

The role and sufficiency of youth services

House of Commons

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KEY MESSAGES

- Councils provide a range of youth services that play a key role to support young people. This includes working to protect and improve outcomes for children and young people, safeguarding and child protection, youth work and early intervention programmes.
- As local authority budgets have reduced and demand for services has increased, councils have had to make difficult decisions about how to use increasingly limited resources. Local government has lost 60p out of every £1 of funding for services, and councils face an £8 billion funding gap by 2025.
- Councils were forced to cut spending on local youth services by 52 per cent, from £652 million in 2010/11 to £352 million in 2017/18.ⁱ 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, this has left limited funding available for universal youth services.
- Councils also provide services to prevent children and young people coming into the youth justice system and lead on tackling serious violent crime in our communities. We welcome the Government's recent announcements regarding new pots of funding to tackle issues around crime and young people. Whilst announcements of new funds are welcome, this should not replace the core funding required to support integral local government services.
- Many other services that impact young adults are delivered by local government outside the remit of youth services. The challenges facing them span a range of areas, including, poverty, housing, skills and employment, access to training and careers advice, access to mental and physical health and wellbeing services, and exposure to violence, crime and exploitation.
- The Government must use the Queen's Speech, Spending Review and other opportunities to deliver powers, certainty and sustainable funding for local government. The LGA's *Councils Can* campaign sets out our positive agenda for a new localism settlement that will help ensure councils can continue to support young adults.ⁱⁱ

Briefing

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Councils provide a wide range of youth services, working across protecting and improving outcomes for children and young people, safeguarding and child protection, youth work and early intervention programmes. As local authority budgets have reduced and demand for services has increased, councils have had to make difficult decisions about how to use increasingly limited resources on youth services.

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. 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.

In the 2018 budget, the Government awarded £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. This is a positive step but should form a part of a wider long-term sustainable funding settlement.

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.ⁱⁱⁱ

Demand for urgent child protection services has increased sharply at the same time as funding has been cut. This includes an 84 per cent increase in the number of children subject to a child protection plan between 2008 to 2018.^{iv} Faced with this increased demand and reduced funding, children and young people are now increasingly reaching crisis point before they receive support,^v with councils forced to divert spending on preventative and early help work into services to protect children who are at immediate risk of harm.

Councils are corporate parents to children in care and care leavers, and part of this role is ensuring that they experience a positive transition to adulthood. Two key provisions for this are 'Staying Put' and personal adviser support. The 'Staying Put' duty was introduced in 2014 and allows children in care to remain with their foster carers after the age of 18. Personal advisers support care leavers throughout their transition from care, supporting them to implement their Pathway Plan which sets out how they will achieve their goals including in relation to employment and training. Personal Advisers support was extended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017 to all care leavers up to the age of 25.

Councils welcome the introduction of both of these duties, which provide much needed security and support for these potentially vulnerable young adults. Unfortunately both of these new burdens have been significantly underfunded. Early LGA findings indicate:^{vi}

- The Staying Put duty was underfunded in 2018/19 by between £1,475 and £20,009 per young person.
- The extension of personal adviser support was underfunded in 2018/19 by between £4,118 and £387,018.

With councils facing a £3.1 billion funding gap in children's services by 2025, it is vital that these duties are properly funded if care leavers are to receive the high quality support they deserve.

Delivering youth services

Youth services can help young people reach their full potential and make a good transition to adulthood, especially for those young people who may not have trusted relationships at home or at school. Through engagement with youth services, young people can progress into adulthood more prepared for the challenges they may face and less in need of additional support. As local authority budgets have reduced and demand for services has increased, councils have had 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^{vii}. Councils were forced to reduce spending on local youth services by 52 per cent, from £652 million in 2010/11 to £352 million in 2017/18, as a result of government funding cuts.

Scaling back these universal services can mean that opportunities to support some young people are 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. 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.

Knife Crime and Breaking the Cycle in Youth Violence

Councils, working with local partners, have taken the lead on tackling serious violent crime in our communities. Across the country they 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 March 2019, the LGA published *Breaking the Cycle in Youth Violence*, which highlights case studies from councils across the country.^{viii} Whilst progress has been made nationally and locally, there is still more to be done. A recent report by the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Knife Crime and Youth Services suggested a growing link between cuts to youth services and the country's increase in knife crime.

Councils' youth offending teams (YOTs) have an outstanding track records working with children and young people to stop them coming into the youth justice system. Compared with March 2008, there are now 86 per cent fewer young people who are first time entrants into the youth justice system and the average youth custodial population has fallen by more than 70 per cent.^{ix}

As the numbers of young offenders has fallen, so has the grant from central government to continue. Council run youth services have seen funding more than halved in real terms since 2010. It has fallen from £145 million in 2010/11 to just £70.7 million in 2019/20. These cuts mean that the youth justice grant now makes up only around a third of funding for YOTs. Council children's services budgets are facing a £3.1 billion funding gap by 2025, limiting the extent to which they can make up the shortfall. As a result YOTs are

struggling to access the funding necessary to run vital, and successful, prevention and intervention schemes.

The Government has made a number of welcome announcements regarding funding to tackle issues around crime and young people that local authorities, Police and Crime Commissioners 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. Whilst announcements of new funds are welcome, this should not replace the core funding required to support integral local government services.

Councils must be given the resources they need to work with young people and prevent their involvement in crime in the first place, rather than simply picking up the pieces after offences have been committed.

Councils Can

The Government must use the Queen's Speech, Spending Review and other opportunities to deliver the powers, certainty and sustainable funding for local government. The LGA's *Councils Can* campaign sets out our positive agenda for a new localism settlement that will help ensure councils can continue to support young adults.

Key elements of the settlement should include:

- **An English Devolution Bill:** To be announced in the first Queens Speech. This should present options for devolved powers to be at least the level of the Scottish Government and be underpinned by statute to ensure that these powers and the powers already devolved through existing deals cannot simply be rolled back by a change in Government policy.
- **A Local Government Finance Bill:** Granting full local control over council tax, local powers to set levels of discounts and powers over banding, and 100 per cent business rates retention amongst other powers.
- **A sustainable funding settlement** in the Spending Review: This should address current funding gaps and provide clarity on place-led domestic successors to current EU structural funding.

ⁱ LGA Analysis <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/section-251-2017-to-2018#section-251-outturn-data>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.local.gov.uk/spending-review-2019>

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

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<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130315162257/https://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/sfr242008pdf.pdf> and <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/characteristics-of-children-in-need-2017-to-2018>

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

^{vi} Research conducted by the LGA, speaking to a sample of councils to quantify new burdens in children's services

^{vii} <https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2016/08/23996.pdf>

^{viii} <https://local.gov.uk/breaking-cycle-youth-violence>

^{ix} <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-justice-statistics-2017-to-2018>