

Debate on the Role and Sufficiency of Youth Services

24 July 2019

KEY MESSAGES

- Funding for children's social services has fallen by £3 billion between 2010/11 and 2017/18.¹ This is a 32% reduction in funding available per child.²
- Around 85% of young people's waking hours are spent outside formal education, yet it has been estimated that local authorities spend 55 times more on formal education than they do on providing services for young people outside the school day.³
- Youth services can play an invaluable role in supporting young people as they make the transition from childhood to adulthood. However, youth services have been particularly hit by reduced funding levels in recent years. An FOI request⁴ found there had been a 40% cut in funding of youth work over the last three years and 87% of councils have shut at least one youth centre since 2011.
- Meanwhile, serious youth violence has been on the rise across the country and we know some of the areas suffering the largest cuts spending on young people have seen the biggest increases in knife crime.
- The scale of child criminal exploitation also appears to be dramatically rising, yet The Children's Society recent report shows that only 50 out of 141 local authorities have a strategy in place for tackling this form of exploitation, meaning thousands of children across the country are not getting the support they need.
- Young people are telling us there are no safe spaces in their local community and feel unwelcome in public spaces like parks.
- **Key recommendations:**
 - The Government should use the upcoming Spending Review to invest £3.1 billion in services for children and young people, such as youth centres, to provide them with safe spaces in their community, be exposed to new experiences and receive support.

What are youth services and why are they important for young adults?

According to the practitioners and young people who attended the APPG on Knife Crime, youth services are "*powerful as it is a voluntary relationship between the young person and the professional.*" The informal nature of youth work means the worker can work with the young person at their own pace, and time can be taken to build trusting, respectful relationships. The aim of youth work is to work in partnership with the young people, rather than doing things for them. Youth services can be delivered through different models such as unhindered open access, detached youth work, or targeted one-to-one support.

¹ Action for Children, Barnardo's, NCB, NSPCC and The Children's Society, 2019. Children and young people's services: funding and spending 2010/11 to 2017/2018. Available at:

<https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/childrens-services-funding-report.pdf>

² Ibid

³ National Youth Agency. Available at: <https://nya.org.uk/2018/11/youth-work-summit-major-new-national-report-launched-in-parliament-media-release/>

⁴ Undertaken on behalf of the APPG on Knife Crime in May 2019. Figures are based on local authorities which responded. Available at: <http://www.preventknifecrime.co.uk/news/>

Young people also receive support in youth centres, where they can engage with a variety of activities, be exposed to new experiences, connect to their local community, and learn about opportunities for their futures. This can all help combat loneliness and an absence of purpose.

Young people clearly stated that youth work can play a significant role in helping support those involved or at risk of involvement in knife crime. Young people involved in knife carrying often get a sense of belonging and purpose from hanging around with friends on the streets. Youth work can help to redirect young people away from violent lifestyles and re-create this sense of community in other settings. As one young person who spoke to the APPG on Knife Crime reported - *"I did a motorbike course, learning how to ride a ped and fix one up and everything and that kept me off the streets because it's something for me to do"*.

Impact of reducing funding for youth services

There is growing evidence that cuts to youth services are impacting on the ability of local authorities to deliver effective early interventions to families in need of help. Recent analysis by the Children's Services Funding Alliance into the impact of budget cuts showed that funding for local authority children and young people's services has fallen by £3 billion between 2011/11 and 2017/18 - a 29% reduction. Analysis showed a shift from spending on early intervention services such as children's centres and family support, to spending on late intervention such as safeguarding and children in care. Specific early intervention funding has fallen from £3.7 billion to £1.9 billion between 2010/11 and 2017/18 - a decrease of 49%.

Despite services reporting demand for youth provision increasing, youth services have faced significant cuts across the country creating a postcode lottery. An FOI by the APPG on Knife crime found:

- 87% of councils who responded to had seen one or more youth centre shut since 2011.
- Over the last three years the average council has cut spending in real-terms on youth services by 40%
- Some local authorities have even reduced their spending which funds services like youth clubs and workers by 91%.⁵

Serious youth violence and child criminal exploitation

We also found that in areas where youth services had experienced the most cuts, they had also seen an increase in knife crime. The top four worst hit local authority areas were:

1. City of Wolverhampton (youth services funding cut by 91%);
2. City of Westminster (91%);
3. Cambridgeshire County Council (88%); and
4. Wokingham Borough Council (81%)⁶

Police forces serving these areas have seen some of the highest knife crime increases. Since 2013/14 there has been an 87% increase in knife crime offences for West Midlands Police, a 47% rise for the Metropolitan Police area (London), a 95% increase for Cambridgeshire Police, and a 99% increase for Thames Valley.⁷

There is emerging evidence of a link between child criminal exploitation and serious youth violence. The Children's Society's *Counting Lives* report found that between 2015/16-2017-18,⁸

⁵ FOI by the APPG on Knife Crime, 7 May 2019.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/counting-lives-report.pdf>

there has been a 34% rise in drugs based stop and search instances where a firearm or offensive weapon is also found, suggesting a link between county lines and other forms of child criminal exploitation and rising serious youth violence. The number of children being arrested for possession with intent to supply Class A drugs is rising substantially. From 2015/16-2017/18, the number of arrests of 10-17 for possession with intent to supply rose by 13% and by 49% when the Metropolitan Police are removed from the statistics, suggesting that London is increasingly an 'exporter' of children being exploited to sell drugs via the 'county lines' model.

Violence is a fundamental part of the process of grooming and exploiting children into criminality. In recent research speaking to professionals working with young victims of child criminal exploitation, The Children's Society found that almost all spoke of children they knew having experienced knife inflicted injuries, being threatened with firearms, and involved in acid attacks.

"These young people have been groomed, been told not to trust professionals, been told not to talk, will be silenced through threats of violence, death, sexual violence."

- The Children's Society Service Manager

Professionals working with child victims of exploitation are very aware that they do not have the resources available to offer diversionary activities and that organised crime groups are able to offer a greater sense of opportunity and aspiration than services that should be there to support children.

"We don't have the resources to actually take them out and offer them something, a lot of my young people, that sense of belonging, smoking cannabis, we can't remove that and replace it at the minute, it's hard with the resources available."

- Professional working with victims of child criminal exploitation.

There is a worrying absence of guidance on how local authorities should be responding to complex crimes such as child criminal exploitation. Only 50 out of 141 local authorities that responded to a Freedom of Information request on this issue said that they had a strategy to tackle criminal exploitation. Locally and nationally youth services should be seen as a critical tool in the toolbox to prevent exploitation and promote children's recovery.

Barnardo's has spoken to young people we support across the country: they report feeling that a lack of safe spaces for young people to hang out contributes to rising crime and anti-social behaviour:

"I'm trying to think what's in our area. All we have in one park. That's it, there's nothing but one run down park in our area. No clubs, no things, it's just nothing"

- Barnardo's young person

Similarly The Children's Society undertook interviews with their knife crime prevention practitioners in May 2019; in their day-to-day work, practitioners see a direct link between the decline in youth provision and rising levels of knife crime:

"The profile of knife crime started rising around 5 years ago, at a time when youth services and youth centres were cut... having provision for young people, having somewhere for young people to go and sit down and chill out, get the support they need and have positive role models is important."

- The Children's Society Practitioner, Birmingham

Barnardo's, The Children's Society, Action for Children, NCB and NSPCC are calling on the Government to address the £3 billion funding gap in children and young people's services with a particular focus on early intervention and prevention.

About Barnardo's

Barnardo's is the UK's largest national children's charity. Last year we worked with 301,100 children, young people, parents and carers through more than 1,000 services. Barnardo's co-secretariats the [APPG on Knife Crime](#) with Redthread and, in coalition The Children's Society and other leading UK charities, we are a member of the Children's Services Funding Alliance. For more information or to arrange a meeting, please contact Claire Stewart, Senior Public Affairs Officer, on 020 8498 7644 or email claire.stewart@barnardos.org.uk

About The Children's Society

The Children's Society is a national charity that works with the most vulnerable children and young people in Britain today. The Children's Society co-secretariats the [APPG for Runaway and Missing Children and adults](#) and our services specialize in child exploitation, looked-after children and care leavers, young carers, children affected by serious violence and abuse, alcohol and misuse services as well as specialist asylum and refugee services. For more information please contact Hannah Small, Public Affairs Officer on Hannah.small@childrenssociety.org.uk