

Local Government Association Briefing

A public health model to reduce youth violence

House of Commons

13 December 2018



KEY MESSAGES

- We support the World Health Organisation (WHO) public health approach to reducing violent crime as it aims to consider the underlying causes of the issue, and identify risk factors. By identifying early indicators of violence, agencies such as councils, law enforcement, youth work and youth justice charities, can intervene early and establish preventative programmes.
- We know that addressing violence is not a single agency issue. Local partners have to develop and deliver a strategic, coordinated approach to tackle youth violence in their local areas.
- Councils play a key role in reducing violence, bringing together partners through their strategic and operational role spanning enforcement (for example the sale of knives and acid), early intervention, prevention in relation to violent crime and provision of support to victims of violence.
- We are extremely concerned by the activity of county lines gangs that often exploit children, young people and vulnerable adults to commit crimes. They use coercion, intimidation, violence and weapons to assert control. This is an issue which affects all local areas.
- While councils have largely managed to protect children's social care budgets by prioritising these over other services, an increase in demand for acute services has forced many authorities to divert spending away from preventative and early intervention into services to protect children who are at immediate risk of harm.
- 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.¹ 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.

Briefing

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A public health approach to reducing violence

The WHO defines a public health approach to reducing violence as one that: 'Seeks to improve the health and safety of all individuals by addressing underlying risk factors that increase the likelihood that an individual will become a victim or a perpetrator of violence. By definition, public health aims to provide the maximum benefit for the largest number of people. Programmes for primary prevention of violence based on the public health approach are designed to expose a broad segment of a population to prevention measures and to reduce and prevent violence at a population-level.'ⁱⁱ

The role of councils in supporting children and young people

Councils are uniquely placed to build communities that are inclusive, cohesive and promote life chances. 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.

The importance of local partnership working is mirrored at the national level, as the lives of children and young people are inevitably affected by decisions over which councils and their partners have little control. It is therefore vital that Whitehall approaches improved outcomes for children with one voice. For example, the Children and Social Work Act signalled a commitment to care leavers by increasing support for them until the age of 25 and requiring local areas to publish their own support offers, yet research has shown that care leavers are five times more likely than the general population to have their welfare benefits sanctioned by the Department for Work and Pensions.ⁱⁱⁱ The Government should develop a new 'children and young people impact assessment' to use alongside existing equalities impact assessments, to ensure that the needs of children are central to all policy and legislative changes.

Councils can 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.

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 £15 billion since 2010. Our analysis shows that councils face a funding gap of £7.8 billion by 2025, of which £3 billion is attributed to children's services.^{iv} 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 out 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.^v

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

Additional Government funding

The Government has made a number of welcome announcements regarding funding 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,
- the Trusted Relationships Fund, and
- the Youth Endowment Fund.

Although ring-fenced 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.

Delivering youth services

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.

Scaling back these universal services can mean that opportunities to support some

young people can be missed. Providers of services for young people have an important role to play in building trusted relationships which can enable young people to share concerns that they may feel unable to raise with their family or those perceived as authority figures such as teachers or social workers. They can then be directed to the right opportunities and support to help them make a positive transition to adulthood.

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.

Case studies

Bristol – Involving the community

Bristol has adopted a public health approach to tackling violent crime – and in doing so is fully engaging the community. A stakeholder group has helped to design and implement the strategy, while community champions have been recruited to work with young people. Two years ago the council decided to refresh its approach by placing a heavier emphasis on early intervention and prevention and community involvement.

It's Preventing Gang Involvement and Youth Violence Strategy was launched in 2017 by the Safer Bristol Partnership. The strategy was focussed on safeguarding young people from aged 10 upwards. It set out a new vision across three key themes:

- Engagement and support
- Empowerment
- Enforcement and disruption

Crime Reduction Manager Stuart Pattison said: "The traditional approach had been focussed around the criminal justice system. But by doing that we were not really addressing the underlying cause of the problems. Now, much like the lauded Violence Reduction Unit in Scotland, we have adopted a 'public health' approach."

The impact of this work to date has been that Bristol. The council and other local partners has set up a single front door and referral pathway through its multi-agency safeguarding hub. It now gets referrals from a variety of different sources including schools, social care, and the youth offending team and the police as well as direct referrals from concerned members of the community. Sadly demand remains high. Currently the hub considers around 50 referrals a month.

Statutory services including social care and early help are available, but crucially the council has also sought to involve the community as part of the solution.

A network of community champions has been recruited and trained to act as voluntary mentors to young people at risk of being caught up in violent and organised crime. They are working with young people to ensure they get the education, employment, housing and wellbeing support they need.

Mr Pattison said they are proving to be incredibly effective. "The mentors are authentic as they come from the community and the holistic support plans provide a meaningful alternative, enabling young people to turn their back on lucrative if extremely dangerous criminal activity."

In the long-term, Mr Pattison said he expects to see falls in the knife crime involving young people and also the public's experience and perception of crime and anti-social behaviour. "It will not happen overnight, but I expect in the next year or so we will see the impact of the work we have started and this will continue to accelerate."

Now that good progress is being made with early intervention and prevention, Bristol is turning its attention to what else can be done to help those who are already being criminally exploited and caught up in the criminal justice system.

The pilot is based on a deferred prosecution model. In return for escaping a criminal charge and potential custodial sentence, offenders will instead be expected to engage with a community mentor for six to nine months and engage in intensive programmes, including employment or education, as well as staying out of trouble. The mentors will be paid for this work.

Northampton – Setting up youth clubs to tackle criminal activity

The Community Safety Partnership has started working with schools to warn pupils about the dangers of knife crime. The initiative has paved the way for a new project which will see youth clubs created to target at youngsters most at risk of finding themselves caught up in organised and violent crime.

In February 2018 a child sexual exploitation event was held at a local theatre where drama productions and awareness sessions were delivered to 500 primary and secondary schools.

And later in the year, the partnership turned its attention to knife crime launching #StopKnivesSaveLives in September. It is a joint project by the ambulance service, police, youth offending service, university, borough council and youth organisation Free2Talk.

The campaign has been targeted at year six and year seven pupils.

The year six pupils have been given talks about community safety, warned about the dangers of rail tracks and about the risks of knife crime.

Councillor Anna King, Northampton cabinet member for community engagement and safety, said: "We did not want it to be too graphic. But we have seen really young people get caught up in crime – some as young as 12 – and so we wanted to start raising the issues early.

"We have had a local judge come in to talk to the pupils as well. He talked about his experience of sentencing young people, warning one mistake can have terrible consequences for your life."

The sessions for secondary school pupils have been more hard-hitting featuring a video filmed by the ambulance service showing the impact of a stabbing and how it has to be treated. Talks have also been given by the youth offending service as well as police officers.

The talks are in the process of being rolled out to schools across the town. By the end of this academic year all 17 secondary schools and many of the primary schools will have been involved. Teachers in all the schools have also been present to help raise awareness of the signs to look out for.

The feedback has been really positive. Pupils have been asked to complete a survey following the sessions. Some 94 per cent said they now know significantly more about

the consequences of carrying an offensive weapon, 79 per cent about blood loss and first aid and 80 per cent about weapons and the law.

Further reading

LGA, Public health approaches to reducing violence, July 2018

(<https://www.local.gov.uk/public-health-approaches-reducing-violence>)

LGA, The relationship between family violence and youth offending, July 2018

(<https://www.local.gov.uk/relationship-between-family-violence-and-youth-offending>)

ⁱ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-data-in-england-2018/childrens-social-care-data-in-england-2017-to-2018-main-findings>

ⁱⁱ https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/15.32%20-%20Reducing%20family%20violence_03.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/resources-and-publications/claiming-after-care-care-leavers-and-the-benefits-system>

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

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

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

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