

The UK's youth services
how cuts are removing
opportunities for young people
and damaging their lives

THE DAMAGE



WARNING: DISMANTLING
COUNCIL SERVICES WILL
SERIOUSLY DAMAGE OUR LIVES
AND OUR COMMUNITIES



Contents

Vital services and unsung heroes	3
Why youth work and youth services matter	4
UNISON's research	4
Cuts in youth service spending	5
Going, going, gone...cuts since 2012	6
The impact of the cuts according to UNISON members.	6
The future for youth services and the communities they serve.	8
Recommendations and conclusions	10

Vital services and unsung heroes

Youth services are among the most important services that local authorities provide, and youth workers are in many senses the unsung heroes of their communities.

By building up relationships of trust and support with young people, working in their communities, helping them make their own decisions about their own lives, and developing their confidence and resilience, youth workers play invaluable roles in supporting young people.

This is why the Government's cuts in local authority funding, and the consequent cuts in spending on youth services by local authorities, are so important. The plight of the young people whom youth services support is clear.

Spending cuts have harmed young people and their prospects in a number of ways. Cuts in benefits have meant that many young people from poorer backgrounds have struggled, even when they are in work, with rising housing costs and reduced housing benefit combining to make it increasingly difficult for young people to get a decent start in their adult lives.

Support for young people wishing to pursue educational opportunities in England has been obliterated as a result of the abolition of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). The scrapping of the EMA is likely to have had a particular impact on young black men, and young people from poorer backgrounds, who relied on the EMA for some level of subsistence while they worked towards qualifications. Meanwhile, the trebling of tuition fees for higher education, to £9000, has presented another barrier to educational opportunities for young people.

Young people are far more likely to be unemployed than those in older age groups. In September-November 2013, 36% of 16-17 year olds and 18% of 18-24 year olds in the UK were unemployed, compared to 5% of 25-49 year olds and 4% of 50-64 year olds. Youth unemployment has risen significantly in recent years, and this is particularly true among certain groups. For example, by 2012, more than half of young black men available for work were unemployed, compared to around a quarter in 2008.¹

Meanwhile, the Government's decision to wind up the Connexions career service, replacing it with a duty for schools to provide careers guidance, but without providing any funding, has left young people with completely inadequate careers advice. A UNISON survey in 2013 found that the majority of schools had reduced their careers advice, and many rely on over-worked teachers to provide it, rather than careers experts. Research by the University of Derby found that of 144 local authorities, only 15 would maintain a substantial careers service.²

Youth workers, through the wide range of activities they engage in, and the deep and lasting relationships they build with young people, are in a unique position to support young people in all of these areas and many more: helping them find employment, get qualifications, avoid drug or alcohol abuse, remain healthy, and play their part in society. But as this report makes clear, youth services have suffered massive cuts, and the vast contribution youth workers make to young people and society in general is being lost.

¹ Office for National Statistics data

² *Careers Work with Young People: Collapse or Transition?* Tristram Hooley and A. G. Watts, 2011



Why youth work and youth services matter

Youth work is provided through a combination of open access services and more targeted interventions, and UNISON thinks all young people are entitled to the rewards and benefits of good quality services across both types of youth work.

Young people want and need to be able to socialise in a safe and secure environment. Open access provision reaches out to and offers vulnerable young people early intervention; these young people might be missed by other services, or their needs might escalate before they are picked up by the targeted service. In poorer communities youth clubs and open access provision are the only services available to young people. Open access services can be more appropriate than targeted ones when it comes to improving some outcomes for young people; but both types are needed.

The youth and community method relies on establishing trust and sometimes long-term relationship building. Young people can enter and leave services over a period of time and positive results are more likely over a long timeframe; short-term indicators cannot easily measure the impact. Good youth work transforms lives but the benefits may be less immediate and less obvious. To give one example: the Audit Commission report into the benefits of sport and leisure activities in preventing anti-social behaviour by young people estimates that a young person in the criminal justice system costs the taxpayer over £200,000 by the age of 16. But one who is given support to stay out costs less than £50,000.³

It is difficult to measure social and personal development, empowerment, confidence and resilience. In addition, youth work operates in a multi-agency setting – isolating the impact of a

simple intervention ignores the fact that there might be several influences. The best measure is the fact that the young person wants to access the service and engage.

For all of these reasons, well qualified and fairly rewarded youth workers are a vital part of our public services, providing real value to our communities.

But as this report makes clear, a crisis is developing as a result of local authorities scaling back or reconfiguring their youth services in response to spending cuts. Open access provision for young people is fast disappearing as councils focus on targeted youth work. But specialist provision for young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) is also being decimated to catastrophic effect. Some authorities have gone further and are withdrawing completely from youth service provision. UNISON believes that youth services will be the first public service to disappear in some areas.

UNISON's research

This report is based on two pieces of research, carried out by UNISON in the autumn and winter of 2013.

- A Freedom of Information request issued to all local authorities in the UK in October 2013, asking what had happened to youth services budgets since 2012, what plans they had for youth service spending in the future, and what had happened to some key quantitative indicators of youth service provision: staffing levels, youth centres, places for young people, and outreach provision.
- A survey of UNISON members working in youth services, issued in November 2013, asking for their views on the impact of changes in youth service spending, on young people, their communities, and the public.

3 *Tired of Hanging Around*, Audit Commission, 2009

Cuts in youth service spending

UNISON's research, based on data provided in response to a Freedom of Information request from 168 local authorities across the UK, shows that youth services lost at least £60 million of funding between 2012 and 2014.

- More than 2000 jobs have been lost in that period
- Around 350 youth centres have closed as a result of the cuts
- 41,000 youth service places for young people have been cut
- At least 35,000 hours of outreach work by youth workers have been removed

Over the two years from April 2012, at least £60 million of funding was withdrawn from the UK's youth services. Of the 168 local authorities that responded to our FOI request, 122, or 73%, said they had cut youth service spending.

These cuts are part of a longer term trend since 2010. 93% of the respondents to our survey of members said that their local authority had cut youth service spending since 2010, and earlier research by UNISON has found that youth service spending was cut by £62m in 2010/11 and £137m in 2011/12. This makes the total since 2010 £259m.

The size and nature of the cuts have varied from place to place, as different local authorities explore different ways of making savings. But some authorities stand out.

In Essex, youth service expenditure by the County Council had fallen to £4.7 million in 2012/13, following a cut of £3.7m, or 44%. Similarly, Surrey County Council had a youth service budget of £2.5m in 2012/13, having been cut by £1.9m, or 43%.

Cuts of this magnitude continued the following year, 2013/14. For example the London Borough of Havering cut its youth service budget for that year by £1.4, to £2.2m – a reduction of 39%. Warwickshire, meanwhile, having cut its budget by £600,000 in 2012/13, made a further cut of £1.4m in 2013/14. This represented a reduction of more than half of its youth service budget in a single year, and a cut from £3.1m to £1.1m across the two-year period.

Stand-out cuts in youth service spending

	Youth service spending		Percentage change (+/-)
	2011/12	2012/13	
Essex	£8.4m	£4.7m	- 44%
Surrey	£4.3m	£2.5m	- 43%
	2012/13	2013/14	
Warwickshire	£2.5m	£1.1m	- 56%
Havering	£3.6m	£2.2m	- 39%



Going, going, gone...cuts since 2012

What do youth services look like as a result of these cuts? Local authorities have given us some revealing figures about the loss of services since 2012. More than 2000 jobs have been lost in that period (1300 or more part-time roles and more than 700 full-time roles). Around 350 youth centres have closed as a result of the cuts. An incredible 41,000 youth service places for young people have been lost. And at least 35,000 hours of outreach work by youth workers have been removed.

The impact of the cuts according to UNISON members

In our survey of members, we asked respondents to tell us what had happened to the youth services they worked in as a result of cuts in funding. The overall picture shows a reduced level of service, provided by staff who are more thinly spread and unable to work as productively as in the past.

- More than three-quarters (76%) reported that some services had been cut as result of reductions in funding since 2010. 54% said that outreach services had been cut, and 52% said that youth centres had closed.
- The impact on staffing has been significant. 82% of respondents said that their services were now provided by a smaller number of staff, and 77% reported that job roles had changed.
- Just under three-quarters (74%) of members said that individuals' workloads had increased as a result of the cuts, while more than a third (37%) said that they had to complete more paperwork.
- The end result of this is that 70% of respondents felt that it is now more difficult

to provide effective services for young people, and more than half (53%) said that young people are now less empowered.

Members' responses also gave a strong feel for the type of youth service provision that local authorities are able to provide in the wake of the cuts. While many have limited the extent of cuts in youth service spending as best they can, members tell us that this is done by vastly reducing the numbers of professional youth workers, with the important JNC qualification and the skills that come with it. Increasingly, the money that remains is being used for more focused youth work aimed at targeted groups, with commissioning models employed for the provision of general youth activities, where there is sufficient funding for them.

For example, in March 2014, Shropshire County Council launched a public consultation on various options for achieving a saving of £140,000 in youth service expenditure. All of the options involved cutting youth work sessions by around a half, and then focusing the remaining sessions in areas of the highest need, and targeted at disabled and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) young people.⁴ The more general open access youth services, provided by professional youth workers and open to all young people, are disappearing. One of our members warned: "More targeted and paperwork on the horizon. The new ideas will miss a large proportion of young people who will fall through all gaps and the results will be evident in 5-10 years time."

4 Children and Young People Now, 17 March 2014, http://www.cypnow.co.uk/cyp/news/1142769/shropshire-focus-youth-services-neediest?utm_content=&utm_campaign=170314_YouthWorkNews&utm_source=Children%20%26%20Young%20People%20Now&utm_medium=adestra_email&utm_term=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.cypnow.co.uk%2Fcyp%2Fnews%2F1142769%2Fshropshire-focus-youth-services-neediest

**A member's view:
disappearing services**

“ The council has completely cut its budget for youth services, and provided a very small amount of money for local commissioning networks - mainly parish councils - to provide youth activities. Most of the professional youth workers were made redundant. The few that remained were employed in other jobs. There is no professional youth service at [name of council] anymore. ”

Following on from this, we also asked survey respondents for their views on the wider impact on young people of youth service cuts, the Government's austerity agenda, and the recession. Members' views present a depressing take on young people's futures.

- Nearly nine-tenths (88%) felt that the cuts and austerity were causing higher youth unemployment, and just under two-thirds (64%) said that it is more difficult for young people to remain in formal education.
- The majority of members felt that the cuts and austerity had led to increased crime and anti-social behaviour (84%), increased alcohol and substance abuse problems (80%), increased mental health issues (69%), higher susceptibility to gangs (63%), and more youth homelessness (56%).
- Just under half of members had observed increased susceptibility to extremist groups, particular problems for young people from minority ethnic groups, and for young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

- A massive 85% reported that the cuts and austerity had caused particularly acute problems for young people from poorer backgrounds.

Members reported that although targeted youth services in many places had been retained, they were not being provided appropriately. For example, some services for young Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people are increasingly being provided by non-LGBT staff, who while sympathetic, may not be able to develop the necessary bonds of trust and empathy.

One member made clear the impact of the cuts on young people's health: "Young people are hungry and have no money, so we provide free tea and toast. Young people are starting to smoke and drink more." Given the opportunity, a high quality youth service can offer so much more than simply ensuring that young people have enough to eat. Our members' observations suggest that we are seeing a fundamental breakdown of basic services, and the deterioration of young people's health.

Worryingly, one member told us simply that there are now "No safe spaces for vulnerable young people."

**A member's view:
the cuts and young people**

“ All cuts affect young people, either through reductions in access to education, services or from effects on family and social life. Job losses for parents, homelessness, lack of youth employment, higher education charges are all leading to young people feeling alone, vulnerable and less empowered. ”



The future for youth services and the communities they serve

In our Freedom of Information request, we also asked local authorities what future plans they had for their youth services. The emerging trend is that the cuts that have taken place so far are merely the tip of the iceberg. While some authorities told us that it was too soon to say what would happen to their youth services in the future, most had agreed on further cuts, or were engaging in service reviews, or had decided to outsource their youth services. For 2014/15 alone, cuts of around £2 million had been agreed by Rhondda Cynon Taf, Cornwall and West Sussex councils. The cut of £1.9m in West Sussex follows a similar reduction two years earlier, which led to the closure of 15 youth centres and the loss of 37 full-time staff.

Two further councils, Wolverhampton and Lewisham, had agreed youth service cuts of more than £1 million for 2014/15 at the time of writing, and a further 21 local authorities had agreed cuts of hundreds of thousands of pounds.

Since UNISON's FOI research was carried out, announcements have come from more local authorities about planned cuts and changes to youth services. In January 2014, Wandsworth council announced that it would outsource its youth services specifically in order to keep costs down and residents' council tax bills low – seemingly regardless of which provider or type of provider might provide the best quality service.⁵

5 *Children and Young People Now*, 24 January 2014, http://www.cypnow.co.uk/cyp/news/1141725/wandsworth-outsource-youth-services?utm_content=&utm_campaign=270114_YouthWorkNews&utm_source=Children%20%26%20Young%20People%20Now&utm_medium=adestra_email&utm_term=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.cypnow.co.uk%2Fcyp%2Fnews%2F1141725%2Fwandsworth-outsource-youth-services

In Sandwell, the council announced plans in early 2014 to reduce the youth services budget from £1.8m to £850,000 – a cut of 53% which would lead to more than 50 jobs being lost. While targeted youth services would remain, there would be just two main youth centres, one open access youth club, two “youth buses” to provide borough-wide services, and two detached youth working teams. The council said that it was making these changes to avoid having to scrap the youth service entirely, as other councils had done.⁶

To give some indication of the loss of service that will result from these cuts, one local authority told us that a cut of £100,000 in 2012/13 led to the loss of 100 places for young people in these services. So the impact on service provision of much larger cuts will be clear.

One member told us: So far [name of council] Youth Service has lost £1m since 2010. However, the current council budget proposals for 2014-16 include a 79.4% cut to the Youth Service here...so in effect there will be no Youth Service in the near future.”

Another said: “More massive cuts coming in next two years which will see most youth provision in the district closing.”

In the face of these plans for youth services in the coming years, we asked the members we surveyed what they expected to happen to the youth services they work in over the next three years. What do the workers providing these services think will happen locally as a result of these spending reductions?

6 *Children and Young People Now*, 10 March 2014, http://www.cypnow.co.uk/cyp/news/1142651/sandwell-reveals-plans-halve-youth-services-spend?utm_content=&utm_campaign=100314_YouthWorkNews&utm_source=Children%20%26%20Young%20People%20Now&utm_medium=adestra_email&utm_term=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.cypnow.co.uk%2Fcyp%2Fnews%2F1142651%2Fsandwell-reveals-plans-halve-youth-services-spend

Nearly everyone agreed that youth services would be forced to undergo massive changes in the coming years, and mostly not for the better. More than three-quarters (77%) said that ‘some of our services will disappear altogether’. Within this broad category, 69% predicted that more youth centres would close, and almost a quarter (24%) said that specialised targeted support would disappear.

However, most significantly, 43% predicted that their entire youth service would disappear.

Views differed more on exactly how these swingeing cuts would be enacted. While the overwhelming majority (90%) said that there would be more job cuts, and 81% said that staff roles and skills mixes would change, a third (33%) felt that youth services would simply be swallowed up in schools provision.

A clear majority felt that privatisation or outsourcing would result from the cuts; 76% foresaw their youth services being outsourced from the local authority to the voluntary sector, cooperatives, social enterprises or mutuals, while 59% predicted outright privatisation.

Respondents’ comments made their views on the future of youth services even clearer. The growing reliance on commissioning youth services from the private and voluntary sectors, and the move away from open access services, will lead to services run by less qualified and experienced staff, and increased provision by organisations whose chief goal will be to make money, rather than provide high quality youth services. The implications of this could be far-reaching, with many of the intrinsic benefits of youth work, like improving youth employment, enabling young people to play an active role in communities, and reducing crime, will be threatened. One member predicted that more child protection issues will go unnoticed as a result of the changes in staffing and the way services are provided.

A member’s view: the impact on the public

“ I think the belief in this local authority that third sector and voluntary organisations will pick up the slack left by local authority youth services is way off. Young people in this borough are already spending more time on the streets, feel less engaged with adults and some are becoming more and more likely to be involved in anti-social behaviour or criminal activity. ”

How will these changes to youth services affect the public in the coming years? Respondents to our survey of members gave long and revealing answers to this question. In the words of those workers who provide these services, the cuts will cause increased poverty, more disengagement and crime, higher rates of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, obesity, higher youth unemployment, and the marginalisation of young people by society.

One respondent even told us that “Young people’s deaths from mental health issues will rise.” These factors will have major knock-on effects on communities, the criminal justice system, the social security system, the health service, and the economy.



**A member's view:
a future without youth services**

“ There will be fewer ‘places to go and things to do’ for the young people living in our area. The quality of youth work will suffer - with an increasing reliance on un/under trained staff/volunteers. The quality of training, networking and development work will suffer across the statutory and voluntary sector, with the withdrawal from delivery by trained, experienced council youth work staff - either because they have lost their jobs - or the council will only engage in training, networking and development where it is specifically funded to do so. This will damage the collaboration and partnerships within the statutory sector (eg council/NHS) and across the statutory and voluntary sectors, to the detriment of a cohesive and effective ‘offer’ for young people of services and activities, providing help, support and opportunities for personal, collective and political expression. ”

Recommendations and conclusions

UNISON believes that, like other vital public services, youth services should be fully funded to meet the needs of the diverse range of young people in our society. The benefits they provide for young people, their communities and UK society should be properly recognised. The importance of human relationships, trust and confidence-building in youth work need to be better understood. And the youth workers and youth support workers providing the services should be fairly rewarded, with decent pay and job security, so that they can concentrate on supporting young people and helping them improve their lives.

UNISON understands that local authorities have had their funding slashed by the current UK government, with more than £11 billion of funding for local authorities cut by 2016. Local authorities clearly have tough decisions to make when it comes to how to spend their money.

However, youth services provide vital support to young people, with so many broader benefits for society – such as reducing unemployment, improving the take-up of education, reducing substance abuse, cutting crime and anti-social behaviour, and improving community cohesion. The cuts in youth services need to be reversed.

Clearly, a complete change of course is needed in order to enable the UK's economy to recover and for vital public services to be saved.

UNISON would like to see:

A stronger statutory base for youth services.

Government legislation is needed to ensure that every local authority provides some form of youth service. Young people rely on these services, and they cannot be allowed to disappear.

Funding for youth services through a fairer tax system.

In UNISON's view we need a new, fairer system of taxation, with a 50% tax on bankers' bonuses above £25,000, a 'Robin Hood' tax on financial transactions, and measures to tackle tax avoidance and evasion, which could earn as much as £90 billion a year in revenue. Councils should be allowed to raise council tax, in line with their status as locally elected leaders, without being constrained by Westminster.

Services saved and kept in-house.

For their part, councils should ensure that reserves are prudent, but not excessive, so that in the short term, services can be saved when possible. Councils should devolve power to council-employed staff to work collaboratively with the communities they serve. They should avoid outsourcing, employ their own staff and trust their expertise. Youth workers themselves know best how they can support young people.

Fair pay.

The UK government should change its policy on pay restraint, ensuring that public service workers receive pay increases which meet the rise in the cost of living. Their spending power will boost local economies, create additional tax revenue and benefit savings for the Treasury, and kick-start a sustainable recovery. Working within sector-wide pay bargaining systems, councils should make sure that the lowest paid employees receive no less than the Living Wage.

THE DAMAGE



WARNING: DISMANTLING COUNCIL SERVICES WILL SERIOUSLY DAMAGE OUR LIVES AND OUR COMMUNITIES

This UNISON report is one in a series of studies looking at some of the vital services provided by councils. In it we explore the long-term damage to the public and to the economy caused by ongoing austerity cuts.



UNISON has more than a million members delivering essential services to the public. Services that protect, enrich and change lives.

We want to see changes that put people before profit and public interest before private greed. Join our campaign to create a fairer society.

To find out more go to unison.org.uk/million

Join UNISON online today at
unison.org.uk/join
or call 0800 0 857 857