

Serious Violence

House of Commons

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KEY MESSAGES

- Tackling serious violent crime is a key priority for councils. It has become even more vital due to rising levels of this type of crime and the harm it causes to victims and young people drawn and exploited into committing it. This complex issue requires a multi-agency partnership approach including education, health, social services, housing, youth services, victim services, charities, local government, and law enforcement.
- Councils have taken the lead on tackling serious violent crime in our communities. They have been working hard to develop strong local partnerships with the police, social care, safeguarding teams, schools, the voluntary sector.
- The risk of being exploited or involved in violent crime can be reduced with the correct interventions. Alongside health and education partners, local authorities are well placed to take advantage of 'reachable and teachable moments' and identify which interventions are most effective and how they can be implemented.
- In our report on family violence and links with youth offendingⁱ, we identified certain risk factors that could affect a child or young person being exploited or involved in violent crime. These could include frequent truancy, levels of poverty and deprivation, and experiences of family violence.
- Children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) can be at risk. The Children Commissioner's report on the characteristics of children and young people associated with gangs found that 40 per cent have an identified special educational needⁱⁱ. We need to ensure there is significant and sustainable funding to address the demand in support from pupils with SEND so they are fully supported in school.
- 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 knife crime epidemicⁱⁱⁱ. 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. Government needs to address this in the forthcoming Spending Review.
- The statistics on reductions to council's budgets since 2010 are stark and councils have had to prioritise spending on statutory services, to the detriment of other public services. Whilst announcements of new funds are welcome, this should not replace the core funding required to support integral local government services.
- The Government has announced a series of separate pots of funding that local partnerships could bid for to support and protect children and young people from criminal activity, including funding through the Serious Violence Strategy, the Early Intervention Youth Fund, the Trusted Relationships Fund, and the Youth Endowment Fund.

Briefing

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- The Government has also announced of a new package of support for domestic abuse survivors, including placing a legal duty on councils to deliver accommodation-based support. It is important that the final package ensures local authorities are supported in their work going forward. It must provide flexibility to ensure services can be tailored to the needs of different areas.
- Sustainability is a key part of this process and we need clarity on funding to sustain community support and youth violence prevention work. 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. The Government must also ensure funding for the Troubled Families Programme is continued beyond 2020.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Councils, working with local partners, have taken the lead on tackling serious violent crime in our communities. 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 March 2019 the LGA published *Breaking the Cycle in Youth Violence*, which highlights case studies from councils across the country.^{iv}

For example, 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. It focuses 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.

In Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, the councils are involved in 'Operation Make Safe'. This 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.

Whilst progress has been made both nationally and locally to tackle serious violence, there is still more that needs to be done to combat this type of crime which is increasingly prevalent in our communities.

Public health services also have an important role to play in tackling serious violence. This includes looking at crime reduction, violence prevention, responses to violence, reducing levels of reoffending and preventing health inequalities. Councils' public health grant funding is being cut by £600 million between 2015/16 and 2019/2020 and we are calling on the Government to reverse these cuts to enable councils to deliver vital public health services and early intervention and prevention services

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.

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 boosting support up 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.^v 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.

Knife Crime

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 knife crime epidemic.

This increase in children and young people tragically involved in knife crime and gang activity reinforces the need to invest in local services to support and work with children and young people to help them stay safe.

Councils' youth offending teams (YOTs) have an outstanding track record in working with children and young people to stop them coming into the youth justice system. However, 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. As a result of these reductions in government funding, council-run youth services have seen funding more than halved in real terms since 2010.

Faced with significant rises in demand for urgent child protection work and a £3.1 billion funding gap facing children's services by 2025, councils are being forced to divert the limited funding they have left away from preventative work. This includes YOTs and youth work, into services to protect children who are at immediate risk of harm.

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. Government needs to address this in the forthcoming Spending Review.

Vulnerability and Exploitation

The Serious Violence Strategy identifies an important shift in the drugs market, through the emergence of new psychoactive substances such as spice and an increase in crack cocaine use since 2014. The supply and demand of drugs are closely linked with the recent rise in serious violence. The number of homicides involving illicit drug dealers and/or users, as either victims or suspects, increased between 2014/15 and 2016/17. During that time, the share of homicides where either the victim or suspect was a drugs user or dealer also increased from 50 per cent to 57 per cent.

These increases have been accompanied by a shift towards younger victims and perpetrators. The data indicates there is an increased involvement of young people in different aspects of the illicit drugs market (notably through county lines activity). For example, the number of young people (10 years - 17 years old) convicted for class A drug production and possession with intent to supply has increased by 77 per cent between 2012 and 2016. This is three times the equivalent increase than seen among adult offenders.^{vi}

Vulnerability is a key factor in serious violence. We know that 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. The Strategy indicates that young people who are in care or who have been excluded from school are more at risk of both victimisation and perpetration of serious violence.

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. Our analysis shows that councils face a funding gap of £8 billion by 2025, of which £3 billion is attributed to children's services.^{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 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.^{viii}

Demand for urgent child protection services has increased sharply at the same time as funding has been cut. This includes 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.

Demand for support for pupils with SEND has also increased significantly and needs to be funded sustainably going forward. The Children Commissioner's report in February 2019 on '*The characteristics of gang-associated children and young people*' found that 40 per cent of children and young people associated with gangs had an identified SEN, and of those 80 per cent do not have a full statement or education, health and care (EHC) plan.^{xi} Research undertaken by the Isos Partnership on behalf of the LGA has

found that councils are facing a high needs funding gap of £806 million for 2019-20, rising to almost £1.2 billion in 2020-21. We are concerned that unless additional funding is found, councils will be unable to meet their statutory duties to support children with SEND.

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^{xii}. 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, 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.

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.^{xiii}

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. It has fallen 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.^{xiv} 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.

Support for councils to tackle domestic violence

The Government has announced of a new package of support for domestic abuse survivors, including placing a legal duty on councils to deliver accommodation-based support. Tackling domestic abuse is an issue which councils take very seriously and already offer a range of support to protect victims and their families from this crime. The LGA has welcomed these additional measures, which will assist councils in this vital work.

Councils need to work with a range of public services, including the police to tackle this issue. It is important that the final package ensures local authorities are supported in their work going forward. It must provide flexibility to ensure services can be tailored to the needs of different areas. The ambition must be to reduce the number of victims, with greater investment in early intervention and prevention schemes that helps stop domestic abuse occurring in the first place.

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, 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.

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.

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

ⁱⁱ <http://www.isospartnership.com/uploads/files/LGA%20HN%20report%20published%2012.12.18.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.preventknifecrime.co.uk/news/>

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

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

^{vi} https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/698009/serious-violence-strategy.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://www.isospartnership.com/uploads/files/LGA%20HN%20report%20published%2012.12.18.pdf> (See page 31)

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

^{xiii} <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-justice-annual-statistics-2016-to-2017>

^{xiv} <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-the-youth-justice-system>