

Local Government Association Briefing

Youth services and youth violence

House of Commons

10 October 2018



KEY MESSAGES

- With responsibility for delivering over 800 different public services, councils are uniquely placed to deliver youth work and youth services as part of a broader package of services for young people, which could include housing, education, health and employment.
- Councils' youth services have a vital role to play in supporting young people to develop skills and interests beyond the limits of a school or family environment.
- The LGA has set out our vision for youth services as part of our Bright Futures campaign. We are calling on the Government to develop a similar vision that recognises the important contribution youth services make to our communities.
- Councils also have a duty to protect children and young people from involvement in and the impact of youth violence, including organised crime, serious violence and modern slavery.
- In order to deliver a range of services for young people 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.
- 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 now face a £7.8 billion funding gap by 2025.¹
- We welcome the Government's recent announcements regarding new pots of funding to tackle issues around crime and young people, through the Serious Violence Strategy, the Early Intervention Youth Fund and the Trusted Relationships Fund.
- Without sustained and continuous funding, these ring-fenced pots will struggle to deliver long-term benefits for the young people themselves, or for their wider communities.
- We are becoming increasingly 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, it is not just something that happens in major cities.

Briefing

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

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

LGA Vision for youth services

Councils want all young people to enjoy their lives, reach their full potential and make a good transition to adulthood with good health and wellbeing. They should be able to achieve their ambitions, develop positive relationships and make worthwhile contributions to their communities. Providing the right youth services for young people locally can help them to avoid potentially negative or dangerous situations, or support them to get out of these situations where they arise.

Providers of services for young people, including but not limited to youth workers, 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.

We have set out our vision for youth services and are calling on the Government to develop a similar vision that recognises the important contribution youth services make to our communities. Youth services should be:

1. Youth-led

Young people's voices and needs are central to the provision offered to them. They can choose to attend a variety of services on a voluntary basis, building a sense of autonomy and trust in practitioners that encourages engagement with further work where needed.

2. Inclusive, promoting equality and diversity

Young people feel included in their local area and can access the support they need as they progress towards adulthood, regardless of their needs and background.

The local youth offer helps to improve social mobility for young people from all backgrounds by offering support to develop the skills, knowledge and networks they need to access and take advantage of opportunities.

3. Respectful

Young people are a valued and respected part of the community whose needs and wishes are considered equally with those of other groups. They are actively encouraged to participate in their communities and to enjoy opportunities in their local area without fear of judgement or negative stereotyping.

4. High quality, safe and prioritise well-being

Good quality services are provided by staff with appropriate safeguarding training, linked to a wider network of support. The youth offer helps to keep young people safe and supports their mental, emotional and physical health, improves their social and economic wellbeing, and makes sure they can access education, non-formal learning and recreation.

5. Empowering

Services empower young people to progress and engage in employment, education and training, and to take an active role in their local communities. Young people are listened to and can make positive demonstrable changes to their communities, and understand how to engage with the democratic process.

6. Positive

Services are strengths-based and focus on developing the skills and attributes of young people, rather than attempting to 'fix a problem'.

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.

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.

Many issues that impact on the wellbeing and life chances of young people fall outside of the remit of youth work, such as housing, education, health and employment. Ensuring that 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 youth workers.

Instances of youth crime

Council Youth Offending Teams have had significant success in reducing the number and proportion of young people entering the youth justice system. There has been 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.² However councils are concerned that a 50 per cent cut to the youth justice grant since 2010 will undermine the progress that has been made by reducing the services available to the young people who need them.

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, they face an overall funding gap of £7.8 billion by 2025, of which £3 billion is attributed to children's services.³ 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.⁴

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-justice-annual-statistics-2016-to-2017>

³ <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/councils-face-almost-ps8-billion-funding-black-hole-2025>

⁴ <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/bright-futures/bright-futures-childrens-services/childrens-services-funding-facts>

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 2017.⁵ Faced with this increased demand and reduced funding, it is unsurprising that children and young people often reach crisis point before they receive support,⁶ with councils forced to divert spending on preventative and early help work into services to protect children who are at immediate risk of harm.

The impact of funding reductions on 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.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

A disproportionately large number of children and young people in the youth justice system have experienced mental health problems.⁷ However, access to mental health services is of particular concern to councils trying to support young people and divert them away from lifestyles and situations in which youth crime and youth violence may play a part.

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.⁸

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 2015⁹ and is coupled with significant reductions to broader local

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/characteristics-of-children-in-need-2016-to-2017>

⁶ <https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/support-for-children-and-families/revolving-door/>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-the-youth-justice-system>

⁸ <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/bright-futures/bright-futures-camhs/child-and-adolescent-mental-health-and>

⁹ <https://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/lga-autumn-budget-submission-2017>

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.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Young people in the youth justice system are more likely to have special education needs. Where these are unsupported, this can lead to disengagement from education, which we know is a risk factor for involvement in youth crime.

However, SEND reforms in the Children and Families Act have been significantly underfunded given the unprecedented rise in demand for SEND support. In addition, the introduction of the national funding formula for schools and reforms to high needs funding are likely to exacerbate things further, by making it more difficult for councils to 'top-up' high needs funding in response to rising demand.

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.

County lines

Figures from the National Crime Agency (NCA) for 2016 show that of the 3805 referrals made to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM),¹⁰ 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.

¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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.¹²

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.¹³

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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ One of the programmes implemented by the YOT in North East Lincolnshire has involved working with children and young people who had been involved in county lines gangs and helped

¹¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/626770/6_3505_H_O_Child_exploitation_FINAL_web_2_.pdf

¹²<https://www.csepoliceandprevention.org.uk/sites/default/files/Exploitation%20Toolkit.pdf>

¹³http://www.eif.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/cost-of-late-intervention-2016_report.pdf

¹⁴<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmhaff/199/199.pdf>

¹⁵<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-justice-annual-statistics-2016-to-2017>

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 Gangsline and the SOS project, should be expanded.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ 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.

¹⁶ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmhaff/199/199.pdf>

¹⁷ 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>

¹⁸ <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/lga-responds-new-relationships-and-health-education-guidance>