

MOVING FORWARD WITH YOUTH WORK: AN AGENDA FOR CHANGE

By Lloyd Russell-Moyle MP and Ben Bradley MP

*A cross-party review of the current youth work policy and practice landscape
and recommendations for reforms in the next parliament*



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FOREWORD



Our first All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Youth Affairs report on youth work in 2019¹, followed a decade of austerity after the 2008 financial crash. That period saw youth services fragment - where 75% had been delivered by local authorities this reduced to 25% with the voluntary and community organisations filling gaps; but with over £1 billion annual reduction in direct spending on that provision, shrinking the pot overall by the end of the decade.

The report led to the renewal of youth work qualifications and the first steps

towards increased investment, from a capital-led Youth Investment Fund and bursaries for youth work training. By the summer of 2020, with the country in the first national lockdown of the pandemic, youth services were deemed an essential service and by 2021 qualified youth workers gained essential key worker status.

This was later underpinned by the National Youth Guarantee for all young people to have access to regular weekly activities out of school, adventure and trips away from home, and more volunteering opportunities in their local area. However, in the economic downturn that followed, to meet critical need, local authorities' spending was largely absorbed by looked-after children and young people in crisis. Once again, voluntary and community organisations have been hit hard with a loss of revenue funding and adult volunteers; they could not be expected to fill the void without additional support.

As this parliament draws to a close and a new government is formed after the

general election public spending will be held tight. There is no 'quick fix'. Rather we need to re-set how we engage, involve and empower young people which means making decisions viewed through the lens of their young lives.

How we support and resource youth work will be pivotal. We look to increased devolved responsibilities and joined-up funding, to enable councils or combined authorities to present a community-based local youth offer, held accountable by residents including young people in line with their local needs and priorities, with voluntary and community organisations alongside a set of local public services.

This short review, five years on from the original APPG report, looks to learn from frontline experiences to inform practical ways forward. We set out priorities and recommendations for the next parliament, to maintain and galvanise cross-party collaboration, both national and locally.

*Cllr Ben Bradley MP
and Lloyd Russell-Moyle MP*



Following a decade that saw local government spending on services for young people plummet by more than £1 billion, the 2020s have seen

a welcome change in fortunes for youth work and youth provision.

Although starting from a low base, the past three years have seen a gradual rise in spending by local authorities on youth services, more youth workers employed and an increase in youth centres opened.

This improving picture at a local level has been mirrored nationally. Following youth workers receiving 'essential worker' status during the pandemic, support for young people has risen up the government's list of policy and funding priorities.

In addition to a £300 million fund to boost youth services infrastructure and investment in targeted programmes to tackle youth violence, a review of youth work spending has strengthened guidance on what services should be provided and led to the creation of a National Youth Guarantee setting out what support young people should be entitled to receive. This has seen more money flow into provision at a time when the challenges facing young people have never been greater.

The disruption and trauma of the pandemic, the economic hardship caused by the cost-of-living crisis and the looming threat of climate catastrophe are, unsurprisingly, raising levels of anxiety, frustration and anger among young people about what the future holds for them. They need the support of trusted adults to help them navigate these difficult times more than ever. Professionally trained youth workers, skilled in listening to young people and forming strong relationships with them so they have the

confidence to make positive choices are vital to the future health and wellbeing of the nation.

This report highlights some of the organisations and projects delivering great relationship-based youth work at both grassroots and national level. They illustrate how, with a bit of investment and a passionate workforce, they can deliver real change for disadvantaged groups of young people.

The challenging financial landscape - for local government specifically and the economy in general - means whichever party forms the next government will have to make some tough choices about where to prioritise limited resources.

However, the focus of the next parliament must be about delivering more relationship-based youth work so as many young people as possible get the help they need.

*Derren Hayes, Editor,
Children & Young People Now*

ABOUT THE REVIEW

This report represents the reflections and recommendations of two Members of Parliament who led and contributed to the APPG on Youth Affairs report on youth work, published in April 2019. It is supported by desk research and a review of government policies and recent reports from national youth organisations. An open-call for insights from frontline

services and practitioners was published by *Children & Young People Now*, which have informed the recommendations on priority areas for the next parliament.

Acknowledgements: with thanks to all those who have shared their experiences and research to contribute to this report, the House of Commons Library on legislation and guidance, and to Jonathan Hopkins (Centre for Young Lives) for his support throughout.

Post Script: Since completing this review the British Youth Council has closed after 75 years. We thank BYC for the vital role it played in the APPG on Youth Affairs and local youth councils. Its loss will be keenly felt by young people and politicians across the country.

Children & Young People Now
For decision makers and service practitioners working with children, young people and families



OUR FINDINGS

Policy landscape

As we approach the 2024 general election, the landscape for youth work has changed since our first cross-party report of 2019. We are witnessing the fall-out act from the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis, with a disproportionate impact on young people. There is a consistent political narrative of young people needing ‘somewhere to go, something to do and someone to talk to’ but a lack of consistency in funding, where and how services are provided.

There is a vastly uneven spread of opportunities within communities as well as between local authority areas. The make-up of youth work is such that four in five youth services are now delivered by voluntary organisations and community groups², albeit a significant part commissioned or grant funded by local councils.

After the convulsions of the 2008-10 financial crash, which led to a decade of austerity and around £1 billion of annual spending lost to the direct provision of youth services, there has been a small up-tick of expenditure in 2022-23³. This may be a consequence of the pandemic, which brought recognition of youth work as an essential service, and greater visibility of young people’s needs in the subsequent cost-of-living crisis. The test will be if this is an upward trend that can be sustained in response to as long-term need or is simply a reaction to a crisis.

National government

Over the course of the current parliament, we have seen an increased awareness of the role and contribution of youth work. This came together with a cross-party report, published in April 2019 after a year-long inquiry⁴. It set the agenda and its recommendations were, in large part, adopted by government. We have seen new funding streams and a National Youth Guarantee, and a pilot programme of local area reviews⁵ alongside strengthened statutory guidance for youth services. Now, five years from our first report, as each of the main parties looks to stabilise and grow the economy, we must consider how to secure stable funding that sustains youth work and supports its growth to meet young people’s increasing needs.

It requires a joined-up approach across government departments to deliver a coherent youth offer. To drive this forward requires greater accountability with a dedicated ministerial post for young people in government, and greater devolved responsibilities to regions and localities, to meet the needs and create opportunities with young people across our communities. An annual report should be published by the minister for young people and presented to parliament on the actions and outcomes relevant to the youth offer, for a scrutiny hearing by a select committee of the House of Commons. This can be supported by a new all-party

parliamentary group of members from both houses of parliament, to lead inquiries and debate for youth work in the next parliament.

Local government

Funding crises and lack of a firm statutory footing has seen local authorities retrench. There remains in place a statutory duty with strengthened guidance for youth work, but a lack of accountability to secure provision for young people outside of the school day. Some local councils step up to the plate, with new ways of working and funding, but others go missing which has created a patchwork of provision and funding in many areas. Where voluntary groups have stepped in to fill the gaps they are fearful of any new money coming into the system being lost within escalating costs of children’s social care; and half of surveyed council leaders are not confident they would have enough funding to fulfil their legal duties in all services in 2024-25⁶.

Statutory guidance was first published in 2008⁷ and revised in 2023⁸. That guidance underpins the duty for local authorities to secure sufficient youth services in their area, of educational leisure-time and recreational leisure-time activities. The first guidance was accompanied by the National Standards for Positive Activity⁹, later dropped in 2012 under the coalition government of the day.

The most recent guidance is aligned to

2. NYA: National Youth Sector Census

3. *On The Ropes*, YMCA 2024

4. APPG on Youth Affairs, 2019

5. National Youth Agency and Local Government Association, DCMS, 2023

6. Local Government Association, December 2023

7. 2008 statutory guidance - see annex

8. 2023 statutory guidance - see annex

9. National Standards for Positive Activity, 2008

10. National Youth Guarantee, DCMS, 2022



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the government's National Youth Guarantee¹⁰ of regular out-of-school activities. What remains contentious is what is considered "sufficient" levels of provision and how that is determined to be "reasonably practicable" and affordable.

The youth sector

Youth work is fractured: there is no spine to youth services like there is for schools and colleges, health and social care, or youth justice. Yet there is little appetite to return to local authority wholly run services, which have been lost or greatly diminished across all parts of England. However, youth work remains dependent on local authorities commissioning provision or grant-funding of voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations. The role of local authorities is critical also for early help and crisis interventions, in allied services for children and families. A fundamental challenge is how this best supports young people and connects to a myriad of youth work projects, programmes and activities in an array of settings and communities. While there is greater understanding of the value

of youth work¹¹ there is still too little appreciation of what and how it does it.

There have been significant strides to define, develop and evidence impact, but all too often it is measuring small parts of the system or is comparing apples and pears across different data sets and years. With a mosaic of providers, funders and commissioners, it requires a better understanding of the life-stages and age-appropriate support, still largely funded by secondary school ages but as part of a continuum of support for 8- to 12-year-olds and 16 to 24 transitions to adulthood.

Local youth offer

There is a groundswell for more places to go and things to do outside of the school day. This brings greater recognition of youth work to help create safe spaces where young people are free to be young – to have fun – and learn skills outside the classroom, in so-called enrichment activities. It fits across statutory-funded services and a rich history of voluntary sector provision. This is best captured by the government's National Youth Guarantee of regular out of school

activities, adventures away from home, and increased volunteering and social action opportunities. Funding of some £500m over three years has been used to back the guarantee. Youth work is embedded in the approach, "creating, expanding and improving youth services across England", of which £300m is capital-led funding for projects completed by 2024/25¹². This is seen as a catalyst for change and to improve services in disadvantaged communities but is based on competitive bids from just [45] local authority areas and 600 district wards.

It is left to local authorities to determine what the appropriate number of youth workers is to secure sufficient provision which will "depend on the area and the needs of young people in that area".¹³ However, in many areas we are seeing youth centres close and youth clubs over-reliant on short-term funding and volunteers. There is an institutional loss of memory of youth work by some local authorities and commissioners, and a generation of young people who don't know what youth work is, never having experienced it within 'deserts of provision'. Therefore, in some areas link workers and related activities can help build

11. *Untapped*, UK Youth, 2022

12. *Youth Investment Fund*, 2022-25

relationships with schools and connect to community organisations to build their capacity. Outreach and detached youth work extend relationships with young people, to develop a centre-based provision and connect to projects and programmes in the area, and to access specialist services where needed.

Early help and prevention

We have seen a resurgence of interest for youth work in relation to knife crime and exploitation, mental health and safeguarding, and school attendance. The statutory basis of youth work is to improve young people's wellbeing¹⁴. Youth work starts where young people are, in their communities, and provides 360-degree support for early help and prevention with targeted interventions and tailored activities, in a relational approach to work with young people and families, across communities. However, there is little joined-up policy and funding which supports youth work wrapped around young people, leaving it restricted to discrete projects and silos.

The emerging policies for and roll out of community hubs spring from different government departments, each with different takes on the practice and interventions we would otherwise attribute to good youth work. It is time to call it by its name, 'youth work', with quality standards which read across allied sectors to embed youth work practice rather than reinvent the wheel – and sow confusion – with projects and funding pots for 'new' roles which act in silos set by the varied government initiatives.

Workforce development

Trained and qualified youth workers are employed in a vast range of services and programmes; but with declining numbers. While there is pedagogy, values and qualifications for youth workers, this has been adopted unevenly by commissioners, funders and employers in different parts of the system and across the country. An annual workforce survey¹⁵ captures the number of youth workers in recognised youth services, largely through local authorities, which

THREE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

1. Under the next government there should be a minister who has a portfolio focussed on young people. A cross-departmental committee would be chaired by the minister, with shared outcomes to read across government, research and practice readily understood by young people. An annual report would be presented to parliament for a scrutiny hearing by a select committee, with mechanisms for youth voice and representation at all levels of decision-making.

2. With youth work seen as an essential service a national youth workforce strategy is needed. One that stimulates demand for, rather than simply supply of, youth workers with revenue funding devolved to secure a deeper and broader

National Youth Guarantee. The strategy and guidance should include clear expectations for what sufficient youth provision is and the capacity to deliver locally, including the ratio of professional youth workers, trainees and volunteers.

3. There needs to be a standardised and national system for evaluating the sufficiency, suitability and quality of youth work. This necessitates a coherent local youth offer that provides for a mosaic of activities and providers. To achieve this, local youth partnerships should be developed which incorporate young people in its design and decision making, and new 'light touch' inspection arrangements and quality assurance.

has shown a steep decline with cuts to those services¹⁶.

A youth work curriculum, new entry routes to the profession, training for allied professions and a voluntary register for qualified youth workers, alongside a national census of youth work provision, have been introduced since 2019.¹⁷ In their relative infancy, these initiatives can provide a baseline of youth work in England.

There is need for an estimated 10,000 extra youth practitioners with youth work training.¹⁸ However, what is missing is a national target and accountability for the number of youth workers necessary to fulfil the statutory duty for local services and the government's own National Youth Guarantee. There are no data sources that would allow an assessment of current staffing levels in relation to youth workers and their capacity to provide sufficient youth services.¹⁹ This contributes to a cycle of decline in the number of newly qualified youth workers,²⁰ despite a host of roles which are being created in different parts of the system to meet specific needs from school attendance to work coaches and violence reduction. The result is that youth work is increasingly seen less as a profession and more an approach or practice. There are no clear career paths and salaries are often patched together from projects and short-term funding. There is a pressing need for a national youth work workforce strategy, which is in development.²¹

Place-based

To meet the varied needs of different ages and stages of life, within communities, is best achieved locally. There is no one size fits all approach, distinctive by age and qualities, urban and rural localities. Critically, young people have the right to be involved in community development, co-design of services and facilities, and funding decisions; and to ensure equitable access and the quality of youth provision, seen through the lens of young people's experiences rather than of a particular government department or single service.

Youth work is embedded in places and spaces where young people are across sports, arts and culture, faith-based and uniformed provision; a host of roles are being created in different parts of the system to meet specific needs from school attendance to work coaches, violence reduction and family support. Therefore, to be effective, a youth offer requires a clear narrative of what we want for – and expect of – young people, readily understood by politicians, providers, communities and young people alike. This calls for devolved powers and joined-up funding for a youth offer delivered locally, and a framework for quality assurance to ensure consistency and equitable access within a local youth offer. To achieve this and put in place clear lines of accountability under statutory guidance, local youth partnerships should be developed as a priority across the next parliament.

13. DCMS, Minister Stuart Andrew MP, written parliamentary question, 19 January 2024

14. Education and Inspections Act 2006

15. LGA local government workforce survey and NYA Youth Sector Census

16. On The Ropes, YMCA, 2024

17. Various, National Youth Agency

18. Commission On Young Lives 2022

19. House of Commons Library, 2024

20. NYA: Annual Higher Education Institutions Monitoring Survey

21. Youth Work Manifesto, NYA, 2024

A NATIONAL PICTURE

This report has drawn on recently published research and reports. We are grateful to the frontline practitioners and youth sector organisations for contributing directly to this review from their insights and experiences. As secondary evidence we have used research and acknowledged submissions which embed young people's experience and voice. It is not a comprehensive account of all that has been done, progressed and achieved over the last parliament. Rather it helps to paint a national picture which informs our findings and recommendations for priorities in the next parliament.

“Youth work is not a luxury; it is a societal necessity. By investing in the development, education, and wellbeing of young people, we are investing in a more resilient, compassionate, and equitable future.”

- Ruth Marvel, CEO, Duke of Edinburgh's Award

“Whatever government is in power it must recognise that prevention work is key to supporting young people with the many challenges they face and acknowledge that a youth service that operates 52 weeks a year not only changes lives but saves lives. It also saves money.”

- Unite trade union



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National government

There have been four government departments overseeing youth work since the first statutory guidance was published in 2008, by the then Department for Children, Schools and Families²². Following publication of revised guidance by the restructured Department for Education under the Coalition Government in 2012²³, youth policies moved to the Cabinet Office in 2013 as part of the civil society ministerial brief. Later moving the Department of Culture, Media and Sport from 2016 where civil society is now held within the portfolio of the Minister for Sports, Gambling and Civil Society.

This diluted the role of youth work within government policy and separated it from the Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing at the Department for Education and related roles at the departments for Health, Justice, Home Office and Work & Pensions. However, over the last parliament there has been a renewed policy agenda²⁴ for youth work, underpinned by the National Youth Guarantee and Youth Investment Fund, and new statutory

guidance published in 2023²⁵.

Some have called for a new statutory duty to secure youth work with a Youth Services Act²⁶. However, given the legislative timetable a new Act is unlikely; rather to drive change greater accountability can be included in an appropriate bill in the new parliament.

“There is no machinery in the 1996 Act for the Secretary of State to require local authorities to account for their fulfilment of their obligations under the statutory duty, unlike the Children Act 1989 where there were three yearly reviews of each authority by the Secretary of State.”

- Fair Play for Children

22. Statutory guidance 2008 – see annex

23. Statutory guidance 2012 – see annex

24. DCMS Youth Review, 2022

25. Statutory guidance 2013 – see annex

26. NYA Youth Work Manifesto, 2024; Youth Service (and Provision) Bill, 2018

Making the case for youth work

The case for renewed investment in youth work and out-of-school activities has been set out by national youth charities and youth sector infrastructure bodies. In its agenda for change, the Back Youth Alliance²⁷ looks to government to enable and resource enrichment and non-formal learning through clear national guidance and investment in positive activities, programmes and clubs.

This includes a comprehensive package of accessible out of school and holiday activities for the most marginalised and at-risk young people, consisting of access to personalised support from a named youth worker, advocacy and support to navigate statutory services.

Three new studies, published by government in 2024, reveal youth work has a positive impact on young people's health, wellbeing and employability, with the positive effects lasting well into adulthood²⁸. This analysis followed participants for decades. It has found young people who received youth work support as teenagers were happier,

healthier, wealthier and more active in their communities as adults, compared with those who did not receive youth work. Other research shows that the individual guidance offered by youth workers helps young people and supports improvement in mental health and wellbeing²⁹.

“Research shows the positive impacts of youth work are experienced across diverse groups of young people; regardless of gender, ethnicity, or socio-economic status.”

- Jacob Diggle, Chief Impact Officer, UK Youth

Local services

Youth services give young people safe spaces to go and trusted relationships with adults that can be the difference between being supported to make positive choices

(including knowing where to go for help when it's needed) and being drawn into negative situations.

The National Youth Sector Advisory Board³⁰ put forward 15 policy recommendations outlining how to achieve a long-term commitment to young people through the power of youth work. This calls for “a clearly defined national offer and consistent local offers through holistic, joined-up community partnerships, with every local authority able to fulfil their statutory duty to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of children and young people”. To achieve this requires data collection and sharing at local level to stop young people falling through the cracks of fragmented services.

Having youth services embedded in local communities, where young people are, increases the ability to respond sooner, before difficulties and challenges become significant problems for individuals and wider society. There are four themes that recur consistently: the earliness of early help; working with families; building resilience; and an integrated joined-up offer. This common ground can be used to construct a definition of an effective local early help offer.



27. Agenda for Change, Back Youth Alliance 2024 – a coalition of national youth charities

28. Youth Review and Life Outcomes, DCMS, 2024

29. Centre for Progressive Policy, 2020

30. NYSAB – a national forum for youth sector representation, NYA secretariat

“Youth workers are likely to have a particular role to play in supporting young people to return to school and helping those young people who struggle to find employment... Supporting them to pursue positive paths through this difficult time will be key to avoiding negative outcomes such as long-term unemployment, mental and physical health difficulties or criminal activity further down the line.”

- Local Government Association

Stable and sustainable funding

There needs to be sustained and long-term revenue funding secured to bolster universal and open-access youth services, catering to all young people throughout the year³¹. Yet, despite a small increase in 2022-23, there has been a long-term downward trend in direct spending on youth work.³² What is missing is coherent accounting for youth work in other statutory and commissioned services and targeted interventions. Government funding criteria has often excluded local

“The absence of a coordinated strategy across government departments has led to fragmented and insufficient funding for targeted youth services.”

- Denise Hatton, CEO, YMCA



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councils and has left the voluntary sector competing for small pots of short-term funding. This undermines the sustained, trusted relationships with youth workers and is detrimental to young people.

Devolved funding to local authority areas with combined authorities and mayors too, will help pool funding and establish joint initiatives to meet local needs. One suggestion is that funding for youth services should be based on the population size of a city or community, apportioned to areas of greater need rather than simply distributed to demographics of size. Super Output areas are a good way of apportioning funding. The funding should equate to £50 per number of young people aged between 11 to 17 per year but distributed 40% per child with the remaining 60% per child in lower Super Output areas³³.

There is a parallel case for a central government funding mechanism for educational and recreational leisure time – youth and play work – akin to the Arts Council and Sports England, which joins up funding and is devolved for local

delivery on a proportional basis by population³⁴. This can be established by the creation of a new funding body or repurposing an existing arms-length government body.

Local partnerships

The impact of a decade of funding cuts have been significant both in terms of who is delivering youth work, and their understanding of what it constitutes. Where youth work is embedded, there is some excellent practice in working alongside other statutory services. This allows for sharing information and ultimately intervening at an appropriate time. However, there are tensions within the current system – some want to see much of the work done by voluntary services be delivered by children’s services while others view voluntary and community organisations as essential to grass-roots delivery. It is not enough that VCOs are treated solely as delivery agents; they must be valued as strategic partners to

31. *Now's Our Chance*, YMCA manifesto, 2024

32. *On the Ropes*, YMCA, 2024

33. *Unite the Union*, 2024

34. *Fair Play for Children*

local authorities and statutory services.

There is sports, arts and faith-based youth provision, volunteer-run and uniformed organisations, national programmes like NCS and DoFE, and targeted youth projects funded by mayors, violence reduction units and the National Lottery, and some corporate funded programmes too.

However, a common concern is that, in many areas, there is very little professional youth work being currently delivered by trained and qualified youth workers. The landscape is fragmented with provision split across diverse institutions and individuals operating in different contexts and structures. Voluntary sector innovation has not happened everywhere and has contributed to a 'postcode lottery' for young people.

“Fund the development of local youth partnerships to enable youth workers, providers and young people to design initiatives to support bespoke and tailored youth work provision where they live.”

- National Youth Sector Advisory Board

Early help and prevention

Social workers, teachers, and health professionals will say that relationship-based practice is what would lead to improved outcomes with the young people they support, but they just don't have the time. As a result, we have seen increased interest in youth work practice – a team of youth practitioners with youth work training – for early help and interventions in settings like A&E departments and schools, for example.

With the emergence of community hubs – crime and violence reduction, mental health, family services and youth employment – we must learn from past models, like Connexions and Sure Start, and place-based approaches for levelling

up services. This fits youth work within early help and prevention, not just at the point of crisis from mental ill health, the point of arrest or as a victim of crime, or being homeless. Youth workers are ideally placed to work in multi-agency teams and in partnership in a variety of different places and spaces.³⁵

“Youth work is not an optional extra or a sticking plaster when other services can't meet young people's needs; it is a crucial preventative tool for young people at risk of social and educational exclusion.”

- Leigh Middleton, CEO, National Youth Agency

Quality, sufficiency and capacity

It is up to individual local authorities to decide what level of youth work and provision is 'sufficient'. There is also very little prescription on the capacity of youth work needed to deliver a sufficient level of services, regarding the number of youth workers. This is more than just about training more youth workers, however well that's done, without winning the argument about why youth work is needed. Like other professions and practice areas, it requires clarity on the roles and ratio of professional youth workers, trainees and volunteers to

“Outcomes from youth work need to be realistic and, at the same time, meet the challenge that you cannot measure good practice (when things don't go wrong).”

- University lecturer, youth and community development

deliver services. This is needed for a local youth offer connected to early help and prevention services, and to create a new generation of qualified youth workers within a team of youth practitioners with youth work training.

This necessitates a coherent local youth offer that provides for a mosaic of activities and providers. This would benefit from a standardised and national system for evaluating the sufficiency and suitability and quality of youth work, as a framework for quality assurance to ensure consistency and equitable access within a local youth offer. This can be developed within proposed reforms of Ofsted, or similar regulatory body, applicable to the appropriate setting akin to its current responsibilities for childcare, schools and children's services.

It could be applicable to the whole of the local youth offer and settings, where there is an established local youth partnership, for example; or include some aspects of youth work in the early help and prevention sections of the ILACs (inspection of local authority children's services).

Young people led

Youth voice and representation is essential at all levels of policy and decision making: creating opportunities for young people and youth-led organisations to meaningfully participate in the design and delivery of policy and services that impact young people, including through policy networks, an active and influential UK Youth Parliament, and local youth councils³⁶.

This is a key part of youth work embedded in the every-day practice, not simply through structured forum. There is no one-size-fits-all approach across the age range and for young people with additional needs or protected characteristics. It requires meaningful engagement in the co-design of the youth offer and active participation in communities, combining youth work and youth voice to engage young people who don't attend youth clubs or take part in projects³⁷. For government, national and local, seeking views from youth practitioners on what is working well and what they would like to see improved will benefit greatly decision making, breaking policy silos and barriers to participation.

35. National Youth Sector Census – Snapshot Report 2023
36. Agenda For Change, Back Youth Alliance 2024

37. Coram Voice advocates to improve the care system

MODELS OF YOUTH WORK

“To be truly universal, youth work delivery must also be targeted; the two go hand in hand. Whilst youth workers can and do work across the spectrum, they are ultimately specialists in reaching young people that other people and services can’t.”

- Paul Oginsky, CEO, Vibe

The statutory basis of youth work is to improve young people’s wellbeing. Its practice can be seen in centre-based approaches like OnSide Youth Zones and detached youth work including rural areas like Young Somerset. Recent developments for community hubs and policies include Young Futures, a so-called Sure Start for teenagers, promoted by the Centre for Young Lives. Each has at its heart a commitment to every young person having a trusted adult (youth practitioners with youth work training).

Trusted relationships are crucial. It is an understanding based not just on the unique way youth work delivers relational practice and voluntary engagement but how this supports the collective impact of all stakeholders for shared outcomes, despite differing roles and activities across the age range. The models of youth work below are curated from the submissions

made to this review to aid policymakers in the next parliament, while noting there are other models of youth work practice.

Place-based

A devolved funding model addresses the issue of youth work falling between the cracks of multiple government departments. This in part could be achieved by pooling funds and policy drivers from across multiple departments and distributed at a local authority level with the convening capabilities of councils for an effective youth service offer to be organised and delivered, of which youth work provides a key element alongside voluntary organisations and community groups, and an array of uniformed, sports and arts groups. We look to:

- A national strategy for young people to

support pooling government departmental budgets.

- Devolved responsibilities and funding to local authorities to secure effective youth service provision across their localities and neighbourhoods.
- An energised approach to developing a robust early help and prevention model recognising that investment at a local authority level is required now, for long-term gain held in the community.
- Consequently, reduced spending in the long-term by increasing preventative interventions and reducing the risk of problems escalating which require more intensive and expensive interventions being required.

Commissioned services

In modelling systems-change around the needs of young people, one way forward is for local authority children’s services to commission a community-based core youth work offer through a charity dedicated to that purpose. This can be an established charity or single entity of a local youth partnership, who would manage a team of place-based qualified youth workers and core funded provision, building their capacity and widening the offer alongside other local providers. The



partnerships would be made up of local voluntary and community organisations and key stakeholders including local authority children's services officers.

Overall, funding should be to secure targeted work with universal work included, building on the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme, but not just in the school holidays and with less emphasis on free school meals to be inclusive of needs and not stigmatising. Just as qualified youth workers were given discretion to identify needs to include vulnerable young people in youth provision during the pandemic.

Local authority led

Nottinghamshire has a three-tiered approach of engagement, which allows young people to access additional support depending on their individual need, and can be extended to include the wider youth sector. This approach creates an ideal opportunity to either create or utilise the council's professionally qualified workforce to support the wider youth sector with regards to safeguarding, training and support, and in planning positive opportunities and outcomes for young people. This can create a neat referral pathway, enhancing what is available to young people in a communicated, organised, and safe way.

Voluntary services

Brighton's youth offer is underpinned by voluntary and community organisations with effective youth voice and participation work embedded, which means that any area will have its ear to the ground for issues and opportunities that arise.

A service, built around neighbourhood youth clubs, can offer more targeted provision, based in youth work principles.

It takes the approach that "just because a young person is arrested or attends hospital having been attacked doesn't mean they aren't also a resident in a particular neighbourhood or attend a particular school or college".

Youth work is active in all of these different spaces. It is the systemic impact of relationship-based practice with trusted adults in a way that shrinks the holes in the safety net for them.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION'S SIX KEY PRINCIPLES FOR DEVELOPING YOUTH SERVICES

1. Youth-led

Young people's voices are central to the provision offered to them. Provision is structured around the needs of young people locally, offering both universal, open-access provision wherever possible, with targeted support for those considered more at risk, disadvantaged or with higher need.

2. Inclusivity, equality and diversity

Young people feel included in their local area and can access the support they need as they progress towards adulthood.

No young person feels marginalised or isolated. The local youth offer helps to develop the skills, knowledge and networks they need to access and take advantage of opportunities.

3. Respect

Young people are a valued and respected part of the community whose needs and wishes are considered equally with those of other groups. They are actively encouraged to participate in their communities without fear of judgment or negative stereotyping.

4. Quality, safety and wellbeing

Good quality services are provided by staff with appropriate safeguarding training, linked to a wider network of support. Ideally this includes professionally qualified youth workers with the skills, expertise and competencies to support safe, quality services with appropriate levels and types of intervention.

5. Empowerment

Services empower young people to progress and engage in employment, education and training, and to take an active role in their local communities. Young people are listened to and can make demonstrable changes to their communities and understand how to engage with the democratic process.

6. Positivity

Services are strengths-based and focus on developing the skills and attributes of young people, rather than attempting to 'fix' a problem. The youth offer helps to keep young people safe and supports their mental, emotional and physical health, and improves their social and economic wellbeing.

Young Futures

There are examples of good multi-agency working that sees youth work delivery in community hubs, A&E departments, with youth offending teams and supporting young people in and leaving care. This could be expanded if adequately resourced. It is critical that hubs established to work with families, on mental health and employment, for example, include effective and accessible support for young people specifically. They are places where staff need to be confident and competent to engage with young people and parents too. This requires a team of youth practitioners with youth work training who provide a bridge to youth provision including open-access youth centres and statutory services.

■ **Early Help:** a 'Sure Start for teenagers' approach will be piloted with the Centre

for Young Lives which supports more points of connection and engagement with parents, carers and whole families, more opportunities for early help and interventions, and more opportunities to improve access to youth services.

- **Community:** an example is Oasis³⁹ whose provision is neighbourhood based, with 360-degree youth work that is relational, restorative and transformative, linking back to a therapeutic core; working from community hubs and youth centres and wrapped around school-academies; in particular for young people with challenging home and school lives, helped by trained youth workers, mentors and peer groups.
- **Young adults:** policy and practice needs to recognise ages 16-24 as a distinct category.⁴⁰ The transition to adulthood has become less linear, more complex, risky and precarious; young people are expected to navigate

39. Oasis Community Partnership

40. State of Paralysis, (16-24 year olds) RSA, 2024



OASIS

systems based on their personal support networks, ensuring they face these complex challenges as individuals. Centrepunkt is working with the Centre for Young Lives to develop a single 'front door' accessible to 16- to 24-year-olds for the various government programmes of support, to be devolved and delivered locally.

School links

There is a move to greater links with schools and academy trusts, as anchor institutions in a local community where most young people are. Many, if not most, young people will not have experience or won't understand what youth work is. Therefore:

- Link youth workers for secondary schools can start to build relationships by such activities as lunchtime wellbeing drop-ins, after school clubs, youth awards programmes and related activities.
- The link workers connect to community organisations to build their capacity, delivering regular weekly out of school enrichment activities, volunteering and social action opportunities.

- Where there are gaps, the youth workers can carry out detached youth work to build relationships with young people, start a drop in and take it from there, working with young people to develop a centre-based provision in the area as an intrinsic part of the local youth offer.

Youth work and arts

Roundhouse is a performing arts venue which has an in-house youth work team and outreach, with the skills and facilities to engage young people directly and deliver within Camden and more widely across London. This provides a holistic package of support for young people in creative settings, in a youth-focused approach led by qualified youth workers and experienced artistic, technical and pastoral staff teams within a one-stop provision. This enables the voluntary engagement of young people participating in positive activities and receiving the support needed at key stages of transitions to adulthood: a range of activities and experiences from ages 11 to 24 years to gain and supporting young adults up to 30, in a differentiated

offer but with trauma-informed practice and youth voice at its core.

Youth work and sports

Football Beyond Borders delivers a long-term (minimum two years), intensive (weekly) and targeted social and emotional learning intervention for vulnerable young people. Youth workers and practitioners are recruited from the communities they serve with lived experience that young people relate to who develop strong relationships with young people and key actors in their lives at school, home, and elsewhere. The optical difference between teaching staff and a tracksuit-wearing practitioner is a useful separation which can complement the work schools do to bridge any divide between the young person, home, school and their community. They teach self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills and responsible decision making explicitly through an award-winning, gender-bespoke curriculum which is targeted towards groups of 16-18 young people that schools put forward for the programme.

CONCLUSION

The next parliament needs to consider ways in which the National Youth Guarantee for youth work and out-of-school activities goes deeper and broader to ensure equitable access for young people to meet their needs and interests.

We cannot ignore the funding constraints and difficult economic circumstances we are in. However, national programmes and local areas competing for funding pots is not the answer. It is no way to fund services.

Where we are to invest, fundamentally, it is in the quality of the positive relationship between the young person and trusted adult that makes the biggest difference to life choices and chances: a trained youth worker or skilled volunteer, often near-to-peer in age, who young people turn to.

To meet the varied needs of different ages and stages of life, within communities, is best achieved locally where funding can be used wisely by people who can see the whole picture and breadth of services across a place. This will help open-up

community spaces, repair and repurpose small-scale capital projects, and use of community assets from schools to parks and leisure to housing associations, for example.

This calls for devolved powers and funding, delivered locally. Seen through the lens of young people's experiences rather than of a particular government department for joined-up funding, including breaking the silos in the development of community hubs for early help and prevention services.



FOOTBALL BEYOND BORDERS

APPENDIX ONE

Legislation and statutory guidance

1. Education and Inspections Act 2006 Amendment to Section 507B of the Education Act 1996

'A statutory duty for local authorities, in the context of national standards, to ensure that young people have access to a wide range of positive activities. In time we want to see the national standards including for example access to two hours per week of sporting activity and access to two hours of other constructive activities in clubs, youth groups and classes.'

The new duty came into force in January 2007. Local authorities have a duty, so far as reasonably practicable, to secure sufficient youth services for "qualifying young persons" in their area. This comprises both educational leisure-time activities and recreational leisure-time activities. The section uses the term "positive leisure-time activities" to refer to such activities. "Qualifying young persons" means young people aged from 13 to 19, and those with learning difficulties or disabilities up to the age of 24. Under section 507B(12), local authorities are required to have regard to guidance from the Secretary of State when performing their youth services functions.

2. Statutory Guidance 2008

The first Statutory Guidance issued under section 507B was published in March 2008. The guidance was detailed and comprised 47 pages. The guidance explained the policy context and went into some detail about the (new) duty to secure 'positive activities'. It had a section on 'Establishing the local offer' which set out national standards for positive activities:

- National Standards for Positive Activities
- Access to two hours per week of sporting activity including formal and informal team and individual sports, outdoor and adventurous sports, and other physical activities such as aerobics and dance - provided through national curriculum and leisure-time activities.
- Access to two hours per week of other constructive activities in clubs, youth groups and classes. This includes activities in which young people pursue their interests and hobbies; activities contributing to their personal, social and spiritual development; activities encouraging creativity; innovation and enterprise; study support; and residential opportunities.
- Opportunities to make a positive contribution to their community through volunteering, including leading action, campaigning and fundraising.
- A wide range of other recreational, cultural, sporting and enriching experiences.
- A range of safe and enjoyable places in which to spend time. This could simply be somewhere to socialise with friends. To meet the government's expectations a local authority will need to:
 - a. put young people, particularly the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, at the centre of needs analysis, decision making and evaluation in regard to positive activities in their area;
 - b. ensure that the local offer of positive activities is integrated with other support functions such as information, advice and guidance and for those who require it, targeted youth support services; and
 - c. monitor progress - including through the use of new data provided by the Government and through developing

local measures based on young people's engagement in positive activities.

3. Statutory Guidance 2012

Under the coalition government (2010-2015) the Department of Education and the Cabinet Office published its strategy, Positive for Youth in which:

The government has confirmed that local authorities should continue to have a duty to secure sufficient leisure-time educational and recreational leisure time activities for the improvement of the wellbeing of 13 to 19 year olds, so far as is reasonably practicable. This duty also requires local authorities to ascertain and take into account young people's views and to publicise information about the local offer.

New statutory guidance was issued in June 2012. The Measures of outcome of the previous guidance were removed gone, instead it introduced an annual requirement to publish 'details of the feedback young people have given on the quality of the local offer and of how they have influenced local decisions' and 'their plans for improving young people's well-being and personal and social development, together with relevant funding and performance data.' The National Standards for Positive Activity were dropped and paragraph six of the 2012 guidance stated the following regarding 'sufficiency':

Local authorities should do all that is reasonably practicable to secure a sufficient local offer for young people, including:

- a. acting on all of the considerations in this and other relevant statutory guidance;
- b. benchmarking their approach and performance relative to other similar areas to identify how they

might improve impact and cost-effectiveness; and
c. drawing on available support and challenge to drive continuous improvement in the quality and impact of local services, including from the local authority sector nationally.

4. Statutory Guidance 2023

Following publication of the APPG on Youth Affairs report on youth work, a review of the guidance was launched in July 2019. Delayed over the pandemic, new updated guidance was published in September 2023.⁴¹ This guidance is much longer than the previous one,

although still shorter than the original guidance. It provides more practical advice than the previous version:

This guidance sets out the practical and reasonable steps local authorities must take, so far as reasonably practicable, to meet the duty whether they are directly providing, funding, commissioning, coordinating, or maintaining oversight of the local youth offer. This guidance also covers suggested activities that local authorities should undertake as well as examples of best practice.

It covers the following main areas and provides step-by-step guides and checklists:

- Assessing young people's needs and current provision
- Determining a sufficient local offer
- Providing, publicising and review the offer

The term 'sufficient' is discussed in some detail but the guidance makes clear that it is ultimately for local authorities to determine what is sufficient:

To ensure transparency, local authorities should document and publish their assessment of local needs for youth services as well as the rationale for their actions and decisions. This should help demonstrate that local authorities have done what is reasonably practicable to secure sufficient services.

APPENDIX TWO

APPG on Youth Affairs

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Youth Affairs published its report on the role and contribution of youth work in April 2019, after a year-long inquiry. It reviewed progress against its recommendations two years on, in November 2021.

April 2019: recommendations

1. There should be a minister responsible who has a portfolio focussed on young people
2. There needs to be greater investment in youth work and commitment to support for youth services in the next Comprehensive Spending Review
3. The government should introduce a clear statutory duty and guidance that defines a minimum and protected level of youth service
4. There should be a lead role

confirmed in each local authority responsible for discharging the statutory duty

5. The government should develop a workforce strategy that stimulates demand for rather than simply supply of youth workers, including expectations for the ratio of professional youth workers, trainees and volunteers
6. There needs to be a standardised and national system for evaluating the sufficiency and suitability of youth services and quality of youth work provision.

November 2021: recommendations

- a. DCMS has retained the lead for youth services and out of school activities: consideration should be given to this being a dual role jointly held at DCMS and DfE, or for a cross-departmental committee to be chaired by the Minister

- b. The Government will review the statutory guidance: this must be strengthened with a clear understanding of what is a 'sufficient' level of youth services for a local area, to support local plans and area needs assessments
- c. Most funding of youth services and related activities is through local authorities: to be effective, local youth partnerships should be established or developed, and incorporate young people in consultation and decision-making.
- d. A national strategy is needed to recruit, train and sustain qualified and entry-level youth workers, and adult volunteers: with greater urgency in recruitment and training as part of long term Covid-recovery
- e. There needs to be a common language and shared outcomes to read across government, research and practice, readily understood by young people and new 'light touch' inspection arrangements for youth services.

41. *Positive for Youth*, Department for Education, 2010

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For decision makers and senior practitioners working with children, young people and families

