



The Future Role of Local Government in Delivering Youth Services

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UK Youth is the largest national youth sector membership and delivery organisation in the country. Through our network, and in partnership with Youth Scotland, Youth Cymru and Youth Action Northern Ireland, we reach more than 840,000 young people across more than 4200 communities.

Our Vision is for all young people to be empowered to build bright futures, whatever their background or circumstances.

Our Mission is to provide access to appropriate, high quality services for young people in every community

UK Youth work to achieve its mission in five key ways:

1. By understanding and building on the strengths and needs of young people
2. By offering support and advice to youth service providers
3. By running world-class skills development programmes for young people
4. By measuring impact and sharing learnings
5. And by influencing policy and funding to prioritise services for young people

UK Youth's mission, **to provide access to appropriate, high quality services for young people in every community** must also be adopted as a priority for all Local Governments.

This doesn't mean that there is an expectation for Local Government to pay for all services on their own, to a large extent that ship has already sailed, and it's not necessarily healthy for any organisation or service to be reliant upon a single income stream. So a turning back of the funding clock will not be adequate, or in fact be effective. But rather, Local Government, as highlighted in the LGA vision, does have a clear responsibility for ensuring youth services are provided locally, with resilient business models in place to ensure the longevity and sustainability of those services.

The changing face of youth service delivery

The youth sector across England has been and continues to evolve rapidly. Having experienced more than £400 million of cuts to local and regional services over the last 7 years, statutory provisions have substantially diminished right across the country, and in some areas ceased to exist entirely.

This environment has led to high levels of innovation in how to sustain delivery, and as a consequence there is now a huge variability and inconsistency in how services are being maintained across England's 152 Local Authority (LA) areas. Multiple youth service models now exist, including commissioned and tendered services, voluntary sector led provisions, Community Interest Companies, Mutuals, Social Enterprises, cross-borough collaborations, and in some cases still statutorily led.

Examples of the variety of new youth service infrastructure models include:

- A Mutual in Merseyside ([Knowsley Youth Mutual](#))
- An employee led Community Interest Company in Kensington and Chelsea ([EPIC](#))
- Wholesale commissioned services in Greenwich (Charlton Athletic Community Trust - [Young Greenwich](#))
- A staff-run social enterprise in Devon ([Space](#))
- County Council led youth services in Hertfordshire ([Youth Connexions Hertfordshire](#))
- An LA funded collective of voluntary sector organisations in Brighton and Hove ([Youth Collective](#))
- [Young People Foundations](#) established in Brent, Barnet, Harrow and other London Boroughs

Plus many more structures that have developed organically throughout the country.

If the responsibility for Local Government isn't just financial, what it is?

In today's more complex ecosystem of service provision the answer is principally and fundamentally, to be the strategic and quality management lead. Each LA may have a different model to delivering an offer, but they still maintain the responsibility and duty to ensure that a comprehensive and fit-for-purpose offer is being delivered.

Whether that be predominately statutory funded, or voluntary sector led, whether there are a range of local social enterprises, or the private sector is playing a more significant role, as they would be with education, it doesn't really matter. Young People don't care who is paying for their local youth centre, just that there is one!

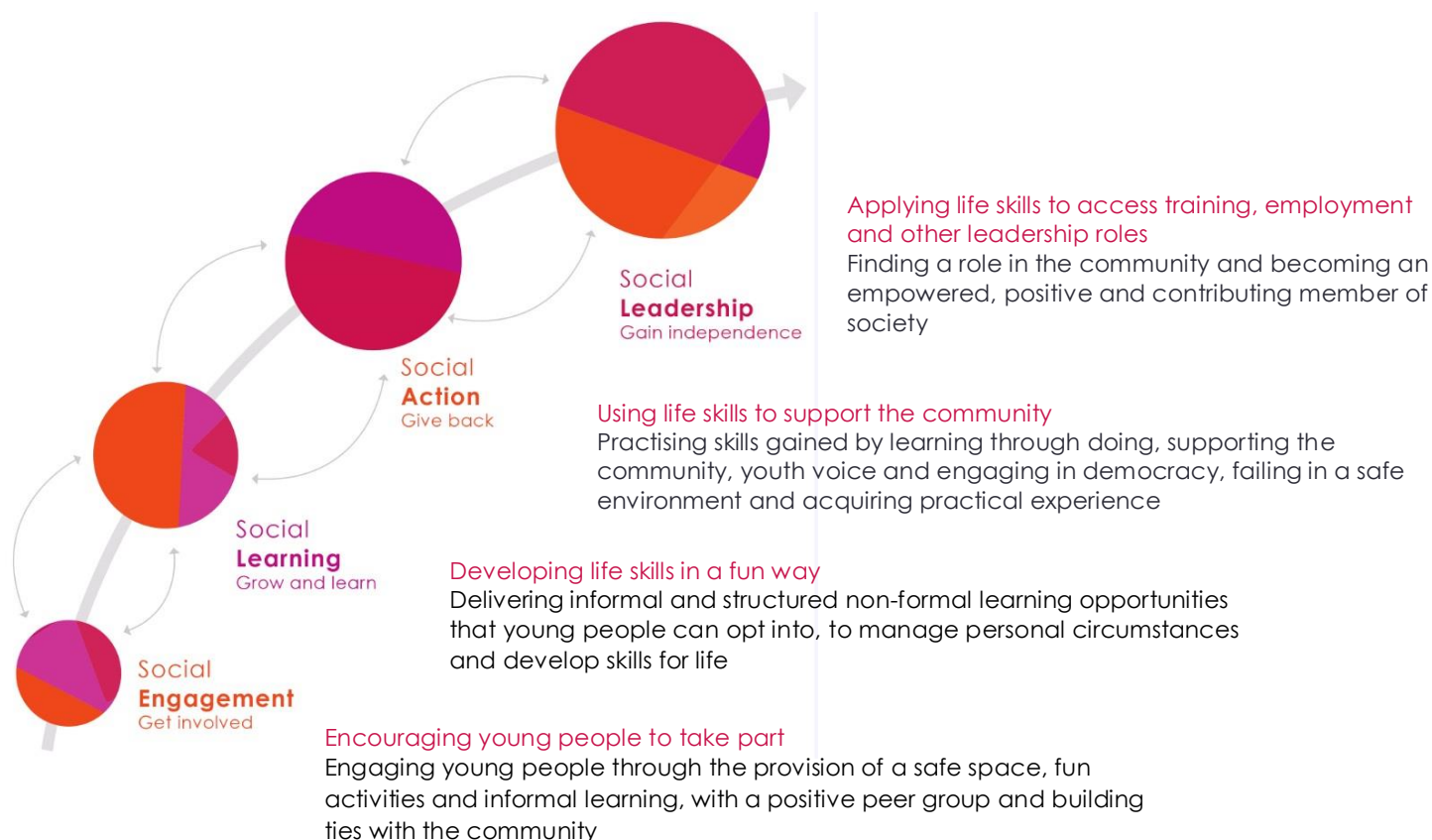
Local Government's key role is therefore to bring local stakeholders together, genuinely cross-sector and essentially, inter-departmental, engaging and partnering with criminal justice, housing, health services, education, social services, early intervention, and more.

Additionally Local Government needs to be the leading voice in establishing a clear strategic vision for their local youth services, because currently the youth sector is being left to struggle along, responding organically, developing siloes, and consequently breeding competition instead of collaboration.

Every Local Government should be asking, *'What Will Our Youth Services Look Like in 2025?'* Create a clear, comprehensive and inter-connected vision, in partnership with young people and delivery professionals, and then set about building the framework, infrastructure and resources to fulfil that vision.

What does a comprehensive youth offer look like?

This is undoubtedly a complex and somewhat subjective question, and it will inevitably be different region to region, depending on the needs and inputs of young people, but whatever the local needs and priorities, every young person in every community has a right to a basic fundamental offer. Which essentially means there must be a range of opportunities for young people to *Get Involved, Grow and Learn, Give Back* and ultimately to *Gain Independence*. At UK Youth we refer to this as the **Social Development Journey**.



This starts with providing informal safe spaces for young people to go, with trusted caring adults around them, positive peer networks and a range of enrichment opportunities, which may include sport, music, art, or any other positive pastime, i.e. access to a broad range of informal activities, within a supportive and welcoming environment.

This is '*Social Engagement*' and if young people don't have this in their local community, then that Local Community is already failing its young people, as everything to come is reliant upon this being in place. Unfortunately, with tighter budgets and more targeted approaches, this is the area that has been most neglected, a demonstrably false economy.

Next, Local Government needs to ensure that all young people in their area have opportunities to access '*Social Learning*'. That is to say, to have informal and non-formal activities that will support them to develop their social and emotional capabilities, such as resilience, confidence, self-efficacy, as well as a range of hard skills which may include digital literacy, financial management, communication skills, and vitally, learning how best to manage their personal circumstances, whatever they may be, with the support of caring adults.

Once a young person is able to better manage their personal and individual challenges, are positively engaged, have meaningfully developed essential skills and capabilities, they are then best able to get the most of engaging in '*social action*' and meaningful volunteering, in order to:

- Test new skills in practice
- Be of benefit to their communities
- Become invested in their local community
- Take on responsibilities
- Engage in democracy and decision-making
- Feel of value and that they have something positive to offer others
- Fail in a safe way, and because they have developed resilience and have a supportive network around them, they will be better placed to learn from their failures and apply that learning

Finally, every community needs to build opportunities for young people to be supported as they transition into '*Social Leadership*' and towards independence. In practice this means that all young people will:

- Be supported to access Further Education, Higher Education and training
- Develop their employability skills and networks in order to find and keep a job they value
- Become involved in long term volunteering, and be genuinely invested in their community, valued by others locally
- Positively contribute to society

This is the Social Development Journey that Local Government has a duty to ensure is present and available for all young people in their communities. The benefit of building this locally is that it acknowledges young people need a supportive infrastructure around them as they progress towards independence and a life of their choosing, but doesn't impose any pre-determined outcomes or objectives.

Similarly it recognizes that everyone's 'journey' will look different. Many young people may begin '*Social Engagement*' in their local youth group at an early age and progress through the four stages as they mature, culminating in them finding a productive role for themselves as young adults.

However, other young people may engage in one or two of these steps to address skills gaps, to improve specific capabilities or to access opportunities. Equally a young person's journey through their '*Social Development*' will not necessarily be straightforward or linear, each young person will have a personal journey and experience requiring the support and guidance that is right for them as an individual, taking into account their unique and personal needs.

Some more questions for Local Government to ask themselves

Local Government, with relatively minimal resource, can and should be auditing local youth services, asking if young people have access to trusted, caring adults, and if the network of services fulfils the '*Social Development Journey*', providing range of local opportunities, which vitally sits outside of the constraints and hierarchical nature of school, but remains complementary to education.

And if these opportunities exist, or the Local Government are actively working towards it, there are some further fundamental questions that Local Government needs to be asking in order to inform their strategic vision:

- Is this journey accessible and navigable for all young people?
- How do young people find out about and access the opportunities on offer?
- How are young people who more resistant to engage being supported?
- How are local young people actively engaged in decision-making processes that affect them?
- Who is supporting young people to steer through the often complex matrix of services on offer?
- Are the range of local service providers, whether that be charities, social enterprise, Community Interest Companies, or statutory services, linked up enough to be able to collaborate and make referrals to each other?
- How will Local Government ensure the quality of these services and the development of staff and volunteers?
- And are the service provision organisations delivering this journey given the support they require to be both sustainable and safe for local young people?

With every Local Government taking the responsibility to strategically lead on the development and delivery of a comprehensive, cross-sector, inter-departmental youth service provision, we can then gradually move towards a place where we also have a comprehensive national infrastructure and strategy. With a view to supporting Local Authorities to effectively implement services, providing access to training and CPD, ensuring safeguarding and quality management are embedded into every service provider's offer, collating and sharing good practice, evidencing and articulating impact, learning what works and replicating success.