Youth & Consequences

A report examining Local Authority expenditure on youth services in England & Wales

May 2018
Context

This research was undertaken by YMCA England & Wales. The findings set out in the report are based on a review of Local Authority expenditure in England and Wales. The data in this report covers the period 2010/11 to 2016/17.

For the purpose of this research, youth services broadly encapsulates two types of service: ‘open-access’ (or ‘universal’) services including a range of leisure, cultural, sporting and enrichment activities often based around youth centres; and more targeted provision for vulnerable young people, including teenage pregnancy advice, youth justice teams, and drug and alcohol misuse services.
YMCA was established in 1844 and is the largest and oldest youth charity in the world, helping more than 58 million people in 119 countries.

Here in England and Wales, 116 YMCAs work to transform more than 740 different communities, impacting on the lives of nearly 630,000 people every year.

We believe the right start in life is crucial for a person’s long-term development. It is for this reason YMCA works with people from birth through to adulthood – supporting individuals and families to flourish.

To this end, each year YMCA supports 33,560 young people through our youth work and services.
Introduction

In 2010/11, Local Authorities spent an estimated £1.2bn on youth services across England and Wales.

Often considered the ‘Cinderella’ or ‘poor relation’ of the services supporting children and young people, recent media reports focussed on violent youth crime have brought to the fore questions around the youth services available today.

To help inform this debate, this research seeks to understand how expenditure by Local Authorities on youth services in England and Wales has changed over recent years.

What cuts have taken place to youth services?

In 2010/11, Local Authorities in England reported spending £1.18bn on youth services, with this work accounting for an estimated 13% of total local spend on all children and young people’s services.

By 2016/17, spend on youth services in England had reduced by £737m, with Local Authorities spending in this area reported to be £448m last year.

This reduction in Local Authority spend in England is equivalent to a 62% cut since 2010/11.
The most significant cuts in England took place in 2011/12, with a reduction of more than a quarter (26%) of funding to youth services taking place in just one year. However, annual cuts in excess of 7% have continued each year since.

Last year alone, Local Authority spending on youth services reduced by £80m, which is equivalent to a 15% reduction on the previous year, demonstrating the cuts show no sign of relenting.
In Wales, the cuts have been less acute than in England, however, expenditure on youth services in Wales has still reduced by 30%, from spending £45m in 2010/11 to £31m in 2016/17.

This is a reduction in spending on youth services in Wales of £14m since 2010/11. As in England, the cuts to youth services in Wales show little sign of yielding, with spending having reduced by at least 4% every year since 2011/12.

**Percentage annual change in expenditure by Local Authorities in Wales on Youth Services**

Across England and Wales, since 2010/11 the cuts to youth services total in excess of £750m.

**Cumulative reduction in expenditure by Local Authorities in England & Wales on youth services**
Where are the cuts taking place?

When looking across England, it is young people in the West Midlands and the North West that have been the biggest losers when it has come to cuts to youth services.

Percentage change in expenditure by Local Authorities in England on Services for Young People between 2010/11 and 2016/17 by region

Local Authorities in the West Midlands have cut spend on youth services by 71% since 2010/11, while in the North West cuts over the same period amount to 68%.

Young people living in the East of England and South West have fared best. However, even in these areas, the annual spend on youth services has more than halved since 2010/11.

Percentage change in expenditure by Local Authorities in Wales on Youth Services between 2010/11 and 2016/17 by region

May 2018
In Wales, it is young people in Mid Wales who have faced the biggest cuts to their youth services. Local Authorities in Mid Wales have almost halved (48%) their spending on youth services since 2010/11.

Those young people in South West Wales have been most fortunate, with cuts to youth services in this region totalling 23% since 2010/11.

The extent of the cuts is demonstrated by the fact only five Local Authorities in England and two in Wales have reported any increase on their spend on youth services since 2010/11.

Where is the funding cut from youth services going?

Between 2010/11 and 2016/17, the total spend by Local Authorities in England on children and young people’s services, without taking into consideration inflation, has actually remained fairly consistent.

In 2010/11, Local Authorities in England were spending £9.26bn a year on children and young people’s services, and in 2016/17 this had reduced by £85m, which is equivalent to just a 1% reduction.

This demonstrates Local Authorities in England have not diverted funding away from children and young people more generally, but instead are choosing or being required to divert spend on this age group away from universal and targeted youth services.
Analysing Local Authority spend over the period 2010/11 to 2016/17 demonstrates spending in this area in England has primarily been diverted towards safeguarding and looked after children.

As a result last year, youth services in England accounted for just 5% of the local spend on children and young people’s services, compared to 13% in 2010/11.

Within Wales, youth services sit within the education budget, making direct like-for-like comparisons difficult, however, the pattern followed is similar.

**Total annual expenditure by Local Authorities in Wales on Education Services**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Expenditure (£)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010/11</td>
<td>£2,586m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011/12</td>
<td>£2,591m</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012/13</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015/16</td>
<td>£2,576m</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016/17</td>
<td>£2,615m</td>
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</tbody>
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Since 2010/11, expenditure on education by Local Authorities in Wales has remained fairly consistent, having actually increased by 1% (£30m). However, spend on youth services fell as a proportion of this, from 2% of the education spend in 2010/11 to 1% in 2016/17.

**Do new funding sources offer hope?**

While Local Authorities remain the primary source of funding for youth services, it is important to acknowledge that providers access funding from a range of sources.

The most prominent new funding source that has emerged since 2010/11 is for the National Citizen Service (NCS).

Between 2010/11 and 2016/17, an estimated £630m was spent on the NCS, and as a local provider, YMCA recognises the positive impact that NCS can have on young people’s lives.
However, it is important to recognise that NCS focusses on a much narrower age bracket than universal and targeted youth services, working only with 16 and 17 year-olds, compared to 11-18 year-olds often catered for through Local Authority funding.

In addition, the NCS is a time-limited service, with participants spending four weeks on the programme, compared to the year round availability of more universal and targeted youth services.

It is important to also note that NCS does not operate in Wales. So while young people in Wales have benefitted from reduced levels of cuts to youth services, they have missed out on any additional spend and provision associated with NCS.

So even if you consider that the introduction of NCS has gone some way to address the significant Local Authority cuts to youth services in England, due to the differences in the way it operates, it is difficult to see this as a direct substitute.
Conclusions

In just six years, Local Authorities have cut their expenditure on youth services in England and Wales by more than £750m.

As this research demonstrates, the long-term benefits of youth services are far too often overlooked by Local Authorities, as they seek to meet more immediate financial and statutory pressures, even within services for children and young people.

It is as a result of these cuts, many young people are now missing out on opportunities outside the school setting to engage in positive activities that support their learning and development, opportunities previous generations took for granted.

It is difficult to imagine any other services in England and Wales that could be on the receiving end of cuts of more three fifths of their total budget over such a short period of time, with little or no scrutiny to the long-term impact this would have on our communities and the individuals missing out.

Unfortunately it is not until news of young people being isolated or incidents like the recent knife crimes in London hit the headlines, attention seems to go to the role of youth services. However, like all news cycles, this will pass, but as set out in this research, the cuts to youth services look likely to continue.

To halt and redress these continued cuts which are seeing increasing numbers of young people miss out, it is critical the importance of youth services are recognised in statute nationally, and in funding locally.

Linked to this, it is critical that Local Authorities are better accountable on how spending on youth services is allocated, particularly in England where existing reporting requirements are extremely limited.

YMCA is calling on the Government to:
▶ Protect youth services from further cuts by committing to maintain spending at current levels of expenditure
▶ Improve accountability by reclassifying youth services as a statutory services and requiring better reporting of local expenditure and delivery

Notes

ONS, LA and school expenditure, December 2017
Welsh Government, Revenue outturn expenditure, October 2017
Welsh Government, Youth service finance - Income and expenditure, November 2017
NAO, National Citizen Service, January 2017
YMCA enables people to develop their full potential in mind, body and spirit. Inspired by, and faithful to, our Christian values, we create supportive, inclusive and energising communities, where young people can truly belong, contribute and thrive.