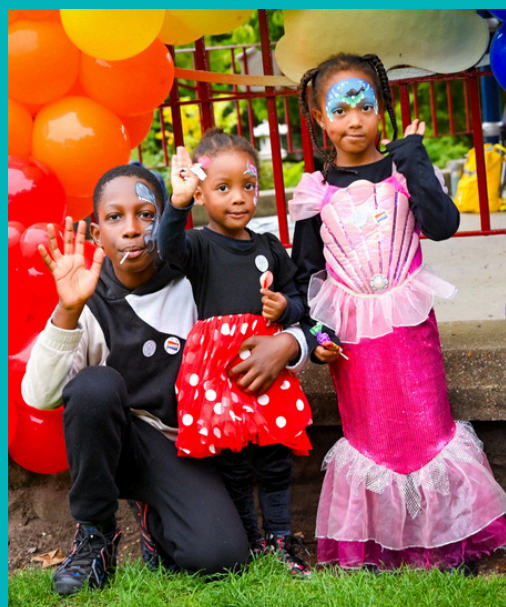


North East LGBTQ+ Community Centre Scoping Research: Key Findings (2024)



Executive Summary

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The case for an LGBTQ+ Community Centre in the North East of England is clear from this research, which scoped the local needs of the LGBTQ+ community.

This research study highlights the urgent need for a dedicated LGBTQ+ Community Centre in the North East of England, drawing on both qualitative and quantitative data from local LGBTQ+ individuals, organisations, and community stakeholders.

The North East, while rich in culture and community spirit, remains under-resourced in terms of safe, inclusive, and affirming spaces for LGBTQ+ people beyond that of commercial bars and clubs. Findings reveal both the want and need for a dedicated LGBTQ+ Community Centre, which would be the first of its kind, in the North East of England.

Key findings include:

- Lack of visible, inclusive infrastructure: The North East has no permanent LGBTQ+ community hub, making it one of the most underserved regions in this regard.
- The need for a centre: 95% of all 220 respondents stating that there is a clear need for an LGBTQ+ Community Centre.
- Using the centre: 92% of all respondents stated that they would use the Community Centre regularly.
- Away from the commercial scene: 89% of respondents expressed the wish that the Community Centre should not be based within the commercial queer scene in Newcastle, known as the Pink Triangle.
- Pitfalls for the centre to avoid: Respondents gave clear tips and ideas about what to avoid when setting up, and running, a LGBTQ+ Community Centre.
- Support from local stakeholders: Over 12 local organisations and their members, expressed formal support for a centre.

The proposed LGBTQ+ Community Centre should act as a safe, welcoming hub for support, education, advocacy, and community-building. Services would include arts and history projects, mental health support, young people and older people outreach, referral services, drop-ins, cultural programming, and a space for community-led events, groups, and activism. In conclusion, the research demonstrates that a dedicated LGBTQ+ centre is not only desired by the community but is essential to addressing inequalities, fostering resilience, and promoting social cohesion in the North East.

Methodology

This survey was competed as a partnership research project between OUT North East and Drew Dalton at the University of Sunderland, to scope the need for an LGBTQ+ Community Centre in the North East of England. This research was deemed 'low risk' and so passed ethical approval.

Research aim:

To explore and assess the need, potential demand, and feasibility for establishing an LGBTQ+ Community Centre in North East England, with the goal of informing future planning, funding, and service development.

Research objectives:

- 1.To consult with LGBTQ+ communities across the region to understand their priorities, experiences and their aspirations for a Community Centre, using quantitative and qualitative data collection methods.
- 2.To assess potential ideas for what a Community Centre should encapsulate, including location, accessibility, and community needs, as well as what a Community Centre should not be.
- 3.To produce a scoping report summarising key findings and recommendations for the next steps.

This survey was hosted online via the OUT North East website and survey data collection was collated via 12 regional group visits, outreach to regional LGBTQ+ organisations, and highlighted via posts on social media. Significant opportunities were built into the survey, to gain not just quantitative information, but also qualitative feedback on the survey questions, in order to ask additional questions. The survey was triangulated with community visits to organisations to both spread the survey further, and to use the framing of the questions to elicit verbal feedback via quotes and notes walls, which were added into the qualitative analysis.

The survey data contained, after the respondents demographics, four key headline questions , of which top line data has been used. All qualitative methods have utilised thematic analysis in order to spot trends across respondent answers.

220

RESPONDENTS

100%

IDENTIFIED AS LGBTQ+

6

NE REGIONS SURVEYED

Jan-June 2024

DATA COLLECTION CONDUCTED

Please note this is an Executive Summary of the overall research study findings, and so the full breakdown of respondents has not been included.

Results

Of the 220 North East respondents who replied to this survey, an overwhelming number of those respondents stated that there was a need for an LGBTQ+ Community Centre in the region (95%).

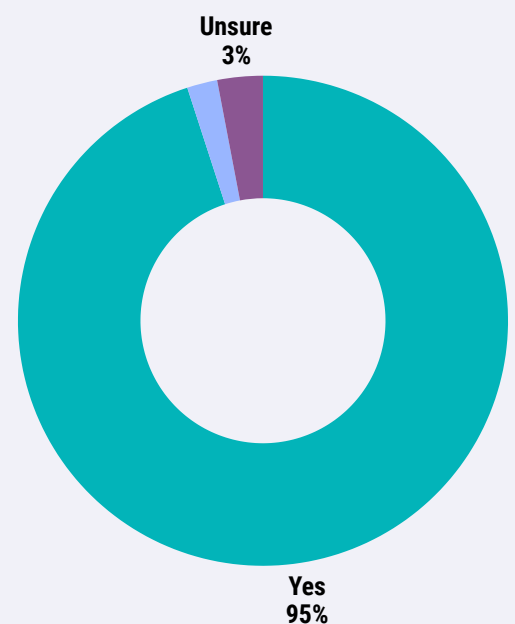
Of all those who responded to the survey, 92% said that they would use an LGBTQ+ Community Centre regularly.

The North East of England has typically centred much of the 'queer scene' in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The area known as the 'Pink Triangle,' has been used as a key location where most of the Newcastle-based commercial bars, spaces and clubs have historically been situated. This area saw significant reinvestment in the late 1990s, by Newcastle's local authority, to shape the space into more of a formalised gaybourhood (Ghaziani, 2014).

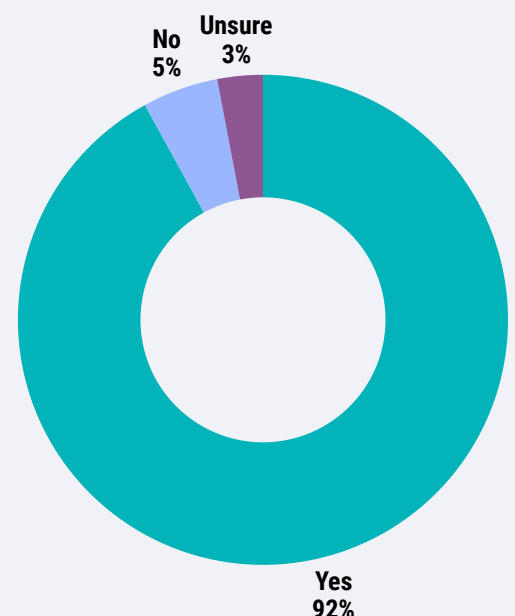
Whilst queer spaces have also appeared in other areas of the region, such as Sunderland, Gateshead, South and North Tyneside, and Durham (areas also under the scope of this survey), they have not been as prevalent as the 'go to space' of the Pink Triangle bars, in Newcastle. Notably, Newcastle stands unique across other cities such as London, Birmingham, Leeds, Brighton and Teesside, in that it has no dedicated LGBTQ+ Community Centre. As a whole, the North East of England, reaching from Northumberland to Sunderland, has no formal LGBTQ+ Community Centre despite a growing population of over 2.68 million residents.

Efforts to create community style spaces such as 'Pride Cafe' (a restaurant and additional community space) closed in 2013, and the long-running sexual health and well-being service (and community meeting space), MESMAC Newcastle, closed in 2023. There is a clear need for a Community Centre space.

Do you think there is a need for an LGBTQ+ Community Centre in the North East of England?



If an LGBTQ+ Community Centre was available, would you use this space regularly?



Results

Of all of the respondents, 89% felt that an LGBTQ+ Community Centre should be hosted 'away from' the commercial scene in Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Whilst opinions were split, Gateshead saw the most popular location for an LGBTQ+ Community Centre, reflecting its position between Newcastle and Sunderland as large urban hubs.

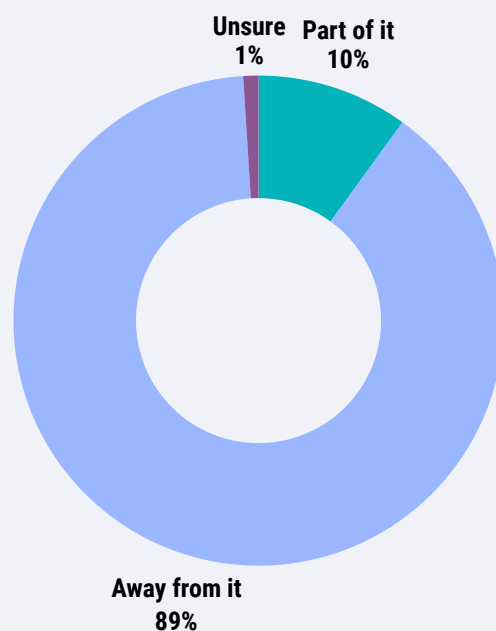
Whilst the qualitative data gives further information about this, it was largely felt that the commercial scene, whilst still important as a community hub, was not seen as a suitable place for an LGBTQ+ Community Centre to be based.

Many of the qualitative comments were sorted into themes to identify core narratives coming from the LGBTQ+ community, with additional questions asking the following:

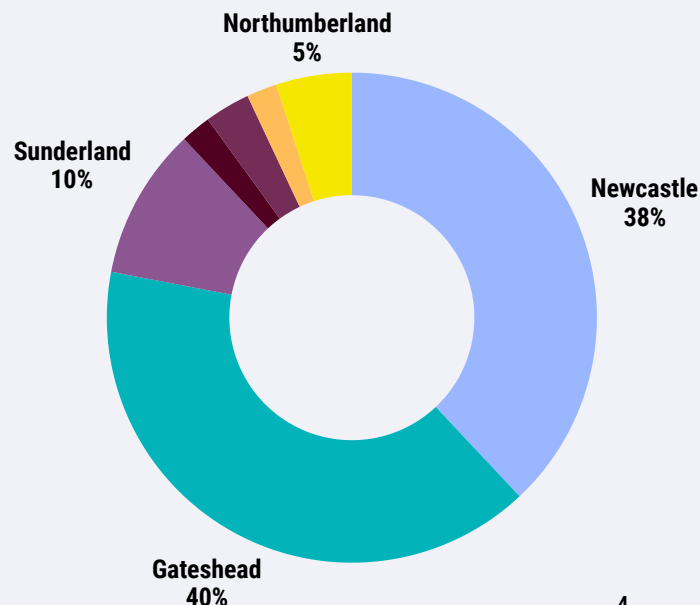
- What would you like to see happen at an LGBTQ+ Community Centre?
- What types of services, events and activities, should an LGBTQ+ Community Centre provide?
- What should not be in an LGBTQ+ Community Centre?

Many respondents viewed a formal LGBTQ+ Community Centre as a 'drop in' style space where they can meet others, socialise, feel included, seek information, and take part in activities, both structured and unstructured. Furthermore, another common theme saw a broad range of identified ideas which were also positioned as different to the commercial bars of the Pink Triangle. Finally, many respondents echoed the geography of the centre being located away from the commercial scene, giving reasons as to why this should be the case.

Would you prefer this LGBTQ+ community centre to be in the centre of, or away from the commercial gay scene (bars, pubs, etc.)?



Where should an LGBTQ+ community centre be located in the North East of England?



A centre to find others, meet others, and to socialise

A significant number of respondents (more than 80% of the total), left comments stating that a future LGBTQ+ Community Centre should have a 'drop in' element to it. Comments summarised that a future LGBTQ+ Community Centre needs to be a safe and inclusive place for people to go during the day, to be able to sit without spending, to seek advice, meet others to socialise (especially for older LGBTQ+ people, parents, and LGBTQ+ families), and to form a basis of intergenerational learning between older and younger LGBTQ+ people.

"Somewhere people could go, just sit and talk, make new friends"

"Open door policy. Welcoming everyone. Adoption groups"

"Alternative activities to the bars. I have little interest in sitting in a bar any longer. Would be nice to have a place where other activities took place"

"I would like somewhere for my boy to meet like minded people and to be able to be himself without fear. As a Mam, I would like to have support from people who understand"

"Something for older gay people would be good as this seems to be a group that is overlooked and even invisible sometimes"

"Family themed activities for the little ones. Somewhere to go have a chat, resources such as housing advisors, debt advice, maybe a drop in for the CAB?"

"Community support to make and meet friends. I am really lonely and I don't go to bars"

"Be useful people who are just out to have a meeting space. A space for older guys to meet and a useful advice area"

"I am desperate for a parent and toddler group. As a queer parent I feel isolated in the group I currently go to by the other women. I would welcome a group open to all, but making it clear that it is queer-friendly. Having it in a centre would do this I think"

"A place to meet friends for a coffee and a chat during the day. To be able to sit and read papers, magazines and watch the world go by"

"A centre I can rely on and drop in there to work, sit and chat. I don't always feel safe as a trans person working in a lot of public places in recent times, so a centre I could sit in, work, have a brew, would be valuable"

"To be honest, I'd be happy to use it just to get involved with queer activities, no matter what is going on I would use it"

"A place where you can relax and make friends within a homely atmosphere might attract more people and allow them into the community such as those who are introverted and don't enjoy pride or bar atmospheres"

"To have family events if possible with people of the LGBT community who have children"

"After school events for gay parents!"

"There are no spaces where older people meet younger LGBT+ people. It's such a shame, as we can really learn from each other - we used to do this a lot but apps and community life has separated us"

"Inclusion. That should be the general theme. Nobody should be turned away or frowned upon. It should be a safe space for anyone, not just the LGBTQ+ community. Whether it be race, religion etc. Anyone who wants to be involved in the community centre for LGBTQ+ persons should be allowed and welcomed with open arms"

"Similar to the 'old pride cafe' - a safe space to grab a coffee and a catch up"

"Support groups, social groups to cater for all ages, warm welcoming space, with nice furnishings - a place to meet others and relax with friends over a coffee. Everywhere charges these days to sit down"

A centre filled with busy and varied activities

When asked what people would like to see at an LGBTQ+ Community Centre, 93% of the answers revealed common themes situated around the centre being a 'buzz of activity,' incorporating a range of groups and activities. Many key points shared by most respondents pointed to the centre being an 'anchor' of the community, hosting public talks, alternative social events, space for emotional support, employability, hate crime support, health and welfare advice, community education, spaces for arts and activism, and to have a visible presence for referral organisations.

"I think drop ins for people to meet new people would be good and also creative sessions like crafts and somewhere people can learn new skills and hobbies"

"A permanent museum to archive and display the north east's queer history where visitors could conduct research, engage with exhibitions"

"Talks, workshops, education events (for schools, youth groups, adults), faith talks, STI drop ins, a safe space for people to ask and talk about gender identity and sexuality"

"Adult education classes, support groups, common interest groups, social/political action-campaigning etc. Awareness raising, training offered externally, volunteering opportunities"

"Plays, live performances, talks, lectures, workshops, theatre groups, crafts, health promotion, alternative social events to gay scene, day trips, exercise and wellbeing classes/groups, self-defence classes"

"Projects for young and homeless, asylum and refugees, older gay people who are all to often forgotten. Social events at Christmas, Easter, Halloween, Pride, etc. Day trips!"

"Some sort of counselling service specific to gender and sexuality where individuals could go to seek assistance with anything from gender transitioning under the NHS to same-sex couple adoptions. A multi-faith prayer room so that the space is accessible to queer individuals of all religions"

"Education around hate crime. Agency involvement and referral. Police support and engagement"

"Counselling, craft groups, library, cafe, parenting groups, youth groups, weight/health and well being support, specialist DV/A support i.e IDVA & ISVA"

"Meeting spaces for queer groups, business start up support, LGBTQ tourist info, info on how to get involved with different groups. Bookshop, gallery space, talks"

"More innovative groups. Perhaps book groups, musical appreciation, cooking, baking and debate groups, political ideas generation"

"Games nights, cookery classes, board games and activities like this. A gaming space"

"Film, conferences and book festivals"

"Social events should be important as well, maybe the venue could hold slam poetry/comedy/talent shows/plays/film nights/anything a bit different from what the scene does"

"I'd like to see a diverse range of groups using the space and for all to feel welcome there. Separate groups could book the space for various activities. It would be good to see a mix of social, welfare and campaigns/causes coming out of the community space"

"Job fairs, helping queer people into work, and recruitment with local employers"

"Aspects of living, working and socialising shared and discussed - Housing, employment practices, transport, pubs, events etc. Like to see a mix of old and young sharing experiences and a focus on LGBT history"

"Education projects to combat homophobia and transphobia. Places for people who are bisexual and pansexual to meet, please!"

Note: Each comment is from a different respondent

A centre to feel safe, informed, and included

When people were asked what they would like to see in an LGBTQ+ Community Centre, 90% of all respondents also talked about the 'feel' of an LGBTQ+ Community Centre. It was felt by a significant number of people that they have lost safe spaces to go to, due to closures of organisations. Alongside this, it was felt that the information on how to find LGBTQ+ groups has also been lost, or is difficult to find. Finally, many wanted an inclusive space which caters to all aspects of the LGBTQ+ community, to allow people to be themselves, and which provides intersectional support.

"Welcoming, support, advice, community, fun, inclusion, positivity, education"

"I want a place I can drive to so I am safe, not somewhere I have to walk around a busy city centre. As somebody who is non-binary, I just get stupid remarks. I would love a place away from a city centre, especially at night"

"It should be open for non-LGBTQ groups to use it as a base as this would promote inclusivity, however groups would need to be LGBTQ-friendly"

"A room for the community to hire for their own functions. A place where we can get married and hire it out"

"Launches and exhibitions of LGBTQ+ work. A safe and inclusive space for all to show their talents"

"All of the posters we used to have, have gone. Where are the noticeboards these days? I want to see groups I can join - not all of us can go online easily!"

"I want a place where I can change and have changing rooms, so I can express who I am without fear of name calling or being attacked for being trans"

"There is nothing for bi people in the UK, and especially the region. I'd love to see a bi meeting group"

"LGBT events that are for specific communities i.e. Black and Asian"

"Groups for people who do not speak English as a first language (language exchanges would be great) homeless LGBTQ people, space for LGBTQ people of colour to organise. LGBTQ parents may also feel isolated as may both younger and older people so groups around this would be awesome. Solidarity campaigns with refugees and asylum seekers would also be great, a lot of LGBTQ people flee persecution for example"

"Due to MESMAC closing and the hate crimes down the scene, I don't feel safe anymore. Everywhere feels like it's closing down - we need new life in the NE for LGBTQ+ people"

"LGBT-friendly spiritual and pastoral services would be just what I need. I don't always feel included in my own spaces of worship. Having talks, discussions about faith, and friendly pastors"

"Since MESMAC closed, I cannot find anything anymore. They used to have lists of community groups on their website, but it's now all lost. I really want a place where I can see all that information - I cannot find a thing on the council website"

"A place for young trans and non-binary people to meet. I can't think of anywhere better than a community centre"

"Lesbian spaces are vanishing. We no longer have anywhere to really go and I don't like the bars, they have changed. I would love to see women+ groups emerge from all of this, don't let us fade away"

"With a lot of people in Northumberland living in rural areas, I need a place I can drive to as we live in the country. Bars don't do that for me, but this would make me feel included"

A centre not located near the 'gay scene' in Newcastle

When asked where people would like to see an LGBTQ+ Community Centre, 89% responded that it should be 'away' from the commercial night-time economy of the Pink Triangle, with 40% (a slight majority) stating it should be based in Gateshead. Upon analysing comments as to chosen location, it was felt that Gateshead was chosen due to its position as a 'link' between Newcastle and Sunderland (with close proximity to South Tyneside) due to public transport. Many comments focused on the community centre standing apart from the partying and alcohol associated with the bars.

"I'd prefer it to be away from the central gay scene as the scene is not diverse and if the community centre were located elsewhere it would help to indicate it is more open to other people, particularly of different ages for example. Just going to the scene is off putting to me personally as I don't feel I belong there. This community centre would be a space for something different"

"Not everyone feels comfortable in the scene. Some would want to approach a community centre that is away from the sights and sounds of the gay scene nightlife. Not all LGBTQ+ people feel free to go out and be seen near the gay scene"

"I think somewhere that has a space within it that is not necessarily a bar with loud music is a positive move. A place for all ages but inclusive of the over sixties"

"It needs to be away from the gay bars. It needs a discrete location, a place where you can walk to it and be anonymous if you're not out"

"When people are not out to their family and friends, being seen going into a place like the gay scene where it's known as an LGBT area is not good. Plus, things being centred there makes the place an easier target for people who disagree with LGBTQ+ community"

"Most definitely away from the commercial scene. The scene is centred around alcohol and dancing and in my experience me and my girlfriend get loads of grief (she presents as fairly masculine) if we go on the scene. I also note that the majority of LGBT hate crime is recorded in the pink triangle, so it would not be a safe space to have a community centre. Also the scene has a large contingent of straight stag and hen parties and this is where the abuse I have received comes from"

"By making it away from the scene, you may attract a wider audience of engagement. Somewhere which feels more like a 'home' than a place you have to get drunk and spend lots of money"

"If away from the scene it might be more accessible for those who don't want to come out yet, or are questioning"

"In Newcastle a lot of queer events are centred around alcohol and loud music, and I'm not really an alcohol and loud music sort of person (I'm on the autistic spectrum and find it a bit overwhelming), so I feel a bit isolated. Having a LGBT space which wasn't (or wasn't just) part of the nightlife would be really welcome"

"Be nice to have a space that is safe and an alternative location to gay bars which are becoming more and more straight and less safe for transgender and gay friends"

"It needs to be in Gateshead, as it's a perfect location between that of Newcastle and Sunderland. It has good Metro stops"

"For people of colour, the traditional bars and clubs are not always accessible as they are centered around alcohol and partying only. On top of that, many queer POC face racism and sexualisation on the scene. Having a centre away from all of that would also help with anonymity of queer POC who want to attend things, but can't go to that area of town"

"It needs to be welcoming to under 18s, other cultures, and cultures that don't drink. It needs to be near public transport and have parking"

What is not wanted in an LGBTQ+ Community Centre

The final question raised the issue of what was not wanted in an LGBTQ+ Community Centre. Around 60% of respondents gave an answer for this, with some expressing 'no comment.' However, key points raised were about alcohol only being allowed on premises for specific events or groups, as was the notion of having a clear equitable mission statement which offers an open non-prejudiced access to the centre itself. Some people noted that they did not want the centre to feel too commercialised and it should feel like a modern, yet cosy/homely community space.

"It should be unlike the commercial 'scene' bars! Music at 'background' levels, competitively priced drinks. I would welcome straight people AS GUESTS and deter curious drunken hens and stags. I'm a comparatively ancient 'queen' and certainly no virginal prude, but I would not like the Centre to be overtly sexual in its decor and image. Wouldn't it be great if young people could bring family members there for a coffee or something without embarrassment?"

"Islamophobia, anti-Semitism or any form of racism or exclusion"

"I think the serving of alcohol should be carefully controlled. There probably shouldn't be any private shop-space neither, as it could be open to exploitative commercialisation. I would not want the centre to become a barricaded and exclusive space neither, it shouldn't discriminate against anyone"

"An age restriction! Needs to be available to ALL LGBTQ+ people"

"Arguing about who is welcome! It needs a strong personality at the helm and a strong mission and vision statement about the rules of the space to avoid this"

"Not a strong emphasis on drinking, though an occasional licence may be useful for example for a Ceilidh night"

"It being dominated by one group or another. It having no real focus - it needs clear aims and objectives"

"Anything that reinforces stereotypes"

"Inflated hire costs, etc for community groups. That it becomes another adjunct to the scene/a drinking venue as, with many individuals in the area identifying as non-scene, this would not be truly inclusive"

"Cold soulless meeting rooms with a few posters dotted about"

"A repetition of the commercial scene. A focus on youth and it becoming just another pick up space. Excluding the wrinkly's"

"A bar although not saying should necessarily be alcohol free as some groups might want"

"Bitter in-fighting about who is and is not included"

"Not to be dominated by one group or set of interests but to be diverse"

"Not too commercialised - community first"

"A reflection of the scene...dominated by and catered to gay men in particular. It should be an alcohol free space and those who are intolerant towards others in the community should not be welcomed"

"Overly commercial looking and having no community feel to it. You should walk in and see a community centre, not a bland commercial space"

"Exclusion of any kind of bi individual"

"No timetable of events and groups. Nothing for me to take away and read"

"No dog-eared out of date leaflets and scruffy second hand sofas, it's off putting walking into community centres with tatty uncomfortable chairs and old tables. It puts me off going back to them. Have homely modern furnishings instead of second hand knock-offs as it makes us feel the same"

Recommendations

***“I can't think of any other LGBTQ+ centre in the North East. So, it would be a welcome addition to the community”
(Survey Respondent)***

An LGBTQ+ Community Centre in the North East of England will act as a beacon for the regional LGBTQ+ community, and their allies. Being the first of its kind in this format, it will provide a unique space for groups who have seen services closed, projects shut down, and a fragmenting sense of community. The results of this research have outlined the need for this space to exist, and thrive.

01 There is a clear need for an LGBTQ+ Community Centre in the NE

The North East of England lacks a clear LGBTQ+ community hub, and with the closing and loss of LGBTQ+ spaces, this has been more stark. The need for this centre is evidenced.

02 People will use an LGBTQ+ Community Centre

It is clear that the notion of an LGBTQ+ Community Centre has clear community support to use it. People have ideas for the space itself and what to avoid.

03 The centre should be informed by community needs

The LGBTQ+ community have provided ideas as to how the centre should feel, how it should be open and inclusive, and what activities are most needed. The centre should reflect this.

04 The proper location of the centre is vital

The centre should not be based within the Pink Triangle of Newcastle around bars and clubs. It should have its own premises in Gateshead.

05 The centre will be vital for community and social cohesion

The activities and programmes provided and held by the LGBTQ+ Community Centre will be vital for long-term community and social connection, intergenerational engagement, educational/skills development, and community empowerment. It will also support vulnerable groups and combat LGBTphobia, isolation, health inequalities, and more.
