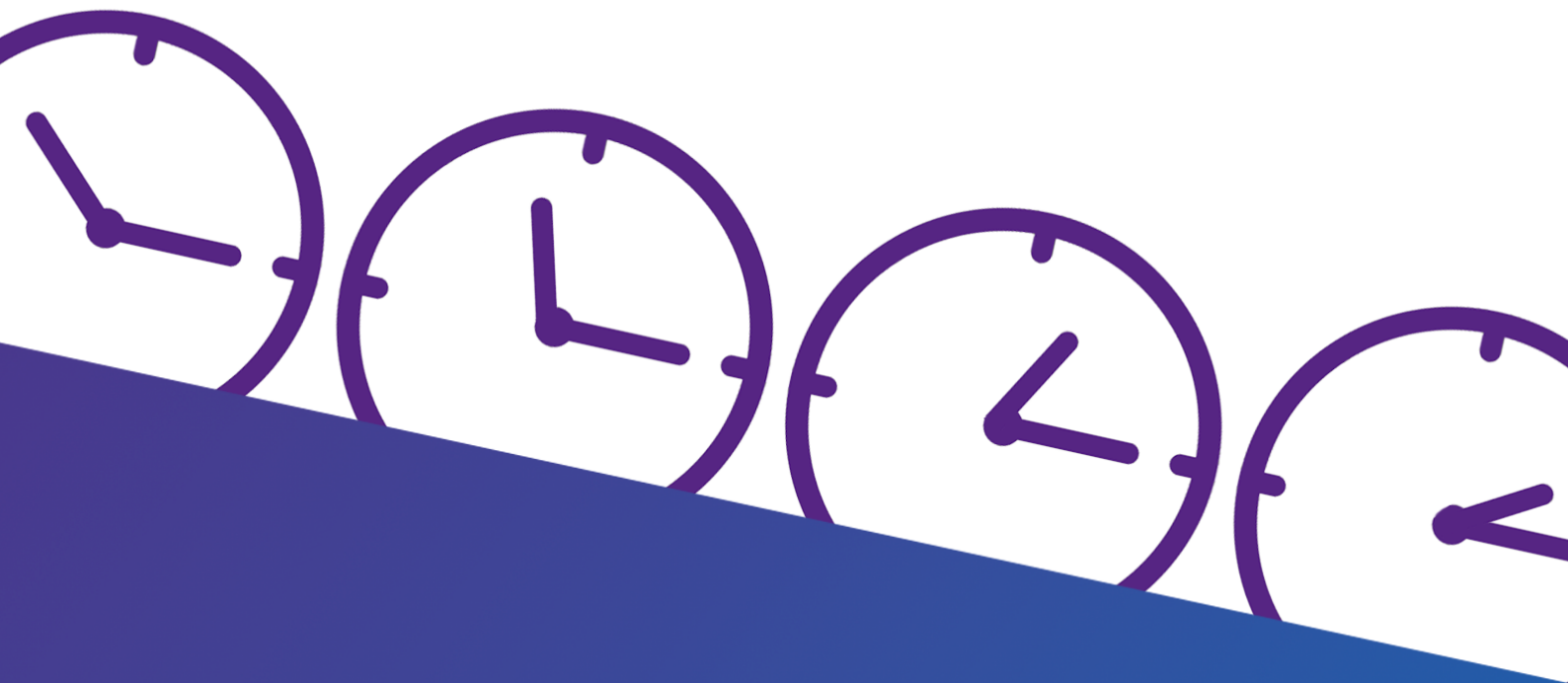




Time's Running Out



Youth services under threat and lost opportunities for young people

September 2021

Foreword

Youth services are in crisis. Seen as an essential service in the pandemic, fears of up to 1 in 4 youth centres folding are very real. Only emergency funding saved some youth charities and community groups collapse, but there is no strategy or long term investment for their survival.

The picture is equally distressing for youth services delivered or funded by local authorities. It the death of youth services by a thousand cuts. For every £16 cut from all local services by local authorities, £1 has fallen on youth provision. We face a critical spending-round with the scale of need increasing three-fold during the pandemic.

We are at the cross-roads for investment and support of youth services. Failure to act now will see youth clubs and centres close, the youth sector decimated and lost opportunities for young people.

**Leigh Middleton, CEO
National Youth Agency**

YMCA's 'Out Of Service' report last year highlighted that more than 4,500 youth work jobs had been lost and 760 youth centres closed as a result of decade-long cuts to youth services, which saw funding fall by almost £1bn in England and Wales since 2010 – a real terms decline of 70%.

When revisiting analysis in 2021, we found that local authority spending on youth services in 2019/20 in England was hit by a further reduction of 6% year-on-year, meaning that vital funding has now faced cuts of 73%.

And this dire situation is only set to get worse before it gets better, as a dramatically increased need for provision is met with further budget cuts locally. Every decision not to invest in youth services right now – when it is needed the most – forces more and more youth centres into perilous situations and sensitive negotiations in order to support their local communities and help young people carve out a path for the future.

**Denise Hatton, CEO
YMCA England and Wales**

Youth services support young people through adolescence, from ages 8 to 25, but are predominantly funded for youth provision from 11 or 13 to 18 years of age. Uniformed organisations typically include children from age 6, or younger.

There are broadly two types of youth service: 'open-access' (or universal) services, and 'targeted' services for vulnerable young people. In which youth work supports young people's personal and social development, in their skills for life and work, and mental and physical wellbeing. It has its own curriculum, pedagogy and professional practice supporting a broader base of trusted adult volunteers, working in community settings and across sectors to improve young people's life chances and healthy choices.

For the purposes of this report, we have used population figures for 8 to 19 year olds, as key stages unless otherwise stated.

1. Summary overview

- a) As a nation we need a clear commitment for young people, put at the heart of Covid-recovery and ambitious for their future. With 85% of their waking hours spent outside of the school-day each year young people want somewhere safe to go, for regular weekly activities with friends to have fun and to learn new skills; with a trusted adult who knows what is needed, able to access specialist or targeted services.
- b) Youth services have wide and popular appeal, and engage with any young people regardless of socio-economic status or where they live.¹ They provide the opportunity for personal development as a key part of a young person's education² and socialisation, which support skills for life and work, and mental and physical wellbeing. Crucially, they include a range of safeguarding and early intervention support services which are vital to many vulnerable or disadvantaged young people, in particular.
- c) The pandemic has thrown into sharp relief the need for quality youth work and services for young people, with youth work classed as an essential service. A government review and consultation with young people and the youth sector³, has highlighted the need for regular weekly activities for all young people, alongside volunteering opportunities, adventure and residential trips, and international exchanges. Recognised as a distinct form of education youth work provides skills for life and work, and mental and physical wellbeing.
- d) Yet youth services have been cut by 73% since 2010. Annual spending has dropped by almost £1 billion. 4,500 qualified youth workers have been lost from the frontline. Where voluntary and community groups have sought to fill the void there is a crisis in volunteer recruitment made worse by the pandemic, with a shortfall of at least 40,000 adult volunteers.
- e) Recruitment of qualified youth workers has seen a dramatic decline, with less than 300 a year for a system that is geared for an annual in-take of up to 2,000 undergraduates. The lack of work placements and dwindling base of community provision is a block to the critical pipeline required for 20,000 entry-level youth workers and trained volunteers (Levels 2 & 3).
- f) Worse may yet come, with existing youth work jobs and services under threat. The government's spending review and grant settlement for local authorities will be critical to protect and youth services, or risk a further round of cuts from which many youth services won't recover and with lost opportunities for a generation of young people.
- g) There is a statutory duty for local authorities to secure sufficient services for young people, but weak guidance has exposed many areas to cuts and loss of youth provision. Meanwhile the government suspended the requirement to report on local authority spending, until 2022, masking the scale of job losses and service cuts. Further, a national youth sector census of youth provision in England has identified up to 8,500 youth charities and community groups, but with perilous finances and a greatly reduced base of support for young people⁴.
- h) **What is missing is a sense of urgency and action to protect, build and grow youth services. Time is running out to save youth services and create opportunities with young people that are transformational, and which provide a lifeline for many⁵.**

¹ Social Mobility Commission: An Unequal Playing Field, Mobility, 2019

² Ofsted, Education Inspections Framework, 2019 – personal development

³ Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport: Office for Civil Society, 2021

⁴ National Youth Sector Census of youth services and out of school activities in England: carried out in May to July 2021; its findings will be published in November 2021 by the National Youth Agency

⁵ DCMS: Civil Society Strategy, 2018

2. Time to act

Annual funding of youth services currently stands at less than £400m by local authorities. However, the level of services and support varies greatly, area by area. Ignoring extreme outliers, the level of funding by local authorities on youth provision varies wildly, from an annual spend of £250 per young person to just £25. At a local level this may be topped up by business supporters and fundraising, or volunteers; but this creates a postcode lottery of service for young people. While the main source of funding comes through local authorities, there is interdependency between local authorities and voluntary sector providers, for commissioning or delivery of services, shared practice and opportunities with young people to meet their needs and interests.

Meanwhile central government is sat on a £500 million new Youth Investment Fund, delayed by over two years and due to be spent before the end of this parliament, and funding for the National Citizen Service programme for 16 to 17 year olds ring-fenced until 2022-23. This still falls far short of the £1 billion annual spending has been lost to youth services in recent years.

The Government has a primary role to ensure the health of the youth sector and a statutory duty to secure sufficient places and activities locally. A fully funded statutory duty is essential to secure a baseline of open-access provision on which wider youth services and out of school activities can flourish. This must include strengthened guidance to secure provision matched to local needs, through local youth partnerships of statutory and voluntary services and community groups; and to invest in preventative and targeted services to support vulnerable young people arising from poverty, violence, exploitation and poor mental health. Youth services cannot be seen in isolation from other services in education, health, justice, social care and employment. Bolder investment on youth services will have significant impact on improving outcomes and bring long term savings.

- Education recovery for social and emotional skills and personal attainment, including alternative provision, outdoor learning and safeguarding.
- A public health approach to reduce negative outcomes, including youth violence and exploitation.
- Social prescribing of youth services and out of school activities, for improved physical and mental health, and reduced loneliness.
- Leisure and recreational activities, to up-skill and embed youth work for effective informal learning across including culture, arts, sport and digital.
- Social care and safeguarding, for early help and support with vulnerable young people and those at the edge of care.

Recommendations

Young people must be a priority for Covid-recovery. A national strategy is needed to secure youth services and in support of young people, over the long term. This requires a national offer for equitable access to open access services and opportunities for all young people, and targeted youth services for those who need it.

1. Strengthen statutory guidance for local authorities to put youth services on a stable footing, fully funded to protect and grow local services and support for voluntary and community providers in local youth partnerships
2. Immediate release of the £500 million Youth Investment Fund (YIF) to act as a down-payment towards levelling up opportunities with young people
3. Long term investment from the government's spending review and grant settlements, to recruit and train 10,000 qualified youth workers, up-skill 40,000 adult volunteers, and work placements for 20,000 young people and volunteers as entry-level youth workers

Escalating needs

The number of vulnerable young people (aged 8-19 years old) in England rose from an estimated 1 million up to 3 million⁶. The strains on schools, colleges, mental health and social services were also apparent, with national concern for mental wellbeing, education catch-up and future employment. Yet the benefits of youth services are being overlooked as local authorities are forced to meet more immediate financial pressures and statutory services for children and young people⁷.

Vulnerabilities

Against the backdrop of the pandemic, increased risks to children, many children became invisible to statutory services providing the safeguarding safety net composed, from schools, GPs and social workers. Between late May 2020 and early January 2021, the total number of safeguarding referrals to children's social care was 9% lower than the average for the previous 3 years. It is very concerning that referral rates remain at such odds with estimates of numbers of highly vulnerable children, and these continuously low rates raise questions about whether enough action is being taken locally to locate these children who are going under the radar.⁸

Education recovery

The impact of the disruption to young people's education during the pandemic is severe. As young people return to schools and colleges from September 2021, there needs to be more actively monitoring young people's wellbeing in educational settings. The potential area for action is to boost funding to youth services, to support attainment and personal development.⁹

Mental health

Before mental health services step in, youth services can provide a vital preventative intervention to help young people work through their problems and improve their quality of life. Through the pandemic, YMCA found that more than a third of young people who had experience of using youth services felt accessing them allowed them to make more friends (36%), and almost three-in-ten felt it made them more confident in talking to others (28%). Youth services also help young people develop in themselves: 30% felt accessing them made them more self-confident, and 22% felt it made them feel less isolated; 25% felt it has decreased their stress levels, and 24% that it had improved their mental health.¹⁰

Exploitation

The number of missing vulnerable children soared as the effectiveness of safeguarding was reduced, including for looked-after children, through reduced contact and staffing under COVID-19. More young people are now in potentially unsafe environments, groomed online and hidden from view, gone missing from education and with reduced social care staffing levels, face to face engagement stopped in many places. Too many children are not identified until exploitation is deeply ingrained in their lives¹¹. A policing response alone is not sufficient to end county lines. There is a lack of sufficient youth services and the support young people receive is inconsistent

Youth voice

Youth services provide opportunities, experience and skills for their voice, influence and political engagement in local and national democracy; and help build social networks to break down barriers and discrimination, including by identity and gender. This requires a commitment to uphold the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child to account for young people's views and to be involved in decision-making at all levels, including local youth councils.

⁶ National Youth Agency: Out of Sight? Vulnerable young people, 2020

⁷ YMCA England and Wales: Out of Service, 2020

⁸ Education Select Committee Inquiry: The impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services - linking access to education and impact on wider children's services; Written evidence submitted by the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England, 2021

⁹ Health Foundation: Generation COVID-19: Building the case to protect young people's future health; 2020

¹⁰ YMCA: Young people face life after lockdown amid anxiety, loneliness and growing uncertainty over their future, 2020

¹¹ Children's Society, 2020

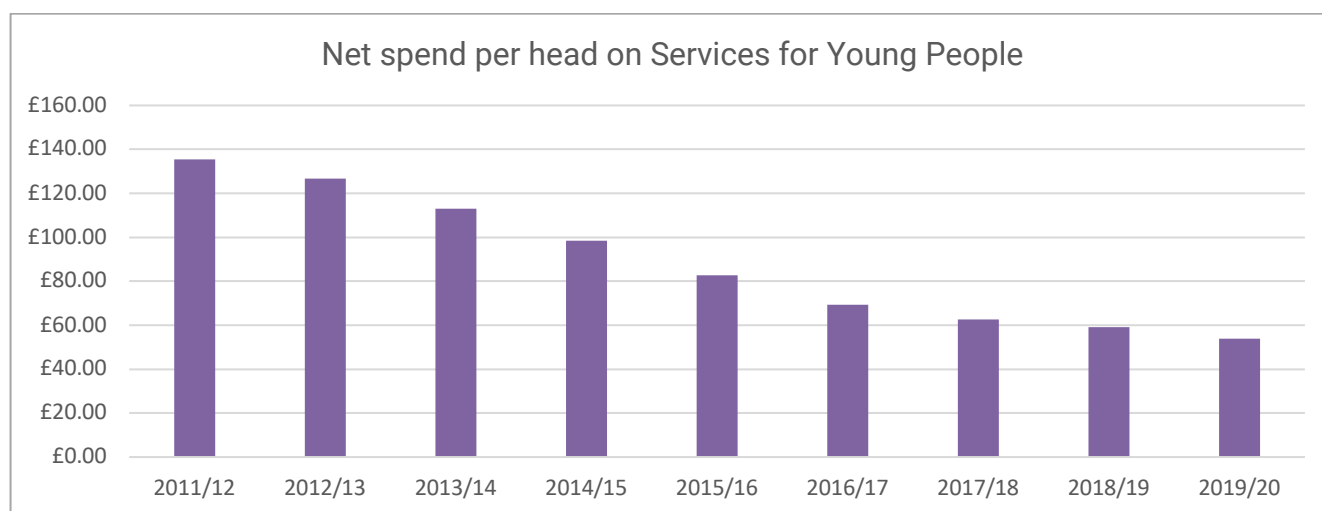
3. Funding levels: diminished over time

Cuts Overall:

Analysis of local authority spending by the National Youth Agency breaks down the annual spending on local youth services per young person aged 11 to 19, for a clearer view on its impact for young people.

Net spend per young person has plummeted from an average of £136 per young person to around £54, since 2011.

Figure (1)

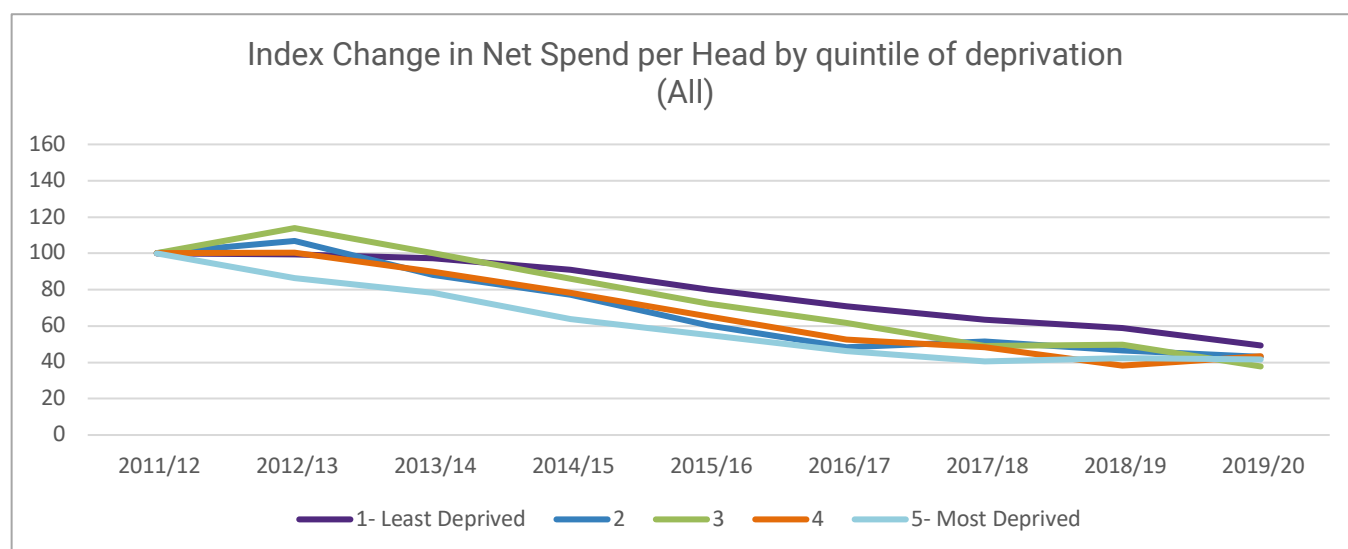


Meanwhile delays to the government review of the statutory duty and guidance on local authorities to secure a sufficient level of local youth provision, means this will not be now due to be completed for 2022. This will miss the budget setting rounds of local authorities, and with no guarantee that the guidance will be strengthened. Without that there is every chance many more local youth services will fail and lead to closure of more youth clubs and centres.

Cuts by area:

Our findings show that on average the more deprived a local authority, the greater and quicker the level of cuts to its youth service it has suffered since 2011.

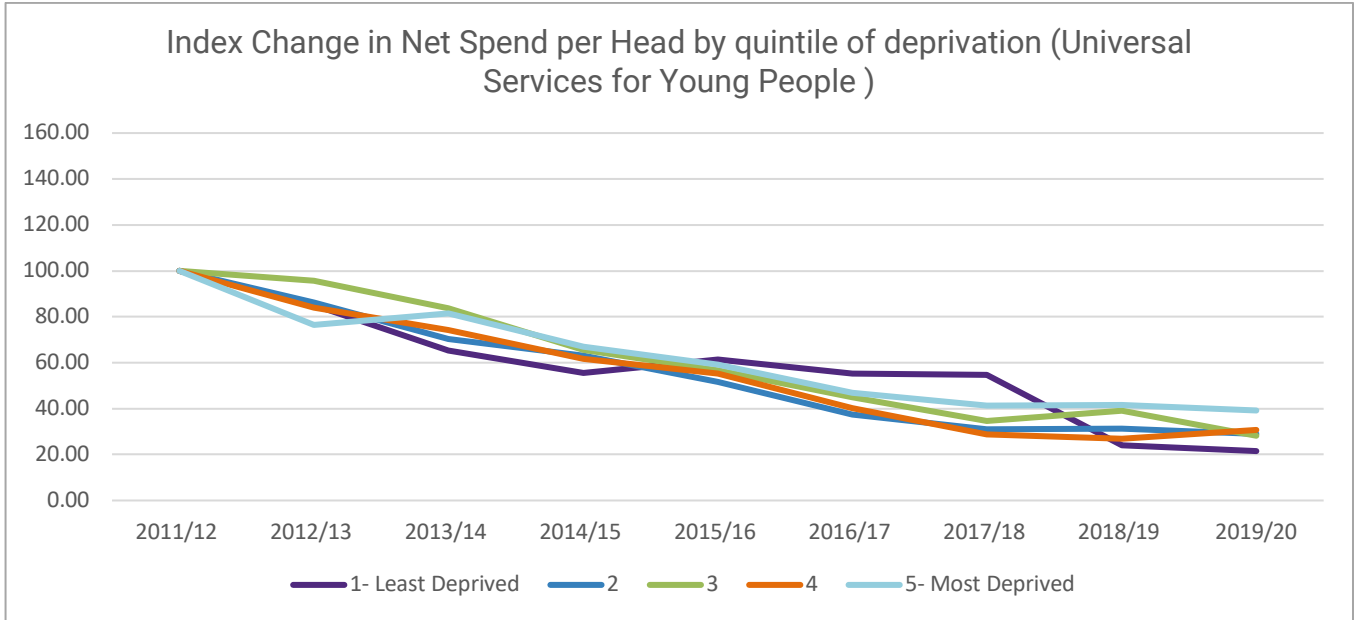
Figure (2)



Cuts by area and type:

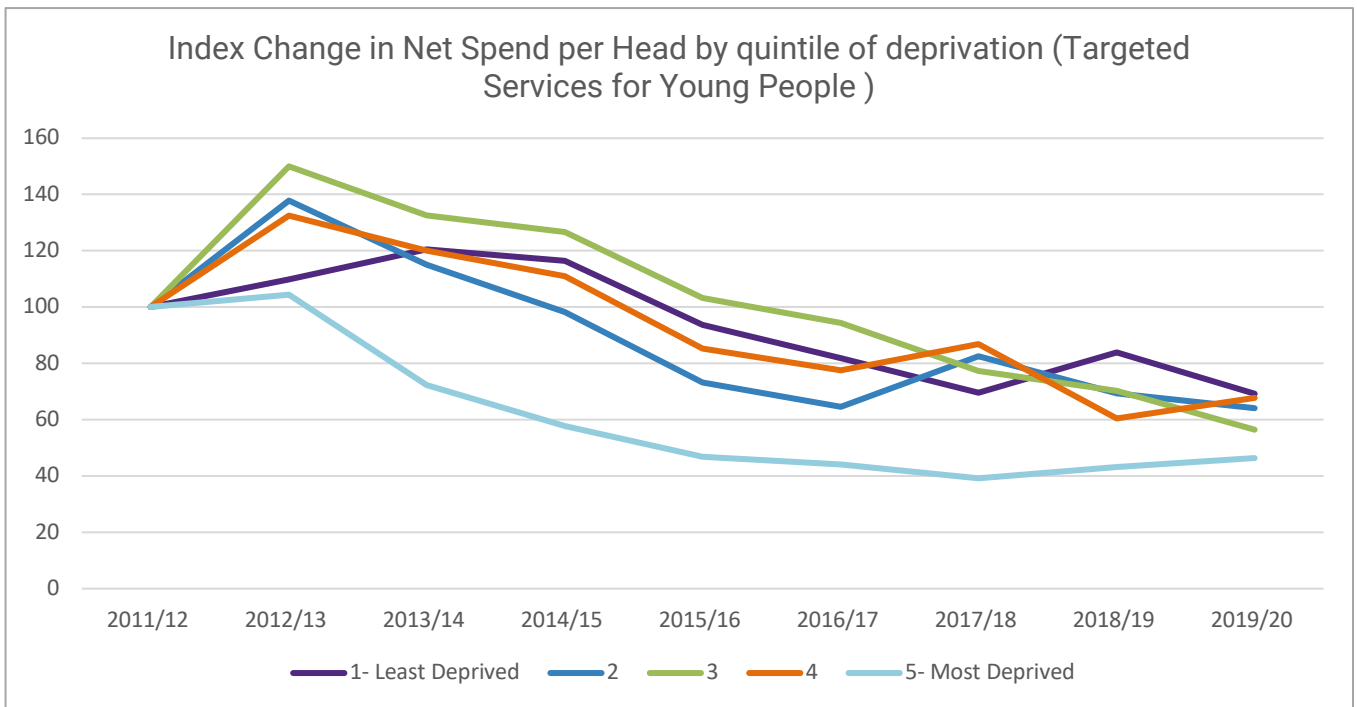
The largest cuts by 'type' of service and area are cuts to universal services in the most affluent areas. For every £1 spent on universal services in the most affluent areas in 2011, a little over 21 pence was spent in 2019.

Figure (3)



The biggest variation in spend between areas is that between spend on targeted youth services in the most deprived areas, and the most affluent. Spending is down by 54 pence in the pound in the most deprived areas, as opposed to 31 pence in the pound in the least deprived.

Figure (4)



[Cuts in nominal terms:](#)

Total youth service spending in deprived areas was down by nearly twice as much per head as the least deprived, with a cut of around £90 per head compared to around £50 in the most affluent areas. (£87-£94 in the two most deprived quintiles; £51 in the least deprived quintile).

Cuts on open-access services, universal to all young people in an area, are up to £71 per head in the most deprived areas, compared to £33 in affluent areas. (£64-£71 in the two most deprived quintiles; £33 in the least deprived quintile).

The pattern is most unequal when assessing cuts to spend on targeted or specialist youth services, for vulnerable or disadvantaged young people. We have witnessed cuts of up to £18 per young person in all areas. However, defying logic and increased levels of need, in the most deprived areas there have been cuts of £30 per young person. (£16-£18 in the four least deprived quintiles; £30 in the most deprived quintile).

4. Conclusion

Youth services simply do not have the capacity or enough funding to meet young people's vastly increased needs from the pandemic. Local authorities services face a devastating round of further cuts and many youth charities have depleted reserves, struggling for survival.¹² Left unprotected by government, youth services have already been cut by over 70% in less than a decade, and the evidence suggests this has been most severe in the most deprived areas. These areas already suffer more from a lack of social infrastructure,¹³ access to extra-curricular activities compared to more affluent areas,¹⁴ and have fewer voluntary and community sector organisations overall.¹⁵

Without a clear commitment by government, strengthened statutory guidance and significant investment in the spending review, with ring-fenced funding in grant settlements for local authorities, the youth sector will be decimated. Young people must be a priority and it is imperative that the government acts to prevent these missed opportunities for young people to get the support they need, and from which we all benefit from as a society.

For reference

[Unison: Youth services at breaking point, April 2019](#)

[APPG Youth Affairs: Youth work inquiry final report, April 2019](#)

[YMCA: Out of Service, January 2020](#)

[NYA: Out of Sight? Vulnerable young people, April 2020](#)

[NYA: Overlooked: young people and rural youth services, August 2021](#)

House of Commons Library: Expenditure on children's services, August 2021

Sources: [Department for Education 251 outturn data](#); [HM Treasury GDP deflator](#); [English indices of deprivation, 2019](#)

¹² NYA: 'Running on empty', 2020

¹³ OCSI & Local Trust: Left Behind? Understanding Communities on the Edge, 2019

¹⁴ Social Mobility Commission: An Unequal Playing Field, Mobility, 2019

¹⁵ New Philanthropy Capital: Where are England's Charities?, 2020

Appendix One - Vulnerable young people

Vulnerability	Data	Source	Age range of original estimate	Time period of estimate	Estimated number of 8-19 year olds*
Existing poor mental health	NHS England estimates of children with self-report MH issues	NHS England MH survey	11 to 16	2020	1,360,138
	CYP in contact with CAMHS during the year	NHS England MH bulletin	0 to 17	2019/20	74,5923
	Children with mental health identified as a factor at CIN assessment	CCO analysis of DfE CIN census 2019/20	8 to 19	2019/20	110,002
Poverty	Numbers of children in poverty	Households below average income	5-19 (*age of youngest child in household)	2018/19	1,969,100
	Children eligible and claiming free school meals	DfE Characteristics of Children in Need 2019/20	8 to 19	2019/20	94,0497
	Number of children in temporary accommodation	MHCLG: homelessness statistics	0 to 17	Q3 2020	78,787
Children not meeting threshold for social care	Children with a CIN referral during the year but no CIN plan	CCO analysis of Children in Need Census 2019/20	8 to 19	2019/20	105,214
Children with SEND or physical health issues	Children with identified SEN	DfE SEN statistics 2019/20	8 to 19	2019/20	882,766
NEETs	Not in education, employment or training	NEET statistics annual brief 2019	16 to 18	December 2019	133,000
Alternative Provision in education	Children in alternative provision	Schools pupils and their characteristics January 2020	8 to 19	January 2020	42,918

-Table of updated statistics from the NYA 'Out of Sight?' report first published in April 2020; see the original table and full list of vulnerabilities at: [NYA/resource-library](https://www.nya.org.uk/resources/nya-resource-library)

-Analysis by the office of the Children's Commissioner for England (February 2020)

-*based on mid-2019 population estimates

Appendix Two - Local authority spending on services for young people

Table One - Net spend per head: all youth services

Deprivation Quintile	2011/12	2019/20	Change	Change %
1 - Least Deprived	101.22	49.90	-51.32	-51%
2	110.24	47.44	-62.80	-57%
3	120.97	45.66	-75.32	-62%
4	154.01	66.63	-87.38	-57%
5 - Most Deprived	161.84	67.51	-94.34	-58%

Table Two - Net spend per head: universal ('open access') youth services

Deprivation Quintile	2011/12	2019/20	Change	Change %
1 - Least Deprived	42.29	9.10	-33.19	-78%
2	66.15	19.18	-46.98	-71%
3	80.14	22.60	-57.54	-72%
4	102.11	31.49	-70.63	-69%
5 - Most Deprived	105.41	41.32	-64.09	-61%

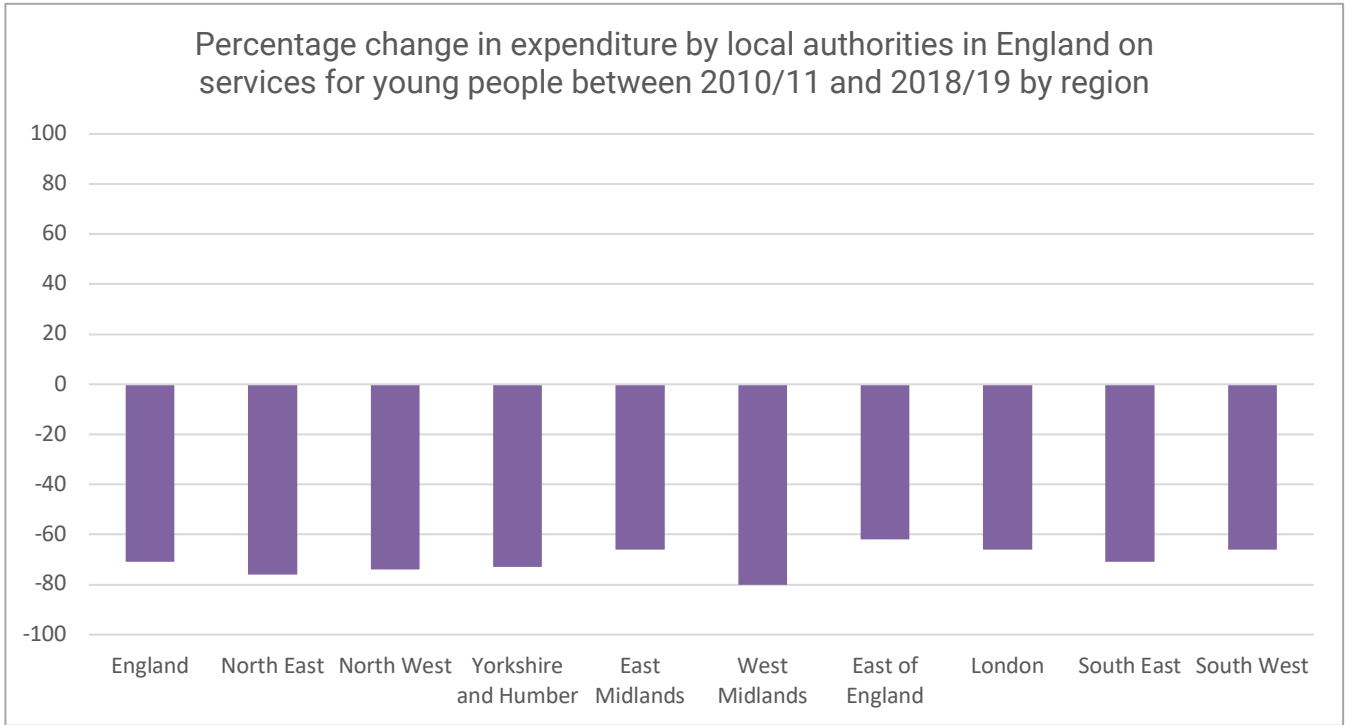
Table Three - Net spend per head: targeted youth services

Deprivation Quintile	2011/12	2019/20	Change	Change %
1 - Least Deprived	58.93	40.80	-18.13	-31%
2	44.09	28.26	-15.82	-36%
3	40.83	23.06	-17.78	-44%
4	51.89	35.14	-16.75	-32%
5 - Most Deprived	56.43	26.19	-30.24	-54%

Appendix Three - Regional breakdown

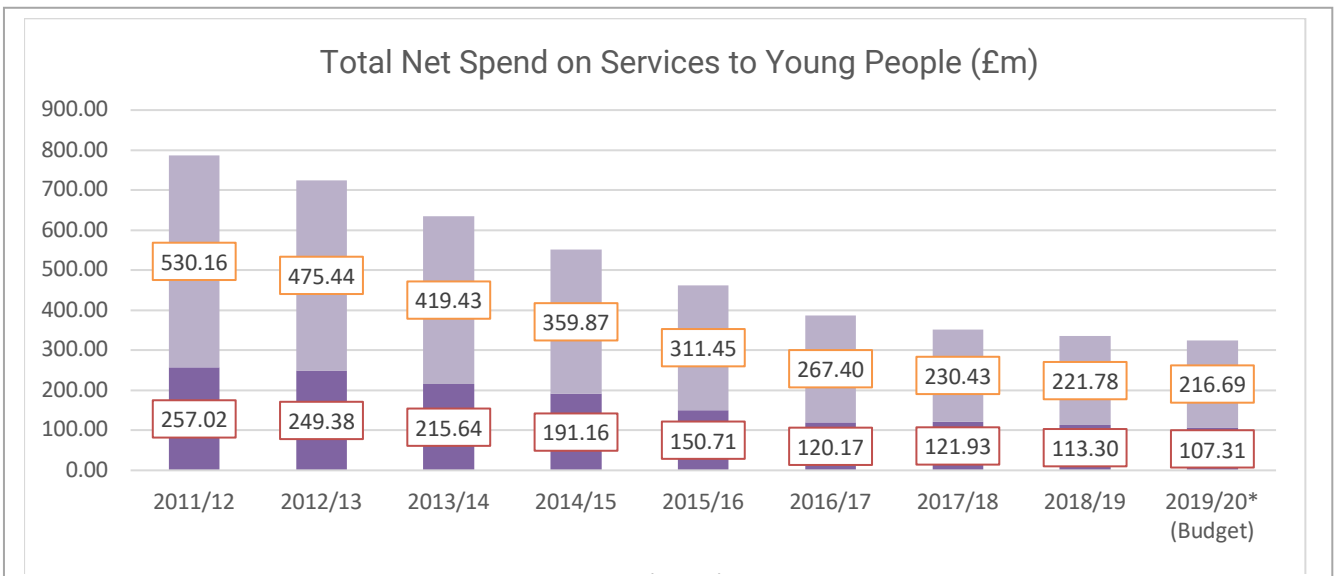
Extracts from *Out of Service, YMCA England and Wales, 2020*

When looking across England, young people in the West Midlands and the North East have lost the most when it comes to youth services provided by their local authority. Local authorities in the West Midlands have cut spending on youth services by 80% since 2010/11, while in the North East cuts over the same period amounted to 76%. Young people living in the East of England and inner London have fared the best. However, even in these areas, the annual spend on youth services have been reduced by 62% and 63% respectively since 2010/11.



Extract from *Overlooked: rural youth services, National Youth Agency, 2021*

The average net expenditure on youth services has fallen from the around £154 per head to £62 per head in urban areas, since 2011; for rural areas, we have witness a drop from £108 to just £47 per head on average.





Published by the National Youth Agency
www.nya.org.uk

 [@natyouthagency](https://twitter.com/natyouthagency)

e. nya@nya.org.uk | t. 0116 242 7350

Registration No. 2912597 | Charity No. 1035804
National Youth Agency, 9 Newarke Street, Leicester LE1 5SN