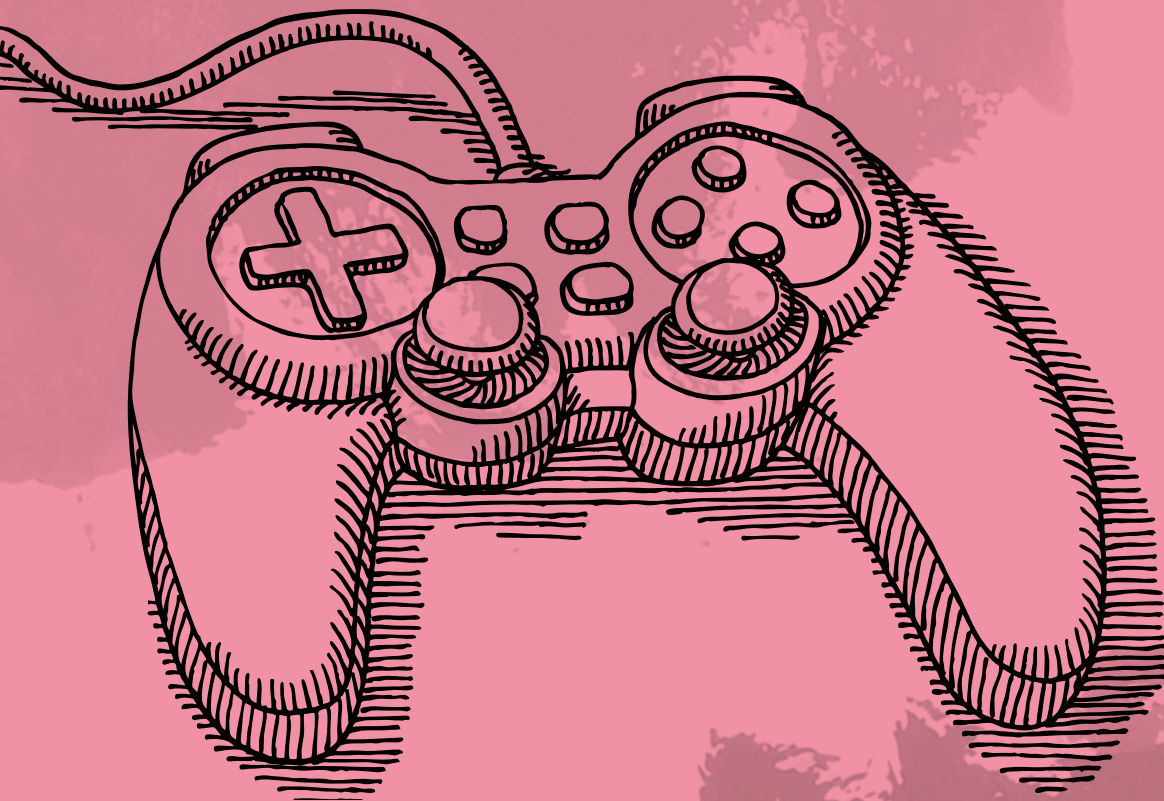


# BRIGHT FUTURES OUR VISION FOR YOUTH SERVICES

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# BRIGHT FUTURES OUR VISION FOR YOUTH SERVICES

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Making sure all children and young people can have the bright future they deserve is a key ambition of every council. But our children's services are under increasing pressure, and every council in the country has seen major changes to their youth provision over the past decade. Demand for child protection support has increased dramatically at the same time as local authority funding has been significantly reduced. Recent research suggests that central government funding for children and young people's services has fallen by £2.4 billion since 2010,<sup>1</sup> and our analysis shows that an additional £2 billion funding gap will have opened up by 2020. Councils have had to make extremely difficult decisions about how to allocate increasingly scarce resources, and youth services have seen their funding reduced as councils are forced to prioritise urgent help for children at immediate risk of harm. This has had a particularly strong impact on the availability of open access, universal services, with provision increasingly targeted at those in greatest need.

Yet councils still retain statutory responsibilities to make sure, as far as possible, that there is sufficient provision of educational and recreational leisure-time activities for young people, despite the increasingly limited funding available to do so. They have a vital role to play in youth provision, whether they are delivering this directly, commissioning services or maintaining oversight of local provision. This includes informal and non-formal learning, safe spaces to meet friends, youth voice services and sports and leisure activities. Councils also have a responsibility for the wellbeing of all young people in their area.

We know that councils are determined that all young people can enjoy where they live, reach their full potential and enter adulthood with confidence and optimism. Local authorities work hard to make the best use of available funds to support as many young people as possible, particularly those with the greatest needs. However, we also know that funding cuts have had a significant impact on universal services in particular, that services in many areas have become fragmented, and as councils have faced different funding and need challenges, levels of provision differ around the country.

This document sets out our long-term vision for youth services and provision, outlining the LGA's aspirations to support local work in this area. It is based on existing good practice around the country, and feedback from councils, partners and practitioners. We will develop a range of support for local authorities to help them to work towards delivering the vision, and use it to help make the case for additional government funding for youth services that genuinely meet the needs of young people.

Youth services are unlikely to return to the same levels of the pre-austerity years. However, we have a duty to our younger citizens to do the very best we can with what we have, and to argue for better. We hope that this document will provide a starting point in taking a fresh look at youth provision, encouraging true collaboration between all providers, to get the best for our children and young people.

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<sup>1</sup> National Children's Bureau, 2017  
[https://www.ncb.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/Turning%20the%20tide%20report\\_final.pdf](https://www.ncb.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/Turning%20the%20tide%20report_final.pdf)

# OUR VISION

Our vision is for all young people to enjoy their lives, reach their full potential and make a good transition to adulthood. They should be able to achieve their ambitions, develop positive relationships and make worthwhile contributions to their communities.

We want to help councils to work across departments and with their partners to support all young people to do this, enabling access to both universal services and targeted support through safe spaces and activities

## SIX KEY PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE YOUTH SERVICES

### YOUTH-LED

Young people's voices are central to the provision offered to them. They can choose to attend a variety of services on a voluntary basis, building a sense of autonomy and trust in practitioners that encourages engagement with further work where needed.

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.

### 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 as a result of disability, sexuality, nationality, socio-economic status, special educational needs, mental health issues, religion or any other characteristic.

The local youth offer helps to improve social mobility for young people from all backgrounds by offering support to develop the skills, knowledge and networks they need to access and take advantage of opportunities.

### 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 and to enjoy opportunities in their local area without fear of judgement or negative stereotyping.

### QUALITY, SAFETY AND WELL-BEING

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. The youth offer helps to keep young people safe and supports their mental, emotional and physical health, improves their social and economic wellbeing, and makes sure they can access education, non-formal learning and recreation.

### 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 positive demonstrable changes to their communities, and understand how to engage with the democratic process.

### POSITIVITY

Services are strengths-based and focus on developing the skills and attributes of young people, rather than attempting to 'fix a problem'.



# DELIVERING OUR VISION

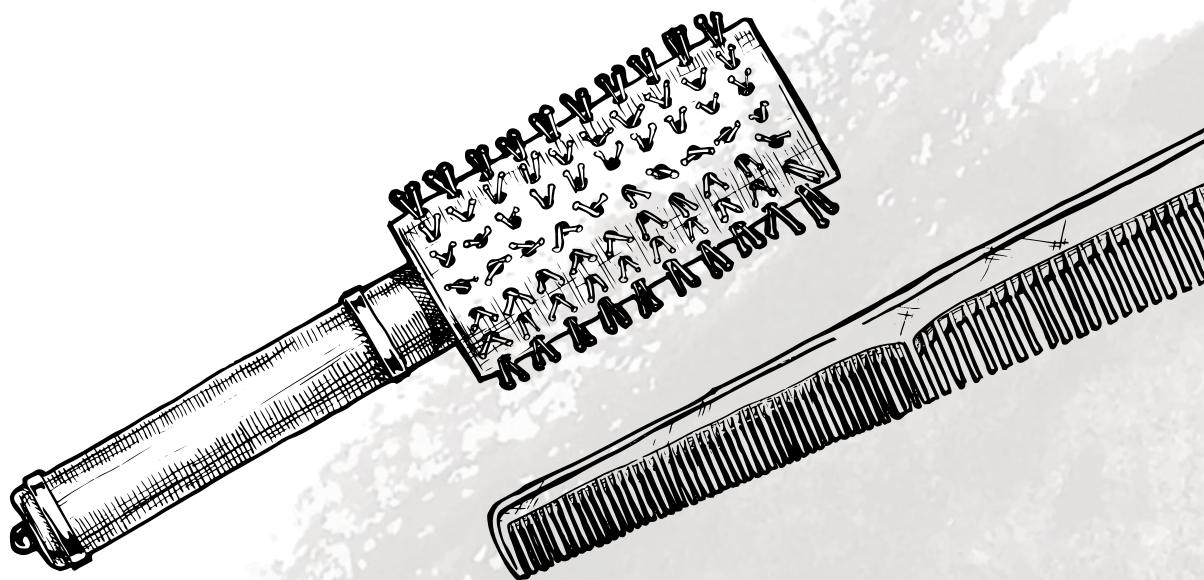
## LOCAL SOLUTIONS

As local leaders who know their communities best and have a key role in place-shaping, councils are ideally placed to set out the vision and direction for youth provision in their area. This includes establishing what services and support are needed and wanted, how all local provision (not just youth services) supports young people, identifying the outcomes that matter most to young people, and working with partners to find ways to deliver these. Councils may not be in a position to directly deliver or commission all youth provision, however their ability to oversee and coordinate, with the support of all levels of local government, is invaluable.

Consultation with young people and partners is key; a joint vision that genuinely responds to young people will stand a far better chance of being delivered and being successful than a vision developed by the local authority alone. This work should also include the local voluntary and community sector, faith groups, schools and employers, involving them from the very start to ensure that their experiences help to shape the vision and the local offer, and that they can contribute to the delivery of outcomes.

As with other children and young people's services, the importance of strong leadership should not be underestimated. The lead member for children's services and the director of children's services (DCS) should champion young people, the importance of youth provision and set the direction for delivery in the area. District councils may find it helpful to appoint a 'youth champion' to lead this work across all services in their area; this could also be an option for children's services authorities to help give a specific focus on young people in addition to the work of the lead member and DCS, whose remits are very large.

Many issues that impact on the wellbeing and life chances of young people fall outside the remit of youth services, such as housing, public health and employment, so the whole council – along with district, parish and town councils – needs to be engaged with this agenda to deliver a positive vision for young people. The role of families and the community is also important; local authorities are in an ideal position to set a clear example as to how young people deserve to be treated in society, and to make sure that young people and their families are at the centre of decision-making.



# COORDINATION

Local children's services authorities have a statutory responsibility to make sure, as far as possible, that there is sufficient provision of educational and recreational leisure-time activities for young people aged 13-19 (or up to 25 for those with learning difficulties). A strong needs assessment is vital to ensure that provision is led by service users' needs; useful tools to inform this include the local Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and the Risk of NEET Indicators (RONI) tool.

Councils already work with a huge range of local partners and have well-established relationships; they also have a statutory duty to promote coordination with the police, NHS services and schools locally for the benefit of young people's wellbeing. These relationships and duties should be maximised to make sure that partners are working together in the most effective way to make the best use of resources and make progress towards shared outcomes and meeting need. Councils may wish to consider the model used by Partnership for Young London, whose purpose is to:

- connect (providers, funders, young people, partners)
- develop (staff, capacity, leadership, collaboration)
- influence (partners, government, vision).

There is often a significant amount of provision available for young people in any given area, but this information is rarely collated and oversight is often limited at best. Coordinating provision across an area is difficult, particularly where services change frequently. However in order to ensure the safety of young people attending services, maximise uptake and spot gaps in provision where needs aren't being met, processes should be put in place to attempt this. Maintaining oversight of services will also help councils to monitor the quality of provision so that they can offer support to improve if needed. Supporting partners in genuine collaboration, for example partners redesigning services to deliver joint outcomes rather than more superficial partnership working, can also help to deliver the local vision, with improved collaboration and coordination more likely to lead to better outcomes.

Government has committed £1.26 billion of investment in the National Citizen Service (NCS) scheme between 2016 and 2020.<sup>2</sup> NCS guidance<sup>3</sup> published in October 2017 recognises local authorities as a key partner in the delivery of the programme, and states that "your NCS provider will always work with you to make sure NCS is delivering the best outcomes for your area in a way that is right for you". The NCS Trust should work closely with councils on the design and delivery of the programme locally so that councils can take advantage of this available funding and provision, and to ensure the scheme supports the needs of local young people and delivery of the local vision. We will also argue for the devolution of a portion of NCS funding to councils to support local provision for young people, expanding the reach of NCS funding from a time-limited programme to ongoing support and an enhanced local offer.

2 National Audit Office 'National Citizen Service' 2017 <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/National-Citizen-Service.pdf>

3 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2017 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-citizen-service-guidance-for-local-authorities>

## THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

Local leadership and vision should ideally operate within a framework established by a clear and ambitious national vision for young people. Young people need to know that they are an important consideration in national policy, and that they will receive services to support them towards the same positive outcomes wherever they are in the country. However, there is currently no clear national vision or policy around services for young people, which fall under the remit of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). Responsibility for young people is with the Minister for Sports and Civil Society.

Neither youth services nor young people are listed in the Department's priorities or in the Minister's role on the departmental website, and we are concerned that this fails to reflect the Government's stated ambitions and commitment to young people. It also does not give the effective or sufficient direction required to support and engage with such a vital part of our society. We consider it essential that youth policy has a far higher profile in government in the future, to provide leadership to the sector and a voice to young people.

Furthermore, where youth services sit with children and family services within councils to ensure integration of services from birth to adulthood, services for young people are currently separate to children's services and education in government. We therefore believe that the Government should explicitly include responsibility for young people within a Ministerial portfolio, to champion young people within government and ensure coordination of policy across all departments.

## SAFEGUARDING

Councils have a statutory duty to safeguard the wellbeing of all young people in their area. This includes making sure that they are safe, and that their mental, emotional and physical health is looked after. Councils will want to satisfy themselves that all provision for young people – regardless of who provides this – is delivered by staff trained in safeguarding procedures and who know how to respond to any concerns. They will also want to be sure that practitioners have the appropriate training and skills for their provision. Training and advice for providers is a key way that councils can support safe, quality provision in their areas. This should reflect the different approach to safeguarding needed for teenagers rather than children, to make sure that all practitioners are aware of the different challenges facing adolescents and are confident in responding to these.

Councils also need to have a strong understanding of their local area and the issues that are affecting young people, as these can change quickly and have considerable impacts in a short space of time. For example, there are emerging criminal activity trends that are more likely to affect young people, such as county lines and gang-related acid attacks; the impact of Brexit is unknown and potentially causing anxiety for those who will be entering the job market at the point of exit from the EU; and the spate of terrorist attacks in England in the summer of 2017 caused an upturn in hate crime, in addition to the inevitable fear felt by residents. Councils need to be ready to respond swiftly to such changes and challenges by putting in place appropriate services to meet the needs of young people, when they need them. Year-round work with young people, as opposed to time limited interventions, is invaluable in identifying and tackling these new issues quickly. It is also helpful to build in flexibility, where possible, to contracts with commissioned providers so that they are responsive and able to alter provision where necessary to meet arising needs.

# FUNDING

Where many youth services were traditionally funded by councils, the landscape has changed significantly since 2010. Councils are facing a £2 billion funding gap for children's services by 2020, and were forced to overspend on their children's services budgets by £605 million across England in 2015/16.<sup>4</sup> Government funding for the Early Intervention Grant has been cut by almost £500 million since 2013 and is projected to drop by a further £183 million by 2020. At the same time, demand for child protection services has increased significantly.

These two factors together have led to a major scaling back of universal youth services as councils have been forced to concentrate funding on those children and young people in the most urgent need, rather than the preventative early help and edge of care services – including youth provision – that might reduce need later on. We know that providing early help to children and young people not only supports better outcomes, but it saves significant amounts of money further down the line. The Early Intervention Foundation, for example, estimates that nearly £17 billion is spent every year on late intervention, with £6.4 billion of that falling on local authorities, in particular children's services.<sup>5</sup>

With limited funding available from councils, many organisations are often pursuing the same funding from external sources such as charities and trusts. Councils have an opportunity to invest smaller amounts in core funding for groups so that they can access further funding, and to coordinate funding bids, supporting smaller organisations to come together to deliver work that can contribute to the wider vision. Opportunities for organisations to collaborate meaningfully should be explored wherever possible to support collective impact. Support for writing funding bids can also be helpful, particularly where organisations have limited or part-time staffing.

In some areas, improving the use of council and community assets has been invaluable, and offers an alternative way of supporting service delivery than financial support. Finding ways to allow easier sharing of assets can improve the viability of, and access to, services across the area. This can apply to buildings, funding and resources – both owned by the council and community organisations, and by private and voluntary partners – as well as staff and volunteers.

Using the council's role as a community and partnership leader to facilitate discussions with and investment from the local private sector can help to support delivery of some youth services. Involving local businesses in the development of the vision for local youth services can support this, encouraging buy-in from the beginning and ensuring that the vision helps to support young people to develop the skills they need for the local job market when they reach adulthood.

Some authorities are looking at alternative delivery models in order to deliver services in different ways, depending on the local context. In some areas, Youth Mutuals have been developed to open up alternative sources of funding and to allow the generation of income, while in others, Young People's Foundations bring together the public, private, voluntary and community sectors to make the most effective use of all available funding and assets. In all models, the council as the body with the statutory responsibility will maintain a key role in supporting and setting the direction of local youth provision.

4 Local Government Association analysis, 2017  
<https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/childrens-social-care-breaking-point-council-leaders-warn>

5 Early Intervention Foundation, 2016  
<http://www.eif.org.uk/publication/the-cost-of-late-intervention-eif-analysis-2016/>



# COMMISSIONING AND OUTCOMES

The vision for youth provision in an area should be firmly based on the desired outcomes for young people, supported by a clear understanding of how each service, whether directly delivered or externally commissioned, contributes to its delivery. For each service, it is helpful when commissioning to consider why that service is expected to contribute to that outcome and feed into the bigger picture, to ensure that the offer for young people evolves to meet changing needs.

Provision by alternative providers such as the voluntary and community sector, schools or religious groups can also help to deliver these outcomes. Clearly this cannot be specified by the council; this is where it is useful to develop the local vision in partnership with other sectors, to encourage progress towards a shared vision for young people. Other provision that is not explicitly youth services, for example health services, parks, housing and transport, can help to meet outcomes as part of a systemic approach to supporting young people. Mapping all of this against the needs analysis and outcomes needed to deliver the vision will help to identify gaps in provision.

Evaluating and reporting on outcomes effectively is not easy, and commissioners should acknowledge this, building in proportionate resources to contracts for robust outcome monitoring. In the context of reduced funding, it is not easy to divert money from frontline delivery; councils have a responsibility to their younger residents to ensure high quality services, and contributing to a good evidence base that allows rigorous scrutiny of services is one way to support this. A clear outcomes framework can help to effectively monitor the impact of a service at key milestones to spot where things aren't working and provide opportunities to make changes where needed. It can also support evidence of collective impact across the system, helping to ensure that everyone is working together toward the same outcomes.

As the voluntary and community sector is increasingly involved in the delivery of youth provision, councils will want to consider their commissioning and contract monitoring arrangements to check that these are proportionate and not excluding smaller organisations from putting themselves forward.

Involving young people meaningfully in service design and commissioning can also be effective in ensuring the delivery of appropriate services for young people. Working with young people to identify needs, establish the right outcomes for different services and consider the offers of different organisations can be invaluable in ensuring that the right service and the right provider are appointed. Skilled practitioners, for example youth workers, youth offending team officers, edge-of-care workers or mental health workers should also be involved to bring their expert knowledge to the table and identify potential issues that require further investigation.

A further opportunity arising from developing a shared vision for youth services in the area is joint commissioning and potentially aligned or pooled budgets. Where outcomes are shared by a range of partners, working with those partners to commission and deliver services that meet those shared objectives is more likely to result in more joined-up, efficient services for young people alongside economic benefits.



# DELIVERING THE VISION SUPPORT FOR COUNCILS

## OUR OFFER

We will work with national and regional partners including the National Youth Agency and UK Youth to provide tools to support councils in developing local visions and action plans.

We will work with partners to produce guidance on engaging with young people and involving young people in commissioning.

We will work with partners to coordinate a biannual meeting of key national and regional stakeholders to share information and identify national lobbying priorities.

We will gather and share examples of best practice to share learning and support councils in developing their approaches.

We will commission new research to establish and disseminate the factors that facilitate an effective early help offer including youth provision, looking at how best to engage partner agencies and the community and voluntary sector in developing a joined up offer.

We will work with the National Youth Agency and the Centre for Youth Impact on an outcomes framework for youth services that all councils can use.

We will work with partners to develop a standard checklist for councils to use when commissioning services.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE GOVERNMENT & NCS TRUST

The Government should ensure that youth policy has a high profile across government to provide leadership and to make sure that young people's voices are heard. Suggestions to do this include:

- The Government should set out its policy and ambitions for services for young people, clearly articulating the role that all government departments will play to deliver that vision.
- The Government should explicitly include responsibility for young people within a Ministerial portfolio to establish a champion for young people and ensure coordination of policy across all departments.

The NCS Trust should work closely with councils on the design and delivery of the National Citizen Service locally.

The Government should allocate a proportion of the funding dedicated to the National Citizen Service directly to councils for them to dedicate to supporting local youth services.

The Government must commit to sustainable investment in preventative services by reversing the cuts to early intervention funding for local councils.

Funding to support the measurement of outcomes and development of a wider evidence base for youth services should be made available to local authorities.





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