

Debate Pack

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Trends in funding levels for youth services

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1 Background

There will be a debate on trends in funding levels for youth services on Wednesday 28 February at 9:30am. This will be held in Westminster Hall and will be led by Rachel Hopkins MP.

Youth services are a devolved matter - this briefing provides information on the situation in England.

In England, local authorities (LAs) have most of the responsibility for providing youth services, but are not obliged to fund them.

There is also some central government provision. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) is responsible for out-of-school youth policy and programmes, and providing support to the youth sector to deliver high quality services to young people, as well as funding the National Citizen Service (NCS) programme for the Youth Investment Fund and the Youth Guarantee.¹

1.1 Statutory duties for local authorities

The statutory regime underpinning the provision of youth services in England is set out in section 507B of the Education Act 1996 (as amended).

1. A local authority in England must, so far as reasonably practicable, secure for qualifying young persons in the authority's area access to—
 - a) sufficient educational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of their well-being, and sufficient facilities for such activities; and
 - b) sufficient recreational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of their well-being, and sufficient facilities for such activities.²

“Qualifying young people” means those aged 13 to 19 years inclusive, and also those aged 20 to 25 years inclusive who have a prescribed learning difficulty or disability.³

The term “sufficient” in relation to activities or facilities, means “sufficient having regard to quantity”.⁴

¹ The Department of Education is responsible for activities in school time, these may have links to youth services.

² [Education Act 1996, s507B\(1\) \(as amended\)](#)

³ [Education Act 1996, s507B\(2\) \(as amended\)](#)

⁴ [Education Act 1996, s507B\(3\) \(as amended\)](#)

Local authorities also have a duty to:

- secure access to sufficient youth work activities.
- ascertain young people's views on positive activities.
- publicise positive activities. Further information is provided in statutory guidance published by DCMS.⁵

1.2 Local authority spending on youth services

Local authority expenditure on services for young people is published by the Department for Education.

[The most recent data is for the 2021/22 financial year](#), when net expenditure (spending minus any income from grants or fees) on youth services was £341 million.

Most of the spending, 61% (£207 million), was spent on targeted services.⁶ Targeted youth support covers specific, tailored interventions for young people (and their families) who need extra provision on top of universally provided services.

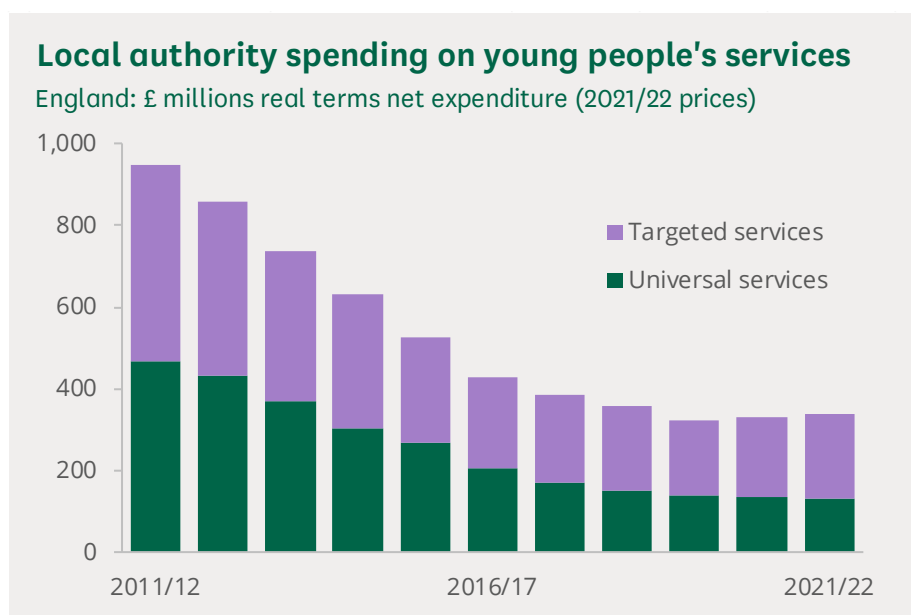
Real terms spending on youth services fell by 64% between 2011/12 and 2021/22, from £947 million down to £341 million. The decrease over this period was more pronounced in universal services (-71%) compared with targeted services (-57%).^{7,8}

⁵ Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Statutory guidance for local authorities on services and activities to improve young people's well-being](#), September 2023

⁶ Gov.uk, [Explore education statistics](#), 2021-22

⁷ Department for Education, [Statistics: local authority and school finance](#), 25 January 2024; HM Treasury, [GDP deflators at market prices, and money GDP December 2023 \(Quarterly National Accounts\)](#), 8 January 2024

⁸ Universal services are available for all young people whereas targeted are just for specific groups of young people.



Sources: DFE [Local authority and school expenditure data](#) and HMT [GDP deflator December 2023](#)

Regional variations in local authority spending

Expenditure on youth services shows considerable variation between regions of England. To effectively compare expenditure between areas, we can look at the amount spent per 11-19 year old.⁹

The East Midlands and London showed the highest overall spending on young people's services per 11-19 year old in 2021/22, with both regions spending £77 per 11-19 year old.

The East Midlands also had the highest spend on targeted services per 11-19 year old (£62 per 11-19 year old). The lowest targeted services spending was observed in the West Midlands (£17 per 11-19 year old).

Yorkshire and the Humber showed the highest rate of spending on universal services (£42 per 11-19 year old), while the East of England had the lowest universal services spend (£5 per 11-19 year old).

⁹ Youth services usually cover all young people within the secondary education age range (ages 11-19). Support is extended up to age 24 for those with learning difficulties, but for the purposes of this analysis the age group is restricted to 11-19 year olds.

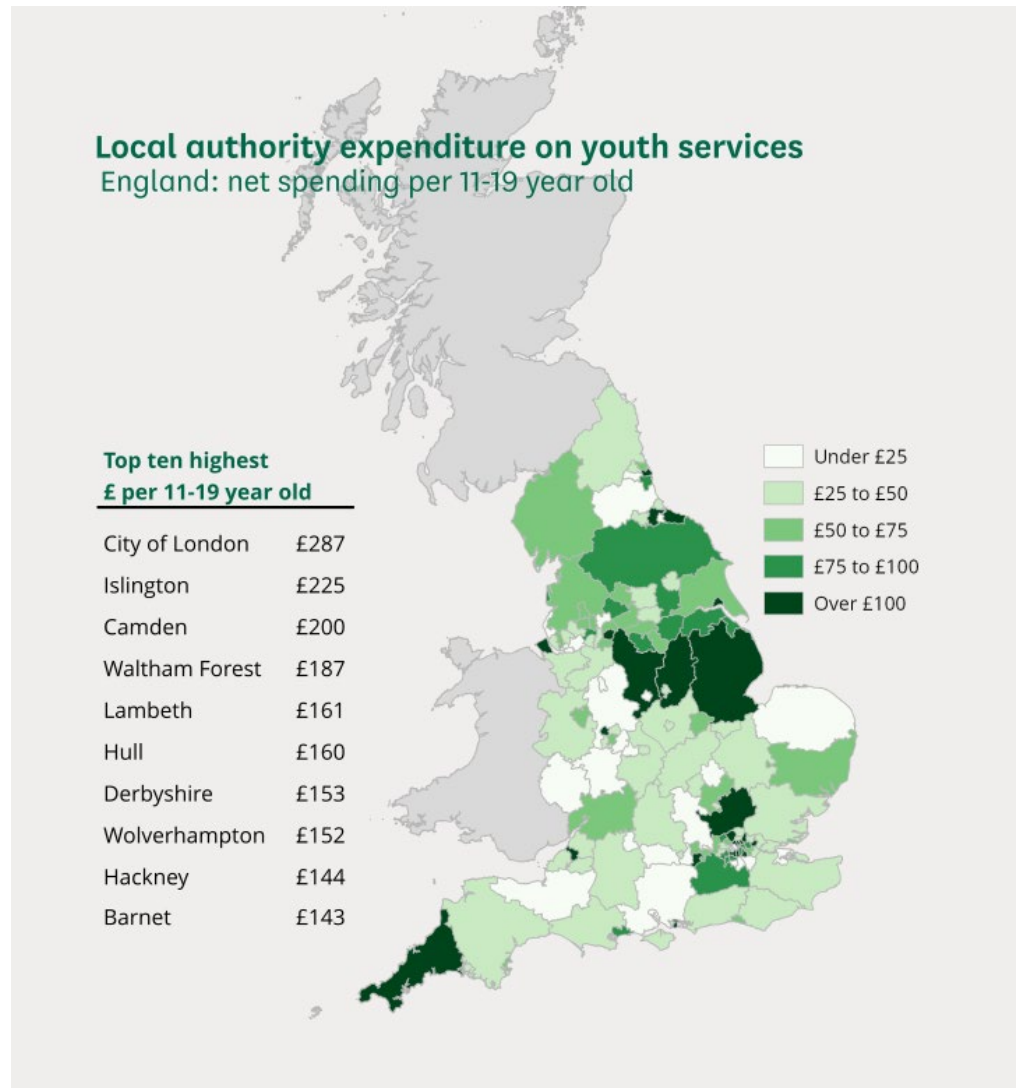
Local authority spending on young people's services by region			
2021/22: £ per 11-19 year old			
	Targeted	Universal	Total
East Midlands	£62	£16	£77
London	£36	£41	£77
Yorkshire and The Humber	£25	£42	£68
South West	£40	£17	£57
North West	£34	£23	£56
East of England	£47	£5	£52
North East	£24	£23	£47
South East	£24	£13	£38
West Midlands	£17	£16	£33
England	£34	£22	£56

Sources: DFE [Local authority and school expenditure data](#) and ONS population estimates

Expenditure per 11-19 year old also shows variation at local authority level as shown in the map overleaf.

Among local authorities with recorded 2021/22 expenditure, spending per 11-19 year old ranged from £4.21 in Somerset through to £287 in the City of London.¹⁰

¹⁰ Five local authorities submitted a zero return for 2021/22 expenditure on young people services.



Sources: DFE [Local authority and school expenditure data](#) and ONS population estimates

1.3 Central government funding

While the main responsibility for youth provision sits with local authorities, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) also provides additional funding for national schemes as well as capital and revenue grants for the out-of-school youth services sector.

DCMS spent £1.1 billion on the youth sector between 2015 and 2021, and is planning to spend over £500 million delivering a “Youth Guarantee” between the 2022/23 and 2024/25 financial years.¹¹

¹¹ PQ 11450 [[Youth Investment Fund](#)], 31 January 2024

Youth review and guarantee

DCMS funding priorities for youth services in the three years of the current Spending Review period, 2022/23 to 2024/25, were developed following a Youth Review first announced at the 2020 Spending Review.¹² The Review launched in February 2021, looking at all aspects of DSMS out-of-school youth services provision, including the future of two key programmes:

- The [Youth Investment Fund](#), which provides capital and revenue grants for youth service projects across England.¹³
- [National Citizen Service](#), A charity providing activities for 16 and 17 year olds across England.¹⁴

During the review the government had engaged with six thousand young people, 170 youth sector organisations as well as academics, researchers and government departments. The review found that young people’s priorities were:

- Regular clubs and activities
- Adventures away from home
- Volunteering opportunities which give back to the community
- Activities that support mental and physical wellbeing and skills development¹⁵

Before the Government’s response to the review was published, the [2021 Spending Review](#) announced an investment of “£560 million in youth services in England over the next three years”.¹⁶

The findings and [Government response to the Review](#) provided further detail on plans to “level up” and expand access to youth provision through a “youth guarantee” designed to provide every young person with “access to regular out of school activities, adventures away from home and opportunities to volunteer.”¹⁷ DCMS also explained how the £560 million would be spent:

- £171 million for the National Citizen Service over three years

¹² [HC Deb 25 November 2020, c865](#)

¹³ Youth Investment Fund, [Youth Investment Fund](#) (accessed 23 February 2024)

¹⁴ Department for Culture, [Media and Sport, Youth sector engagement exercise](#), 23 February 2023; National Citizen Service, [About us | NCS](#) (accessed 23 February 2024)

¹⁵ Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Youth Review: Summary findings and government response](#), February 2022

¹⁶ 2022/23 to 2024/25; HM Treasury, [Autumn Budget and Spending Review 2021](#), CP 822, 27 October 2021, para 2.129

¹⁷ Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Youth Review: Summary findings and government response](#), February 2022

- £368 million through the Youth Investment Fund to “level up” youth infrastructure in “left behind” areas. Capital grants were planned to create 300 new youth centres over the three years, and revenue grants would support 45,000 extra youth activities per year.
- £22million to offer the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme to every state-funded secondary school in England, to eliminate waiting lists for [Uniformed Youth](#) and to the [iwill fund](#) to create new youth volunteering opportunities.

Along with a commitment that DCMS would listen to young people’s voices in the ongoing development of policy, the Review also proposed further support for the youth sector through:

- building a skilled and trained youth workforce,
- maximising investment,
- Reviewing the statutory duties of local authorities, and
- strengthening the evidence base.¹⁸

For more information on the two largest areas of DCMS youth services funding see:

- Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [National Citizen Service Trust annual report and accounts 2022 to 2023](#), 8 December 2023
- [What is the Youth Investment Fund?](#) Youth Investment Fund Website
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Youth Investment Fund Phase 2: Impact evaluation feasibility study](#), 9 February 2023

1.4 The youth services workforce

There are no statistics available of the number of youth workers. The absence of a common form of youth service across England makes it difficult to collect and collate such figures.

While some organisations have attempted to gather information through Freedom of Information requests, factors such as varying response rates and potentially different interpretations of what constitutes a youth service mean such estimates should be treated with caution.¹⁹

¹⁸ Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Youth Review: Summary findings and government response](#), February 2022

¹⁹ For example, see Unison, [Youth services at breaking point](#) (PDF), April 2019

The National Youth Sector Census by the National Youth Agency has been commissioned by DCMS to begin to gather data around youth services in England.²⁰ However, information about the youth service workforce is not yet available.

1.5

Research into youth services

All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Youth Affairs

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Youth Affairs aims to “raise the profile of issues that affect and concern young people, encourage dialogue between parliamentarians, young people and youth services, and encourage a co-ordinated and coherent approach to youth policy making”. The British Youth Council and YMCA England provide the secretariat for the APPG.

Youth Work Inquiry 2018-2019

The APPG’s Youth Work Inquiry examined

evidence submitted by individuals and organisations involved in the youth services sector about the state of youth work. Its April 2019 report made the following recommendations:

2. There should be a minister responsible who has a portfolio focussed on young people.
3. There needs to be greater investment in youth work and commitment to support for youth services in the next Comprehensive Spending Review.
4. The Government should introduce a clear statutory duty and guidance that defines a minimum and protected level of youth service.
5. There should be a lead role confirmed in each local authority responsible for discharging the statutory duty.
6. The Government should develop a workforce strategy including expectations for the ratio of professional youth workers, trainees and volunteers.
7. There needs to be a standardised and national system for evaluating the sufficiency and suitability of youth services and quality of youth work provision.²¹

²⁰ National Youth Agency, [National Youth Sector Census](#) (accessed 23 February 2024)

²¹ All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Youth Affairs, [Youth Work Inquiry Final Report](#), April 2019, p8.

Progress Review 2021

A progress review was published in July 2021 which [reviewed](#) progress across statutory and voluntary youth services and considered the impact of the pandemic.²²

Time's running out: National Youth Agency (NYA) and the YMCA England and Wales

The National Youth Agency (NYA) and the YMCA frequently carry out research on youth services, including [Time's Running Out: Youth services under threat and lost opportunities for young people](#), published in September 2021. This explores the trends in funding levels for youth services since 2010.

The report found that since 2010:

- 500 qualified youth workers have been lost from the frontline'.²³ There is a significant shortage of volunteers to fill the gap this has left.
- Recruitment of qualified youth workers had dramatically declined, 'with less than 300 a year for a system that is geared for an annual in-take of up to 2,000 undergraduates'.²⁴
- 8,500 youth charities and community groups are contending 'with perilous finances and a greatly reduced base of support for young people'.²⁵

They also reported that the impact of spending cuts has not been even across the country:

Total youth service spending in deprived areas was down by nearly twice as much per head as the least deprived,²⁶

They concluded that (combined with the pandemic) trends in youth services provision could impact:

- The number of vulnerable children
- The number of young people being identified for safeguarding referrals
- Education recovery following pandemic disruptions
- The role of youth services in mental health support

²² All-party parliamentary group (APPG) on Youth Affairs, [Review of Youth Work in England: Interim report](#), July 2021

²³ National Youth Agency and YMCA England and Wales, [Time's Running Out: Youth services under threat and lost opportunities for young people](#) (PDF), September 2021, p3, para d.

²⁴ National Youth Agency and YMCA England and Wales, [Time's Running Out: Youth services under threat and lost opportunities for young people](#) (PDF), September 2021, p3, para e.

²⁵ National Youth Agency and YMCA England and Wales, [Time's Running Out: Youth services under threat and lost opportunities for young people](#) (PDF), September 2021, p3, para g.

²⁶ National Youth Agency and YMCA England and Wales, [Time's Running Out: Youth services under threat and lost opportunities for young people](#) (PDF), September 2021, p8.

- The effectiveness of safeguarding and measures to prevent the exploitation of young people
- Opportunities for young people to have their voices heard²⁷

The report recommended that funding for youth services should be prioritised and be long term and ringfenced:

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.²⁸

YMCA Youth funding reports

The YMCA produce an annual report on the state of youth services.²⁹

The latest YMCA report, [On the Ropes: The impact of local authority cuts to youth services over the past 12 years](#), was published in February 2024. This found some minimal increases in funding over the previous year but that there had been significant cuts over the last 12 years.³⁰ The report found that although there had been the cuts in funding in England and Wales, they were much more significant in England than in Wales.³¹

²⁷ National Youth Agency and YMCA England and Wales, [Time's Running Out: Youth services under threat and lost opportunities for young people](#) (PDF), September 2021, p5.

²⁸ National Youth Agency and YMCA England and Wales, [Time's Running Out: Youth services under threat and lost opportunities for young people](#) (PDF), September 2021, p8.

²⁹ YMCA, [Publications - YMCA England & Wales](#), (accessed 23 February 2024)

³⁰ Please note: that the report methodology compares spending from year 2010/11 with other years. The structure of local authorities accounts change in 2011 so it is only appropriate to compare years 2011/12 onwards as in section 1.4.

³¹ YMCA England and Wales, [On the ropes: the impact of local authority cuts to youth services over the past 12 years](#) (PDF), February 2024, p3.

2 Parliamentary material

2.1 Parliamentary Questions

Youth Centres

13 February 2024 | UIN 13412

Asked by: Mike Amesbury

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment she has made of trends in the number of youth clubs available to young people since 2010.

Answering member: Stuart Andrew | Department: Department for Culture, Media and Sport

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport does not hold the data requested. Local authorities have a statutory duty to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient provision of educational and recreational leisure-time activities for young people in their area. This is funded from the Local Government settlement, which is due to rise to more than £64 billion in 2024-25. We have worked with local authorities and with the youth sector to update the statutory guidance that underpins local authorities' duty to support them in adequately meeting the needs of young people.

The Government recognises the vital role that youth services and activities play in improving the life chances and wellbeing of young people, which is why we have committed to the National Youth Guarantee. This includes the delivery of up to 300 new and refurbished youth spaces and services in left behind areas through the Youth Investment Fund, totalling over £300 million.

Youth Investment Fund

31 January 2024 | UIN 11450

Asked by: Paul Bristow

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whether she plans to open a third phase of the youth investment fund.

Answering member: Stuart Andrew | Department: Department for Culture, Media and Sport

The Government recognises the vital role that youth services and activities play in improving the life chances and wellbeing of young people.

While local authorities are responsible for delivering youth provision, the Government has worked closely with local authorities to update statutory guidance to support this delivery. The Government additionally provides

significant funding to support youth services, with over £1.1 billion provided to the youth sector from DCMS in England between 2015 and 2021.

Over this Spending Review Period, DCMS is investing over £500 million in youth services to deliver the National Youth Guarantee, a government commitment that by 2025, every young person will have access to regular clubs and activities, adventures away from home and opportunities to volunteer. This includes a significant number of interventions such as the Youth Investment Fund which is delivering grants to build, renovate and expand youth centres. Future funding commitments for the Youth Investment Fund beyond the current phase 2 will be subject to the next Spending Review Period.

Youth Services: Buildings

19 January 2024 | UIN 9243

Asked by: Rachael Maskell

To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, if she will review the youth services estate; and if she will fund repairs for that estate.

Answering member: Stuart Andrew | Department: Department for Culture, Media and Sport

The Government recognises the vital role that youth services and activities play in improving the life chances and wellbeing of young people.

While local authorities are responsible for delivering youth provision, the Government has worked closely with local authorities to update statutory guidance to support this delivery. The Government additionally provides significant funding to support youth services, with over £1.1 billion provided to the youth sector from DCMS In England between 2015 and 2021.

Furthermore, over this Spending Review Period, DCMS is investing over £500 million in youth services to deliver the National Youth Guarantee, a government commitment that by 2025, every young person will have access to regular clubs and activities, adventures away from home and opportunities to volunteer. This includes a significant number of interventions. For example, the Youth Investment Fund is delivering grants to build, renovate and expand youth centres, and the Million Hours Fund has created more than a million hours of youth activities in antisocial behaviour hotspots.

Topical Questions

11 January 2024 | 743 c436

Asked by: Rachael Maskell

Labour has a programme for a new generation of youth hubs, because we know that our young people are struggling with mental health challenges, school, themselves and others, and some are being picked off by criminal gangs. In contrast with our programme, the YMCA has identified a 70% cut in

funding since 2010 and a loss of 4,500 frontline youth workers. When will the Government invest in our young people and in a comprehensive youth service?

Answered by: Lucy Frazer | Department: Culture, Media and Sport

I am grateful for the hon. Lady's question, because this is something I feel very passionately about. I am very proud that we are investing £500 million in our national youth guarantee, and that we already have in place a programme to build youth clubs—we have already built 87 throughout the country, spending £300 million. We want constructive things for people to do, which is why we are spending £300 million on our sports pitches. I have strengthened the statutory guidance in relation to what local authorities are required to do, and we are working across Departments to ensure that our young people have something to do, somewhere to go and someone to talk to.

2.2

Early Day Motions

YOUTH SERVICES

EDM 315 (session 2023-24)

24 January 2024

Jon Trickett

That this House recognises the deep impact that the last decade of austerity has had on local youth services; notes the YMCA's findings that youth services have been cut by £1.1bn nationally since 2010/11, which is a real-terms fall of 74 per cent, and that the annual spend per head for 5-to-17-year-olds in England plummeted from £158 in the 2010-11 financial year to just £37 in 2020-21; further notes the cuts to local councils and that local authorities such as Wakefield have had real-term funding cuts of 40.4% since 2015-16, which have added further pressure to services which support young people; expresses its alarm that Hemsworth constituency in the Wakefield District has had nearly £400 per pupil cut from school budgets; praises the comments on this issue made by local people such as Codie Smith, a pro-boxer in Hemsworth, who has called on Parliament and local councillors to do more for young people; believes that the lack of opportunities and low social mobility for young people fuels anti-social behaviour; and urges the Government to rethink its strategy for funding youth services.

3

Press material

[Oxford youth workers criticise 'disastrous' funding cuts](#)

BBC News

14 February 2024

[How a decade of austerity has squeezed council budgets in England](#)

The Guardian

29 January 2024

[Kent County Council agrees £900k youth service funding cuts](#)

BBC News

30 November 2023

[Rural children 'forgotten' in youth centre funding](#)

BBC News

20 September 2023

4

Press releases

[YMCA Issues Urgent Plea Ahead of General Election: Safeguard Youth Services Before It's Too Late](#)

YMCA England & Wales

13 February 2024

[20,000 more young people to access new and renovated youth clubs](#)

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

3 February 2024

[Government funding to train 500 new youth workers](#)

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

27 September 2023

[Major boost for young people with plans to transform youth centres](#)

Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport

4 August 2023

[Government outlines ambitious plans to level up activities for young people](#)

Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport

1 February 2022

[Labour will launch Young Futures programme to tackle knife crime](#)

The Labour Party

10 October 2023

5

Further reading

[On the Ropes: The impact of local authority cuts to youth services over the past 12 years](#)

YMCA

February 2024

[The social cost of youth work cuts report](#)

National Youth Agency

31 October 2023

[Youth Investment Fund](#)

[Million Hours Fund](#)

The National Lottery Community Fund

[Applying to the Million Hours Fund](#)

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

5 October 2023

[Statutory guidance for local authorities' youth provision](#)

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

27 September 2023

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