:

- Senior leadership /oversight of Planet Youth was limited
- Multi-agency engagement at operational level has developed, but limited buy-in at strategic level in many areas
    - Strategic engagement with Education was weak in some areas
- Limited ownership and accountability in new coalitions at early stage of development
- Fidelity gaps where Planet Youth is embedded into wider governance structures (Dundee, West Dunbartonshire) and where there is low level of multi-agency strategic buy-in (Argyll and Bute, Angus).

The coalition survey explored the perceptions of coalition members of the strength of the implementation structures. Although results differ across and within areas, some broad patterns emerge.

Confidence in capacity of local implementation structures

Responses demonstrate reasonably strong levels of confidence in the capacity to implementation of Planet Youth in their areas:

- 75% saying that they have **commitment from leaders** in key partner organisations to support the implementation of Planet Youth in this area
- 68% feel that people on the coalition **have appropriate levels of authority to** make decisions on behalf of their organisations
- 64% agreeing that the coalition has **a clear action plan** to embed the Planet Youth approach in the area

Responses show **lower levels of confidence** that implementation of Planet Youth was embedded **in partners' strategies and actions plans** (51% agreed).

Less than half (47%) agreed that 'all partners who need to be round the table are represented on the coalition'. Negative responses were higher among newer coalitions at early stages of development.

We also asked coalition members if there were any gaps or weaknesses in the coalition that affected its capacity to implement Planet Youth in the area.

Responses identified **gaps in membership/engagement** in Planet Youth coalitions and recognised the need to develop stakeholder and partner engagement, including parental engagement.

> *"It is felt that it would be useful to have other groups, councillors and parents that could do more to be involved in the coalition"*
>
> *"We still have to get more schools onboard, particularly at primary level and early years as well."*
>
> "The group is very small and needs further partners who represent community organisations."

A number of responses specifically mentioned lack of funding as a gap. These comments demonstrate the focus on the development of activity rather than on system change:

> *"Lack of any budget to support a programme of action"*

Other comments highlighted concerns about the limited capacity and resources to implement Planet Youth

> **"***Coalition partners have competing demands on their time and may not always have the capacity to meet the emerging needs of progressing the Planet Youth model."*
>
> "*Action plan delivery budgets and long-term dedicated staff allocation will be required to progress Planet Youth in any area. Adding responsibility to overburdened education staff or expecting underfunded voluntary organisations to take on extra work with no financial support is not going to be effective."*

5.2.2 Progress in implementation

Most areas show progress in implementation, with increased engagement with partners and communities (to some extent) to increase awareness of Planet Youth. Most areas improved dissemination of the data insights (from the pupil survey) and there is evidence of use of the data to inform the development of local action plans, although in newer coalitions the capacity for action planning is still underdeveloped. In some areas, local partners are using the Planet Youth principles and data to inform their own services, and there is evidence of collaborative planning at the operational level (although not at the system level) Some local areas have secured funding to deliver new prevention-focused activities.

There is also evidence of increased local ownership of Planet Youth: partners in four pilot areas have committed funding to secure continuation of implementation teams.

However, the depth and breadth of implementation varied widely.

Common strengths:

- Increased levels of activity to raise awareness and engagement in Planet Youth (enabled by additional staff capacity)
- Improved dissemination of data insights: Some areas produced high quality outputs with clear focus on risk/protective factors.
- Improved use of data:
  - Most areas have used the data from the second round of pupil surveys.
  - Most areas have developed action plans based on data insights although action planning is still weak in some areas.
  - Some areas have used Planet Youth data in local plans or strategies.
  - Some partners are using Planet Youth data/principles to inform their own services (embedding protective factors).
- Improved collaboration at operational level

Common weaknesses:

- Challenges in integrating schools into community planning and decision making.
- Parent and wider community engagement remained weak in most areas.
- A focus on the development of activities rather than system change.
- Limited focus on upstream prevention in local action plans.
- Sustainability risks are emerging in areas reliant on short-term funding or single key individuals.

5.3 What difference has Planet Youth made at the local level?

5.3.1 Process outcomes

Although there has been a significant increase in levels of activity in all areas, there is still limited evidence of impact. Although it is clearly too early to expect any changes in behaviours at the local (changes in the risk and protective factors in each community), we used the coalition survey to explore perceptions of 'process outcomes' from implementation to date:

- Increased awareness of the Planet Youth at the local level
- Increased understanding of prevention
- Increased community involvement and collaboration in planning/development of preventative approaches.

Again, recognising the limitations of the survey results, and the differences between areas, coalition members reported:

- progress in raising awareness of Planet Youth with **local organisations**,
- increased **understanding of prevention** (and the role of risk and protective factors in prevention), and
- increased collaboration **between local organisations** and increased collaboration **with schools**.

They reported **less progress** in raising awareness of Planet Youth in **communities** and in **engaging parents** in developing preventative approaches.

5.3.2 Supporting primary prevention at the local level

As previously noted, the development of action planning is mixed reflecting differing levels of the maturity of local coalitions. As such, many of the coalitions have not moved from planning to delivering actions.

While action has been limited, there have been successes in securing funding to develop new interventions, and examples of new service development influenced by Planet Youth data and principles in most areas. Some partners also reported that they are using Planet Youth data to inform service plans in their own organisations or departments.

There are examples of 'action' in every area, but progress on converting planning to action has been slow.

Some common themes in developing prevention-focused actions include:

Delivery capacity at the local level

Interviews with partners highlighted examples where partners had been unable to deliver on actions identified in local action plans due to lack of capacity.

A lack of focus on upstream prevention

Although 85% of respondents in the coalition survey reported that the priorities and actions in their plan focused on upstream prevention, this confidence did not align with the information gathered through interviews with partners.

Interviews highlighted very mixed interpretations of upstream prevention, highlighting tensions between the desire of coalitions to address the challenges identified by the young people who responded to the pupil survey and the Planet Youth principle of upstream prevention.

Interviews with schools also suggested a greater focus on actions responding to the needs of the current cohort of young people (those who responded to the survey) rather than a focus on upstream prevention.

> "If young people are saying that they don't feel safe at school, you can't ignore that, you've got to do something about it"

This disparity in responses highlights a limited and inconsistent understanding of upstream prevention, which remains a key constraint on the capacity of local approaches to deliver prevention effectively

6. Learning from implementation of Phase 2

The previous chapter outlined how local implementation structures matured during Phase 2, highlighting both development and variation across the pilot areas.

Importantly, this variation is not a weakness: while all areas worked from the same core principles, guidance, frameworks, and support, it was expected that they would adapt these to their own local contexts including.

- differences in local planning and delivery infrastructure,
- variations in capacity and resources, and
- the identity and approach of the lead agency in each area.

Building on this, the present chapter examines the capacity of local models to deliver the Planet Youth approach, including their fidelity to the model, the factors that supported or hindered implementation, and the lessons that can inform future practice. It also considers the system-level influences that shaped local capacity.

6.1 Fidelity to the Planet Youth approach

In practice, local factors have shaped how the model was applied. While each of the local models integrates key elements of the Planet Youth approach, the degree of integration differs and fidelity to the model is mixed.

6.1.1 Factors affecting the fidelity

Phase 1 learning (Chapter 3) showed that local implementation of Planet Youth in Scotland was constrained by limited prior knowledge and only a partial understanding of its principles and processes. This led to weaknesses in design and delivery, slowed implementation, and reduced readiness for Phase 2. Key issues included:

- **Early focus on data collection** rather than building capacity to implement the approach.
- **Limited understanding of the model**, with key elements (e.g., parent and community engagement) neither planned nor resourced.
- **Insufficient resources**, with no dedicated staff to deliver the approach.
- **Lack of leadership and strategic planning** in several areas.

There has been limited integration of core principles and processes of the Planet Youth model. As a result, fidelity to the Planet Youth model was compromised in most areas resulting in **weak foundations for implementation** as many areas skipped the critical step of developing multi-agency buy-in and effective structures to implement the approach.

As a result, progress in implementation was slow in Phase 1, but fundamental weaknesses in the design of local approaches have also impacted on the capacity of the pilots in Phase 2.

6.1.2 Development of the pilots in Phase 2

As reported in the previous chapter, local models have developed and evolved in Phase 2. The additional resources made available through the Scottish Government funding have facilitated development of new coalition structures, increased levels of engagement with partners and communities, and increased alignment with local structures.

This has allowed some areas to better integrate the principles and process of the Planet Youth approach. However, commitment to fidelity in implementation also varies, reflecting differing levels of strategic commitment to the Planet Youth approach and capacity to deliver the approach.

For example, in Highland, there is a very high level of commitment to Planet Youth which is reflected in high degree of fidelity in design (integration of the principles) and in implementation. The local approach includes multi-agency buy-in (although there continue to be challenges in engaging with Education at the strategic level), there are champions in leadership, clear strategic alignment with ADP and Public Health priorities and very strong methodical adherence to Planet Youth's ten-step process.

Approaches in other areas have evolved differently and demonstrate a much lower degree of fidelity: for example, in Dundee and West Dunbartonshire the decision to integrate responsibility for Planet Youth into existing planning and decision-making structures mean that there is no local coalition structure.

The intent of these models is to create system level alignment, using Planet Youth data to influence strategic and operational planning. However, the lack of a visible collaborative planning structure for Planet Youth affects partner engagement and ownership: it can be difficult for partners to understand 'what Planet Youth is' and their role in Planet Youth. These weaker engagement structures don't fully reflect the broad, inclusive coalition principles and the weakness of these models to engage schools, communities and parents in decision making reduce fidelity to the community-led approach. While these approaches have strong strategic intent and 'fit' with local strategic priorities, structure and capacity, they reflect lower levels of fidelity to the Planet Youth principles and processes.

Others have achieved partial fidelity. In Argyll and Bute, the implementation of the approach is still at an early stage. Local coalitions are in development, and more recently there have been attempts to develop a local-authority wide coalition. Local coalitions have started to use the data to identify local priorities and actions, (and in one coalition area, the data has supported the development of new activities). There is some evidence of use of data in strategic plans. However, the lack of multi-agency support and strong leadership oversight dilute the model's whole-system principles.

In Angus, there is a strong multi-agency coalition which has been built on pre-existing multi-agency work around youth issue in the area, strong relationships at officer level and a history of collaborative work. There is very strong practitioner-level ownership among local partners

with a sense of shared responsibility for Planet Youth. The coalition has developed three sub-groups which are chaired by local partners. The sub-groups leading on developing action in the relevant domains (Leisure, School, Community). The coalition members have been working to 'influence upwards' to engage senior leadership and political support for Planet Youth. Strategic buy-in is emerging but remains limited at senior leadership level. Fidelity to the model is mixed: very high at practitioner level but the risk in Angus lies in limited strategic level buy-in which will limit the capacity for a whole systems change.

In Clackmannanshire, once things picked up pace, a formative coalition was refreshed and strengthened. There is increased collaboration between partners in planning, and good use of data insights to attract new funding for prevention activities in third sector organisations. There is increased strategic alignment: Planet Youth is aligned to the transformational change agenda in Clackmannanshire and has been embedded within the Family Wellbeing Partnership (FWP) structures. The model in Clackmannanshire is developing alignment to Planet Youth principles — demonstrating multi-agency collaboration and data-driven planning – but the coalition is still young and there is a need to build ownership and accountability across the system to engage the potential of the model to drive system change.

While the Scottish pilots have shown varying levels of fidelity to the principles of the model, it is also evident that some aspects of the guidance from Planet Youth Iceland are unclear—for example, the advice on coalition development is weak on the governance role of these coalitions.

6.2 Strengths and weaknesses in local models

6.2.1 Enablers and barriers in the design of local models

Drawing on learning from the pilots, this section identifies the factors that acted as enablers and barriers to implementation.

Leadership:

- **Visible Leadership**: Visible support from leaders and champions has lent legitimacy and fostered buy-in from other partners.

Strategic Alignment

- **Alignment with existing strategies**: An existing focus on prevention, within ADP, public health, or wellbeing strategies provided a 'fit' and legitimacy for Planet Youth (Highland, Clackmannanshire, Dundee).

Partnerships and Collaboration

- **Building on existing relationships**: It was easier to bring partners together and build coalitions where partners had existing relationships and experience of working together. This was critical to developing multi-agency involvement from the start.
- **Pre-existing collaborative culture:** In areas which already had strong collaborative working in place, there were existing relationships and trust which supported the implementation of Planet Youth.
  "Relationships are very important – finding allies and champions in other departments, building a group of people who are interested and motivated"

Capacity for implementation

- **Staff capacity:** Additional staff capacity supported implementation in Phase 2.
  - Highland used Scottish Government resources to fund a fulltime co-ordinator. The additional resource in the lead role has accelerated the progress in implementation
  - Clackmannanshire struggled until stable leadership was in place.

- **Trusted, skilled leads:** Individuals with established relationships and the trust of local partners have been able to bring others on board on the strength of that trust.
  - Community development skills and facilitative leadership have also been critical in building engagement, fostering ownership, and creating collaborative relationships, keeping the group working together constructively while guiding it toward shared decisions

Resource Leverage

- **Funding for prevention activities**: While the long-game is to influence systems, the delivery of activities has created credibility and legitimacy.

Many of the barriers mirrored the enablers, with the absence or weakness of these enabling factors—such as visible leadership—becoming obstacles to progress.

Lack of multi-agency support and leadership:

Lack of multi-agency support has been a key limiting factor in the capacity of local models to deliver the Planet Youth approach

- The lack of capacity to deliver on local action has been limited by lack of multi-agency support
- The capacity of local approaches to influence the system is limited by lack of multi-agency support.

Weak coalition/governance structures

- Local coalitions do not have authority for resources and cannot hold partners accountable

- Models which have embedded decision-making into community planning structures (Dundee/West Dunbartonshire) have limited capacity to engage communities in decision-making, reducing the capacity to deliver a community driven approach.

Capacity constraints

Capacity constraint in the local infrastructure impact on the development of implementation structures and the capacity to deliver prevention

- Capacity of coalition members/partners to engage in the collaborative planning process
- Capacity in the local infrastructure for delivery of prevention

6.2.2 Enablers and barriers in the delivery of the approach

This section identifies learning about factors in the delivery of the approach at the local level:

- Leading implementation (which organisation is best placed to lead on the implementation of Planet Youth?)
- Governance
- Skills of lead officers

- **Leading implementation**

A central barrier to effective implementation across the pilots was the absence of strong multi-agency strategic support and robust governance structures.

While different lead bodies brought valuable strengths to their local models—for example, Education-led pilots strengthened school engagement, and joint-lead arrangements boosted capacity and stakeholder involvement—a shared weakness was evident across all models. In the absence of early, co-ordinated engagement from key partners, and without clear governance structures to both empower the lead organisation and hold all partners accountable, lead agencies lacked the authority and legitimacy to drive system-wide change. In practice, this meant lead officers did not have the mandate or backing required to deliver effective implementation.

The capacity to lead implementation of a systems-level approach like Planet Youth depends on sustained multi-agency commitment and clear governance, rather than reliance on a single lead body.

- **Governance**

While many local coalitions have successfully engaged organisations and strengthened collaboration, they have not fulfilled a governance role, leaving gaps in decision-making authority and accountability.

Local coalitions lack the capacity for strategic leadership and authority to allocate resources, set shared priorities, and hold partners accountable. The limitation of the existing coalition structures is demonstrated in their focus on developing activities a rather than systems change.

There is a recognition in some areas of the need for 'strategic coalitions:

  - Highland moved from a single regional coalition to multiple local action groups, supported by a strategic coalition.
  - Argyll and Bute is developing five local coalitions plus an authority-wide coalition (although this is still at early stage).

To improve the effectiveness of local models, coalition structures need to be developed to improve leadership and governance. Coalition structures should provide clear leadership, align system-wide goals, enable joint decision-making, and oversee accountability mechanisms to drive a coordinated and sustainable approach to prevention.

Establishment of appropriate governance arrangements would confer greater legitimacy on lead agencies and provide the leadership capacity to address and overcome implementation-level barriers, and drive change through the system.

- **Skills required for implementation of Planet Youth**

Variations in implementation across pilot areas have meant that the role of the 'lead' has looked different in each context, demanding a range of skills. In general, lead officers require strengths in three key areas:

- Strategic development capacity

While the evaluation highlights the need for muti-agency strategic leadership of the Planet Youth approach, lead officers also need to understand 'how systems work' to support implementation:

  - Understanding local planning and decision-making structures
  - Influencing skills to gain buy-in and secure support

- Local knowledge and relationships

Local knowledge and trusted relationships have been critical in raising awareness of Planet Youth and building local momentum. This involves:

  - Understanding how communities and local systems work, and identifying key players within them
  - Knowing the right people to involve and having the relationships to bring them into coalitions

- Facilitative leadership
  - Fostering collaboration across partners

- Guiding stakeholders towards a shared vison and goals
- Building the capacity of partners to take responsibility for action.

6.3 Challenges in implementing the model

6.3.1 Which elements of the Planet Youth model have been 'hard to deliver' and why?

Differences in the design and implementation models across the pilots mean that there have been different challenges in different pilots. Some of these are related to local issues, but the following represent challenges in implementation that affect the potential success of the Planet Youth approach.

Developing a shared understanding of Planet Youth

One of the key local challenges was developing a shared purpose and vision for Planet Youth, along with clarity about the roles of different partners. While the Planet Youth brand—and the proven success of the Icelandic Prevention Model—provided a strong hook for generating interest, levels of understanding of implementation varied.

In particular, partners differed in their grasp of the principles of primary prevention, how the Planet Youth approach operates, and what this meant for their role in the process.

> "We need to help people at the operational level to see the bigger picture – [they need to understand] what is Planet Youth beyond the survey and action plan" (Strategic leader)

> "This is still an evolving project in [area], we have made some progress, but there is still a lot of work to be done to promote understanding of the Planet Youth model." (response to coalition survey 2025)

At the local level, stakeholders identified the need for a broader understanding of primary prevention, for all local stakeholders.

> "We focused on 'what is Planet Youth' not 'what is prevention'. We should have gone in with 'what does prevention mean, what does it look like'. We've been led by the process and not the purpose"

Another lead commented:

> "How can we get people to design solutions when they don't know what prevention is?"

Interviews with local coalition members and partners revealed varying levels of emphasis on prevention. In many cases, action plans focused more on addressing immediate issues identified through the survey rather than using the insights to develop longer-term, upstream preventive solutions.

This reflects the very early stage of Planet Youth's development within the pilots, where building understanding of primary prevention takes time. Encouragingly, interviews also suggested a growing awareness and commitment to 'moving upstream'—for example, through increased engagement with primary schools and in transition events. These shifts illustrate the gradual cultural change required to embed a prevention-focused approach.

Limited engagement with schools

While all of the pilot areas were successful in engaging schools in the initial data-collection (the pupil survey) there have been vary varying levels of success in engaging schools in joint planning of responses.

The gap in school engagement in local planning was identified as a gap by a number of stakeholders.

> "It would be helpful to have more senior representatives from schools attending Planet Youth community meetings to better integrate the plans and projects of various community groups with the schools and to promote these efforts with young people themselves." (Comment from coalition survey 2025)

There are several components to the lack of engagement from schools:

- The lack of early development to establish multi-agency support for Planet Youth means that in some areas there is no strategic-level buy-in from Education.
- At the operational level, schools are under-resourced and even where there is the will to participate, they do not have the capacity to engage.
- Interviews with schools highlighted varying levels of awareness of the Planet Youth approach and different expectations of the role of the school in approach.

As a key principle of the Planet Youth approach is to build connectedness in communities with schools as the hub - the challenge in engaging schools undermines the capacity of the model.

However, as previously noted, guidance from Planet Youth Iceland on the implementation of this principle has lacked clarity, and recent interpretations on the role of schools appear to contradict the principle.

There is a need to create greater clarity in the model around the role of the school in the approach, to ensure that those expectations are communicated to schools before recruiting the schools for data-collection, and that the expectations on schools are realistic in relation to their capacity to engage.

Lack of progress in the 'family' domain

The family domain focuses building the protective factors for young people around the quality and strength of relationships within the family unit, (levels of parental involvement) and connectedness between families in communities, (social cohesion and intergenerational closure).

Pilots have struggled to engage parents and communities. As previously noted, progress in engaging parents and communities at the local level was limited in Phase 1. Limited understanding of implementation of Planet Youth meant that engagement was not well planned or resourced in Phase 1.

The additional staff capacity enabled through the Scottish Government investment has accelerated activity around community engagement, and there are growing examples of practice in engaging parents and communities with the Planet Youth 'messages' (developing an understanding of the risk and protective factors) and in activities to promote family connectedness (e.g. family sport sessions, Dad's and Daughters football sessions) although these are still not delivered at scale.

Some coalition members expressed some frustration at the difficulties of engaging parents, given that the protective factors within the family domain are seen as one of the most powerful aspects of the Planet Youth model.

Partners also recognised that fostering parental engagement and social connectedness is inherently a long-term endeavour, requiring sustained commitment to fully realise the model's potential. This underscores the significant challenges of attempting such outcomes within the constraints of short-term funding and delivery timelines.

> "We've informed them [parents], but we haven't done anything to empower them to do anything [with the insights]"

> "You need time to build relationships with communities"

> **"**Parental engagement is a long game. We need to be able to sustain this over the long term**"**

Capacity for system change

Weaknesses in the design of the local approaches (including limited leadership for prevention and insufficient multi-agency buy-in) have hindered the pace of implementation and constrained the potential of the Planet Youth approach to deliver wider system change.

In areas where there was a lack of system level leadership for prevention, lead officers were left without the authority or support needed to drive change. This has resulted in a focus on the development of activities rather than on effecting more fundamental systems change.

> **"**We can do the activities, but the culture change piece, that requires strategic buy-in**"**
> **(Planet Youth lead)**

6.3.2 System level barriers to implementation

This section summarises the system level barriers which have affected the capacity of local models to deliver prevention.

Short-termism

Although short-term funding has been critical to enabling the pilot, and therefore essential to the initial development of Planet Youth in Scotland, short-term funding cycles undermine the stability required to embed and sustain long-term prevention approaches.

Short-term funding has influenced the design of local approaches and the implementation of the approach. It has undermined continuity of support at national and local level, restricted strategic planning, and influenced operational planning "we focused on what we could achieve in the time available". It also disrupts the development of trust-based partnerships and undermines long-term community engagement efforts.

Managing expectations

A key challenge in delivering long-term preventative approaches lies in managing expectations around impact.

Funders and stakeholders seek measurable results within short timeframes. While we can see some but progress in delivery as a Planet Youth the actions are very often small scale and incremental.

The misalignment between the time required for effective prevention and the demand for short-term impact which can constrain investment in prevention also plays out at the local level. There are challenges in maintaining engagement of partners who have invested their time in Planet Youth when there is 'not much to show for it'.

The need for impact has also reduced the focus on upstream prevention.

"Partners want to see action - they want solutions to today's problems"

Lack of capacity in the system

The sustained disinvestment in non-statutory services—particularly in areas such as community development—over the past decade has significantly eroded the infrastructure necessary to support and empower communities to participate.

The involvement of communities in developing solutions underpins the Planet Youth approach – and all whole system approaches.

Learning from other whole system approaches highlight the time and resources required to build community capacity to participate.

Without sustained investment in the structures that support and enable communities to participate, these approaches are unlikely to succeed.

Funding for prevention

Strategic leaders highlighted the challenges of moving from funding existing services (to address crises) to funding prevention at the local level.

"Of course, we agree with the principle, but how do we move from what we are funding now to what we know we need? If the Planet Youth data tells us we should be funding A, B and C, but we are currently funding X, Y and Z [services to deal with the crisis] how do we do that?

The lack of resources to implement actions developed through Planet Youth, and budget cuts to service areas important to building the protective factors for young people (in particular youth work and the wider community support delivered by the third sector), has resulted in some stakeholders questioning the 'readiness' of Scotland.

The capacity of local government to influence the system at the local level is also limited by structural changes in the way services are delivered. For example, in many areas, leisure services are delivered by ALEOs which operate outwith the control of local authorities.

At the operational level, some local partners felt that Planet Youth was 'swimming against the tide'

"All the support that we know [through Planet Youth] that young people need - all the additional stuff that builds the protective factors - is being cut"

Stakeholders also pointed to the structural barriers in existing funding mechanisms as a key barrier. Funding structures that are siloed and tightly prescribed for particular thematic areas restrict the capacity to apply resources in a flexible, needs-led manner at the community level.

"We need to apply funding in new, more integrated ways, but the system works against the principle"

Understanding of upstream prevention

A key insight from the pilot was that stakeholders interpreted the concept of upstream prevention in different ways. At the local level, these differing interpretations led to uncertainty about how to deliver prevention in practice, which in turn contributed to weak and inconsistent action plans.

Lack of understanding across the system of how different sectors/services contribute to prevention

At the strategic level, we need a better shared understanding of prevention and better understanding of the contribution of all parts of the system.

At the operational level, lack of understanding of the 'system' and the role of different sectors /services play in contributing to prevention made it difficult for some partners to understand their role in Planet Youth.

"At the start, it wasn't clear what we were trying to do" (community coalition member)

Lack of national support and co-ordination for prevention

Planet Youth is a whole systems approach, but responsibility for joining up the system is lacking at the national level.

Strategic leaders highlighted the lack visible 'support' for prevention at the national level and lack of a mechanism to address the known barriers in the system – siloed funding, short-term funding, reporting on outcomes etc

"The biggest challenge in implementation is how do you address the barriers? Who can unlock those barriers? Scottish Government, Public Health Scotland, NHS…….?"

7. Programme level learning and recommendations

The decision to pilot the Planet Youth approach represented a bold and forward-looking step by Winning Scotland, offering a valuable opportunity to explore how a shared national aspiration for prevention could be implemented in practice.

The evaluation has provided important learning, highlighting both the potential of the Planet Youth approach and the significant challenges of delivering systems-level prevention within Scotland's current funding and operational context.

Overall, while it is premature to judge Planet Youth's viability for Scotland at national scale, the National Pilot has laid important groundwork. It has put prevention firmly on the agenda, created valuable learning about how to operationalise a primary prevention model in Scotland, and provided a platform for further development and testing.

7.1 Is Planet Youth viable for Scotland?

At this stage, the pilots have not yet provided sufficient evidence to demonstrate the viability of the Planet Youth model for national scale-up in Scotland. Short timescales, early implementation challenges, and variation in local delivery mean the full potential of the approach has not yet been realised.

Phase 1 implementation was shaped by limited prior knowledge and, in some areas, incomplete understanding of the model's underlying principles. This resulted in weaknesses in local design and reduced capacity from the outset. These early limitations continued into Phase 2, where Scottish Government funding created opportunities to strengthen delivery but difficulties in translating this into practice constrained impact.

While local adaptation was anticipated, in some areas weaknesses in design reduced fidelity to the core Planet Youth model. Consequently, the pilots have not demonstrated the model's full capacity in practice.

Nevertheless, the National Pilot has made a contribution to furthering a shared policy priority in Scotland to shift toward preventative measures in public service delivery. Winning Scotland's introduction of Planet Youth to Scotland successfully brings a focus to primary prevention, as a means of improving the lives of young people.

Stakeholders reported that Planet Youth has 'put a focus' on prevention at the national level but recognised the challenges of 'shifting the dial' when there is no national strategy or framework to support prevention and no shared vision or common understanding of primary prevention. The need for a broader understanding of primary prevention was echoed at the local level and was evidenced in the tensions in action planning between 'dealing with the current problems' and developing upstream solutions.

At the local level, the National Pilot has provided resources and a framework to operationalise aspirations for prevention. While the full impact of the Planet Youth approach was limited by challenges in implementation, short timescales, and the broader challenges faced by prevention approaches, the pilot areas have all demonstrated 'outcomes' which will support the development of their prevention approaches in future. There is greater awareness of the need for prevention, stronger collaboration between local agencies and increased partner engagement in prevention activity. In several areas, the National Pilot has generated local ownership, with four pilot sites committing their own funding and resources to continue the work. However, ambitions for meaningful community and parental involvement have not yet been achieved, reflecting both the resource intensity of engagement and the short timescales.

Unknowns in the transferability of the model

There are other unknown factors relating to the transferability of the Planet Youth approach.

- We do not know the extent which the success of IPM was dependent the action at the national level to support prevention and concerns among stakeholders that local approaches cannot be successful without changes in national policy and legislation.
- There are also concerns that some of the interventions that underpin the success of the Icelandic Prevention Model may not be transferable to Scotland.

Known barriers to viability

The local data and the data insights which inform the development of local solutions are central to the Planet Youth approach. However, data analysis and reporting are carried out by Planet Youth Iceland under the service contract. The cost of data collection/analysis is not sustainable at the Scotland level.

Winning Scotland recognises that the cost of data analysis is a barrier to expansion of the approach Scotland and is exploring options for bringing data collection/analysis in-house.

Overall, while it is premature to judge Planet Youth's viability for Scotland at national scale, the National Pilot has laid important groundwork. It has put prevention firmly on the agenda, created valuable learning about how to operationalise a primary prevention model in Scotland, and provided a platform for further development and testing.

7.2 Using the learning to inform the future

Although there are still unknowns about the transferability and viability of Planet Youth, the pilot phase has generated rich learning that is highly valuable for shaping Scotland's future approach to prevention.

Added value of the Planet Youth approach

Despite the challenges of implementation, the pilots have helped to identify where the Planet Youth model adds distinctive value to prevention in Scotland, and the conditions needed for success.

The unique strength of Planet Youth lies in its **data-driven focus on primary prevention**. At its core, the model generates high-quality population-level data that deepens understanding of the risk and protective factors shaping young people's wellbeing. This data provides a foundation for prevention activity that is both evidence-based and locally tailored. Key features include:

- **Population-Level Survey Data**: systematic evidence across multiple domains (family, school, peer relationships, community) to inform prevention priorities.
- **Community-Specific Insights**: disaggregated analysis at the local/community level, enabling place-based planning.
- **Data-Driven Action Planning**: prevention strategies are shaped by local evidence rather than a one-size-fits-all model.
- **Longitudinal Tracking**: biennial surveys allow monitoring of change, assessing impact, and adjusting interventions over time.

By contrast, the **structured framework for implementation**—while important—is not unique to Planet Youth. The model borrows from established principles and practices that are already embedded in the Scottish policy and practice landscape, such as:

- whole system approaches
- collaborative planning and decision-making
- community participation in service design

This means that while the data dimension of Planet Youth offers a distinctive contribution, the implementation structures it promotes could be underpinned by and aligned with approaches already well established in Scotland. Taken together, this suggests that a future Scottish prevention approach could usefully combine Planet Youth's unique data offer with Scotland's existing strengths in collaborative and community-based working.

Developing a Scottish Prevention Approach

Rather than adopting the Planet Youth model in its entirety, the learning from the pilots suggests that its principles and core components could usefully inform the development of a Scottish Prevention Approach—an approach that is built on the foundations of the Planet Youth model but is more clearly tailored to Scotland's systems, governance, and strategic context.

(Note that this is dependent on developing a sustainable, Scotland-based model for data collection and analysis).

In this way, the Planet Youth experience can act as a catalyst for designing a system-wide prevention approach that fits the unique context and ambitions of Scotland.

7.3 Delivering a Scottish Prevention Approach

The learning from the evaluation can inform:

- Action required at the national level to provide leadership for prevention and address the structural barriers
- Action required to support development and implementation at the local level

7.3.1 Action required at the national Level

To develop a Scottish Prevention Approach that can be scaled nationally, there is a need for sustained national leadership to raise the profile of prevention, build a shared understanding of what primary prevention entails, clarify the roles of all agencies, and manage expectations around the time, resources, and collective effort needed.

Leadership at the national level

Planet Youth approach is based on a whole systems approach to prevention - but the overarching responsibility for joining up the system up is lacking at the national level. There is a need for a leadership from the Scottish Government and an undertaking to ensure that prevention is embedded within the portfolio of all relevant departments and is the responsibility of all senior roles.

Building a shared understanding of primary prevention

Early promotion of Planet Youth focused on the success of the Icelandic Prevention Model and on the Planet Youth approach.

The Planet Youth brand and the now famous 'hero slide' showing the dramatic impact on substance use rates in Iceland over the last two decades is compelling and has served to generate interest in the approach.

A key insight from the pilot is that stakeholders interpret 'upstream prevention' differently, leading to a lack of clarity about Planet Youth's goals. To build further engagement in the prevention agenda, more work is required to develop a shared understanding of primary prevention in Scotland.

To do that, we need to be able to better define and visualise primary prevention. The challenge is that there is a gap in locally grounded examples and narratives from Scotland. In the absence home-grown examples, the dominant stories and examples are those from Iceland which risks narrowing perceptions of primary prevention to specific Icelandic interventions, many of which are not transferrable to Scotland. This would potentially undermine rather than support development of a shared understanding.

Increasing understanding of primary prevention and the role of all sectors

A lack of a shared understanding of upstream prevention made it difficult to develop a shared vison for Planet Youth at the local level and for partners to identify how they could contribute to prevention. Partners need a greater understanding of primary prevention and of their role in prevention.

There is a need for work with national and sectoral bodies that inform policy and practice at local level (COSLA, Education Scotland etc) to develop greater understanding of the roles of all sectors in prevention and embed those roles in policy and guidance to the sector.

Developing a vision for a Scottish prevention approach

The profile of Planet Youth as a national pilot, and an international example of good practice have been important levers in getting engagement at the local level.

While each pilot was committed to the outcomes, the decision to adopt the approach was based on varying levels of recognition of the process of change - 'the how'.

There is a need to develop the vision for a 'Scottish prevention approach' which is rooted in an understanding of the system in Scotland and articulate the approach in a way that could be more fully understood by a wider group of people.

National campaigns to raise awareness of the risk/protective factors

Stakeholders reported that work at the local level would be supported by increased awareness of the risk and protective factors at the national level.

> "The messages about the protective factors are really powerful – if there was more awareness of them, that would open doors for us at the local level"

There are opportunities for:

- national framing of the data insights and
- generating greater awareness at the national level about the risk and protective factors through links with national organisations, and through publicity and campaigns aimed at the public.

Delivering a national prevention approach

Winning Scotland has made a significant contribution to advancing prevention, with the decision to pilot the Planet Youth approach representing a bold and forward-looking step.

As a small third-sector organisation, it has demonstrated agility and responsiveness; however, its scale and position as a charity have limited its capacity and influence in addressing all challenges. Its independence from the Scottish Government and statutory sector has also been a strength as an advocate for prevention but has meant it held less policy influence at the national level.

Given the need for stronger national leadership on prevention, there may be a need to identify an organisation with greater capacity to provide national leadership and take the Scottish Prevention Approach to the next stage.

7.3.2 Action to support implementation

Action 1: Development of a Readiness assessment tool

The learning from the evaluation shows that critical success factors in adopting Planet Youth into new areas include committed system-level senior leadership, strong local infrastructure—without these, implementation of any whole system approach to prevention risks being slow or stalling before it gains traction.

A readiness assessment tool is required to assess capacity prior to committing to the Planet Youth (or any whole-system prevention approach).

The assessment should cover the extent of leadership commitment, the degree of strategic alignment with local priorities, and the capacity to deliver in terms of resources, skills, governance, and infrastructure.

It could be used both for local self-assessment and as part of a national decision-making process to ensure future implementation is built on strong foundations.

Key criteria for readiness assessment include:

- **Leadership commitment** – Local areas need leadership commitment and accountability for prevention. This requires visible and sustained strategic commitment across key agencies from leaders who fully understand the scope of their role and have the authority to drive change.
- **Strategic alignment** – clarity on how Planet Youth fits within local priorities, plans, and existing prevention strategies.
- **Capacity to deliver** – assessment of resources and skills to implement the approach and operational infrastructure required to deliver prevention at the local level.

Action 2: Invest in preparation and lead-in time

The learning from implementation of Planet Youth also highlighted the lack of sufficient preparation and lead-in time prior to implementation. This resulted in a weakness in the models due lack of shared understanding of the approach and processes, but also lack a shared vision for prevention, lack of implementation plans, and limited understanding by partners of their roles in prevention.

Prior to implementation, all areas need a preparation /lead in phase to develop shared understanding of the process across all partners:

- build knowledge understanding of prevention across all partners and develop a shared vision for the local area
- develop knowledge/understanding of the principles and process to better understand 'how' implementation of the approach will work.

The output of this stage should be a shared implementation plan, with clear roles and responsibilities for partners.

Action 3: Develop effective governance systems

The evaluation highlighted the need for effective governance structures to support effective decision-making, ensure accountability, and give the lead agency the mandate to drive change.

- Develop governance structures and identify how these governance structures integrate with existing planning and decision-making structures in the area.

Action 4: Develop a bespoke support package for implementation in the Scottish context

There is a need for a bespoke support package which provides clear and consistent guidance for implementation of a Scottish Prevention Approach.

Action 5: Build capacity for prevention

In addition to model-specific implementation training and support, the evaluation identified a need to broaden the training offer to develop a local learning programme that develops:

- understanding primary prevention
- understanding whole system approaches
- leadership of systems change.

Arrivo | Consulting

braw data
altruistic analytics

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot