

# Youth provision and life outcomes

## A study of the local impact of youth clubs

A Youth Evidence Base report for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport



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**SQW**



**UK YOUTH**



## Summary of key findings

The goal of this research was to understand what impact the presence of youth clubs have on local areas.

Data sources used were predominantly official statistics relating to national and local government, including spend data that related predominantly to local authority spending. However, some data were unavailable for all areas of interest, or were reported inconsistently across different local authorities. We encountered data shortages relating to the numbers of youth clubs, and youth workforce headcount including volunteers, and participants. Nevertheless, interviewees said that the trends revealed in our analysis nevertheless broadly reflected their experiences.

During the period 2011 to 2021, funding of youth provision declined in real terms from £1,058.2m in 2011 to £408.5m in 2021, and the number of youth clubs operating in local authorities (according to available data) have nearly halved in number between 2011/12 and 2018/19. There is significant spatial variation in the scale of changes in spending and its effects. Over a third (34%) of local authorities reduced their real-terms expenditure on youth provision by more than three quarters between 2011 and 2021. Subsequently youth provision has changed and, specifically:

- Targeted youth work has been prioritised over universal provision (which is open to anyone)
- There is more Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) involvement both in strategic direction and service delivery, but VCS spend reported in local authority data represents approximately 4% of all spending with local authority spend dominating (at over 85%)
- Volunteers fill gaps left by fewer professional youth workers employed by local authorities
- The spaces in which youth work takes place are changing. Anecdotally, fewer local authority facilities are available, and modes of delivery such as detached youth work have increased.

Statistical analysis of the effect of these changes on localities shows that a year after a drop in expenditure, local authorities see increased incidences of bike theft, shoplifting, possession of weapon offences, and a higher proportion of young offenders who re-offend.

We found no statistically significant association between a decrease in local authority youth expenditure and any short-term changes in education outcomes or socio-economic and health outcomes in that local authority area (either positive or negative). Furthermore, we found no statistical evidence that serious crime offences (such as criminal damage and arson, theft from the person, or drug offences) are affected. Data limitations affect the range of analyses undertaken and whilst statistical associations at a local authority scale are not apparent, interviewees stressed that youth work is linked with positive outcomes for many young people they know.

# Executive summary

## Study background and scope

1. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) commissioned three projects to research youth provision called the Youth Evidence Base. SQW, the University of Essex, University of Warwick and UK Youth carried out the three projects concurrently, with advice from DCMS and a specially convened Youth Panel.
2. Our research objective was to answer the question: **‘What impact does the presence of youth clubs have on local areas?’**. Specifically, we explored how provision has changed in response to reductions in service levels and the extent to which those changes might affect social outcomes for young people. The six outcome areas of interest were: educational outcomes; employment / career pathways; general health; mental health; life satisfaction and wellbeing, and; crime and anti-social behaviour.

## Study design

3. To capture changes in provision, we used S251 data (provided by local authorities to the Department for Education (DfE)),<sup>1</sup> and Barnardo’s data for the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime.<sup>2</sup> Social outcomes data was drawn from the DfE’s Local Authority Interactive Tool (for educational outcomes),<sup>3</sup> Individualised Learner Record (ILR) and Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data (for progression),<sup>4</sup> Active Lives survey (for physical health),<sup>5</sup> Public Health England data (for mental health)<sup>6</sup> and ONS crime data.<sup>7</sup> The data was used to examine what impact the presence of youth clubs have on local areas.
4. **We conducted further research in five case study areas** – Cornwall, Doncaster, Hull, Liverpool and Shropshire. These locations were chosen to provide contrasting local characteristics including region and spending patterns. We interviewed 30 stakeholders working in local councils and for national and local youth organisations about changes in provision in their area over time, and their perceptions of the impact this has had on young

<sup>1</sup> S251 data is available through the Department for Education’s Official Statistics, here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-catalogue/planned-la-and-school-expenditure/2023-24>

<sup>2</sup> This data was kindly shared with us by Barnardo’s. It is not available publicly, but described in detail in our report. It was originally presented in the APPG on Knife Crime and Violence Reduction (2020) report, Securing a brighter future the role of youth services in tackling knife crime: <http://www.preventknifecrime.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Securing-a-brighter-future-the-role-of-youth-services-in-tackling-knife-crime-v.2.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> GOV.UK (2023) Local authority interactive tool (LAIT). Available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-authority-interactive-tool-lait>

<sup>4</sup> GOV.UK (2022) *Progression to higher education or training*. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/progression-to-higher-education-or-training>

<sup>5</sup> Sport England (2023) *Active Lives*: <https://www.sportengland.org/research-and-data/data/active-lives>

<sup>6</sup> GOV.UK (2019) Mental health and self-harm in children and young people. Available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mental-health-and-self-harm-in-children-and-young-people>

<sup>7</sup> ONS (2019) *Recorded crime data at Community Safety Partnership and local authority level*. Available at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/recordedcrimedataatcommunitysafetypartnershiplocalauthoritylevel>

people and communities. Data analysis and case studies were conducted concurrently between September 2022 and March 2023.

## Reflections

5. The findings outlined in this research (and summarised, above) about the reduction in youth spending are consistent with other research on this topic.<sup>8</sup> We note that although local authorities are impacted by reductions in central funding, they make individual decisions about their spending on youth services, and report that:
  - **95% of local authorities reduced their real terms spending** on youth services by at least a quarter between 2011 and 2021
  - The 43% decline in total expenditure on young people's services between 2014 and 2021 includes a **51% drop in funding for universal (open access) provision**, while targeted expenditure (for young people with additional or specific needs), reduced by 35%
  - Data showed the **average number of youth clubs** supported by individual local authorities in England has fallen from 14 in 2011/12 to eight in 2018/19.
6. **These broader headlines hide differences between different areas.** Some areas reduced their spending in real terms by more than 75%. Local authorities have a statutory duty to 'secure as far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient provision for educational and recreational leisure-time activities for young' but their interpretation of how to meet this duty is within a broad range. Case study interviewees told us that one reason for this may relate to local political will (especially among local councillors) and community pressure.
7. **There was a slight uptick in real terms spending on youth services between 2020 and 2021, after an overall fall in spending between 2011 and 2020.** The reasons for this recent upturn are unclear although some case study interviewees hypothesised it might have been a response to the dwindling opportunities available for young people revealed during the Covid-19 pandemic. Research published by the YMCA finds that since the 2022 financial year, some local authorities have included the Department for Education's Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) fund in their youth services spending figures.<sup>9</sup>
8. Stakeholder interviews, document reviews and case study interviewees suggest that **there are four ways in which the changes to funding have affected all areas to at least some extent.** These relate to the balance of universal and targeted provision, the role of the VCS, the changes in the workforce, and the spaces in which youth work happens. While spending on all types of provision have reduced, **it is spending on universal forms of provision that have declined most.** Partly this reflects necessity – local authorities have had to make

<sup>8</sup> For example: YMCA (2023) *Generation Cut*. Available at: <https://www.ymca.org.uk/generation-cut>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

unenviable decisions about where to direct diminishing resources, and understandably prioritised targeted services for the young people in greatest need.

9. **As many local authorities have scaled back their investment in youth services, the VCS has responded.** In many areas combined groups of local authority and VCS partners oversee local strategic priorities and decision making although local authorities remain the dominant local voice. VCS partners may coordinate activities and provide resources to complement public expenditure. **The qualified youth workforce has diminished;** many practitioners have taken different jobs or retired since budget cuts came into force. This increase in the prominence of VCS provision and reduction in the 'qualified' workforce raises questions about the quality and consistency of youth provision. Case study interviewees and Youth Panellists questioned whether volunteers deliver the same quality of service as qualified practitioners.
10. Finally, **youth work takes place in different spaces now compared with ten years ago.** As local authority premises have closed, some VCS spaces are used instead, or space is rented temporarily or on a sessional basis. Youth workers may not have a physical base but work in a more 'detached' way to bring their activities to young people. ('Detached' youth work takes place on streets, in parks, and other locations where young people congregate).
11. **There is a lack of data on the scale and composition of local youth provision, attendance, and the professional workforce.** Although some local areas collate data on these elements, some case study interviewees suggested that even basic data like a directory of services and key contacts is not available or maintained. The reliability of S251 data outlining local authority expenditure on youth services, the submission of which is coordinated by the DfE, is questioned, and it is focussed on reporting public spend rather than assessing the overall level of resources available in an area. Our experience is that S251 data reflected interviewees' experiences of trends in local spending.
12. Limited data imposed constraints on our analysis which meant we examined short-term outcomes (within a year of changes in youth expenditure), as opposed to longer-term outcomes. We know many of the beneficial impacts of youth work may take longer to manifest for young people and communities and would therefore be missed in our analysis. Our findings relating **to increases in some types of crime resulting from reductions in youth spending** are striking and, for advocates of youth work, intuitive. Increased levels of crime and anti-social behaviour may reflect young people having fewer positive influences (such as positive role models or places to spend time) or a greater prevalence of negative influences.
13. The absence of any discernible impact on education and health outcomes may be more a reflection of the **limitations of the research design** than the actual absence of these effects. Indeed, longitudinal analysis conducted for a separate strand of this Youth Evidence Base research has uncovered some compelling evidence about the longer-term impact of youth activities on participants in later life. A lack of association in this study might also reflect the inherently complex landscape in which youth work operates; singling out its impact among other influences is challenging.

# 1. Introduction to the project

## Key points

- DCMS commissioned SQW, the University of Essex, University of Warwick and UK Youth to carry out three research projects called the 'Youth Evidence Base'
- Our research objective was to answer the question: 'What impact does the presence of youth clubs have on local areas?'
- This research focused on the ways in which youth provision (such as youth clubs and other types of youth activities that take place outside school) shape outcomes for young people and their communities
- Specifically, we examined how youth provision in local authorities has evolved since 2011, and whether a reduction in local youth provision is causally linked to changes in community-level outcomes
- We did this through a combination of, a), analysis of secondary data to examine the degree and impact of funding cuts within local authorities and, b), further research in five case study areas to understand how a reduction in local authority spending on youth services has affected outcomes for young people in these areas
- The six outcome areas of interest were:
  - a) Educational outcomes
  - b) Employment / career pathways
  - c) General health
  - d) Mental health
  - e) Life satisfaction and wellbeing
  - f) Crime and anti-social behaviour.

## Project overview

- 1.1** Local authority youth service spending has declined by 73% since 2010 according to YMCA research.<sup>10</sup> YMCA and National Youth Agency research has shown that this scale of decline has meant there are fewer skilled youth workers (4,500 qualified youth workers since 2010).<sup>11</sup> This has been exacerbated because there are too few volunteers to support or replace skilled youth workers – a shortfall of at least 40,000 volunteers.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, up to 8,500 youth charities’ and community groups’ finances were characterised by the National Youth Agency (NYA) and YMCA as ‘perilous’. The effects of these losses are felt differently in different places, with cuts disproportionately affecting young people in the most deprived areas.<sup>13</sup>
- 1.2** Partly in response to these challenges, the government’s National Youth Guarantee committed £560 million of funding to ‘level up activities for young people’.<sup>14</sup>
- 1.3** It is in this context that the Civil Society and Youth (CSY) directorate at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) commissioned this research.
- 1.4** The Youth Team sits in the CSY directorate and is overseeing this research. The Youth Team leads on out of school provision in England for young people aged 11 to 18 years (up to 25 years for those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)). Their remit covers a range of provision including youth clubs, youth volunteering, residential activities, uniformed youth groups and universal access youth groups.
- 1.5** This project is one in a series of three related projects that are collectively called the ‘Youth Evidence Base’, commissioned to build a stronger evidence base about the youth sector’s impact. Combined, these projects increase understanding of how young people’s involvement in youth provision makes a difference to their lives, and to the communities in which they live. Figure 1-1: sets out a summary of each research strand:

<sup>10</sup> YMCA (2023) *Generation Cut*. Available at: <https://www.ymca.org.uk/generation-cut>.

See also: YMCA (2020) *Out of Service*. Available at: <https://www.ymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/YMCA-Out-of-Service-report.pdf>

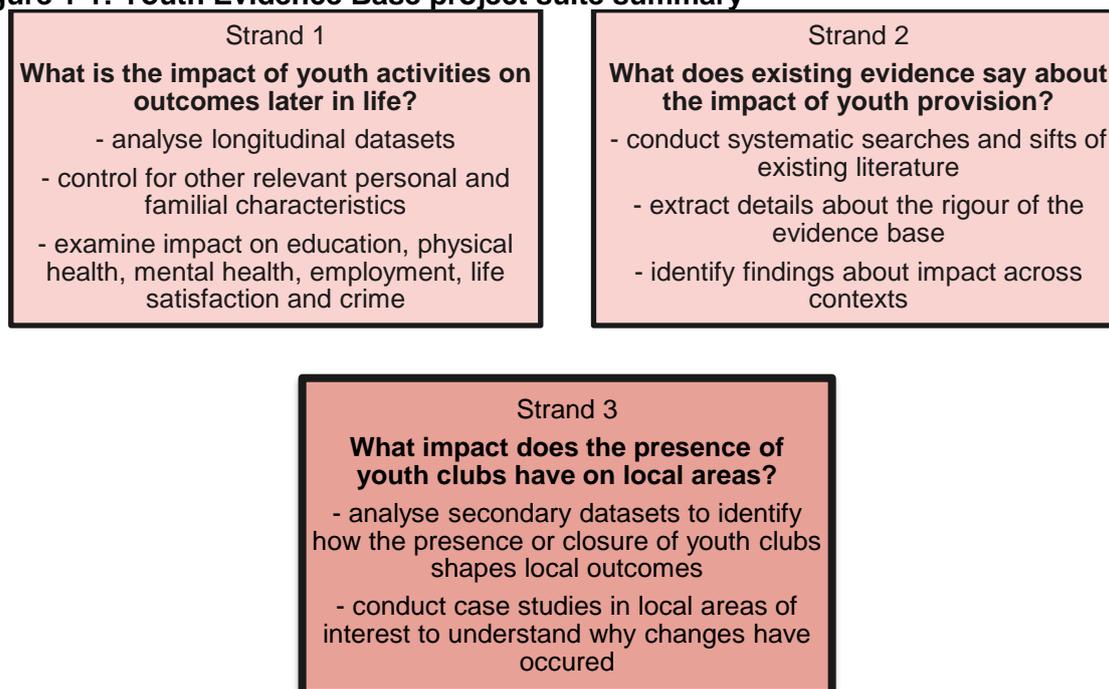
<sup>11</sup> National Youth Agency and YMCA (2021) *Time’s Running Out*. Available at: <https://www.nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Times-Running-Out-v6.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> GOV.UK (2022) Government outlines ambitious plans to level up activities for young people. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-outlines-ambitious-plans-to-level-up-activities-for-young-people>

**Figure 1-1: Youth Evidence Base project suite summary**



Source: SQW

- 1.6** This report sets out our approach and findings in relation to Strand 3. Reports for Strands 1 and 2 will be published separately.
- 1.7** This strand of the research was led by SQW, a public policy and economic research consultancy, with support from Jacob Diggle and Somia Nasim at UK Youth. UK Youth is a charity that seeks to secure sustainable investment into the youth sector, build cross-sector understanding of how youth work makes a difference, and create opportunities to embed effective solutions at scale. They provided strategic guidance, informed the research design, and feedback on analysis - as well as helped to recruit a Youth Panel – a group of six young individuals aged 16 to 25 years who used their lived experience of attending youth clubs to provide feedback on our approach and findings. We are indebted to our panellists Grace Berringer, Mia Meggiolaro, Shaun Horne, Victor Agbontean, Molly Taylor and Therese Crossan for their insights. Dr Cara Booker, a Senior Research Fellow at The Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) at the University of Essex supported the delivery of the longitudinal analysis (strand 1), and Dr Tom Perry and Dr Rebecca Morris at the University of Warwick are leading the literature review (strand 2): all have also contributed to the design of this project.

## Project scope and objectives

### Research objectives

- 1.8** Our research objective was to answer the question: ‘What impact does the presence of youth clubs have on local areas?’. Specifically, our objectives were to:
- conduct secondary analysis to ascertain which areas have suffered particularly severe reductions in youth provision in recent years
  - conduct further analysis and research in case study areas to understand how these high-level trends have shaped outcomes for young people locally
  - assess and analyse the extent to which any change in social outcomes is causally linked to reduction in youth provision.
- 1.9** We provide an overview of our approach in section 2 and findings in section 3, below.

### Approach to scoping

- 1.10** We scoped the project with DCMS and our Youth Panel. We agreed the research design, timelines and tools with DCMS.
- 1.11** Our Youth Panel contained six young people aged 16 to 25 with experience of attending or running youth provision. The Panellists are from across the UK and were remunerated for their time. The research team met with the Youth Panel during the project’s inception to gather feedback on our research and analysis plans, and again to get their feedback on our emergent findings.

### Scope and definitions

- 1.12** In dialogue with DCMS and our Youth Panel, we identified the parameters for this study and defined key terminology.
- 1.13** We scoped the terms ‘youth club’, ‘youth provision’, ‘youth services’ and ‘youth activities’ with DCMS and our Youth Panel. Youth provision is highly varied and can be categorised by activity, mode of delivery and type of provider. Its overarching purpose can be summarised as giving young people something to do, somewhere to go and someone to talk to.

**1.14** The Youth Panel highlighted activities they see as within the remit of youth work.

## Youth Panel reflections on types of youth provision

The Youth Panel described the range of activities they understand to be within the remit of this study, including:

- Youth clubs
- Detached youth work
- Residentials and outdoor learning
- Sports, arts and cultural learning - where the primary purpose of the activity is young people's personal development as opposed to elite talent development
- Skills and knowledge building, for example in relation to finances, outside of formal education
- The development of emotional and social skills, including activities targeting young people's confidence
- Social action
- Pastoral support, and mental health and wellbeing support, outside of a clinical setting

**1.15** This research adopts an expansive definition of 'youth provision' that reflects DCMS' remit and is focused on young people growing up in England aged 11 to 18 years and up to 25 years for those with SEND. Figure 1-2 summarises the modes of delivery and provider types within scope for this research, which can be universal or targeted to specific groups of young people.

**Figure 1-2: Summary of modes of delivery and provider types**

### Modes of delivery

- Centre- or facility-based
- Detached and street-based youth work (not typically attached to a building or hub)
- Outreach youth work (typically an 'extension' of building- and hub-based provision)
- Outdoor learning in parks, sports fields or residentials
- Digital youth work

### Provider types

- Local authority youth services
- National uniformed organisations (for example, the Scouts or Girlguiding)
- Voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations, not affiliated to a national uniformed organisation
- Provision delivered through faith groups
- Organisations with embedded youth workers, for example, some Housing Associations, schools, and hospitals

Source: UK Youth

**1.16** To ensure that we were able to focus on the provision that best fits the Youth Team’s remit within DCMS we identified criteria to help us judge whether provision falls in or out of scope for this research, namely:

- Young people’s participation should be voluntary and not mandated (therefore the youth justice and children’s care systems and their associated services are out of scope)
- Activities run by volunteers or by trained youth practitioners are in scope (including activities in schools), but activities run by teachers in or out of school are out of scope
- Activities that prioritise young people’s holistic development are in scope; activities focused on a specific talent (such as sport or music) are out of scope
- Activities involving a financial contribution by parents (such as activities charging a fee) are in scope so long as they conform to the above criteria.

### Defining impact

**1.17** In light of dialogue with DCMS and the Youth Panel, the project team identified six outcome areas for the Youth Evidence Base research projects, this study included. These six areas are described in Figure 1-3:

**Figure 1-3: Six outcome areas for this study and wider Youth Evidence Base research**

- Improved education and skills
- Improved employment prospects
- Improved physical health
- Improved mental health
- Improved life satisfaction
- The avoidance of negatives, such as crime, anti-social behaviour, poor health and becoming NEET.

Source: SQW

## 2. Our approach

### Key points

- The research was conducted concurrently in two phases
- Phase 1: analysis of secondary data
  - i) This examined ‘youth services’ using data about physical youth clubs and local expenditure on provision of educational and recreational leisure-time activities. This phase of the research was conducted using S251 data (which is collected by the Department for Education and outlines local authorities’ expenditure on youth services), and Barnardo’s data about the number of youth clubs in local authorities<sup>15</sup>
  - ii) Owing to limitations imposed by the available data on outcomes of interest, we examined short-term impacts of youth provision closing rather than longer-term outcomes.
- Phase 2: case studies of five local authorities
  - We adopted a more expansive definition of ‘youth provision’ covering different modes and provider types
  - Locations were chosen to provide a spread of local characteristics including region and spending patterns
  - We interviewed stakeholders working in local councils and for national and local youth organisations about changes in provision in their area over time, and their perceptions of the impact this has had on young people and communities
  - Stakeholders were ‘warm leads’ identified in dialogue with DCMS and national youth organisations and Regional Youth Work Units.

**2.1** This project was conducted in two phases, the first involving analysis of secondary data and the second involving collection of primary qualitative data based around different case study areas:

- Phase 1, the analysis of secondary data, examined ‘youth services’ using data about physical youth clubs<sup>16</sup> and local expenditure on provision of educational and recreational leisure-time activities<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> This data is not publicly available in ‘raw’ form. We are grateful to Barnardos for sharing these data with us.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Bricks and mortar’ youth centres, as captured in the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime & Violence Reduction ‘Securing a Brighter Future’ report. This is available at: <http://www.preventknifecrime.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Securing-a-brighter-future-the-role-of-youth-services-in-tackling-knife-crime-v.2.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> This is captured in local authorities’ S251 data.

- Phase 2, the case studies, adopted a more expansive definition of ‘youth work’ covering the modes and provider types summarised in Figure 1-2, above. This more expansive definition can be characterised as seeing youth services as giving young people ‘somewhere to go, something to do and someone to talk to.’

**2.2** We provide an overview of our approach in each phase below, and additional technical information in Annex A and B. Findings from the research are then presented thematically in Section 3.

## Phase 1: Analysis of secondary data

### Data source selection

- 2.3** During project scoping, and in dialogue with DCMS, we identified potential datasets with which to examine the research questions. We agreed to use the datasets described in this section, and Annex A, discounting other data sources where these, 1), did not contain data at the local authority-level or, 2), did not relate sufficiently closely to one of our six outcome areas.<sup>18</sup>
- 2.4** Table 2-1:, below, summarises the data sources we used in our analysis into three main categories (youth provision, outcomes of interest and control variables), and we provide further information about each in Annex A. We conducted novel analysis of these datasets, and our results are presented, in full, in the Annex. Annex A presents a full description of the data sources incorporated into our analysis, including specific variables.

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<sup>18</sup> For this reason we did not use the NYA’s Census data as this was re-introduced in 2020, and does not contain data on preceding years.

Table 2-1: Data sources

Source	Variable/s	Time periods (financial years)
<b>Youth provision</b>		
DfE local authority and school expenditure statistics	Expenditure on services for young people	2011-2021
APPG Knife Crime report	Number of youth centres supported*	2011-2018
<b>School absence and disciplinary action</b>		
Local Authority Interactive Tool (LAIT)	Rate of secondary unauthorised absences	2013-2019
Local Authority Interactive Tool (LAIT)	Rate of secondary suspensions	2013-2020
Local Authority Interactive Tool (LAIT)	Rate of secondary exclusions	2013-2020
<b>Sport and physical activity levels</b>		
Active Lives, Sport England	Rates of activity among young people, school years 1-11	2017-2020
<b>Education and training</b>		
Local Authority Interactive Tool (LAIT)	Percent not in education or training (NEET), aged 16-17	2018-2021
DfE Progression to higher education or training statistics	Percent progressing into higher education or training in the year after completing 16 to 18 study	2015-2018
Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID)	Percent of all children achieving 5+ GCSEs	2013-2015
<b>Crime</b>		
Local Authority Interactive Tool (LAIT)	Rate of first entry into the Youth Justice system, aged 10-17	2013-2021
Local Authority Interactive Tool (LAIT)	Rate of children cautioned or sentenced, aged 10-17	2013-2020
Office for National Statistics crime data	Rates of: bicycle theft, criminal damage and arson, drug, possession of weapons, public order, shoplifting and theft from the person	2011-2017
<b>Mental health and life satisfaction</b>		
Local Authority Interactive Tool (LAIT)	Inpatient admission rate for mental health disorders, aged under 18	2013-2020
Public Health England data from GOV.UK	Hospital admission rate as a result of self-harm, aged under 18	2013-2017

Source: SQW summary of key data sources. \*Data available for around 50% of local authorities

## Defining the geographical unit of study

- 2.5** The impact of youth clubs and youth services (particularly those based around a ‘bricks and mortar’ centre) will have a geographical dimension as young people can only travel so far to attend provision. The extent to which data might be analysed at a neighbourhood level was explored. We discounted approaches using localities based around a club or youth centre because although there are some data sources at postcode, LSOA or MSOA level<sup>19</sup>, these do not reach far back enough in time for us to examine the impact of provision or its closure. Specifically, crime data can be traced to a postcode level and often provides a breakdown by the type of crime. However, publicly available versions of this data only go back to 2019.
- 2.6** The local authority area was therefore adopted as the geographic unit of analysis. A local authority is a large-enough geographical area that it captures the impact for young people travelling to a youth setting outside their immediate locality.

## Conceptual considerations

- 2.7** Our research has been shaped by different conceptual considerations (alongside practical considerations relating to the availability of data). Discussions with DCMS, the Home Office, Barnardo’s (who produced the analysis for the APPG Knife Crime report), UK Youth, and our Youth Panel highlighted three categories of conceptual challenge which have shaped our analytical approach:

### Consideration 1: Cause and effect

- **The relationship between youth service closures and at least some of the outcome measures flows both ways**, presenting an endogeneity issue. In other words, the decision on the level of provision may be influenced by observed or anticipated trends in, for example, anti-social behaviour
- **The closure of youth services can happen ‘by stealth’**. Local authorities have historically been big spenders on youth provision. However, budgetary pressures mean many have scaled back their own services and contracted them out at a lower cost and smaller scale. While provision is still available, reduction in hours, range of services, new charges for attendance or changes from universal to targeted can change the nature of services and their accessibility
- **Youth service closure does not happen immediately**. There will often be a period during which certain elements of an area’s youth provision is winding down but not fully closed. Consequently, it is often not the case that a youth service is straightforwardly ‘present’ or ‘absent’ in a locality

<sup>19</sup> Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOA) and Middle Super Output Area (MSOA).

- **The timeframe for impact will vary.** Some benefits from the presence of youth provision may take months or years to manifest
- **Cuts to other service areas**, for example in health or education, may affect outcomes for young people.

### Consideration 2: Data availability and quality

- **Data availability on the dependent variables of interest is limited.** On many outcome variables considered, data was only available for a short time frame (see Table 2-1). Although data for our main explanatory variable of interest (S251 youth expenditure) were available from the 2009 financial year, we restricted the study data to a 2011 start given outcome variable data availability
- **There are known issues with S251 data.** While DfE publishes guidance for local authorities, how local authorities collate and report information differs. DfE does not quality assure the data submitted
- Some local authority provision is expanded through initiatives funded by other providers and sectors interacting with young people. For example, Public Health teams sometimes have youth outreach to tackle substance misuse or teenage pregnancy, Violence Reduction Units might focus on victims of crime, and Housing Associations have youth initiatives to address anti-social behaviour. **We have some data on spending in the voluntary sector but this does not capture wider spending** by health, police or housing departments, or by non-local authority-related youth services.

### Consideration 3: Geography and population

- **The geographic scale at which youth services will have influence will vary**, depending on the type of provision, local characteristics such as transportation and the characteristics of the young people in attendance. Some youth services (such as community youth centres) may have a highly localised impact on the streets and neighbourhood immediately nearby. Others may have a more diffuse impact where young people travel to attend or spend significant portions of time in other locations
- **‘Bricks and mortar’ provision is one part of an evolving landscape.** Detached youth work, for example, meets young people ‘where they are’, for example in parks. Likewise, some youth organisations are ‘mobile’, based in buses, and providing services online
- **Youth services may be more present in areas of high need.** For example, they may exist to help tackle high levels of anti-social behaviour. An area’s rates of anti-social behaviour (for example) may be high, although the counterfactual is that these rates could have been even higher had the youth provision not been in place
- Finally, **differences in outcomes across local authorities may be driven by pre-existing differences between the local authorities.** For example, a larger local authority

may have higher crime levels than a smaller one because there are more people living there.

### Analytical approach

- 2.8** The analytic approach was designed to account for each of these considerations.
- 2.9** To ‘break’ the reverse causal link discussed in consideration (1), an instrumental variable (IV) specification was used in the model. This effectively examines the changes in our outcome variables associated with changes in youth provision in the previous year. This enabled us to break the reverse causal link as the relationship of interest (spending changes last year led to changes in outcomes this year) persists, but the reverse link is broken (outcomes this year cannot influence last year’s spending decisions).
- 2.10** Due to the challenge around **data availability (2)**, we are only able to use the findings from this research to look at the **short-term changes from one year to the next in outcomes associated with changes in youth provision**. To examine any longer-term impact of a change in youth provision (e.g., 3 to 5 years after the decrease in expenditure) a dataset with more years of data on both outcomes and spending would be required.
- 2.11** To isolate the effect of youth provision changes on our outcomes from other **geographic and population characteristics of the local authority (3)**, we ‘controlled’ for local authority-specific characteristics. A technical description of our approach is provided in Annex A.

### Phase 2: Case studies

- 2.12** Our case studies were taken to provide qualitative insights from a range of areas, and to help contextualise broader trends emerging from our analysis of secondary data.

#### Case study selection

- 2.13** We triangulated sources of information to identify case study locations. These information sources were:
- Our analysis of secondary data, which highlighted local authorities experiencing particularly high levels of cuts to youth service expenditure or youth club closures, according to S251 and Barnardo’s data. Figure 3-3 outlines total S251 expenditure since 2011 in each of our five case study locations
  - Conversations within the research partnership (Youth Panel, SQW, UK Youth, and DCMS), and sector experts including the NYA, YMCA George Williams College, OnSide and Regional Youth Work Units.

- 2.14** From these sources we created a 'long list' of potential case study areas. The final shortlist (see below) was identified in dialogue with DCMS, ensuring coverage in terms of location/geography, experience of funding cuts, and evolving modes of youth service delivery.
- 2.15** We interviewed 30 stakeholders online in January and February 2023.<sup>20</sup> Interviewees work in a variety of roles across local government (including administration, finance, and youth services). We also spoke with representatives from charities and voluntary organisations working directly with young people or providing infrastructural support for youth organisations (such as recruitment and finance).
- 2.16** Potential participants gave informed consent before taking part in interviews. SQW designed an interview topic guide in dialogue with our research partners and with DCMS. The topic guide contained questions covering:
- Changes in youth services over the last decade
  - The evidence base, including questions about the availability of data on youth provision such as the number of physical youth clubs, and on the reliability of existing data such as S251 returns. We asked interviewees whether there was any additional data we should incorporate into our analyses (although none was forthcoming, either because it is not collected in the first place, or because it contains sensitive information). We also asked interviewees to sense-check emergent findings from our phase 1 analysis
  - The implications of changes in youth provision on young people and communities, particularly in relation to our six impact areas (education, employment, physical health, mental health, life satisfaction and crime/anti-social behaviour)
  - Interviewees' prognoses about the availability and quality of youth services in the future.
- 2.17** SQW's team analysed this primary data, identifying key similarities and points of difference across interviewees' responses.
- 2.18** Several interviewees have regional or national coordination roles. Our sample was a sample of convenience and we relied on introductions and warm leads ('contacts of contacts'). Tight timelines also meant adult interviewees did not have time to arrange interviews with young people and wider community members on our behalf.
- 2.19** It should be noted that the self-selection of interviewees into this study could influence our findings. To mitigate against this self-selection bias, interview topic guides contained probes about evidence and data and, wherever possible, we have triangulated findings across different data sources (quantitative and qualitative).

<sup>20</sup> We spoke with: four stakeholders in Cornwall; five in Hull; two in Shropshire; eight in Doncaster; seven in Liverpool. We also conducted four background interviews.

## Pen portraits of the five case study locations

**2.20** Table 2-2 summarises case study location characteristics and Figure 3-3 outlines total S251 expenditure since 2011 in each of our five case study locations. The data sources in this table are outlined in Annex A (for example, Spending on youth services is taken from S251 Total expenditure on services for young people in the DfE's Official Statistics):

**Table 2-2: Summary of case study area characteristics**

Local authority area	Type of authority	Region	Urban / Rural	Spending on youth services over time (000s of 2021 Pounds)	Percent change in spending on youth services, 2011-2021
<b>Cornwall</b>	Unitary	South West	Rural	2011 = £14,607 2014 = £8,459 2017 = £6,659 2021 = £6,463	-55.8%
<b>Doncaster</b>	Metropolitan	Yorkshire and Humber	Urban	2011 = £6,381 2014 = £5,040 2017 = £2,283 2021 = £3,675	-42.4%
<b>Hull</b>	(City) Unitary	Yorkshire and Humber	Urban	2011 = £7,173 2014 = £5,271 2017 = £4,879 2021 = £6,227	-13.2%
<b>Liverpool</b>	Combined	North West	Urban	2011 = £12,651 2014 = £5,347 2017 = £3,499 2021 = £2,772	-78.1%
<b>Shropshire</b>	Unitary	West Midlands	Mix	2011 = £5,944 2014 = £3,440 2017 = £1,405 2021 = £962	-83.8%

Source: SQW

- **Cornwall:** Funding for youth provision in Cornwall has declined significantly, with budgets reported to be roughly half of what they were in 2010. Whilst some local authority provision

remains, most youth provision has been commissioned to the VCS who also run their own provision. It was always challenging to ensure provision covered all communities in more remote rural areas and there are increasing concerns regarding the coverage of youth provision across Cornwall. Where provision is available, practitioners reported that it has become more targeted and specialised.

- **Doncaster:** Owing to reductions in spending on youth provision by the local authority, 14 youth buildings across the locality were lost. However, the Council has sought to rebuild some of its youth services. It owns two youth buildings located in the most deprived areas of Doncaster and has set up 'EXPECT Youth' to support VCS organisations delivering youth work.<sup>21</sup> The local authority sees youth provision as especially important in helping to mitigate the effects of poverty, poor health and crime on young people.
- **Hull:** Youth services in Hull suffered a reduction in funding after 2010 which continued for around six years before it stabilised. The local authority implemented a commissioning model whereby it worked collaboratively with VCS providers to meet the needs of young people in the city. This, in combination with strong political support, enabled a lot of the youth provision that existed in the city pre-2010 to be retained (albeit not at the pre-2010 scale).
- **Liverpool:** The local authority's spending on youth provision reduced dramatically between 2011 and 2021. As a result, youth provision in the city is mostly delivered by VCS, which relies largely on charitable and private funding (to fill gaps in public funding). Youth provision is devolved to each ward and is coordinated and delivered through a partnership approach; each ward has a lead VCS organisation that works with the Council to allocate funding. This helps coordinate resources and reduce duplication of effort within each ward, although interviewees said it also raises questions about the quality and consistency of provision, necessitating a reliance on volunteers as opposed to trained and qualified youth workers. Liverpool has experienced difficulties in recruiting and retaining youth workers.
- **Shropshire:** Funding for youth provision in Shropshire has declined steeply since 2010. The local authority went from delivering a full youth service to targeting the most vulnerable through a detached youth work model. The VCS picked up a lot of the work where the local authority withdrew, however this was not the case everywhere: consultees reported that it is a much more fragmented landscape now and raised concerns regarding the quantity and breadth of provision in rural areas in particular.

**2.21** Further detail about the five case study locations is provided in Annex C.

<sup>21</sup> More information is available here: <https://expectyouth.co.uk/>

### 3. How funding of local youth services has changed

#### Key points

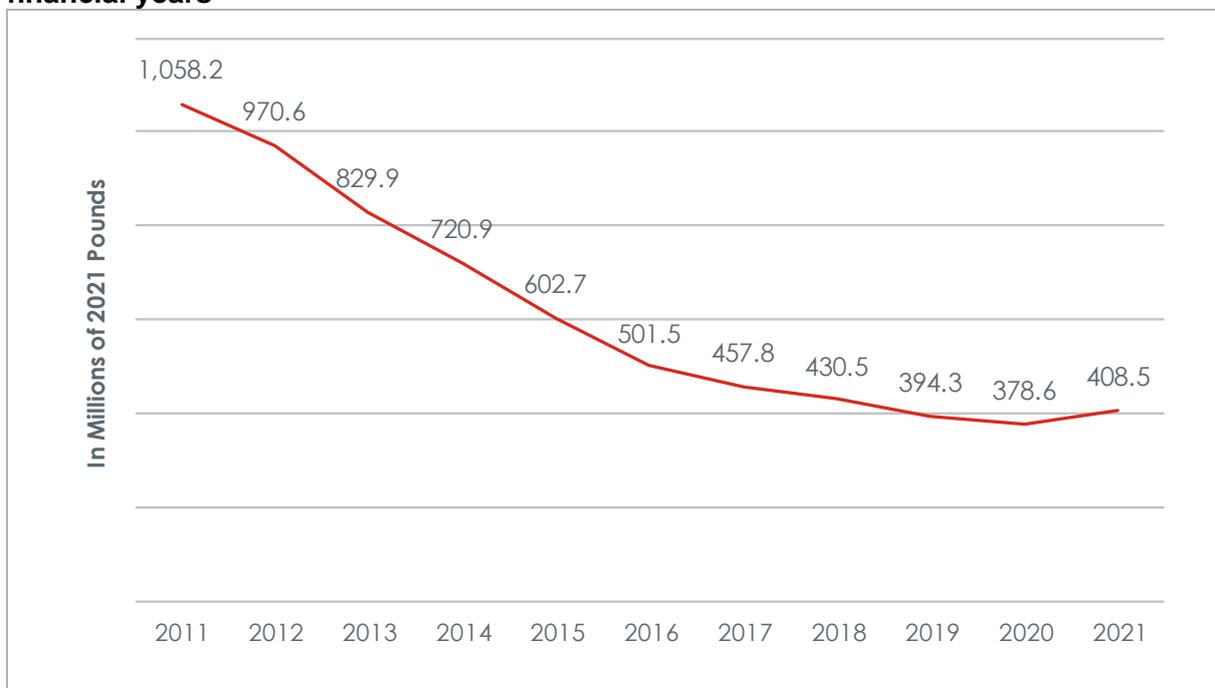
- Local authority funding for youth provision has decreased significantly since 2011, falling by 64.2% from £1,058.2m in 2011 to its lowest point in 2020 of £378.6m, before rising slightly in 2021 to £408.5m
- 95% of local authorities reduced their real-terms spending on services for young people per state-funded secondary school pupil by at least 25% between 2011 and 2021. About 34% of all local authorities in England reduced real-terms expenditure per state-funded secondary school pupil by over 75%.

### Changes in youth provision funding in the past decade

#### Local authority funding for youth provision has decreased significantly since 2011

- 3.1** Overall expenditure on youth provision has declined in England since 2011 (Figure 3-1). This figure fell by 64.2% from £1,058.2m in 2011 to £378.6m in 2020, before rising slightly in 2021.

**Figure 3-1: Total S251 Expenditure on services for young people for 2011-2021 financial years**



Source: Source: SQW analysis of S251 local authority Expenditure data National-level figures. A full list of data sources is presented in Annex A. Detailed data analysis is presented in Annex B.

- 3.2** This tallies with other research on funding cuts in youth services.<sup>22</sup> YMCA research notes that the stabilising and slight increase in expenditure on youth services by local authorities may reflect the influence of national policies including the government's National Youth Guarantee and Holiday Activities and Food programme (both announced in 2022).<sup>23</sup> However, these policies have been introduced since the upturn we observe between 2020 and 2021. Some case study respondents said Covid-19 had re-established the importance of youth work in their area, given the many opportunities young people missed out on during the pandemic.
- 3.3** As we mention in Section 2, there are known issues with accuracy and quality of S251 data. Most of our case study interviewees, including those working for local authorities, were not aware of S251 expenditure data. The few who were said it is imperfect because what local authorities report in their submissions varies. While the data is not perfect, its analysis broadly aligns with case study interviewees' accounts. While this is not definitive (due to the limited number of areas covered) it provides assurance that the data does provide a good representation of overall trends.

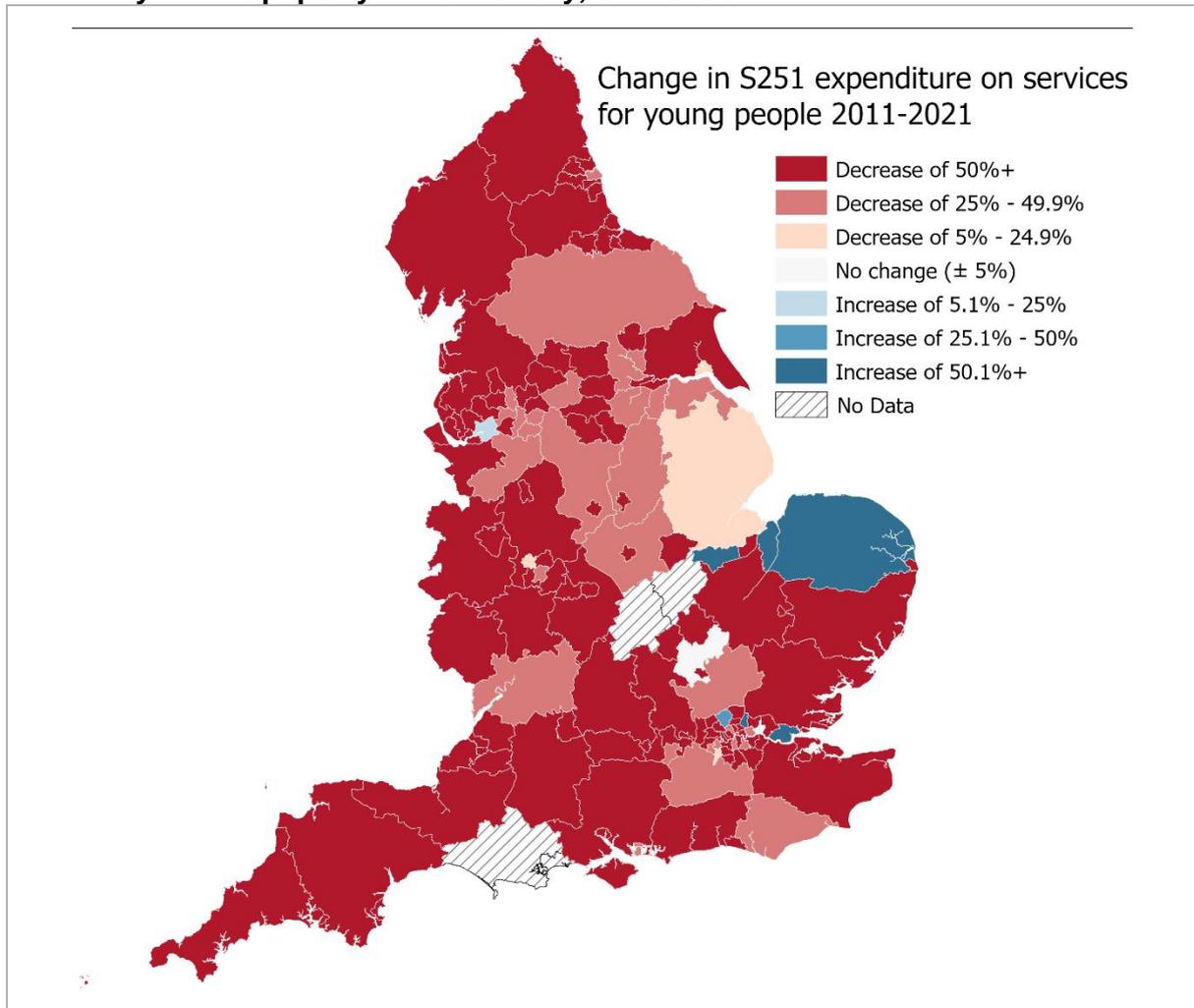
Over 9 in 10 local authorities have reduced expenditure on youth services by at least a quarter between 2011 and 2021

- 3.4** The national trends described above have been experienced differently between different local authority areas. Some areas have significantly decreased their spending whilst a few have actually increased their spending on services for young people over the same period. 95% of local authorities reduced their real-terms spending on services for young people per state-funded secondary school pupil by at least 25% between 2011 and 2021. About 34% of all local authorities in England reduced real-terms expenditure per state-funded secondary school pupil by over 75%. Figure 3-2 maps these changes by local authority area.

<sup>22</sup> National Youth Agency (2021) *Time's Running Out*. Available at: <https://www.nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Times-Running-Out-v6.pdf>; YMCA (2020) *Out of Service*. Available at: <https://www.ymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/YMCA-Out-of-Service-report.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> YMCA (2023) *Generation Cut*. Available at: <https://www.ymca.org.uk/generation-cut>

**Figure 3-2: Change in S251 expenditure on services for young people per state-funded secondary school pupil by local authority, 2011-2021**



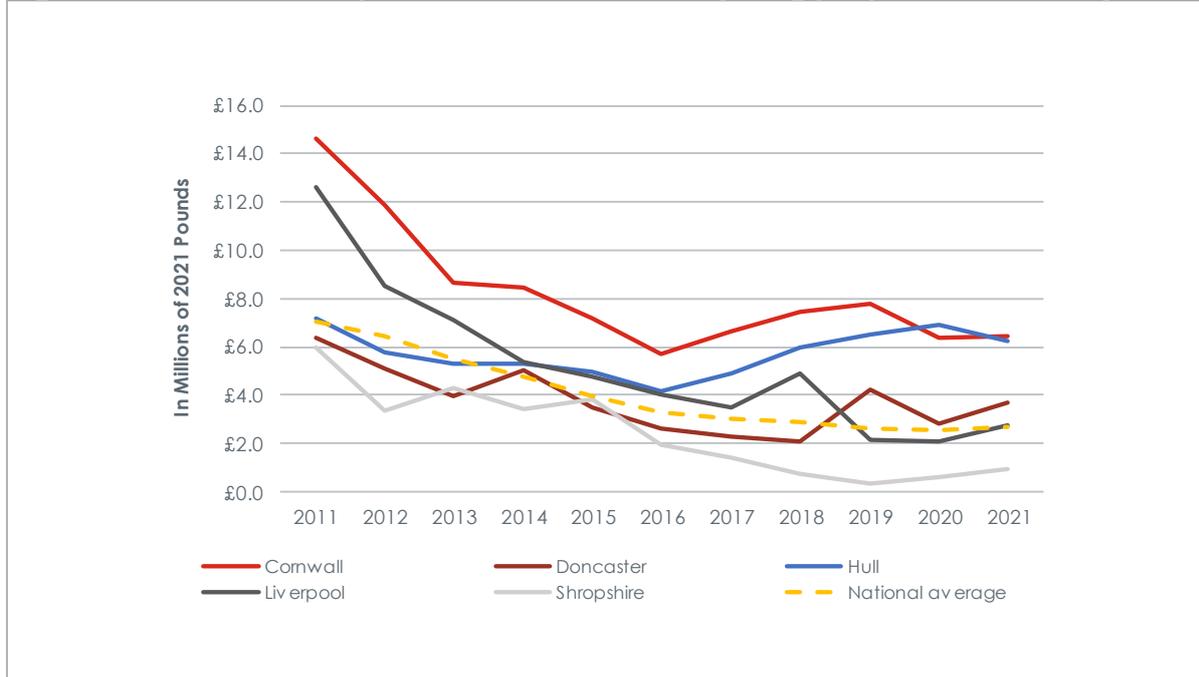
Source: Produced by SQW 2023. Licence 100030994

Data available for 148 local authorities, excluding: Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole; Dorset; North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire due to boundary reorganisation under 2019 local government reforms  
State-funded secondary school pupil figures obtained from DfE Statistics, available: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>

**3.5** There are a few notable concentrations of 75%+ declines, namely in the North East and West Midlands.<sup>24</sup> In many areas local authorities' cuts to youth budgets have been disproportionately high in comparison with cuts to other services.<sup>25</sup> Spending on children's and youth services in all five case study areas declined between 2011 and 2016. Since then each local authority increased its expenditure relative to the previous year at least once (Figure 3-3).

<sup>24</sup> Although a decline in S251 total expenditure on services for young people was observed for 138 out of 148 local authorities, this was not a universal trend; ten local authorities increased their spending between 2011 and 2021.

<sup>25</sup> For example, see: National Audit Office (2021) *Financial sustainability of local authorities visualisation: update*. Available at: <https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/financial-sustainability-of-local-authorities-visualisation-update/>

**Figure 3-3: Total S251 Expenditure on services for young people for case study areas**

Source: SQW analysis of S251 local authority Expenditure data. A full list of data sources is presented in Annex A. Detailed data analysis is presented in Annex B.

- 3.6** The reasons for spending patterns are not clear cut and may reflect a confluence of political will (particularly but not exclusively within local councils) and community pressure including from parents. Political will, particularly from local councillors, was cited by interviewees in areas that had experienced less severe funding cuts to youth services; a stakeholder in Hull said:

*"We have and still do enjoy significant political support in Hull for our youth work and offer. There is no doubt that this has helped us maintain relative significant investment in Hull in youth work. Also, across the directorate and beyond, the value of youth work has been recognised and valued."*

**Interviewee, Hull**

- 3.7** Interviewees in Doncaster said that increased funding for youth services in the future was in part reflective of renewed political interest.

*"There is excitement around the new Youth Strategy, which the Council is in the process of finalising. There is strong political will and championing of youth services in the local cabinet ... which is really important. The Council is hoping to treble their funding into LA-led youth services in the next year."*

**Interviewee, Doncaster**

## 4. How the nature of youth services has changed

### Key points

- Youth work is changing in light of reductions to funding in four fundamental ways. Firstly the 43% decline in average total expenditure on services for young people from 2014 to 2021 is driven more by the fall in universal (51%) than targeted expenditure (35%). Youth work has become more targeted and specialised, a response to funding being targeted towards the young people perceived to be most in need
- Secondly local areas have become increasingly reliant on VCS provision, which in many cases 'backfills' gaps left by receding local authority support
- Thirdly, the number of youth clubs has declined. The average number of youth clubs supported by local authorities in England has fallen by about 44% from the 2011/12 to the 2018/19
- There are significant workforce challenges associated with recruitment and retention and the challenges of replacing a professional workforce with volunteers.

### The increasing prominence of targeted youth provision

#### Youth services have increasingly been targeted to where they are most needed

- 4.1** Average universal expenditure decreased from 2014 to 2019 before a slight two-year increase.<sup>26</sup> However, targeted expenditure fell from 2014 to 2016 and has since remained relatively stable. As such, the 43% decline in average total expenditure on services for young people from 2014 to 2021 is driven more by the fall in universal (51%) than targeted expenditure (35%) (Figure 4-1).

<sup>26</sup> Disaggregated data is available from the 2014 financial year.

**Figure 4-1: Mean universal, targeted and total S251 expenditure on services for young people (indexed, 2014=100)**



Source: SQW analysis of S251 local authority Expenditure data  
 Disaggregated data is available at the local authority-level for 2014-15 to 2021-22.  
 Data relates to 148 local authorities, excluding: Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole; Dorset; North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire due to boundary reorganisation under 2019 local government reforms

- 4.2** The data trends were confirmed by case study participants who all reported local decisions to reduce universal provision in order to retain some targeted services. Interviewees said that they believed that targeted and specialist provision should not come at the expense of young people's access to universal provision but that central funding cuts left their areas with little alternative.
- 4.3** How provision is being targeted in different localities varies but is generally driven by a desire to direct resources towards the young people in greatest need. In all five case study locations, interviewees described how local authority-funded projects tended to target more vulnerable, disadvantaged or marginalised young people. This makes the provision more specialist (for example targeting young people who have SEND) or, more reactive in nature, for example to address issues of crime, gangs or anti-social behaviour. This trend was less pronounced in Hull, where spending levels have been maintained, although several universal youth hubs have nonetheless closed as programmes become more targeted. We heard how young people have sometimes been involved in decisions about targeting activities, for example in Doncaster, where 'Young Commissioners' sit on the council's commissioning team.
- 4.4** In Hull, VCS providers have attempted to maintain a degree of universal access provision but an interviewee involved in VCS youth provision described how funders' requirements push local VCS into making provision more targeted.

- 4.5** Some universal access provision remains, although interviewees described how this can be universal in theory and targeted in practice. For example, Doncaster Council is funding two My Place buildings (originally built in the 2000s), now delivering a mix of universal, targeted and uniformed youth work and wraparound community services, for example classes for young mothers and their babies. These buildings are situated in areas of greater deprivation, which means they are serving the communities most in need of additional support but they are nevertheless open to anyone who wants to use the service. In practice, interviewees felt the spaces are less likely to be attended by young people from more affluent families.

### Reliance on voluntary and charitable sector provision raises concerns about quality

- 4.6** VCS has played a vital role in supporting access to youth provision. Some respondents, and the Youth Panel, expressed concerns that the reduction in qualified youth workers delivering frontline work, and growth in the proportion of volunteers doing this, might affect the quality and consistency of youth work. They emphasised the need to continue to ensure quality of service for young people and to ensure systems were in place to assure service quality. For example, an interviewee in Doncaster said:

*“We haven't got a big youth service so obviously our VCS is vital in helping us make sure we deliver a good enough youth offer across Doncaster and that's why we need to make sure that [providers] are good enough; that they are meeting the standards that we require [as] a youth service.”*

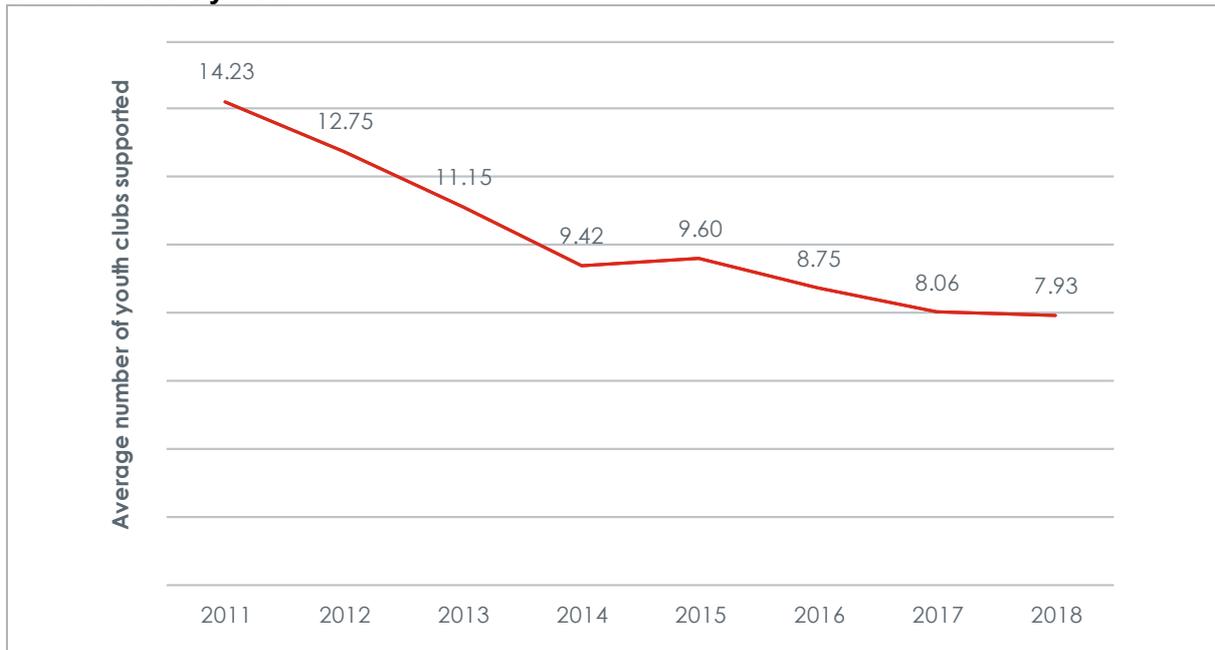
**Employee, Doncaster Council**

## The reduction in the number of local youth clubs

- 4.7** Data availability on the presence of youth clubs in local authorities is partial. Barnardo's data<sup>27</sup> – which relates to approximately half of local authorities – indicates that the average number of youth clubs supported by local authorities in England has fallen by about 44% from the 2011-12 to the 2018-19 financial year with a mean annual closure rate of around 8%. The figure decreased throughout this period, except for a slight increase from 2014 to 2015 (Figure 4-2:).

<sup>27</sup> This data was kindly shared with us by Barnardo's. It is not available publicly, but described in detail in Annex A. The data was generated via Freedom of Information requests to individual local authorities and originally presented in the APPG on Knife Crime and Violence Reduction (2020) report, Securing a brighter future the role of youth services in tackling knife crime: <http://www.preventknifecrime.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Securing-a-brighter-future-the-role-of-youth-services-in-tackling-knife-crime-v.2.pdf>

**Figure 4-2: Average number of youth clubs supported by local authorities for 2011-2018 financial years**



*Source: SQW analysis of Barnardo's data, which is not publicly available. The graph outlines averages calculated for all local authorities for which there was data for that year, n= 70 to 100. A full list of data sources is presented in Annex A. Detailed data analysis is presented in Annex B.*

**4.8** We do not have sufficient data on the five case study areas to report the number of youth club closures in these localities. However, interviewees told us:

- In Doncaster, there had been 16 local authority-run buildings in 2010, and are now two
- In Hull, in 2010, there were around nine local authorities centre, and there are now five
- Shropshire ran 12 youth centres at one point. It now has two nominal youth centres, although interviewees told us these buildings tend to be used for other purposes.

### There are significant workforce challenges

**4.9** All five of the five case study areas reported significant challenges in youth worker recruitment and retention.

**4.10** Interviewees explained that due to funding constraints, many youth workers had taken voluntary redundancy, moved into targeted youth work roles, or left the sector altogether, resulting in a collective loss of experience in the youth workforce and especially for universal access and universal provision.

**4.11** Some local areas are more dependent on volunteers, who interviewees recognised make a valuable contribution to youth provision, but who can lack the knowledge and skills of more highly qualified practitioners. For example, in Hull, there were 68 youth workers at the local

authority in 2010; there are now approximately 35. Often this shortfall has been filled by volunteers.

**4.12** Interviewees described a circular problem, whereby:

- Youth worker jobs were cut or lower pay was offered
- This meant fewer people seek to train as youth workers because, unlike nursing or teaching, they do not believe there will be a job for them when they qualify
- This reduces the availability of skilled practitioners entering the youth workforce and therefore the quality of youth work taking place
- It also reduces the availability of high-quality training as training providers (often universities) cannot financially justify these courses.

**4.13** Liverpool has seen a reduction from upwards of 75 to 10 youth workers with Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC)-accredited qualifications, and the local authority youth team has shrunk to one manager (from a team of six), one senior practitioner (from a team of 13), and they lost the Head of Service post.

*“When the cuts happened, people who are qualified were retrained or got other work. So those workers were lost to the sector and because there's no jobs for them it also meant there's no jobs when people are thinking about their careers. People don't want to be a youth worker because they don't see any youth worker jobs. Because of this we lost the degree as well as the university stopped doing degree as there was little demand for it. So that basically means you've depleted a well-trained, well experienced workforce and you've taken away opportunities for people to get employment in the areas because the jobs were gone and the training was gone which leads to a national shortage of youth workers.”*

**Council employee, Liverpool**

**4.14** The employee at one organisation, Your Edge, told us how their organisation seeks to respond to these workforce challenges by providing training to its existing employees and volunteers. A different model was used by Shropshire Youth Association, which places a paid, qualified and experienced youth worker in a youth club. Parish councils provide funding for the building and two volunteers to support the youth worker. The trained youth worker will upskill the volunteers to Level 3 JNC and then leave the youth club, by which point the volunteers can take on the responsibility of running the provision.

## 5. How the location and coordination of youth services has changed

### Key points

- Different physical spaces are being used in case study areas to fill the gap left by a reduction in local authority youth provision. In some cases these belong to VCS organisations although many such providers still need to rent space. In other cases, youth work has moved out of physical centres and now takes place in a detached form
- The strategic coordination of youth provision has changed. Commissioning models are used in some areas which move from grants to negotiated agreements. Ward- or authority-level partnership management committees operate in some areas to decide what the priorities are and how to deliver them. The VCS has a key role in all areas – although the configuration of that role varies between places
- Provision in rural areas is harder to sustain due to problems with transport, and workforce challenges, particularly the recruitment and retention of qualified youth workers
- Coordination is made harder through a lack of consistent data at a strategic level, and more practically as well, about what is happening and where.

### The changing locations of youth provision

#### Different physical spaces are being used in case study areas to fill the gap left by a reduction in local authority youth provision

- 5.1** Interviewees told us that different ways of delivering services have been developed including, a), VCS-led delivery and, b), alternative and lower-cost modes of youth work, including detached youth work that does not require physical premises. They also mentioned alternative funding sources including the Youth Endowment Fund and Youth Futures Foundation.
- 5.2** Interviewees said VCS is relied upon in all locations for both universal and targeted youth provision without commensurate funding. Local authorities have had to close physical youth club premises in all five case study locations as they became unaffordable. In some areas, VCS providers use their own buildings to offer open access youth work for example, we heard about faith organisations doing this (for example in Cornwall). However, many VCS providers are reliant on renting space for these activities. Interviewees in Liverpool noted that VCS youth

providers often rely on rented spaces so that they can reduce overheads on premises and channel funding towards paying staff.

- 5.3** Liverpool local authority has run detached youth work for over a decade. Shropshire local authority introduced detached youth work in the 2010s; this is now the only provision the local authority delivers. Shropshire Youth Agency (SYA) is the largest VCS provider in the county and delivers youth provision and infrastructural support to VCS organisations, such as DBS checks and training. SYA coordinates provision from dedicated youth clubs and other venues (for example, churches, sports venues and charity buildings). Cornwall has seen many of its local authority-run centres closed. Young People Cornwall is the largest VCS provider of youth provision in the county and runs a blended delivery model combining centre-based, detached and outreach youth work.

## The changing coordination of youth provision

### There has been evolving shift in the strategic coordination of youth provision

- 5.4** Interviewees described how, as a result of reduced funding and concurrent reliance on VCS youth provision, some local authorities play a less prominent role in the strategic coordination of youth services. For example, in Cornwall, three youth projects are coordinated by management committees external to the local authority.
- 5.5** In case study areas, VCS has sought to meet local needs, and in many cases, local authorities have sought to facilitate this. For example, in Hull, rather than providing grants to VCS providers, the local authority commissions services so that it can work collaboratively with these providers. This has helped remove an ‘us versus them’ dynamic between the authority and VCS. One example of such provision is Hull’s Warren Youth Project involves a team of 24 staff, offering free support, guidance, training and counselling to 14- to 25-year-olds, and the number of young people it serves increases year-on-year.
- 5.6** In Liverpool, decision making about youth provision has been largely devolved to ward-level across the city. In each ward, a Council member and a VCS ‘lead’ make decisions on where funding should be directed, across the organisations working in that ward. The lead arranges ward-wide meetings involving all youth organisations in the area, and creates quarterly reports summarising the impact of youth work in their ward.
- 5.7** In Doncaster, Flying Futures – a not-for-profit Community Interest Company that manages and delivers a range of social programmes across Yorkshire and Humberside, the North East and East Midlands – and EXPECT Youth, a youth coordination and infrastructure organisation (funded by the Council), have become key to the local coordination and provision of youth activities. Building on this foundation, the Council has developed a new Youth Strategy which, capitalising on local political support, will express a renewed commitment to youth provision locally and particularly in deprived areas.

**5.8** Furthermore, in the context of local authorities dealing with wider budgetary cuts and workforce churn, their capacity to take a strategic lead has been curtailed (something interviewees said in relation to two local authorities).

**Coordinating resources across geographies has become more challenging**

**5.9** Case study interviewees told us that a corollary of the reduction in local authorities' role in youth provision is that gaps have begun to emerge in different localities within their jurisdictions. For example:

- While geographic coverage was always patchy in Cornwall, a reduction in youth provision means young people in some areas have no access at all. This is more challenging in rural areas because of a lack of adequate transportation, and something that interviewees also said about Shropshire
- In Doncaster, despite efforts to target resources, interviewees felt that children and young people in more deprived areas had the lowest access to youth provision. For example, one stakeholder said:

*“Where the biggest impact has been felt around the reduction in youth provision is not in your middle classes, it's in those deprived areas, and it's probably those kids that we want to have it more than anybody.”*

**Interviewee, Doncaster**

**5.10** This may be because some families can more easily pay to access enrichment activities outside school. We heard similar concerns about Liverpool and Hull. This links with findings from another strand of our Youth Evidence Base research, showing how the profile of young people involved in youth activities has changed.<sup>28</sup>

**5.11** Furthermore, VCS providers are often in competition for funding. One interviewee noted that a reduction in local authority funding for youth provision reduces the sector's overall credibility, thus making it harder for VCS providers to obtain further funding.

**Coordination is made harder through a lack of consistent data**

**5.12** One reason coordinating youth provision is challenging is due to the variable quality – and in cases, absence – of data available about local resources and organisations. People delivering youth services said this sort of data is useful because it helps to communicate impact. Such data also helps to signpost young people and families to appropriate provision.

**5.13** Organisations delivering youth work collect their own data (for example, number of attendees, activity types, etc.)

<sup>28</sup> Reference strand 1 report when ready

**5.14** However, we heard during interviews that the extent to which data is shared between organisations and reviewed strategically is variable but often limited, making it harder to understand and then coordinate what is happening across localities. Furthermore, there are no common data standards, leading to different variables and definitions across localities.

**5.15** Interviewees in each case study location described the mechanisms they use for monitoring the availability of local provision. How local authorities and other providers gather data varies between localities, but can include:

- Signposting data: Records assembled on an ad hoc basis by individual coordinators (sometimes local authority employees), that contain information about organisations for directing young people towards the provision
- Contract compliance data: Service level and contract management data submitted by providers to funders including local authorities, outlining the numbers of young people attending their provision, high-level needs, staffing, etc.
- Public service data: The triangulation of local, cross-sector data, for example using Public Health, policing and social care data to identify particular areas of need.

**The sector continues to collaborate to coordinate provision**

**5.16** Some interviewees described how collaboration and coordination between providers had become more important in the face of funding cuts. Such collaboration took a variety of forms, intended to coordinate resources and reduce duplication of effort, including:

- Network meetings between local authorities and VCS providers
- Meetings between other services supporting young people, including health, policing, social care and education, to identify the groups of young people and geographic areas most in need
- The appointment of local VCS 'leads' (for example, in Liverpool), who coordinate money and other resources in specific localities
- Partial or whole integration of youth services into Early Help and Early Intervention services for children and families, so that young people and families can benefit from a coordinated range of support (such is the case in Hull)
- Youth voice, such as youth panels that provide feedback to local authorities and VCS about areas of need and quality of available provision. This was something interviewees flagged has been in place since before funding cuts began taking effect.
- Other forms of collaboration are future-focused and seek to harness political willpower, such as political coordination and support from counsellors and local politicians, helping to secure funding and other resources in kind such as premises, and 'joined up' strategy

development, such as that embodied by the Young Cornwall Foundation and work underway in Doncaster.

**5.17** One interviewee in Liverpool said:

*“I am more positive than I have been for a long time about youth work and its value. ...There seems to be more value placed on youth workers and youth work than ever before. Professionals value it more and there’s been a battle of purpose and people understanding what youth work is.”*

**Youth worker, Liverpool**

## 6. The impact of changes in youth provision and funding on young people and communities

### Key points

- We used a lagged model examining the year-on-year the effect of decreases in youth provision on outcomes across two main areas: (i) crime and antisocial behaviour and (ii) education and health outcomes in the local authority
- Our estimates suggest that following a decrease in youth expenditure in the year preceding, local authorities tend to see increased incidences of bike theft, shoplifting, possession of weapon offences, and a higher proportion of young offenders who re-offend. Case study interviewees explained this may be because youth workers provide tailored personal advice and support, as well as building activities that provide motivation to ‘stay out of trouble’.
- However, we did not find in our quantitative analysis that a decrease in local authority youth expenditure is statistically significantly associated with any short-term changes in education outcomes or socio-economic and health outcomes in the local authority.
- Furthermore, there is also no evidence that serious crime offences (such as criminal damage and arson, theft from the person, or drug offences) are affected. However, in our case studies, interviewees stressed that – while often indirect – youth work is linked with many positive outcomes for young people, for example motivating them to attend school, or equipping them with skills that may help them find and flourish in employment.
- Other strands of Youth Evidence Base research also highlight the immediate and longer-term benefits of involvement in youth work for young people.

**6.1** In addition to exploring how youth provision has evolved since 2010, both phases of this research considered the impact of these changes on young people and their communities. Impact was explored in line with the six outcomes described in Figure 1-3. This section presents our findings, beginning with those that our quantitative analysis identified as statistically significant.

### Crime and antisocial behaviour

**6.2** Our analysis of secondary data indicates that reductions in youth provision are linked with increased levels of certain crimes. Table 6-1 below summarises the results of our main

regressions assessing the effect of changes in youth provision on crime and antisocial behaviour in the local authority. The table presents results using the total S251 expenditure of the local authority including targeted and non-targeted, and all forms of provision are included.<sup>29</sup>

**6.3** The results indicate that a decrease in youth provision is statistically significantly associated with:<sup>30</sup>

- **An increase in the number of children cautioned or sentenced**, although this finding is statistically significant only at the 10% level. Our estimated coefficient suggests that for every 1% decrease in youth provision expenditure, the number of children cautioned or sentenced in the local authority increases by 1.03. The average annual decrease in youth provision of 7.1% is therefore associated with an expected additional 7.3 children cautioned or sentenced per local authority
- **An increase in the proportion of young people who reoffend**. This is statistically significant at the 5% level in specification (2) and due to the nature of the variable could not be tested in (1) and (3). The results suggest that the average annual decrease in S251 expenditure is associated with a 0.14 percentage point increase in the rate that young offenders reoffend
- **An increase in the number of bicycle theft offences**. This is statistically significant across all three specifications tested and the estimates suggest that the average annual decrease in S251 expenditure is associated with 4.8 additional bicycle theft offences per local authority
- **An increase in the number of weapon possession offences**. This is statistically significant in specification (2) and (3) and the results indicate that the average annual decrease in S251 expenditure is associated with an annual increase of 1.8 weapon possession offences per local authority, and reflects a pattern observed in the APPG on Knife Crime report<sup>31</sup>
- **An increase in the number of shoplifting offences**. However, this effect is only statistically significant in specification (3) at the 10% level. The results suggest that the average annual decrease in S251 expenditure is associated with an annual increase of 10 shoplifting offences per local authority.

<sup>29</sup> Considering the number of Youth Club closures as an alternative outcome variable did not yield conclusive results. Although the data availability for this variable was substantially lower than for S251 expenditure.

<sup>30</sup> The interpretations are for the number of (variable) specification except for the proportion of reoffenders.

<sup>31</sup> All-Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime & Violence Reduction 'Securing a Brighter Future' report. Available at: <http://www.preventknifecrime.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Securing-a-brighter-future-the-role-of-youth-services-in-tackling-knife-crime-v.2.pdf>

**Table 6-1: Summary of regression outputs - Crime**

Outcome variable	(1) Logarithmic specification	(2) Per capita specification (per 100k for crime data)	(3) Specification in levels
First time entry into the youth justice system, aged 10-17	-	-	-
Children cautioned or sentenced, aged 10-17	-	-	-102.54 (60.47) *
Proportion of young offenders who reoffended, aged 15-17	n/a	-1.97 (0.91) **	n/a
Bicycles theft offences	-0.11 (0.06) *	-29.34 (10.08) ***	-68.26 (32.32) **
Criminal damage and arson offences	-	-	-
Drug offences	-	-	-
Possession of weapons offences	-	-8.72 (4.28) **	-24.81 (10.72) **
Public order offences	-	-	-
Shoplifting offences	-	-	-141.51 (75.66) *
Theft from the person offences	-	-	-

**Note:** coefficients are only reported when significant  
 Note 2: regressions are IV using last year's S251 expenditure as the only excluded instrument. All specifications include a vector of relevant control variables, local authority-specific fixed effects, and dummy variables to account for year effects & trends.

Significance levels: - not significant, \* 0.10, \*\* 0.05, \*\*\*0.01, standard errors in parentheses

Source: SQW analysis. A full list of data sources is presented in Annex A. Detailed data analysis is presented in Annex B.

**6.4** The models vary in how the outcome variable is specified and the size of the local authority is accounted for. See Annex B for a summary of the differences between the three versions.

**This may be due to fewer positive influences or greater prevalence of negative influences**

**6.5** Case study interviewees said that demonstrating a definitive link between a reduction in youth provision and rising anti-social behaviour and crime would be difficult at a local level, mainly owing to a lack of suitable data. However, they said that, intuitively, it makes sense for crime and anti-social behaviour to increase alongside reductions to youth provision, for example because of young people's reduced access to positive activities and role models. Furthermore, while provision has proportionally become more targeted, overall there is less provision.

- 6.6** Case study interviewees and the Youth Panellists said that youth workers and volunteers can provide positive role models who encourage young people to stay engaged with their communities. Youth workers give young people an alternative to the typical ‘authority figures’ they encounter in parents and teachers. Furthermore, interviewees said they feel that attending youth provision and socialising with adults and peers helps build a shared sense of community and responsibility:

*“It is [hard to prove a link between reduced youth provision and increased crime] but when we did have a service that created a space for you people to engage in positive activities. I think intuitively we say there were a lot more things for young people to do and a range of trusted adults they can speak to who could support [them] outside of outside of school.”*

**Interviewee, Doncaster**

- 6.7** These adults also provide a vital safeguarding function, identifying young people who might be in danger of getting involved – or are already involved – in risky behaviours and crime. However, interviewees hypothesised that a reduction in youth provision gives young people fewer ‘positive’ places to go and makes them more likely to congregate in unsafe spaces. One interviewee in Liverpool said:

*“We’ve seen it in our city that an increase in violence and antisocial behaviour is because our clubs have lost so much over the years.”*

**Interviewee, Liverpool**

- 6.8** There may be a self-fulfilling component to this, whereby a loss of universal provision and concentration of targeted provision in more deprived areas where young people have greater need contributes to negative perceptions about the types of young people in attendance. In addition to the geographic location, this (unfair and unwarranted) perception could dissuade more affluent parents from sending their children to these places. This further reduces the social mixing that takes place in these settings.

## Education and health outcomes

**Our analysis of secondary data showed no discernible short-term impact of youth provision on education and health outcomes**

- 6.9** We tested for a range of education outcomes, both relating to attendance and disciplinary actions (unauthorised absences, suspensions, exclusions) and attainment (progression to higher education and achieving 5+ GCSEs). On health outcomes, we considered both physical and mental health indicators. Table B-2 in the annex, summarises the regression outputs for the per capita specification of the education and health outcomes. As the results indicate, no significant short-run effect of the decrease in S251 expenditure on education or health outcomes were identified.

- 6.10** These results suggest that the decreases in local authority provision of youth services have not led to an immediate deterioration of outcomes for young people for their education and health. That said, the data used in this study only covers a short time period (and in that time, provision has reduced); other factors (such as schools taking on greater pastoral responsibilities) and effects for which we did not have actual data or a proxy might also influence outcomes. Furthermore, young people's health tends to be high, giving less room to identify positive change.
- 6.11** However, interviewees, our Youth Panellists (and wider research<sup>32</sup>) highlight the vital influence that youth provision can have on young people's wellbeing and, from this, wider outcomes
- 6.12** Interviewees and our Youth Panel emphasised that they believe youth provision *does* have an important impact on young people's shorter- and longer-term wellbeing and, by extension, on wider educational and health outcomes. Furthermore, these findings should be taken in the context of results from longitudinal research conducted for this Youth Evidence Base series.<sup>33</sup> This indicates that involvement by young people in youth provision possesses a range of contemporaneous and longer-term benefits across education, employment, health and wellbeing.
- 6.13** We heard concerns that young people's mental health and wellbeing have worsened in recent years, compounded by social media (which can generate greater peer pressure and bullying) and the pandemic (which increased isolation and loneliness). Interviewees and Youth Panellists said both have contributed to heightened anxiety. A lack of support available elsewhere – for example through CAMHS – has made these challenges worse. One interviewee said:

*“The levels of poverty, complex mental health problems and vulnerabilities: I've never seen it at this level in 30 years.”*

**Interviewee, Liverpool**

- 6.14** This has been accompanied in some communities, particularly in poorer areas, by worsening physical health, for example in the form of rising obesity.
- 6.15** Where young people can access youth provision, practitioners believe it has a beneficial impact on wellbeing and health:

*“I think that that having services like ours available to young people has kept them safe from issues that they would have been vulnerable to, and in a major way mental health is chief amongst them...”*

<sup>32</sup> SQW (2023) Youth provision and life outcomes: study of longitudinal research; UK Youth (2022) *Untapped*. Available at: <https://www.ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Economic-Value-of-Youth-Work-Full-Report.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> SQW (2023) Youth provision and life outcomes: study of longitudinal research.

*“The amount of times people in this building say if we weren’t here X would have happened, X would not have got this. It’s something that’s repeated over and over: we’ll go to whatever lengths are necessary to support young people.”*

**Youth practitioner, Hull**

- 6.16** At one time, young people could have attended a youth club and had interactions with peers and trusted adults. Schools’ resources are spread increasingly thin and many find supporting enrichment activities (or families find paying for such activities) challenging. Furthermore, case study interviewees and Youth Panellists said that youth provision provides an opportunity to engage in physical activities. As our analysis, above, demonstrates, the availability of universal provision and therefore such opportunities are now few and far between for most young people. Our qualitative research has highlighted how this, in turn, reduces the outlets available to young people to confide in trusted adults.
- 6.17** While schools and other adjacent services including children’s social services and healthcare play an important role in supporting young people, interviewees felt these institutions can often be target driven and short-term, and therefore not led by young people’s needs in the way universal youth provision can be.
- 6.18** Youth provision played an important preventative role that stopped wellbeing and physical and mental health problems from arising in the first place. Through interaction with positive role models, interviewees said that youth provision can motivate young people to attend school and find employment or prevent them from ‘falling through the cracks’. A lack of youth provision makes preventative work harder and resulting health and wellbeing issues more complex.

There are several possible reasons for the results of our analysis of secondary data

- 6.19** One explanation for the results outlined, above, is that any benefits for young people’s health and education that youth services may unlock take time to materialise – this was something our Youth Panellists emphasised. Due to the data limitations discussed above, we are only able to estimate the short-term impact of changes in youth provision. If health and education benefits from youth services take time to materialise, our model would not be able to associate changes in these outcomes with changes in the level of youth provision.
- 6.20** Furthermore, lots of youth work remains preventative. This means young people who might have developed issues do not do so. However, there is no way to capture this counterfactual.
- 6.21** Another plausible explanation for our finding is that health and education outcomes are determined in a complex system by a wide range of influencing factors, of which youth services are a small part. Our outcome variables measure the average level of health and education across youth from the whole local authority. It is possible that the variation in these outcomes across the local authority is too high and the influence of youth services on this average is too low for our models to pick up a statistically significant effect.

**6.22** Finally, as youth work participation rates are low (and further lowered by funding cuts), it may be that there are not enough young people in a local authority area who have benefited to change average scores substantially.

## 7. Conclusions and recommendations

### Conclusions

#### How youth provision has changed in light of reduced funding

- 7.1** There have been **dramatic reductions in total expenditure on youth provision** since 2010, with funding in local authorities shrinking by more than half. This is consistent with other similar research.<sup>34</sup> 95% of local authorities have reduced spending on youth provision by at least 25%. About 34% of all local authorities in England reduced real-terms expenditure per state-funded secondary school pupil by over 75%.
- 7.2** Accordingly, there has been a sharp decline in the number of open youth clubs, and qualitative evidence suggests that this brings a more limited range of activities and lower numbers of trained staff.
- 7.3** **The decline in spending has disproportionately affected universal provision**, which is open to all young people irrespective of need. Since 2014 average expenditure on universal provision shrank by 51%. By contrast, average targeted expenditure – that targeting young people with specific needs driven by, for example, poverty, special educational needs or vulnerability to crime or health risks – shrank by 35%. Case study interviewees emphasised that, in their areas, **spending has been re-routed from universal to targeted provision** in order to minimise the reduction in service provision for the young people in greatest need. Interviewees suggested that, in some cases, universal provision is more likely to open in deprived areas, making it open in theory but targeted in practice.
- 7.4** In addition to these patterns emerging from our analysis of secondary data, case study interviewees emphasised how **youth provision has evolved in terms of providers and modes of delivery**. In all five of our case study areas, the VCS have taken on increased responsibility for the coordination and delivery of youth provision.
- 7.5** In turn, the strategic coordination of youth provision in local areas is also evolving. Interviewees in case study locations told us that, alongside local authorities, other types of providers including VCS play an increasingly prominent role in coordinating local activities such as identifying areas of particular need and allocating human and financial resources.
- 7.6** Case study interviewees said that the reduction in funding means that **coordinating activities within localities has become more challenging**. For example, ensuring coverage in geographically dispersed and rural locations is harder not only because there is less money to support youth provision in these areas, but because infrastructure such as transport can also be affected. That said, **there are examples of positive effects in terms of local coordination and collaboration**, for example including the appointment of VCS

<sup>34</sup> YMCA (2023) *Generation Cut*. Available at: <https://www.ymca.org.uk/generation-cut>

'leads' who, using their extensive knowledge of local areas and the communities within these, help councils to 'join the dots'.

- 7.7** Interviewees highlighted how **wider pressures facing the youth workforce are making it harder to offer quality youth provision**. For example, since 2010 many qualified youth workers changed jobs or retired, culminating in a collective loss of knowledge and expertise from the sector. **Youth work training programmes including at universities are struggling to recruit** enough participants because prospective students worry there will not be a job for them when they graduate. This means that **many local areas are increasingly dependent on volunteers for the delivery of youth provision**. Some interviewees said this raises questions about the quality of provision, and about the support and resources available to volunteers.

### **Implications of changes in youth provision and funding on young people and communities**

- 7.8** Key findings from the statistical analysis of key datasets are that a reduction in local youth provision is associated with a rise in certain types of crime and anti-social behaviour in the short term, namely increases in: the number of children cautioned or sentenced; the proportion of young people who reoffend; the number of bicycle theft offences; the number of weapon possession offences, and; the number of shoplifting offences. From this, we might assume that the opposite may also be true: that increased youth provision in a local area may reduce these negative outcomes, although research would need to test this association specifically.
- 7.9** Interviewees said that this may be because **youth workers and volunteers provide positive role models** who can encourage young people engage with their communities. Furthermore, they emphasised how **youth workers provide a vital safeguarding function**, often identifying young people at risk of involvement in – or currently involved in – crime or other risky behaviours. For this reason, **youth work often provides an important preventative function** that other public services are not well-placed to offer.
- 7.10** However, **our analysis of secondary data showed no discernible short-term impact of youth provision on education and health outcomes**. That said, our analysis only covers a short time period and the outcomes may take longer to materialise. Furthermore, other factors and effects for which we did not have actual data or a proxy might also influence outcomes.
- 7.11** Interviewees and our Youth Panel strongly emphasised the possible link between youth provision and educational and health outcomes; the closure of youth provision threatens these. Scaling back and closures of youth provision have come at an unfortunate time when many young people's wellbeing and physical health have – according to interviews – suffered as a result of social media, the prevalence of gang-related crime (and, latterly, the pandemic).

## Recommendations

### Improving data and subsequent knowledge of the youth landscape

**7.12** As has been explored in depth throughout this report, the quality of available data impedes analysis on the coverage, type and quality of youth provision. It is extremely labour intensive to ascertain with certainty how many youth providers there are in any given location. This should be a priority to ensure information is available to inform effective policy.

- **Recommendation 1:** DCMS should continue to support the National Youth Agency to disseminate the Annual Census to as many youth organisations as possible.
- **Recommendation 2:** DCMS should work with partners including national youth infrastructure organisations such as UK Youth, NYA and YMCA George Williams College (among others) to identify other ways to categorise and build qualitative knowledge about the coverage, mode, type and quality of youth provision nationally.
- **Recommendation 3:** DCMS should commission research to examine the impact of funding being re-routed away from universal forms of youth provision towards more targeted provision.

**7.13** We heard from advisors and case study interviewees that S251 data is unreliable because of variance in the ways local authorities return information. While in theory S251 data captures information about local authority expenditure on youth services, it is possible that the data does not do so comprehensively or consistently given local authorities' approaches (both to administering youth provision and to submitting data) are so varied. However, we observe that – broadly speaking – there was reasonably close alignment between trends in S251 data and what case study interviewees told us anecdotally was happening in their areas. We also note that the DfE has published guidance to local authorities to improve S251 data submissions, and that this makes specific reference to submitting information about children and young people's services.<sup>35</sup>

- **Recommendation 4:** The DfE with support from DCMS should investigate the extent to which S251 data is consistent and reliable – perhaps through obtaining feedback from local authorities – and, if required, update guidance to local authorities to improve the consistency of data submissions.
- **Recommendation 5:** The DfE with support from DCMS should investigate the sources of funding reported in S251.

**7.14** We heard concerns about the availability of data capturing accurate information about private and philanthropic funding sources (mainly because local authorities themselves often will not know this information in relation to youth organisations in their areas). Improving the

<sup>35</sup> GOV.UK (2022) Section 251 outturn guidance 2021 to 2022. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/section-251-2021-to-2022/section-251-outturn-guidance-2021-to-2022#notes-to-table-a1-children-and-young-peoples-services>

availability of reliable data about private and philanthropic funding would help to improve knowledge about the stability of the youth sector and whether certain provider types are more at risk of falling into financial difficulties.

- **Recommendation 6:** DCMS should seek to improve its understanding of non-governmental funding of youth provision (such as through endowment funds), possibly through commissioning or supporting data collection and/or research investigating this.
- **Recommendation 7:** DCMS should work with partners including national youth infrastructure organisations such as UK Youth, NYA and YMCA George Williams College (among others) to examine which provider types are more at risk of financial instability.

**7.15** Improving data is not only about gathering more quantitative data. To identify how and whether youth services affect these outcomes, future research should seek to gather rich qualitative insights that improve understanding of causal mechanisms.

- **Recommendation 8:** Future research should gather qualitative feedback alongside quantifiable information on the outcomes. This should feature a prominent youth and practitioner voice.

### Knowledge of the Voluntary and Community Sector

**7.16** As this study highlights, VCS plays an increasingly prominent role in the provision of youth work and services. However, there is limited understanding in the sector of the impact this is having on the quality of youth work and modes of delivery. A paucity of data means little is known about the volunteer 'workforce', and how this varies in different local authorities.

- **Recommendation 9:** DCMS should commission research to examine the makeup of the volunteer workforce delivering youth work and its subsequent impact on the availability, type, scale and quality of provision.

### Developing support to youth providers

**7.17** Our research demonstrates the growing prominence of non-local authority youth provision. This is a relatively new development that has occurred alongside shifts in the youth workforce. However, some of the support infrastructure has yet to catch up.

- **Recommendation 10:** The NYA's Youth Workforce Development Strategy should be updated to reflect the growing role that volunteers play in the delivery of youth services.

**7.18** Our case studies highlight some of the ways in which local authorities have had to adjust their approaches to coordinating youth work as a result of cuts to funding. Often, many stakeholders working within local areas have helped to reshape the delivery of youth work. However, we perceive an opportunity to do more to help stakeholders in different local authorities share learning and ideas.

- **Recommendation 11:** DCMS should work with DLUHC to facilitate a knowledge exchange between local authorities who are taking different approaches to supporting youth work in their areas.

## Annex A: Data sources and variables

**A.1** We grouped data sources into three main categories:

**A.2** *Youth provision*: Two data sources described youth provision at a local level:

- Expenditure on services for young people, based on local authority-level S251 expenditure data.<sup>36</sup> This includes expenditure on services for young people aged 13 to 19 years. This encompasses all local authority expenditure on provision of educational and recreational leisure time activities, including activities such as youth work, activities for young people and services to support young people's participation in education or training. Expenditure can cover the cost of employees, staff training and other costs related to premises, transport, and supplies needed for delivering the service. This data is published as Official Statistics by the Department for Education (DfE)<sup>37</sup>
- Within S251 outturns, expenditure is reported as being either universal or targeted. Universal services are open to all young people, regardless of their circumstances or perception of vulnerability. Targeted services, on the other hand, are focused on supporting early intervention for vulnerable young people, including those identified as being at risk of teenage pregnancy, substance misuse, youth crime and not being in education, employment or training (NEET)
- Expenditure is also reported by provider type, in four categories: local authority own, private, other public sector and voluntary provision
- Local authority-own provision refers to “expenditure on services provided/managed by the local authority”
- ‘Private’ refers to “expenditure on services provided/managed by private sector entities such as profit-making companies”
- ‘Other public’ refers to expenditure on services provided/managed by public sector entities such as other local authorities and other public providers (such as services provided by other local authorities or health bodies)

<sup>36</sup> Under section 251 of the Apprentices, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009, local authorities are required to prepare and submit an education and young people's services budget statement to the Secretary of State for Education for each financial year. See GOV.UK (2023) *Section 251 budget guidance*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/section-251-2023-to-2024/section-251-budget-guidance#services-for-young-people>

<sup>37</sup> GOV.UK (2022) *LA and school expenditure*. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/la-and-school-expenditure#content>

- ‘Voluntary’ refers to “expenditure on services provided/managed by third sector entities such as voluntary and community groups, social enterprises, charities, cooperatives and mutuals”<sup>38</sup>
- Data disaggregated by provision (universal vs. targeted) and provider type are available at the national level across the study period for expenditure on services for young people. From the 2019-20 release, which contains data reaching back to the 2014-15 financial year, this data is disaggregated at the local authority level
- Barnardo’s data on the number of youth clubs supported by local authorities, reported to the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Knife Crime<sup>39</sup>. The data was gathered through Freedom of Information requests made by Barnardo’s to local authorities and there is data for approximately half of all local authorities.<sup>40</sup>
- *Outcomes of interest:* We obtained data from several sources, relating to our six areas of impact (see Figure 1-3, above). We used:
  - DfE’s Local Authority Interactive Tool (LAIT) to obtain access to data related to children and young people. DfE compiles the LAIT using data sourced from various departments across government<sup>41</sup>
  - Data available from the Individualised learner record (ILR) and Higher education statistics agency (HESA) outlining progression to higher education and training<sup>42</sup>
  - Active Lives, Sports England surveys measuring people’s activity levels across England<sup>43</sup>
  - Office for National Statistics (ONS) data on recorded crime data at Community Safety Partnership and local authority level<sup>44</sup>
  - Public Health England data available on GOV.UK outlining mental health and self-harm in children and young people.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>38</sup> See: [Section 251 outturn guidance 2021 to 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/101232/section-251-outturn-guidance-2021-to-2022.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> APPG on Knife Crime and Violence Reduction (2020) Securing a brighter future the role of youth services in tackling knife crime. Available at: <http://www.preventknifeandviolence.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Securing-a-brighter-future-the-role-of-youth-services-in-tackling-knife-crime-v.2.pdf>

<sup>40</sup> We are aware of the National Youth Sector Census. However, this was reintroduced in 2020 after a hiatus of nearly a decade, making it unusable for our study period.

<sup>41</sup> GOV.UK (2023) *Local authority interactive tool (LAIT)*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-authority-interactive-tool-lait>

<sup>42</sup> GOV.UK (2022) *Progression to higher education or training*. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/progression-to-higher-education-or-training>

<sup>43</sup> Sport England (2023) *Active Lives*. Available at: <https://www.sportengland.org/research-and-data/data/active-lives>

<sup>44</sup> ONS (2019) *Recorded crime data at Community Safety Partnership and local authority level*. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/recordedcrimedatataatcommunitysafetypartnershiplocalauthoritylevel>

<sup>45</sup> GOV.UK (2019) *Mental health and self-harm in children and young people*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mental-health-and-self-harm-in-children-and-young-people>

**A.3** *Control variables:* Our analysis incorporated a number of controls, to provide background context to the local area. These cover factors such as population size, ages and ethnicities, family sizes, qualification levels and wages. A full list of control variables is available in Table A-1, below.

**A.4** Table A-1 contains a complete list of variables used in the secondary analysis.

**Table A-1: Strand 3 secondary analysis variables**

Variable	Source	Years	Local authorities*	Mean	Standard deviation	Range
Main explanatory variables						
S251 Total expenditure on services for young people (£000s)	DfE Official Statistics	2011-2021	146	3645.244	3384.788	24643.000
Youth clubs supported	APPG Knife Crime Report – Barnardo’s	2011-2018	91**	9.298	9.050	59.200
Outcome variables						
Secondary school unauthorised absences (as a % of total possible sessions)	Local Authority Interactive Tool	2013-2019	146	1.547	0.555	3.300
Number of secondary suspensions (as a % of the school population)	Local Authority Interactive Tool	2013-2020	146	9.461	7.198	86.296
Secondary exclusions (as a % of the school population)	Local Authority Interactive Tool	2013-2020	146	0.175	0.123	0.822

Variable	Source	Years	Local authorities*	Mean	Standard deviation	Range
Proportion not in education, employment or training (NEET), aged 16-17	Local Authority Interactive Tool	2018-2021	146	2.811	1.170	6.307
First time entry into the youth justice system, aged 10-17 (per 100,000)	Local Authority Interactive Tool	2013-2021	145	356.136	175.709	1361.000
Rate of children cautioned or sentenced, aged 10-17 (per 1,000)	Local Authority Interactive Tool	2013-2020	128	5.860	2.955	18.900
Proportion of young offenders who reoffended, aged 15-17	Local Authority Interactive Tool	2013-2019	145	40.036	8.147	58.180
Inpatient admission rate for mental health disorders, aged under 18 (per 100,000)	Local Authority Interactive Tool	2013-2021	145	87.969	376.914	434.800
Hospital admissions as a result of self harm, aged under 18 (per 100,000)	Local Authority Interactive Tool	2013-2017	145	180.053	22.587	682.030

Variable	Source	Years	Local authorities*	Mean	Standard deviation	Range
Percent progressing into higher education or training in the year after completing 16 to 18 study	DfE Progression to higher education or training statistics	2015-2018	146	63.207	9.831	57.800
Percent of all children achieving 5+ GCSEs	Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID)	2013-2015	148	57.401	5.701	32.571
Percent engaging in >30 minutes of physical activity per day, school years 1-11	Active Lives – Sport England	2017-2018, 2020	142	0.671	0.0601	0.381
Bicycles theft offences	ONS Crime Statistics	2011-2017	139	574.430	505.027	3423.000
Criminal damage and arson offences	ONS Crime Statistics	2011-2017	139	3370.156	2684.472	22704.000
Drug offences	ONS Crime Statistics	2011-2017	139	1075.422	875.474	6637.000
Possession of weapons offences	ONS Crime Statistics	2011-2017	139	162.436	146.286	1661.000

Variable	Source	Years	Local authorities*	Mean	Standard deviation	Range
Public order offences	ONS Crime Statistics	2011-2017	139	1263.187	1331.074	16043.000
Shoplifting offences	ONS Crime Statistics	2011-2017	139	2059.884	1587.893	12178.000
Theft from the person offences	ONS Crime Statistics	2011-2017	139	582.143	976.530	9855.000
Control variables						
Population	Nomis Population Estimates	2013-2020	147	367580.000	276545.000	1551266.000
Population below 15	Nomis Population Estimates	2013-2020	148	19.358	2.066	12.000
Population 65+	Nomis Population Estimates	2013-2020	148	17.070	4.487	22.700
Employment rate	Annual Population Survey	2012-2020	147	73.322	5.108	26.800
Percent of population that is an ethnic minority	Annual Population Survey	2012-2020	147	15.326	15.397	71.900

Variable	Source	Years	Local authorities*	Mean	Standard deviation	Range
Median weekly pay for full time employees	Annual Survey of Household Earnings	2013-2021	146	564.570	87.963	602.200
Percent of population with no NVQ qualifications	Annual Population Survey	2012-2021	146	8.140	3.433	23.700
Percent of children under 16 in low income families	Local Authority Interactive Tool	2013-2021	148	18.497	6.843	37.400

Source: SQW analysis

\*Excluded local authorities: Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole; Dorset; North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire due to boundary reorganisation under 2019 local government reforms, as well as the City of London and Isles of Scilly due to missing data for a majority of outcomes

\*\*Includes local authorities for which we have at least two out of a total of eight possible observations.

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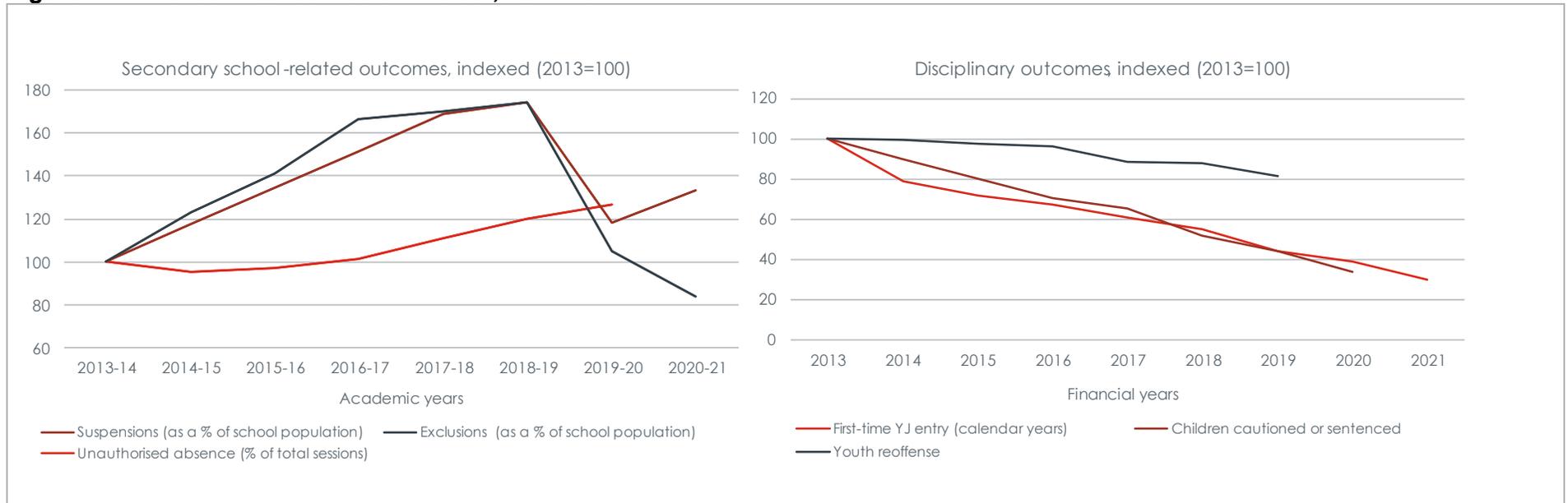


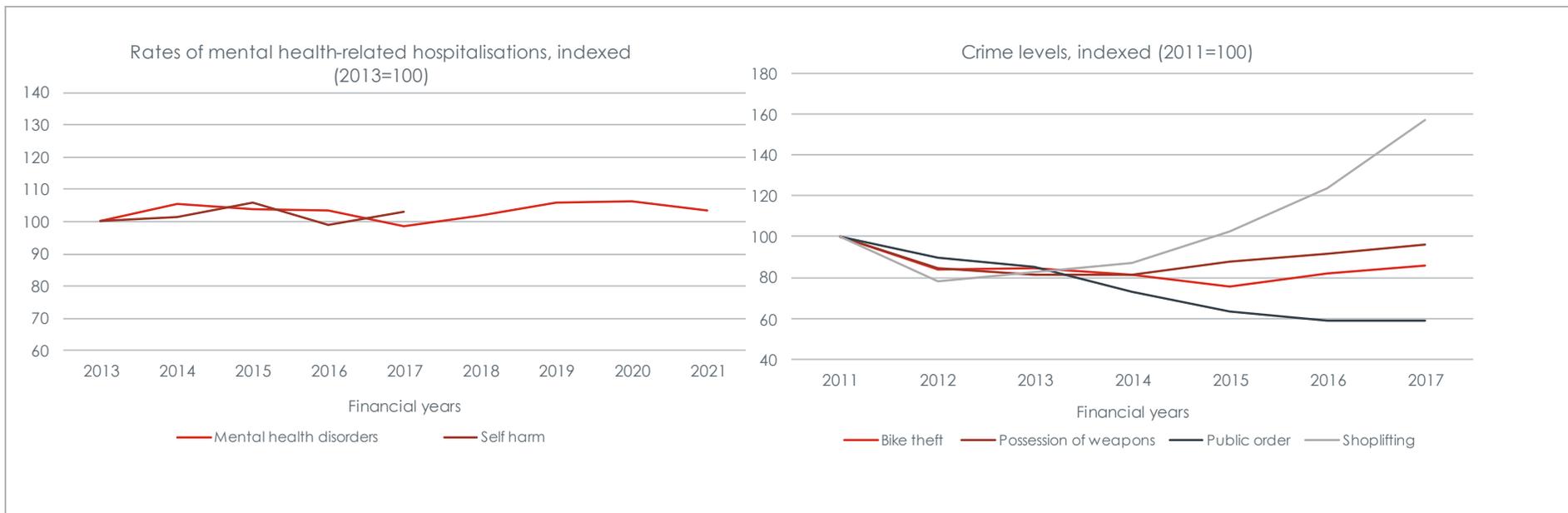
**UK YOUTH**



## Annex B: Further detail on regression approach and outputs

**Figure B-1: Trends in outcomes of interest, 2012-2021**





Source: SQW analysis



**B.1** Figure B-1 describes trends in our outcome variables over the time period we collected data. In summary:

- *Secondary school-related outcomes:* Levels of unauthorised absence as a percent of total possible sessions remained relatively stable from 2013 to 2016, before rising slightly through to 2019. Suspensions and exclusions (represented as a percent of the school population), on the other hand, increased from 2013 to 2018 and subsequently fell in 2019, likely due to Covid-19-related school closures.
- *Mental health outcomes:* Both the rate of hospitalisations for mental health disorders and incidences of self-harm for ages under 18 experienced little fluctuation for the years for which this data is available.
- *Disciplinary outcomes:* Overall, levels of disciplinary outcomes have declined across the study period. While the rate of first-time youth justice system entry for 10–17 year-olds decreased moderately from 2013 to 2019, rates of children cautioned or sentenced (aged 10-17) and 15 to 17 year old offenders who have reoffended fell to a greater degree.
- *Crime levels:* Patterns in crime levels vary from crime to crime. Theft from the person offences rose the most across from 2011 to 2017. Criminal damage and arson also increased throughout this period, and shoplifting levels fell for the first year but ultimately rose steadily through 2017. An initial decline to 2014 and return to initial levels by 2017 was observed for bicycle theft, possession of weapons, and drug offences. Finally, public order offences declined relatively consistently from 2011 to 2017.

## Local authority controls

**B.2** To isolate the effect of youth provision changes on our outcomes from other **geographic and population characteristics of the local authority (3)**, we ‘controlled’ for local authority-specific characteristics.

- *Population characteristics:* the proportion of people below 15 and above 65, the proportion of people belonging to an ethnic minority, the number of people in the local authority
- *Education characteristics:* the proportion of people with no NVQ qualification
- *Economic characteristics:* the employment rate, the median income and the proportion of children living in low-income families in the local authority
- Finally, we also included *year and local authority fixed effects* to isolate the effect of time trends in the outcome and youth provision variable and unobservable differences

between local authorities not captured through the data on local authority characteristics listed above.

## Regression approach

**B.3** For the secondary data analysis, we used an instrumental variable design, with the first lag of total S251 expenditure as the instrument for current levels of youth provision.

**B.4** We tested three specifications that vary in how the outcome variable accounts for the population size of the local authority:

- **(1) Logarithmic specification**  $\log(Y) = \beta_0 + \beta_1(X = l.\log(X)) + \dots + \varepsilon$
- In this specification, both the S251 expenditure and the outcome of interest are transformed using the natural logarithm. The model coefficient estimates the approximate *percentage* effect of a *percentage* change in S251 expenditure.
- **(2) Per capita specification**  $Y/\text{Population} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(X = l.\log(X)) + \dots + \varepsilon$
- Here only the S251 expenditure is log-transformed and the outcome of interest is expressed as a per capita rate. The model coefficient estimates 1/100 times the approximate effect of a percentage change in S251 expenditure on the per-capita incidence of the outcome variable of interest.
- **(3) Specification in levels**  $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1(X = l.\log(X)) + \dots + \varepsilon$
- Here the outcome variable expressed as a number (of 'occurrences') and the S251 expenditure is log-transformed. The model coefficient estimates 1/100 times the approximate effect of a percentage change in S251 expenditure on the incidence of the outcome variable of interest.

**B.5** Each specification included year and local authority fixed effects, to isolate the effect of time trends in the outcome and youth provision variable and unobservable differences between local authorities not captured in the data.

**B.6** Table B-1 summarises our analytical approach in Phase 1 of the project.

**Table B-1: Analytical approach to Phase 1**

Step	Approach
Descriptive analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graphical analysis of trends in service closures and outcome measures</li> <li>➤ A combination of map plots and line graphs</li> </ul>

Step	Approach
Selecting the indicator for service closures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess likelihood of the indicator to be directly affected by outcome measures               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ e.g. funding of youth services is more likely to be affected by the levels of anti-social behaviour in the area than the number of clubs or number of young people choosing to engage with them</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Identify 'instruments'               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ alternative types of funding, rural vs urban areas, etc.</li> <li>➤ testing the strength of correlation between club closures and the instruments (first-stage IV regression F-test)</li> <li>➤ testing the validity of instruments (Hausman overidentification test)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Testing the need for the instruments               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Hausman test for the differences between IV and OLS models<sup>46</sup></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Selecting the overall approach to analysis: year-on-year changes vs longer time periods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informed by the analysis of trends</li> </ul>
Analysis of selected models and triangulation of results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specification tests relevant for each type of the model(s)</li> <li>• Correcting for possible violation of assumptions</li> <li>• E.g. cluster-robust standard errors</li> <li>• Comparing the results across outcome measures and types of models (if more than one is selected based on the findings from earlier steps)</li> </ul>

Source: SQW

<sup>46</sup> OLS stands for Ordinary Least Squares, the 'benchmark' estimator for most econometric models.

- B.7** Further detail on regression approach and outputs the data on local authority characteristics.
- B.8** Each specification also incorporated the following control variables: the logarithm of the population, percent of the population below 15, percent of the population over 65, employment rate, percent of the population that is an ethnic minority, the logarithm of the median weekly pay for full time employees, percent of the population with no NVQ qualifications and percent of children under 16 in low-income families.
- B.9** Table B-2 contains a detailed summary of regression outputs from the secondary analysis.

**Table B-2: Detailed summary of regression outputs (robust standard error in parentheses)**

	(1) Logarithmic specification	(2) Per capita specification	(3) Specification i levels
Secondary school unauthorised absences (as a % of total possible sessions)	n/a	0.006 (0.311)	n/a
Number of secondary suspensions (as a % of the school population)	n/a	-0.021 (0.323)	n/a
Secondary exclusions (as a % of the school population)	n/a	-0.002 (0.019)	n/a
Proportion not in education, employment or training (NEET), aged 16-17	n/a	1.656 (2.818)	n/a
Percent of all children achieving 5+ GCSEs	n/a	2.703 (2.793)	n/a
Percent progressing into higher education or training in the year after completing 16 to 18 study	n/a	3.767 (4.136)	n/a
Percent engaging in >30 minutes of physical activity per day, school years 1-11	n/a	-0.001 (0.020)	n/a
First time entry into the youth justice system, aged 10-17 (per 100,000)	0.008 (0.037)	13.821 (14.091)	21.189 (44.461)
Rate of children cautioned or sentenced, aged 10-17 (per 1,000)	0.007 (0.031)	0.056 (0.215)	-102.538 (60.468) *

	(1) Logarithmic specification	(2) Per capita specification	(3) Specification i levels
Proportion of young offenders who reoffended, aged 15-17	n/a	-1.965 (0.908) **	n/a
Inpatient admission rate for mental health disorders, aged under 18 (per 100,000)	n/a	-2.018 (4.324)	n/a
Hospital admissions as a result of self harm, aged under 18 (per 100,000)	n/a	-18.947 (13.731)	n/a
Bicycles theft offences	-0.105 (0.055) *	-2.934e-4 (1.008e-4) ***	-68.258 (32.324) **
Criminal damage and arson offences	-0.016 (0.030)	-6.640e-5 (3.196e-4)	-1.741 (73.446)
Drug offences	-0.028 (0.064)	1.855e-4 (1.491e-4)	-2.328 (56.990)
Possession of weapons offences	-0.063 (0.059)	-8.720e-5 (4.280e-5) **	-24.807 (10.721) **
Public order offences	0.039 (0.096)	-2.789e-4 (6.540e-4)	-174.884 (150.069)
Shoplifting offences	-0.011 (0.035)	-3.475e-4 (2.559e-4)	-141.514 (75.662) *
Theft from the person offences	-0.013 (0.077)	-1.140e-5 (8.440e-5)	-31.960 (31.566)

**Note:** Due to the nature of the data for some variables, not all specifications could be run. This is denoted with an 'n/a'.

**Note 2:** X is S251 Total expenditure, Y is the outcome variable of interest

**Significance levels:** \* 0.10, \*\* 0.05, \*\*\*0.01, standard errors in parentheses

Source: SQW analysis

**B.10** Table B-3 shows regression outputs for crime variables, using universal and targeted S251 expenditure on services for young people as the main explanatory variables.

**Table B-3: Detailed summary of crime regression outputs for universal vs. targeted expenditure (robust standard error in parentheses)**

	(1) Logarithmic specification		(2) Per capita specification		(3) Number of (variable) per local authority specification	
	Universal	Targeted	Universal	Targeted	Universal	Targeted
First time entry into the youth justice system, aged 10-17	0.024 (0.045)	0.011 (0.041)	12.263 (17.041)	-6.990 (15.716)	-1.976 (53.464)	-33.178 (40.872)
Children cautioned or sentenced, aged 10-17	0.054 (0.047)	-0.007 (0.031)	0.054 (0.047)	-0.216 (0.184)	26.624 (112.108)	-59.410 (56.796)
Proportion of young offenders who reoffended, aged 15-17	n/a		-1.484 (1.715)	-2.863 (1.476) *	n/a	
Bicycles theft offences	-0.116 (0.539)	-0.095 (0.035) ***	3.753e-4 (0.001)	-1.749e-4 (3.9e-5)***	45.470 (137.051)	-47.686 (11.42) ***
Criminal damage & arson offences	0.263 (0.847)	0.010 (0.016)	0.002 (0.009)	1.377e-4 (1.727e-4)	1017.421 (4530.36)	55.569 (47.731)
Drug offences	0.203 (0.574)	0.053 (0.041)	5.347e-4 (0.001)	1.593 (1.029e-4)	213.873 (505.327)	23.754 (41.224)
Possession of weapons offences	-0.284 (0.694)	0.023 (0.040)	-4.038e-4 (0.001)	9.810e-6 (2.530e-5)	-20.368 (102.408)	8.282 (8.070)
Public order offences	1.217 (4.134)	0.079 (0.069)	0.004 (0.014)	5.241e-4 (3.443e-4)	2973.690 (13690.1)	133.834 (131.241)
Shoplifting offences	0.348 (1.115)	-0.008 (0.036)	0.002 (0.006)	-7.980e-5 (2.460e-4)	1031.501 (2592.73)	-11.865 (64.480)
Theft from the person offences	-0.086 (0.467)	0.023 (0.051)	5.025e-4 (0.002)	5.260e-5 (5.950e-5)	121.857 (517.584)	5.954 (20.279)

**Note:** Due to the nature of the data for some variables, not all specifications could be run. This is denoted with an 'n/a'.

**Note 2:** X is S251 Total expenditure, Y is the outcome variable of interest

**Significance levels:** \* 0.10, \*\* 0.05, \*\*\*0.01, standard errors in parentheses

Source: SQW analysis

- B.11** When using the targeted component of S251 expenditure the results are broadly consistent with our main regression results. We identify a significant effect of decreases in expenditure on the incidence rate of bike theft offences as well as the proportion of young offenders who re-offend.
- B.12** On the other hand, when using the universal (non-targeted) component of S251 expenditure we are not able to identify a robust effect of changes in the expenditure on the outcome variables considered.
- B.13** These results indicate that the effect of the decreases in S251 expenditure on crime and antisocial behaviour outcomes is driven to a larger extent by changes in target expenditure rather than non-targeted universal expenditure. However, most effects are significant only when considering the total S251 expenditure, suggesting that it is not exclusively targeted expenditure that matters.

## Annex C: Case study summaries

### Cornwall

Funding for youth provision in Cornwall has declined significantly, with budgets reported to be roughly half of what they were in 2010. This has resulted in a considerable reduction in the amount of youth provision delivered by the local authority: one consultee estimated that, in 2005, there were around 25 youth projects run by Cornwall Youth Services; a decade later only three were still active and were instead overseen by management committees as opposed to the local authority.

The local authority does still commission youth provision, for example giving Kernow Connect a grant of £900,000 a year to deliver a mix of universal and targeted youth work. However, the responsibility for funding and delivering the bulk of youth provision now lies with the VCS. Young People Cornwall, an organisation originally established to provide infrastructure support to VCS-led youth clubs, is now also one of the biggest providers of youth provision in the county: it runs two youth clubs (in Truro and St Austell) and delivers a range of programmes and projects that provide mental health and wellbeing support to young people. Church groups were cited as another prominent player in the youth provision landscape in Cornwall, post-2010.

Since 2010 Cornwall has suffered a loss of experienced youth workers. Restructuring within the local authority resulted in many experienced youth work managers taking voluntary redundancy, retirement or jobs with other priorities. With fewer jobs available, the perceived value of graduate and post-graduate-level youth work education has declined, and this adds to the recruitment and retention challenges facing youth work in the county.

It was always difficult to ensure that youth provision reached communities in more remote rural areas, and this has become more of a concern over time. In some areas the VCS has not been able to step in to backfill gaps left by shrinking local authority presence. Furthermore, VCS provision is dependent on often modest and short-term funding. North East Cornwall was one area that was identified as a cold spot for provision.

Where provision is available in the county, it has become more targeted and specialised. This is sometimes a response to funders' requirements. Some universal provision is situated in areas where young people have greater and more complex needs, meaning that the provision has become more targeted by default.

However, there were reports of greater creativity and collaboration between youth organisations in the county, necessitated by having to do more with less and coordinate

scant resources. For example, representatives from the youth service, health and justice systems to identify where local need is greatest and coordinate suitable youth responses.

## Doncaster

A reduction in local authority funding resulted in the loss of 14 youth buildings across Doncaster since 2010. This led to youth provision shifting from being all Council-led to mostly VCS-led. Due to the high rental costs in using leisure centres, some youth providers now deliver their services in parks. Faith organisations sometimes provide low-rent spaces or themselves deliver youth activities.

Interviewees said that young people's needs in Doncaster are getting more pronounced and complex, for example relating to growing mental health issues (including anxiety, depression, ADHD, self-harm, lower confidence and self-esteem) exacerbated by the prevalence of social media (leading to greater isolation, bullying, grooming), crime (including gangs) and physical health issues (for example, obesity). Youth services have seen increased demand as more families struggle to pay bills – youth clubs are seen as somewhere young people can be safe warm and fed.

In this context, youth provision in Doncaster has become more targeted in nature, responding to this greater level of need among young people. Furthermore, some forms of enrichment provided by youth clubs in the past – such as trips to twin-towns in Europe – have stopped due to funding constraints.

The Council owns two 'My Place' youth buildings located in highly deprived areas of Doncaster. It has set up a creative youth crime prevention team (called EPIC). It has also, separately, set up a charity called EXPECT Youth to, a), mobilise and standardise local VCS-led youth provision and, b), deliver a universal youth offer by forming a Youth Alliance with numerous VCS organisations around Doncaster. Over time large VCS-led organisations have developed their own supply chains, often commissioning smaller VCS-led organisations to deliver youth work.

In more recent years, the Council has increased its expenditure on youth provision, and made applications for other forms of funding such as that available from the Youth Investment Fund. The Council also intends to acquire more buildings around Doncaster, hire more qualified staff to deliver universal provision and include children from an earlier age of eight in youth provision. A new Youth Strategy is under development with broad political support that aims to treble Doncaster's youth services funding by 2024.

## Hull

Hull has a long tradition of youth work operating in a range of informal and community settings. Youth services in the city suffered a substantial reduction in funding after 2010 and there were concerns that local authority provision would disappear. Local authority funding for youth services stabilised in 2015/16.

Alongside reshaping the statutory youth service in line with budget restrictions, the local authority introduced a new commissioning model whereby it engaged VCS youth providers in the design and then the delivery of five-year contracts. The commissioning model offered delivery organisations stability and engendered a shared sense of responsibility with the local authority to meet the needs of young people in the city. The first commission was in 2011.

Although the amount of youth provision delivered directly by the local authority has reduced – in 2010 there were 68 full time youth workers and nine local authority run youth centres; there are now 35 youth workers and five youth centres respectively – the commissioning model has enabled much of the youth provision that existed pre-2010 to be retained. This includes both universal and targeted forms of provision.

For example, the Warren Youth Project has a team of 24 staff who offer free support, guidance, training, education, counselling, employability skills and creative expression activities to young people aged 14- to 25-years-old. In a typical year The Warren works with between 1,200 and 1,300 young people. However, the level of need is increasing and this year the team expect be working with more than 1,500 young people.

High political support has helped maintain investment in youth services in Hull. The youth service has a high profile in local communities and city councillors are vocal about the value of, and the need to deliver, youth work. If anything, this stance has strengthened since 2010.

## Liverpool

The local authority's spending on youth provision reduced from approximately £10m in 2011 to less than £1m. This was reflected in staffing, and a reduction from six managers across the city to one, and 12 senior practitioners to two. All senior youth workers have been removed. The local authority no longer has any buildings for youth provision, having sold them off. As a result, youth provision in the area is mostly delivered by VCS.

Youth provision is devolved to each ward. Each ward has a lead contact within a VCS organisation that works with the Council to allocate funding and collect monitoring data. This helps coordinate resources and avoid duplication of effort within the ward. However, reliance on volunteers also raises the question about the quality and consistency of this provision. It was also raised by one consultee that although ward-level coordination helps to coordinate scant resources, it may also lead to a belief that coordinating organisations benefit disproportionately.

Some funding is provided by The Youth Endowment Fund and Youth Futures Fund. The football clubs (Liverpool, Everton, Tranmere) are also large providers of National Citizens Service, a voluntary personal and social development program for 15 to 17 year olds funded by the government. Other public sector service areas such as healthcare providers have also started to deliver youth work, to fill some of the gaps left by an absence of specific youth provision.

Provision across the city has become more targeted towards young people with the greatest need. This might include young people facing marginalisation (such as those identifying as LGBTQ+), those at risk of involvement in crime, and those at risk of mental health issues. Because provision is more targeted, some areas of the city are better served than others.

Recruiting staffing presents a key challenge for organisations delivering youth work. There has been a reduction in the number of qualified youth workers in the city who are Joint Negotiating Committee accredited from upwards of 75 to ten. A churn in leadership at the Council (with three chief executives in three years) has made generating 'joined-up', city-wide strategy harder.

## Shropshire

The landscape of youth provision in Shropshire has changed drastically since 2010. Pre-2010, the local authority delivered around 80% of youth provision. There were around 22 full time, qualified youth workers, 12 local authority run youth centres (each of which provided multiple open access sessions a week), and a mix of universal and targeted support across the county. The Shropshire Youth Association (SYA), a charity, provided infrastructure support to the VCS, which delivered the remaining 20% of youth provision.

The youth budget plummeted in the 2010s, falling from just under £5 million in 2011 to £960,000 in 2021. During this time, the local authority introduced a positive activities team (working with 10- to 16-year-olds), before then opting to shift responsibility for youth clubs to Town and Parish Councils. SYA worked with town and parish councils to maintain two youth clubs in each town in the county. Town and parish councils provided funding for activities which were normally delivered by VCS organisations.

Most town and parish councils have funded youth provision in their area, although around 10% have been unable to do so. As a result young people's access to youth provision across the county varies, and provision in rural areas is considered to be more fragmented.

Consequently, the VCS now accounts for around 80% of the delivery of youth provision in Shropshire. Following a five year period where no full time professionally qualified youth workers were employed by Shropshire Council, the number in post is now three, significantly down on the 22 employed pre-2010. The number of local authority youth centres has fallen from 12 to two. However, the two remaining centres are used for a variety of purposes now alongside youth work.

The local authority has established a Targeted Early Help Team to target the most vulnerable young people through a detached youth work model, however this is still in the early stages of development and activity to date has largely involved personal and social education outreach in schools.

# SQW

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