

Local Government Association Briefing

Organised crime and young people's safety

House of Commons

5 September 2018



KEY MESSAGES

- Local government has a key role to play in protecting children and young people from involvement in, and the impact of, organised crime, including serious violence and modern slavery as they are uniquely placed to build communities that are inclusive, cohesive and promote life chances.
- Councils provide more than 800 services to their local communities and despite working hard to identify efficiencies and generate innovative solutions to core funding reductions, they face a £7.8 billion funding gap by 2025. £3 billion of this is attributed to children's services.
- Government has recently made a number of welcome announcements regarding new pots of funding that councils, among other organisations, can bid for in order to tackle issues around crime and young people. This includes funding through the Serious Violence Strategy, the Early Intervention Youth Fund and the Trusted Relationships Fund.
- Ringfenced and one-off pots of funding play an important role in developing programmes that can protect children and young people and support them to become healthy and confident members of their local communities. However, without sustained and continuous core funding for councils' children's services, these funds will struggle to deliver long-term benefits for the young people themselves, or for their wider communities.
- National Crime Agency (NCA) figures show that in 2016, over 1200 children and young people were officially reported as potential victims of modern slavery, including being used to conduct forced criminality and being sexually exploited.
- County lines gangs often exploit children, young people and vulnerable adults to move and store drugs and money. They use coercion, intimidation, violence and weapons to assert control. We know from the Serious Violence Strategy that nearly every police force in England and Wales has been affected by county lines activity to some degree. This is an issue which affects all local areas, it is not just something that happens in major cities.
- To this end, we welcome the Government's recent decision to make Relationship and Sex Education a compulsory school subject. Schools have an important role to play in helping children and young people learn about positive relationships and educating them about wider issues. Conversations inside and outside the classroom can help children to recognise potentially abusive behaviours, identify trusted adults who they can talk to and receive information about support services.

Briefing

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The role of councils in supporting children and young people

Organised crime, in its many forms, presents a serious threat to children and young people in all areas of the country. It is vital that public, private and voluntary organisations work together to protect some of the most vulnerable people in our communities from its impact. Local government has a key role to play in achieving this.

Councils are uniquely placed to build communities that are inclusive, cohesive and promote the life chances of everyone in them. They do this by tailoring more than 800 local services to the needs of their populations, creating bespoke solutions to specific, local challenges. This includes working to protect and improve outcomes for children and young people, such as safeguarding and child protection services, as well as services like youth work and early intervention programmes to improve young people's health and wellbeing.

Councils also provide a number of wider public services that contribute to residents' wellbeing, such as public transport, parks and culture and sports activities. They are connectors to other related local services, including the voluntary and private sectors, for example youth programmes or local apprenticeship and training opportunities.

Core funding for children's services

Councils have worked hard to identify efficiencies and generate innovative solutions in response to reductions in central government funding totalling nearly £16 billion since 2010. However, they face an overall funding gap of £7.8 billion by 2025, of which £3 billion is attributed to children's services.¹ These council-wide funding pressures will have an undue impact on services that support children and young people's safety and wellbeing, including safeguarding, youth work, community safety, transport and culture and sports activities.

As well as this, our analysis shows that funding for the Early Intervention Grant, which helps deliver early intervention work that can help head off serious challenges (including serious violence and involvement with organised crime), has been cut by almost £500 million since 2013 and is projected to drop a further £183 million by 2020. This represents a 40 per cent reduction by the end of the decade.²

Demand for urgent child protection services has increased sharply at the same time as funding has been cut, including an 83 per cent increase in the number of children on child protection plans between 2007 and 2017.³ Faced with this increased demand and reduced funding, it is unsurprising that children and young people often reach crisis point before they receive support,⁴ with councils forced to divert spending on preventative and early help work into services to protect children who are at immediate risk of harm.

One example of cuts to preventative services is the reduction in spend on youth services. Spending has been cut by almost 40 per cent since 2010,⁵ which represents a £260 million reduction to budgets.⁶ Conversely, government has invested £1.2 billion between

¹ <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/councils-face-almost-ps8-billion-funding-black-hole-2025>

² <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/bright-futures/bright-futures-childrens-services/childrens-services-funding-facts>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/characteristics-of-children-in-need-2016-to-2017>

⁴ <https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/support-for-children-and-families/revolving-door/>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/section-251-2016-to-2017> ('A1' tab, net current expenditure column, services for young people excluding connexions and student support for comparability reasons)

⁶ <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130103215746/https://www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/financialmanagement/schoolsrevenuefunding/section251/archive/b0068383/section-251-data-archive/summary-level-la->

2016 and 2020 on the National Citizen Service (NCS), a short-term programme for 15-17 year olds that achieved only 12 per cent take up by eligible young people in 2016.⁷ The LGA is calling for devolution of some of the NCS funding to make up some of the shortfall in youth services budgets to provide local, year-round support to young people who need it.

If we do not invest fully in children and youth services, we will not be able to support young people to move out of dangerous situations. Only with the right funding and powers can councils continue to make a difference to peoples' lives by supporting families and young people and help tackle instances of organised crime and violence in our local communities.

Additional Government funding

The Government has made a number of welcome announcements over the summer regarding funding that has been made available or that has been increased to tackle issues around crime and young people that local authorities, PCCs or other partners can submit bids for. This includes funding through the Serious Violence Strategy, the Early Intervention Youth Fund and the Trusted Relationships Fund.

Although ringfenced pots of funding can be useful, one-off funds are most effective when there is adequate time to submit bids. The funding should be made available, and expected to be spent, within a reasonable time period. Often the bidding process for these funds requires strategic partnership arrangements to be put in place, between local government, the voluntary sector, the police, or wider practitioners. This level of collaboration can take time to establish and the bidding process should reflect this.

Sustainability is a key part of this process, so it is important for local authorities to receive clarity on future engagement in order to sustain community support and youth violence prevention work. For example, at the time the Serious Violence Strategy was launched in April 2018, councils were still waiting to receive their youth justice grant allocations for 2018/19. This is vital funding used to support young people and help keep them away from criminality in the first place. Whilst announcements of new funds are welcome, this should not replace the core funding required to support integral local government services.

Modern slavery and county lines

Figures from the National Crime Agency (NCA) for 2016 show that of the 3805 referrals made to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM)⁸, 1278 were minors. The most common exploitation of minors was labour exploitation, which includes forced criminality such as cannabis cultivation. Nearly 150 minors were referred to the NRM as potential victims of sexual exploitation.

County lines gangs often exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store drugs and money. They use coercion, intimidation, violence and weapons to assert control. We know from the Serious Violence Strategy that nearly every police force in England and Wales has been affected by county lines activity to some degree. This is an issue which affects all local areas, it is not just something that happens in major cities.

[outturn-data-reports](#) (Outturn table 1, 'net' column, services for young people)

⁷ <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/national-citizen-service/>

⁸ National Referral Mechanism: a framework for identifying victims of human trafficking or modern slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support

Raising awareness of county lines activity is vital. The Home Office's guide on county lines helps frontline staff identify the risk and warning factors at an earlier stage, and outlines how to report suspicious activity to the relevant authority.⁹ The LGA is working closely with the Home Office to provide further guidance and best practice on county lines, to help local authorities and frontline staff identify some of these key warning signs.

The Children's Society toolkit for frontline professionals on 'children and young people trafficked for the purpose of criminal exploitation in relation to county lines' is also helpful as it highlights some key factors that can increase the vulnerability that a child or young person will be exploited by others.¹⁰

In order to tackle county lines activity, we also need to address the root causes of serious violence. This means focusing on the drivers of serious violence, as well as the outcomes, however increasing demand for crisis-level services alongside significant funding cuts is limiting councils' abilities to provide early intervention and prevention services. According to the Early Intervention Foundation, nearly £17 billion per year is spent in England and Wales on addressing the costs of late intervention. Of this, the largest share is borne by local authorities, costing approximately £6.4 billion.¹¹

The Serious Violence Strategy

Serious violent crime has a detrimental impact on our communities. There is a huge cost to people who suffer trauma from both physical and psychological injuries and in some of the worse cases, serious violent crime can lead to loss of life.

Since the Home Affairs Committee report on gangs and youth crime in March 2015, we have seen some progress being made through a number of initiatives to tackle serious violent crime at a national level.¹² To help tackle knife crime, a number of major retailers have signed up to the voluntary agreement on the sale of knives. In August 2016, zombie knives were banned and police forces took action against knife crime through Operation Sceptre. We have also seen progress being made through the introduction of the Offensive Weapons Bill and changes to firearms legislation through the Police and Crime Act 2017.

Councils, working with local partners, have taken the lead on tackling serious violent crime in our communities. In Staffordshire the youth offending service is leading a prevention project to help identify children and young people who face poorer outcomes than their counterparts and intervening early with bespoke projects to help them thrive.

In Lincolnshire, the council is working in partnership with the NHS foundation trust as part of the Healthy Minds Lincolnshire Service which aims to support emotional wellbeing needs of young people, focusing on early intervention, promoting resilience and the prevention of emotional wellbeing concerns escalating to mental health issues. Qualified practitioners deliver direct, evidence-based interventions to children and young people up to the age of 19 (25 if they are a care leaver or SEND) and priority is given to vulnerable groups.

Council Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) have achieved huge success in working with and supporting young people to prevent them getting involved in crime, with an 85 per cent drop in First Time Entrants to the youth justice system and 74 per cent fewer young people in the average custodial population over the last decade. One of the programmes implemented by the YOT in North East Lincolnshire has involved working with children

⁹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/626770/6_3505_HO_Child_exploitation_FINAL_web_2_.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.csepolicelandprevention.org.uk/sites/default/files/Exploitation%20Toolkit.pdf>

¹¹ http://www.eif.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/cost-of-late-intervention-2016_report.pdf

¹² <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmhaff/199/199.pdf>

and young people who had been involved in county lines gangs and helped them work towards an art qualification as part of a rehabilitation programme. Learning about these young people's experiences has informed the council's response to county lines issues in their local area and they are able to share this best practice nationally.

Across the country, councils have developed strong partnerships with the police, social care, safeguarding teams, schools, the voluntary sector and many others to improve the response to managing risk and safety. In Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, the councils are involved in 'Operation Make Safe' which includes fortnightly meetings with a range of safeguarding and local partners to review police intelligence and assess children who may be at risk of exploitation and the location and status of perpetrators. These councils also use a screening tool, originally developed to assess children at risk of child sexual exploitation, which has now been expanded to include child criminal exploitation. Any professional is able to use the tool, from universal services through to targeted and specialist services. This has helped to develop the statutory agencies' response to assessing risk and vulnerability.

The Home Affairs Committee 2015 report recommended that primary school anti-gang education programmes and existing work of local organisations, such as Gangline and the SOS project, should be expanded.¹³ The Committee also recommended that programmes with records of turning around the lives of young people in gangs and with entrenched behavioural difficulties need to be commissioned more consistently, particularly the use of mentoring programmes that focus on gang-affected young people. The Committee found that intervening at the right time, at the 'teachable moment' when young people may be receptive to support, is vital. We are supportive of this approach as education and behavioural programmes are an important aspect of youth violence prevention work.

Understandably, schools have an important role to play in helping children and young people learn about positive relationships and educating them about wider issues, such as serious violence. Teachers can be a regular point of contact for children and young people, so they are in a good position to identify trends in behaviour and take action if needed. Children also learn about the importance of healthy relationships in schools, both as part of the curriculum and in the school environment. Conversations inside and outside the classroom can help children to recognise potentially abusive behaviours, identify trusted adults who they can talk to and receive information about support services.¹⁴ It is a good opportunity to help raise awareness within schools of the warning signs/risk indicators of criminal exploitation.

We are pleased that the Government has responded positively to our calls to make Relationships and Sex Education, a compulsory school subject, delivered as part of the broader PSHE programme.¹⁵ We also want to ensure the Serious Violence Strategy is coordinated with the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Green Paper proposals, so that the new designated mental health leads who will be working with schools can recognise serious violence as an issue and refer children and young people appropriately.

¹³ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmhaff/199/199.pdf>

¹⁴ Pearce, J. (2009) *Young People and Sexual Exploitation: It's not hidden, you just aren't looking* London: Routledge, <https://www.routledge.com/Young-People-and-Sexual-Exploitation-Its-Not-Hidden-You-Just-Arent/Pearce/p/book/9780203874189>

¹⁵ <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/lga-responds-new-relationships-and-health-education-guidance>