

Local Government Association Briefing

Serious Violence

House of Commons

18 February 2019



KEY MESSAGES

- Tackling serious violent crime is a key priority for councils. It has become even more vital due to rising levels of this type of crime and the harm it causes to victims and young people drawn and exploited into committing it.
- This complex issue requires a multi-agency partnership approach across education, health, social services, housing, youth services, victim services, local government, law enforcement and others.
- The risk of being exploited or involved in violent crime can be reduced with the right interventions. Alongside health and education partners, local authorities are well placed to take advantage of 'reachable and teachable moments' and identify which interventions are most effective and how they can be implemented.
- In our report on family violence and links with youth offending, we identified certain risk factors that could affect a child or young person being exploited or involved in violent crime. These could include frequent truancy, level of poverty/deprivation, delinquent peers, and experiences of family violence.
- We need to help pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) at any earlier point, to ensure they are fully supported in school and not left vulnerable to criminal exploitation. This includes significant and sustainable funding to manage the rising demand in support from pupils with SEND.
- The statistics on reductions to council's budgets since 2010 are stark and councils have had to prioritise spending on statutory services, to the detriment of other public services.
- The Government has announced a series of separate pots of funding that (typically) local partnerships could bid for to support and protect children and young people from criminal activity, including funding through the Serious Violence Strategy, the Early Intervention Youth Fund, the Trusted Relationships Fund, and the Youth Endowment Fund.
- Local areas that already have good partnership working and resources tend to be best-placed to secure this additional funding, which could potentially exacerbate skewed funding allocations across the country.
- Sustainability is a key part of this process and we need clarity on funding to sustain community support and youth violence prevention work. For example, it is unclear what will happen to the Troubled Families Programme after 2020, as the fund is due to end.
- Whilst announcements of new funds are welcome, this should not replace the core funding required to support integral local government services.

Briefing

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The role of councils in supporting children and young people

Councils are uniquely placed to build communities that are inclusive, cohesive and promote the life chances of everyone in them. They do this by tailoring more than 800 local services to the needs of their populations, creating bespoke solutions to specific, local challenges. This includes working to protect and improve outcomes for children and young people, such as safeguarding and child protection services, as well as services like youth work and early intervention programmes to improve young people's health and wellbeing.

Many issues that impact on the wellbeing and life chances of children and young people fall outside of the remit of children's services, such as housing, health and employment. Ensuring that children and young people have access to opportunities and have their needs addressed must be seen as the responsibility of both the whole council and a wide range of partners, not just council children's services.

The importance of local partnership working is mirrored at the national level, as the lives of children and young people are inevitably affected by decisions over which councils and their partners have little control. It is therefore vital that Whitehall approaches improved outcomes for children with one voice. For example, the Children and Social Work Act signalled a commitment to care leavers by boosting support up until the age of 25 and requiring local areas to publish their own support offers, yet research has shown that care leavers are five times more likely than the general population to have their welfare benefits sanctioned by the Department for Work and Pensions.ⁱ The Government should develop a new "children and young people impact assessment" to use alongside existing equalities impact assessments, to ensure that the needs of children are central to all policy and legislative changes.

Councils can play a central role in integrating services around the needs of families to improve their outcomes and life chances. All too often the savings from investment by one agency are recouped by another, resulting in disincentives to invest in early intervention. We need to reform how funding is allocated across local services to encourage joint working and investment in early intervention that shifts the balance from crisis spend towards prevention, while considering how best to balance universal and targeted services in a time of reduced public spending.

Vulnerability and Exploitation

The Serious Violence Strategy identifies an important shift in the drugs market, through the emergence of new psychoactive substances such as spice and an increase in crack cocaine use since 2014. The supply and demand of drugs are closely linked with the recent rise in serious violence. The number of homicides involving illicit drug dealers and/or users, as either victims or suspects, increased between 2014/15 and 2016/17. During that time, the share of homicides where either the victim or suspect was a drugs user or dealer also increased from 50 per cent to 57 per cent.

These increases have been accompanied by a shift towards younger victims and perpetrators. The data indicates there is an increased involvement of young people in different aspects of the illicit drugs market (notably through county lines activity). For example, the number of young people (10 years - 17 years old) convicted for class A drug production and possession with intent to supply has increased by 77 per cent between 2012 and 2016. This is three times the equivalent increase than seen among adult offenders.ⁱⁱ

Vulnerability is a key factor in serious violence. We know that county lines gangs often exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store drugs and money. They use

coercion, intimidation, violence and weapons to assert control. The Strategy indicates that young people who are in care or who have been excluded from school are more at risk of both victimisation and perpetration of serious violence.

Funding for children's services and youth services

Councils have worked hard to identify efficiencies and generate innovative solutions in response to reductions in central government funding totalling nearly £16 billion since 2010. Our analysis shows that councils face a funding gap of £7.8 billion by 2025, of which £3 billion is attributed to children's services.ⁱⁱⁱ These council-wide funding pressures will have a significant impact on services that support children and young people's safety and wellbeing, including safeguarding, youth work, community safety, transport and culture and sports activities.

Funding awarded in the October budget, £410 million for adults and children's social care, and £84 million to roll out innovation projects in up to 20 councils over five years, is a step in the right direction. However, it will do little to alleviate the immediate and future pressures on services for some of the most vulnerable children and families in the vast majority of council areas.

As well as this, our analysis shows that funding for the Early Intervention Grant, which helps deliver early intervention work that can help head off serious challenges (including serious violence and involvement with organised crime), has been cut by almost £600 million since 2013 and is projected to drop a further £100 million by 2020.^{iv}

Demand for urgent child protection services has increased sharply at the same time as funding has been cut, including an 83 per cent increase in the number of children on child protection plans between 2007 and 2017.^v Faced with this increased demand and reduced funding, children and young people are now increasingly reaching crisis point before they receive support,^{vi} with councils forced to divert spending on preventative and early help work into services to protect children who are at immediate risk of harm.

Delivering youth services

As local authority budgets have reduced and demand for services has increased, councils have been forced to make difficult decisions about how to use increasingly limited resources. In many areas, services for young people are increasingly targeted at those in most need to try to ensure that they receive the support they need to flourish. While this targeting is essential to make the best use of resources and make sure those in most need are supported, this has left limited funding available for universal youth services. More than 600 youth centres have closed, and nearly 139,000 youth services places were lost, in the UK between 2012 and 2016. Councils have been forced to cut planned spending on youth services from £650 million in 2010/11 to just £390 million in 2016/17, a cut of nearly 40 per cent.

Scaling back these universal services can mean that opportunities to support some young people can be missed. Providers of services for young people have an important role to play in building trusted relationships which can enable young people to share concerns that they may feel unable to raise with their family or those perceived as authority figures such as teachers or social workers. They can then be directed to the right opportunities and support to help them make a positive transition to adulthood.

Most youth provision is now delivered through the National Citizen Service, which received £1.2 billion funding from central government between 2016 and 2020, 95 per cent of central government spending on youth services. While this is a good programme, it is a short term summer programme that will only reach a relatively small number of young people, with take up at only 12 per cent of eligible young people in 2016. We believe it needs to be part of a broader package of provision, and have called for some of the funding to be devolved to councils to support year-round provision that meets the

needs of a wider group of young people locally.

Youth justice

Council youth offending teams (YOTs) have an excellent track record of delivering early intervention services and working with young people to prevent their coming into the youth justice system. Compared with the year ending March 2007, there are now 85 per cent fewer young people who are first time entrants into the youth justice system, and 74 per cent fewer young people in the average custodial population.^{vii}

However, YOTs have been victims of their own success. As the numbers of young offenders has fallen, so has the grant from central government to continue the preventative work that caused the fall in the first place - from £145 million in 2010/11 to just £72 million in 2017/18. These cuts mean that the youth justice grant now makes up only around a third of funding for YOTs. With council children's services budgets increasingly focused on those children in the most urgent need of protection, YOTs are struggling to access the funding necessary to run vital, and successful, prevention and intervention schemes.

A disproportionately large number of children and young people in the youth justice system have experienced mental health problems or have special educational needs.^{viii} However, as outlined earlier, there are significant issues around access to support services, which could help young people to remain in education or to choose positive paths away from youth crime.

Additional Government funding

The Government has made a number of welcome announcements regarding funding to tackle issues around crime and young people that local authorities, PCCs or other partners can submit bids for. This includes:

- funding through the Serious Violence Strategy,
- the Early Intervention Youth Fund,
- the Trusted Relationships Fund, and
- the Youth Endowment Fund.

Although ring-fenced pots of funding can be useful, one-off funds are most effective when there is adequate time to submit bids. The funding should be made available, and expected to be spent, within a reasonable time period. Often the bidding process for these funds requires strategic partnership arrangements to be put in place, between local government, the voluntary sector, the police, or wider practitioners. This level of collaboration can take time to establish and the bidding process should reflect this.

Sustainability is a key part of this process, so it is important for local authorities to receive clarity on future engagement in order to sustain community support and youth violence prevention work. For example, at the time the Serious Violence Strategy was launched in April 2018, councils were still waiting to receive their youth justice grant allocations for 2018/19. This is vital funding used to support young people and help keep them away from criminality in the first place. Whilst announcements of new funds are welcome, this should not replace the core funding required to support integral local government services.

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- i <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/resources-and-publications/claiming-after-care-care-leavers-and-the-benefits-system>
- ii https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/698009/serious-violence-strategy.pdf
- iii <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/councils-face-almost-ps8-billion-funding-black-hole-2025>
- iv <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/bright-futures/bright-futures-childrens-services/childrens-services-funding-facts>
- v <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/characteristics-of-children-in-need-2016-to-2017>
- vi <https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/support-for-children-and-families/revolving-door/>
- vii <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-justice-annual-statistics-2016-to-2017>
- viii <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-the-youth-justice-system>