

Local Government Association Briefing

Initiatives in early intervention in children's lives that would improve the welfare, life chances and social mobility of young people in the UK

1 November 2018



KEY MESSAGES

- With responsibility for delivering over 800 public services, councils are uniquely placed to deliver early intervention programmes that improve the lives of children and young people. This could include children's services, youth services, and mental health services, as well as education, public health and employment.
- Since 2010 councils have worked hard to manage a core reduction in funding of £16 billion through innovation, efficiencies, scale-backs and the decommissioning of non-statutory services. We have previously warned that councils face a funding gap of nearly £8 billion by 2025.ⁱ
- While councils have largely managed to protect children's social care budgets by prioritising these over other services, this increase in demand has forced many areas to divert spending away from preventative and early help work into services to protect children who are at immediate risk of harm.
- Councils have seen a significant rise in demand for child protection services over the last decade, including a 158% increase in serious cases where the local authority believes a child may be suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm.ⁱⁱ
- An average of more than 270 children are now taken into care or placed on a child protection plan every single day.ⁱⁱⁱ
- The positive work of councils in supporting the life chances of children and young people is illustrated by the latest Ofsted data on children's social care, which shows that, in 2017/18, the proportion of council children's services rated good or outstanding has increased.^{iv} We know that without a sustainable, long-term funding solution, councils will struggle to continue this good work and deliver long-term benefits for children, families and communities.
- Councils need guaranteed, long-term funding commitments to ensure that they can develop programmes that will consistently protect and care for all children and young people, but especially those that are vulnerable.
- Councils are struggling to manage the rising demand in support for children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND). The LGA called on the Government to address the underfunding of SEND provision in the Autumn Budget, otherwise councils may not be able to meet their statutory duties and children with high needs or disabilities could miss out on a mainstream education.
- The LGA Bright Futures campaign calls on the Government to prioritise support for children and young people, highlighting examples of effective early intervention services to support children and young people and the growing challenge facing councils in continuing to resource them.

Briefing

KEY STATISTICS

- Councils have increased their spending on children's social care by over £750 million over the past four years to a record £8.8 billion in 2017/18, despite significant reductions in core government funding.
- Spending on children's social care has increased at a faster rate than any other area of council business. All areas except adult social care have seen a reduction in spending, yet councils had to spend £816 million more than they had budgeted for children's social care during the last year alone.
- The government's children's services Early Intervention Grant has been reduced by almost £600 million since 2013 and is projected to decrease by almost £100 million more by 2020. The cost of late intervention has been put at almost £17 billion a year.^v
- From 2007 to 2017 there has been a 158% increase in serious cases where the local authority believes a child may be suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm
- According to the Social Mobility Commission disadvantaged young people are almost twice as likely as better-off peers to be NEET (not in education, employment or training) a year after GCSEs.^{vi}

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The role of councils in supporting children and young people

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.

Many issues that impact on the wellbeing and life chances of children and young people fall outside of the remit of children's services, such as housing, health and employment. Ensuring that children and young people have access to opportunities and have their needs addressed must be seen as the responsibility of both the whole council and a wide range of partners, not just council children's services.

Councils can and should play a central role in integrating services around the needs of families to improve their outcomes and life chances. All too often the savings from investment by one agency are recouped by another, resulting in disincentives to invest in early intervention. We need to reform how funding is allocated across local services to encourage joint working and investment in early intervention that shifts the balance from crisis spend towards prevention, while considering how best to balance universal and targeted services in a time of reduced public spending.

Core funding for children's services and youth 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, we have previously warned that councils face a funding gap of nearly £8 billion by 2025.^{vii} These council-wide funding pressures will have a significant 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. Funding awarded in the October budget, £410 million for adults and children's social

care, and £84 million to roll our innovation projects in up to 20 councils over five years, is a step in the right direction. However, it will do little to alleviate the immediate and future pressures on services for some of the most vulnerable children and families in the vast majority of council areas

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 £600 million since 2013 and is projected to drop a further £100 million by 2020. This represents a 40 per cent reduction by the end of the decade.^{viii}

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.^{ix} Faced with this increased demand and reduced funding, children and young people are now increasingly reaching crisis point before they receive support,^x with councils forced to divert spending on preventative and early help work into services to protect children who are at immediate risk of harm.

Early help, child protection and local authority care

Councils will work to keep families together wherever this is safe and best for the child(ren), but where this is not possible, time in local authority care can have a positive impact on a child's life chances compared to if they remained at home on a child protection plan. For example, children in care have better educational outcomes than children in need, particularly where they go into care before the end of primary school.^{xi} Children in care are also less likely to be persistent absentees from school than any other group, and significantly less likely than children in need.^{xii}

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

In the LGA's Bright Futures: Children and Young People's Mental Health campaign, we highlight that:

- The average waiting time for children and young people to access mental health services ranges from 14 to 200 days.
- Once through the referral process and able to get specialist support, even young people with life-threatening conditions can wait more than 100 days before receiving any form of treatment.
- Specialist services are turning away one in four of the children referred to them by their GPs or teachers for treatment.
- Around 75 per cent of young people experiencing a mental health problem are not able to access any treatment.^{xiii}

In addition, the Government has confirmed a £331 million reduction to public health budgets between 2016/17 and 2020/21. This is on top of £200 million in-year reductions announced in October 2015^{xiv} and is coupled with significant reductions to broader local government funding. Councils are juggling competing demands and trying to deliver services with increasingly squeezed resources. This undermines the ability of councils to provide young people with the support services they need, and the LGA continues to call on the Government to reverse the cuts to public health budgets that have been made since 2015.

Early education and childcare

The early years are key to a child's education and social mobility, with evidence showing that attending a high quality early years setting can have a significant positive impact on a child's early development and school readiness, particularly for those children growing up in poverty.^{xv}

We know that children in the most deprived areas are less likely to reach a good level of development by age 5 than those in the least deprived areas^{xvi} and while many councils are targeting resources at the most deprived areas, these resources are limited. Additional support is needed to tackle the attainment gap between children from the most and least deprived backgrounds. 3 in 10 disadvantaged two-year-olds are still missing out on a free childcare place, and those in the most deprived areas are twice as likely to miss out on free childcare as their peers in more affluent areas^{xvii}; however, changes to the early years funding formula mean that councils can now retain less of the early years funding block to pay for outreach and support work to encourage take up.

Additionally, provision in many deprived areas too often offers less choice and quality to families.^{xviii} This is a consequence of complex and interlocking factors, including constraints on councils' ability to intervene on quality or to expand maintained provision outside of school sites. Families and children in deprived areas would benefit if the ability and resources to monitor and intervene on quality were returned to councils.

The Nuffield Foundation highlights staff qualifications as a key factor in the quality of early education provision,^{xix} however two thirds of councils in a recent LGA survey^{xx} raised concerns over the quality of Level Three practitioners in their area. Improvements in pay levels, career progression and professional development were cited as potential ways to improve this, however 4 in 5 councils (43 per cent) raised concerns that the new early years funding formula could have a negative effect on quality.

Delivering youth services

Most youth provision is now delivered through the National Citizen Service, which received £1.2 billion funding from central government between 2016 and 2020, 95 per cent of central government spending on youth services. While this is a good programme, it is a short term summer programme that will only reach a relatively small number of young people, with take up at only 12 per cent of eligible young people in 2016. We believe it needs to be part of a broader package of provision, and have called for some of the funding to be devolved to councils to support year-round provision that meets the needs of a wider group of young people locally.

As local authority budgets have reduced and demand for services has increased, councils have been forced to make difficult decisions about how to use increasingly limited resources. In many areas, services for young people are increasingly targeted at those in most need to try to ensure that they receive the support they need to flourish. While this targeting is essential to make the best use of resources and make sure those in most need are supported, this has left limited funding available for universal youth services. More than 600 youth centres have closed, and nearly 139,000 youth services places were lost, in the UK between 2012 and 2016. Councils have been forced to cut planned spending on youth services from £650 million in 2010/11 to just £390 million in 2016/17, a cut of nearly 40 per cent.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Councils have undertaken reviews for 94 per cent of children and young people that were transferring from SEND statements on to EHCPs, despite the complex, multi-agency approach needed to transfer them.

We are pleased that the Children and Families Minister has recognised that this has been a significant achievement for councils and we welcomed tranches of additional funding that were allocated to support the EHCP transfer process (£40 million in April 2017, followed by £29 million in November 2017). We are now calling on the DfE to make this funding available in future financial years to allow councils to continue to provide vital support for children with SEND.

Additional funding is needed to help councils and schools respond to the significant increase in requests for support from the families of children with SEND. In the three-year period 2014-17 the number of children and young people with statements or EHCPs increased by 21.1 per cent from 237,111 to 287,290. This compares with a 3.5 per cent increase in the previous three-year period 2011-14. The increase between 2016 and 2017 was 12.1 per cent.

As well as an increase in numbers of children and young people on EHCPs, the proportion of pupils with SEND who attend special schools has increased from 5.6 per cent in 2012 to 8.5 per cent in 2016 and the proportion in independent schools has moved from 4.5 per cent to 6.3 per cent.

By their very nature, these places are more expensive than mainstream provision. This is because pupils in special schools have much higher needs and disabilities than those in mainstream and often need specialised equipment and therapies plus much smaller classes – those with severe autism cannot be in a class larger than 8 pupils. Independent school fees are much higher because they are children who cannot be educated even in special schools locally and it sometimes involves residential provision.

While there have been some small increases in high needs funding it has been a cash-flat settlement, in line with the general schools budget, taking no account of inflation, increasing pensions contributions and sharply increasing demand. Pressure on high needs funding will increase further with the introduction of the National Funding Formula for schools this year that removes council flexibility to move funding from the general schools block to the high needs block of the Dedicated Schools Grant to help plug this funding gap. Schools also face funding pressures and should not be expected to meet shortfalls in high needs funding.

We are concerned that without additional funding being made available councils may be unable to meet their statutory duties to ensure appropriate provision for pupils with SEND. We are therefore calling on the DfE to undertake a fundamental review of high needs funding arrangements, including home-to-school transport.

Youth justice

Council youth offending teams (YOTs) have an excellent track record of delivering early intervention services and working with young people to prevent their coming into the youth justice system. Compared with the year ending March 2007, there are now 85 per cent fewer young people who are first time entrants into the youth justice system, and 74 per cent fewer young people in the average custodial population.^{xxi}

However, YOTs have been victims of their own success. As the numbers of young offenders has fallen, so has the grant from central government to continue the preventative work that caused the fall in the first place - from £145 million in 2010/11 to just £72 million in 2017/18. These cuts mean that the youth justice grant now makes up only around a third of funding for YOTs. With council children's services budgets increasingly focused on those children in the most urgent need of protection, YOTs are struggling to access the funding necessary to run vital, and successful, prevention and intervention schemes.

A disproportionately large number of children and young people in the youth justice system have experienced mental health problems or have special educational needs.^{xxii} However, as outlined earlier, there are significant issues around access to support services, which could help young people to remain in education or to choose positive paths away from youth crime.

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.

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- ⁱ <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/councils-face-almost-ps8-billion-funding-black-hole-2025>
- ⁱⁱ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/characteristics-of-children-in-need-2016-to-2017>
- ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/characteristics-of-children-in-need-2016-to-2017> and <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2016-to-2017>
- ^{iv} <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-data-in-england-2018/childrens-social-care-data-in-england-2017-to-2018-main-findings>
- ^v <https://www.eif.org.uk/report/the-cost-of-late-intervention-eif-analysis-2016/>
- ^{vi} https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/662744/State_of_the_Nation_2017_-_Social_Mobility_in_Great_Britain.pdf
- ^{vii} <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/councils-face-almost-ps8-billion-funding-black-hole-2025>
- ^{viii} <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/bright-futures/bright-futures-childrens-services/childrens-services-funding-facts>
- ^{ix} <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/characteristics-of-children-in-need-2016-to-2017>
- ^x <https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/support-for-children-and-families/revolving-door/>
- ^{xi} <http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/research/educational-progress-of-looked-after-children/>
- ^{xii} <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/outcomes-for-children-looked-after-by-las-31-march-2017>
- ^{xiii} <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/bright-futures/bright-futures-camhs/child-and-adolescent-mental-health-and>
- ^{xiv} <https://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/lga-autumn-budget-submission-2017>
- ^{xv} <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/global/reports/education-and-child-protection/untapped-potential.pdf>
- ^{xvi} https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/569410/Social_Mobility_Commission_2016_REPORT_WEB_1_.pdf
- ^{xvii} <http://www.smf.co.uk/failure-invest-early-years-provision-risks-creating-lost-generation-hitting-social-mobility-warns-senior-labour-mp/>
- ^{xviii} https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/sites/default/files/files/Quality_inequality_childcare_mathers_29_05_14.pdf
- ^{xix} https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/sites/default/files/files/Quality_inequality_childcare_mathers_29_05_14.pdf
- ^{xx} <https://www.local.gov.uk/early-years-provision-survey-results-june-2018>
- ^{xxi} <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-justice-annual-statistics-2016-to-2017>
- ^{xxii} <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-the-youth-justice-system>