

REPORT

# Review of youth sector funding and decision-making

SQW and UK Youth

January 2026

**SQW**  
**UK YOUTH**



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**Disclaimer**

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Whilst SQW and UK Youth have used reasonable care and skill throughout, it is unable to warrant either the accuracy or completeness of information supplied by the client or third parties, and it does not accept responsibility for any legal, commercial or other consequences that arise from its use.

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## About the research

### About the Youth Endowment Fund

The Youth Endowment Fund is a charity that exists to prevent children and young people from becoming involved in violence. We do this by funding good work, finding out what works, and building a movement to put this knowledge into practice. We also aim to better understand the young people affected by violence, violence itself, and the relevant practices and systems around violence reduction. We focus our work across seven essential sectors: Policing, Children's Services, Education, Health, Neighbourhoods, Youth Justice and Youth Sector. The Youth Endowment Fund was established in March 2019 by children's charity Impetus, with a £200m endowment and ten-year mandate from the Home Office.

### About the research team

**SQW** is a consultancy specialising in economic and social development. SQW believes research informs good public policy which is then a powerful force for a better society. Founded in 1983, the company employ c.50 staff from offices in Cambridge, London, Edinburgh and Manchester. Staff have expertise in a range of inter-linked socio-economic domains: local economic development, children and young people's services, skills development, and the personalisation and integration of public services. SQW's services include, economic and social research and evaluation, policy research, project appraisal and business planning, strategy, action planning, and partnership development.

**UK Youth** is the UK's leading infrastructure organisation for the youth sector, working with a network of over 9,000 youth organisations. UK Youth is a leading charity that exists to ensure all young people are equipped to thrive and empowered to contribute at every stage of their lives. They are a national voice for the youth sector, championing the critical role youth work plays in young people's lives. They do this by building a movement of change; developing and funding youth work programmes and bringing young people and youth workers together with business leaders, teachers, social workers, doctors, policy makers and other professionals to identify solutions, provide practical support, and campaign for social change.

SQW and UK Youth have been supported by an **Expert Panel**, comprising **Luke Billingham** an Open University Research Associate and a youth and community worker in North East London for Hackney Quest, **Ben Lindsay OBE** founder of Power The Fight, a charity launched in 2019 to train and empower communities to end youth violence, and **Alex Stutz** from the National Youth Agency. The NYA aims to enable great youth work to happen by setting the standards, growing the capacity and building the case to improve the quality and quantity of youth work in England.

# Executive Summary

## Background to the research

1. The positive role of youth clubs, and the influence of youth workers, on giving young people somewhere to go and someone to talk to is increasingly widely recognised. However, the changes experienced by the youth sector over the past two decades is probably less widely appreciated. In 2007 local authorities were given a statutory duty to provide sufficient, quality youth provision in their area. But far from being a foundation for growth, this was followed by periods of austerity and policy change that have seen funding for youth services decline locally alongside a shift to national funding programmes from a range of government departments. This has made youth service funding very complicated and provision patchy.
2. In December 2024, the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) commissioned SQW (an independent research organisation) in partnership with UK Youth (the UK's leading youth work charity) to undertake a research study exploring youth sector funding and decision-making. This research sought to disentangle some of the funding issues identified above by understanding the sources of funding for youth services, the scale of that funding and the level of discretion that budget holders and delivery teams have in its utilisation.

## Methodology

3. A detailed description of the methods and key workstreams of the research undertaken between December 2024 and June 2025 is provided in Chapter 2. In summary the research was informed by a scoping phase which collated available secondary evidence (via three rapid desk-based evidence reviews (focused on 1) developments over the last 15 years in funding policy and programmes, 2) policy development in England and Wales, and 3) mentoring and associated funding) and a review of secondary datasets to map provision and need at the local authority level); fieldwork comprised a series of interviews with 32 stakeholders who manage or have oversight of youth sector funding alongside a set of five case studies based in local authority areas in England and Wales (comprising 30 interviews, with at least five in each area); and triangulation, analysis and reporting.

## Key findings

### In England and Wales, who determines how much money is spent on local youth provision and who chooses which services are delivered?

4. In England and Wales, youth provision is funded by different public and private sector stakeholders that we have categorised as:
  - National government (including several different government departments)

- Local government (including both local and combined authorities)
  - Public service providers (connecting government services locally)
  - Independent youth provision (including independent grant providers, intermediary organisations, Housing Associations and Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations)
5. Central government ministers set the overall policy and funding direction, but responsibility is fragmented across multiple departments. We identified 30 different national streams that fund local youth services in England, of these only three were sponsored by more than one department. A rough estimate suggests these total £497m each year.
  6. Local authorities play a key role in allocating and commissioning youth services and have a statutory duty to ensure 'sufficient' provision. In England central government funding allocations are not ring-fenced for youth services, unlike in Wales. Elected council members make decisions informed by their officers, but after more than ten years of austerity, those decisions are often about what to cut or how to target, rather than how to invest.
  7. In both England and Wales, other agencies play a role in youth work funding. These include combined authorities and Police and Crime Commissioners (both democratically elected), as well as health care providers and housing associations. Their contributions are managed locally through a set of different partnership arrangements including (but not limited to) Community Safety Partnerships (that operate everywhere at either district, unitary or borough level), Integrated Care Boards, and, in twenty sub-regions, Violence Reduction Units. Independent grant providers play a growing role in youth work funding. These organisations set their own priorities but often work with the youth sector to manage and deliver projects.
  8. Considering geographical variation, youth services in Wales have more structured support infrastructure than many regions in England. Wales has a National Youth Work Strategy and central provision for its oversight and accountability. This includes ring-fenced funding, national data sharing structures, and Lead Youth Worker equivalent roles in each LA. Wales demonstrates a policy commitment to stronger co-ordination and co-production but it still experiences severe challenges in ensuring all young people can access the support they need.
  9. Overall, youth provision is funded through a fragmented mix of public and independent sources, with Wales showing stronger coordination than England but both facing major gaps in sufficiency and equity.

### **How does local authority funding of youth provision vary across England and Wales?**

10. Local authorities (LAs) in England and Wales provide data to the respective governments about spend on youth provision (Section 251 dataset for English local authorities and

statutory youth work dataset for Welsh local authorities). These data are imperfect, but show a total annual spend in England of £474m and in Wales of £45m in 2023/24. The median LA expenditure per 1,000 young people on youth services is slightly higher in England than Wales. However, it is unclear whether this represents genuine differences in the level of funding, or differences in the definition of young person (which extends to age 25 in Wales) or the data collection processes.

11. To capture the scale of wider grant funding in England and Wales we analysed youth work-related 360Giving data for one year (2023/24). This revealed a total of 2,637 grants amounting to £165m. As this data is reported voluntarily it is unlikely to be complete.
12. Across England and Wales, there is some correlation between the total expenditure on youth services for young people reported by the local authority and the number of young people in that local authority – 43% of variation in expenditure can be explained by the number of young people. Despite this, the range is still broad from £503k per 1,000 young people in Westminster to £7k per 1,000 young people in Shropshire.
13. Data from 2024 on youth crime was mapped using ‘children cautioned or sentenced’ Youth Justice Board data. There is no correlation between this indicator and youth expenditure ( $r^2 < 0.01$ ) – this means less than 1% of the variation in youth expenditure can be explained by the variation in young people cautioned/sentenced. However, there are a few notable spatial trends, with major urban centres (London, Manchester, Leeds, Bristol etc.) having higher than median levels of both expenditure and children cautioned/sentenced, and the North of England having higher than median levels of expenditure but not children cautioned/sentenced.
14. Data comparing spend with population characteristics was mapped for total population, the proportion of young people in an area, ethnicity and socio-economic status. We found there was only a limited correlation between demographics (age, ethnicity and socio-economic status) and youth expenditure (each of the demographic factors explained 2% or less of the variation in funding). This is true across both England and Wales.
15. Low local authority expenditure data is not explained by high levels of wider grant funding (i.e., it does not appear that where local authority funding is low this is due to there being an adequate supply of wider, e.g. lottery or philanthropic, funding).
16. There is a wide variation in the spend of local authorities of youth services. But, local authority funding levels are not strongly determined by the number of young people in the area, the level of crime or violence involving young people or their demographic characteristics.
17. The report then considers the total spend from national government, local government and voluntary and community sectors. There is considerable, yet imprecise, overlap between spending reported by local authorities (in S251 returns), the national government programmes we list and 360Giving data.

- 18.** Partly, this is due to limited detail provided in Section 251 returns that allow them to be cross-checked. Government guidance to local authorities about these returns has been clarified and updated since CIPFA concluded in 2014 that S251 analyses were not fit for the purpose either of making valid assessments of total spending on specific areas or of making useful comparisons between local authorities. In our research we found some stakeholders remained cautious about the quality of the data. Another factor is that some Funds, or proportions of Funds, identified by national decision makers are routed through local authorities and hence may be reported by both. Similarly, also with 360Giving the source of funds reported could be local or national government commissioning and therefore also possibly double counted.
- 19.** Just as the total amount of spend on youth services is ambiguous, the proportion of spend on youth violence and crime prevention is not clear cut. Section 251 data reports spend by 'universal' and 'targeted' however, targeted provision is not the same as provision to prevent youth violence for two reasons; firstly conceptually it can be argued that all youth services help prevent youth violence including universal provision which is often open access provision in areas of deprivation or social need; and secondly targeted services include provision to support or prevent teenage pregnancy, substance misuse, young people NEET as well as crime.

#### **What are decision-makers priorities when thinking about local youth provision?**

- 20.** The priorities of local statutory decision makers regarding local youth provision are political. These are shaped by manifesto priorities, influence of national and local advocates, and significant local events that raise the salience of violence prevention and youth services. Priorities for public service providers predominantly relate to tackling issues within their organisational remits, for example Violence Reduction Units support youth service provision focused on tackling youth violence, particularly knife crime, alongside a range of other priorities, while ICBs focus on working with stakeholders in a local community to encourage a preventative/public health approach. Independent funders' each have their own organisational objectives for their youth provision support to achieve a range of benefits for children and young people (including mental health and wellbeing, youth violence, and skill development and employability). Housing Associations are driven by their social purpose and prioritise investing in supporting the people living in the communities around their housing assets. Each is driven by their organisational mission or statement of social responsibility.
- 21.** Decision-makers at a national government level, corporates, and charitable grant makers usually have more freedom to change their approach than local authorities and other local partners who work within stricter funding parameters. Most consultees indicated that multi-agency working was a regular feature of their work. However, it was felt that collaboration was more consistent when driven by a statutory requirement.

22. Local authorities and public service partners work collaboratively to build better data to create strategic approaches to funding youth work. The quality and availability of data available to decision makers has improved but remains imperfect, both in terms of range of issues covered, detail and accuracy.
23. Consultees almost universally described local provision as inadequate, primarily because of a lack of funding. They also highlighted large geographic inequalities. Almost all consultees wanted to see more support for 'up-stream', preventative interventions. Indeed, the preventative link between youth services and violence prevention is widely recognised by decision makers. They also highlight links between youth provision and other positive outcomes such as mental health and wellbeing, educational attainment and civic engagement.
24. Primary support (youth provision open to all young people) is dominated by VCSE provision; tertiary support (for young people already involved in crime or violence) is addressed through the youth justice system. Decisions and trade-offs at a local level by local authorities and delivery partners about resource allocation are therefore focused on secondary provision for work with children and young people who are vulnerable to exploitation or exhibiting behaviours linked to violence.
25. Decision-makers did not allocate funding specifically for young people from Minority Ethnic backgrounds. There is often a lack of information to assess whether or not there is equitable coverage for children from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds.
26. The interviews and case studies identified many examples of ways in which young people were involved in decision-making processes - from consultation through coproduction. However, more fundamental changes to decision making are needed to ensure young people's participation was inclusive and influential.
27. Overall, decisions about funding youth provision and preventing violence are shaped less by consistent evidence or long-term strategy and more by political priorities, funding constraints, and inconsistent coordination.

### **What services are budgets for youth provision spent on?**

28. Youth service funding covers (1) direct service delivery including: open and targeted provision, provision in youth clubs and through outreach, and specialist provision through youth justice services; (2) capacity building for local delivery teams, for example through shared training, and (3) partnership management to improve co-ordination of service planning, delivery and sustainability of provision. Findings under this question are predominantly based on five case study local authority areas.
29. Local youth provision budgets have fluctuated dramatically over recent years. Local fluctuation is partly due to accessing time-limited grants or programme funding. Local authority budgets have declined substantially in both absolute and in real terms.

30. Funding is often allocated for short time periods, most commonly on an annual basis. However, funding commitments reported by stakeholders varied, with some reporting funding via annual cycles, others reporting between 2-4 years, and in one case, going up to seven years. In Wales, youth service budgets were said to be more stable than in England. However, they are still decided annually and there is still an annual period of uncertainty. Whilst there is ring-fenced government funding for youth services in Wales, it is not sufficient to meet demand, and local areas still need to secure funding from other sources to provide essential services.
31. Violence reduction activities take many forms. These include universal violence reduction programmes for all young people (such as knife crime awareness in youth clubs and schools) and personalised support for young people involved in crime or at risk of becoming involved in crime (which may be one-to-one support or may be a referral to open access youth club provision). The lack of a clear typology of violence reduction activities, alongside the lack of detailed budget data for each local area, meant that it was not possible to say how much budget in the case study areas was allocated to primary, secondary and tertiary services.
32. The majority of youth work respondents advised that their organisations were not focused specifically on violence prevention unless they were funded to do this. This does not however mean that youth provision did not have a positive effect on violence prevention. Furthermore, case study consultees were unable to provide information about the number of Black-led organisations that were funded in their area either because this data was not collected, or was not reported.
33. Overall, whilst local stakeholders universally felt that youth provision contributes positively to violence prevention, the lack of consistent funding, clear categorisation of prevention activities, and data on equity (e.g. funding for Black-led organisations) makes it difficult to assess effectiveness, target resources, or ensure fair distribution.

### **What mentoring for children and young people is taking place across England and Wales?**

34. Mentoring is a broad concept that is interpreted and applied in varying ways. There are many different mentoring project models - from having an informal chat after a sports match to more formal, in-depth, regular and year-long personal support. Mentors may be unpaid volunteers, paid volunteers or specialist providers, trainee youth workers or paid youth workers. Training is important for all mentors.
35. Mentoring projects were delivered in most case study areas. Few consultees were able to describe in detail the mentoring taking place in their areas or across their policy agendas. This is an important finding as it may lead to gaps or duplication in mentoring provision and coverage, but it also means that the project is unable to answer all the research questions in full.

- 36.** We were able to describe a diverse range of models of mentoring from our case studies. However, we cannot extrapolate to conclude which types of mentoring models are more common nationally. We also did not find sufficient examples in our primary fieldwork to comment on attrition or the context of delivery. We found examples of mentoring designed to achieve a broad range of outcome objectives. These included improving mental health, educational attainment, employment and skills, inclusion and identity-based support, family support, as well as violence prevention and youth safety. We cannot say which types are more prevalent with any confidence.
- 37.** There is no national mentoring programme, although The New Deal for Young People in London was a major £11m mentoring programme. The second largest funder of mentoring programmes is the National Lottery Community Fund. According to 360Giving data (2023-25) most mentoring is delivered by registered charities and community interest companies and there are some parts of the country that have almost no provision. Just 3 mentoring awards have been recorded in both Wales and the North East.
- 38.** Mentoring that aims to address crime and violence seems to be less well funded than mentoring to promote positive mental health. Twenty grants out of the 231 grants for mentoring were specifically for mentoring to address violence and/or crime. In comparison, 43 of the 231 grants were specifically for mentoring to address issues related to mental health.
- 39.** Overall, mentoring is widely used and valued for multiple outcomes, but provision is fragmented, unevenly distributed, and poorly connected to local and national decision-making. The lack of oversight, consistent data, and strategic coordination means its potential impact – particularly on violence prevention – is undermined.

#### **Are the current processes for determining local youth provision working well?**

- 40.** There is a lot of energy and good will from policy makers, funders, and providers to work collaboratively and join up their activities – despite a difficult funding and operational environment. However, there is also widespread recognition that decision making processes are not working well and have not enabled the range, variety and reach of services required for all young people.
- 41.** The youth sector struggles with legitimacy, particularly when compared to statutory services such as education and children’s social care. This lack of trust and respect is exacerbated by fewer training opportunities, insecure employment and churn in youth work roles, and limited capacity to engage in partnership activities that are not directly funded.
- 42.** Almost all consultees – from all professional backgrounds – felt that the resource available for youth provision and violence prevention was too small and too short-term. This makes it difficult to meet current need and prevents the development and implementation of effective, long-term strategies. Stakeholders argued for a longer-term approach that would allow for

continuity for both providers and the participants in youth services. Short-term funding cycles also affect workforce development (and therefore quality of provision) as it is more challenging to retain skilled staff on short contracts, expensive to re-train staff, disrupts relationship building with partners across the local systems.

- 43.** The quality and sustainability of collaborative structures vary between places and partners, as does the quality and granularity of the local evidence available to them. Interviewees called for transformation of data capture to enable more tailored and responsive funding that considered the unique challenges of local areas.
- 44.** There was a tension between processes that established funding criteria that did not allow sufficient flexibility at a local level. Stakeholders thought that more could be made of limited funding if they could be used flexibly to fit to local need.
- 45.** Overall, the three most common priorities for change from consultees were: funding that strengthens workforce training and partnership building; funding that enables meaningful involvement from young people and local communities in decisions that affect their area; and longer-term investment in services that take a preventative approach.

## Implications for policy and practice

- 46.** The report presents detailed conclusions and implications arising from these findings. The seven overarching insights for policy and practice change are:
- 47.** There is a need for national leadership to provide strategic oversight and co-ordinate and encourage alignment of government funding of youth provision across all government departments and between national and local government. The forthcoming National Youth Strategy provides an opportunity for the youth sector. The Welsh system provides useful lessons regarding national network and support infrastructure and ringfenced funding for service delivery.
- 48.** Local authorities should be made more accountable for the sufficiency of their youth services. This needs more robust data, and reporting mechanisms. But it also needs sufficient resources to ensure youth provision are fully effective. National government allocations for youth provision should be ring-fenced in England as it is in Wales. Provision should balance open with targeted, and invest in actions that prevent young people from becoming involved in violence.
- 49.** Local authority accountability also needs a clear and comprehensive typology of youth provision, a shared outcomes framework, and quality standards to facilitate effective reporting and comparable assessments.

- 50.** Better data is needed to inform decision makers. Financial data needs to be reported systematically and scrutinised for consistency and robustness. Needs assessment data should be granular, revised annually and comparable between areas.
- 51.** Youth provision funding is precarious. Stable, multi-year funding models should be the norm. Long term strategies cannot thrive when decision horizons barely extend beyond months. Funding should cover both core and delivery costs and should be for three to five years. Local flexibility should enable funders to pool budgets to address local needs and priorities. Commissioning should embed equity considerations by design covering eligibility, monitoring and evaluation processes.
- 52.** Youth services need local co-ordination through investment in streamlined structures. Local collaboration about youth provision should involve young people and youth workers in decision-making roles to ensure governance arrangements are inclusive.
- 53.** A mentoring framework that describes good mentoring practice and quality systems should be used by commissioners of mentoring programmes to assure quality and provide the basis for ongoing evaluation of what works in England and Wales.

# 1. Introduction

## Background to the research

- 1.1** The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) aim to publish a set of recommendations for how the youth sector across England and Wales can support the reduction of serious violence amongst children and young people. These recommendations will draw upon YEF's existing work in the youth sector, including projects YEF has funded and evaluated within the sector; relevant sections of the YEF toolkit; and the annual YEF Children Violence and Vulnerability survey of young people. To inform the recommendations, YEF has also commissioned four reviews of practice, covering; youth sector funding and decision-making, youth clubs, A&E navigator programmes, and youth workers' role in safeguarding.
- 1.2** In December 2024, YEF commissioned SQW (an independent research organisation) in partnership with UK Youth (the UK's leading youth work charity) to undertake one of these four research studies, focused on exploring youth sector funding and decision-making. This report presents findings of the study. The positive role of youth clubs, and the influence of youth workers, on giving young people somewhere to go and someone to talk to is increasingly widely recognised. However, the changes experienced by the youth sector over the past two decades is probably less widely appreciated. In 2007 local authorities were given a statutory duty to provide sufficient, quality youth provision in their area. But far from being a foundation for growth, this was followed by periods of austerity and policy change that have seen funding for youth services decline locally alongside a shift to national funding programmes from a range of government departments. This has made youth service funding very complicated and provision patchy. This research therefore seeks to disentangle some of the funding issues by outlining different sources of funding, and how it is used. To help frame the study a brief review of policy is helpful, because it establishes three things:
- since 2010 central government investment in Youth Services has been in national programmes rather than local provision
  - local provision has been cut everywhere - but more in some places than others
  - policies aimed at preventing young people from getting involved in crime and violence have been funded with targeted investments into Youth Services in some places.
- 1.3** There is a glossary of key terms in Annex A, but it is important to state at the outset that 'Youth services' describe a broad set of interventions from youth clubs and activities that are open to all young people, through mentoring to groups or individuals, to targeted case load work with individual young people to engage and connect them with positive activities. Youth workers are qualified professionals often working alongside professionals from other sectors (such as education, health, probation and social services) and volunteers.

## Policy context

- 1.4** Local authority provision of organised youth services has been a **consistent central government policy since the 1940s, and became a statutory duty in 2007**. At the time the New Labour administration promoted greater integration of youth services across agencies and ringfenced local authority grants for youth work. After 2010, the coalition government encouraged more involvement by volunteers and businesses in youth work. They emphasized reducing the state's role in public services, promoting a market-driven approach where voluntary and for-profit sectors compete for funds. The Coalition's 2010 "Positive for Youth" policy and subsequent statutory guidance for local authorities promoted partnerships between government, voluntary and the private sector to meet the needs of young people. The government's heavy investment in the National Citizen Service (NCS) marked a move away from local youth services. These changes alongside an extended period of austerity have framed the evolution of youth services over recent years.
- 1.5** **Spending by English local authorities nationally has declined over the past 15 years** . Between 2011-2021, 95% of local authorities in England reduced their spending on youth provision by at least a quarter, with one third reducing their spending by more than three quarters (SQW and UK Youth, 2024a). In addition there is a substantial per capita variation between local authorities. In 2023/24 according to Section 251 and Welsh Youth funding data, spend in England ranged from £504k to £0k per 1000 people aged 13-19, and in Wales ranged from £179k to £44k per 1000 people aged 11-25.
- 1.6** **The overall scale of spend within local authority areas is uncertain and estimates vary**. The YEF use Section 251 and Welsh Government data in their calculations of expenditure over time<sup>1</sup>. Their most recent Beyond the Headlines (2025) report notes that in 2023-24 for England and Wales youth expenditure combining both targeted and universal provision was £492m. YMCA (2025) also base their assessments of spending on youth services using the same data but adjust it to ensure Holiday Activity and Food Programme is *excluded* as it was a) a significant sum that suggested spending had increased, and b) was not reported consistently in returns. Their adjusted figures calculate that local authority expenditure on youth services in England totalled £447.5m in 2023-24. Others have sought to estimate the value of charities, trusts, foundations and volunteer contributions (which is under-reported in S251). Frontier Economics and UK Youth (2022) research suggested that volunteering and other giving amount to the equivalent of £0.6bn in time and £1bn in donated premises and other non-labour costs each year.
- 1.7** In the context of constrained public expenditure, it is important to ensure that spending is efficient and used in ways that achieve best public outcomes. Over the past decade, there has been increasing evidence of the effectiveness of youth provision in promoting wellbeing, preventing violence, and advancing social equity. For example, we have shown that spending

<sup>1</sup> Section 251 data has to be submitted annually by Local Authorities and details their planned and actual expenditure on education and children's social care. This is discussed more in Chapter 3.

on youth services creates a social return on investment (through a range of factors including reduced knife crime and anti-social behaviour) of anywhere between 2.5 and 7.8 (UK Youth, 2022). This creates a clear case for investing in youth services to reduce crime and violence affecting young people.

**1.8** Over the past decade, there has also been a **significant shift in how youth violence is understood and addressed in England and Wales**. Traditionally, youth violence was treated primarily as a criminal justice issue, with responses focused on punitive measures, law enforcement, and youth justice interventions. These approaches emphasised individual accountability and were largely reactive, often engaging with young people only after they had entered the justice system.

**1.9** However, there is increasing recognition that **this model alone is insufficient to prevent violence or support long-term positive outcomes for young people**. In response, policymakers and practitioners are adopting a public health approach to violence reduction (HM Government, 2018). This approach reframes violence as a preventable outcome shaped by wider social, economic, and environmental factors. It emphasises:

- Early intervention and prevention, underpinned by evidence-based practices and targeted support
- Addressing root causes such as poverty, trauma, social exclusion, and inequality
- Multi-agency collaboration across health, education, social care, youth services, and community organisations.
- A focus on equity, acknowledging that children from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds often face disproportionate risks and barriers (Brown, 2020, Case and Browning, 2021).

**1.10** The *Serious Violence Strategy* (2018) was a **key milestone in promoting this shift**, presenting violence as preventable and a result of factors such as adverse childhood experiences and harmful community environments. This was followed by the creation of Violence Reduction Units (VRUs)<sup>2</sup> across England and Wales, and the launch of the Youth Endowment Fund (2019), which supports and evaluates violence prevention programmes (Home Office, 2023, Lipscombe, *S et al.*, 2023). Subsequently in September 2024, the Labour government launched the Coalition to Tackle Knife Crime, stating that the coalition will bring together the police, health and education service, with charities, young people, victims' families, technology companies, and sports organisations *"to develop an extensive understanding of what causes young people to be dragged into violence"* (HM Government, 2024).

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<sup>2</sup> We refer to VRUs throughout this report acknowledging that some call themselves Violence Reduction Partnerships.

- 1.11** As a result, government, local authorities, and other commissioners have placed greater emphasis on early intervention and prevention. **This evolving policy context has direct implications for how youth services are funded, designed, and delivered** as youth services are brought into multi-agency partnerships to focus on prevention of violence and crime.

## Research questions

- 1.12** YEF noted these changes in funding for local areas and the associated difficulties in determining how much funding is available for youth work in different areas, and the discretion commissioners have over their funding of youth provision. Aligning with YEF's mission they also wanted to explore further how funders consider violence prevention in their decision-making noting this may differ between different types of funders. This study was therefore designed to help fill some gaps in knowledge regarding the sources of funding for youth services, the scale of that funding and the level of discretion that budget holders and delivery teams have in its utilisation. This is important context for influencing the scale and effectiveness of youth provision that prevents children and young people being drawn into violence.
- 1.13** YEF's brief for this research included a series of research questions, which are reproduced as follows:

### 1. Key decision-makers

- In England and Wales, who determines how much money is spent on local youth provision and who chooses which services are delivered?

### 2. Regional variation

- How does local authority funding of youth provision vary across England and Wales? In addition:
  - How does this map against the level of violence in the area?
  - How does this map against population characteristics including age, ethnicity and socioeconomic status?

### 3. Approach to youth provision

- What are these decision-makers priorities when thinking about local youth provision? In addition:
  - To what extent do they think about youth provision as a means of violence prevention?
  - How do they think about distribution and coverage of local services? To what extent do they aim for an equitable coverage of provision for children from Minority Ethnic backgrounds?
  - How do they think about the balance between primary, secondary, and tertiary provision?
  - To what extent do they consider and prioritise integration between services?

- How much freedom do they have to change their approach?
- To what extent are their decisions (e.g., about which needs to prioritise, which approaches to fund) informed by research and evidence?
- To what extent are their decisions informed by the perspectives of young people and those with lived experience?
- Do these aspects vary between nations and between different kinds of decision-makers?

#### 4. Budgets

- What services are budgets for youth provision spent on? In addition:
  - How much of the budget is allocated to primary, secondary, and tertiary services?
  - What is the duration of funding, and how consistent is the funding for individual organisations over time?
  - What proportion of the organisations that receive funding are Black-led?
  - How much does the size and allocation of the youth provision budget vary year-to-year?
  - Do these aspects vary between nations and between different kinds of decision-makers?

#### 5. Mentoring

- What mentoring for children and young people is taking place across England and Wales? In addition:
  - How prevalent are different types of mentoring?
  - What is the duration and intensity of mentoring programmes?
  - In what contexts is mentoring delivered?
  - Who is offered mentoring, who receives it, and who completes the full programme?
  - Who delivers mentoring and what training have they had?
  - How much funding is dedicated to mentoring and where does it come from?

#### 6. Policy and practice changes

- Are the current processes for determining local youth provision working well?
- What changes to these could help to the sector's ability to prevent children and young people from being drawn into violence?

## Report structure

**1.14** The structure of this report addresses each of these research questions in turn as follows:

- Chapter 2: Methodology - describing the primary research that informs this report.
- Chapter 3: Findings - who determines how much money is spent on local youth provision and who chooses which services are delivered?
- Chapter 4: Findings - how does local authority funding of youth provision vary across England and Wales?

- Chapter 5: Findings - what are decision-makers' priorities when thinking about local youth provision?
  - Chapter 6: Findings - what services are budgets for youth provision spent on?
  - Chapter 7: Findings - what mentoring is taking place across England and Wales?
  - Chapter 8: Findings - Are the current processes for determining local youth provision working well?
  - Chapter 9: Conclusions, insights and implications.
- 1.15** The report contains five Annexes: one which sets out a glossary of key terms for the report; a second which outlines a reference list for the study; a third which acknowledges the various contributors to the study; a fourth which provides additional information on funding streams described in Chapter 3; and a fifth which provides additional information on, and tables from, the data sources used in Chapter 4.
- 1.16** The budget figures used to estimate spending into youth services are those that relate to the financial year 2025-26 as they were known in autumn 2025 and before any announcements associated with the National Youth Strategy were known.

## Acknowledgements

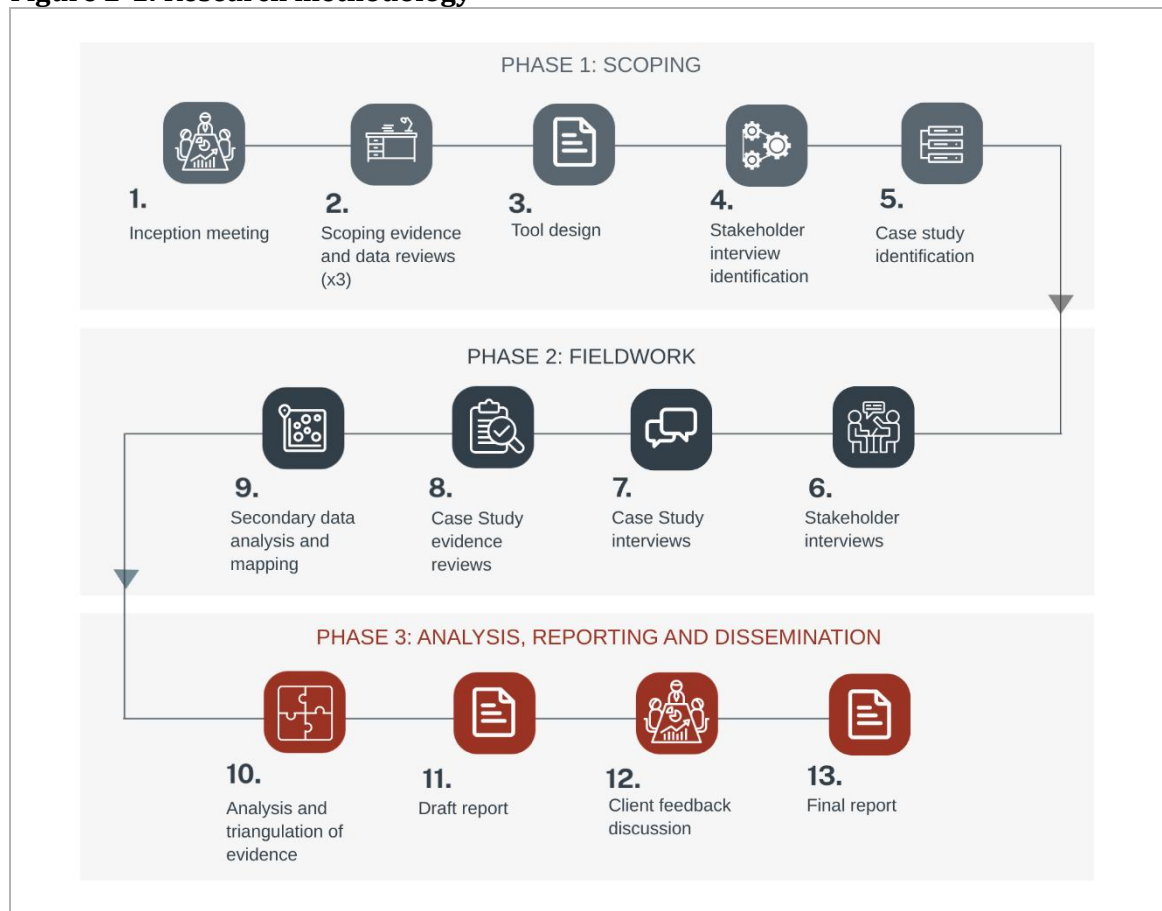
- 1.17** This report has been written by Dr Jo Hutchinson, Carolyn Hindle, Harriet Shaw, Paulina Szymczak, Louis Cantello and Matthew Timms from SQW, and Jacob Diggle and Somia Nasim from UK Youth.
- 1.18** We are indebted to each of the stakeholders who gave up their time to participate in our study, either through taking part in a stakeholder interview or case study interview. A list of organisations involved in the research is set out in the Methodology section and Annex C. We would also like to thank the members of our Expert Panel for their invaluable insights, expertise, and guidance, and the team at YEF who provided ongoing advice and support to direct the study, arrange peer review and ensure it provided necessary input for their recommendations for the youth sector on how to reduce violence amongst children and young people.

## 2. Methodology

### Overview of approach

- 2.1** An overview of the methods and key workstreams of the research undertaken between December 2024 and June 2025 is provided in Figure 2-1. In summary the research was informed by a scoping phase which collated available secondary evidence; fieldwork comprised a series of interviews with stakeholders who manage or have oversight of youth sector funding alongside a set of five case studies based in local authority areas in England and Wales. The remainder of this chapter describes each phase of the research in more detail.

**Figure 2-1: Research methodology**



Source: SQW

#### Phase 1: Scoping

- 2.2** The research began with a scoping phase to rapidly review available secondary evidence as a foundation for the research. This comprised:
- three rapid desk-based evidence reviews. These were explorations of key issues and factors affecting funding decisions, and were designed to provide a foundational

understanding to inform key lines of enquiry for fieldwork activity. The evidence reviews focused on developments over the last 15 years (since 2009) reflecting the policy arc described in the Introduction. Each rapid evidence review was written as a working paper to be used to inform the research design, research tools and help frame findings presented in this report. The three evidence reviews focused on:

- **Funded policy and programmes:** We started with a list of funds that the research team was familiar with and then extended this through input from the Expert Panel. Targeted online web searches, and Hansard searches were used to provide additional information, and additional funding streams. Funded youth work programmes were listed with information about source of funding, its focus, when the funding was available, and how long it was available to individual organisations. Funds were included in the list that were live alongside those that had recently closed as we needed to map funding sources that might be described in fieldwork. Evidence was not always complete, and the list of funding sources was extended as the primary research revealed additional sources. The evidence review was used to help identify key relevant stakeholders for fieldwork and inform discussions regarding relevant funding programmes.
- **Key policy instruments:** We traced youth sector policy since 2009 with a particular emphasis on youth violence prevention. We included an analysis of policies from the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) and other government departments related to youth provision. We also explored key concepts that informed the development of policy over that period from enforcement to prevention and ‘child first’. Evidence was again identified via suggestions from our Expert Panel, our networks and an online web search, rapid evidence search and summary. The evidence review was used to understand the policy context for youth service provision and commissioning, identify different partnership structures and inform research tool development.
- **Mentoring and associated funding** to provide an overview of the key issues associated with mentoring and its extent in England and Wales. A sample of quality papers, published since 2009 were selected to provide a range of perspectives on different models and types of mentoring. This scoping phase also explored the potential of using 360Giving data to supplement other data about the scale of mentoring in England and Wales. This was written as a working paper which informed the design of research tools.
- **Scoping secondary datasets which could be used to map both provision and need at local authority level**, including initial exploration to understand coverage of datasets, descriptive analysis and mapping/visual representation, before agreeing the focus of subsequent analysis with YEF. This included mapping of:

- youth services expenditure using S251 data<sup>3</sup> (provided by local authorities to the Department for Education) and Welsh youth work funding data from the Welsh Government<sup>4</sup>
- grant funding reported through 360Giving<sup>5</sup> (open data from funders about who, what are where they fund using the 360Giving standard)
- data showing demographic characteristics of young people<sup>6</sup>
- data showing the prevalence of youth crime<sup>7</sup>.

**2.3** The scoping activities informed a **workshop** with YEF on 17<sup>th</sup> February to **review emerging findings and learning** and discuss implications from the desk-based activity for the fieldwork phase. In particular, the workshop highlighted key lines of enquiry for research tools for use in interview and case study fieldwork, alongside priority stakeholders and characteristics for stakeholder interview and case study selection.

**2.4 Case study sample selection:** five case studies were used to explore sources and scale of funding, and how funding decisions were made. The case study selection process was as follows:

- Broad selection criteria were identified in collaboration with YEF, including geography (for regional spread and including Wales), urban/semi-urban/remote, levels of youth violence, mix of presence/lack of VRUs political context and level of investment in youth activities, alongside area availability and interest in taking part.
- Using these criteria, an initial longlist of 21 case study areas (and suggested shortlist of 5) was identified and shared with YEF for approval. Following sign off, the Local Government Association, National Youth Agency and UK Youth supported in providing introductions to lead contacts in each area. Some areas declined to participate citing time pressures, and suitable alternatives were subsequently agreed.

**2.5** The five areas (chosen from 397 local authorities in England and Wales) were selected to provide depth of insight across the wide range of funding environments, geographic and delivery contexts, and levels of youth violence<sup>8</sup>. It was not possible to secure agreement from local authorities with a range of political leadership although one area had recently changed council leadership. The following bullet points provide an introduction to each case study area; where available, range or approximate figures have been used for anonymity purposes.

<sup>3</sup> S251 available here: [LA and school expenditure, Financial year 2023-24 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>4</sup> Welsh youth work funding data available here: [Expenditure summary by local authority](#)

<sup>5</sup> 360Giving data available here: [360Giving GrantNav](#)

<sup>6</sup> Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) available here: [English indices of deprivation 2019 - GOV.UK](#); youth population data available here: [Nomis - Query Tool - Population estimates - local authority based by single year of age](#)

<sup>7</sup> Rate of children cautioned or sentenced data available here: [Youth Justice Statistics - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>8</sup> Levels of youth violence were determined using Youth Justice Statistics Data (2023-24) for England and Wales published by the Youth Justice Board (which are comprised of one, or several, local authorities (there are 152 YJB areas in total). The number of children cautioned or sentenced per 1,000 was then used to allocate areas into high/medium/low levels of youth violence.

- Area A is a small London Metropolitan Authority area, which has held a Labour majority for many years. It is predominantly urban, with a high number of people per hectare. With a total population of over 230,000 residents, the area has a very high proportion of young people (under 16s) in England and Wales (approximately 60,000), and residents are predominantly from Ethnic Minority backgrounds (65-70%). It has high levels of poverty, with 25-30% of young people living in poverty (compared with 19.9% for England). According to local data there has been an increase in youth violence offences since 2020, with half of all serious wounding offences including GBH with intent, attempted murder, stabbings and shootings carried out by those aged between 10-24 years.
- Area B is the smallest local authority within its Combined Authority area, under Labour majority control for over five years. It has a mix of urban and rural areas within its boundary. With a population of over 200,000 residents, it is predominantly 'White – English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British' (over 80%). It has areas of poverty, with 20-25% of children aged 0-15 living in poverty (compared with 19.9% for England), with some localities within the area having a rate as high as 70-75%. A local survey found young people's health and wellbeing were showing improvement since the COVID19 pandemic, but secondary school students reported feeling unsafe with respect to gangs and drug dealing.
- Area C is a large local authority in Wales, under Plaid Cymru majority control for approximately ten years. It is geographically diverse and largely rural with a low number of people per hectare. With a total population of around 120,000 people, young people make up approximately 15-20% of the overall population, however the population is ageing. Most of the population identify as Welsh only, British only, or a combination of UK identities; less than 5% report a non-UK identity. Rural and small-town deprivation is a key concern for the local authority. Local youth justice service data from 2020-23 show that the number of first-time entrants to the youth justice service are high when compared to the average in Wales.
- Area D is a large local authority, under Labour majority control for the last year. It has a mix of urban and rural areas within its boundary, with the urban element accounting for 20% of the area, but 90% of the population. With a total population of around 300,000 people, young people (aged 0-15 or in full time education aged 15-19) make up approximately 25-30% of the overall population. According to the latest school census, over 50% of pupils were from Ethnic Minority backgrounds. It has mid-levels of poverty, with 15-20% of young people living in poverty, and some localities within the area having rates as high as 30-35%. Local data shows the area has mid-levels of youth violence, with 125 cases per 100,000 (compared to 147 across England) and the number of violent offences committed by young people decreasing between 2021 and 2024 by 12-15%.
- Area E is a mid-sized local authority within its Combined Authority area, under Labour majority control for over 50 years. It is predominantly urban, with a high number of

people per hectare. With a total population of around 270,000, young people make up approximately 20-25% of the overall population, and residents are predominantly 'White – English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British' or 'White – Other' (over 80%). It has high levels of poverty, with almost 40% of children (aged 0-15 or in full time education aged 15-19) living in poverty (compared with 19.9% for England). According to local data sources, rates of youth violence have increased post-COVID, but have not yet returned to pre-COVID levels, with 24% fewer A&E admissions recorded.

## Phase 2: Fieldwork

- 2.6** A full set of research tools (including stakeholder interview topic guide, case study interview guide and briefing and privacy notices) were approved by YEF. In our briefing notices we said that individuals would not be named, for case studies we advised participants that *'case study areas will not be named, neither will individuals or organisations that participate in the research. However, this is a well-networked sector so we cannot guarantee anonymity in our reporting.'* Throughout this report we have therefore sought to achieve a balance between respecting confidentiality whilst providing enough information to help the reader to contextualise the findings or issues reported.
- 2.7** The fieldwork phase involved two parallel elements of activity:
- **Stakeholder interviews:** the longlist of stakeholders (x45) were invited to interview by SQW/UK Youth in late February 2025, with responses monitored centrally and a 'cascading' process to recruitment adopted in order to fill gaps and ensure a broad range of perspectives. In total, **32 interviews were completed with stakeholders**, with a list of organisations consulted in Annex C. This included: three central government departments, two Combined Authorities/regional governments, three local authorities, six PCCs and/or VRUs, one public health organisation, three housing associations, thirteen VSEs (including foundations and trusts) and one organisation from the private sector. The interviews took place online via MS Teams and ranged in duration from 30 to 60 minutes. Most of the interviews were one to one; a handful were paired. Each interview was, with permission, recorded and comprehensive notes were taken.
  - **Case study research** involved the following:
    - **A review of relevant documentation or data** supplied by the case study area related to youth provision commissioning and funding. The documents reviewed varied by case study area but for each area included the following where available: Section 251 and 360 Giving data, ONS demographic data, local authority committee papers (e.g., Children and Young People Committee papers), local authority and/or stakeholder strategy/policy documents (e.g., Community Safety Partnership, Local Authority or VRU strategies and action plans), and organisation and/or intervention websites.
    - **Semi-structured interviews** with a range of stakeholders across the case study areas. The first interview for each case study area was with a key contact for youth

services within the local authority who subsequently provided nominations and introductions for further interviewees. This key contact was usually a youth service leader, or an equivalent position. The roles and organisations of interviewees varied depending on the nature of commissioning activity within each case study area, however interviewees covered a range of key stakeholders including Directors and elected representatives of Children / Youth Services, youth service providers, police and crime commissioners, housing associations, VRUs, and combined authority leads. A summary of case study interviewees is provided in Table 2-1. All interviews took place online via MS Teams and ranged in duration from 30 to 90 minutes. Most of the interviews were one to one; a handful were paired. Each interview was, with permission, recorded and comprehensive notes were taken. In total, 30 interviews were completed with at least five in each area.

**Table 2-1: Case Study Interviewees**

Organisation	Organisation
<b>Case Study A: a London Metropolitan Authority</b>	
Local Authority - Head of Participation, Opportunity and Wellbeing	Local Authority - Community Safety Partnership Manager
Local Authority – Head of Youth Support Participation	Local Community Charity – CEO
National Youth Charity – Founder and CEO	
<b>Case Study B: a semi-urban Local Authority within a Combined Authority in England</b>	
Local Authority – Service Manager for Early intervention	Local Authority – Youth Work Team Member
Local Authority – Violent Crime Coordinator	Local Authority – Elected Councillor
Violence Reduction Unit - Director	Combined Authority - Violence Reduction Unit Research & Evaluation Specialist
Housing Association – Youth Work Coordinator & Senior Operations Manager	
<b>Case Study C: a Local Authority in Wales</b>	
Local Authority – Youth Service Manager	Local Authority – Youth Justice Manager
Local Authority – Community Safety Manager	Police and Crime Commissioner – Serious Violence Programme Lead
Local Youth Charity – Head of Development	
<b>Case Study D: a Unitary Local Authority in England</b>	

Organisation	Organisation
Local Authority – Youth Work and Participation Lead	Parish Council – Youth Service Manager
Local YMCA – Youth and Community Manager	Local Youth Charity – Operations Director
Local Charity - Director	
Case Study E: an urban Local Authority within a Combined Authority in England	
Local Authority – Senior Youth Work Manager	Local Authority – Community Safety Officer
Local Authority – Commissioning manager	Local Authority – Lead Member for Children & Youth People
Housing Association – Community Development Manager & Head of Communities and Tenant Involvement	Violence Reduction Unit – Partnership Lead
National Youth Charity – Chief Executive	VCSE Infrastructure Organisation - Strategic Lead

**2.8** All evidence was synthesised in a concise area case study working paper which was used for analysis and data extraction in the final report.

### Phase 3: Analysis, triangulation and reporting

**2.9** The project concluded with an analysis, triangulation and reporting phase, which comprised:

- **Quantitative analysis:** quantitative indicators on expenditure, crime and demographics were analysed and mapped at the local level; this included comparing expenditure levels against crime levels and demographics. Table 2.2 below lists the data sources used in the analysis of expenditure, youth crime and demographic data.

**Table 2-2: Data sources for maps, graphs and tables**

Data	Source	Further information
Expenditure on youth provision in <b>England</b>	<a href="#">DfE (2024) LA and school expenditure</a>	<i>Dataset:</i> Expenditure on children and young people services; FY 2023/2024 <i>Category of expenditure:</i> Services for young people: 3.5.3 Total Services for young people Ages 13-19
Expenditure on youth provision in <b>Wales</b>	<a href="#">Stats Wales (2024) Youth work, Expenditure summary by local authority</a>	Finance: Expenditure: Total spending; FY 2023/2024 Ages 11-25

Data	Source	Further information
Total population	<a href="#">ONS (2024) Population estimates for England and Wales: mid-2023</a> *	All ages; 2023
Youth population	<a href="#">ONS (2024) Population estimates for England and Wales: mid-2023</a> *	Age 11-25; Age 13-19; Age 10-17; 2023
Levels of youth crime	<a href="#">Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (2025) Youth justice statistics: 2023 to 2024</a>	All caution and sentence types and tiers; FY 2023/2024 Ages 10-17
Levels of youth violent crime	<a href="#">Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (2025) Youth justice statistics: 2023 to 2024</a>	Offence groups: 'Violence Against The Person', 'Robbery', 'Sexual Offences'; FY 2023/2024
360Giving Data	<a href="#">360Giving GrantNav</a>	Grants in England and Wales active in FY 2023/2024, using the following search terms: "Youth provision" OR "youth work" OR "youth services" OR "youth sector" OR "youth workers" OR "youth prevention" OR "youth crime" OR "youth violence" OR "young people provision" NOT "early years" NOT "primary school" OR "mentor" OR "mentoring" OR "trusted adult" OR "youth club" OR "youth centre" OR "youth hub" OR "youth activities" Excluded grants marked as 're-grants' and those where 'best available location' was not known
Ethnic composition	<a href="#">ONS (2021) TS021 - Ethnic group</a> *	Census 2021
Youth composition	<a href="#">ONS (2024) Population estimates for England and Wales: mid-2023</a> *	Age 11-25; 2023
Socioeconomic deprivation in <b>England</b>	<a href="#">Ministry of Housing, Communities &amp; Local Government (2019) English indices of deprivation 2019</a>	Proportion of LSOAs in top 10% most deprived; Proportion of LSOAs in top 20% most deprived; 2019 (latest release)
Socioeconomic deprivation in <b>Wales</b>	<a href="#">StatsWales (2019) WIMD 2019</a>	Proportion of LSOAs in top 10% most deprived; Proportion of LSOAs in top 20% most deprived; 2019 (latest release)

Source: SQW. \* = accessed via nomis

- **Qualitative analysis:** all qualitative feedback was written up, input to the qualitative analysis software MaxQDA, coded, and thematically analysed by research question and emerging key themes.
- A series of **internal workshops**, including members of the External Panel were conducted in parallel to analysis to reflect on the research findings and consider implications and insights from the research.

**2.10** A draft report was prepared for review by YEF and an external expert. Two sets of comments and feedback were then incorporated for further review and agreement. This final report will inform YEF-developed recommendations for how the youth sector across England and Wales can support the reduction of serious violence amongst children and young people.

## Data limitations

**2.11** The study findings – presented in the following chapters – should be interpreted with the following caveats and limitations in mind:

- National sources of financial data are inconsistently reported and have gaps at a local level, by funding and resource allocation. There are concerns around the quality of Section 251 data, with inconsistent reporting practices across local authorities leading to inaccuracies and limiting the reliability of spatial comparisons. With respect to 360Giving, the data relies on voluntary submissions by funders, with differences in data coverage across funders and local areas affecting comparability between areas. In addition, for some grants the information on where the funding is actually spent is missing. These issues are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.
- All stakeholder and case study interviewees opted into the research – in other words, responses may be influenced by self-selection bias. Where possible we have triangulated findings across different data sources (quantitative and qualitative) to mitigate this. Qualitative feedback was analysed by theme. Our reporting provides a sense of scale of responses, but because these were open questions designed to encourage discussion of locally significant themes it is inappropriate to undertake frequency analysis of qualitative data.
- Case studies are typical but not socio-economically or geographically representative. Case study research was conducted in five local authority areas to explore youth sector funding and decision-making in different geographies and contexts. The case study areas provide a balance by geography, youth funding expenditure and levels of youth violence. They cannot represent the wide variety of funding and delivery models that operate in England and Wales but, together, they provide sufficient difference to enable us to contrast different approaches and identify common themes.

- Case study areas are not politically representative. Despite sampling effort to ensure a mix of political perspectives through the case studies there is limited political range between the areas. At the time of the fieldwork there were no Conservative-led Local Authority case study areas that agreed to take part, and fieldwork was undertaken before elections created Reform-led councils. In addition, we undertook two additional stakeholder interviews with elected members from local authorities that (at the time) were led by Conservative councils.
- While we asked about actual budget and resources allocated to Youth Services, we found that knowledge about specific budgets was dispersed across different parts of a local authority and different providers. We have pieced together information shared in interview with information found in council papers and local reports to create an overview of funding sources, scale, and services in each case study area but, as we did not conduct a forensic audit it is unlikely that all services are captured in all case studies.

### 3. Findings: Who determines how much money is spent on local youth provision and who chooses which services are delivered?

#### Summary of key findings

- Youth provision is funded by different public and private sector stakeholders that we have categorised as:
  - **National government** (including several different government departments)
  - **Local government** (including both local and combined authorities)
  - **Public service partnerships** (connecting government services locally)
  - **Independent youth provision** (including independent grant providers, intermediary organisations, Housing associations and Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations),
- At national government level, ministers set the overall policy and funding direction, but responsibility is fragmented across multiple departments. We identified 30 different national streams that fund local youth services in England, of these only three were sponsored by more than one department. A rough estimate suggests these total £497m each year.
- Local authorities play a key role in allocating and commissioning youth services and have a statutory duty to ensure ‘sufficient’ provision. In England, central government funding allocations are not ring-fenced for youth services, unlike in Wales. Elected council members make decisions informed by their officers, but after more than ten years of austerity, those decisions are often about what to cut or how to target, rather than how to invest.
- Public service partnership arrangements connect local authority youth services with other public services such as health and housing. Contributions are managed locally through a set of different partnership arrangements including (but not limited to) Community Safety Partnerships (that operate everywhere at either district, unitary or borough level), Integrated Care Boards, and in twenty sub-regions, Violence Reduction Units. Independent grant providers also play a growing role in youth work funding. These organisations set their own priorities but often work with the youth sector to manage and deliver projects.
- Youth services in Wales have more structured support infrastructure than many regions in England. Wales has a National Youth Work Strategy and central provision for its oversight and accountability. This includes ring-fenced funding, national data sharing structures, and Engagement and Progression Coordinator roles in each LA. Wales demonstrates a policy commitment to stronger co-ordination and co-production, but it still experiences severe challenges in ensuring all young people can access the support they need.

## Introduction

- 3.1** This chapter explores the roles of national and local stakeholders in England and Wales who influence both the funding levels for local youth provision and the services that are ultimately delivered. It draws on data from the scoping evidence reviews, alongside stakeholder and case study interviews. The chapter focuses on *who* decides how much is spent and *who* determines which services are provided. Subsequent chapters will explore the *why* and *what* in more detail. England and Wales are discussed separately for clarity. As mentioned earlier in the report, many different groups are involved in youth services, and we therefore start this section with a description of different types of youth service and an overview of the main stakeholders.

## Youth provision stakeholders

- 3.2** Youth services include a wide range of different types of activity, modes of delivery and provider types (see Figure 3-1). Youth services range from open access youth clubs which offer; a range of sports, cultural or life skills, mentoring offered either through volunteers or youth workers, connecting and signposting young people to positive activities. Services can also be more targeted to work with specific individuals or groups of young people. There are many different organisations involved in providing these services including local authority provision or services run by the voluntary and community sector. Further information about the types of services delivered is provided in Chapter 6.

**Figure 3-1: Summary of modes of delivery and provider types**

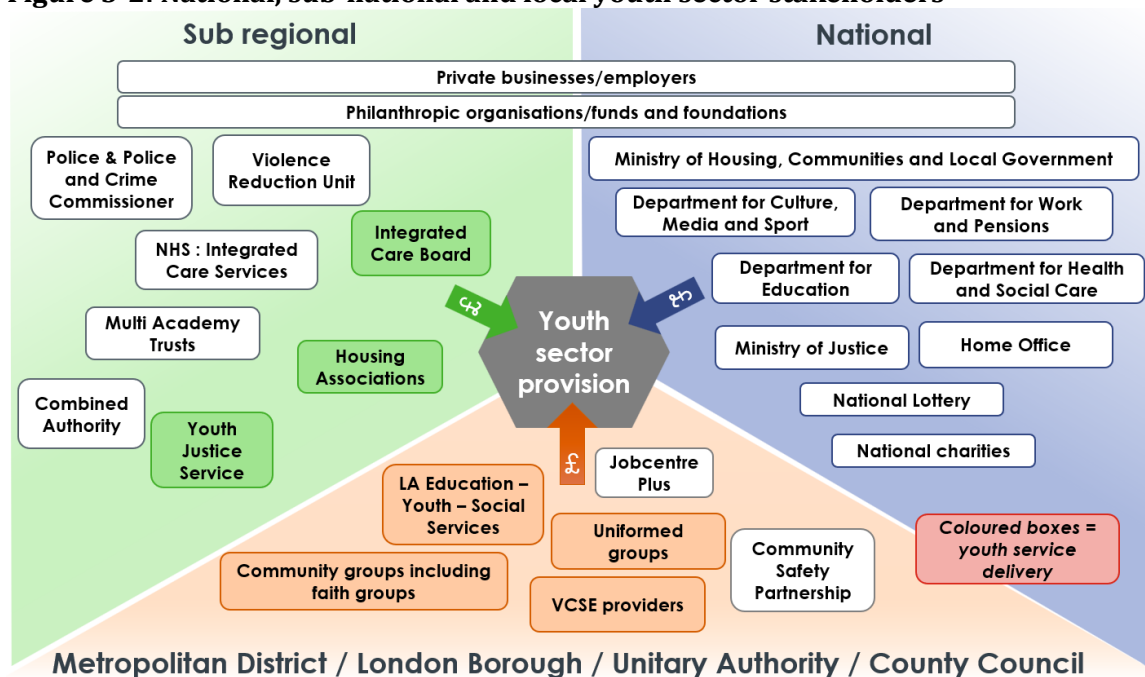
<p><b>Modes of delivery</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centre- or facility-based</li> <li>• Detached and street-based youth work (not typically attached to a building or hub)</li> <li>• Outreach youth work (typically an ‘extension’ of building- and hub-based provision)</li> <li>• Outdoor learning in parks, sports fields or residential</li> <li>• Digital youth work</li> </ul> <p><b>Provider types</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local authority youth services</li> <li>• National uniformed organisations (for example, the Scouts or Girlguiding)</li> <li>• Voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE) organisations, not affiliated to a national uniformed organisation</li> <li>• Provision delivered through faith groups</li> <li>• Organisations with embedded youth workers, for example, Housing Associations, schools and NHS Hospitals</li> </ul>
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*Source: SQW and UK Youth (2024). Youth provision and life outcomes: a study of longitudinal research.*

- 3.3** Youth service funding reflects this diversity of provision. Figure 3-2 shows that there are many different sources of funding for local youth provision. It is a complex mix of national and

local government sources, with resources also provided by other public, private and philanthropic organisations. Generally, provision is organised at the local level and within local authority areas, although some provision is managed and delivered through organisations that work across different areas (including for example some Youth Justice Services, Integrated Care Boards or Housing Associations).

**Figure 3-2: National, sub-national and local youth sector stakeholders**



Source: SQW/UK Youth

**3.4** This complex funding environment has evolved as youth sector policy has changed. There are five key policy themes that help explain this picture and provide necessary context for answering the research question ‘who determines how much money is spent on local youth provision and who chooses which services are delivered?’:

- HM Treasury uses a funding formula to allocate resources to local authorities that includes metrics specifically related to young people and their needs, particularly through the Children and Young People’s Services (CYPS) relative needs formula. However, there is **no expectation or requirement that local authorities in England should ring-fence any of their allocation for youth services**. As we explain later in this chapter the situation is different in Wales.
- Austerity measures from 2011 onwards resulted in cuts to local services which affected local authority youth services very significantly. Local authority expenditure on youth services has fallen by 73% in England and 27% in Wales since 2010-11, equating to a real-term cut of £1.2 billion in England (YMCA, 2024). Different authorities adopted different approaches to funding cuts over this period. **Thus, funding decisions made several years ago still shape the context for contemporary decisions on youth provision.**

The National Youth Agency (2022) have characterised the current local authority models into four types of commissioning models; 1) local authority maintains delivery of youth services, 2) a mix of local authority and external commissioned services, 3) all youth work commissioned externally with no local authority delivery, or 4) no funded local authority services (generally a temporary situation borne of budget crises).

- Local authorities have to balance a wide range of other statutory duties passed to them by national government. Research from the Institute for Government and UK Youth (2024) outlined how spending on social care has increased, and while all other services have seen real cuts (including waste collection, planning, road maintenance and libraries) it is youth services whose budgets have suffered most cuts. **The statutory duty for youth services is less strongly phrased and monitored than other duties**, with no minimum standard or obligation to fund services to a particular level. As such, it is considered to be an area where budget savings can be made- even if under duress.
- The research also notes that a consequence of this is that preventative local authority spending on services like youth clubs and children's centres was cut by more than three-quarters (77.9%) between 2009/10 and 2022/23, while acute spending on looked after children and safeguarding services rose by more than half (58.1%) over the same period (Institute for Government & UK Youth (2024).
- The Serious Violence Strategy (2018) established a public health approach to youth violence prevention i.e. viewing violence as a preventable consequence of a range of factors, such as adverse early-life experiences, or harmful social or community experiences and influences. Action in the strategy centred on four main themes: tackling county lines and misuse of drugs; early intervention and prevention; supporting communities and local partnerships and law enforcement and the criminal justice response. This draws **other partners into youth provision** and funding has followed which partly offsets some of the cuts described above but only in certain areas and for specific and targeted services.
- As funding became tighter, **service providers have sought alternative funds from a range of sources** including independent funders (e.g., Foundations, Charities, Trusts and Companies). They have also been commissioned by other public sector organisations such as health and housing bodies who recognise that youth provision can help them to achieve their social policy objectives.

**3.5** Broadly, four key categories of funding provider can be identified from the above narrative. The categories of providers are described as national government (including different departments working individually or collaboratively), local government (focussing on local authority areas but also including partnership structures), public services which tend to operate on a sub-regional level, and independent funders (e.g., Foundations, Charities, Trusts and Companies) that can be hyper-local through to national. Decisions about funding levels

and which services are delivered are often closely linked. In many cases, those who decide how much funding is available also set parameters for how it should be spent. Different decision-makers have distinct drivers, priorities, and strategies (discussed further in chapter 5 in this report). In the next sections we outline for each of the four different categories of providers: who the key stakeholders are, their funding streams, and the services they support.

## National government youth provision in England

- 3.6 Central government plays a key role in youth provision** by creating policies and laws that guide youth sector development, directly funding youth services and programmes, coordinating and overseeing efforts across departments, providing training and setting standards for youth workers and services, delivering national programmes and support platforms as well as promoting of youth voice. Ultimately central government determines the scale of public funding available for youth provision in England.
- 3.7** Government funding and guidance for youth services are not however housed within a single Department as **many departments' policy priorities intersect to support young people**. These include areas of education, employability, housing, policing and community safety, and health. In our scoping review, we identified 30 different national streams that fund local youth services in England, of these only three were sponsored by more than one department. This wide spread of responsibility indicates the complexity of the funding landscape and the presence of decision makers with varying remits in the provision of youth services. In this chapter we list the government departments whose remit and responsibilities connect with youth provision in England before considering the position of the Welsh Government. Table 3-1 provides a summary list for each of the different department sponsored programmes or funded policies that are mentioned, the total value allocated to the Fund, when it operated, where and whether it was for open access or targeted support.
- 3.8** Ministerial responsibility for youth services is with the Minister for Sport, Media, Civil Society and Youth at the DCMS although the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families at the DfE is responsible for youth justice and safeguarding as well as family hubs.
- 3.9** The **Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)** has overall responsibility for youth policy and funding for all out of school programmes in England providing support to the youth sector to deliver high quality services to young people. More specifically, it is responsible for the Statutory Duty for youth services; Section 507B of the Education Act 1996 (as amended), places several duties on local authorities including a duty to 'secure as far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient provision for educational and recreational leisure-time activities for young people'. Associated statutory guidance was last updated in 2023. Local authorities must ensure that qualifying young people (in England this is young people aged 13 – 19 and up to 25 for those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)) have sufficient educational leisure-time activities aimed at improving their well-being, and that local authorities both include young people's views on positive activities and help to publicise

them. In defining “sufficient” service, the guidance said that local authorities should publish an assessment of their area’s need for youth services and how the services they offer meet that requirement.

**3.10** DCMS also directly funds a range of national programmes. It funded the National Citizen Service (NCS) programme for 16- & 17-year-olds until March 2025, and distributed the Youth Investment Fund (YIF) which was mainly for capital investment in building and renovating youth clubs. DCMS also funds the National Youth Agency (NYA) to set professional standards, qualifications and a curriculum for youth work. In addition, they distribute funds to expand and diversify existing provision via the Local Youth Transformation Pilot and Dormant Assets Scheme and funds for targeted provision such as the Adventures Away from Home Fund. Finally, DCMS use the youth service funding for workforce development (DCMS, 2023).

**3.11** Other government departments that invest in youth services include:

- The **Department for Education** (DfE) funds a variety of youth provision programmes, ancillary to general education funding to support young people’s education, wellbeing, and personal development. These initiatives are delivered through schools, colleges, local authorities, and community and youth organisations. Examples include holiday activity programmes, and enrichment programmes.
- The **Department of Health and Social Care** (DHSC) supports youth provision primarily through targeted mental health and wellbeing initiatives, often in collaboration with other government departments and local authorities. While the DHSC doesn’t directly fund general youth clubs or universal youth services, it plays a crucial role in enhancing health-focused youth support, such as youth work services focused on children and young people with poor mental health. It directly funds early years and family health programmes as well as the Public Health Youth Innovation Grants which was a local grant programme designed to support grassroots initiatives that strengthen community ties and improve quality of life. At a local level this is felt through the contribution of ICBs to the formal and informal partnership structures that local youth service providers are involved in.
- The **Department for Work and Pensions** (DWP) has a core Youth Offer primarily aimed at supporting young people, particularly those not in education, employment, or training (NEET). Their programmes focus on employment support, skills development, and reducing long-term dependency on benefits and are delivered locally through Jobcentre Plus. The recently announced Youth Guarantee Trailblazers may involve some engagement with youth services but are mostly focused on employment support.
- The **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government** (MHCLG) which supports youth provision through a range of targeted, community-based initiatives. While it is not the main department responsible for youth services, it has funded programmes that indirectly and directly support young people, particularly those in vulnerable or underserved communities. They are not a primary funder of general youth work but play

a vital role in youth provision where housing, family support, homelessness, and community cohesion intersect. They are responsible for setting and contributing to overall funding levels for local authorities and dispersing flexible funds such as Stronger Communities and Shared Prosperity Funds.

**3.12** At a national level, the provision and commissioning of **youth violence prevention** interventions often involves multiple players reflecting the collaborative and multifaceted approach needed to address youth violence prevention. The government departments driving and funding the prevention agenda are:

- **Home Office** - The Home Office leads on youth violence-related programmes and funds VRUs. It also oversees community safety and prevention partnerships.
- **Ministry of Justice (MoJ)** - The UK MoJ funds several key programmes aimed at supporting youth provision, particularly focusing on early intervention, diversion from crime, and rehabilitation aiming to reduce youth offending and promote positive outcomes for young people. These initiatives are primarily delivered through Youth Offending Teams (YOTs), with strategic oversight from the Youth Justice Board.

**3.13** More generally, **HM Treasury** plays a critical overarching role by setting departmental budgets, including cuts or increases, and shaping the fiscal framework in which all other departments operate. Its decisions are heavily influenced by political priorities, which then cascade down to departmental strategies and funding allocations (Downs, 2025).

**3.14** Overall, the national government policy and funding environment is characterised by:

- **Cross departmental change and transition:** There are currently major policy initiatives in development including Young Futures Hubs (DfE), Young Futures Prevention Partnerships (Home Office), and a new National Youth Strategy (DCMS led and due in autumn 2025). All these initiatives point to the diverse and complex distribution of funds for youth provision.
- **A desire to support better integration and cross-departmental working:** For example, the Young Futures Hubs is an £95 million initiative (involving central government departments, DCMS, DfE, Home Office, MoJ as well as wider national and local stakeholders) to support young people's mental health and prevent crime, with a network of hubs and additional support in A&E units and custody centres (DCMS, 2024). The New National Youth Strategy's focus will be on better-coordinated youth services, local empowerment, and a review of approaches of funding for youth facilities and programmes (House of Commons Library, 2024). Strategy development is being led by DCMS, with support from other central government departments, young people and wider national and local stakeholders.

- **Investment in young people but limited investment in youth work:** While all these departments collectively contribute to a network of support systems for young people, relatively little is directly allocated to youth work provision.
- **Fragmented policy and complex funding context for youth services.** For example, whilst the statutory duty sits with DCMS, some stakeholders argued that the DfE—with its focus on families, education, and early intervention—might be better placed to lead on youth services. Others pointed to the fragmentation caused by having community safety and youth violence funding led by the Home Office, separate from youth work policy.

*“This further contributes to a lack of collaboration and cohesiveness at national level, which has a knock-on impact at local level. Overall, for children, young people and their families, the policy and funding picture is very disjointed at national level.” – Stakeholder Interviewee - Local Government Advocacy Group*

**3.15** These points are elaborated further when we review the different funding streams from these departments for youth provision. Table 3-1 details central government departments’ funds available to support youth provision at the time of the research (which spanned the financial years 2024-25 and 2025-26). Funds listed therefore include some that were phased out at the end of March 2025. It does not include updates announced from April 2025 onwards due to the timing of this study (further information included in Annex D). Key points to note include:

- There are **no core ring-fenced national government funding streams for youth provision**. The local authority award through MHCLG is listed in Table 3-1 but because there is no expectation of ringfencing for youth services, no award amount is listed (we present more information on local authority funding in Chapter 4).
- **Funding streams are in transition.** March 2025 saw the closure of major funds including the National Citizen Service, and Youth Investment Fund and others have had extensions announced such as the Million Hours fund and the Adventures Away from Home Fund, but the longer-term future of programmes listed is not known. Still others are new for 2025 but only for a short period (such as the Local Youth Transformation and Youth Guarantee Trailblazers). The effect of this transition period creates great uncertainty within the sector, and we discuss the effect of short-term funding further in chapter 6.
- **Cross-departmental funding is not common.** However, the DfE do have some funds that are shared with other departments (for example, The Enrichment Partnership Pilot with DCMS, and the Family Hubs and Start for Life with DHSC).
- **Funding sources are rarely long-lived.** Some of the listed funds have been in place since 2016, but most are fewer than five years old.
- **Disaggregated data is not published** in a format that enables us to report how much is allocated to youth services.

**Table 3-1: Funding landscape: Government spending by department and Fund available in 2024/5 and 2025/6 (compiled March 2025)**

Organisation	Policy or Programme	Total value of fund	Live (start and end date)	Nation	Open/ Targeted	Youth crime/ violence focus
Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)	Civil Society Strategy	Overarching strategy covers individual funds	Announced in 2018 Unclear if ongoing	UK	N/A	N/A
	Youth Investment Fund	£560m	2022-2025	England	Both	No
	Dormant Assets Scheme	£87.5m for youth services	Started 2008. Current phase 2024-2028.	England/ UK	Both	No
	NCS: National Citizen Service	£69m in FY 2022/23	2011-2025 Annual award varied	UK	Both	No
	Local Youth Transformation Pilot	£8m for 10 – 12 pilot areas	2024- March 2026	England	Open	Yes
	NYA Core Grant	£3.93m per annum	2022-23 to 2024-25	England and Wales	N/A	No
	UK Youth Parliament	£2.4m per annum	2024-25	UK	Both	No
	Adventures Away from Home Fund	£1.1m	April 2024-March 2026	England	Targeted	No
	Creative Careers	£0.95m	2022-2025	England	Targeted	No
	Youth Worker Bursary Fund	£0.79m per annum	Start 2019 – ongoing	England	Targeted	No
	Million Hours Fund	£22m	2023-2026	England	Open	No

Organisation	Policy or Programme	Total value of fund	Live (start and end date)	Nation	Open/ Targeted	Youth crime/ violence focus
DCMS & National Lottery Community Fund	#iwill fund	£66m plus 1:1 match funding	2016-2026	England	Targeted	No
DCMS and Department for Education (DfE)	Enrichment Partnership Pilot	£2.7m	2024-March 2025	England	Targeted	No
DfE	Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF)	£200m per annum	2022-2025	England	Targeted	No
Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and DfE	Family Hubs and Start for Life programme	£126m	2022 -2025	England	Open	No
DHSC	Early Support Hubs	£7m	2025-2026	England	Open	No
	Public Health Youth Innovation Grants	Determined LA & ICSs	Unknown	England	Unknown	No
Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)	Youth Guarantee Trailblazers	£45m across 8 sub-regions	Unknown	Regional	Targeted	No
Home Office	Violence Reduction Units	£315m (2019-2023) £55m (2023-24 FY)	2019-2025	England and Wales	Targeted	Yes
	Safer Streets Fund	£125m for capital investment	2020 – 2025	England	Targeted	Yes

Organisation	Policy or Programme	Total value of fund	Live (start and end date)	Nation	Open/ Targeted	Youth crime/ violence focus
	Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs)	Determined by each PPC	Awarded annually	England and Wales	Targeted	Yes
	Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs)	Determined by each PPC	Determined by each PPC	England and Wales	Targeted	Yes
	Police & Fire Cadets	Unknown	Ongoing	England	Targeted	No
Ministry of Defence (MoD) and DfE	The Ministry of Defence Cadet forces	£180m per annum	Ongoing	UK	Targeted	No
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)	Local Authority Provision	Determined by each LA	Awarded annually	England	Both	Yes (in some areas)
	Youth Integration and Uniformed Youth Group	£7.6m	2025-2026	England	Both	No
	Local Growth and UK Shared Prosperity Fund	Determined by LA	Funded annually	England	Open	No
	Stronger Communities Fund	Unknown	Funded annually	England	Open	No
Ministry of Justice	Turnaround Programme	£300m	December 2022-March 2025	England and Wales	Targeted	Yes
	Youth Justice Services Grant via the Youth Justice Board	£85.7m in England £6.6m in Wales	Awarded annually	England and Wales	Targeted	Yes

Source: SQW/UKY Review of publicly available documentation/data see Table D-1  
Includes sources known to be live from April 2024 including Funds being wound down in the FY 2024/25.

**3.16** Due to these factors, providing a snapshot of the total amount of available funding to the English youth sector is problematic. If we take funding that we know was still live in April 2025 (to exclude those programmes that were closed down but include transitional funding) and assume an equal division of funding over time when it covers multiple years, then we calculate **government funding nationally to be circa £497m** (Table 3-2).

**3.17** However, this is likely to be an overestimate because some programmes support a wide range of services for young people including, but not exclusively, youth activities. Meanwhile others support a wider age range of children and young people. In both cases, the proportion of support for youth activities for young people is not known. In summary, Table 3-2:

- *includes* the Youth Guarantee Trailblazers because these will include outreach via youth services and youth clubs, but also support career and employability advice and training programmes. These figures therefore over-estimate the amount of funding that supports youth worker-led activities.
- *includes* the DHSC Family Hubs programme which support families including families with young people. This is included in the list because family support could include support for older siblings, and young parents.
- *includes* non-discretionary funding for statutory services, notably the Youth Justice Service (£85.7m in England and £6.6m in Wales per annum) which are not included in S251 returns.
- *excludes* local authority spend (see chapter 4) and Holiday Activities and Food programme as most clubs offering HAF provision were primary schools (Cox et al, 2022).

**Table 3-2: Summary of government funding live in April 2025 (compiled March 2025)**

Government Department	£m
Department for Culture Media and Sport	49
Department of Health and Social Care	7
Department of Health and Social Care and Department for Education (DfE)	42
Department for Work and Pensions	45
Home Office	80
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government	8
Ministry of Justice	86
Ministry of Defence and DfE	180
<b>Total</b>	<b>497</b>

Source: SQW/UKY Review of publicly available documentation/data see Annex Table D-2

- 3.18** It is worth noting that these funding sources are used to support delivery infrastructure, capital spend as well as revenue funding and some are also used for other services (such as the Youth Guarantee Trailblazers). Also, only selected areas are eligible to apply for most of these funds.
- 3.19** Direct comparators are problematic but to indicate scale, in 2021/22 the NHS spent £12bn on mental health services of which 8% was on children and young people (The King's Fund, 2024) which would equate to £960m each year. Meanwhile in 2022–23, Sport England spent £323 million across its programmes (benefitting all ages) (Sport England, 2024). Also, in 2024/25, Arts Council England reported total spending of approximately £870 million – again across all ages but with young people being a strategic priority within its Let's Create strategy. Against these comparators, the allocation to youth services – which affect all young people - is very low.

## Local government youth provision in England

- 3.20 Youth services is a devolved policy area throughout the UK.** In England and Wales, local authorities hold the responsibility for providing, commissioning and funding local youth services. The geography of responsibility in England is such that responsibility for youth services sit with Unitary Authorities, Metropolitan Districts and London Boroughs in urban areas and County Councils in other areas. These types of local authority remain responsible in areas that are within Combined Authorities (CAs). Nevertheless, CAs may elect mayors who choose to prioritise youth services and who have access to some additional resource.
- 3.21** As outlined earlier in section 3.9 every local authority has a statutory duty to ensure sufficient provision of youth services. There is no minimum standard for quality and local authorities are not obliged to fund services to a particular level. However, the revised guidance enforced in 2023, indicates that for transparency purposes, local authorities should publish their needs assessment alongside the rationale for their actions and decisions in order to help demonstrate that local authorities have done what is reasonably practicable to secure sufficient services. (DCMS, 2023). While the case study local authorities have undertaken work to assess needs these are not clearly available on all local authority websites. The services they deliver are only partly a function of a rational assessment of need. Other factors also affect who influences how much funding is spent on youth provision and what type of services they offer. These include local authority structures, and statutory partnerships.
- 3.22** In England there is no single senior job role within local authorities that are clearly responsible for youth provision (unlike for example a Chief Finance Officer or Chief Planning Officer). Youth services are rarely a standalone service with its own dedicated Director. Rather, local authorities' youth services can be located within a range of different departments, overseen by a Director of Children's Services, Director of Social Care or Director of Adult Services for example.

**3.23** Where youth services fit within the structures of local government has an influence on what outcomes they are expected to deliver. Youth services that come within Children’s and Education Directorates might be expected to prioritise delivery within schools and PRUs. By contrast, services that sit within community safety or children’s social services will be expected to take on different services for different groups of young people. For example, youth workers in Case Study B were seeking to become part of the Youth Justice team because, as a statutory service, this was a more secure funding environment. In case study D services were based within children services. In Case Study E, they were situated within the Children and Young People’s Service but informed by a leadership team including the Director of Education, Director of Safeguarding, Director of Commissioning and Director of Health. The interviewees mentioned as a result they are directed by many and competing priorities.

### Case Study D – multi-agency collaboration

The local authority is the lead commissioner for youth services. Youth services are within the Children’s Services department, working closely with Early Help and Youth Justice. The council acts as commissioner, connector and coordinator of services supporting other funders to allocate funding, make referrals, and plan strategically. It collaborates with a wide range of partners including the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), health, and education services, and over 30 VSC organisations. The council also supports quality assurance through initiatives like the Youth Provision Safe Practice Mark.

Multi-agency collaboration is a defining feature of provision in the area. Strategic partnerships such as the Children and Young People’s Prevention and Wellbeing Alliance bring together public, health, and voluntary sectors to align priorities and share resources. The Youth Justice Strategic Board oversees performance and promotes trauma-informed, child-first approaches. This integrated but resource-constrained system relies on funds for both targeted and open-access services

**3.24 Elected councillors make decisions and are accountable for them** - and they are advised by their executive teams and specialist officers. Council leaders, and their executive teams set annual budgets and corporate plans that have to be approved by their elected members at a full council meeting. Annual budgets have to balance income and outgoings (recent announcements about local authorities declaring bankruptcy illustrate how challenging this can be). Within the budget cycle local authorities’ own scrutiny committees are expected to formally challenge decision-makers. Systems underpinning financial decision making in local authorities seek to ensure decisions and the information on which they are based, are robust, and the responsibility clearly rests with elected councillors. They have considerable decision-making influence, but youth services are often only a priority if the elected member is personally interested or it is clearly part of their manifesto.

- 3.25 Directors and deputy directors within local authorities** – particularly those responsible for youth services, education and economic development have considerable decision-making influence. They are often required to balance local needs analysis and assessments of value for money against central government priorities and ministerial directives, as well as the views and interests of locally elected officials. They inform budget planning but do not have power to authorise spending levels – that rests with full council.
- 3.26** Depending on local structures, some **heads of youth service or equivalent roles** also wield influence as to how youth work is commissioned and delivered once budgets have been set by directors and deputy directors and approved at full council. Whilst they may not determine the total amount of funding allocated to youth provision, they often shape service priorities and, in many cases, work alongside young people during the commissioning process.
- 3.27** The **value placed on youth work by decision-makers is a critical factor in determining funding levels**. Stakeholders reported that where senior leaders – whether in local or central government – understand and value the benefits of youth provision, it is easier to develop and sustain strategic services, even in financially constrained settings. In contrast, in areas where this understanding is lacking, youth services struggle to gain support. For example, one stakeholder noted that there were two local neighbouring metropolitan authorities, one with a lot of gang violence and the other with some. Politicians in the latter area were reluctant to characterise their area as having a gang violence issue and therefore did not apply for significant available funding to address the issue.

*“It comes back to individual understanding about the value of youth work - so in one area they have built a commissioning structure that is built on the principles of youth work, and their commissioning is aligned with that.” – Stakeholder Interviewee - Local Youth Agency*

- 3.28** However, some interviewees expressed concern that this has also made local decision-making more politically driven. As the number of elected roles has increased (e.g. introduction of Mayors and Police & Crime Commissioners), so too has the tendency for **decisions to be influenced by electoral considerations**. Some interviewees felt that this has led to policies that are more reactive – driven as responses to tragic events and shifts in public opinion – rather than rooted in early intervention and long-term preventative approaches, which research consistently identifies as more effective.

*“Local authority provision and decision making are politically driven now. There focus seems to be to respond to problems, via rapid response when they occur, to be seen to be dealing with youth issues. But it is a reactive and public facing approach, driven by politicians thinking about what is going help them to get re-elected. So, it is not about early intervention it is ‘trouble informed practise or adverse childhood experiences’.” – Stakeholder Interviewee – Housing Association*

**3.29** The following sub-section outlines the key local stakeholder groups offering additional funding for youth services, including Combined Authorities and Police and Crime Commissioners.

#### Combined Authorities

**3.30 Combined Authorities (CA)** have a limited role in youth provision. A CA is formed between several local authorities including county councils and possibly unitary councils. Responsibility for youth services remains with those councils. Most CAs have an elected Mayor and their remit covers transport and infrastructure, economic development and growth and adult skills. Mayors have influence and can convene and organise partners but do not allocate funding for youth services. In one area the CA had made a commitment to review children's services, which would include youth services. But more usually, CAs have limited direct influence on youth provision. The only significant exception to this is currently with three Combined Authorities that have assumed the powers of the Police and Crime Commissioner and in these three places there are stronger links between the CA and youth provision as it relates to violence and crime.

#### Police and Crime Commissioners

**3.31 The Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs)** are directly elected politicians who are responsible for securing an "efficient and effective" police force for their area. A PCC represents every police force area in England and Wales with the exceptions of London, Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire where the powers of the PCC are held by Combined Authority. Their budgets are derived from annual government grants to police forces. While much of this funding is earmarked for core policing, PCCs can use commissioning budgets and grants for youth services if aligned with their strategic priorities. In practice, PCCs support prevention, early intervention and diversion programmes. Interviewees noted that PCCs operate independently, making funding decisions based on their manifesto commitments. As a result, priorities can vary significantly between places but typically focus on issues associated with knife crime prevention, substance misuse education and intervention, mental health and wellbeing support, youth engagement in policy and scrutiny, and building trust between the police and the communities they serve. For example, in Case Study E, the area's PCC provides funding to various projects focused on engaging with young people aged 10 to 17 who are vulnerable to getting involved in criminal activities, displaying anti-social behaviour and/or engaging in violence by engaging them in community physical activity and sport.

#### Youth Justice Services

**3.32** The Youth Justice Board distributes a funding allocation to each of the 152 Youth Justice Service in England and Wales. Local authorities are required to establish multi-disciplinary teams to fulfil their statutory duty to provide youth justice services (known also as youth offending teams or youth offending services). Their role is to supervise out of court disposals

(OCD) and youth sentences. They also supervise rehabilitation programmes and implement referral orders. Youth workers in these teams work alongside other professionals including probation officers and social workers.

## Public service partnership youth provision in England

- 3.33** Several other non-elected local public service providers play a role in determining both how much money is spent on youth services and which services are delivered – particularly in relation to youth violence prevention.

### Violence Reduction Units

- 3.34 Violence Reduction Units (VRUs)** were established in 2019 by the Home Office with their own budgets. There are now 20 VRUs in parts of the country identified as having high instances of violent crime. They bring together police, local government, health providers, community leaders and other organisations to address violent crime. Each VRU has to build an annual strategic needs assessment, a response strategy and a delivery plan for Home Office approval.
- 3.35** The Home Office sets annual budget envelopes for VRUs, and a portion of this funding is earmarked for commissioning interventions that address the root causes of youth violence (including through funding youth work initiatives), such as knife crime, domestic violence, and knife-enabled robbery. Due to the nature of this funding, VRUs are influenced by national policy and Home Office priorities in their decision-making. For example, the Home Office’s requirement to adopt a public health approach to reducing violence has shaped the type of services VRUs commission, bringing in public health partners as key decision-makers and collaborators. That said, stakeholders reported that VRUs generally enjoy a high degree of autonomy in deciding what to commission and fund. This flexibility allows for local innovation and experimentation, contributing to a growing evidence base of what works in youth violence prevention shaped by local priorities, political dynamics, and varying levels of understanding of youth work and preventative approaches. In our case study areas, VRUs funded a range of different services including hospital navigator services, primary school transition programmes, sports provision, and deterrence services in schools (e.g., virtual reality education activities focused on knife crime and the risks of gang-involvement).
- 3.36** VRUs partner with a wide range of local organisations, including youth service delivery organisations, schools, colleges, family support teams, public health services, and others. However, stakeholder interviews indicated that whilst these partners are involved in delivery, they typically do not influence decisions about how much funding is allocated to them to deliver youth services.

## Integrated Care Systems and Integrated Care Boards

- 3.37** There are 42 **Integrated Care Systems (ICS)** in England bringing health and care organisations together to develop shared plans and joined-up services. Each ICS has an Integrated Care Board (ICB) whose role is to manage the NHS budget and commission, plan and fund most NHS services.
- 3.38** Interviewees noted they were becoming increasingly well connected with youth services (not least through A&E navigators), but it remains unclear to what extent youth services are currently included in ICB decision-making or what youth services they provide, with stakeholders consulted unable to provide further detail on this.

## Community Safety Partnerships

- 3.39 Established under the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs)** bring together local councils, police, health services, and youth organisations to address youth crime. The Home Office provides resources and guidance to support and facilitate the partnerships. CSPs work on the principle that no single agency can address all drivers of crime and antisocial behaviour, and that effective partnership working is vital to ensuring safer communities. There are over 300 CSPs in England and Wales, operating as either district, unitary, or borough partnerships. They provide annual assessments of local issues and an associated Community Safety Partnership Plan which sets out priorities for their area and aligns these with plans of the local Police and Crime Commissioner and other bodies. Because of their focus on crime and anti-social behaviour, they usually support ongoing research and provision of early intervention and prevention services that address youth crime. This can include grant funding for projects that deliver their priority actions.

## Independent youth provision in England

### Independent grant providers

- 3.40** Charities, Trusts and Foundations influence how much money is spent on local youth services. Stakeholder interviewees made it clear that independent grant providers now play an increasingly prominent role in determining funding levels for youth work, as government investment – at both national and local levels – has declined. The scale of their involvement and the exact value of the sector is unknown. Estimates suggest that volunteering and other giving amount to the equivalent of £0.6bn in time and £1bn in donated premises and other non-labour costs each year and that for all youth services the ratio of government to non-government expenditure is 0.5:2.0, i.e. 25% (Frontier Economics and UK Youth, 2022).
- 3.41** Decision-making authority over the size of funding pots for youth provision rests entirely within the independent grant-making organisations and their Boards. Some of the most influential funders, due to the scale of their investment, include:

- **BBC Children in Need** – is the UK’s largest independent funder of youth work, with approximately 30% of its funding portfolio dedicated to this area (c. £30m total budget in 2025). They support a wide range of initiatives aimed at improving lives of children and young people particularly those facing disadvantage.
- **The National Lottery Community Fund** – the UK’s largest community funder, with over a third of its grants supporting children and young people (although some of this is delivered using funding from DCMS)
- **Paul Hamlyn Foundation** - plays a pivotal role in youth provision across the UK by funding and supporting organisations that empower young people, particularly those aged 14–25 facing systemic inequities. Their approach emphasises youth-led change, systemic reform, and asset-based development. Other funders include Garfield Weston, Henry Smith, Tudor Trust, and John Lyons.
- **Youth Futures Foundation (YFF)** - Funding targeted youth employment programmes focusing on narrowing employment gaps for young people facing greatest challenges. Established with £90m of dormant asset funding from UK Government in 2019, followed by £20m in 2023 and £15.35 in 2024.
- **Youth Endowment Fund (YEF)** – established with £200m of Home Office funding over ten years to research what works to prevent children and young people from becoming involved in violence.

**3.42** Some youth service providers noted that large independent funders have made funding more **flexible and responsive** compared to statutory sources (including multi-year funding opportunities), allowing for more meaningful and lasting impact. Table D-2 in Annex D provides further information about a range of independent funding streams. This shows that funds often include provision for organisational management and capacity building or networking, that applications can suggest activities and actions that achieve a stated outcome, funds accept applications at different points in a year in a rolling cycle, and in some cases that successful applicants can then also access expertise and advice to maximise the impact of the funding.

*“It’s worth noting that while statutory funding constitutes the bulk of youth work resources, it tends to lack flexibility. Smaller grants from independent foundations are more agile and willing to fund riskier projects. I find losing council funding less concerning than losing support from these independent funders, who truly drive meaningful change.” Stakeholder Interviewee – Central Government*

**3.43** In addition, some **charitable foundations affiliated with private corporations**, such as Coca-Cola Europacific Partners (CCEP), also fund youth work. These programmes are shaped by the corporation’s global strategies and are subject to regulatory constraints. For example, CCEP’s UK programmes cannot engage young people under the age of sixteen due to

marketing restrictions associated with their products. The work they are doing with youth sector aligns to their focus on social mobility and they try to work with youth work organisations who are in areas of lower social mobility and high on the index of multiple deprivation. Their current focus is on overcoming barriers to the workplace, and they support programmes that help build confidence and employability skills. Stakeholders also noted that charitable trusts are increasingly seeking partnerships with the private sector to secure multi-year funding aligned with corporate Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) objectives.

### Intermediary organisations

- 3.44** Youth sector infrastructure organisations, such as Young Peoples Foundations, UK Youth, and NYA can also play a key role acting as **intermediaries** by managing and distributing funds on behalf of other public and independent funders. For example, several interviewee organisations have worked with funding organisations to help agree priorities, to encourage providers in the youth sector to bring bids forward and then to support the assessment and grant award decisions. In some cases, the intermediary funders themselves can sometimes compete for the funding from the funder initially, before running decision-making and grant distribution processes in line with national objectives. Stakeholders frequently highlighted the shift in control, with one stating:

*“Decision-making for funding levels [in youth services] is now with grant-making foundations and the decision-making panels within them.” – Stakeholder Interviewee - Regional Youth Service Provider and Commissioner*

### Housing associations

- 3.45** A **housing association** is a not-for-profit organisation that provides affordable housing for people in need. They are community based and play a key role in providing social housing.
- 3.46** Housing Associations such as Peabody, Poplar HARCA, and Sovereign Network Group are playing an expanding role in funding and delivering youth services, especially in areas where statutory provision is limited. The interviews conducted with the housing associations highlighted that they often act as funders and commissioners, working across the UK to develop and deliver youth programmes. Their grant funding processes are typically competitive, with organisational strategies adapted to local needs through a place-based approach. For example, in Case Study E, one housing association commissions local Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) providers to deliver services in their youth clubs, as well as providing grants for community-led organisations to deliver youth provision activities in their local area (e.g., football clubs, community gardening clubs). These organisations have dedicated staff to ensure compliance with procurement guidelines, value-for-money principles, and alignment with their charitable objectives. Decisions are informed by local data, community investment leads, and, frequently, co-design processes with local authorities and youth organisations.

## Voluntary and community sector delivery organisations

- 3.47** At a local level, most youth services are delivered either by youth workers employed by local authorities or other public funders, or through voluntary and community organisations or a combination of both. In all of the case study areas for example, we heard about how different voluntary, community and social enterprise groups were commissioned to run provision, involved in outreach and referral or operating independently as part of an area's social and community networks. The **voluntary, community and social enterprise sector therefore plays a crucial role in delivering youth services across England and Wales**. The NYA (2024) Census states that voluntary and community youth groups typically spent around £80,000 on the delivery of youth services each year from grants, commercial activity, and fundraising. It further finds that more than half of organisations receive funding from four or more sources (notably charitable or voluntary donations, Grants, Trusts and Foundations, Local Authority and trading income).
- 3.48** In exploring who determines how much money is spent on local youth provision and who chooses which services are delivered, the research indicates there is a distinction between youth service funders and youth service providers. People making funding decisions are either elected (national Ministers, local councillors and council leaders and PCCs), are publicly accountable for delivering public services (ICBs and VRUs for example), or are accountable to their executives (and the Charities Commission) in the case of corporate funders or charities and Trusts. Decision makers have national, regional or local influence reflecting the scope of their mandate. They decide how much funding to allocate to youth provision and the terms associated with its spend. Those terms can include which organisation type can disburse the funding, over what time period, in what place, doing what and who should benefit.
- 3.49** Delivery partners (usually either local authorities, multi-sector partnerships or VCSE organisations) are not passive in the decision-making process. They will guide, advise, advocate and influence decision-makers to try to ensure that their knowledge and insight is included in those decisions. But ultimately, they then decide whether, and how, to translate funds to their own context and make decisions about the balance of open or targeted, where to deliver who to and who to employ to do it, which delivery vehicles work best and what outcomes might be achieved. Their decisions may be highly constrained by the limits of the funding, but they too influence what services are offered. These issues are further explored in Chapter 6 when we present findings from the case studies.

## Youth provision in Wales

- 3.50** Youth sector funding in Wales differs in some key respects to those operating in England although services in both countries face many of the same challenges with regarding to funding and service delivery. This section explores the roles of national and local stakeholders in Wales who influence how much money is spent on local youth provision drawing on document review, stakeholder interviews and one Welsh case study local authority.

## Welsh government / the Senedd youth provision

- 3.51** The legal framework for youth provision in Wales is provided by the Learning and Skills Act which means that youth services are most closely aligned with education services. The Act sets an expectation that youth support services are available from the 22 local authorities for young people up to the age of 25 years. Implementation of this policy is managed through a National Youth Strategy and associated Implementation Board. Policy for youth work is currently being strengthened with a new statutory framework for youth work. This creates a stronger legal and policy framework for youth provision with stronger oversight and co-ordination infrastructure in Wales compared with England.
- 3.52** The National Assembly for Wales introduced the **Learning and Skills Act in 2000**, and the Cabinet Secretary for Education holds ministerial responsibility for youth services. **Section 123** of this Act directs local authorities to provide youth support services which are ‘*services which in the opinion of the National Assembly for Wales will encourage, enable or assist young persons (directly or indirectly) to participate effectively in education and training, to take advantage of opportunities for employment, or to participate effectively and responsibly in the life of their communities*’.
- 3.53** In Wales, **the purpose of youth work is firmly based in education, and is for young people aged 13 to 25 years**. This age range reflects the strategy’s commitment to supporting individuals through key transitional stages—from early adolescence through to young adulthood. This is a further point of contrast with England where services for young people only extend to 25-year-olds if they have SEND characteristics.
- 3.54** This policy is enacted through a **National Youth Work Strategy** (2019) with its implementation overseen by a partnership group. The strategy aims to ensure sustainable, high-quality youth work provision, focuses on collaboration between statutory and voluntary sectors and supports workforce development and funding mechanisms. There is also a **strong focus on rights-based youth work and youth participation** in national policy frameworks in Wales.
- 3.55** The **Youth Work Strategy Implementation Board** (established in 2022 by Welsh Government) plays an advisory role to decision-making, providing advice to the Welsh Government on achieving a sustainable delivery model for youth work in Wales. Whilst it does not have formal decision-making powers, it was established to make recommendations aimed at developing a sustainable youth work delivery model in Wales. Its influence is intended to guide those who do hold formal authority over service provision for young people.
- 3.56** Despite these developments there has been some policy ambiguity about the role of youth work, what constitutes youth work and the professional status of youth workers. Consequently, the Welsh Government ran a consultation on the future of youth work policy at the end of 2024; to inform a new **statutory framework for youth work**. A key element of

the new proposal is to require local authorities, in partnership with the voluntary and community sector, to develop **strategic youth work plans every five years, with the voices of young people embedded at the heart of the process**. These plans are intended to guide strategic direction, rather than set out specific spending decisions. The aim is for them to reflect young people's views on what they need now, and in the future, ensuring youth voice is a central component of planning. The proposed framework also includes a **requirement for a multi-agency approach** – starting from the needs of the young person and building outwards. This would include collaboration with health boards, VCSE organisations, the police, and other relevant services. Stakeholders described this as part of a broader effort to clarify the relationship between youth work and the wider ecosystem of services for young people, whilst also emphasising the need to protect the distinct and valuable role of youth work within that system (Welsh Government, 2025).

**3.57** Unlike in England, where local authority spend on youth services is discretionary (subject to them fulfilling their statutory duty), in Wales there is some government mandating of youth service spend. Welsh Government oversees three main funding streams for youth service provision in Wales: **Youth Support Grant; Revenue Support Grant; Strategic Voluntary Youth Work Organisation Grant**. Decision-making power regarding the overall funding levels and strategic direction rests with the Welsh Government, and funds are distributed to local authorities across the country. Table 3-3 summarises national funding linked with active youth policy from both Westminster and the Senedd.

**Table 3-3: Westminster and Senedd national funding streams for youth provision**

Organisation	Core youth provision funding streams	Total Value of Fund	Live (Start and end date)	Geography	Open/ targeted
Welsh Government	Youth Support Grant	£10m per annum	2022/23-2024/25	Wales (local authorities)	Both
Welsh Government	Revenue Support Grant	£6.1bn (Local Authorities can then allocate part of this to youth services)	2025-2026 (current iteration)	Wales (local authorities)	Open
Welsh Government	Strategic Voluntary Youth Work Organisation Grant	£1.1m per annum	April 2025 to March 2028	Wales (local authorities)	Open
Home Office	Violence Reduction Units	£315m (2019-2023) £55m (23/24 FY)	2019-2025	England and Wales	Targeted
Home Office	Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs)	Determined by each PPC	Awarded annually	England and Wales	Targeted

Source: SQW/UK Youth consultation evidence

### Youth Support Grant (YSG)

**3.58** The Youth Support Grant is **allocated directly to each local authority to deliver and commission youth services**. It is ring-fenced funding that can only be used for youth services and is available to all 22 local authorities. The allocation is made on the basis of funding formula that considers local demographics (specifically population size and number of young people in out-of-work families). The Welsh Government sets the initial funding envelope, and local authorities decide how to use it locally. The Welsh Government does not prescribe how the funding must be spent, but it does provide guidance and expects support to cover emotional well-being, youth housing and homelessness and young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET). Local authorities are **encouraged to collaborate with voluntary and community sector** partners in delivering services. There is one mandatory requirement: **local authorities must employ an Engagement and Progression Coordinator** (or equivalent), to ensure alignment with the Welsh Government's Youth Engagement and Progression Framework.

### Revenue Support Grant (RSG)

- 3.59** The Revenue Support Grant is a **general funding allocation to local authorities who can then choose to allocate part of this to youth services**. Some local authorities allocate all of this to youth services – others around 30%. This represents an indirect funding route for youth work. The amount spent on youth services varies by local authority, depending on local priorities and decisions made by elected members.

### Strategic Voluntary Youth Work Organisation Grant

- 3.60** The Welsh Government also **directly funds voluntary and community organisations to deliver youth work**, through the Strategic Voluntary Youth Work Organisation Grant. This provides core funding on a three-year cycle and is delivered via a competitive application process. It is up to £1.1m per annum of which £900k is allocated to national organisations and £200k to specialist organisations (working in fewer areas, often with targeted or niche provision). This grant is non-prescriptive, intended to supplement other core funding and support the sustainability and expansion of youth work delivery.

## Local Government youth provision in Wales

- 3.61** Local authorities are responsible for allocating the above funding streams within their local areas, but interviewees noted that it is not enough to meet young people's needs and that local authorities in Wales actively seek external funding to '*plug the gap*' once Welsh Government funding has been allocated. As with England, local authorities can bid for other Welsh Government funding programmes, such as Families First (sponsored by the Children and Families division of Welsh Government), adapting their delivery models to meet varying terms and conditions. As a result, senior leaders and Ministers across multiple departments influence decision-making and funding availability for youth work.
- 3.62** Case Study C provides an example of the complex structures associated with youth service provision.

## Case Study C – Youth service and its networks

In Case Study C, youth services are managed under the Local Authority's Education Department, aligning them closely with educational priorities such as preventing school exclusions and re-engaging disengaged youth. Alongside the Education Department, the Local Authority's youth service activities also connect with Social Care, Youth Justice, and Economic Development departments, creating a complex flow of resources. Funding is therefore sourced from a mix of core local authority budgets, in combination with parish councils, public sector partners, and independent funders.

The process is collaborative, involving statutory partners like police, probation, and health services whose representatives serve on an executive management board. Decision-making involves regular scrutiny meetings, with service-level agreements guiding commissioned services. Youth voice plays a significant role in shaping services, with flexibility allowed in how outcomes are achieved. However, competing departmental priorities and rigid outcome requirements linked to some funding sources limit local innovation and responsiveness. Despite these challenges, Case Study C's approach reflects a commitment to aligning youth provision with both strategic goals and the lived experiences of young people.

## Public service partnership youth provision in Wales

### Violence Reduction Unit

**3.63** Home Office funding supports some youth provision in Wales in the same way as in England as there is a VRU in South Wales. This is because policing remains a reserved matter under UK Government control. Although it is a VRU, it is called the Wales Violence Prevention Unit and has a broader scope, notably, while it delivers services in South Wales it also has a national policy advice role. This is an example of some of the challenges associated with working to different policy agendas; national programmes delivered across all of Wales need to adapt to the different structures in South Wales. Meanwhile they also have to reconcile different policy priorities, for example, the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) (Wales) Act 2015 reflects a distinctly Welsh approach to tackling violence, which may not align with Home Office priorities.

### Public Health Wales

**3.64** **Public Health Wales** is an NHS Trust and the national public health agency for Wales. It is responsible for protecting and improving health and well-being, reducing health inequalities, and providing expert public health advice, health protection, disease surveillance, and screening services across Wales. With regard to youth provision, Public Health Wales has a

support role – it does not commission services but it supports professionals across Wales to adopt a public health approach to violence prevention through advocacy work with policy-makers and politicians, production of strategy (Wales Without Violence Framework, 2023) consulting and co-producing with children and young people, and data and evaluation.

## Independent youth provision in Wales

- 3.65** In stakeholder interviews with organisations involved in youth service provision in Wales, there was **less reference to independent grant providers and voluntary and community sector intermediaries compared to those in England**. 360Giving data<sup>9</sup> analysis suggests that in 2023/2024 non-government grant-making organisations provided less youth funding per 1,000 young people<sup>10</sup> in Wales (£5.7k) compared to England (£8.5k). Similarly, the normalised level of lottery funding for youth provision was lower in Wales than in England in 2023/2024 (£19.0k per 1,000 young people in Wales vs £21.5k in England).
- 3.66** Nevertheless, there were still some **examples of external funding being used in Wales**. For instance, some youth organisations had accessed funding from the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF). One such example is Wales Without Violence, which was described as a “*case study for co-production*.” This initiative involved the Peer Action Collective, Media Academy Cymru, and funding from YEF, bringing together the police, education, and health sectors alongside children and young people. In this case, funding decisions were made by the original grant provider.
- 3.67** In summary, the policy and funding landscape in Wales appears less complex and more clearly structured at national and local authority level in comparison to England. However, due to limited funds and prioritisation youth service providers in both Wales and England top up core funding from a number of independent and public service provider funders. The decision making by these funders is less complex but managing multiple funding streams remains a common issue.

## Funding in case study areas

- 3.68** Table 3-4 summarises how these funding sources are distributed by local authority and public services in the case study areas. It is important to note that this information was taken from consultee feedback and limited public documentation, and it is likely that it does not reflect the full picture for each case study area. For example, allocations to VRUs are known, but the breakdown of allocation to each LA area for which type of service is not known. Further discussion of case study services is provided in Chapter 6.

<sup>9</sup> Please see Chapter 4 for more detail on 360Giving data and the search criteria used.

<sup>10</sup> We defined young people here as those aged 13-19 years for both England and Wales, using a consistent definition to help with non-LA data comparability. Please note a different age group is used in Chapter 4 for Welsh LA funding as statutory youth work is defined differently in Wales.

**Table 3-4: Summary of budget data available for case study areas**

Case study area	Local Authority	Violence Reduction Unit	Police and Crime Commissioner	VCSE (from 360Giving 2023/24)	Other
A	Commissions services £400k 2024/25	Funds some youth projects in the area £unknown	The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) funds some youth projects	National Lottery c.£115k Other grants c.£120k.	Integrated Care Board run a 'youth work in acute settings pilot'. £unknown.
B	Commissions and delivers £1.4m in 2023/24	Funds some youth projects in the area £111k via CSP	Funds some youth projects in the area £14.6k via CSP	National lottery: c£495k Other grants c£320k	Integrated Care Board also fund projects (£80k) via CSP
C	Commissions and delivers £1.3m in 2023/24	No VRU	Funds partners to tackle crime and re-offending £65k in 2024/25. £57k to the CSP	Data not available	Core funding topped up with Shared Prosperity Fund and parish councils
D	Commissions and delivers c. £2.3m	Funds some youth projects in the area including in schools and A&E navigators	Project tackling knife crime: £90k; £265k to CSP; £756k for partnership working	National Lottery c. £65k Other grants c.£95k.	LA have invested £350k in knife crime prevention activities in the past three years (up to March 2025).
E	Commissions and delivers £1.5m in 2023/24. 80-90% of which used for LA youth service.	Funds some youth projects c. £150k p.a. Funds CSP £150k half of which goes to youth projects	No data available	National Lottery c.£530k Other grants £195k	Integrated Care Board plus Housing Association spend on youth services £unknown

## Conclusion

**3.69** Decisions about how much money is spent on local youth provision, and which services are delivered, are dispersed across a complex web of actors. Central government sets the broad policy and funding direction, but responsibility is fragmented across multiple departments, each with its own priorities. While this creates multiple entry points for investment, it also generates duplication, inefficiency, and gaps in coverage.

*“Flexibility is crucial, but there are so many different initiatives that come out from central government; this makes local decision-making even more complex, and creates even more barriers that need to be tackled in order to make something work locally.” Stakeholder Interviewee – Local Government Advocacy Group*

**3.70** Local authorities hold the statutory duty to ensure “sufficient” youth provision, yet in England their allocations from central government are not ring-fenced. This leaves elected councillors and officers making difficult trade-offs between competing local needs, often in the context of prolonged austerity. In Wales, ring-fenced funding, national oversight, and co-ordination mechanisms provide a stronger framework, but financial pressures still constrain provision.

**3.71** Beyond local authorities, there are a range of other public services such as health and housing that come together through partnership networks and which contribute to youth work funding, often through specific initiatives such as Violence Reduction Units, Community Safety Partnerships or Integrated Care Boards. Independent grant makers and voluntary sector organisations also play a growing role, both in resourcing and providing youth services with decisions shaped by the priorities of funders and the delivery capacity of local partners.

**3.72** Taken together, the landscape of youth service funding is highly fragmented and inconsistent. Wales demonstrates that clearer national direction can strengthen accountability and co-production, but in both countries the overall picture is one of insufficiency and inequity. The choices made by ministers, councillors, agencies, and funders all shape what youth services look like - and who ultimately gets access to them.

## 4. Findings: how does local authority funding of youth provision vary across England and Wales?

### Summary of key findings

- LAs in England and Wales provide data to the respective governments about spend on youth provision. These data are imperfect, but show a total annual spend in England of £474m and in Wales of £45m in 2023/24.
- To capture the scale of grant funding (both public and non-public) in England and Wales we analysed 360Giving data for one year (2023/24). This revealed a total of 2,637 grants amounting to £165m. As this data is reported voluntarily it is unlikely to be complete.
- The median LA expenditure per 1,000 young people on youth services is slightly higher in England than Wales. However, it is unclear whether this represents genuine differences in the level of funding, or differences in the definition of young person (which extends to age 25 in Wales) or the data collection processes.
- Across England and Wales, there is some correlation between the total expenditure on youth services for young people in a local authority and the number of young people in that local authority – 43% of variation in expenditure can be explained by the number of young people. Despite this, the range is still broad from £503k per 1,000 young people in Westminster to £7k per 1,000 young people in Shropshire.
- 2024 data on youth crime was mapped using ‘children cautioned or sentenced’ Youth Justice Board data. There is no correlation between this indicator and youth expenditure ( $r^2 < 0.01$ ) – this means less than 1% of the variation in youth expenditure can be explained by the variation in young people cautioned or sentenced. However, there are a few notable spatial trends, with major urban centres (London, Manchester, Leeds, Bristol etc.) having higher than median levels of both expenditure and children cautioned/sentenced, and the North of England having higher than median levels of expenditure but not children cautioned/sentenced.
- Data comparing spend with population characteristics was mapped for total population, the proportion of young people in an area, ethnicity and socio-economic status. We found there was only a limited correlation between demographics (age, ethnicity and socio-economic status) and youth expenditure (each of the demographic factors explained 2% or less of the variation in funding). This is true across both England and Wales.
- Low Local Authority expenditure data is not explained by high levels of wider grant funding (i.e., it does not appear that where local authority funding is low this is due to there being an adequate supply of wider, e.g. Lottery or philanthropic, funding).

## Introduction

- 4.1** Youth provision funding differs between local authority. All young people should have access youth provision, and where local authority youth provision spending varies, we would expect that variation to reflect local needs. In this section the difference in funding is mapped to compare total local authority funding between areas, and then to compare total funding with the rate of children sentenced/cautioned and population characteristics in England and Wales to test whether variation in spend can be explained by variation in need.
- 4.2** Data on public expenditure on the youth sector has been garnered from two sources, depending on whether the local authority area is English or Welsh. **For English local authorities, the data comes from the 'Section 251 (S251)' dataset<sup>11</sup>**, which is submitted by upper-tier local authorities every year detailing their expenditure on young people (including education and other types on expenditure on children and young people).

### Section 251 data

Under section 251 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009, each local authority is required to submit to the Secretary of State for Education their education and children and young people's services budget statements followed by annual outturns. These returns cover early years spending, schools budgets, education services, high needs (such as special schools, PRUs, mainstream classes), central support for music, visual and performing arts and outdoor education centres, education welfare and school improvement as well as services for young people.

Associated government guidance<sup>12</sup> about reporting 'services for young people' states that local authorities should report expenditure on staff, transport, premises and all other associated costs for a wide range of youth services including youth work, activities for young people, services to support young people's participation in education and training, substance misuse, teenage pregnancy, and student support. Examples of activities include special interest clubs, provision of out of school hours coaching, volunteering, youth councils, sporting and cultural activities. Expenditure on activities such as tracking young people's participation in education and training, careers services and support for young people NEET are also included in these returns. Youth justice costs are not included in the 'Services for Young People' returns.

- 4.3** From this data, we used figures for **expenditure on 'services for young people'**. The total expenditure figures presented in Table 4-1 include universal expenditure (on services open to all young people) and targeted expenditure (focused on supporting early intervention for vulnerable young people). With respect to S251 data, 'young people' is taken to be those aged

<sup>11</sup> [ONS - LA and school expenditure, Financial year 2023-24](#)

<sup>12</sup> Department for Education [Section 251 Guidance](#) is updated regularly.

13 to 19 (in line with guidance for local authorities), and thus expenditure has been normalised against this (presented as expenditure per 1,000 young people).

- 4.4 For Welsh local authorities, we used data from the Welsh Government** on expenditure on **statutory youth work**<sup>13</sup> (data presented in Table 4-1). This details each LA's annual expenditure on the Welsh 'Youth Service', the framework by which youth services are provided. In this context, youth services are provided to individuals aged 11 to 25, and thus expenditure has been normalised against this age group.

**Table 4-1: Total expenditure on youth provision**

	Total expenditure in 2023/24	'Youth' age range
England	£474,251,051	13 to 19 years and up to 25 for SEND
Wales	£45,440,026	11 to 25 years

*Source: DfE: LA and school expenditure, Financial Year 2023/24 - Total Services for young people  
StatsWales: Youth Work Expenditure summary by local authority*

- 4.5** There have been **concerns around the quality of expenditure data, in particular the S251 data**. The reliability of this data was questioned by CIPFA a decade ago (Freeman and Gill, 2014). In fact, their report concluded that S251 analyses were not fit for the purpose *either* of making valid assessments of total spending on specific areas *or* of making useful comparisons between local authorities. This was based on research that compared costs of Looked After Children rather than the full S251 return which would have included youth services. Underpinning problems included; different people in local authorities providing different parts of the return (with no mechanisms or incentives to check or quality assure data) thus creating inconsistencies within Local Authority returns. This was then compounded when they explored differences between local authorities which suggested practice differed. Since then, DfE have updated completion guidance annually but there remains ambiguity about the robustness of the data in the returns.
- 4.6** We explored data quality in interviews with stakeholders and case studies. Stakeholders acknowledged that the data returned by different local authorities may use slightly different definitions of what to include or exclude from returns, therefore it is likely that there is some inconsistency. Some of the case study interviewees said they recognised the numbers in their return, others either did not know or were more cautious about affirming their accuracy. In addition, there were limited efforts to include any data on other public sector spend or voluntary provision (in 2023-24 most local authorities (89%) returned no data on other publicly-funded youth services, 77% provided no data on voluntary provision and 66% providing nothing on private provision).
- 4.7** Despite these concerns we considered it was still a useful exercise to map the data because a) it is a time series government dataset that reports spending on youth services and is used by

<sup>13</sup> [StatsWales - Expenditure summary by local authority](#)

policy-makers, b) there are no similar alternatives, and c) further exploration of its validity is also a useful exercise for future research.

**4.8** Because local authority spending is not the only source of funding for youth services we also analysed 360Giving. 360Giving publishes open, standardised data on grant funding from central, devolved, and local government, as well as lottery distributors and various grant-making organisations (such as Trusts, Charities or Foundations). This includes information on grant value, what the grant is for, and, in some cases, where it is spent. We restricted our search to grants in England and Wales which were active in 2023/2024, and used search terms to identify funding related to young people services.<sup>14</sup> We also excluded grants whose location was unknown and those marked as ‘re-grants’ (i.e. grant funding intended for further redistribution as grants) to avoid double-counting. This resulted in a sample of 2,637 grants, totalling £165m.

**4.9** It should be noted that 360Giving relies on a **voluntary declaration of the grant by organisations**, and thus will not offer universal coverage. Based on information provided by 360Giving, **coverage varies by funder type** (e.g. with higher coverage for central government grants and lower for local authority grants) **and by location** (e.g., inconsistent reporting practices across local authorities or lack of coverage of around half of community foundations). This has implications for the reliability of spatial comparisons. Moreover, **data on where the grant funding is actually spent (i.e. beneficiary location) is not available for some grants**. Therefore, in our analysis we used the grant recipient location (e.g. head office of the organisation delivering youth services) where information on beneficiary location was not available. While this increases the amount of available data, it could skew the picture towards urban areas (where most head offices are located). However, in general, based on a comparison of beneficiary and recipient location data (where both are available), recipient location seems to be a good proxy for where the money is actually spent.<sup>15</sup> For robustness, we also checked the spatial distribution of funding using beneficiary location only (see Figure E-6 in Annex E). Finally, it is worth noting that while 360Giving’s search engine functionality was generally helpful in identifying grants related to youth provision, it is possible that some of the identified grants may unwittingly fall outside the scope of this research.

<sup>14</sup> We used the following search terms: “Youth provision” OR “youth work” OR “youth services” OR “youth sector” OR “youth workers” OR “youth prevention” OR “youth crime” OR “youth violence” OR “young people provision” NOT “early years” NOT “primary school” OR “mentor” OR “mentoring” OR “trusted adult” OR “youth club” OR “youth centre” OR “youth hub” OR “youth activities”.

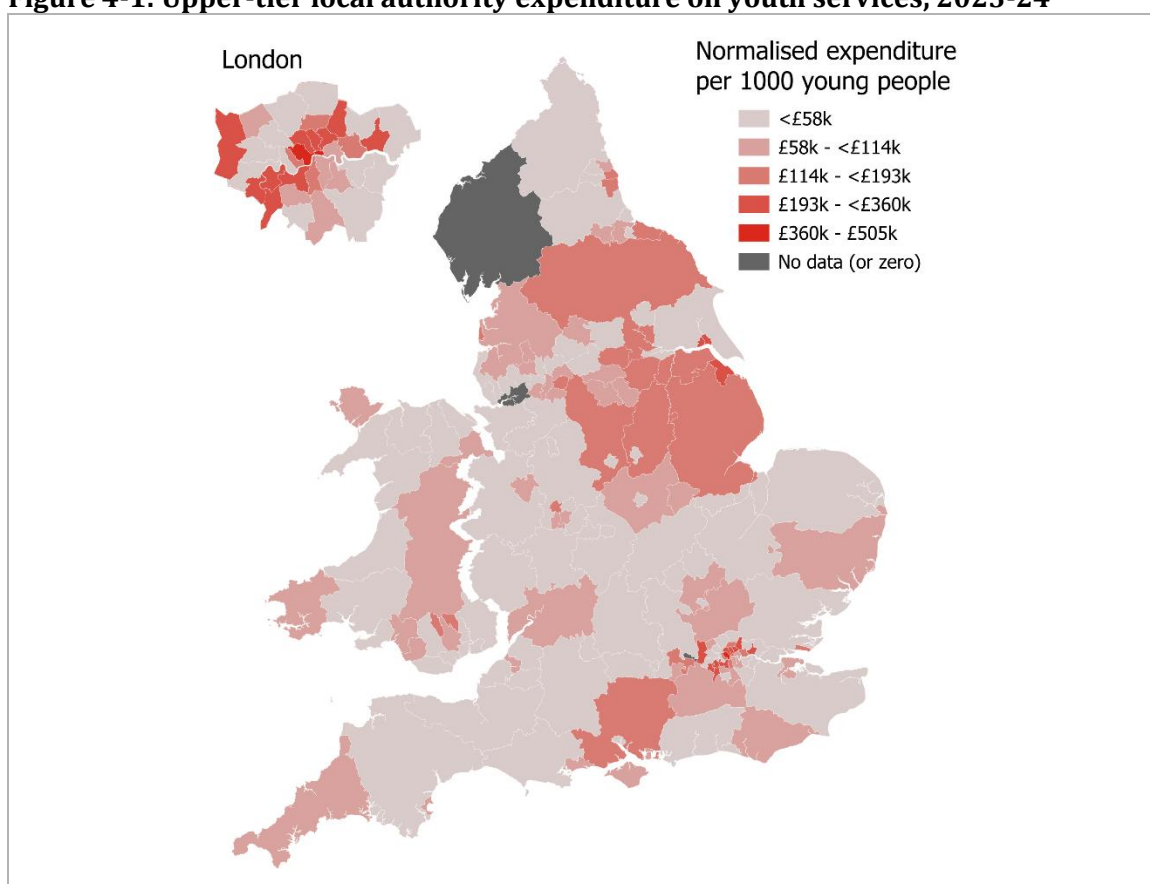
<sup>15</sup> Based on the sample used, we compared the ‘beneficiary location’ to the ‘recipient location’ for grants where both were available (301 grants). It showed for 91% of those grants (273 grants), the two locations were the same.

## How does funding of youth provision vary across England and Wales?

### Local Authority funding

**4.10** Figure 4-1 presents the spatial distribution of local authority-level expenditure on young people (expenditure per 1,000 young people, defined as above). Due to the different data sources for English and Welsh expenditure, the two cannot be directly compared. **The median expenditure per 1,000 young people is slightly higher in England than Wales (£93k and £85k, respectively)**, although it is unclear whether this represents genuine differences in the level of funding, or differences in the definition/data collection processes.

**Figure 4-1: Upper-tier local authority expenditure on youth services, 2023-24**



Source: ONS: Section 251; StatsWales: Expenditure summary by local authority; ONS (2024) Population estimates for England and Wales: mid-2023

Note: West Northamptonshire and North Northamptonshire have been presented together.

**4.11** One local authority, Westminster, spends far more on youth services per 1,000 young people (£503k) than any other area, vastly exceeding the second highest (Camden, at £360k). **The top four local authorities with highest normalised expenditures are located in London**, followed by North East Lincolnshire. Within Wales, Wrexham has the highest level of funding per 1,000 young people (£150k), followed by Pembrokeshire (£127k). The areas with the

lowest normalised expenditure<sup>16</sup> are Shropshire (£7.0k) and Cambridgeshire (£7.5k). In terms of regional patterns, lower levels of funding can be observed in the East of England and the West Midlands.

- 4.12** This unequal geographic distribution, particularly between London and the rest of England and Wales, as well as local disparities, was also recognised by multiple stakeholder consultees, as well as smaller scale disparities within towns and cities.

*“There is dominance from London in the funding landscape” - Stakeholder Interviewee- Youth Service Advocacy Group*

*“I have a sense that is a postcode lottery, particularly when it comes to violence prevention. The landscape is so different across areas, dependent on funding, and different priorities from key organisations” - Stakeholder Interviewee- Health Authority*

*“I think actually if you looked at the Wales model in terms of the stuff they're doing around policy, actually it does look quite interesting and stuff that other regions could learn from. Whether or not they've got the money to do that is another issue.” - Stakeholder Interviewee- Local youth advocacy group*

## Case Study C – rural challenges in youth provision

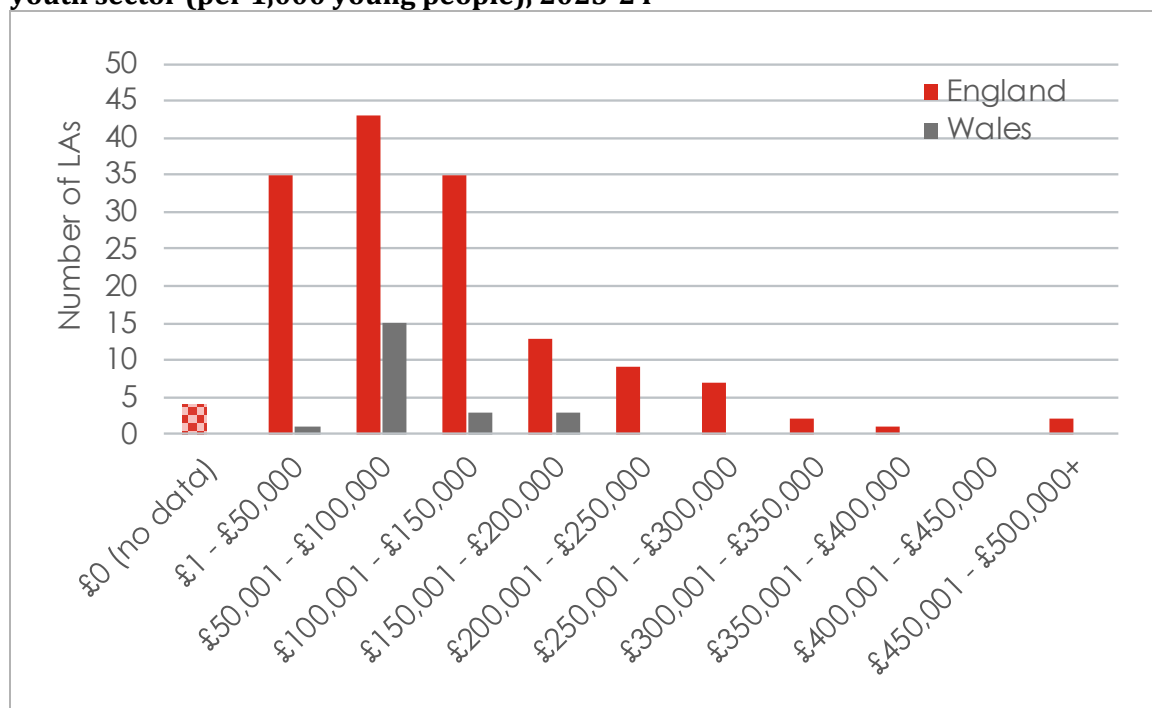
Case Study C highlights the significant challenges posed by its rural geography and demographic trends. As a large, predominantly rural county, Case Study C faces issues of rural and small-town deprivation, with a declining youth population. The dispersed nature of communities makes consistent service delivery difficult, prompting the use of a “roaming” youth worker model, where staff rotate between areas every few months. This approach, while resourceful, limits continuity and depth of engagement with young people.

Youth provision in Case Study C has declined significantly over the past decade, with only 10 youth clubs remaining compared to 40 previously. Services are stretched thin, and while there is a strong commitment to early intervention and holistic support, the scale of provision is insufficient to meet local needs. The limited number of youth workers, combined with short-term and fragmented funding, restricts the ability to offer sustained, impactful support. Local leaders express a desire for more full-time youth workers in schools and better resourcing to address the complex needs of young people, particularly in isolated rural areas.

<sup>16</sup> Excluding those with expenditures of zero: Halton, Warrington, Slough and Cumbria

**4.13** Figure 4-2 shows the frequency distribution of local authority youth expenditure per 1,000 young people. **For both England and Wales, the most frequent local authority expenditure is between £50k and £100k per 1,000 young people** – the median for England is £93k, for Wales it is £85k, and for England and Wales it is £90k. There seems to be higher variation in the level of funding in England than Wales (standard deviations of £81k and £28k, respectively), though this might be at least partly due to data quality (see more detail above).

**Figure 4-2: Frequency distribution of upper-tier local authority expenditure on the youth sector (per 1,000 young people), 2023-24**



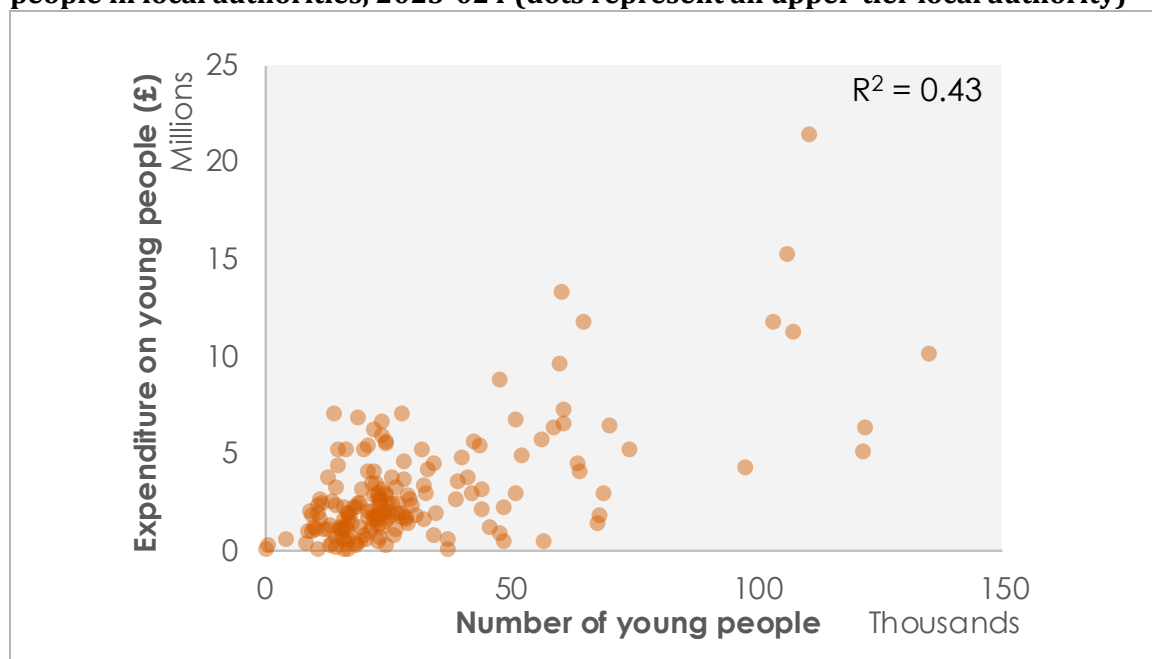
Source: SQW Analysis of: ONS: Section 251; StatsWales: Expenditure summary by local authority; ONS (2024) Population estimates for England and Wales: mid-2023

**4.14** There is a moderate correlation ( $r^2 = 0.4$ )<sup>17</sup> between the total expenditure on young people in a local authority and the number of young people in that local authority – where expenditure and number of young people are defined as above (Figure 4-3). The correlation remains relatively consistent, regardless of if England and Wales are combined or treated separately<sup>18</sup>, or if the local authorities with no reported S251 spend are included or excluded. This means that 43% of the variation in local authority expenditure can be explained by the number of young people. This leaves a range of other factors to explain the difference. One of these is the extent to which other funding sources are available for youth services.

<sup>17</sup> The coefficient of determination ( $r^2$ ) indicates the extent to which the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variable in a statistical model, with a value of 1 signifying a perfect fit and 0 indicating no explanatory power.

<sup>18</sup> The coefficient of determination between expenditure and number of young people in Welsh local authorities is higher (0.60) although this is likely as a result of the vastly smaller number of local authorities.

**Figure 4-3: Relationship between number of young people and expenditure on young people in local authorities, 2023-024 (dots represent an upper-tier local authority)**



Source: SQW Analysis of: ONS: Section 251; StatsWales: Expenditure summary by local authority; ONS (2024) Population estimates for England and Wales: mid-2023

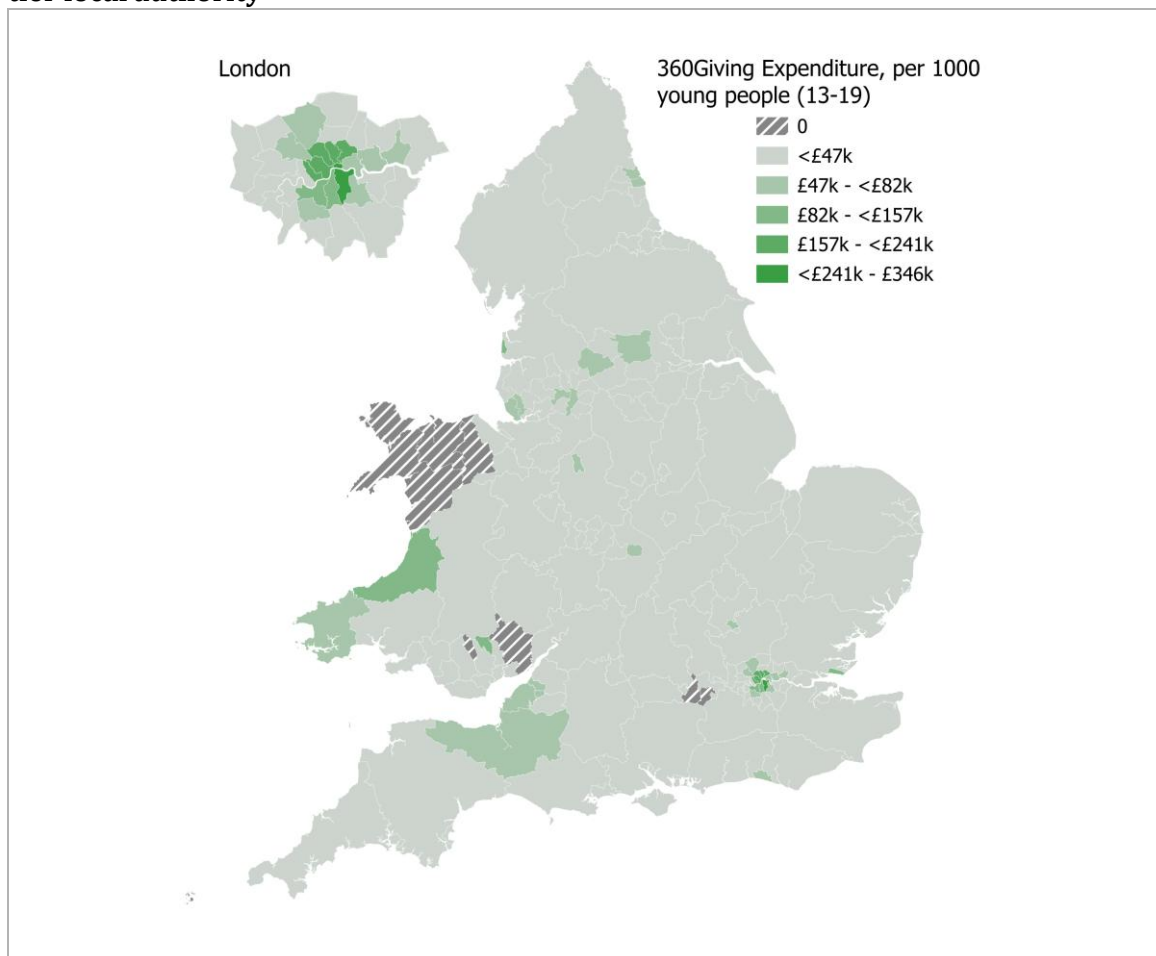
Note: The coefficient of determination ( $r^2$ ) indicates the extent to which the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variable in a statistical model, with a value of 1 signifying a perfect fit and 0 indicating no explanatory power.

### 360Giving funding

**4.15** 360Giving is a database of **grant funding in the UK**. Figure 4-4 shows the spatial distribution of 360Giving data for grants active in 2023/2024 and related to young people services. The funding has been normalised to the population of those aged 13-19. Expenditure is highest in cities, particularly London – of the ten highest normalised expenditures, eight are London boroughs – though this might be skewed by the location of recipient organisations’ head offices in urban areas, as described above. The other two areas with high normalised expenditure, Blaenau Gwent and Ceredigion, feature in the top ten not as a result of high expenditure, but as a result of their very small youth populations – they are the local authorities with the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> fewest young people, respectively. The highest – the City of London (£1.1m) – has over three times as much grant funding as the next highest (Southwark, £314k). This is likely as a result of a combination of factors, including the very low youth population and the fact a large number of organisations may be headquartered there.

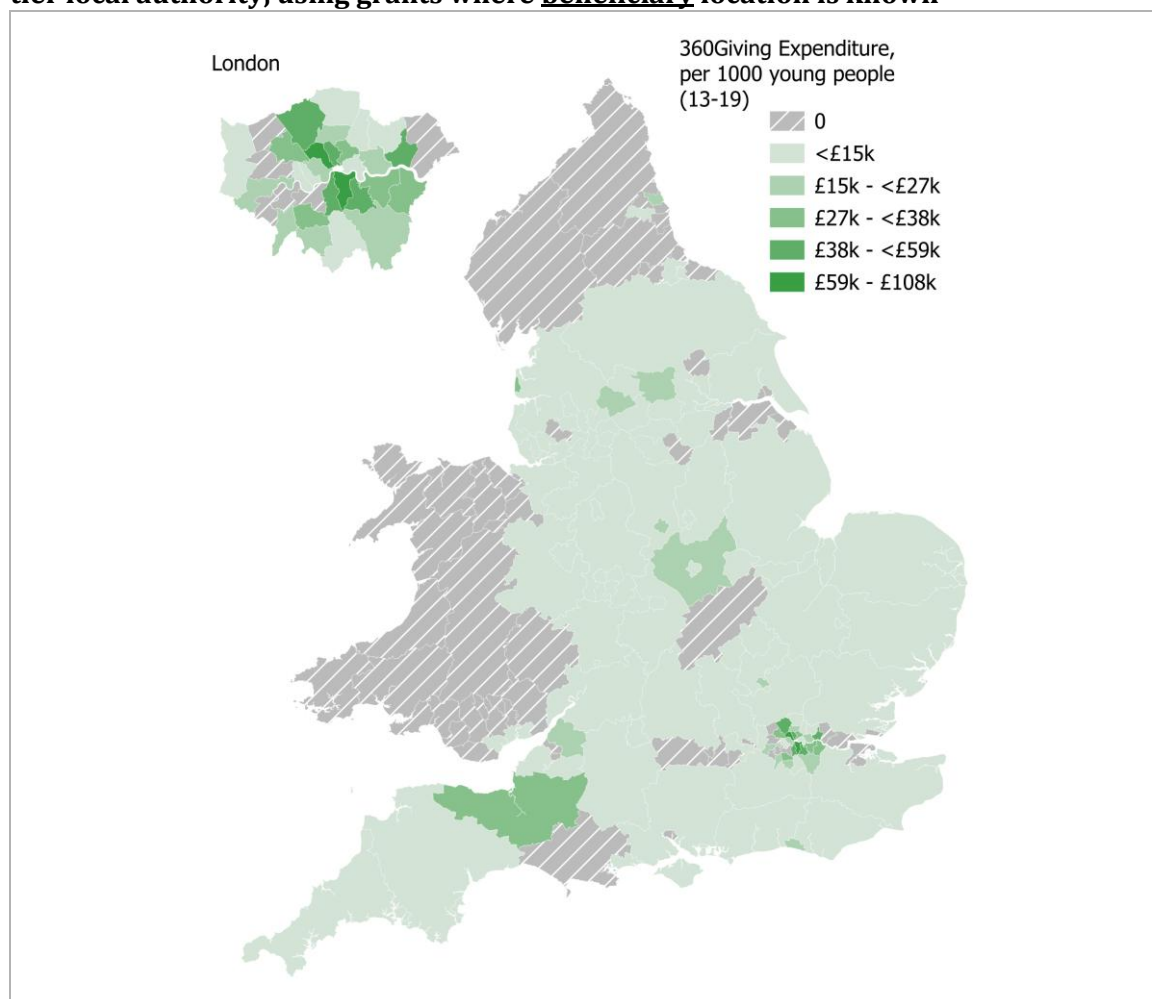
**4.16** Figure 4-4 maps the grant funding location using the ‘best available location’, i.e. the beneficiary location (where the funding is actually spent) where available and the recipient location (where the organisation receiving the funding is based) otherwise. Another version of this map, using the beneficiary location only, can be found in Figure 4-5. It shows a similar spatial pattern, though it should be noted it is based on a far smaller dataset, with only 41% of the identified grants and 25% of the grant value having a listed beneficiary location.

**Figure 4-4: 360Giving grant funding expenditure, grants active in 2023-24 by upper-tier local authority**



Source: 360Giving; ONS (2024) Population estimates for England and Wales: mid-2023  
 Note: Grant funding location is based on 'beneficiary location' where available, and 'recipient location' otherwise.

**Figure 4-5: 360Giving grant funding expenditure, grants active in 2023-24 by upper-tier local authority, using grants where beneficiary location is known**

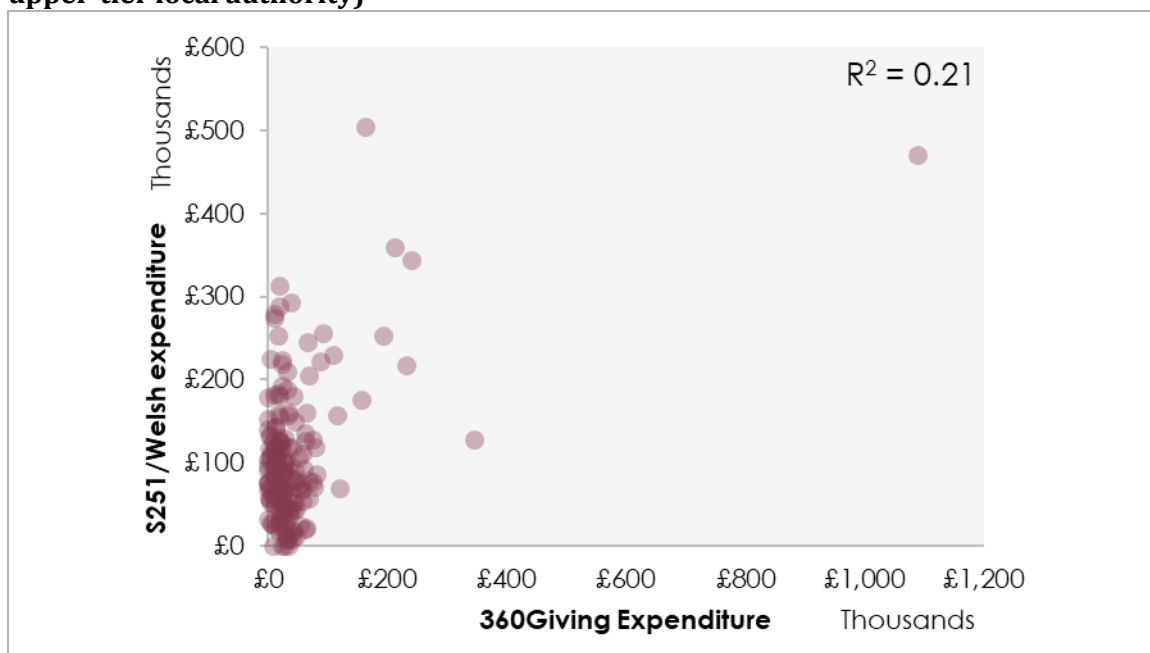


Source: 360Giving; ONS (2024) Population estimates for England and Wales: mid-2023

**4.17** Figure 4-6 compares the 360Giving data to the S251/Welsh local authority expenditure for each local authority area, both normalised to the population of young people.<sup>19</sup> **There is only a weak correlation between these ( $r^2 = 0.21$ ), which suggests that low Local Authority expenditure data is not explained by high levels of grant funding (both public and non-public, including lottery and philanthropic funding).** In other words it does not appear to be the case that where Local Authority funding is low this is due to there being an adequate supply of wider funding. It is possible to hypothesise that a lack of investment creates a lack of infrastructure to receive investment which makes it harder for other funders to provide additional funding. However, care should be taken in interpreting the findings from this chart given the data quality issues discussed above.

<sup>19</sup> Normalised to the population of young people aged 13-19 for S251 and 360Giving data, and aged 11-25 for the Welsh data.

**Figure 4-6: Normalised S251/Welsh and 360Giving expenditures (dots represent an upper-tier local authority)**



Source: 360Giving; ONS (2024) Population estimates for England and Wales: mid-2023; ONS: Section 251; StatsWales: Expenditure summary by local authority

**4.18** Across the different expenditure data, it is worth keeping in mind that the same expenditure level might in fact be linked to different provision levels due to cost differentials across areas. It could be, for example, that it costs more to deliver the same type of service in a rural area than an urban area due to greater dispersion. On the other hand, some costs in urban areas could be higher due to higher prices.

## How does this variation map against the rate of children cautioned/sentenced in the area?

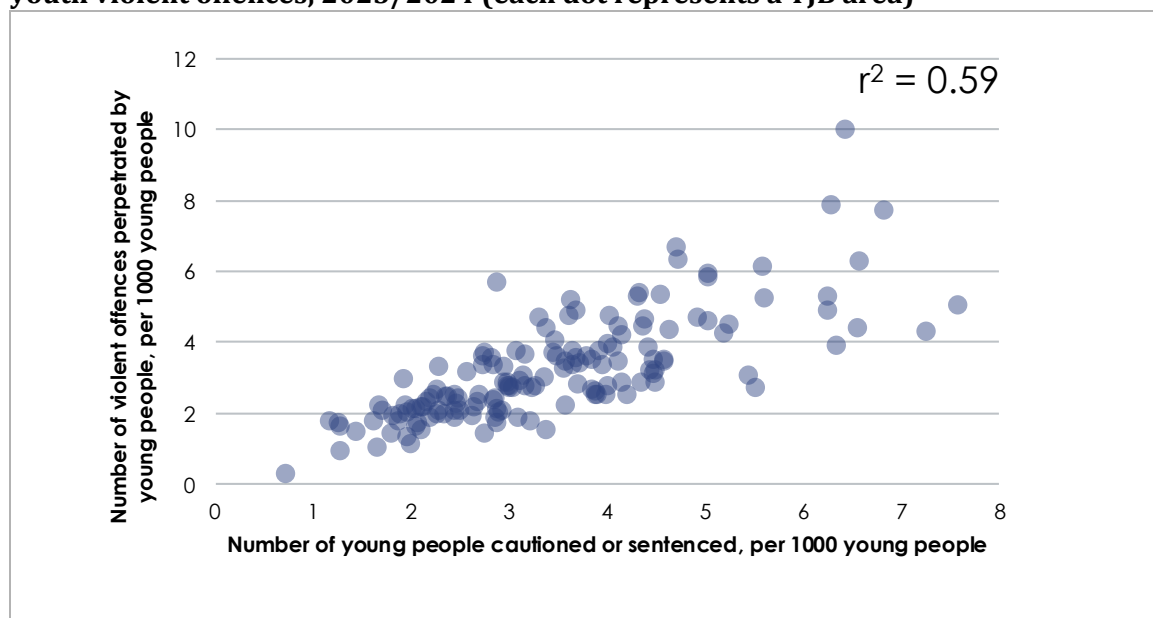
**4.19** To map funding against youth crime, we used **youth justice data for England and Wales published by the Youth Justice Board (YJB)** which are comprised of one, or several, local authorities (152 YJB areas in total). It is important to note that throughout this analysis, VRU funding (which is targeted to high violence areas) has not been included.

**4.20** We used data measuring the rate of ‘children cautioned or sentenced’ (aged 10-17, per 1,000). This measure was chosen instead of the ‘number of violent offences’ to give more statistical power to the data (i.e. higher ability to observe patterns in the data, relative to violent crime data with a lower number of data points). It should be noted that there is a link between the two measures. This is shown in Figure 4-7 below which **compares the data on the rate of children cautioned or sentenced to the published figures on the number of violent offences**<sup>20</sup> perpetrated by young people in each YJB area. This points to a **strong correlation** between the two measures. Figures E-1 and E-2 in Annex E provide further context, including

<sup>20</sup> Defined as ‘Violence against the person’, ‘Robbery’ or ‘Sexual offences’.

the rate of children cautioned or sentenced at the YJB level and the frequency distribution across all YJBs with respect to the rate of children cautioned or sentenced.

**Figure 4-7: Correlation between the rate of young people cautioned or sentenced and youth violent offences, 2023/2024 (each dot represents a YJB area)**



Source: Source: Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (2025) Youth Justice Statistics: 2023 to 2024  
 Note: The coefficient of determination ( $r^2$ ) indicates the extent to which the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variable in a statistical model, with a value of 1 signifying a perfect fit and 0 indicating no explanatory power.

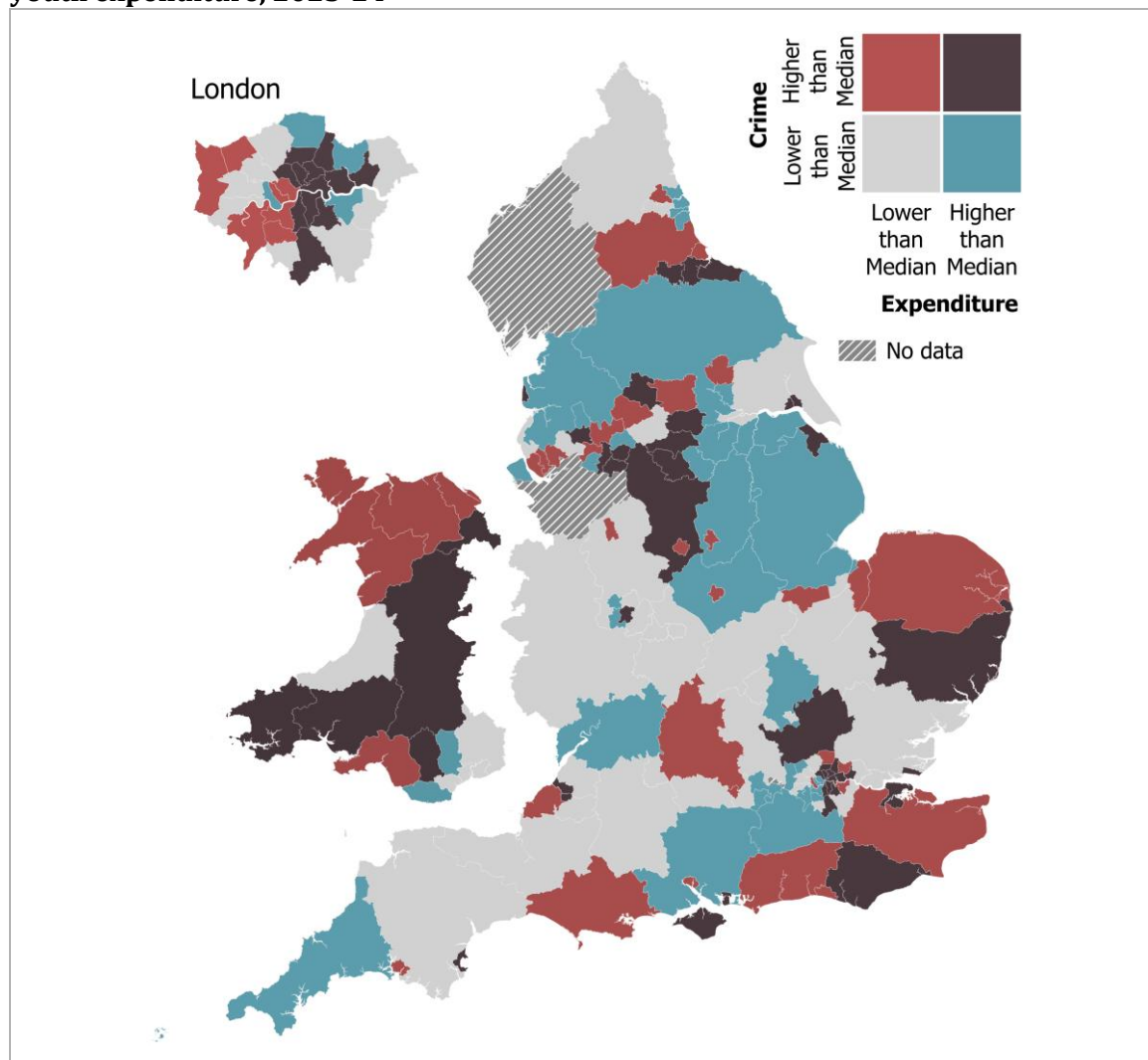
**4.21** Figure 4-8 shows the rate of children cautioned or sentenced mapped against local-level expenditure on youth services. This is a bivariate map, where areas that are red indicate higher than median levels of the rate of children cautioned/sentenced, areas that are blue indicate higher than median levels of expenditure, and areas that are brown indicate higher than median levels of both. As before, due to the different expenditure data sources for England and Wales, we have presented them separately. A version of the same map, where both children cautioned/sentenced and expenditure have been broken down into three categories (instead of two), can be found in Annex E (Figure E-3).

**4.22** The data suggests that there is **no correlation between the rate of children cautioned/sentenced and youth expenditure** ( $r^2 < 0.01$ ) – this means less than 1% of the variation in youth expenditure can be explained by the variation in the rate of children cautioned/sentenced. However, as the map shows, there are a few notable spatial trends – generally, major urban centres (London, Manchester, Leeds, Bristol etc.) have higher than median levels of both expenditure and children cautioned/sentenced, and the North of England has higher than median levels of expenditure (but not children cautioned/sentenced).

**4.23** As a robustness test, we produced another version of these maps which removes London from the data (given the high concentration of both funding and children cautioned/sentenced in London). However, as removing London has a very small impact on the median amount of

expenditure and median rate of children cautioned/sentenced, the results stay broadly the same. The maps excluding London can be found in Annex E (Figure E-4 and E-5).

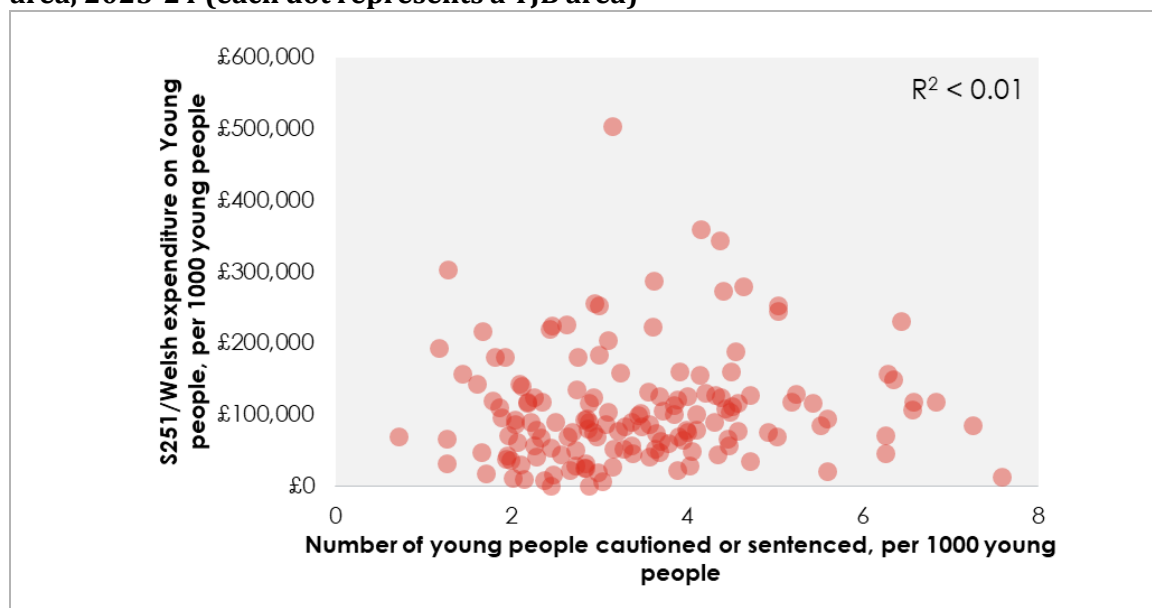
**Figure 4-8: Bivariate map showing variation in children cautioned/sentenced and youth expenditure, 2023-24**



Source: ONS: Section 251; StatsWales: Expenditure summary by local authority; Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (2025) Youth Justice Statistics: 2023 to 2024; ONS (2024) Population estimates for England and Wales: mid-2023  
 Note: Areas where no expenditure is reported are listed as 'No data.' Expenditure data is relative to the median for England and Wales separately.

**4.24** The information from Figure 4-8 is also presented as a scatter diagram in Figure 4-9 below. Replotting the data in this way helps demonstrate the lack of correlation between S251/Welsh expenditure on youth services and the rate of children cautioned/sentenced and reinforces the finding that there is very little correlation between children cautioned/sentenced and youth expenditure.

**Figure 4-9: Variation in children cautioned/sentenced and youth expenditure by YJB area, 2023-24 (each dot represents a YJB area)**



Source: ONS: Section 251; StatsWales: Expenditure summary by local authority; Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (2025) Youth Justice Statistics: 2023 to 2024; ONS (2024) Population estimates for England and Wales: mid-2023

## How does expenditure map against population characteristics including population, age, ethnicity and socioeconomic status?

**4.25** We examined correlations between youth expenditure and population characteristics for YJB areas in order to explore whether there are any significant relationships between demographics and youth expenditure. Specifically, we looked at three demographic indicators:

- **Age:** the proportion of the local population aged between 11 and 25 was used as a proxy for how ‘youthful’ each YJB area is. Source: ONS (2024) Population estimates for England and Wales: mid-2023.
- **Ethnicity:** the proportion of the population from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background at the previous census was used. Source: ONS (2022) Census 2021: TS021 - Ethnic group.
- **Socioeconomic status:** two metrics were used to estimate the socioeconomic status – the proportion of LSOAs<sup>21</sup> within each YJB area that are in the top 10% most deprived in the country, and the proportion of LSOAs in the top 20% most deprived in the country. Deprivation in England uses the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) measure, whilst deprivation in Wales uses the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD). They are

<sup>21</sup> ‘Local Super Output Areas’ are areas of smaller geography within local authorities, with a population of between 1,000 and 3,000.

calculated differently (although use the same principles), which is why the proportions refer to their respective countries only. Source: ONS (2019) English indices of deprivation 2019; StatsWales (2019) WIMD 2019.

**4.26** These relationships are shown in Figure 4-10 below. In general, **we found that demographics are unrelated to expenditure** (as evidenced by the low coefficients of determination<sup>22</sup>). Using a stricter definition of deprivation (% of LSOAs in the top 10% most deprived, rather than 20% most deprived) shows a similarly weak correlation – this figure can be found in Annex E (Figure E-6).

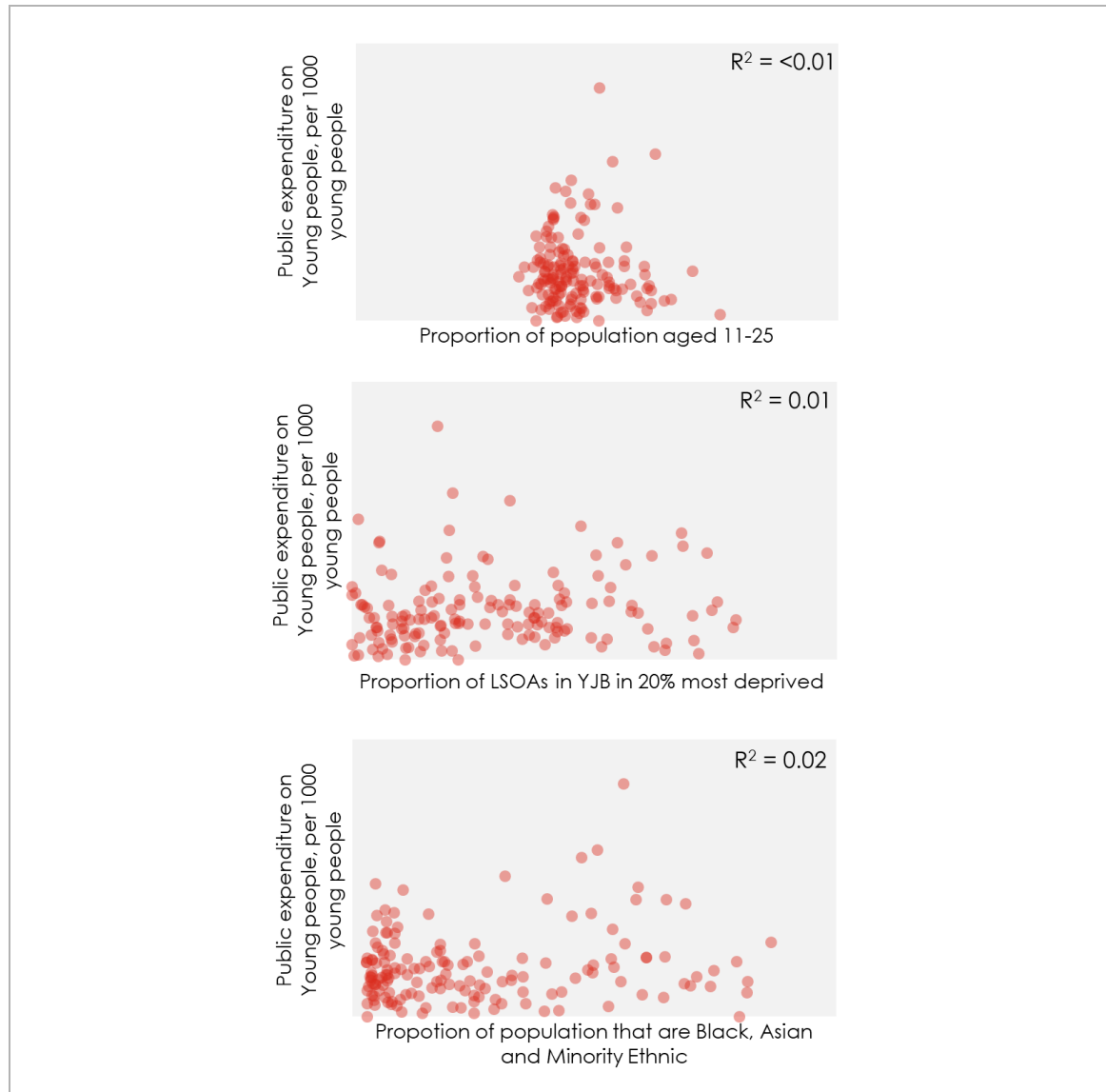
**4.27** The low correlation coefficients indicate that the demographic features explain only a small proportion of the variation in expenditure between YJBs. For example:

- 2% of the variation in expenditure can be attributed to the proportion of the population from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities
- 1% of the variation in expenditure can be attributed to the total population of young people
- 1% of the variation in expenditure can be attributed to the proportion of LSOAs in the 20% most deprived
- <1% of the variation in expenditure can be attributed to the proportion of the population aged 11-25.

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<sup>22</sup> The coefficient of determination ( $r^2$ ) indicates the extent to which the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variable in a statistical model, with a value of 1 signifying a perfect fit and 0 indicating no explanatory power.

**Figure 4-10: Correlations between demographic factors and youth expenditure for each of the YJBs (each dot represents a YJB area). Top right = coefficient of determination.**



Source: ONS: Section 251; StatsWales: Expenditure summary by local authority; Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (2025) Youth Justice Statistics: 2023 to 2024; ONS (2024) Population estimates for England and Wales: mid-2023; ONS (2022) Census 2021: TS021 - Ethnic group; ONS (2019) English indices of deprivation 2019; StatsWales (2019) WIMD 2019

Note: For visual clarity, axes values have been left off.  
The coefficient of determination ( $r^2$ ) indicates the extent to which the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variable in a statistical model, with a value of 1 signifying a perfect fit and 0 indicating no explanatory power.

## How much national and local authority funding reaches local areas?

**4.28** In Chapter 3 we outlined a range of national youth activity programmes, this chapter has presented data on local authority spend. The total amount of funding that reaches local areas is not a simple addition of local plus national because many of those national funds are routed via local authorities and could be included in their Section 251 returns. We therefore sought

to estimate the extent to which the national funding sources listed in Chapter 3 (Table 3-1) are additional to, or reported and included as part of the Section 251 returns analysed in this Chapter. Table 4-2 summarises a simple categorisation of those funds that are allocated to activities via local authorities (or local authority-involved partnerships) and those that are not. This makes important assumptions:

- that local authorities report national funding systematically and in full in the Section 251 return
- that local authorities do not include Ministry of Justice funding for Youth Justice Services in line with DfE Section 251 budget guidance
- that 100% of the national programme funds reported are distributed via local authorities ( we know this is probably not the case but do not have a basis to estimate a range of probability)
  - e.g. Dormant Assets are used by YFF to fund a range of provision – a proportion of which involves local authority delivery
  - e.g. While Home Office funding for Violence Reduction Partnerships and Safer Streets are all managed through local authority partnerships, only a proportion will be allocated to support young people.

**4.29** Our research was not designed to explore the veracity of these assumptions. Nevertheless the analysis indicates the scale of overlap between national programmes and those reported in Section 251 returns. It shows that roughly half of the total value of national programmes are delivered in whole or part through local authorities.

**Table 4-1: Distribution of national funding (£m) (April 2025)**

	National funding programmes summarised in Table 3-1	Allocated via local authorities or local authority partnerships	Allocated via other delivery organisations
DCMS	49	41	8
DHSC	7	7	0
DHSC/DfE	42	42	0
DWP	45	45	0
Home Office	80	25	55
MHCLG	8	0	8
MoJ	86	86	0

	National funding programmes summarised in Table 3-1	Allocated via local authorities or local authority partnerships	Allocated via other delivery organisations
MoD/DfE	180	0	180
<b>Total</b>	497	246	251

*SQW Analysis*

**4.30** Reflecting on the distribution of S251 returns (in Table 4-1) and national funding set out in Table 4-2 in summary:

- according to S251 data, local authorities in England reported £474m and in Wales £45m on services for young people a total of £519m.
- from an annual national government budget of £497m for services for young people £245m was routed through local authorities and therefore probably included in the £474m figure above
- 360Giving data shows that grants amounted to £165m. Of this, £108m were grants from the National Lottery already listed above due to DCMS oversight, while £17m were local authority grants and therefore already included in the £474m S251 figure above.

**4.31** This demonstrates some of the complexity of piecing together resources from multiple sources into youth services for young people. The data here suggests approximately £810m a year is spent on youth activities in England and Wales including cadets and youth justice. Just as the total amount of spend on youth services is ambiguous, the proportion of spend on youth violence and crime prevention is also not clear cut. Section 251 data reports spend by 'universal' and 'targeted' and shows that there is an average 40:60 ratio with more being spent on targeted provision by local authorities. However, targeted provision is not the same as provision to prevent youth violence for two reasons; firstly conceptually it can be argued that all youth services help prevent youth violence including universal provision which is often open access provision in areas of deprivation or social need; and secondly targeted services include provision to support or prevent teenage pregnancy, substance misuse, young people NEET as well as crime.

## Conclusion

**4.32** Local authorities in England and Wales hold a statutory duty to ensure sufficient youth provision and to report their spend on local youth services. The evidence suggests that patterns of reported funding are neither strongly related to levels of local need nor to demographic factors. While government data on local authority spend is imperfect, it remains the only consistently available source and highlights significant variation. In England, total annual spend across all local authorities is estimated at £474m, compared to £45m in Welsh

local authorities. Geographic analysis shows the relationship between expenditure and the number of young people within local authorities is only partial. Just 43% of the variation in spend can be explained by population size. There is also spatial inequality with spend in London and major urban areas generally higher than across the rest of England and Wales.

- 4.33** Attempts to correlate children cautioned/sentenced or demographic characteristics with youth expenditure also show very limited associations. Less than 1% of the variation in youth expenditure can be explained by variation in children cautioned/sentenced, and no more than 2% by demographics such as age, ethnicity or socio-economic status.
- 4.34** Importantly, low local authority expenditure does not appear to be offset by higher levels of wider grant funding (including philanthropic or lottery funding). This means that differences in investment are not systematically compensated for by other funders.
- 4.35** Aggregating local authority spend with national spend is problematic due to double counting, while reported voluntary and community sector spend (using 360Giving data) probably underestimates its true value.
- 4.36** These findings suggest that youth service expenditure is not shaped solely by an assessment of need or demand. Other factors shaping funding decisions are explored in the next chapter of this report.

## 5. Findings: what are decision-makers' priorities when thinking about local youth provision?

### Summary of key findings

- The priorities of statutory decision makers regarding local youth provision are political. These are shaped by manifesto priorities, influence of national and local advocates, and significant events that raise the salience of violence prevention and youth services.
- Public service partners work collaboratively to build better data to create strategic approaches to funding youth work. The quality and availability of data available to decision makers has improved but remains imperfect, both in terms of range of issues covered, detail and impact.
- The preventative link between youth services and violence prevention is widely recognised by decision makers, but with constrained resources this objective needs to be balanced with education, health and employment objectives. Those decision makers who prioritise violence prevention are either funded through MoJ or Home Office or who have an electoral mandate to address young people and violence or crime.
- Consultees almost universally described local provision as inadequate, primarily because of a lack of funding. They also highlighted large geographic inequalities. Almost all consultees wanted to see more support for 'up-stream', preventative interventions.
- Decision-makers did not allocate funding specifically for young people from Minority Ethnic backgrounds. There is often a lack of information to assess whether or not there is equitable coverage for children from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds.
- Primary support is dominated by VCSE provision, tertiary is addressed through the youth justice system. Local authorities and delivery partner trade-offs about resource allocation are focused on secondary provision for work with children and young people who are vulnerable.
- Decision-makers at a national government level, corporates, and charitable grant makers usually have more freedom to change their approach than local authorities and other local partners who work within stricter funding parameters.
- The interviews and case studies identified many examples of ways in which young people were involved in decision-making processes - from consultation through coproduction. However, more fundamental changes to decision making were needed to ensure young people's participation was inclusive and influential.
- Most consultees indicated that multi-agency working was a regular feature of their work. It was felt that collaboration was more consistent when driven by a statutory requirement.

## Introduction

- 5.1** The previous chapter explored the links between known funding in different local areas. It showed no clear correlation between spending on youth services and the needs and interests of young people, and neither were there clear associations between spend on youth provision and levels of crime. We know the reality is not simply random. For example we know that there is a likely correlation over time between withdrawal of universal youth provision spending and increasing levels of criminal behaviour (Villa, 2024). In addition, there are funding streams (such as VRUs) into areas that are scaled according to the level of crime in an area. In this chapter we unpack further the types of decisions and factors shaping how decisions are made in local authorities.
- 5.2** We draw upon case study evidence and evidence from stakeholders who perform a range of decision-making roles to answer nine inter-related research questions about the factors shaping funding decisions. The issues discussed were common to both England and Wales therefore we have combined the evidence base for this chapter.

## What are decision-makers' priorities when thinking about local youth provision?

- 5.3** The evidence presented in this chapter considers **different types of decision**. Decisions about local youth provision can be thought about in terms of strategic decision making (how much funding should be allocated and to achieve which objectives), and operational decisions (which services should be delivered where and by whom). In this chapter we emphasise **findings about the amount of funding and its objectives**. Chapter 6 considers operational decision-making in more detail.
- 5.4** It also considers the **authority of different types of decision-maker**. As we discussed in Chapter 3, most of the funding for youth services that we can trace comes from public funding, and decisions about its allocation and amount are made by **elected decision-makers**. These include local councillors and council leaders in local government, ministers, Members of Parliament (MPs) and Members of the Senedd (MSs) in national government, and Police and Crime Commissioners. **Different decision factors apply for funding offered through public service providers and Charities, Trusts and Foundations**, or by private companies where senior executives have decision-making authority.

### Priorities for Ministers, Councillors and their senior officials

- 5.5** In terms of public sector, **priorities for local youth provision are political decisions**. Their priorities are at least partly shaped by promises or statements made during election campaigning or in manifestos, the role of lobbying or advocates raising issues for public discourse which then shape the context for decisions.

**5.6** We were told about implications arising such as:

- **Aligning youth services with the agendas of political leaders.** For example, one mayor made new homes a key commitment (aligning with that of central government). Education and youth services need to connect with this priority (through promotion of construction careers or work experience or connection with building companies for example) to maintain relevance.

*“The political dimension by default plays a role - have to be cognisant of the metropolitan mayor and their political commitments and ambitions.” - Stakeholder Interviewee - Combined Authority*

- **Reconciling potentially different political agendas.** One youth service said they enjoyed political support because young people were seen as a priority but even so, they were pulled between what different leaders wanted of their service:

*“...politically, I think we serve 2 masters: we serve the children services managers, and we also serve the councillors and they sometimes they want different things. But we are quite responsive.” - Case Study Interviewee - Local Authority*

*“The MP has an interest in serious violence as the chair of the Community Safety Partnership therefore sometimes certain demands come down from their office. The other issue is that youth violence and crime etc sits in and is a focus for a number of departments internally and different council cabinet members have it under their remit, so there can be differing demands from them, duplication of work as well as misalignment and confusion on who does what.” - Case Study Interviewee - Local Authority*

**5.7** We were told that one London Borough was known to have 19 active gangs while its neighbour had seven. The latter considered that they had violence under control and therefore chose different priorities for its allocation of resources and youth services. One local councillor said that their colleagues voted for budget cuts to youth services but then only realised the implications after their ward suffered anti-social behaviour and there were almost no youth service resources available to address it.

**5.8** As part of a political process it is right that services should respond to the **concerns of local communities and these are often thrown into focus around significant events** that mobilise public opinion and demand political responses. The national focus on knife crime arises from a series of high profile tragic cases involving young victims.

*“Tragedies have promoted understanding in the needs of those communities and what can be done to reduce the risk of serious violence. Investment would go to things like counselling for young people who witnessed those tragedies.” - Stakeholder Interviewee - VRU*

- 5.9 Councillors receiving complaints of anti-social behaviour** in their wards and wanting youth services to work with young people and tackle the problem in their local community were also noted to influence decision-making.

*“A local authority councillor might report a problem with anti-social behaviour, and so maybe they will deploy a team to a specific park or somewhere where there is a violence hotspot. It's very much driven by community pressures.”- Stakeholder Interviewee - National Youth Charity*

- 5.10 Lobbying and community activism** or advocacy also shape political decision making. This can take the place through intermediary or advocacy groups which provide a voice for the communities of programme recipients.

*“We pulled together a collaboration of local youth providers together and challenged the [Local Authority] commissioner...This points to collective power and also that commissioners will listen to them {the group} and to young people. This resulted in extension of provision for both [areas].”- Stakeholder Interviewee - Local Youth Service Provider*

- 5.11** In addition and alongside political priorities lie **economic circumstances**. All local public sector funding stakeholders are tasked with decisions about how to allocate scarce resources. In some cases these considerations are acute, such as in local authorities that have been under extreme financial stress or even declared bankrupt:

*“...being a bankrupted local authority puts a big pressure on everything; seeing a big part of your local system struggling has a knock on effect.” - Stakeholder Interviewee - Combined Authority*

#### **Priorities for public service providers**

- 5.12** Violence Reduction Units (VRUs) prioritise violence reduction. More specifically **supporting youth service provision focused on tackling youth violence within their communities** by bringing together police, local government, health providers, community leaders and other organisations. They directly fund provision, but their work also seeks to build a whole system approach to reducing violence by working beyond organisational boundaries to provide a coordinated response to youth violence.

- 5.13** VRUs in England and Wales prioritise defined and vulnerable populations within their areas. They are tasked with preparing a strategic needs assessment to articulate the scale, nature and drivers of serious violence locally, and which key groups are affected. For example, one VRU noted that their strategic needs assessment brings together insights from stakeholders alongside data from across the system, including data on criminal justice, health and wellbeing, community provision and housing. VRUs are not solely targeted at young people, but they do a lot with them because politically it is important, but also practically young people are disproportionately affected by crime and violence.

*“[Our region is] regularly top of the knife crime charts; this weighs heavily on the team and the work they do. We try to challenge ourselves to think how we would run the VRU if in a different region, to make sure we are thinking upstream and about prevention, despite feeling the sharp edge of these issues quite frequently.” - Stakeholder Interviewee - VRU*

- 5.14** Housing Associations are driven by their social purpose and they prioritise investing in supporting the people living in their communities, as well as supporting local youth organisations to grow and develop within the local area. Ambitions centred on supporting the strengthening of local communities, both from a youth violence reduction perspective and more generally in terms of building capacity within the youth sector.

*“As a Housing Association, we have a range of services to build houses, manage housing, and provide homes to some of the most vulnerable people in society. We also have a big focus on social purpose that we invest in supporting the people living in those communities.” - Stakeholder Interviewee - Housing Association*

- 5.15** As with VRUs, the place-based nature of Housing Association activity inherently leads to a focus of activity on particular geographic areas. Indeed, it was acknowledged by housing association interviewees, that **the geographic focus of their activities (in terms of where they are delivered) is predominantly centred on the area in which they operate**, to ensure the benefits experienced are of benefit to children and young people within their local area. That said, housing associations noted that their support would predominantly be open access and available to children and young people from outside their housing areas.

*“We award some funding directly. That is much more based around if we’ve got housing in the area, so it benefits our customers and communities.” - Stakeholder Interviewee - Housing Association*

- 5.16** Operationally, prioritisation and decision-making amongst housing associations was noted to be informed by both organisational social purpose or social value strategies and/or corporate responsibility commitments, alongside an in-depth understanding of local community needs understood through local community officers data collected by the housing association from a range of sources (private and public). For example, several housing association noted that they have community leads who cover a geographic area and are responsible for understanding what provision is available in an area and where the gaps are that the Housing Association needs to fill.

*“We have a team of community investment leads who cover a geographic area, so they will be responsible for going and seeing what other provision is in the area and what the gap/need is. Also looking at if there is an opportunity for us to work in partnership with other people to do something. So, it might be with the local authority, it might be with another youth organisation, or it might be with another housing association, for example.” - Stakeholder Interviewee - Housing Association*

**5.17** For ICBs, we were told that priorities focus on **working with stakeholders in a local community to encourage a preventative/public health approach**, for example through supporting violence prevention activities. As an example, in Case Study E, the ICB provides funding to the Local Authority, with the intention being that it supports a range of work related to specific public health issues.

*“Some of that was a deal that they did with children’s services a few years ago when the children services budget was going down and the health budget was there. Also because I think the [local area] value was on doing work on vaping, smoking, sexual health etc.” – Stakeholder Interviewee – Local Authority*

### **Priorities for independent funders (Foundations, Charities, Trusts and Companies)**

**5.18** Independent funders’ objectives relate to **an ambition to support youth provision to support a range of benefits for children and young people** (including mental health and wellbeing, youth violence, skill development etc). Each is driven by their organisational mission or statement of social responsibility. Because they are independent they can pursue their own objective but tend not to work in isolation of other providers and statutory provision. Key examples are included below:

- One independent funder reported that their priorities are clear at two levels: (1) regional and national plans identifying priority areas for the organisation to be supporting (e.g., a particular vulnerable group or geography); and (2) local need within the communities they serve across the UK (demonstrated by the below quote).

*“We need to understand that local environment, it’s not just about the indicators of multiple deprivation, there might be no shops or a food desert, for instance, or there might be no other youth provision. It was basically about understanding those communities, what it’s like to be a young person in those communities. Data is important, but it’s about understanding the kind of ecosystem that operates within each area.” Stakeholder – Independent organisation*

- We were told by one Foundation that their ambition is to support play and youth providers who deliver on the ground in their local catchment area. The Foundation intends to support good governance, effective stewardship around finance and how organisations manage their budgets, as well as how to be culturally sensitive to the communities which they serve.

**5.19** Overall, across the range of stakeholder types, decision-makers priorities are politically and contextually driven, shaped by their respective organisational purpose. Within that, prevailing priorities in local youth provision are influenced by articulations of local need, political mandates, high profile events, lobbying and community activism, and leaders’ personal priorities. This leads to extensive variation in commissioning practices, meaning the overall amount and the focus of youth work funding varies widely.

## To what extent do decision-makers think about youth provision as means of violence prevention?

**5.20** The previous section detailed the range of priorities decision-makers consider when thinking about youth provision. Youth services can contribute to achieving a range of objectives for young people, one of which is youth violence prevention. The extent to which decision-makers think about youth provision as a means of violence prevention was explored further in interviews with stakeholders and in case studies and is discussed below.

**5.21** National and local politicians and elected officials, public service, and independent service decision-makers have a range of **different objectives for youth provision** that reflect their own professional role and personal values. For example, people from within the youth sector at both national and local level thought youth activities were important to help all young people to thrive. In Wales youth support policy is driven by educational objectives and therefore a primary objective for youth provision was to encourage young people to engage and succeed in education. Youth provision is therefore seen as a way to achieve many different objectives for all young people including the important role to prevent violence, but also health, education, civic engagement and employment.

**5.22** As resourcing for youth activities has declined, decision makers have had to prioritise to decide who should have priority access to services, and which objectives are most important. As funding has declined priorities have shifted;

- from open access for all, to targeted services for those most at need across a range of vulnerable groups.
- from broad-ranging objectives to help all young people to fulfil their potential, to a deficit model to use youth activities to address social issues including school absence, mental ill-health and crime and violence.

*“Given the high rate of youth violence in the area, the youth offer is designed to provide positive activities for young people to engage in, and programmes work alongside housing, the police, community safety teams with detached youth workers who are deployed to hotspots across the area.” Stakeholder interviewee - Local Authority*

**5.23** Many of the stakeholders who participated in the research said that their preference would be for youth services to tackle social issues through offering universal, positive, early intervention services, rather than a deficit model that targeted young people when they were already struggling. But they recognised that this was not current reality.

**5.24** This narrative was familiar in the case studies. One case study area had violence and crime prevention, mental health and wellbeing as their key priorities for their young people (as shown in the box below). This approach was broadly similar to other case studies, whereby youth activities provided targeted early intervention, preventative forms of support, designed

to achieve a range of objectives such as young people’s mental health and wellbeing, education and employment which in turn would deliver benefits in terms of violence prevention. Additional youth work directly targeted at violence prevention operated within this context.

## Case Study E – violence prevention

In Case Study E, the youth service sits within the Children and Families directorate. Preventing violence and its impact on families was seen as one of several drivers for the delivery of youth provision, alongside other priorities such as children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing, physical health, skills development and relationship building. The local authority chose to focus on preventing violence and its impact as part of its ambition to support every child to reach their full potential, which includes a focus on reducing risk taking and keeping young people safe (alongside improving young people’s health and wellbeing, and education and employment for example). This focus on youth violence was informed by a range of data analysis undertaken and insights gathered by the local authority, including data collected to inform the area’s strategic needs assessment (required by the local VRU).

Overall therefore, within the area’s local authority provision, decision-makers saw the universal youth provision delivered as a more early intervention, preventative form of support, which should deliver against these wider priorities (e.g., mental health and wellbeing, education and employment) and in turn deliver benefits in terms of violence prevention. Meanwhile, the detached and targeted youth work delivered by local authority youth workers was seen as a more direct means of violence prevention.

More widely, within the case study area, decision-makers from organisations distributing funding and delivering activities funded by the local VRU noted that these were more likely to be focused on youth provision as a means of violence prevention. However, within this funding commitment it was acknowledged that while some of this funding will go towards *“direct tertiary/targeted interventions where young people are in the throes of risk and violence”*, much of this is still done with an *“upstream”*, early intervention focus.

**5.25** Some decision-makers did prioritise youth violence and crime prevention as a key objective for youth work. These were in community safety and law enforcement roles – linked to Home Office funding and the Serious Violence Strategy. For them, youth services provide a key mechanism to achieve violence reduction objectives (see Table 5-1). Home Office funding is granted to areas that are experiencing the highest levels of such crime through VRUs who are expected to build multi-agency collaborative ways of working to reduce violence. Therefore, VRUs (in areas where they are funded), and Community Safety Partnerships (which can

secure funding from VRUs) consider all forms of violence and safety issues including youth violence prevention.

- 5.26** In addition, Youth Justice Teams employ youth workers (alongside a range of other professionals) to support young people who have been involved in violence or other forms of criminal or anti-social behaviour. Funded by the Ministry of Justice, Youth Justice Teams have a clear objective to think about youth provision as a means of violence prevention and to prevent re-offending.
- 5.27** Where resources are focused on youth violence, **decision-makers also prioritise different types of violence**. The current government has a focus on knife crime which is also prioritised by many VRUs. Other decision-makers have chosen additional priorities: in one region for example the PCC has a clearly stated priority to address violence against girls and young women including domestic abuse and the effects of misogyny.
- 5.28** In summary, whilst many stakeholders recognise the role of youth services in preventing violence, this is often balanced against other objectives like education, health, and employment. Those decision-makers that prioritise prevention of violence for young people are decision makers who are either funded through the Home Office or the Ministry of Justice, or who have a local electoral mandate to address youth violence or criminality.

## How do decision-makers think about the distribution and coverage of local services?

- 5.29** In addition to considering specific factors such as the role of youth provision as a means of violence prevention, decision-makers are required to reflect on the distribution and coverage of local services. The extent to which decision-makers think about distribution and coverage, with a particular focus on the influence and implications of resource scarcity on allocations.

### Resource scarcity

- 5.30** There was universal recognition that funding levels were inadequate to provide the coverage of local youth services, distributed to all areas and communities that stakeholders would like. There was no difference in this assessment between different types of stakeholders. Despite stakeholders in Wales recognising that their funding context was slightly more generous and less complex than their counterparts in England, they still said that additional resources would be beneficial.

*"I'm always hearing off the strategic leads saying that they're either restructuring again or they're having to pull their purse strings much tighter again." – Stakeholder Interviewee - Local government advocacy group*

*"...Local authorities asked for a 7% increase from central government, they've got 3.5%, so they are looking at deficits. You've had one London borough that's gone into receivership 3 times*

*already, so every single London borough, I would argue has got a slightly different set of complex issues going on.” – Stakeholder interviewee - Strategic partnership charity*

- 5.31** Many consultees noted that, although they aimed for fair distribution and coverage of services, limited funding prevented them from reaching all areas and groups equitably.

*“It’s not as fair as it could be. We try to be equitable but we’re only a relatively small funder...There is not enough funding in the wider system.”- Stakeholder Interviewee - VRU*

*“There is not enough of anything to make it fair. If we had adequate resources that we were distributing, then we’d be closer to this. The whole system isn’t currently working as a whole system and that has a knock on impact on the services that are delivered. Despite this, we do a lot of upstream prevention and open work for as many young people as we can reach.”- Stakeholder Interviewee - Local Government Advocacy Group*

- 5.32** We were also told that the implications of insufficient funding were widely acknowledged by those who engage with the youth sector. Notably that a lack of investment in youth activities has adverse implications for young people.

*“The local community, people, parents; lots of people understand the importance of funding youth activities and try to influence where they can; and they understand that the funding has massively reduced for positive youth activities and what this lack of investment in support for young people means. It means serious knife crime, substance misuse, serious youth violence, teenage pregnancy has all gone up. The public know that you need the investment in young people / youth offer.” – Stakeholder Interviewee - Local Authority*

### **Resource allocation options**

- 5.33** In the context of scarce resources decision-makers have to consider a range of options that shape their decisions, these are discussed in turn below.

- 5.34 New providers or different types of provision.** As challenges facing young people in their area change or increase, providers may need to offer different activities, more activities or indeed new providers may offer better solutions. Decision-makers have to balance funding established and stable organisations in their area and supporting newer providers. There are trade-offs to be made when new priorities require provision from new providers:

*“We’re starting to look at ways to try and be a bit more equitable with our funding. I think we are equitable, but being able to say no actually you’ve had nine years of funding, we want you to take two years off because there are different priorities coming through. We’re having to make those decisions and we’ve never done that.” – Stakeholder Interviewee - National Youth Charity*

- 5.35 Targeting concentrations of young people.** Differences were also noted between provision in urban and rural areas with the latter being perceived as missing out because provision was

more expensive per capita due to the limited distances young people can travel, and also, because issues in rural areas were different and of a lower order of priority.

*“There are not as many partners that work once you get out of the main urban areas [...] We're getting youth work deserts and duplicated effort going to the same urban areas.” – Stakeholder Interviewee – Housing Association*

**5.36 There were also differences in provision within local authority areas as decision makers target resources to localities of need**, recognising that this may leave some areas without support. Within a difficult funding landscape, decision-makers often have to prioritise the neighbourhoods and communities of most need within their patch. Limited resources are funnelled to the places they are most needed. While the below quote is from a VRU to demonstrate this point, the same was true of local authority decision-makers, several of whom stated that their local knowledge meant they were aware of gaps in provision across their wards, but lacked resources to tackle issues of unequal coverage.

*““In terms of our decision making, we'll always try and give broad brush. But do we go into the detail of saying, well, actually we've got X number of wards, these are bids that have come in and we've left out X wards and therefore we need to put provision in there? No, we don't, if I'm honest. But that's not to say that we wouldn't if the crime profile suggested that we actually had a problem in an area with no provision. Also the political pressures may feed in but are a secondary consideration for us.” – Case Study Interviewee – VRU*

**5.37 Targeting by type of service.** The nature of services provided by youth workers and VCSE organisations were also unevenly distributed. Some youth services had stronger statutory provisions than others with those that were part of community safety and youth justice duties being better protected from funding cuts than other areas. For example, in Case Study B around 70% of the local authority's budget is for statutory services, with limited discretionary funding available for local priorities. As such, the local authority has seen cuts to youth worker positions (from over 55 FTEs in 2020 to 14 in 2021, to 6.5 in 2025), with the staff that remain likely to be moved into the youth justice service as this is a statutory service where roles might enjoy more protection in future funding cuts.

**5.38 Funding time limited project work to address specific issues.** Consultees from local authorities, VRUs, housing associations and VCSE organisations reported that they have funded time limited initiatives with specific aims and objectives used either to test a concept in the hope of scaling up, or, more often a response to an urgent or high profile issue with allocated funding. For example, one interviewee highlighted the time limited funding they have been able to access for Critical Incident funding from the VRU:

*“[In our Local Authority] there were fatal stabbings and shootings. It's then possible to access critical incident funds to do some additional work in the local area in the immediate aftermath of an event like that.” Stakeholder Interviewee – Local Authority*

## Implications of resource scarcity

**5.39** Resource scarcity has a number of implications which make youth sector provision very precarious in some places. Firstly, there is a shortage of qualified and experienced youth workers, which alongside a lack of organisational infrastructure affects both the quality and sustainability of services in an area. Organisations need resources to manage their organisation, train and provide professional development for their paid workers, support volunteers, and secure and manage funding.

*“Recruitment is such a challenge at the moment, there is a severe lack of youth workers. It’s taken us three recruitment rounds to find one youth worker in recent recruitment.”- Stakeholder Interviewee - Local Authority*

**5.40** Interviewees also identified a number of **challenges caused by project-level funding**, namely:

- People delivering projects may not have the support they need to deliver really effective youth work

*“There are people that are working with groups of young people haven't been trained, they don't know what they're looking for, they are thinking that just by playing football or table tennis that will keep young people safe. But it's not enough. We need to provide the infrastructure and understand what is going on so that we can do more than sticking plasters.”- Stakeholder Interviewee - National Youth Charity*

- Short term funding lacks continuity and stability which impacts upon the quality of experience for young people, who may get involved only for projects to close

*“Funding needs to be much larger but also much more systematic in terms of the length of the funding and the pre requisites for that funding of like who you're connected with, your longer term plan for young people to become on-boarded into your programs and then be supported beyond them.” – Case Study Interviewee – Youth Charity*

**5.41** In conclusion, decision-makers all recognise there are finite resources that are not enough to give all young people access to quality youth services in the way they would like. Options for resource allocation in the context of scarcity include allocation to different service providers, different places, targeting groups of young people, prioritising statutory duties and offering short term project funding. This creates a precarious operating environment for youth sector organisations leading to staff recruitment and retention difficulties, limited training, and disruptions for young people.

## To what extent do decision-makers aim for an equitable coverage of provision for children from Minority Ethnic backgrounds?

**5.42** The options for targeting limited resources outlined above were explored further in the interviews with stakeholders and in case studies to investigate the extent to which provision for children and young people from Minority Ethnic backgrounds was explicitly considered within strategic funding decisions.

### Direct targeting

**5.43** Across all types of decision-makers, most interviewees stated that they had **not allocated or ringfenced any amount of funding specifically for young people from Minority Ethnic backgrounds**. Therefore, for most and across all types of decision-makers, ensuring equitable coverage of provision for children from Minority Ethnic backgrounds was not a stated aim. Occasional exceptions were predominantly independently grant-funded projects that interviewees knew about that were run by and for people with Minority Ethnic backgrounds. Examples offered were:

*“Having targeted groups for some young people works well as they can talk to peers and get peer support, particularly young people from racialised communities. A young person should feel like they belong.”- Stakeholder Interviewee - Youth Advocacy Group*

*“We Move, this Fund gets budget every year and that's for black-led organisations. ... that looks specifically at youth social action for black-led organisations and that's been a really interesting and successful programme to date.”- Stakeholder Interviewee- National Funder*

**5.44** A few organisations (including a local authority, VRU, and VCSE organisations) said that they nevertheless consider the effect of all of their work on children and young people of Minority Ethnic backgrounds. For example, one local authority said that they used Equality Impact Assessments to explore the effect of “*every significant decision that we make around funding activity or changing an existing offer or decommissioning or stopping something*” to ensure that its effect on their communities is properly explored and to prevent any unintended consequences.

**5.45** In some localities, stakeholders (including local authorities, VRUs and housing associations) said that there were **very few young people from Minority Ethnic backgrounds living in their area**. Their assessments of need considered, but did not necessarily prioritise the needs of those groups relative to all other young people in their areas.

**5.46** That said, some funders or support organisations have a proactive approach to engaging and supporting providers of youth services that are specifically designed for particular communities, including Minority Ethnic communities. For example, one local authority

service said they recruited team members from different communities and this was helpful because they spoke community languages and brought cultural understanding to the team.

**5.47** Capacity building within Minority Ethnic communities was another proactive element of provision. Organisations and local authorities in some spaces provided community groups with support to help them to strengthen their governance structures, build organisational leadership and management skills and undertake sufficient due diligence that they could credibly apply for funding for their community.

*“We work with organizations who.... work with diverse organizations [...] ..... taking a broad approach of always thinking who's missing out here or who haven't we thought about? It is also about going into their spaces, I think that's the biggest thing as a local authority not expecting those organisations and people to come to you, you have to be willing to go to them.” – Case Study Interviewee – Local Authority*

### Indirect targeting and support

**5.48** Stakeholders from across all types of decision-makers indicated that they deliver provision that addresses deprivation in their areas, recognising that by targeting deprived communities they are indirectly targeting some Minority Ethnic communities in their areas. For example, interviewees across all types of decision-makers noted that many funders will **target resources to areas with factors associated with need**; either characterised by social deprivation (which is itself more prevalent amongst Minority Ethnic communities) or by the characteristics of the population living in those areas. One funder said:

*“We have targeted support for areas with a minority population and look to fill gaps in those areas. Using data, we can look at a range of factors including minority status. For example, Bangladeshi and Pakistani young men will have higher unemployment levels, which will inform where funding goes.”- Stakeholder Interviewee – Central Government*

**5.49** Some stakeholders (across the different types of stakeholder groups) said they did not prioritise funding for Minority Ethnic communities and that either:

- their efforts fell short of what they would like, predominantly due to funding constraints necessitating a need to focus on universal open access provision, and/or a lack of organisational capacity
- it was not a priority because of the lack of diversity in some area's youth population (as noted above)
- they did not have participant or organisational data to monitor the effect of their activities (whether they were extensive or not).

**5.50** Overall, most of the stakeholders we spoke to (across all types of decision-maker) considered that they predominantly indirectly support children and young people from Minority Ethnic backgrounds through provision that addresses wider needs that are more common in certain ethnic communities. This risks missing the specific needs of children and young people (e.g. for culturally competent provision). A small proportion reported that they directly support children and young people from Minority Ethnic backgrounds, predominantly through independently grant funded projects that interviewees knew about that were run by and for people with Minority Ethnic backgrounds.

## How do decision-makers think about the balance between primary, secondary, and tertiary provision?

**5.51** In the context of prevention of youth violence, primary provision refers to universal programmes that aim to support positive development and prevent the circumstances and behaviours associated with later involvement in violence. Secondary is targeted interventions that work with children who are vulnerable to criminal exploitation or starting to display behaviour associated with involvement in violence. Tertiary are targeted interventions that aim to protect children who are already involved in crime and violence against further involvement. The extent to which decision-makers think about the balance between these types of provision were explored in the interviews with stakeholders and in case studies.

**5.52 Terminology used by decision makers (across all types) is not always consistent.** Those familiar with YEF and from a youth justice or youth offending background were more likely to be familiar with the distinctions of primary, secondary and tertiary. People from a children and youth services background talked more of open and targeted services. But nevertheless the concepts underpinning both were familiar – in as much as they reference a scale of need with prevention at one end and intervention at the other.

**5.53** Almost all stakeholders we spoke to (across all decision-maker types), including those who were associated with tertiary provision said they wanted to see **more work up-stream**. They said they did not want to find themselves in a situation where young people only accessed youth worker support when they were in crisis. **Everybody wanted more ‘up-stream’ preventative interventions.**

*“Open access is the fundamental foundation, on which you might then build or extend services to target them.” – Stakeholder Interviewee - Local Government Advocacy Group*

### Tertiary provision

**5.54** According to local authority decision-makers, young people who need **tertiary support** are supported by statutory services. Those statutory services appear to be relatively well resourced. For example, in Case Study B, the local authority youth work team had been

significantly reduced over the past three years while their youth justice team has maintained its levels of work.

- 5.55** Rather than targeting specific demographics when determining who receives their tertiary support, the local authority in one case study area described how they base their targeting **on geographic hotspots of crime**.

*“There are targeted services as you'd expect for different demographic, but normally actually it's more that they're targeted in specific areas where we know youth violence can be higher.”- Case study Interviewee – Local Authority*

### Primary provision

- 5.56** As we reported in Chapter 4, a lot of youth activities are provided through VCSE organisations which includes open access sports, arts and outdoor activities – this would be categorised as open access or primary provision. In addition, some local authorities support this voluntary provision, and also maintain local youth clubs. Youth clubs may be run by local-authority employed youth workers, or commissioned out to VCSE organisations to run on their behalf. **Local authority open access or primary provision is vulnerable to cuts when difficult funding decisions are being made.**

*“Some areas keep an open access service, but others have got no funding at all available for open access. So I think when you're looking at it, open access funding and provision is definitely the hardest to secure funding for. Some boroughs do commit to it, but of course, if you're looking at the next round of cuts, which is what we do, it is actually the hardest thing to keep. You're more likely to be able to keep targeted funding or funding which is very much focused on a key cohort of young people than your more generic open access youth services.”- Stakeholder Interviewee - Local Youth Advocacy Group*

*“In [my local authority] the balance between open and targeted is around 60:40. This also depends on the time of year, in winter you need a more open offer because people need to be somewhere safe and warm; in summer, the service can be a bit more targeted. Ideally it would be 50:50.”- Stakeholder Interviewee - Local Authority*

### Secondary provision

- 5.57** Much of the focus of trade-offs for decision-makers who have available resources (for example VCSE and youth justice systems) then is on the tensions and choices associated with secondary provision which is an important mid-category focused on work with children and young people who are vulnerable, including vulnerability to criminal exploitation or starting to display behaviour associated with involvement in violence. We use a slightly broader definition of vulnerability (beyond crime and violence) as decision makers focus on a broad range of objectives alongside crime and violence when considering vulnerability, more often than not applying their own eligibility thresholds for targeted services.

**5.58 The balance between open and targeted and between which types of targets remains a constant tension.** Across all decision-maker types, consultee's views on whether their current balance between open and targeted provision was right varied, as did their views of the right way to target. Place-based targeting was the more usual approach for secondary provision amongst all decision-maker groups.

*"I think what we are seeing now from the new government is that targeted is important, whether that is place based or targeted at individuals. The universal approach might feel a bit scattergun and that limited resources is better focused and targeted rather than just open to anybody."- Stakeholder Interviewee - Police and Crime Commissioner*

*"I think the balance is appropriate. A lot of young people go under the radar. Frankly, a lot of people don't meet statutory thresholds. So, having some sort of open access provision, particularly within disadvantaged communities and areas of high violence makes sense to me. I am always struck by the number of young people who have found their own way into youth services rather than being referred and there is something in that."- Stakeholder Interviewee -National Funder*

**5.59** There was no clear difference found during consultations between the ways that decision makers in Wales think about the balance between primary, secondary and tertiary, compared to those in England.

**5.60** In conclusion, decision-makers think about the balance between different types of provision, with a range of terminologies utilised. Overall, tertiary services are provided through the Youth Justice System and are relatively well-resourced, while resources for secondary-type interventions were mostly allocated to specific places. Meanwhile, primary services are predominantly provided by VCSE organisations and funded by their communities or through local authority commissions.

## To what extent do decision-makers consider and prioritise integration between services?

**5.61** In order to ensure equitable coverage, access and an effective balance between levels of provision, decision-makers are required to consider and prioritise mechanisms for integration between services (see Chapter 3's introduction of partnership structures). The extent to which integration is considered and prioritised in practice was explored in the interviews with stakeholders and in case studies.

**5.62** There are instances where **national policy decision makers collaborate** to encourage integration between services. In Chapter 3, Table 3-1 listed Funds that were sponsored by two government departments, including the Enrichment Partnership Pilot (DCMS and DfE), and the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme (DfE with DHSC). This is not however the norm and usually multi-sector working and policy integration is expected to take place closer to the point of delivery.

*“At a national level national policy is really disjointed. The youth services statutory duty sits with DCMS, which is separate to DfE. A lot of both policy and funding continues to come through different parts of government. Overall, the policy and funding picture is very disjointed at national level.” – Stakeholder Interviewee - Local Government Advocacy Group*

**5.63** Some national policy instruments require different services to integrate or to work together. Youth Justice Service for example are required to bring multiple services together to support their clients. This is reflected in their funding. The Youth Justice Board impact report noted that each Service pools resources from at least six different funds with a typical representation being Youth Justice Board (30-40%), Local Authority (23-30%), Police (10-15%), Probation Service (5-10%), NHS (5-10%), Education and VRUs etc (5-10%) (Youth Justice Board, 2025).

**5.64** Similarly, provisions in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 require local authorities, probation services, police forces, fire authorities and Clinical Commissioning Groups to work in Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs). As noted earlier, VRUs are also expected to work collaboratively across different sectors.

**5.65** In other cases, national policy makers make access to different Funds contingent upon collaboration. For example, by allocating PCCs their own funds they have empowered them to bring partners together – although the extent to which this was achieved varies between them.

*“PCCs enable collaborations and can hold partners to account. Local authorities can often struggle to work together. But if they deal with the same issues, the PCC can bring them together. One because they have a mandate and are elected and two. They have the power of funding. The PCCs have got the funding. They can use the funding to bring them together and say oh actually you know there's a real issue here we need to focus on.” – Stakeholder Interviewee - Police and Crime Commissioner*

**5.66** Regionally, mechanisms for collaboration are primarily driven by key regional organisations such as VRUs and combined authorities who can play a coordinating role. However, consultees did note that this collaboration can sometimes be hindered when organisations lack an understanding of youth work.

*“VRUs are pretty good at coordination. But it comes back to individual understanding about the value of youth work. In [one local authority area] they have built a commissioning structure that is built on the principles of youth work and they Commission aligned with that”- – Stakeholder Interviewee - National Youth service advocacy group*

**5.67** Local funders also actively seek to distribute funds to encourage capacity building, integration and the appropriate use of specialist service providers. In one case study area this was part of a strategic decision for the local authority.

*“Making sure this year that we don't allocate all the money internally, i.e., we give it to integrated youth support services or we give it youth justice service or we give it to children's services. .... we can't deliver all this activity on our own, there's other people out there that also have knowledge and experience and ability. And therefore I felt it was right that we've got some expressions in from the community and voluntary sector and that's why there will be at least two bids that will be funded from the VCSE sector.” – Case Study Interviewee – Local Authority Community Safety Partnership*

**5.68 Local government proactively support integration and collaborative working.** One case study area had commissioned a ‘consortium’ of youth providers to deliver youth services in order to maximise reach and avoid duplication. Another had created six ‘youth partnerships’ across its local authority area, which brings together members of the community (including youth voice), the voluntary sector, the council and other key stakeholders to tackle challenges facing young people in the area.

*“We look at making sure we don't duplicate on the same nights, making sure we do joint funds together, making sure we play nicely. The neighbourhood managers sometimes want more youth work, so that's why if we can't do it, they get a charity in to do it. And I suppose it's worked really well, those partnerships.”- Case Study Interviewee – Local Authority*

## Case Study D – multi-agency collaboration

In Case Study D - the council acts as commissioner, connector and coordinator of services supporting other funders to allocate funding, making referrals, and supporting strategic planning. It collaborates with a wide range of partners including the Police and Crime Commissioner, health, and education services, and over 30 voluntary and community sector organisations. The council also supports quality assurance through initiatives like the Youth Provision Safe Practice Mark.

Multi-agency collaboration is a defining feature of youth provision in Case Study D. Strategic partnerships such as a Children and Young People’s Prevention and Wellbeing Alliance bring together public, health, and voluntary sectors to align priorities and share resources. The Youth Justice Strategic Board oversees performance and promotes trauma-informed, child-first approaches. This integrated but resource-constrained system relies on both targeted and open-access services funded through a combination of restricted and short term sources.

**5.69** Most consultees involved in service delivery said the culture of multi-agency or partnership working was familiar and that better integration or referral was something they aspired to while noting the challenges of achieving it. **The challenges of collaborative working at a local level are substantial, challenging and complex.** Collaboration is inconsistent across areas and often lacks a longer-term, strategic view. A lack of clarity about the projects and

roles of key stakeholders within different areas was also raised an issue, sometimes leading to duplication of efforts. Different partners work across different geographical areas, some have sufficient personnel to invest in partnership working whereas for others it can take them away from policy delivery. In addition, aligning levels of decision-making authority within structures can be challenging as can working to different timescales, funding requirements and monitoring requirements.

*“There is an opportunity for local areas to think holistically about this. But if you have money from different sources or timescales with different reporting mechanisms and trying to achieve different things, it doesn’t make your job any easier. It probably exacerbates issues.” – Stakeholder Interviewee- Research group*

*“The whole system isn’t currently working as a whole system and that has a knock on impact on the services that are delivered. We need to consider really what intervention and prevention looks like rather than firefighting all the time in random places.” – Stakeholder Interviewee- Local Authority*

**5.70** Consultees based in Wales, spoke more positively about both regional and national collaboration, particularly from a youth violence perspective through providing national data broken down to authority areas, providing maps of services and active promotion of national policy frameworks. These are not unique actions to Wales but in a smaller nation where we were told that many of the key stakeholders know each other or at least know of each other, communication appears to be more straightforward. This, alongside simpler funding systems makes integration or at least collaboration, more efficient.

*“Over the last 3 to 4 years we’ve had people working in our team funded by [the area] Police and Crime Commissioner. They help us provide more services around evaluation, and to create data profiles for the kind of boards and groups that we have in [the area]. ..... We also run national webinars and publish violence monitoring reports, available nationally and local partners can access violence prevention data.”- – Stakeholder Interviewee - Health Authority*

**5.71** Overall, although integration between services is recognised as valuable, in practice integration of services to support young people is an aspiration for many decision-makers and inconsistently achieved. There is some evidence of national policy makers working across departments although commentators suggested more could be done. Most collaborative working is expected at local level. In some cases this is required by statute, in others as a condition of funding. The benefits of integration and collaboration were recognised by decision-makers, and bodies such as VRUs, CSPs and ICBs were seen to play a key supporting role, however its practical challenges should not be underestimated and further investment in enabling infrastructure is required.

## How much freedom do decision-makers have to change their approach?

**5.72** Given the range of priorities and agendas that are highlighted above for decision-makers to consider, ideally decision-makers would have freedom to change their approach and adapt to changing circumstances. However, **the reality of resource scarcity, short term funding and funding/commissioning priorities often limits the degrees of freedom** experienced by decision-makers. This section explores evidence from interviews with stakeholders and in case studies as to the extent decision-makers have freedom to change their approach and the challenges faced.

**5.73** When it comes to decisions about the amount of funding and its desired objectives, national governments and independent funders appear to have more freedom to change their approach than local decision-makers who work within the frameworks and structures they are given. The next chapter 6 explores in more detail how budgets are spent on different services locally.

**5.74** National governments set policy and associated expectations. In chapter 3 we explored the different approaches made by the Welsh and English governments with the former having a youth strategy and enabling infrastructure that actively shaped provision. **In neither case do governments have freedom from economic and fiscal constraints, nor competing priorities from other departments and policy priorities through comprehensive spending reviews and annual budget cycles.**

**5.75** At national government, some funding streams have been in place for a long time and are part of an established infrastructure. Community Safety Partnerships and support for the National Citizen Service have endured for 27 and 15 years respectively. But as the case of the latter shows, even well-established programmes can be wound down as government decision-makers' priorities change.

**5.76 Grant funding bodies have moderate degrees of freedom in their decision-making.** Such organisations' leadership or governing bodies set expectations for a fund (in terms of focus and eligibility) and hand its management over to a programme management team, who in turn may commission support from voluntary and community sector organisations to bring forward expressions of interest and applications.

**5.77** At a local level, decision makers (e.g., VRUs, VCSE organisations, local/regional authorities) may find their freedom to change approach constrained by a number of factors including:

- The funding streams it can access, their eligibility criteria, scale, duration and management conditions

*"It's those regional/national plans that really creates the road map in each area as to where our interests lie." – Stakeholder Interviewee - National youth charity*

*“The VRU doesn’t get to spend the Home Office funding however it wants. The Home Office set strict requirements; they have to spend 30% on YEF high impact interventions, and achieve match funding, 10% of intervention spend must be on evaluation, and a year on year delivery plan has to be signed off in advance. This can lead to delays and then a lack of flexibility later in the year; once a delivery plan has been signed off there’s not a lot of wriggle room to make additional decisions.” – Stakeholder interviewee - VRU*

- Local infrastructure – the vitality of the voluntary and community sector, the structure of local authority services and the responsiveness of potential delivery organisations
- Nature of multi-sector partnerships and the culture of collaboration

*“My director has fortnightly dialogue with the major decision makers so there are official formats for conversation to try to influence local youth provision budgets.” – Stakeholder Interviewee - Combined Authority*

- Whether local partners really understand the nature of youth work, how it works, its culture and values and what it can deliver for partner organisations’ agendas.

*“Youth work is often misunderstood, but it’s amazing and can do so many things with and for young people. Developing that broad understanding is also key to influencing decision makers including Ministers.” – Stakeholder Interviewee - Regional Government*

## Case Study C – Local Authority decision-making and flexibility

In case study C the senior leadership team, finance colleagues, and elected members at the Council make final decisions on youth service funding. The Youth Service team advocates for funding but does not set the size of their budget. Once the budget is set the Youth Service team leads on allocating the funding to the required youth provision shaped by local needs, data, national trends, and government grants. Youth voice is gathered and incorporated through forums, surveys, and recruitment panels, although the level of co-production is currently limited by resources.

Delivery is collaborative, involving education, social care, youth justice, and integration with external voluntary sector partners and independent grant funders. The team works proactively to source additional funds due to reduced core funding. When they are successful funding is ad hoc, and project or intervention based. It was noted by interviewees that these other sources of funding often use a more collaborative structure involving senior leadership teams and Boards of Trustees, with input from staff and young people which informs live changes to how they spend it.

Decision-makers prioritise prevention and early intervention, however there is an overall focus on maximizing impact with limited resources, and balancing open access and targeted provision. On reflection, case study consultees indicated that wider systemic changes such as flexible, multi-year funding, more opportunities for collaborative bids, and simplified commissioning would be ideal as it would give them more freedom to change their decision-making approach, to involve young people more and to be more responsive to local needs as they arose.

**5.78** In conclusion, decision-makers at national level and from independent providers have more freedom to change decisions about the level and objectives of funding compared to local government. Flexibility in local level decision-making to adapt services to emerging needs is limited by funding structures, including strict conditions and short-term funding cycles.

### To what extent are decision-makers' decisions informed by research and evidence?

**5.79** Evidence-informed decision-making is well understood to be best practice in determining youth provision, however there are often limitations with the amount and coverage of data and information available to decision makers due to inconsistencies or challenges in data collection and/or access. The extent to which decision-makers decisions are informed by research and evidence was explored in the interviews with stakeholders and in case studies.

**5.80** The context for this research question is that **the evidence available to decision makers is improving**. Evidence of the effectiveness of youth work is growing, as is the effectiveness of particular types of intervention, not least due to the What Works Centres. National data and local administrative data is also getting better as IT systems and geo-location improves. Finally, as local authorities and other providers are increasingly involving young people in research and decision making it is becoming more youth-led and youth-relevant.

**5.81** While it was reported that national decisions were informed by evidence we were not able to elaborate further regarding the type of data or the weight of its effect, although some national stakeholders noted current and widespread consultations among young people associated with the forthcoming National Youth Strategy in England. We were however able to explore the use of evidence by local government and local partnerships. The **role of violence reduction units in England** were important in this regard not least because they have funding and a mandate to collect, collate, analyse and interpret data to inform decision-making.

**5.82** Interviewees reported how VRUs:

- **Use administrative data provided by partner organisations** to shape insights (for example admissions data provided by NHS partners, or crime data from police services, fire rescue and ambulance data). These data sources require clear data sharing protocols and this takes time to agree but the results are detailed, geo-located and current. This approach was noted by a range of stakeholders including local authorities, VRUs, housing associations. For example, one respondent said their VRU Knowledge Team was a ‘powerhouse’ in respect of creating strategic needs assessments and the response strategy.
- Build approaches to testing and enriching such data through **co-production of local needs assessments** to ensure that there is a broader understanding of the specific nature of issues and what is driving them:

*“Always start with the data and what it’s saying about how things are; this isn’t just about hard criminal justice data, but also what our local changemakers, young leaders, and community partnerships are telling us about life in our local areas; qualitative and quantitative data is equally important.” – Stakeholder Interviewee- VRU*

**5.83** Having a clear evidence base was important to a number of local groups, particularly VRUs that are operating in local authorities and housing associations working with specific local communities. Often this extends beyond a strictly quantitative approach, and involves co-production from local communities, for example:

*“There will be a data led approach. We’ll coproduce with the community and ask if the data tells us a true picture. Does it feel this way? Looking at who’s coming in to the area, so [the area] at the moment is an aging population, but we know in five years’ time that’s going to start to*

*change with more younger families moving in.” – Stakeholder Interviewee – Housing Association*

**5.84** In addition, the local needs assessment produced by the VRU was noted as a particularly helpful tool for youth provision specifically focused on violence prevention:

*“The local profiles we produce identify specific areas of need for different reasons and this would help target provision. We also identify emerging areas of need, areas that are creeping up so we can move towards a more preventative approach. They do help to flag specific crime types too so really helps funders make more informed decisions.”- Case Study Interviewee – VRU*

**5.85** Data was also used in other ways to shape decisions:

- Allocation of regional funds by central and regional government to local authority areas done on the basis of proportional allocation by youth population
- Allocation of funds from VRU budgets to ensure that at least 30% went to project delivery and that a proportion of that was for interventions with proven moderate or high impact (according the YEF Toolkit)
- Scaling up or scaling back projects by stakeholders across the decision-maker types depending on monitoring and evaluation evidence:

*“If we look at last year's allocation, we got halfway through the year and we were getting the stats coming through showing that 18 to 30 was a key risk for us. We were conscious that all the funding was allocated predominantly up to the 16 year age range, so therefore we reverted back to a provider and said we've got a small amount of underspend, can you deliver a project?”- Case Study Interviewee – Local Authority Community Safety Partnership*

- Allocation of funds by stakeholders across the decision-maker types based on levels of violence and other key determinants, such as rates of exclusion and levels of poverty, to facilitate a public health approach that allows funds to be prioritised. Collecting a range of data wide enough to show a holistic picture:

*“The funding that we give to boroughs is dependent on levels of violence, though it's a bit more sophisticated than that. We use a tool that blends, for example, rates of exclusion, rates of poverty, rates of free school meals alongside violence stats. .... So we use a more sophisticated tool than just violence stats to enable us to sort out funding.”- Stakeholder Interviewee- VRU*

## Case Study B – Use of evidence

The quality of data provided through the VRU to Case Study Area B has improved in its coverage and detail. The VRU has three researchers who do a lot of data collation as well as reviewing local, national and international research on factors affecting young people's vulnerability and risks of being caught up in serious violence.

*"The Knowledge, research and evaluation hub are a powerhouse in respect of creating strategic needs assessments and the response strategy. Each year they look at police, local authority, fire and rescue, ambulance/A&E and education data. They use five years of data rolling every 12 months"*

It is mainly based on police data and looks at the number and types of crime, where crimes have occurred, where people who have committed crime live and where victims live. This data is further broken down by crime committed by and to children. This data is shared with each partner in the Community Safety Partnership with detailed breakdowns for their area and is used to shape decisions about funding allocations, and core service delivery. Recent analysis has shown for example that just 16 young people are responsible for half of reported incidences of violent crimes.

The types of data collected and reported through this process do not however always pick up on some of the issues that local youth workers said were affecting young people they worked with. These issues reflected the changing nature of the area and included how young people's needs are changing, including conversations about the effects of poor mental health, the influence of people from outside the area on young people raised within the area, gang activity, and domestic and other violence against women and girls experienced in different ways both in white British and Pakistani British households.

**5.86** While data to inform decision-making is important and an essential component of the political process; stakeholders raised two concerns about this. **The first concern was to ensure that the availability of data about a certain issue did not, in itself, shape the policy agenda.** For example, just because data highlighted a need associated with knife crime or anti-social behaviour this should not mean that other issues, which are no less important but may be hidden, should be de-prioritised. An example given was violence against girls and young women which includes domestic abuse and control issues in relationships.

**5.87** **The second concern was the focus on initiatives or interventions for which there was high quality evidence available.** Stakeholders expressed concern that experimental methods of impact assessments were better suited to some interventions (such as A&E Navigators) than others (universal access youth work). Stronger evidence then attracts more funding and it creates a cycle of impact evidence which reinforces the evidence for some

interventions over others. Youth workers in particular stated how challenging they found it to provide high quality evidence of the impact of their work because of the time between intervention and impact, their integrated way of working with other sectors, and their young-person led approach to objective-setting. Youth workers were aware of this and keen to build a better evidence base:

*“We are looking at a way to do distance travelled measures (self-reporting at the start, middle and end of a young person’s journey[with us]). Once we have better systems behind the scenes, that will be very helpful. We need to do some work on baselining when a child arrives- looking at a starting point, really understanding what is going on. It would be great to be able to provide a report that tells decision makers how much money we’ve saved them [in the longer term].”- Case Study Interviewee – Local Authority*

**5.88** In conclusion, the quality of local data is improving with VRUs and other partnerships combining government and administrative sets to provide granular and multi-faceted data that can inform both strategy and delivery decisions. However, although data and evidence increasingly informs decision-making, challenges remain in gathering consistent quality data, particularly regarding the long-term impact of universal youth work, that is suitable for informing decision-making.

## **To what extent are decision-makers’ decisions informed by the perspectives of young people and those with lived experience?**

**5.89** In addition to data and evidence, the perspectives of young people and lived experience is recognised as important in informing decision-making on youth provision. The extent to which this currently happens in practice was explored through the interviews with stakeholders and in case studies.

**5.90** There were **many examples of ways in which young people were involved in decision making** in local authorities (for example ‘Youth Combined Authority’, youth parliaments, or youth voice teams), VRUs (with examples of extensive consultations and youth voice groups) and delivery organisations (which may involve young people in shaping what services and activities they do and how they operate).

*“We’re doing a lot of work in schools at the moment, and so that’s based on the research of 4000 young people across [the area]. As to what they think is contributing to a rising exclusion and suspension rate and what is behind the problems around attendance. So they collectively worked with teachers and researchers around how you might turn that around and what you want in schools.”- Stakeholder Interviewee- VRU*

## Case Study E – youth voice and research/evidence

In Case Study E, a range of good practice examples were highlighted in terms of engaging young people in decision-making. In terms of youth voice, several stakeholders spoke about the strength of the Youth Combined Authority (YCA) for the local area, who have been actively involved in decision making within the combined authority. The YCA has also been involved in the co-production of free bus travel in the local area for 16-18 year olds, and has presented at Youth Select Committees on Curriculum for Life and Knife Crime. Other interviewees pointed to the varied landscape of youth voice across a number of services in the case study area, including a range of multi-agency partnerships, committees and lived experience groups.

- 5.91** Funders also shared examples of the ways they use the **perspectives of young people to inform their funding decisions**. For example, a national funder highlighted that their strategy specifically seeks to understand community need through engagement with community voice and therefore, responds accordingly to needs identified in applications.

*“Our strategy clearly outlines starting with the need that is established through community voice. So what are young people telling us they need? Young people would not be saying they want ‘youth violence prevention projects’, although they obviously say that violence is a big issue and feeling safe on the streets is something we hear a lot.” - Stakeholder Interviewee - National funder*

- 5.92** All case studies described approaches to involving young people although one case study area described that they value co-production in their youth services but that it was hard to conduct regularly due to limited time and resources. The area therefore used a Youth Council system to get input into their decisions and regularly used surveys and outcome tracking to gain an understanding of young people’s opinions. Another highlighted the importance of empowering the community and organisations:

*“I would say that we really heavily focus on empowering the community and organisations, whether that’s through takeover days, ....the point of representation at boards is really, really important. And we’ve worked to diversify that where we can.” - Case Study Interviewee - Local Authority*

- 5.93** In terms of variation by nation, unlike their counterparts in England, a national delivery partner in Wales felt that youth voice was already embedded when considering youth violence prevention.

*“Welsh Government always aims to be led by young people and ask their grant recipients to take the same approach; both are increasingly hearing more about knife crime, youth violence, and*

*questions around how to deal with exposure to these things from young people. This has become a recurring theme in recent years.” – Stakeholder Interviewee – National Delivery Partner*

*“Local authorities are expected to have sound structures in place to ensure young people participate in the design and delivery of youth services. But a closer relationship between national and local levels would be beneficial.” – Stakeholder Interviewee - Local Authority*

**5.94** Stakeholders recognised and welcomed all these approaches and suggested that it will increase in importance given the approach currently being taken to develop the Youth Strategy. Some stakeholders with limited youth voice approaches in place, went further and suggested that a more fundamental change should be taken to involving young people so that young people are seen as an asset, rather than part of a problem that needs fixing, that young people’s voices should be involved right at the start of a process:

*“The one missing piece of the jigsaw will be young people... What we need to think about more clearly is how young people are involved in the co design of these things and, ...are actually involved at the start.” – Stakeholder Interviewee- Local youth advocacy group*

**5.95** Overall, different structures used to involve young people and those with lived experience in the design and delivery of youth services were described by individuals across the decision-maker types. For example, these included surveys, consultations, research and youth councils. The value of youth and lived experience voice was well recognised amongst stakeholders, and while some areas have effective mechanisms in place, it would appear it still needs deeper, earlier and more consistent integration into decision-making processes.

## Conclusion

**5.96** This chapter has presented findings that relate to nine different research questions explaining the priorities and influences on different types of decision maker. It is clear that decision makers are not able to make free, objective choices about what to fund and how much resource to allocate. Rather, decisions are made on the basis of 'bounded rationality', a concept that recognises decision makers have limited data, constrained options, time and other resource pressures, and are shaped by environmental and a range of social and economic factors. Within this context we have some clear findings:

- Across all types of decision-makers, most interviewees stated that they had not allocated or ringfenced any amount of funding specifically for young people from Minority Ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, for most and across all types of decision-makers, ensuring equitable coverage of provision for children from Minority Ethnic backgrounds was not a stated aim.
- Decision makers think a lot about the balance between primary, secondary and tertiary provision - although they are more likely to talk about it as either open or targeted provision. The ideal balance for them would be for universal access to primary/open

provision with the anticipation that this would, in time, reduce the need for secondary or tertiary provision. In practise however, resource constraints push decision makers to focus on targeted or tertiary provision for those young people who need it most

- Decision makers recognise that youth provision can help to reduce the risks of young people being involved in crime and violence. Decision makers in organisations whose remit is to reduce crime and violence prioritise this effect; but others also recognise and seek to balance the effect of youth provision on self-actualisation, better health, engagement and attainment in education, and community activity.
- Decision makers in areas with VRUs and in Wales have better data because these organisations have invested in data sharing architecture. But even here, data is imperfect and changes quickly as young people move and their needs change
- Young people are increasingly being drawn into decisions by contributing their knowledge or insights through consultations and one-off exercises, Or more consistently through governance infrastructures, although we did not find any examples where young people made decisions about the level and type of youth provision being resourced in their area.

**5.97** The chapter also considered different types of decision maker and the factors that shape the decisions. Economic factors are clearly paramount as the effects of years of austerity funding has been the reduction of capacity within Youth Services with the cumulative effects being an increased reliance on targeting specific groups of young people or, more often, targeting places where they live. Austerity has affected decision makers at all levels of government as departments vie for a share of decreasing resources. As many of the funding sources that we explored in this research were public sources of funding, accountability for decisions was also an important factor shaping decisions - again at all levels of government. National and local politicians manifestos and associated decisions, were shaped by a range of factors including personal assessments of priorities for change, their brief, the influence of campaigns and advocacy, high profile news stories (such as local tragedies or nuisances), and the professional assessments of civil servants and local council officers. In the next chapter we explore how these are experienced locally by presenting evidence from five locality case studies.

## 6. Findings: what services are budgets for youth provision spent on?

### Summary of key findings

- Effective youth services need a strong ecosystem where delivery organisations can grow, adapt and change provision within networked and effectively guided partnership structures. Resources to sustain strong ecosystems are needed for (1) direct service delivery including: open and targeted provision, youth clubs and outreach, and specialist provision; (2) capacity building for local delivery teams, for example through training, and (3) partnership management to co-ordinate service planning, delivery and sustainability of provision.
- Local youth provision budgets have fluctuated dramatically over recent years. Local fluctuation is partly due to accessing time-limited grants or programme funding. Local authority budgets have declined substantially in both absolute and in real terms.
- Funding is often allocated for short time periods, most commonly on an annual basis. However, funding commitments reported by stakeholders varied, with some reporting funding via annual cycles, others reporting between 2-4 years, and in one case, for seven years. In Wales, youth service budgets were said to be more stable than in England. However, they are still decided annually and there is still an annual period of uncertainty. Whilst there is ring-fenced central government funding for youth services in Wales, it is not sufficient to meet demand and local areas still need to secure funding from other sources to provide essential services.
- Spending on violence reduction activities take many forms. These include universal violence reduction programmes for all young people (such as knife crime awareness in youth clubs and schools) and personalised support for young people involved in crime or at risk of becoming involved in crime (which may be one-to-one support or may be a referral to open access youth club provision). The lack of a clear typology of violence reduction activities, alongside the lack of detailed budget data for each local area, meant that it was not possible to say how much budget in the case study areas was allocated to primary, secondary and tertiary services.
- The majority of youth work respondents advised that their organisations were not focused specifically on violence prevention unless they were funded to do this. This does not however mean that youth provision did not have a positive effect on violence prevention.
- Case study consultees were unable to provide information about the number of Black-led organisations that were funded in their area either because this data was not collected, or was not reported.

## Introduction

- 6.1** Previous chapters, using evidence from the past fifteen years, have shown how funding sources have become more diverse as local authority spending has declined such that youth services now exist within a complex pattern of national government programmes, with multi-sector and multi programme funding feeding into different delivery structures in different areas. Alongside this, the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector (VCSE) has taken on a much greater role in delivering local youth provision, as have private funders, companies, charities, and other organisations (Institute for Government and UK Youth, 2024). This shift has created a diverse and fragmented ecosystem, with multiple funders and delivery models working at different spatial levels across different local areas.
- 6.2** **This chapter presents data drawn primarily from the five case studies** to explore the different services that youth service budgets are spent on where information was available. Each case study comprised interviews with at least five strategic partners, alongside review of publicly available documents describing youth sector plans, and Council papers and data drawn from Section 251/Welsh government sources and 360Giving for each local authority area. Before exploring the size, duration and allocation of local services we firstly introduce the different ways that funding providers support youth service ecosystems.

## Local youth service ecosystems

- 6.3** An effective youth sector needs funding to cover service delivery as well as maintaining an ecosystem that encourages change, innovation and ongoing development. The local authority funding introduced in Chapter 3 offer resources to youth services to support one, or a combination of all of **three key functions vital for an effective local youth sector**;
- **service delivery** to pay for youth worker time, facilities and equipment and ongoing expenses associated with both open and targeted, centre-based or peripatetic provision
  - **capacity building** to ensure people with the right skills in the right spaces are involved including training and supervision of youth workers, leading and managing services and building evidence and evaluative capacity, and
  - **building local infrastructure and connections** associated with mapping provision and contribution to strategy and planning, and partnership support.
- 6.4** These three key functions are covered in detail in the following sub-sections, including examples from case study areas to illustrate key points. If youth activities are to be effective at delivering services that meet a wide range of objectives, including tackling youth violence then they need to be part of a healthy ecosystem. This chapter therefore starts by outlining how those ecosystems are maintained in the case study areas before presenting data about the sources, uses and scale of budgets allocated to youth services.

## Service delivery

- 6.5** Youth services are delivered locally to young people through a mix of activities at centres/facilities, drop in spaces, detached and street-based work, outreach, outdoor learning and digital platforms. Delivery often includes a combination of open access and targeted support, as well as tailored support for young people who meet specific criteria for one to one and small group interventions. Funding can cover both core services and additional short term resources. For example, in Case Study C, Youth Justice Service funds additional youth worker positions to support delivery of local youth provision, where help and support for those who have offended or are at risk of offending can be accessed in the local community and/or through access to 1-to-1 support from a youth worker.
- 6.6** There are a **wide range of different services that budgets for youth provision are spent on**. These are summarised in Table 6-1 which shows that youth services operate in a range of different places (including in youth centres, community buildings and through street-based outreach) and with young people who may be self-motivated to attend or be targeted either individually or as part of a group or community. Youth violence prevention is often part of targeted services which may be led or funded by the youth justice services (which may employ specialist youth workers):
- **Youth Justice Team Referrals** - The local authority youth justice service in Case Study C focuses on preventative work. It is split into two-teams the case management team to manage all the out of court disposals<sup>23</sup> and court orders using a Bureau process for children arrested by police. The other part of the team is the resource team, which includes all the specialist support such as accommodation, education, health and restorative justice and victim work. Most of their work is via referrals from non-justice services (children's services, education, health) for children at risk of entering the justice system.
  - **Jointly delivering deterrence provision** - Case Study B's VRU supports work in collaboration with the local Council on targeted intervention based on the deterrence model. It includes police officers and youth workers working on patrol together, which is directed around individuals or places where there is a need to divert young people away from serious violence.

**Table 6-1: The range of youth services**

Type	Description
Open access, centre based	Youth clubs offering a range of activities, open after school hours. Available to all young people, regardless of need or background, typically without a referral. Also known as 'universal provision'.

<sup>23</sup> Out-of-court disposals offer alternative resolutions to formal criminal court proceedings for less serious offenses

Type	Description
Detached youth work	Youth work that takes place outside traditional centres, engaging young people in community settings such as parks, shopping centres, or housing estates (not typically attached to a building or hub).
Outreach youth work	Youth workers going to places where young people are to engage and offer support (typically an 'extension' of building- and hub-based provision)
Targeted youth work	Specialist youth services that address specific needs or characteristics, such as ethnicity, special educational needs, or risk of offending. Youth workers offer one to one or small group support to specific groups of young people.
School-based youth work	One to one or group work to support students' personal and social development, connecting with other services or opportunities
Sports and recreational youth work	Use sport or arts and culture to engage young people by running clubs or programmes that encourage participation and learning
Alternative settings	Youth workers based in a range of different settings including Accident and Emergency Departments in hospitals, online and as part of outdoor education and enrichment activities.

Source: Consultation evidence

**6.7** Youth organisations note that often **funding streams do not cover all core costs associated with running a service** and that the costs of managing a service, providing administrative and monitoring data are often ineligible for funding. They also note that where funding streams are competitive, this places a high burden on organisations to spend time writing bids, and to employ or commission people with the necessary skills and experience. This creates a precarious environment for people working in the sector, particularly in smaller organisations:

*"...in terms of scale, people being asked to deliver more with less money...squeezing people out. Also we hear from smaller organisations...they can't always compete with those bigger organisations or deliver as much....they get priced out and are stuck." – Stakeholder Interviewee - Collaborative Advocacy Group.*

### Capacity building

**6.8** Youth services aim to **strengthen delivery through building capacity** amongst local delivery structures and partnerships to ensure youth activity providers can meaningfully connect with young people from their communities. This research highlights examples of services that build capacity in youth and community organisations, and help young people influence decisions about services that affect them. Feedback also suggests some funding is spent on improving youth worker skills and knowledge for example:

- using funds from the Home Office Serious Violence Duty Burden Grant, the VRU in Case Study D supports the capacity and capability of local partnerships. They focus on support for the development and delivery of sustainable training solutions for local partnerships. The team has been involved in working with local partners to develop and deliver new training packages and approaches. They have placed particular focus on the benefit being sustainable, through train-the-trainer approaches which will maximise the longer-term impact for local delivery partners.

**6.9** A further example is provided in the box below.

## Case Study A – capacity building

In Case Study A, the local authority created a new role, Head of Youth Support Participation, in direct response to 507B of the Education Act 1996 (as amended), which places several duties on local authorities including a duty to ‘secure as far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient provision for educational and recreational leisure-time activities for young people’. The role is cross cutting within the local authority, covering the local youth service activity, as well as areas such as education, community safety and public health.

Alongside supporting in the distribution and awareness of VRU funding, the Head of Youth Support Participation is working with the local voluntary and community sector to understand, build and promote the youth offer in the local area. This has involved a range of activities, with a core component being the development and maintain a central web page detailing the range of youth provision available across the area (including local government-commissioned, charity-based and VCSE provision).

The local authority is also working to build capacity within local providers through a range of mechanisms. A key example of this is through supporting organisations’ applications for funding, including through writing letters of support to funders, supporting providers to consider monitoring and evaluation activities in their bids, and offering wider skills and capacity building support for bid writing. More widely, the local authority is also connecting local youth providers with one another and encouraging joint-working and consortia bids for funding opportunities (e.g., VRU funding), which is in part facilitated by an improved understanding of the local offer through the website activity outlined above.

### Building local infrastructure and connections

**6.10** Local youth services aim to connect youth providers with each other, their delivery partners, young people and funders through formal partnerships and informal networks. Recent

research for DCMS shows that youth workers play a key role in connecting people at both strategic and operational roles (SQW and UK Youth, 2025). These partnerships take different forms, including joint strategy planning and shared funding systems to support referral commissioning:

- **Jointly developing strategy** – Case Study E’s Community Safety Partnership (CSP) is made up of public and private agencies focused on reducing crime and disorder. Key partner agencies include the local City Council, Police, Fire and Rescue Service, NHS Integrated Care Board and the Probation Service. The Community Safety Partnership works to deliver the local Community Safety Strategy, a three year strategy to respond to the area’s crime and disorder.
- **Referral commissioning** – In Case Study B, the Local Authority Targeted Youth Work Team offer targeted services taking referrals from partner organisations including schools and health care providers. The local authority fund youth workers to provide this service. About three years ago there were a team of 8-10 workers, but these numbers were cut at the same time as open provision was cut. *“But of course if you close down open access, then you will see an increase in targeted demand. We now basically have a situation where children have to meet a threshold.”* They currently run a waiting list of between 6-9 months.

**6.11** In conclusion, the case studies show that just as government funding for youth service delivery is constrained, the funding that supports its ecosystem is also increasingly fractured. Youth services should be diverse in their form and mode of delivery to meet the needs of all young people, yet case study areas did not describe all these forms in their areas suggesting gaps in different types of services exist. Furthermore, when funding is for independent youth organisations, too often it cannot be used to cover all their organisation and delivery costs. Similarly, while there was funding for particular forms of partnership (Community Safety and VRUs for example), there were far fewer examples of funding for capacity building of the workforce in the case study areas – which risks workers losing skills, not being up to date to relevant practice and leaving the sector.

**6.12** The rest of this chapter looks in more detail at delivery including the consistency and duration of funding, the size of budgets year-on-year, ring-fencing for particular funding streams, and differences between types of youth provision organisations.

## How much does the size and allocation of the youth provision budget vary year-to-year?

**6.13** The size of overall youth budgets fluctuate over time, although as we explained in Chapter 4, the general trend is downward and budgets are diminishing both absolutely and in real terms as inflation pushes running and salary costs up. Although the funding from Local Authorities appears fairly consistent in recent years (as shown in the previous sub-section) the extent to

which the size and allocation of youth provision budgets varies year to year amongst local areas and the implications of this was explored with stakeholder interviewees and case study areas.

**6.14** Section 251/Welsh Government data for the five case study areas over the past three years is provided in Table 6-2. This shows how **spend fluctuates from one year to the next**, with the largest increase being over £4.5m and largest decrease £2m and with three areas having increases one year followed by decreases the next. This likely reflects short-duration funding being awarded or closing down. It also shows that across the five areas, more is being reported in 2023-24 than two years earlier suggesting an increase in youth spending, although there is a lack of consistency to this both within and between areas.

**Table 6-2: Section 251/Wales youth data spending for Case Study areas.**

	2021-2022		2022-2023		2023-2024
Case Study A	£3,301,633	↑	£7,753,281	↓	£5,834,170
Case Study B	£1,978,464	↓	£1,145,430	↑	£1,359,836
Case Study C	£1,419,380	↑	£1,519,742	↑	£1,729,515
Case Study D	£1,419,803	↑	£3,147,735	↓	£2,356,673
Case Study E	£2,661,475	↓	£2,238,687	↓	£1,542,590

Source: SQW Analysis of: ONS: Section 251; StatsWales: Expenditure summary by local authority

**6.15** The same trend is apparent across local authorities in England and Wales, with stakeholders from both reporting that they have experienced budget pressures and reductions in funding. For example, an interviewee from the Welsh Case Study C stated that for 2023-24 they received £1.3 million core funding which was topped up with other support grants from the Welsh Government *"I think it's getting less and less; we have had a reduction of about 9% I think for this financial year."* Overall, the funding formulae take into account the number of young people in their local authority area which have decreased, further to this all departments in the local authority have been asked to make further savings.

**6.16** However, across our five case study areas we found **most respondents were unfamiliar with the Section 251 / Welsh Government financial data**. They were not responsible for the returns (which were completed by a different team), and they were not involved in their review. Therefore their comments were, by their own admission, not fully informed. For example:

- The figure reported for Case study A includes a wide range of funding in addition to the £400k per annum that funds the Local Authority youth service.
- Respondents in two Case study areas (A and E) said they thought the figures were about right. This however appears inconsistent as they reported very different models with Case

Study E describing more overall provision than Case Study A, but with a similar reported budget.

- The local authority lead for Case study C suggested their budget was £1.3m rather than the £1.7m recorded but was not sure what was included in the figures and interviewees described how they had needed to cut youth services over the past two years.

**6.17** Therefore, the reported **data provides a useful barometer for the scale of local authority budgets and spending** but should not be relied upon as a consistent and robust source of spending data.

**6.18** National programme funding also varies from year to year. Some national funding programmes have been running for decades and are expected to continue (MoD Cadet Forces, Community Safety Partnerships). However, others, such as the National Citizen Service and #iwill fund, are winding down ahead of updates linked to the National Youth Strategy. In comparison, other significant funding is annual, for example, while VRUs have a three-year funding commitment, they will allocate grants of differing duration based on annual budgets.

**6.19** In terms of national variation, in line with findings in Chapter 3, feedback from stakeholder and case study interviewees suggests **Wales youth service budgets set by the Senedd are more stable than in England**. However, they are still allocated annually and there is still an annual period of uncertainty and a continued reliance on supplementary funding sources to maintain essential services:

*“It is still decided upon annually at Government level; a draft budget is presented at the end of the calendar year, and then there is a two month window each year where funding is not settled (Jan – March) and there’s quite a degree of uncertainty; it’s the same in local authorities as well. Funding levels have however remained stable, despite the annual uncertainty before the budget is signed off.” – Case Study Interviewee – Local Authority*

**6.20** The effects of reduced and sporadic funding on youth services in local areas mean that provision available to young people is reduced, and also this progressively limits the capacity available to organisations to network, contribute to partnerships and secure other funding. These are illustrated in two of the case study areas:

- Case study C have had to make substantial savings over the last two years. It has meant reduction in service provision for example youth workers are only present in schools 2–2.5 days per week rather than full time limiting their impact in preventative work. Cuts have also led to a roaming model for community youth work, rotating through areas every few months and some rural areas feel underserved or forgotten, especially in the south of the area. As a result, the council has to prioritise core needs (well-being, NEET prevention, homelessness) over broader or emerging issues like youth violence. This also limits capacity to respond to new challenges or expand successful initiatives. In addition,

partnerships are difficult to sustain limiting ability to fully engage or lead joint initiatives collaborations with health, housing, and justice sectors.

- Case study D youth service recently underwent a restructure due to a £250,000 budget cut. This has led to a reduction in the size of the in-house youth team, though the council has retained a core team of qualified youth workers and apprentices. It has led to a reduction in direct delivery, meaning the council's youth work is now highly targeted, focusing on young people involved with social care or early help. Open access and broader provision are increasingly outsourced to the voluntary and community sector (VCSE). Due to the funding being sporadic the council is often dependent on external grants (e.g. Million Hours Fund, PCC funding, church donations). The council has also made a shift to collaborative delivery and shared responsibility across sectors (e.g. police, health, education) for more partnership working.

**6.21** In conclusion, local youth service funding fluctuates up and down from year to year. Overall the trend is for budgets to decline over time in both England and Wales. Section 251/Welsh government data demonstrates a fluctuation but the data should be treated as a barometer of changes as there were discrepancies between what interviewees told us and what was reported in the data. Some of the fluctuation is due to changes in national funding as programmes are time limited. The effect of fluctuations and reductions is to limit the services available to young people through targeting, and to limit the capacity of organisations to network, capacity-build and secure other funding.

## What is the duration of funding, and how consistent is funding for individual organisations over time?

**6.22** Four of the five case study areas delivered their own youth services alongside other partners. These local authority services were resilient but subject to cuts that reduced their staffing and resources. Other public service partnerships are also resilient – such as Community Safety Partnerships that have been running since 1998. Some organisations with core government funding are therefore stable and reliable, despite funding changes

**6.23** However, other organisations who rely on grant awards to fund their services are more vulnerable to the effects of short term grant funds and the limitations associated with short duration funding. **Across England and Wales, many grants, awards or project-based funding is for short periods.** Funding commitments varied across stakeholder responses, with the majority reporting funding via annual cycles or shorter, and a minority reporting 2-4 years and the noteworthy example of one Local Authority having a seven year grant cycle.

*“Most programmes are set up on a three year basis, as long as performance is as it should be; the maximum a programme would last is five years.” - Stakeholder interviewee- Combined Authority*

**6.24** Annual allocations are not always negative as they may be associated with piloting new initiatives. This can lead to services doing things differently or doing different things (such as working with new partners or moving into different places). This may strengthen capacity in the longer term and help them to respond to the changing needs of young people.

**6.25** Also, some delivery organisations have established strong relationships with commissioners or independent grant providers that provide a degree of longer-term stability but this is unusual.

**6.26** Inconsistent funding creates workforce challenges for youth sector providers. Recruitment and retention of skilled and experienced workers is a major challenge. Some interviewees noted mechanisms such as bridging loans being used to avoid recruitment and retention issues and associated service inconsistencies. One stakeholder emphasized that they would prefer £200,000 per year for five years than £1 million for one year, as the former would ensure the ability to plan, retain staff, and build stable youth provision:

*“We can't work with 12 months funding, well we can, but you'll only ever get primary prevention work done so training, awareness, promotion, that sort of things, things that you can commission over 12 months and demonstrate an impact. You can't employ anybody to do anything. It's unfair. It's unfair on local authorities or any other host to go out and recruit somebody in a 12-month post.” – Stakeholder Interviewee- Local authority*

*“Most of it is short term funding, so for a year, then you've got the recruitment and retention issues that impact on top of that.” – Stakeholder interviewee- Strategic partnership charity*

**6.27** Another effect of short-term funding is the lack of consistency of provision which affects young people who may find their activities being cut, or find themselves excluded from it.

*“With Youth Services, if we're going to really make a difference, I think people need the stability so that we can set things up and know that they're going to be funded not indefinitely because nothing lasts forever but you know at least for the next 5-10 years without having to worry each year about having to keep hoping the funding is going to be coming. Or else you get people you're working with to a certain point, and then all of a sudden, the provision is gone.”- Case Study Interviewee – National Youth Charity*

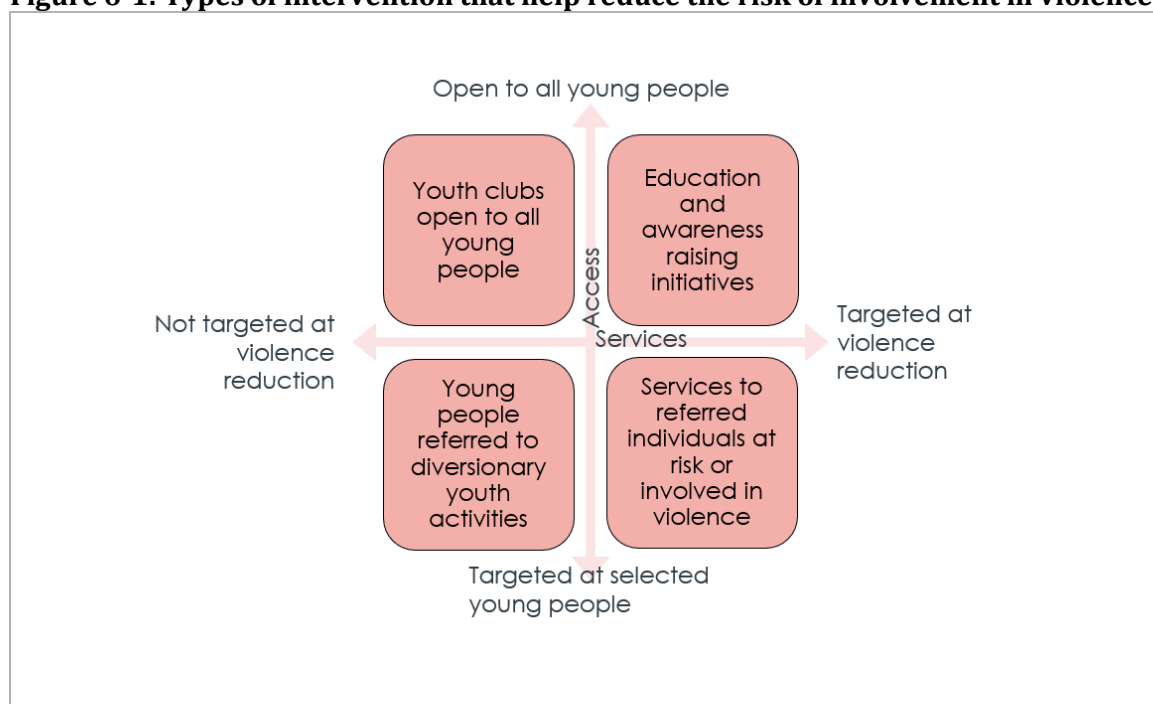
**6.28** A third effect is the lack of impact evidence. The ability to show positive effects of a service on young people is increasingly important for successful grant applications. This generates a conundrum where longer term funding is needed to make the case for longer term funding.

**6.29** In conclusion, local authority budgets are set annually, and core funding for youth services is informed by previous years' funding. Other funding streams are allocated annually, or less often (e.g., every two to four years). For youth sector providers the implications of this are felt with recruitment and retention difficulties, difficulties of working strategically and building an evidence base.

## How much of the budget is allocated to primary, secondary, and tertiary services?

- 6.30** It was noted in chapter 5 that youth services are generally characterised as either open access or targeted. A different way of describing this is as primary, secondary and tertiary services. Case study interviews explored how local budgets are allocated between these different groups of provision. This was supplemented by additional reflections from relevant local stakeholder interviewees and a review of Section 251 on targeted versus universal youth expenditure.
- 6.31** Firstly, it is not straightforward to categorise how much funding goes to either primary, secondary or tertiary services. Many of the people we spoke to said that youth work had a range of positive outcomes, including reduction in youth violence, meaning that all youth work could be classed as part of violence reduction. Types of violence reduction interventions take different forms. They may be whole-group interventions designed to educate all young people about certain issues (for example knife-carrying, misogyny), alternatively they may be individual preventative measures for young people who have been involved in violence that are delivered in open access youth clubs. This is illustrated in Figure 6-1 which shows examples of the different types of intervention by how open or targeted the provision was (in terms of how young people access the service), and how focused it was on violence reduction.

**Figure 6-1: Types of intervention that help reduce the risk of involvement in violence.**



Source: SQW/UK Youth

- 6.32** Case studies were more familiar with describing their services as either open or targeted and usually offered examples of both. Overall, interviewees were able to provide broad reflections on the extent to which their budgets were allocated between the two types of provision but

were unable to provide a quantitative figure or approximate proportional split. For each, this was predominantly linked to the complexities highlighted in the graphic above in terms of categorising funding into particular types of provision. For example:

- In Case Study C, the Local Authority youth service team described their youth provision as primarily targeted, with its three main strands being the provision of youth workers in schools, a 16-25 support team that uses a case management approach and joint funding for community youth work team for open access youth provision, providing safe spaces and activities for young people. The Youth Justice team was then described as being split into two teams delivering targeted support, one focused on in-court case management and the other focused on specialist support.
- In Case Study E, the Local Authority is a key provider of youth services in their area. Local Authority interviewees described themselves as having both targeted and open provision, with a higher proportion of the former. Their open provision consists of several walk-in youth centres, while their targeted provision consists of both one to one work through the early help system to targeted group work, such as gendered groups, groups for the LGBTQIA+ community and a group for young people with SEND.
- In Case Study D, the Local Authority is also a key provider of youth services. They described their Youth Service as currently delivering a range of primarily targeted provision, including targeted Early Help provision focused on providing timely support to families and young people to prevent issues from escalating. They also described their targeted youth justice work as focusing on diverting young people from the criminal justice system and promoting positive activities that foster personal development. That said, the Local Authority noted they are currently focusing on expanding open access youth club and activity provision.

**6.33** Overall, Section 251 data indicates that there is a lot of variation across the four English case study areas in terms of the allocation of funding between universal (or open) and targeted provision. Across the case study areas, on average per 1,000 young people, a higher proportion is allocated to targeted provision (£68,910 as opposed to £49,638). The data for each is presented by case study in Table 6-3. This data should be treated with care given the data caveats and the challenges local authorities face in categorising provision types.

**6.34** A breakdown by open/targeted is not available in Welsh youth expenditure data.

**Table 6-3: Case Study Area Section 251 youth spend data (per 1,000 young people)**

	2021-2022		2022-2023		2023-2024
<b>Case Study A</b>					
Universal	£144,923	↓	£21,583	↑	£59,808
Targeted	£0	↑	£310,094	↓	£185,325

	2021-2022		2022-2023		2023-2024
<b>Case Study B</b>					
Universal	£115,801	↑	£65,491	↑	£75,677
Targeted	£0	=	£0	=	£0
<b>Case Study D</b>					
Universal	£47,103	↑	£48,561	↓	£39,355
Targeted	£9,940	↑	£74,158	↓	£47,626
<b>Case Study E</b>					
Universal	£42,788	↓	£31,218	↓	£23,713
Targeted	£80,944	↓	£68,625	↓	£42,689

Source: SQW Analysis of ONS: Section 251 expenditure summary by local authority  
Welsh government data for case study C does not include this breakdown.

**6.35** Interviewee feedback also provided a range of wider qualitative insights into how budgets are allocated between different provision types. Firstly, as **an increasing proportion of funding for provision in case study areas is from VRUs or other programmes designed to prevent violence**, new provision is being put in place for projects or pilots. This in part is driven by the national government requirement that 30% of VRU provision should align with those effective interventions listed in the YEF toolkit.

**6.36** Where funders supported provision that spanned the primary, secondary and tertiary types, they emphasised the need for a) flexibility to move resources to different types of provisions as need arose and b) wanting to target resources at issues where they would see impact.

*“Our spend this year varied from open kind of access style work to targeted work with a particular age group with a particular kind of corrective action or course of action that we wanted to try.” – Stakeholder Interviewee - Housing Association*

**6.37** More widely, where provision was targeted it was to support young people in situations where they faced a number of risks including poor mental or physical health, disengagement from education or unstable family backgrounds, as well as the risk of being involved in violence. The majority of **respondents advised that their respective organisations were not focused specifically on violence prevention, but that this was nevertheless a potential effect of their services.**

*“Violence and harm reduction is just one element of the wider landscape.” – Stakeholder Interview - Domestic Violence Charity*

**6.38** Respondents who operated in Wales felt that they were better placed to maximise funding directed towards youth violence prevention, with youth work and youth offending beginning to be merged at local authority level in some cases. On the other hand, a national

commissioner advised that there was no specific ring-fenced amount or objective for reducing youth violence in the grant funds they were involved with.

*“It’s definitely grown and there are two, possibly three local authorities in Wales now that have merged youth work and youth offending services. So they’re probably possibly better placed to maximise some of that funding because they’re working with the same cohort for the targeted work that they do.” – Stakeholder Interviewee - Local Government Advocacy Group*

**6.39** In conclusion, it is difficult to state how much budget is allocated to primary, secondary and tertiary services. There is limited data on organisational spend. There is no reliable data that categorises spend by provision type. Nor has it been possible to trace spend on targeted groups. Available data suggests that whilst funding supports open access provision, targeted youth work increasingly dominates. Targeted services seek to support young people facing a range of challenges by providing one to one support, special groups, and family support, as well as open access provision and Youth Justice work.

## What proportion of the organisations that receive funding are Black-led?

**6.40** In line with understanding the extent to which decision-makers aim for an equitable coverage of provision for children from Minority Ethnic backgrounds, the research aimed to understand the diversity of delivery organisations receiving support and funding from commissioners. Specifically, case study interviews aimed to explore the proportion of organisations receiving funding locally that are black-led.

**6.41** Case study interviewees were unable to provide information about the number of black-led organisations that were funded overall. In some case study areas there were small Minority Ethnic populations and very few Black young people. Funders, mainly Local Authorities and VRUs, did not capture governance data relating to the ethnic leadership of organisations they commission or offer grant funding. Some stakeholders said that this is not to say that supporting diversity across stakeholder organisations was not important, but rather that ethnic background was not a selection criteria upon which decisions were made – and therefore they could not speculatively capture data.

**6.42** Interviewees recognised that **youth provision lacks quality data on equity in funding**, regarding Black-led organisations (and Minority-Ethnic-led organisations more widely). Some stakeholders recognised the importance of addressing this gap:

- In Case Study B, the VRU did not have an overview on the profile of organisations that delivered youth-based interventions and did not know the number of organisations that were black-led. They did however say that they have a new strategic lead for the police Race Action Plan to work with their diverse communities, alongside a ‘Community Leaders Programme’ which invests in adults that work with children and young people in

the community. As part of this, they are creating a service directory to understand what is taking place at the local level.

- In Case Study A (see box below), one stakeholder reported efforts to support community capacity building that will strengthen all Minority Ethnic-led organisations.

### Case Study A – equality impact assessments

In Case Study A, the Community Safety Partnership lead noted that their funder had placed an increasing focus in the latest round of funding on commissioners completing equality impact assessments to inform their funding decisions. As a result, in their commissioning decisions for 2025/26, the organisation reported having decided to establish a consortium of delivery partners through which they could commission youth services, as opposed to one sole provider. The purpose of this was to ensure organisations brought a diverse mix of understanding of the local authority area, with relevant networks, reach and access to community space. In scoring the consortium applications, the Community Safety Partnership had included equity and diversity within their matrix of scoring to ensure diversity within the Consortium delivery group and diversify the reach of activity. Interviewees noted that while equality impact assessments often feed into decisions to ensure equitable coverage of provision for children from Minority Ethnic backgrounds, the use of this approach at the application assessment stage is novel within their organisation and most peers.

- 6.43** In conclusion, there was a lack of data and awareness of the proportion of organisations that receive funding which receive funding and are Black-led. Stakeholders recognise the importance of addressing this gap in understanding through improved equity data and monitoring systems, as well as more broadly supporting Black-led organisations to secure funding.

## Conclusion

- 6.44** The case studies highlight the complexity of understanding how budgets for youth provision are spent, as well as the limitations of available data. Despite extensive review of council papers, statutory returns and interviews with decision-makers, it was not possible to produce a detailed breakdown of expenditure by type of service. This reflects both the high-level nature of published financial data and the fragmented way in which services are funded, particularly where resources flow through regional bodies or short-term grant programmes.
- 6.45** Nonetheless, clear themes emerge. As budgets are eroded across local areas, so too is the capacity of the youth sector to maintain effective and health organisational ecosystems where

is there resource to train and innovate, to build and maintain effective networks and to deliver a diverse and evolving range of youth activities that meet the needs of young people. Budgets are insufficient to meet local demand and have declined substantially in recent years, requiring local authorities and providers to seek funding from alternative sources. For delivery organisations this increases the administrative burden on youth workers and managers, who must balance service delivery with fundraising and partnership management. Funding is often short-term, usually annual, generating uncertainty for providers and young people alike. The effects for organisations are recruitment and retention challenges, difficulties working strategically and building an evidence base. For young people this creates uncertainty regarding how long they might be able to access provision. While Wales benefits from ring-fenced national funding, this is still inadequate, and local areas must supplement it with additional grants.

- 6.46** Local authority resources are spread across direct service delivery, capacity building, and network and partnership management. Targeted and specialist provision, including youth justice and violence prevention, receive particular attention, but open access services have become increasingly vulnerable to cuts.
- 6.47** While stakeholders consistently believe youth provision contributes positively to preventing violence, the lack of a clear typology of prevention activities or equity data limits effective oversight.
- 6.48** Overall, funding is fragmented, short-term and inadequate, leaving provision reactive rather than strategic and undermining the consistency, equity, and sustainability of youth services. This significantly limits the potential impact youth work can have on preventing violence.

## 7. Findings: what mentoring is taking place across England and Wales?

### Summary of key findings

- Mentoring is a concept that is interpreted and applied in a broad range of different ways. The range extends from having an informal chat after a sports match to more formal, in-depth, regular and year-long personal support. Consequently, delivery organisations and funders may not share the same idea of what is being delivered.
- Mentoring projects were delivered in three of five case study areas. In these areas the programmes were small scale and supplemented core youth work. Across all fieldwork we found examples of mentoring designed to achieve a broad range of outcomes. These included improving mental health, educational attainment, employment and skills, inclusion and identity-based support, family support, as well as violence prevention and youth safety.
- Few consultees were able to describe in detail the mentoring taking place in their areas or across their policy agendas, hence it was not possible to comment on the prevalence of different types of mentoring, different contexts or issues such as mentee attrition and mentor support. There is no quality standard for youth mentoring and so it is not possible to provide assurances of quality.
- Provision of mentoring across England and Wales is patchy. There is no national mentoring programme. There has been a conurbation-wide New Deal for Young People in London which was a major £11m mentoring programme. The second largest funder of mentoring programmes is the National Lottery Community Fund. According to 360Giving data (2023-25) there are some parts of the country that have almost no provision. Just three mentoring awards have been recorded in both Wales and the North East, both valued at around £200,000.
- Most mentoring is delivered by registered charities and community interest companies. Mentoring that aims to address crime and violence seems to be less well funded than mentoring to promote education and employability outcomes. Twenty grants out of the 231 grants for mentoring were specifically to address violence and/or crime.

### Introduction

- 7.1** The YEF Toolkit provides evidence from eight different studies which found on average, mentoring programmes are likely to have a moderate impact on youth violent crime prevention. Mentoring is effective in both reducing crime and the behaviours associated with

crime and violence. The toolkit research suggests that, on average, mentoring reduces violence by 21%, all offending by 14%, and reoffending by 19%.<sup>24</sup>

**7.2** This research sought to explore further questions about the extent of mentoring in England and Wales. More specifically the research questions relating to mentoring were:

- How prevalent are different types of mentoring (e.g. adult-youth mentoring, peer mentoring, standalone mentoring, mentoring as part of a multi-component programme)?
- What is the duration and intensity of mentoring programmes?
- In what contexts is mentoring delivered?
- Who is offered mentoring, who receives it, and who completes the full programme?
- Who delivers mentoring and what training have they had?
- How much funding is dedicated to mentoring and where does it come from?

**7.3** Evidence is presented from two different sources; analysis of both stakeholder and case study interviews, and an analysis of 360Giving data to explore potential funding outside of publicly-funded provision:

- Two national stakeholders who run mentoring programmes were interviewed, along with eleven additional stakeholders who shared insights about mentoring in their local areas. Of the five case studies, three provided descriptive details about specific mentoring delivery models. However, they were unable to fully address all of the research questions related to mentoring.
- 360Giving data was analysed to explore the sources of funding for mentoring projects and where it was allocated. The benefits and challenges of using this data source was outlined earlier in chapter 4, so it should not be considered comprehensive, but its analysis did align with themes raised by interviewees and therefore its inclusion in this report is helpful.

**7.4** With the exception of the two stakeholders who run mentoring programmes, none of the other interviewees were responsible for directly commissioning mentoring programmes, or managing them. While they were aware of the concept of mentoring and were aware of mentoring programmes they were not generally familiar with performance management data such that they could provide comprehensive answers to the research questions listed above.

**7.5** Across the five case study areas, mentoring projects were described as relatively small and self-contained. While they may be meaningful to the individuals involved, they were not

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<sup>24</sup> See the YEF Toolkit evidence on mentoring: <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/mentoring-2/>

considered central or essential components of youth provision in those areas. Two areas were unable to describe any mentoring programmes – these two areas also had no grants for their area recorded in 360Giving. Two other areas described some provision with both areas having two projects focussed on crime and violence prevention (and in both case study areas 360Giving picked up one of their two projects). One case study area had four general mentoring projects listed in 360Giving. We conclude that neither 360Giving nor case study interviewees offers a full list of mentoring programmes but both reinforce each other in terms of the sense of scale of mentoring and its focus.

## How prevalent are different types of mentoring?

- 7.6 There are different types of mentoring.** Types can be characterised by the type of mentor (a volunteer adult, a paid adult, or an older young person for peer-to peer mentoring); or the context in which mentoring takes place (standalone mentoring or mentoring as part of a multi-component programme). Other variables include the characteristics of the mentee, whether the mentoring has a specific objective, and the physical location where mentoring takes place (in school, the mentor’s workplace, online or a community setting for example). Some people noted that the youth work approach to working with young people shared lots of similarities with mentoring and was in itself a type of informal mentoring. As there are so many different types of mentoring, it covers a wide range of practice and experience.
- 7.7 Interviewees recognised mentoring as a broad term** and said this led to a degree of ambiguity because it is a term that can be used to describe a wide range of experiences. One respondent described mentoring as being both formal and informal; acting as a role model within the context of a project but also more widely in the community:

*“I think we need more trusted adults in young people's lives, and I think mentoring as a good approach towards that. Now, whether that's the formal mentoring relationship or whether that's more adults who actually like and know young people, I think it could be a mix. Because I feel that it doesn't necessarily just have to be within a project. It needs to be, sounds cliché, but it is the whole thing of it takes a village and actually we need positive role models and we need mentors and people looking out for young people who have been let down by the adults in their lives. I feel that's a very broad answer, but I do feel that that's the case. Basically, I think it is not just about those formal mentors, it is actually about how we treat young people in general.” - Stakeholder Interviewee- National Funder*

- 7.8 Stakeholder interviewees also said that there was an overlap with the practice of youth workers**, something which was acknowledged by a national funder who said while they don’t formally fund mentoring programmes, by supporting youth work they also support mentoring work:

*“The Mayor of London funds a significant mentoring program, while we focus on supporting informal mentoring and conversations through trusted adults in youth clubs. Mentoring is often*

*an implicit element of youth work, even if it isn't formally labelled as such." Stakeholder Interviewee – National Funder*

- 7.9** One case study interviewee from a local authority noted that while their youth service does have youth workers engage in one-to-one work with young people that has many traits of mentoring, they would not formally classify it as such. These more **informal forms of mentoring** must also be recognised as important within the youth sector and violence prevention space. For example, one case study interviewee gave an example of how the youth club sessions his organisation delivers provide informal employability mentoring.

*"I think throughout the youth club sessions it's not official mentoring as such, but they'll be given an opportunity where they might run and deliver an event, so they would do the planning, the organising of delivery and then from that, gain skills like organisational skills, budgeting skills, whatever that might be." - Case Study Interviewee – Housing Association*

- 7.10** This ambiguity was recognised by **youth work providers who said that they knew of others who describe their practice as mentoring** because then it fits the opportunities for funding or research participation. This provides access to resources which could be important for organisational survival. A mentoring approach aligns well with core youth work. The four cornerstones of youth work in the youth work curriculum (participation, equality, education, empowerment<sup>25</sup>) reflect a set of values about working alongside a young person in a mutually respectful and voluntary capacity that fit well with mentoring methodologies. This is not to say that all mentors are youth workers, or indeed that all youth workers do mentoring but it does help explain why many mentoring projects deploy youth workers, and why those mentoring projects that take referrals or work with young people involved in youth justice are delivered by youth workers.

- 7.11** However it then becomes a challenge for funders to know what different providers using their funding were offering young people:

*"A lot of our providers will say they mentor but there is no understanding of whether that is a qualified mentor or if it is just a guy that's having a chat at the end of the sports session as a youth mentor type stuff." - Stakeholder Interviewee- Housing Association*

- 7.12** One of the **mentoring programme leaders** we interviewed said they were shifting the type of mentoring they were offering following a period of review, research and reflection. They saw mentoring as a powerful tool to help young people build social and emotional skills like confidence, resilience, and effective communication. They wanted to move more resource to provide intensive and longer term support to under-served young people who had a deficit with these skills due to poverty or race. There were challenges associated with this shift. Firstly, mentoring funding can be a numbers game- **long term one to one mentoring with**

<sup>25</sup> See National Youth Work Curriculum : <https://nya.org.uk/national-youth-work-curriculum/>

**young people is not cheap**, but when funders use crude measures of cost-per-mentee in a competitive process; this type of in-depth mentoring can lose out.

*There needs to be clarity on the terminology used for mentoring. Things like going to a farm for a day is not mentoring. This contributes to the overall issue of not actually understanding what mentoring means. Interviewee – Mentoring Programme*

**7.13** A second **mentoring programme leader** was building an innovative mentoring programme. Their vision was to amplify youth voice through peer mentoring. This would have a dual objective, firstly to create an efficient mechanism to bring the voices of young people from across the country to respond to policy issues or contribute to national conversations, and second, to help address a democratic deficit where young people felt increasingly disenfranchised from civic society. A peer support model was being developed where young people would be trained to mentor other young people to participate in youth voice initiatives.

**7.14** In conclusion, mentoring takes a range of different forms which makes it difficult to define as it can be used to describe a wide range of experiences. One to one mentoring shares values and traits of youth work as both empower young people and are led by the needs and interests of the young person. Informal mentoring happens in youth work settings but would not necessarily be called 'mentoring'; while youth providers might describe a programme as a 'mentoring programme' to open up funding opportunities. Mentoring programmes can be very light touch but those that follow a more intensive and longer term programme need sufficient resource to do it well.

## Who is offered mentoring, who receives it, and who completes the full programme?

**7.15** Eleven stakeholder interviewees provided **examples of mentoring programmes** that their funding supported either directly or indirectly (for example if they helped a funder to disburse funds or, youth providers to access funds). These interviewees knew some detail about the mentoring programme but were not responsible for delivering them, or their performance management and therefore they could not all answer questions about take up of mentoring, or numbers starting or completing programmes.

**7.16** The types of young people who were offered mentoring in these examples included:

- young people who were engaging in anti-social behaviour.
- young adults being mentored in prison
- care-experienced young people
- mentoring for boys / young men who need positive male role models

- young people referred by social workers
- at-risk young people aged 11-24 years (including those with care experience, mental health challenges, or at risk of exploitation/offending)
- 21 to 25 year olds who are not in employment, education or training, and who are 'hanging round on the street or in parks etc
- Young people referred by Jobcentre plus.

**7.17** The types of programme and their objectives described a similarly broad span. The mentoring programmes aimed to deliver one or a range of objectives including:

- Improved mental and physical well-being
- Education, training or employment outcomes (So, the idea is if we can get them a job, then they don't have to deal with drugs etc)
- mentors act as a connecting point between services young people need as well as helping the young person along their journey
- helping young people to achieve goals that they set themselves.

**7.18** Details about rates of attrition were generally not known although one programme over-recruited (taking on 25 young people for a programme that ran with 20) to anticipate its effects.

**7.19** The research asked whether respondents felt there was enough mentoring available to young people and whether there were sufficient services for young people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. Most stakeholders said that more services for young people were necessary and included mentoring in this definition of services. Some people saw mentoring (including informal mentoring) as a very powerful intervention and one that had the power to be transformative; others were more circumspect questioning whether what was called 'mentoring' was actually mentoring or something else.

**7.20** We did not uncover many mentoring projects that were specifically targeted at young people from different ethnic backgrounds (although it is likely they exist). Rather, projects were delivered in areas and targeted young people who could benefit. One funder for example said that they seek out applications which reflect the diversity of their target area in terms of ethnicity, faith, gender and neurodiversity.

**7.21** There are case study area examples of projects that use mentoring to support young people at risk of serious youth violence. The box below provides examples of project drawn from one case study area. The first project uses mentoring approaches alongside other forms of

intervention to provide a range of support around an individual. Both projects use professional and experienced youth workers as mentors.

## Case Study B – mentoring young people at risk of violence

A Foundation provides a one to one mentoring programme which targets young people aged 10-17 at risk of serious youth violence and criminal exploitation across a major city. They also offer similar programme for 8-11 year olds, which focused on developing social, emotional and personal skills. The former project is a six-month mentoring, coaching, family support and case management programme which provides one-to-one mentoring for young people aged 10-17 at risk of serious youth violence and child criminal exploitation across four Local Authority areas. Youth workers are directly employed by the Foundation and have proven experience in supporting young people with complex needs, typically with a background in education, the voluntary sector or social care. The programme has been running since 2017 and supports cohorts of c.10-15 young people with intensive one-to-one support from trained youth workers.

A second and different project was launched in 2021 and provides one-to-one intensive support for young people at the older age range of 18 to 25 who are on a trajectory to going into prison or served at prison sentence. Launched alongside the Community Safety Partnership, the project is delivered to ex-offenders by dedicated workers in two Local Authority areas with the goal of supporting them into paid work.

**7.22** To summarise, interviewees were aware of a wide range of different types of mentoring programmes tailored to young people with a wide range of characteristics spanning gender, age, employment, involvement in crime and violence, and with a range of different backgrounds. Mentoring programmes had a range of objectives including health, education, employment and general support and advocacy. Interviewees wanted to see more youth support programmes generally and included mentoring among these.

## Who delivers mentoring and what training have they had?

**7.23** The stakeholders who participated in the research were able to describe in general terms the types of organisation delivering mentoring, the types of mentors they use and an overview of their training. But they were not directly involved in delivering mentoring programmes or in the performance management of mentoring programmes and therefore could not all offer detailed insights.

**7.24 Mentoring programmes that the interviewees were aware of, were delivered by a wide range of organisations** including VCSEs, charities and youth services. In one area we were told that almost all organisations in the youth sector offered some form of mentoring:

*“Picture in our county is confusing. We are fortunate that there is a diverse youth sector with over 1000 organisations, and the vast majority say they do mentoring, but all define in a different way.” – Stakeholder Interviewee -VRU*

**7.25 Mentoring is delivered by a wide range of people** Mentors may be unpaid volunteers, paid volunteers or specialist providers, trainee youth workers or paid youth workers. Mentors need a range of skills and knowledge alongside time and the capability to communicate well with young people. Some interviewees noted that prior experience of working with young people was important, as was lived experience and local perspectives. For example one provider talked about the added authenticity of including people who themselves had been involved in knife crime among their mentoring team.

**7.26 Stakeholders commented on the importance of training for all mentors** to develop the relevant skills and capabilities to support mentees. One case study interviewee from a local youth work provider noted that the role of volunteer mentors in their service has been reduced due to funding cuts that have impacted its ability to onboard and properly train volunteers.

## Case Study D – Paid staff supporting trained mentors

Commissioned by the Local Council, one local VCSE organisation provides mentoring interventions, including for young people aged 11-24 at risk of serious violence. They have supported over 400 young people in the last year. The service is targeted at children and young people with care experience, mental health challenges, or at risk of exploitation/offending. All the young people are experiencing at least one of these, however most experience multiple needs which compound the level of risk they face.

Mentoring is delivered for up to 18 months, with flexibility based on need. They provide community-based, volunteer-led mentoring (they have 169 mentors trained to support young people), supported by paid staff. The mentors are adult volunteers aged 18 plus, they are provided with training and support by staff, once trained they are matched with a young person. The volunteers receive £15 per session to cover expenses. Staff from the VCSE organisation conduct an initial assessment with the young person. Mentors and beneficiaries typically meet weekly, but talk or message more regularly, especially when they are anxious or need additional support. The programme is young person led and mentees set their own goals. Staff and mentors organise and connect young people to a range of activities and resources. This allows them to learn to cope with and manage everyday life, build their confidence, and develop the skills to re-engage with education, obtain work experience, employment, and greater independence, thereby moving them away from risks associated with negative relationships or behaviour.

**7.27** One local authority youth service had built a mentoring programme. They created the specification and framework for mentoring for their local authority area, and provided **training for organisations receiving funding** and help to match organisations with mentors. In some cases those mentors will work alongside a professional.

*"It can't be a one size fits all approach. The matching process is key to success and interests of both mentor and mentee need to align."* **Stakeholder Interviewee – Local Authority**

**7.28** The quality of mentors was a concern of a violence reduction unit that was setting standards for funded mentoring programmes in their area:

*"Schools and other providers commission mentors to different standards and different approaches. We are in process of establishing regional standards and developing a framework of quality assured providers to support commissioners to have confidence in the mentoring they are commissioning out."* **Stakeholder Interviewee – VRU**

**7.29** In summary, mentoring programmes that the interviewees were aware of, were delivered by a wide range of organisations and delivered by a wide range of people including paid and

trained professionals and unpaid committed volunteers. Stakeholders commented on the importance of training for all mentors to develop the relevant skills and capabilities to support mentees. Frameworks for commissioning and quality assuring mentoring programmes were being developed by two funders.

## What is the context, duration, intensity of mentoring programmes?

**7.30** Few interviewees were able to provide detail about the design of mentoring interventions:

- Respondents said that programmes lasted between a single school term and up to twelve, and in one case, 18 months. There was insufficient detail provided to suggest a mean duration.
- Similarly, respondents were usually unable to describe the frequency or intensity of mentoring programmes although one was described as a programme where young people guided the frequency, while others were weekly.

**7.31** The lack of detailed information reflects both the relatively small proportion of funding in each area that is allocated specifically to mentoring projects and that people who set and manage budgets across local authority areas are not necessarily familiar with all aspects of project delivery.

**7.32** The range of different designs has **implications for the costs of different mentoring models**. Light touch, small group and embedded mentoring may be relatively low cost per mentee compared with intensive work with young people with multiple needs.

*“The difficulty is they are very high cost, so we’re not going to be able to deliver these with anything less than 20 grand budgets and then it’s 20 grand budget for maybe a group of 6/8/10 young people. So therefore, the cost per capita head is very expensive, plus also the difficulty with them is that by nature of the high cost, we want to engage the right cohort, and the difficulty with that is they are very hard to engage [...] and therefore it takes a certain organization and a certain individual to be able to engage with them.” – Case Study Interviewee – Community Safety Partnership*

**7.33** There was insufficient information provided to be able to offer any assessment of the mean cost or range of costs associated with mentoring projects in England or Wales, or indeed the range of costs from low intensity to high intensity models – although such benchmarks may be available in the literature. The next section uses secondary data sources to explore costs and funding in more detail.

## How much funding is dedicated to mentoring and where does it come from?

- 7.34** To analyse the landscape of active mentoring grants, we selected 360Giving data from ongoing programs (as of 31/03/2025) that have been active since 01/04/2023. The scope of youth provision within the funding data was identified using key term searches in grant titles and descriptions<sup>26</sup>. These were further refined to focus on grants explicitly referencing a mentor or mentoring either in their title or description. Where available, grant location was limited to England and Wales. This process found **231 active mentoring grants in England and Wales, totalling £24,222,774**. It should be noted that in project descriptors it is clear that for some projects, mentoring is part of a multi-strand approach involving youth work, mentoring, advocacy, peer support, learning groups and meetups and employment support.
- 7.35** The **London Mayor's mentoring programme** features strongly in the data and shows the difference between mentoring projects funded in London and those funded elsewhere. London local government are responsible for £11.4m of funding for mentoring projects, **National Lottery** distributors account for £9.4m of grant funding issued since April 2023 with other grant making organisations (notably BBC Children in Need) responsible for distributing £3.4m. Table 7-1 provides a breakdown of the ten largest grant funders since April 2023.
- 7.36** London's mentoring programme (part of the **New Deal for Young People**) is unique in its scale and funding in England. After Covid the London Recovery Board agreed key challenge areas that needed to be rebuilt. A group focussing on young people recognised that this period had led young people to have fewer social connections, and social understanding and that one approach to tackling this was through mentoring. An £11million pan-London mentoring programme has been delivered, with capacity building for voluntary and community organisations, a quality framework and infrastructure training to support longer term sustainability. Over 150 mentoring organisations have been funded by City-Hall and the programme has reached over 100,000 young people.
- 7.37** The types of mentoring programme listed in the database fall under a number of broad categories. A brief key word analysis provides an indication of the number of mentoring programmes under each category in brackets:
- Education, employment and skills development: employer mentoring, career mentoring and raising aspirations
  - Violence prevention and youth safety: including support for young people at risk of violence through exploitation, gang involvement and domestic abuse,

<sup>26</sup>("Youth provision" OR "youth work" OR "youth services" OR "youth sector" OR "youth workers" OR "youth prevention" OR "youth crime" OR "youth violence" OR "young people provision" NOT "early years" NOT "primary school" OR "mentor" OR "mentoring" OR "trusted adult" OR "youth club" OR "youth centre" OR "youth hub" OR "youth activities" NOT "primary academy")

- Mental health and emotional wellbeing: including in some cases therapy as well as general wellbeing support
- Inclusion and identity-based support: mentoring specifically associated with individual characteristics such as disability, gender identity and sexuality, cultural communities
- Family and parent support: to support families alongside individuals being mentored.

**Table 7-1: Ten largest Grant Funders, April 2023-April 2025**

Funder Name	Amount Awarded	Number of awards
Greater London Authority	£10,087,974	49
The National Lottery Community Fund	£9,254,201	101
BBC Children in Need	£1,475,717	17
Violence Reduction Unit/Partnership	£1,282,980	14
Paul Hamlyn Foundation	£765,000	4
Comic Relief	£720,000	4
Mercers' Charitable Foundation	£188,298	1
Sport England	£123,614	11
Heart Of England Community Foundation	£61,331	11
Wiltshire Community Foundation	£51,900	5

Source: Contains data from [GrantNav](#) a [360Giving](#) application released under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution Sharealike license \(CC-BY-SA\)](#)

**7.38** Funding is distributed **primarily to registered charities**, with £19.7m being issued since April 2023. Some funding also goes towards community interest companies (£2.3m), with the average grant amount being significantly smaller than those distributed to registered charities (£47,843 vs £139,887) (see Table 7-2).

**Table 7-2: Amount awarded by recipient organisation type, April 2023- April 2025**

Recipient Organisation	Total	Count of awards	Average funding per grant
Registered Charity	£19,724,069	141	£139,887
Community Interest Company	£2,296,447	48	£47,843
Company Limited by Guarantee	£25,000	2	£12,500
Missing	£2,177,258	40	£54,431

Recipient Organisation	Total	Count of awards	Average funding per grant
Total	£24,222,774.00	231	£104,860

Source: Contains data from [GrantNav](#) a [360Giving](#) application released under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution Sharealike license \(CC-BY-SA\)](#)

**7.39** The majority of recorded awards have been distributed across London, with 106 awards amounting to £13.6m of funding. Much of this is attributed to local government funding, but £2.2m has also been issued by grant-making organisations and lottery distributors. **West Midlands is the second-best funded region for mentoring** with a total of 21 awards. Just three mentoring awards have been recorded in both Wales and the North East, both valued at around £200,000 (see Table 7-3).

**Table 7-3: Regions in England and Wales by amount awarded, April 2023 – April 2025**

Region	Amount Awarded	Number of awards
London	£13,625,836	106
West Midlands	£1,940,022	21
East Midlands	£1,540,662	8
Yorkshire and The Humber	£1,457,545	8
North West	£1,368,840	30
Undetermined	£1,123,856	10
South East	£1,112,936	9
South West	£910,580	24
East of England	£739,770	9
Wales	£202,307	3
North East	£200,420	3

Source: Contains data from [GrantNav](#) a [360Giving](#) application released under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution Sharealike license \(CC-BY-SA\)](#)

**7.40** The database was also interrogated for projects that were targeted to achieve specific objectives by using key word searches. Of the 231 mentoring grants:

- **43** of the 231 grants specifically mentioned '**mental health**' (amounting to £4,767,352).
- **11** grants (worth £484,830) mentioned '**crime**'; of these 5 specified targeted ages (ranging from 8 through to 18 years), 1 specified support for SEN children, and 1 was to support young people with a named cultural heritage. Four were based in London, and a further four were based in the North West.

- **10** (worth £1,090,083) mentioned '**violence**'; of these 2 had a focus on support for young women, 1 specified targeted ages (ranging from 8 through to 16), and 1 was to support young people with Black, African and/or Caribbean ethnicity. Five of these ten were based in London.

**7.41** Descriptions in the database are brief (<65 words) and consequently most of these eleven grants mentioning crime typically describe the target group they want to support and the outcomes they want to achieve typically in terms of avoiding crime, knife and exploitation. Other detail includes:

- Mentoring, diversion activities for young people at risk of crime or exploitation (3 projects)
- Mentoring within a sports programme (3 projects)
- Matching with a trusted adult and one to one support and education (2 projects)
- Youth worker run youth clubs to provide a safe space and guidance (2 projects)
- A project involving one to one mentoring and family support.

**7.42** One of the projects listed, mentioned both crime and violence. Additional detail from descriptions for the 10 'violence' mentoring projects includes:

- youth work, mentoring advocacy, peer support to vulnerable groups to build self-belief and improve aspirations (5 projects)
- weekly football or other structured sporting activities (2 projects)
- employing a support worker to train women mentors and match them with young women who are at risk of abuse, violence and exploitation (1 project)
- youth workers based in GP surgeries to provide personalised mentoring and connect young people with other services (1 project)
- weekly social sessions and monthly peer support forums for volunteer mentors helping young women experiencing domestic violence to stay safe (1 project).

**7.43** In summary, 360Giving data found 231 grants mentioning mentoring in England and Wales over a two year period totalling £24.2m. The London Mayor's mentoring programme accounts for £11.4m and National Lottery for £9.4m. Most of the grants were for charities and community interest companies. There is regional inequality in the distribution of grants. Grants sought to achieve a range of objectives but only 11 of the 231 grants mentioned crime and 10 mentioned prevention of violence.

## Conclusion

- 7.44** Mentoring is widely recognised as a valuable form of personalised support for young people. Models range from informal conversations in community or sports settings, through to structured, year-long one-to-one programmes. Mentors may be volunteers, trainees or paid youth workers, and while training is acknowledged as important, practice varies significantly.
- 7.45** Our case studies confirmed that mentoring projects are present in most areas. Our consultees often struggled to describe their scale, scope or integration with wider youth services and violence prevention agendas. This patchiness reflects a wider lack of data and coordination: there is no national mentoring programme, and provision is typically shaped by local projects accessing a mixture of short-term or charitable funding. Notable funders include the National Lottery Community Fund and, in London, the £11m New Deal for Young People mentoring programme. However, geographic disparities are stark, with very limited mentoring provision recorded in Wales and the North East.
- 7.46** Mentoring is used to pursue a wide range of outcomes—from improving mental health, educational attainment and employability to supporting identity, family relationships and safety. Violence prevention is one such goal, but funding for this purpose is much less common than for mental health. Without consistent data, it is difficult to assess the prevalence, intensity or effectiveness of different models.
- 7.47** Overall, mentoring is highly valued but provision is fragmented, unevenly distributed, and poorly connected to local and national decision-making structures. These weaknesses limit its potential impact, particularly in relation to violence prevention.

## 8. Findings: Are the current processes for determining local youth provision working well?

### Summary of key findings

- There is a lot of energy and good will from policy makers, funders, and providers to work collaboratively and join up their activities – despite a difficult funding and operational environment. However, there is also widespread recognition that decision making processes are not working well and have not enabled the range, variety and reach of services required for all young people.
- The youth sector struggles with legitimacy, particularly when compared to statutory services such as education and children’s social care. This lack of trust and respect is exacerbated by fewer training opportunities, insecure employment and churn in youth work roles.
- Almost all consultees – from all professional backgrounds – felt that the resource available for youth provision and violence prevention was too small and too short-term. This makes it difficult to meet current need and prevents the development and implementation of effective, long-term strategies. Stakeholders argued for a longer-term approach that would allow for continuity for both providers and the participants in youth services.
- Short-term funding cycles also affect workforce development (and therefore quality of provision) as it is more challenging to retain skilled staff on short contracts, expensive to re-train staff, and disrupts relationship building with partners across the local systems.
- The quality and sustainability of collaborative structures vary between places and partners, as does the quality and granularity of the local evidence available to them. Interviewees called for transformation of data capture to enable more tailored and responsive funding that considered the unique challenges of local areas.
- There was a tension between processes that established funding criteria that did not allow sufficient flexibility at a local level. Stakeholders thought that more could be made of limited funding if they could be used flexibly to fit to local need.
- The three most common priorities for change from consultees were: funding that strengthens workforce training and partnership building; funding that enables meaningful involvement from young people and local communities in decisions that affect their area; and longer-term investment in services that take an early intervention and preventative approach.

## Introduction

- 8.1** This chapter summarises how stakeholders and case study participants responded to questions about what they would change to make youth services function better. This chapter presents their reflections on challenges faced within current decision-making processes before presenting suggested improvements to these. In Chapter 9 we then go on to consider these responses alongside the other evidence presented in this report to make a set of conclusions and reflect on their implications.

### Are the current processes for determining local youth provision working well?

- 8.2** Current processes for determining youth provision are broad ranging and include different groups of people at national and local level working together to create shared priorities, evidence, lobbying for resources and implementation of allocation systems. Stakeholders recognised the energy and good will that goes into systems and noted some aspects that they thought work well such as local collaborative working, and involving young people in the decision making process.
- 8.3** However ultimately, **these processes have not created the range, variety and reach of services to meet the needs of young people** and there was almost universal recognition that things could be improved. Most stakeholders thought that current processes are overly complex and resulted in piecemeal provision across England and Wales. The following chapter details the key themes from interviewee reflections on current decision-making processes.
- 8.4** A first issue highlighted relates to the **scarcity of resource** available for youth provision and the challenges this causes for decision-making processes, mirroring the wider policy context and funding cuts outlined in Chapter 3. The lack of funding was recognised to directly constrain decision making processes, resulting in trade-offs being made as to what is funded, as demonstrated by the below quote:

*“The lack of adequate funding means that decision makers are constantly having to make tough choices as to what gets funded or cut; these choices are often based on only having access to small pots of short term funding, rather than councils being able to develop and adequately resource a long term strategic approach to youth provision.” – Stakeholder Interviewee – Local Government Advocacy Group*

*“There are gaps and local authorities have had to cut funding, so some trade-offs and difficult decisions have had to be made. It is important to have a consistent offer, even though there are different reasons for struggling due to underfunding in education or prevention.” – Stakeholder Interviewee – Central Government*

**8.5** While interviewees emphasised that these solutions would not solve the problem on their own, a number of options were suggested by consultees to address funding scarcities:

- **Identify further opportunities for private sector investment in youth provision:** “Need to look at private sector investment into these provisions as well, because government money is always going to be tight; there's not going to be any more, you're taking it away from somewhere else to put into this.”- **Case Study Interviewee – National Youth Charity**
- **Encourage providers to collaborate with other organisations in developing joint bids for funding and maximise success:** “...ensuring that people write partnership and collaboration into any funding programmes so that they're not all just doing their own thing and competing with each other, they're actually working in partnership and collaborating.” – **Case Study Interviewee – Local Authority**

**8.6** In relation to resource, the **length and sustainability of funding** was also identified as a key issue influencing decision-making. In particular, this pertained to the small, short-term nature of funding available which prevent long-term strategies from being implemented at the local level. This was recognised as a key challenge amongst both commissioners/independent grant providers and provider organisations, who highlighted the knock on effects for the level of impact interventions can achieve.

**8.7** The associated **precarity of working in the youth sector** was also a challenge. For the workforce, this related to a perception that working in the youth sector was an unattractive offer in terms of job security and pay (often linked to the short-term nature of funding mentioned above). This, combined with a reduction in the number of training and accreditation opportunities available for individuals to enter into the youth workforce, was seen to contribute directly to challenges in youth sector organisations around recruitment and retention, which in turn influences the amount and quality of services on offer.

**8.8** Looking forward, the majority of interviewees indicated that there needs to be increased focus amongst decision-makers about how best to support the sector to develop a more sustainable workforce with the appropriate skills. In particular, ensuring relevant accreditations are secured, alongside wider skills such as community youth engagement.

*“A youth worker is poorly paid. Ultimately, you get paid the same for working in a supermarket and at the end of the day you take off your uniform and you don't have all that emotional baggage and you've got job security as well. If you're on a six month contract with zero hours provision where do you get the opportunity to develop? How do you value that career? 4,500 youth workers have left their roles, what other sector could put up with that kind of drain of talent” - Case Study Interviewee – National Youth Charity*

*“I guess there's something there around ensuring that we've got a workforce for the future. Understanding what that workforce needs to look like and you know how do we invest in that*

*workforce and ensure that they can be excited about the fact there is a future in youth work.?” - Case Study Interviewee – Community Safety Partnership*

**8.9** While several interviewees highlighted examples of positive collaboration and partnerships within current decision-making processes, others reflected on **challenges in both creating partnerships and avoiding unequal partnerships** from developing. In particular, the lack of collaboration between youth providers, funders and local authorities was cited. Interviewees advised that siloing of services has led to a current level of disjointedness between partners around funding, decision making and delivery.

**8.10** In comparison, where interviewees highlighted that positive collaboration and partnerships have developed, they stressed the importance of all actors being willing to fully commit to regular collaboration and communication in order to tackle shared issues, as demonstrated by the below quote.

*“There is that willingness. We meet with the senior leadership team within the local authority on a regular basis to talk about how we can work better and how we can join stuff up. I think we’re really fortunate here from that perspective. You know that the political leadership, city mayor, executive leadership team within the Council, our locality leads around the ICB are all great, all happy for our sector to knock on the door and say, do you know what, you know that billions of pounds that you’re spending, we might be able to provide a solution to that.”- Case Study Interviewee - VCSE Infrastructure Organisation*

**8.11** While a number of interviewees pointed to robust processes for determining provision of resources, including the use of strategic needs assessments and integration of youth and community voice, others noted areas for development in terms of the level of **evidence and insight data** currently informing decision-making processes. Case study evidence further demonstrated this point, with the use of youth and community voice varying substantially across different areas, as well as between organisations within areas. For example, one case study interviewee stated:

*“So for me it’s about that that true co-production, not just using it as kind of a catch all term or something which you feel like you should say or you should do. It’s about really, truly valuing the views of local communities, but also understanding the skills and the local community to be able to work alongside them so they can deliver what they want to deliver. It’s within our remit to do it. So for me that’s a key message. There’s all lip service paid to that at the minute, but not much action.” - Case Study Interviewee – Housing Association*

**8.12** In relation to evidence and data more broadly, interviewees also highlighted the need for commissioners and funding providers to develop better metrics to inform decision-making with regards to funding. For example:

*“There needs to be a move away from certain success indicators. It is unlikely to see short-term social mobility or employability impacts in interventions for 12 year olds. There needs to be*

*consideration of improvement in confidence, communication with adults, relationships with peers.” - Stakeholder Interviewee – National Youth Service Provider*

**8.13** Another challenge highlighted by interviewees in relation to current decision-making related to the **geography of decision-making**, specifically that local issues do not always align with those identified at the regional or national level. To this end, several interviewees expressed concerns about the current lack of flexibility of funding to fit around the needs of a local area, noting that these needs are usually best understood by local providers.

*“My view of it is you have to look at the needs analysis in a local area because you may have areas with a huge level of need, in which case your offer is going to have to look very different to others with less need. I think there’s something about having a local partnership, a place-based approach in place in each local authority to look at the levels of need and the levels of provision and then design what the offer is.” Stakeholder Interviewee – Local Youth Service Advocacy Group*

**8.14** As an example, in one case study area, interviewees described the importance of their consideration of factors in their decision-making process such as travel practicalities and boundary issues. While case study interviewees recognised the need for national funding mechanisms, as well as a mix of hyperlocal and broader provision, interviewees indicated that provision should always be informed or influenced by local decision-makers and community voice inputs.

*“For me, it’s about having that variety of scale, there is a place for the big provision, but there’s also a place for the hyper local and the really small as well. There’s a place for flashy, funded stuff, but there’s also a place for the mum who’s noticed that there’s an issue in the neighbourhood and she wants to do something.” - Case Study Consultee – Housing Association*

## **What changes to these could help the sector’s ability to prevent children and young people from being drawn into violence?**

**8.15** The challenges and complexities associated with current decision making processes highlighted above currently hinder the sector’s ability to prevent children and young people from being drawn into violence. As such, interviewees were asked to identify things they would change to specifically help the sector’s ability to prevent children and young people from being drawn into violence. The majority of recommendations aligned with the challenges and improvements to current decision-making processes highlighted above, with key themes as follows:

- **Strengthen the youth sector workforce:** as noted above, the youth sector workforce faces substantial challenges in recruitment and retention, and for some, this struggle to establish youth work as a legitimate sector is largely due to its reliance on the voluntary

workforce. Specifically, several interviewees (in particular from youth sector infrastructure and delivery organisations) argued that professionalisation—through structured training, recognised qualifications, and employment security—is essential for credibility and effectiveness, and in turn should strengthen its ability to prevent children and young people from being drawn into violence. In terms of how this could happen, one respondent highlighted a youth strategy framework that advances professional development, enabling youth workers to achieve Level 3 accreditation, and suggested extending it to other topic areas. The following quote demonstrates this point further:

*“I would say a professional workforce. It's not to devalue a lot of the other work that goes on with young people in sport, in arts etc, but youth work being a specific intervention based on personal social education and voluntary engagement. We get quite a bit of kickback from the voluntary sector around professionalisation and registration, because that's where youth work organically grew. And I understand that history, but we're in a different place now. Youth work is a profession. It is a degree qualified profession and we need more skilled workers in the sector.”*  
**Stakeholder Interviewee – Local Government Advocacy Group**

- **Push youth work higher up the policy agenda by recognising its value:** linked to the above, some respondents felt that youth work is perceived as being less legitimate than other support systems for young people, particularly when put against statutory services (e.g., education and children’s social care). Interviewees stressed the importance of ensuring youth work is taken more seriously at the strategic level and acknowledged within policy agendas. In turn, this should ensure key decision-makers are aware of the needs of young people and recognise the importance of long-term sustainable funding to tackling long-term issues such as violence affecting young people, as outlined below:

*“(what would help)...is for youth work to be taken more seriously at strategic level. I know a lot of people anecdotally will say youth looks great, but when it comes to a crunch, for example, when considering funding, it's not always invested in and it's very short term thinking then because the young people in their mid to late teens, early 20s that we're working with now, if they're not properly engaged in youth provision and such like, then they're going to become more disengaged and they'll be the ones smashing your windows next week.”* – **Case Study Interviewee – Local Authority**

- **Build a stronger evidence base to inform decision-making:** several consultees noted that stronger evidence bases around what works and what youth sector provision is needed are being developed, including through strategic needs assessment requirements by funders and use of the YEF Toolkit. However, there is room for the development of a more robust evidence base of local needs as well as what works to more fully understand the impact funding has had in order to direct funding towards appropriate provision. For example, several interviewees highlighted the need to better understand what works to address violence affecting young people across the range of provision available.

*“I would like to see some more work done to evaluate the benefits of the youth work. Actually trying to get a handle on the impact funding has would be really interesting. Does increased funding actually lead to more people engaging or different cohorts engaging?” Stakeholder Interviewee – National Youth Service Provider*

- **Focus on an early intervention, preventative approach to youth provision:** a range of interviewees noted that while a mix of open and targeted provision is important to help the sector’s ability to prevent children and young people from being drawn into violence, there should be a focus on long-term, early intervention and preventative approaches to youth sector provision. This is demonstrated by the two quotes below.

*“My main highlights are more investment in universal Open Access youth work as a preventative tool and method of stopping young people getting involved in in organized crime. It's more on the vulnerabilities. As I said, it's understanding what you've heard and helping develop young people socially, personally. It develops that confidence and self-esteem to be able to safeguard and wrap trusted adults in a community around those children and young people. Without that, they've not themselves got those mechanisms or those tools to be able to protect themselves or others from being exploited and being directed into that.”- Case Study Interviewee – National Youth Charity*

*“Prevention element should have more importance in early years in schools. Youth services need to integrate better with the school system to catch young people at risk of serious violence” Stakeholder Interviewee – Central Government Department*

## Conclusion

- 8.16** Stakeholders concluded that current processes for determining local youth provision are marked by strong goodwill and commitment to collaboration, but they fall short of delivering the range, reach and consistency of services young people need. Across England and Wales, decision-making is constrained by complex processes resulting in piecemeal provision.
- 8.17** While examples of effective collaboration exist, these are uneven and depend heavily on local relationships and project-specific funding requirements. Youth workers often feel undervalued within partnerships compared to statutory services, with insecure employment, limited training, and workforce churn further reducing their capacity to contribute. This weakens both the quality of provision and the ability to build long-term trust with young people. Consultees highlighted the need for stronger workforce development, greater respect for youth work as a profession, and long-term investment that enables stability. Data and evidence remain a further weakness with a wish for more and better impact data to inform local decision making
- 8.18** Overall, current processes are not working well. To improve, consultees emphasised three priorities: funding that strengthens workforce training and partnership building; funding that enables meaningful involvement from young people and local communities in decisions that

affect their area; and longer-term investment in services that take an early intervention and preventative approach.

## 9. Conclusions and implications

**9.1** This chapter draws together key findings from the research to inform future policy and practice across the youth sector in England and Wales. It sets out practical implications for policymakers, commissioners, and youth sector leaders, with the aim of strengthening the role of youth provision in preventing violence and improving outcomes for young people. Overall, the evidence points to the need for more coherent, consistent, long-term approaches to funding, service planning, and cross-sector collaboration.

### Conclusions: Funding and youth services decision makers in England and Wales

**9.2** The research indicates that youth provision in England and Wales is funded through a complex and fragmented landscape involving four key stakeholder groups (national government, local government, public service partnerships, and independent youth provision). Each of these groups brings different priorities, funding mechanisms, data collection processes, and decision-making powers to bear. Overall, national government sets the policy and funding direction, public service partnerships and local authorities allocate funding and commission youth services, and independent grant providers play a growing role in supporting essential services.

**9.3** In both nations, policy shifts towards early intervention and public health approaches have altered how youth violence and wellbeing are understood. In England, the diffuse responsibility for reducing youth violence and promoting young people's wellbeing across multiple Whitehall departments, combined with severe funding pressure on local authorities, has created a highly fragmented funding environment.

**9.4** Our analysis found that central government funding is spread across 30 different funding streams, of these only three were sponsored by more than one department. Local authorities have statutory duties to ensure 'sufficient' provision but face significant constraints due to the compound effect of years of austerity and discretionary funding decisions. This has led to a reliance on short-term grants, and competitive commissioning.

**9.5** In contrast, Wales benefits from a clearer strategic direction and more central co-ordination – including a National Youth Work Strategy, ring-fenced funding, and national reporting mechanisms. However, challenges in sufficiency and equity remain. The impact of UK-wide policies relating to violence reduction can complicate delivery – particularly where they diverge from devolved priorities.

**9.6** A consistent finding across both England and Wales is that there is limited influence of young people and frontline professionals in shaping the provision required and decisions about resource allocation. Despite some encouraging examples of youth-led commissioning and co-production, these remain the exception rather than the norm.

**9.7** Overall, the youth provision landscape is marked by governance complexity, inconsistent coordination, and funding insecurity. While Wales demonstrates a more coherent model, local authorities in both nations rely heavily on supplementary funding from independent and public service partnerships. This has left many areas with severely limited provision that cannot meet the needs of young people. Addressing these issues will require clearer national direction, stronger local accountability, and more strategic investment to ensure all young people can access the support they need.

#### **Implications:**

There is a need for national leadership for the youth sector

**9.8** For youth provision to be effective, national government departments must recognise it as a core component of a wider system of violence prevention. This requires;

- stronger alignment of youth policy and funding with violence reduction efforts across all government departments supporting young people via cross-departmental ministerial groups and associated funding streams to create fewer, larger and more strategic funds that directly support youth services
- closer collaboration between central and local government to ensure funding reflects current and future need rather than historic patterns or short-term political priorities.

The forthcoming National Youth Strategy provides a valuable opportunity for this

**9.9** Through the development of the National Youth Strategy in England we have seen national government departments take a more proactive role in setting joined up policy priorities across youth services, education, health, and criminal justice. This follows the impact of the Welsh National Youth Strategy with its clear policy and funding direction. The Strategy should establish the priorities and purpose of a national youth sector, bring funding together to pool resources into funding frameworks that devolve decision-making to local areas regarding how they best use youth sector resources to address local issues and provide support for all young people.

#### **Conclusions: Variation of local authority funding of youth provision**

**9.10** All young people should have access to high-quality youth provision and local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure there is 'sufficient' provision in their area. Where spending on youth services varies between local authorities, we would expect those differences to reflect meaningful factors such as levels of deprivation, violent crime, rurality, or other population needs. However, the evidence shows that funding for youth work is highly unequal and often shaped more by historic allocations and local political priorities than by any consistent assessment of need.

- 9.11** Local authority-reported data shows an overall annual spend of £474 million in England and £45 million in Wales. While these figures provide a broad overview, they are imperfect and do not fully capture the scale of youth provision, especially from non-public sources. Analysis of 360Giving data revealed £165 million in grant funding (both public and non-public), though this is likely an underestimation due to voluntary reporting.
- 9.12** Demographic data is not consistently driving decision-making: the weak correlation between funding, rates of violent crime, and population rates suggests that resources are not being allocated according to population characteristics or levels of need. This raises concerns about how well local authorities are using evidence to plan and deliver services.
- 9.13** As well as providing an overall picture of the scale of youth work funding, the data highlights wide disparities in allocation of this funding between local areas, with some authorities spending over £500,000 per 1,000 young people and others as little as £7,000. Some areas (particularly London boroughs, e.g., Westminster and Camden) invest heavily in youth services, others (including in the East of England and West Midlands) allocate considerably less. In Wales, Wrexham leads in the way (£150k), followed by Pembrokeshire (£127k). Most local authorities in Wales spend between £50k and £100k per 1,000 young people.
- 9.14** Importantly, low levels of local authority expenditure are not offset by higher levels of wider (e.g. lottery or philanthropic) funding. This means that areas with limited public investment are not being compensated by other sources, further exacerbating inequalities in access to youth services.
- 9.15** Attempts to correlate youth service expenditure with the rate of children cautioned/sentenced and demographic characteristics reveal weak associations. Less than 1% of the variation in youth expenditure can be explained by differences in young people cautioned/sentenced, and demographic factors such as age, ethnicity, and socio-economic status account for 2% or less of expenditure variation. These findings show that youth service funding is not systematically aligned with indicators of need or risk. While urban centres like London, Manchester, and Bristol show higher levels of both expenditure and children cautioned/sentenced, these patterns are inconsistent nationally and do not reflect a strategic national approach.
- 9.16** The lack of correlation between funding and need raises serious concerns about the equity and adequacy of current youth service arrangements, highlighting the limitations of relying on voluntary data reporting and historic funding patterns to guide investment decisions. Evidence suggests that expenditure is shaped more by political priorities, past allocations, budget constraints, and local pressures than by any clear assessment of need or demand. This results in wide variation in youth work opportunities and undermines efforts to ensure sufficient and equitable provision. Addressing these disparities will require a more strategic and evidence-informed approach, with stronger national co-ordination, improved data collection, and targeted investment in areas of greatest need.

**9.17** Analysis to consider the extent to which national funding sources are additional to, or reported and included as part of the Section 251 returns demonstrate the complexity of estimating how much funding for youth services from multiple sources reaches localities. Just as the total amount of spend on youth services is ambiguous, the proportion of spend on youth violence and crime prevention is also not clear cut. Section 251 data reports spend by 'universal' and 'targeted' however, targeted provision is not the same as provision to prevent youth violence for two reasons; firstly conceptually it can be argued that all youth services help prevent youth violence including universal provision which is often open access provision in areas of deprivation or social need; and secondly targeted services include provision to support or prevent teenage pregnancy, substance misuse, young people NEET as well as crime.

### Implications

Local authorities should be made more accountable for the sufficiency of their youth services

**9.18** A lack of consistent national and local data on youth provision makes it harder to demonstrate the preventative impact of youth work. Therefore, national government should mandate more consistent and robust annual financial data, standardised monitoring data and the assurance of quality youth services from all local authority areas. This requires resources to collate, review and verify annual returns and political oversight at both local and central government level.

**9.19** National funding allocations should be ring-fenced for youth provision funding based on population size, rates of violence, and other factors like deprivation (assessed through robust needs assessments). This could help guarantee a baseline of provision in every area.

**9.20** Accountability reporting by local authorities to their electorate and national government should require them to consider youth services and violence prevention holistically, rather than in silos. Each local authority should publish an annual report on local needs, funding, provision, outputs and outcomes.

**9.21** There are several technical procedures that need to be established to build accountability frameworks. Potential improvements include:

- establishing a clear and comprehensive typology of youth provision, which references primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention roles; Developing a standard typology of youth services, alongside a shared outcomes framework, would make it easier to demonstrate and improve the impact of youth work, particularly in relation to violence prevention.
- and mandating minimum standards per local authority, such as access rates, outcomes, and cross-sector working expectations.

### Better data is essential for accountability

**9.22** Weaknesses in data systems and limited engagement with research and evaluation remain major barriers to effective commissioning and delivery of youth work.

- Reforms to Section 251 reporting are essential. Current inconsistencies in how youth service spending is recorded hinder effective monitoring and national oversight. A standardised and robust approach to financial reporting is needed to underpin accountability, equity, and continuous improvement. The DfE, DCMS, Home Office and MHCLG government departments should audit the quality of data returns and consult on changes needed to achieve a reliable annual reporting system for local authorities - tracking funding, types of provision, access rates, and young people's outcomes.
- Funders also have a role to play by encouraging more comprehensive and consistent use of 360Giving grant data, including reporting on equity and beneficiary locations, to reduce urban bias and improve spatial accuracy.

### Conclusions: Decision makers' priorities

**9.23** The research found that decision-making about youth services is heavily shaped by acute funding constraints, imperfect data, and short-term political pressures. This reflects an environment of "bounded rationality," where limited time, information, and options mean that choices are influenced as much by external factors – such as media narratives, advocacy campaigns, and personal experiences – as by evidence. One key factor shaping this is that central government funding frequently comes with strict conditions that restrict local adaptation, while short-term funding cycles limit the ability to respond to emerging issues or build on learning over time. As a result, commissioning practices vary significantly between places, leading to wide differences in both the amount and focus of youth work funding.

**9.24** Decision-makers are often aiming for universal access to open provision, but limited budgets often force a focus on narrowly targeted services and prioritise acute services – where outcomes are visible and immediate - over preventative youth services, whose benefits for violence reduction may take years to materialise. Despite growing recognition of the importance of upstream, preventative interventions, most consultees described youth provision as inadequate and unevenly distributed. Equity considerations, particularly for Black and Minority Ethnic young people, are often subsumed within broader disadvantage frameworks, and a lack of granular data about access and impact makes it difficult to effectively respond to specific needs.

**9.25** Current processes for determining local youth provision are marked by strong goodwill and commitment to collaboration, but they fall short of delivering the range, reach and consistency of services young people need. Furthermore although many stakeholders recognise the contribution of youth services to violence prevention, this priority is often

balanced against the need for youth services to deliver other objectives such as improving education, health, and employment outcomes.

**9.26** Taken together, the evidence suggests that decisions about youth provision are rarely driven by long-term strategy or robust evidence, but instead reflect reactive responses to political, economic, and social pressures. Addressing this will require a more inclusive, data- and evidence-informed, and strategically coordinated approach to ensure that youth services are equitable, sufficient, and responsive to the needs of all young people.

### Implications

*Stable, multi-year funding models should be the norm.*

**9.27** There is therefore an urgent need to shift towards more stable, multi-year funding models if youth work is to play its full role in preventing violence. All funding organisations (including national government) should offer grants of three to five years, covering both core and programme costs, as the norm rather than the exception. This would enable better planning, workforce development, service continuity, and long-term relationship-building (with both young people at risk and other statutory agencies), all of which are essential for effective collaborative working on violence prevention.

**9.28** As part of a National Strategy and Local Plans, funders at national level (such as DCMS, DfE, and MoJ), sub regional - public service partnerships and local government (via local authorities) could encourage pooled budgets for youth services across public services such as youth, social, education and justice departments to support place-based approaches tailored to local needs, and prioritise commissioning models that deliver shared violence reduction outcomes. Funding allocations and grants should encourage flexible use by local decision makers (local government and service providers) to offer both open and targeted provision that is best suited to the local context. Flexibility requires accountability, and central government should build clear national frameworks for youth services, and also prioritise commissioning models that deliver violence reduction outcomes. These models would be:

- Collaborative – designed and delivered jointly by multiple agencies across sectors to address shared priorities such as youth violence prevention.
- Flexible – to allow local decision makers to tailor provision to specific needs of local community.
- Outcomes focused - to ensure all agencies prioritise interventions that demonstrate measurable impact on violence prevention.
- Accountable - Operating within a clear national framework that ensures transparency, consistency, and alignment with national goals.

### Funding available to youth organisations should cover more than delivery costs

**9.29** Youth organisations (those run by local authorities and the VCSE) face persistent challenges from short-term, competitive funding models and project-restricted grants, which make youth work precarious. These funding dynamics undermine the stability of provision that is essential for effective violence prevention. Short-term grants rarely support core costs (such as rent, management services or training and development) or long-term infrastructure, making it difficult for organisations to retain experienced staff, build capacity, or sustain the trusting relationships with young people that are critical to reducing violence. Smaller organisations - often rooted in the communities most affected by violence - are particularly disadvantaged, as they lack the resources to compete with larger providers. This creates inefficiencies, weakens continuity of support, and limits the sector's ability to respond strategically to local needs. Ensuring that funding decisions are based on needs-based assessments - factoring in deprivation, rurality, and variable service delivery costs - is essential for building a more equitable and resilient youth sector.

### Governance arrangements should be inclusive

**9.30** Youth voice is valued by decision-makers but is not consistently embedded in decision-making processes. Youth voice needs to be integrated earlier and more deeply if it is to meaningfully shape priorities.

**9.31** Youth workers often feel undervalued within partnerships compared to statutory services, with insecure employment, limited training, and workforce churn further reducing their capacity to contribute. Consultees consistently highlighted the need for

- More workforce development with access to continuous professional development essential for professional growth comparable to that offered to teachers in schools and further education
- Greater respect for youth work as a profession, championed through a workforce development strategy and opportunities for youth workers to train and contribute to strategy alongside other professionals.
- Long-term investment in the sector to retain youth work talent and deliver stable and reliable services to young people that demonstrate impact.

### Equity considerations should be embedded in commissioning structures

**9.32** All commissioning activity - from central and local government to public service providers and independent funders - should explicitly embed equity.

- Equity impact assessments should be used routinely, not only when introducing new funding streams but also when altering or withdrawing existing services.

**9.33** While research participants recognised the value of youth and lived experience voices, these were rarely embedded deeply, consistently, or early enough in decision-making. This limits both the relevance and effectiveness of provision.

- Funders and commissioners should ensure that young people’s voices (especially those with experience of violence) shape every stage of the process – from needs assessment to programme design and evaluation.

**9.34** To strengthen relationships between youth organisations and other partners working to prevent violence, improve service continuity, and strengthen youth workers’ ability to achieve positive outcomes for young people:

- Targeted investment is needed to support small, community-based and Black-led organisations, which are often marginalised by mainstream commissioning.
- Capacity-building support should be provided to smaller and Black-led organisations to enable equitable access to funding.

### **Conclusions: Types of youth provision funded**

**9.35** To understand how budgets for youth provision are spent, we draw on evidence from the case studies, which highlight both the complexity of tracking expenditure and the limitations of available data. Despite extensive review of council papers, statutory returns, and interviews with decision-makers, it was not possible to produce a detailed breakdown of spending by service type. This reflects the high-level nature of published financial data and the fragmented way services are funded, particularly where national and independent resources are channelled through regional bodies or short-term grant programmes.

**9.36** Nonetheless, several clear themes emerge. Local youth provision budgets have fluctuated over time but show a general downward trend, particularly in local authority funding, which has declined both in absolute terms and relative value. Current budgets are insufficient to meet local demand, forcing local authorities and providers to seek alternative sources of income. This increases the administrative burden on youth workers and managers, who must balance frontline delivery with fundraising and partnership management. Funding is often short-term, typically annual, creating uncertainty for providers and young people alike.

**9.37** Local authority resources support a youth service ecosystem alongside direct delivery of services. Targeted and specialist provision, including youth justice and violence prevention, tends to receive more protection, while open access services have become increasingly vulnerable to cuts. Stakeholders consistently believe that youth provision contributes to violence prevention, but the absence of a clear typology of prevention activities limits effective reporting on different types of provision that are funded – including the balance of resources allocated across primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention. The lack of

transparency and granularity therefore undermines efforts to evaluate impact, target resources effectively, and ensure equitable distribution.

**9.38** Overall, youth service funding is fragmented, short-term, and inadequate. This leaves provision reactive rather than strategic, undermining consistency, equity, and sustainability, and significantly limiting the contribution youth work can make to preventing violence. Addressing these challenges will require longer-term investment, clearer categorisation of prevention activities, and stronger data collection – particularly around equity and impact – to ensure youth services can deliver on their full potential.

**9.39** There is strong commitment within the youth sector to improve service delivery and co-ordination, but stakeholders widely acknowledge that current systems are fractured and failing young people. As a result, the three most common priorities for change from consultees were: funding that strengthens workforce training and partnership building; funding that enables meaningful involvement from young people and local communities in decisions that affect their area; and longer-term investment in services that take an early intervention and preventative approach.

### Implications

Youth services need local co-ordination through investment in streamlined structures

**9.40** Integration between services is widely valued but inconsistently achieved. Violence Reduction Units (VRUs), Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs), and Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) play an important role in cross-sector coordination. But they cover different geographies and have a wider scope than focus on young people. This situation risks duplication and inefficiency. The lack of coordination is felt most acutely at the local level, where organisations working with young people must navigate fragmented and overlapping structures.

- National government has a key role to play in addressing these challenges. Greater integration of structures at national level, or alternatively, greater devolution of decision-making and budgets to authorities with statutory responsibility could enable the development of more streamlined, multi-sector arrangements.
- Investment in local infrastructure bodies (E.g. VRUs; regional youth work units, etc) is needed to embed evidence-informed practice, support robust data sharing, and strengthen relationships across sectors.

### Conclusions: Mentoring provision

**9.41** Mentoring is a widely used, valued, and recognised intervention in England and Wales, but its form, purpose, and delivery vary significantly. Stakeholders talked about formal mentoring programmes as well as informal mentoring that happens within other forms of intervention.

Mentoring is often part of a multi-strand approach alongside youth work, advocacy, peer support, and employment support. This diversity makes it difficult to generalise findings or assess national trends.

- 9.42** While mentoring projects were noted by many of the national stakeholders we spoke to, mentoring projects were known in just three of the five case study areas. With the exception of two stakeholders who run mentoring programmes, respondents were not sufficiently close to the management of mentoring projects to describe in detail the mentoring taking place locally or across policy agendas. Nonetheless, the research uncovered useful insights and trends.
- 9.43** Mentoring takes many forms – including peer-to-peer, adult–youth, volunteer-led, and practitioner-led models - and occurs across diverse settings such as schools, prisons, and youth centres. This flexibility allows for tailored approaches but also generates confusion about what constitutes effective mentoring. Provision ranges from formal programmes to informal relationships that are often conflated with youth work and, as a result, remain underfunded and under-recognised. Many formal programmes are short-term, particularly those targeting crime and violence, and there is little consistent training, accreditation, or professional development for mentors.
- 9.44** The absence of a national mentoring framework contributes to fragmented provision and inconsistent data collection. Most programmes are locally driven and rely on funding from sources such as the National Lottery Community Fund or regional initiatives like the New Deal for Young People in London. Funding disparities are evident, particularly between mentoring focused education and employability and that aimed at violence prevention. Despite mentoring’s potential as a preventative tool, violence- and crime-related programmes remain underfunded: of 231 grants identified, only 20 focused on this area. Geographic inequalities also persist, with London receiving the majority of grants while Wales and the North East of England receive much more limited investment. This raises questions about fairness and the need for more evidence-led funding.
- 9.45** Models of mentoring vary in duration, intensity, and structure, with differing attrition rates, but the research generated insufficient evidence to determine which approaches are most effective or prevalent. Access also remains uneven: few programmes are specifically designed for Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic young people, despite their disproportionate experiences of marginalisation and violence.

### Implications

A national mentoring framework would bring consistency to mentoring funding and provision

- 9.46** A mentoring framework, developed by mentoring providers and championed by a national funder would provide a clear description of vision, scope, oversight, mentor training and

accreditation, quality standards and evaluation. The absence of a national mentoring framework means provision is fragmented and inconsistently funded which in turn hinders strategic investment, makes it harder to scale effective models, and prevents robust evaluation at a national level.

- 9.47** Funders using the mentoring framework should require standardised data collection and reporting because without reliable UK data on attrition, delivery contexts, or model effectiveness, it is difficult to present mentoring as a proven intervention in policy discussions or work out what improvements to current practice are needed.
- 9.48** Funders could strengthen quality and impact by requiring all mentoring programmes to meet minimum standards, including safeguarding protocols, structured training for mentors (whether volunteers, trainees, or paid youth workers), and ongoing support and supervision. Sustained, relationship-based models should be prioritised over short-term interventions, particularly for young people facing complex challenges.
- 9.49** Commissioners should work with providers to map existing mentoring provision, identify gaps, and establish evaluation requirements which will show approaches that are most effective for different groups of young people. This should include assessing variation in duration, intensity, setting, and focus of mentoring relationships, as well as whether programmes are reaching those most at risk. Learning from established programmes - such as those developed in London - could inform how to tailor mentoring for underrepresented groups.
- 9.50** To enable more strategic investment, local authorities could track and report mentoring activity and expenditure separately within youth budgets. This would improve understanding of coverage and help identify where targeted investment could have the greatest impact. Equity should also be central to commissioning: ringfenced funding for community-based and Black-led organisations could help ensure culturally competent mentoring, with more equitable distribution of resources.
- 9.51** Commissioners should also invest in workforce development, particularly in areas with shortages of trained mentors, by funding professional development and fostering partnerships between local providers. Greater clarity, guidance, and training standards are needed to ensure safe, consistent, and high-quality mentoring.
- 9.52** Finally, mentoring must not operate in isolation. Commissioners should embed mentoring within wider youth offers and violence prevention efforts, with clear referral pathways, service coordination, and shared outcomes. This integrated approach would enhance quality, strengthen continuity of support, and maximise mentoring's role in improving young people's wellbeing and reducing their risk of involvement in violence.

## Annex A: Glossary

- **Allied Sectors** – Sectors that support specific aspects of a young person’s life. Examples include education, social care, health, youth justice, and housing.
- **At Risk** – Refers to young people who are in circumstances that increase their likelihood of involvement in violence. It does not imply certainty but rather an elevated probability of harm or challenge.
- **Child First Approach** – A principle guiding youth justice strategies, prioritising the best interests of the child. It focuses on recognising young people’s needs, building on their strengths, and working with them to promote prevention, diversion, and intervention.
- **Detached Youth Work** – Youth work that takes place outside traditional centres, engaging young people in community settings such as parks, shopping centres, or housing estates.
- **Early Intervention** – Identifying and addressing problems at an early stage to prevent them from escalating.
- **Ethnicity** – A cultural, national, or linguistic identity shared by a group of people. It is more specific than the concept of race.
- **Intervention** – Structured approaches or programmes designed to support young people and help them achieve positive outcomes.
- **Local Youth Offer** – Defined by DCMS as the full range of youth services available to young people in a specific local authority area.
- **Mentoring** – Mentoring is described as a relationship between mentee and mentor, with the mentor often referred to as the ‘role model’ for the young person. The range of definitions is rather broad but at the heart of them are relationships based on trust and **mutual respect** that are led by the needs and wishes of the young person.
- **Open Access Provision** – Youth services available to all young people, regardless of need or background, typically without a referral. Also known as ‘universal provision’.
- **Outcome** – The results or impact of an intervention on young people. Outcomes can be observed over different time periods with some being observed immediately and others taking longer. They may be directly or indirectly related to an intervention.
- **Public service providers** – Non-elected providers of services, including Violence Reduction Units, health agencies (e.g., Integrated Care Systems and Integrated Care Boards), and housing associations.

- **Prevention / Preventative Approach** – A strategy within public services aimed at resolving issues before they become crises.
- **Primary interventions** – Universal programmes that aim to support positive development and prevent the circumstances and behaviours associated with later involvement in violence.
- **Public health approach to violence reduction** – An approach that seeks to improve the health and safety via prevention measures of all individuals by addressing the underlying risk factors that an individual will become a victim or a perpetrator of violence. (Local Government Association, 2018)
- **Public Health Approach** – A population-level strategy aimed at improving safety and reducing violence by addressing root causes and risk factors. This approach focuses on prevention and aims to benefit the largest number of people.
- **Race** – A categorisation based on physical traits such as skin colour, recognised as a social construct rather than a biological reality. In UK law (Equality Act 2010), it includes colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origins.
- **Race equity** – A state where a person’s racial identity no longer statistically predicts how they fare in areas like education, employment, health, and justice. It involves actively eliminating racial disparities and ensuring fair treatment, opportunity, and outcomes for all races. YEF have a commitment to addressing the different ways White children and children from Black, Asian and other minority backgrounds are able to access support and services, including diversion away from formal criminal justice processing.
- **Secondary Interventions** – Targeted support for young people who are vulnerable to exploitation or exhibiting behaviours linked to violence.
- **Statutory duty** - Statutory duty refers to obligations or responsibilities that legal obligation imposed by law on a local authority and applies to young people aged 13 to 19 and additionally those with learning difficulties or disabilities aged 20 to 24 years.
- **Statutory Youth Services** – Youth services delivered or funded by local authorities who have a statutory duty and are legally required to provide a local youth offer that responds to young people’s needs, in accordance with statutory guidance (last updated September 2023).
- **Targeted Provision** – Specialist youth services that address specific needs or characteristics, such as ethnicity, special educational needs, or risk of offending.
- **Tertiary Interventions** – Programmes aimed at protecting young people already involved in crime or violence from further harm or involvement.

- **Uniformed Groups** – combine youth development with service to others, within a structured and uniformed environment. Organisations such as the Fire, Police, Army and Sea Cadets, Girlguiding, The Scout Association, and others that form part of the national youth work sector.
- **Violence Reduction Units (VRUs)** – Multi-agency partnerships bringing together police, health, education, local government, and communities to address serious violence collaboratively.
- **Vulnerable Young People** – Young people who face a higher risk of harm or poor outcomes due personal, familial, or societal factors.
- **Young people and children** – In the youth sector it includes all young people aged between 8 and 25
- **Youth Alliance** – A network of VCSE (voluntary, community, and social enterprise) youth organisations working to strengthen local youth work infrastructure and support the workforce through training and collaboration.
- **Youth Justice Board (YJB)** – The public body that oversees the youth justice system and the provision of youth justice responsible for overseeing the youth justice system and services in England and Wales.
- **Youth Offending Team (YOT)** – Multi-disciplinary teams set up by local authorities to deliver youth justice services. In some areas, these are known as Youth Offending Services (YOS).
- **Youth Provision** – A broad term for services and activities designed to meet the needs of young people, including youth centres, community events, and mobile services. These can be universal (open-access) or targeted.
- **Youth Sector** – Organisations primarily working with young people through youth work. Youth work is a practice that supports the personal, social, emotional and educational development of a young person to help them reach their full potential. It is informal, voluntary and centred on building relationships in safe and supportive environments.
- **Youth Voice** – The perspectives, ideas, and participation of young people in shaping services, policies, or decisions that affect them.
- **Youth work** - a practice that supports the personal, social, emotional and educational development of a young person to help them reach their full potential. It is informal, voluntary and centred on building relationships in safe and supportive environments.

- **Youth Worker** – A professional or volunteer supporting young people through non-formal learning and development, helping them grow personally, socially, and professionally.

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## Annex C: Organisations involved in the research

**C.1** This table provides a list of organisations interviewed for stakeholder interviews.

**Table C-1: Stakeholder Interviewees**

Organisation	Organisation
Association of Police and Crime Commissioners	The Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition
BBC Children in Need	The Diana Award
Coca Cola Europacific Partners	Voice 4 Change
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	Welsh Government
Department of Work and Pensions (DWP)	Welsh Local Government Association
East Sussex County Council	West Midlands Combined Authority
Enfield Council	West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit
Ending Youth Violence Lab	Young Peoples Foundation Trusts
Home Office	Youth Focus North East
Local Government Association	360Giving
London Violence Reduction Unit	
Merseyside Police	
National Lottery Community Fund	
National Youth Agency	
Nottingham Violence Reduction Unit	
Nottingham Violence Reduction Unit	
Partnership for Young London	
Peabody Housing Association	
Poplar HARCA Housing Association	
Public Health Wales	
South Gloucestershire Council	
Sovereign Network Group Housing Association	

Source: SQW/UK Youth

**C.2** This table provides a list of the roles of individuals interviewed for case studies.

**Table 9-1: Case Study Interviewees**

Organisation/Role	Organisation/Role
<b>Case Study A: a London Metropolitan Authority</b>	
Local Authority - Head of Participation, Opportunity and Wellbeing	Local Authority - Community Safety Partnership Manager
Local Authority – Head of Youth Support Participation	Local Community Charity – CEO
National Youth Charity – Founder and CEO	
<b>Case Study B: a semi-urban Local Authority within a Combined Authority in England</b>	
Local Authority – Service Manager for Early intervention	Local Authority – Youth Work Team Member
Local Authority – Violent Crime Coordinator	Local Authority – Elected Councillor
Violence Reduction Unit - Director	Combined Authority - Violence Reduction Unit Research & Evaluation Specialist
Housing Association – Youth Work Coordinator & Senior Operations Manager	
<b>Case Study C: a Local Authority in Wales</b>	
Local Authority – Youth Service Manager	Local Authority – Youth Justice Manager
Local Authority – Community Safety Manager	Police and Crime Commissioner – Serious Violence Programme Lead
Local Youth Charity – Head of Development	
<b>Case Study D: a Unitary Local Authority in England</b>	
Local Authority – Youth Work and Participation Lead	Parish Council – Youth Service Manager
Local YMCA – Youth and Community Manager	Local Youth Charity – Operations Director
Local Charity - Director	
<b>Case Study E: an urban Local Authority within a Combined Authority in England</b>	
Local Authority – Senior Youth Work Manager	Local Authority – Community Safety Officer
Local Authority – Commissioning manager	Local Authority – Lead Member for Children & Youth People

Organisation/Role	Organisation/Role
Housing Association – Community Development Manager & Head of Communities and Tenant Involvement	Violence Reduction Unit – Partnership Lead
National Youth Charity – Chief Executive	VCSE Infrastructure Organisation - Strategic Lead

*Source: SQW/UK Youth*

## Annex D: Funding streams – additional tables

**D.1** This Annex presents tables detailing additional information on core funding streams from central government and independent grant providers.

**Table D-1: Funding landscape: core central government and local departments or stakeholders (compiled March 2025)**

Organisation	Policy or Programme name	Description	Total value of fund	Live (start and end date)	Geography	Open/targeted provision	Youth justice/violence prevention focus
Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)	Civil Society Strategy	Sets out how the government will support 'civil society', meaning individuals and organisations when they act with the primary purpose of creating social value.	Overarching strategy covers individual funds.	Announced in 2018 – unclear if ongoing	UK	N/A	No
	Youth Investment Fund	The Youth Investment Fund's objective is to create, expand and improve local youth facilities and their services, in order to drive positive outcomes for young people. The Fund provides investment to youth organisations to expand and improve facilities for youth activities in areas of need, referred to as "left behind" areas.	£560m	2022-2025	England	Both	Unknown
	Dormant Assets Scheme	The Dormant Assets scheme is the distribution of unclaimed money to be used for public good. Money is allocated equally between four causes, one being the provision of services, facilities or	£350m 2024-28 total (£87.5m for youth services)	Started 2008. Current phase 2024-2028.	England/ UK	Both	No

Organisation	Policy or Programme name	Description	Total value of fund	Live (start and end date)	Geography	Open/targeted provision	Youth justice/violence prevention focus
	NCS: national citizen service	opportunities to meet the needs of young people.  Delivered by the National Citizen Service Trust for 16- to 17-year-olds personal and social development programme in England - could do community work skills building and residential. The NCS is being wound down in 2025.	The trust drew down £69m of grant-in-aid from DCMS in FY 22/23, generating other income of £3.2m.	2011-2025	UK	Both	No
	Local Youth Transformation Pilot	The Local Youth Transformation (LYT) Pilot aims to support 10 to 12 local authorities to start to rebuild a high-quality offer for young people and the transition back to local youth services leadership. The fund will test ways to best rebuild local authority capability to ensure a local youth offer which addresses the needs of young people and supports government priorities.	£0.75m	2024- March 2025	England	Open	Unknown
	NYA Core Grant	Its core functions are around youth work qualifications, a youth worker and youth services registry and safeguarding support	£3.93m	22/23-24/25	England and Wales	N/a	No
	UK Youth Parliament	The UK Youth Parliament is made up of more than 300 young people aged between	£2.4m	FY24/25	UK	Both	No

Organisation	Policy or Programme name	Description	Total value of fund	Live (start and end date)	Geography	Open/targeted provision	Youth justice/violence prevention focus
	Adventures away from home fund	11 and 18 years, elected as Members of Youth Parliament (MYPs) to represent the views of their peer's and bring about social change through meaningful representation and campaigning.  This award will provide bursaries for approximately 7,500 disadvantaged and/or vulnerable young people to take part in outdoor learning activities in 2023-24.	£1.1m	April 2024- March 2025 Now extended until March 2026 with a larger financial contribution (£4.7m).	England	Targeted	No
	Creative Careers Programme	The CCP pilot is designed to address skills shortages and information failures in the creative industries (CIs) by providing young people across England with specialist information, advice and guidance (IAG) about creative careers and securing the long-term future of the programme.	£0.95m	2022-2025	England	Targeted	Unknown
	Youth Worker Bursary Fund	NYA distributes youth work training bursaries across the country. The strategic goal of this work is to support a sufficiently qualified youth sector workforce, which will	£0.79m	Start 2019 – ongoing	England	Targeted	No

Organisation	Policy or Programme name	Description	Total value of fund	Live (start and end date)	Geography	Open/targeted provision	Youth justice/violence prevention focus
		support young people to develop skills for life and work, and improve their mental and physical wellbeing, alongside meeting government priorities to reduce wider societal challenges such as NEET (individuals classed as not in education, employment or training) and serious youth violence.					
DCMS, National Lottery Community Fund	Million Hours Fund	The funding of extra hours of youth work that will help young people to have: improved emotional wellbeing, improved life and practical skills, and access to trusted relationships with adults and feel safer.	£22m	2023-2026	England	Open	No
	#iwill fund	The #iwill Fund will enable more young people to take part in social action through high quality opportunities which create lifelong habits. The fund distributes its investments through working in partnership with other funders.	£66m plus 1:1 match funding from other funders	2016-2026	England	Targeted	No
DCMS and Department for Education (DfE)	Enrichment Partnership Pilot	The pilot, focused on the North West, North East and East of England areas, aims to test whether providing centralised support to schools around enrichment has a positive impact on the quality and uptake of	£2.7m	2024-March 2025	NW, NE and East of England	Targeted	No

Organisation	Policy or Programme name	Description	Total value of fund	Live (start and end date)	Geography	Open/targeted provision	Youth justice/violence prevention focus
		enrichment activities locally, without leading to additional costs/resources for schools.					
DfE	Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF)	HAF provides healthy meals and activities to children from reception to year 11 who receive free school meals. Funding is distributed to LAs who are asked to ensure that the offer of free holiday club provision is available for all children in receipt of free school meals in their area.	£200m per annum	2022-2025 Now extended to March 2029.	England	Targeted	No
DHSC and DfE	Family Hubs and Start for Life programme (with DHSC)	This programme aims to join up and enhance services delivered through transformed family hubs in local authority areas, ensuring all families can access the support they need.	£126m	2022 -2025	England	Open	No
Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC)	Early Support Hubs	This is part of the UK Government's 2025–26 youth funding package, aimed at expanding access to structured, inclusive youth activities—particularly through uniformed youth organisations.	£7m	2025-2026	England	Open	No
	Public Health Youth Innovation Grants (local level)	The Public Health Youth Innovation Grants are designed to support the health and wellbeing of young people through innovative projects. These grants are part of	Determined LA & ICSs	Unknown	England	Unknown	No

Organisation	Policy or Programme name	Description	Total value of fund	Live (start and end date)	Geography	Open/ targeted provision	Youth justice/ violence prevention focus
		a broader initiative to engage young people in positive activities outside of the classroom, focusing on their mental health and crime prevention. The grants have provided funding various initiatives, including outdoor play areas, gardening projects, cycling initiatives, first aid training, yoga sessions, and wellbeing through arts participation.					
Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)	Youth Guarantee Trailblazers	The Youth Guarantee Trailblazers are pilot areas in England that aim to support young people aged 18-21 in accessing education, training, and employment opportunities. The initiative focuses on reducing economic inactivity and aims to provide tailored support to vulnerable young people, including those with special educational needs and disabilities.	£45m	Unknown	Regional	Targeted	No
Home Office	Violence Reduction Units	Funding for 18 areas identified as having high instances of violent crime, aimed at bringing together police, local government, health providers, community leaders and other organisations to address violent crime, including supporting young people in at risk areas or risk groups for violence.	£315m (2019-2023) £55m (23/24 FY)	2019-2025 Extended to 2024/25.	England and Wales	Targeted	Yes

Organisation	Policy or Programme name	Description	Total value of fund	Live (start and end date)	Geography	Open/targeted provision	Youth justice/violence prevention focus
	Safer Streets Fund	The Safer Streets Fund allows forces and local authorities to invest in transformative crime prevention initiatives. The fund this year tackles neighbourhood crime, violence against women and girls (VAWG) and anti-social behaviour (ASB).	£125m (to date)	2020 – 2025	England	Targeted	Yes
	Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs)	PCCs are elected in areas of England and Wales to make sure that local police meet the needs of the community, a small percentage of funds are allocated for youth crime prevention.	Determined by each PPC	Awarded annually	England and Wales	Targeted	Yes
	Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs)	Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) brings together local partners to formulate and implement strategies to tackle crime, disorder and antisocial behaviour in their communities.	Determined by each PPC	Determined by each PPC	England and Wales	Targeted	Yes
	Police & Fire cadets	These cadet programmes are not only youth development platforms but also serve as preventative and community safety tools, often working in partnership with local authorities, schools, and Police and Crime Commissioners.	Unknown	Ongoing	England	Targeted	No

Organisation	Policy or Programme name	Description	Total value of fund	Live (start and end date)	Geography	Open/targeted provision	Youth justice/violence prevention focus
Ministry of Defence (MoD) and DfE	The Ministry of Defence cadet forces	The MoD (with a small amount subsidised by DfE) sponsors and supports five cadet forces that offer challenging and enjoyable activities for young people. The cadets are based on the traditions, values and standards of their parent service but are not part of the Armed forces.	MoD c.£180m, DfE £1.1m (per annum since academic year 2021/22)	Late 1800s-indefinite	UK	Targeted	No
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)	Local Authority Provision	The MHCLG local government finance settlement annually determines Local Authority funding. This must be then used by local authorities to deliver their statutory duty on youth provision.	Determined by each LA	Awarded annually	England	Both	No
	Local Growth and UK Youth Prosperity Fund	The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Local Growth Fund are key parts of the UK government's post-Brexit strategy to replace EU structural funding and support local economic development. In terms of youth provision, it funds Youth employment and training programmes, Community-based youth services, Support for NEETs (young people Not in Education, Employment or Training) and Youth mental health and wellbeing projects.	Determined by LA	Funded annually	England	Open	Unknown

Organisation	Policy or Programme name	Description	Total value of fund	Live (start and end date)	Geography	Open/targeted provision	Youth justice/violence prevention focus
	Stronger Communities Fund	The Stronger Communities Fund is designed to support initiatives that strengthen community ties and improve quality of life. Funding is available for youth clubs and safe spaces, youth-led regeneration projects, skills development and mentoring and mental health and wellbeing services for young people.	Unknown	Funded annually	England	Open	Unknown
Ministry of Justice (MoJ)	Turnaround Programme	Provides funding to Youth Offending teams to enable them to intervene earlier and improve outcomes for children on the cusp of entering the youth justice system.	£300m	December 2022-March 2025	England and Wales	Targeted	Yes
	Youth Justice Grant	The Youth Justice Board makes an annual grant to local authorities for the purposes of the operation of youth justice services.	Unknown	Awarded annually	England and Wales	Targeted	Yes

Source: SQW/UKY Review of publicly available documentation/data

**Table D-2: Current funding for youth activities (compiled March 2025)**

Government department	Title of fund	Per annum £m	Distributed via Local Authority (singly or with partners)	Distributed via other delivery partner
Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)	Dormant Assets Scheme *	21.8	21.8	
	Local Youth Transformation Pilot	4	4	
	NYA Core Grant *	3.9		3.9
	UK Youth Parliament	2.4		2.4
	Adventures Away from Home Fund	1.1		1.1
	Creative Careers	0.9		0.9
	Youth Worker Bursary Fund	0.8	0.8	
DCMS & National Lottery Community Fund	Million Hours Fund	7.33	7.3	
	#iwill fund	6.6	6.6	
Department of Health and Social Care and DfE	Family Hubs and Start for Life programme	42	42	
DHSC	Early Support Hubs	7	7	
Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)	Youth Guarantee Trailblazers	45	45	
Home Office	Violence Reduction Units *	55		55
	Safer Streets Fund	25	25	

Government department	Title of fund	Per annum £m	Distributed via Local Authority (singly or with partners)	Distributed via other delivery partner
Ministry of Defence and DfE	The Ministry of Defence cadet forces	180		180
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)	Youth Integration and Uniformed Youth Group	7.6		7.6
Ministry of Justice	Youth Justice Services Grant via the Youth Justice Board *	85.7		85.7

Source: Analysis of Table D-2  
\*England and Wales

**Table D-3: Funding landscape: independent funders (compiled March 2025)**

Organisation	Policy or Programme name	Description	Total value of fund	Live (start and end date)	Geography	Open/ targeted provision	Youth justice/ violence prevention focus
Duke of Edinburgh Award (funding from Julia and Hans Rausing)	DoFE Funding for Community Organisations	Voluntary and community organisations can access up to £10,250 of grant funding, combined with support from an operations team to setup, launch and deliver their DoE programme	Unknown	2022-2025	National (with priority regions)	Open	No
Paul Hamlyn Foundation	Youth Fund	Fund focused on support organisations that work with people aged 14-25, targeted at young people who face transitions	Rolling	Rolling application cycle- start date unclear	UK	Targeted	No

Organisation	Policy or Programme name	Description	Total value of fund	Live (start and end date)	Geography	Open/targeted provision	Youth justice/violence prevention focus
		in their lives which may be challenging for example into or out of education, care settings, housing or the secure estate.					
Paul Hamlyn Foundation	Youth Strategic Investment Fund	The Youth Strategic Investment Fund supports the development, sustainability and impact of youth-focused organisations. Two-4 organisations are funded a year; they must be known to the foundation and applications are by invitation only. Provides a fixed term investment towards the core costs of an organisation, each grant also includes a package of tailored, expert support.	Rolling	Unknown - Ongoing	UK	Targeted	No
BBC Children in Need, the Hunter Foundation and the #iwill fund	Youth Social Action Fund	Aimed to support organisations to embed youth social action across the UK.	£3m	2022-2024	UK	Targeted	No
BBC Children in Need	BBC Children in Need Grants	BBC Children in need has several funding programmes open at any one time, including project grants,	Different values for different	Unknown - Ongoing	UK	Open	No

Organisation	Policy or Programme name	Description	Total value of fund	Live (start and end date)	Geography	Open/ targeted provision	Youth justice/ violence prevention focus
		core grants and emergency essential grants.	funding streams				
The National Lottery Community Fund	National Lottery Awards for All England	Funding projects that will: bring people together to build strong relationships in and across communities; improve the places and spaces that matter to communities; help more people to reach their potential, by supporting them at the earliest possible stage; support people, communities and organisations facing more demands and challenges because of the cost-of-living crisis.	Unknown	Unknown - ongoing	England	Open	No
The National Lottery Community Fund	National Lottery Awards for All Wales	Funding projects that will: bring people together to build strong relationships in and across communities; improve the places and spaces that matter to communities; help more people to reach their potential, by supporting them at the earliest possible stage; support people, communities and organisations facing more demands	Unknown	Unknown - ongoing	Wales	Open	No

Organisation	Policy or Programme name	Description	Total value of fund	Live (start and end date)	Geography	Open/targeted provision	Youth justice/violence prevention focus
		and challenges because of the cost-of-living crisis.					
The National Lottery Community Fund	National Lottery - Partnerships	Funding for organisations working together in partnership to help their community (people living in the same area, or people with similar interests or life experiences).	Unknown	2023/24 to 2025/26/27	England (and regional competitions too)	Open	No

*Source: SQW/UKY Review of publicly available documentation/data*

## Case study funding

### Case study A:

**D.2 Youth provision in Case Study A** (a London Metropolitan Authority) is primarily funded via the following key stakeholders:

- **The Local Authority** is responsible for the commissioning of services in the Borough, covering a range of early intervention, open access provision and targeted support. The Local Authority has reduced its spend on youth services significantly in the past three years, reaching £400k in 2024/25<sup>27</sup>. The Youth Service team works very closely with partners in the Community Safety Partnership and Youth Justice Service, with a focus on youth violence prevention.
- **The VRU** is allocated funding from the Home Office. Funding is then distributed to the areas local authority districts. Areas are not told how to spend this funding however, guidance around expected outcomes is given and most areas, including Case Study A, spend some of this funding on youth focused projects.
- **The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC)** has allocated funds for children and young people, with a particular focus on reducing youth violence.
- 360Giving records also show some funding for the VCSE sector comes from the National Lottery (c.£115k - 23/24), as well as other grant funding (c.£120k).

**D.3** As well as the above organisations, the Integrated Care Board was noted to have played a role in decision-making and funding in the local area more recently via the provision of funding for a 'youth work in acute settings' pilot, however the scale of their funding was not available/provided.

### Case study B

**D.4 Youth provision in Case Study B** (a semi-urban Local Authority within a Combined Authority) is primarily funded via the following key stakeholders:

- **The Local Authority**, which delivers youth services as well as commissioning them. The Local Authority has reduced its spend on youth services significantly in the past three years, reaching £1.4m in 2023/24 according to Section 251 data.
- **The VRU** is allocated funding from the Home Office (£4.3m in 2024/25). Funding is then distributed to the areas local authority districts according to population size. Areas are

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<sup>27</sup> In Case Study A the local authority declined to provide further breakdowns of local funding.

not told how to spend this funding however, guidance around expected outcomes is given and most areas, including Case Study B, spend some funding on youth focused projects.

- **The Community Safety Partnership (CSP)** receives funding from a range of sources and channel funding to community projects, some of which are focused on young people. Key sources of funding in 2024/25 include the **VRU (£111k)**, **Integrated Care Board (£80k)** and **Police and Crime Commissioner (£14.6k)**.
- 360Giving records also show some funding for the VCSE sector comes from the National Lottery (c.£495k - 23/24), as well as other grant funding (c.£320k).

**D.5** As well as the above organisations, key decision makers in case study B include the Combined Authority, PCC, Housing Associations and specifically the Children and Young People service and Youth Justice team within the Local Authority. However, the scale of their overall organisational funding was not publicly available/provided in interviews.

### Case study C

**D.6 Youth provision in Case Study C** (a Local Authority in Wales) is primarily funded via the following key stakeholders:

- **The Local Authority** delivers services as well as commissioning them. It has had a relatively consistent budget over recent years (£1.3m in 2023/24). Their Youth Team is primarily focused on early intervention and preventative work and they commission a housing charity to provide support for 16-25 year olds facing homelessness or other serious disadvantage. Core funding is topped up by Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) and contributions from local parish councils for community provision.
- **The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC)** has allocated funds for children and young people. In 2024/25 this focused on two areas: (a) £65k for working with partners to prevent and tackle crime and re-offending, and (b) Serious Violence Duty to local Community Safety Partnerships.
- **The Community Safety Partnership (CSP)** receives funding from the PCC to support the delivery of the UK Government's Serious Violence Duty (£57k in 2024/25).
- The Local Authority's **Youth Justice Team** also fund some youth work positions and collaborates on projects. Data on Youth Justice Team funding is not publicly available.

**D.7** As well as the above organisations, key decision makers in Case Study C include the Town and Village Councils and local Housing Associations, however the scale of their funding was not publicly available/provided.

## Case study D

**D.8 Youth provision in Case Study D** (a Unitary Local Authority) is primarily funded via the following key stakeholders:

- **The Local Authority** commissions youth provision, as well as providing its own services. The youth services have had a relatively consistent budget over recent years (c.£2.3m) and work closely with the early help and youth justice teams to deliver provision. They have invested £350k in knife crime prevention activities in the past three years (up to March 2025). As well as a range of smaller pots of funding from a range of independent funders, other public service departments and DCMS programmes.
- **The VRU** has allocated funding from the Home Office. Funding is then distributed to the areas local authority districts (proportion allocated to Case Study D unknown). Areas are not told how to spend this funding however, guidance around expected outcomes is given and most areas, including Case Study D, spend some funding on youth focused projects. Projects funded in the case study area include school and hospital navigators and a focused deterrence project.
- **The Police and Crime Commissioner** have funded three relevant projects: (a) £90k over two years for a programme combatting youth knife crime; (b) £756k to oversee the Violence Prevention Partnership; and (c) £265k to deliver the Community Safety Partnership.
- 360Giving records also show some funding for the VCSE sector comes from the National Lottery (c. £65k -23/24), as well as other grant funding (c.£95k).

**D.9** As well as the above organisations, key decision makers in Case Study D include local Housing Associations and VCSEs, however the scale of their funding was not publicly available/provided.

## Case study E

**D.10 Youth provision in Case Study E** (an urban Local Authority within a Combined Authority) is primarily funded via the following key stakeholders:

- **The Local Authority Youth Service** commissions youth provision, as well as providing its own services. It has had a relatively consistent budget over recent years (£1.5m in 2023/24), the majority of which goes towards the staffing of their youth service (80-90%), while the remainder is dedicated to grant funding.
- **The VRU** are allocated funding from the Home Office on an annual basis (£4.3m in 2024/25). This funding is then distributed to the areas local authority districts (£150k each). Areas are not told how to spend this funding however, guidance around expected

outcomes is given and most areas, including Case Study E, spend some funding on youth focused projects.

- **The Community Safety Partnership (CSP)** receives funding from the VRU (£150k in 2024/25) and the Serious Violence Duty (£10k). In Financial Year 2024/25, over half of this funding was spent on youth provision (c.£95k). The CSP fund interventions from community and third sector providers, focused on school intervention and community outreach projects.

**D.11** Giving records also show some funding from **National Lottery grants** has funded provision in the area (c.£530k – 23/24), as well as **other grant funding** (c.£195k).

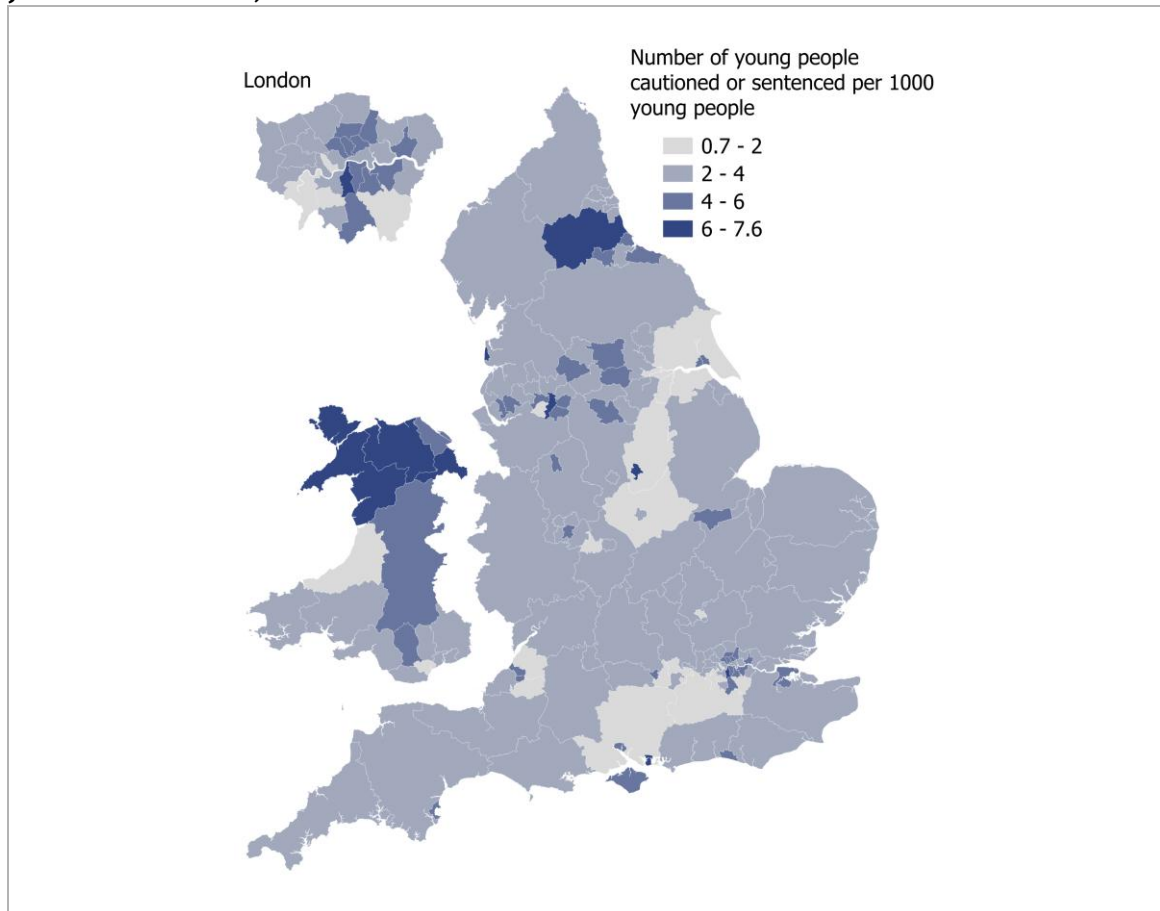
**D.12** As well as the above organisations, key decision makers in Case Study E include the Combined Authority, Police and Crime Commissioner, Integrated Care Board and Housing Associations however the scale of their funding was not available/provided.

## Annex E: Data sources and supplementary figures

### Supplementary figures

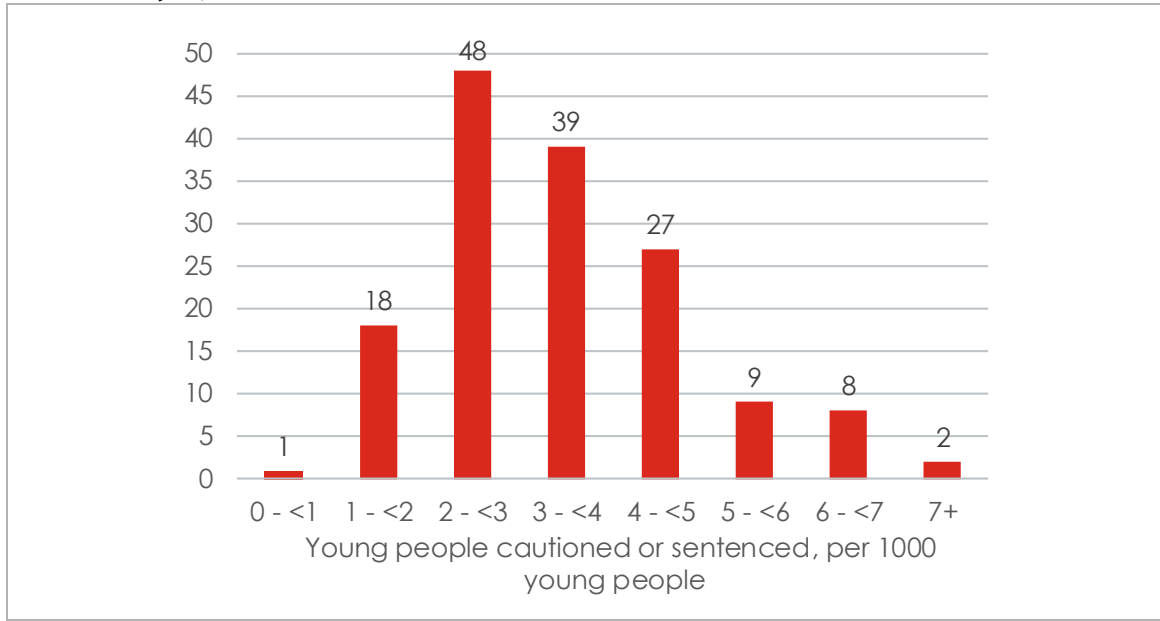
- E.1** The main analysis of the expenditure, youth crime and demographic data is provided in Chapter 4. This annex section presents the remaining maps and diagrams created to provide additional detail or as a robustness check. The findings from this additional analysis are discussed in Chapter 4.

**Figure E-1: Rate of children cautioned or sentenced (aged 10-17 per 1,000), by Youth Justice Board area, 2023-24**



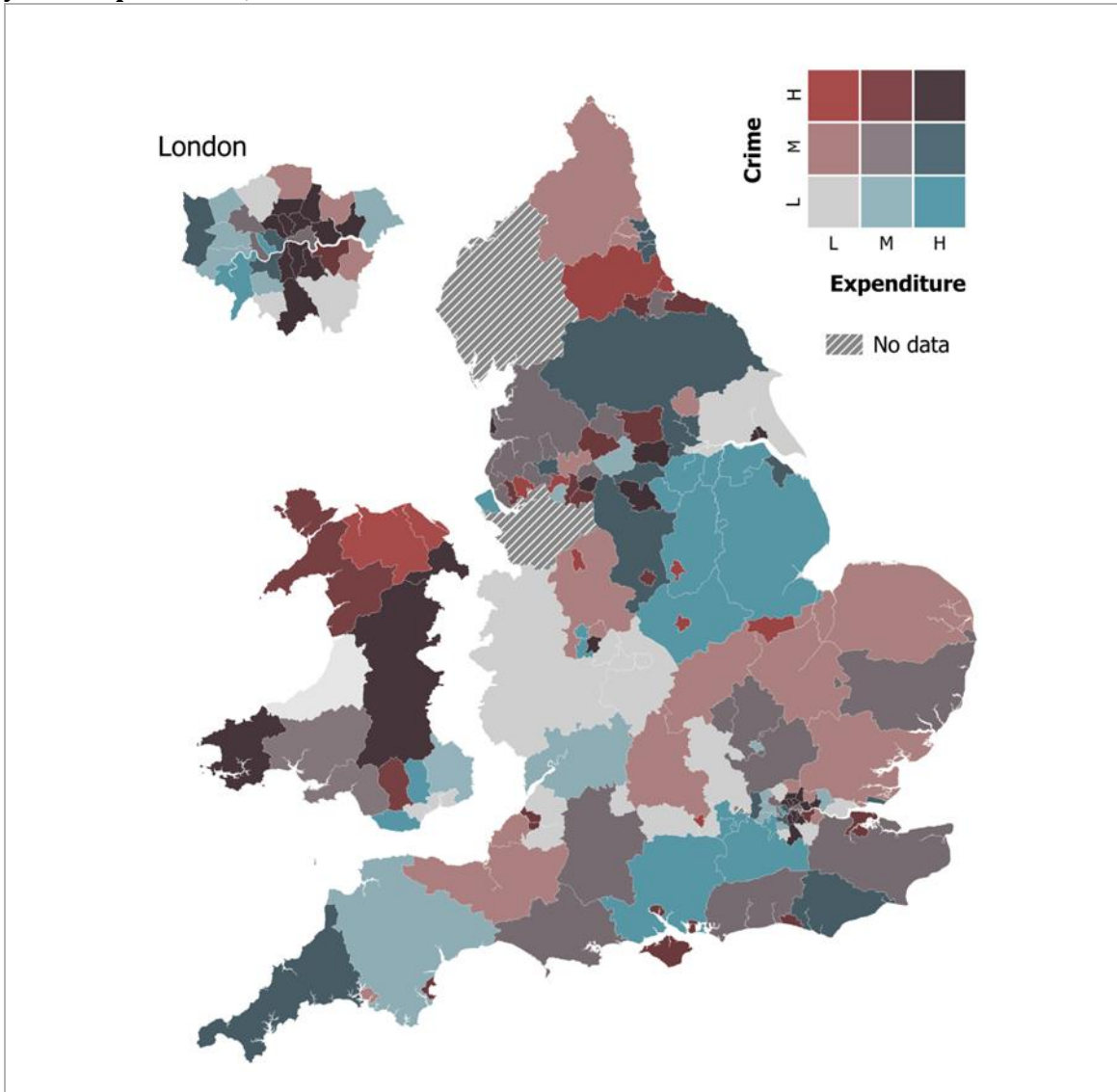
Source: Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (2025) Youth Justice Statistics: 2023 to 2024; ONS (2024) Population estimates for England and Wales: mid-2023

**Figure E-2: Frequency distribution of the rate of children cautioned or sentenced across all YJBs, 2023-24**



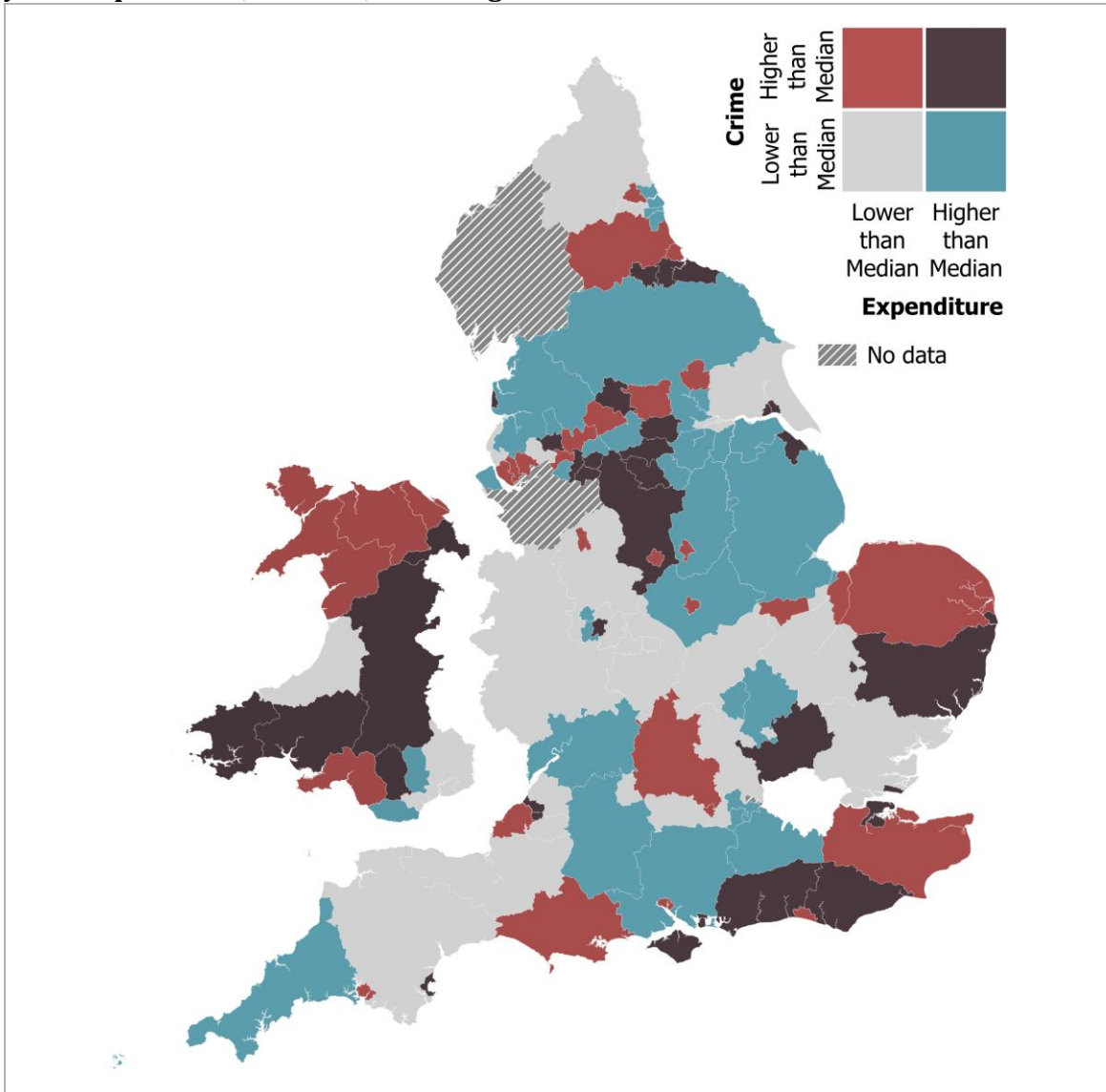
Source: Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (2025) Youth Justice Statistics: 2023 to 2024; ONS (2024) Population estimates for England and Wales: mid-2023

**Figure E-3: Trivariate map showing variation in children cautioned/sentenced and youth expenditure, 2023-24**



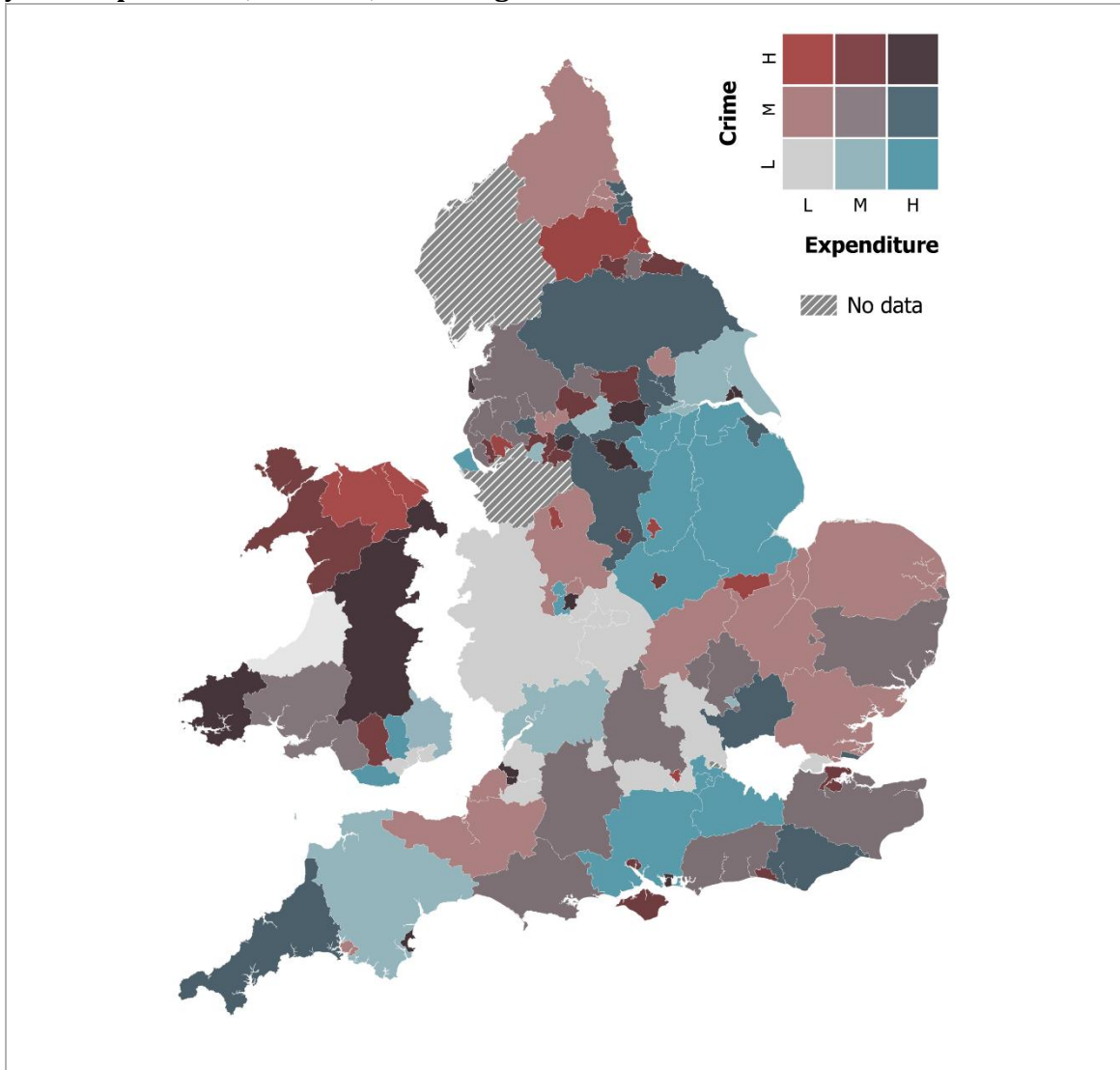
Source: ONS: Section 251; StatsWales: Expenditure summary by local authority; Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (2025) Youth Justice Statistics: 2023 to 2024; ONS (2024) Population estimates for England and Wales: mid-2023  
Note: Areas where no expenditure is reported are listed as 'No data'. Expenditure data is relative to the median for England and Wales separately.

**Figure E-4: Bivariate map showing variation in children cautioned/sentenced and youth expenditure, 2023-24, excluding London data**



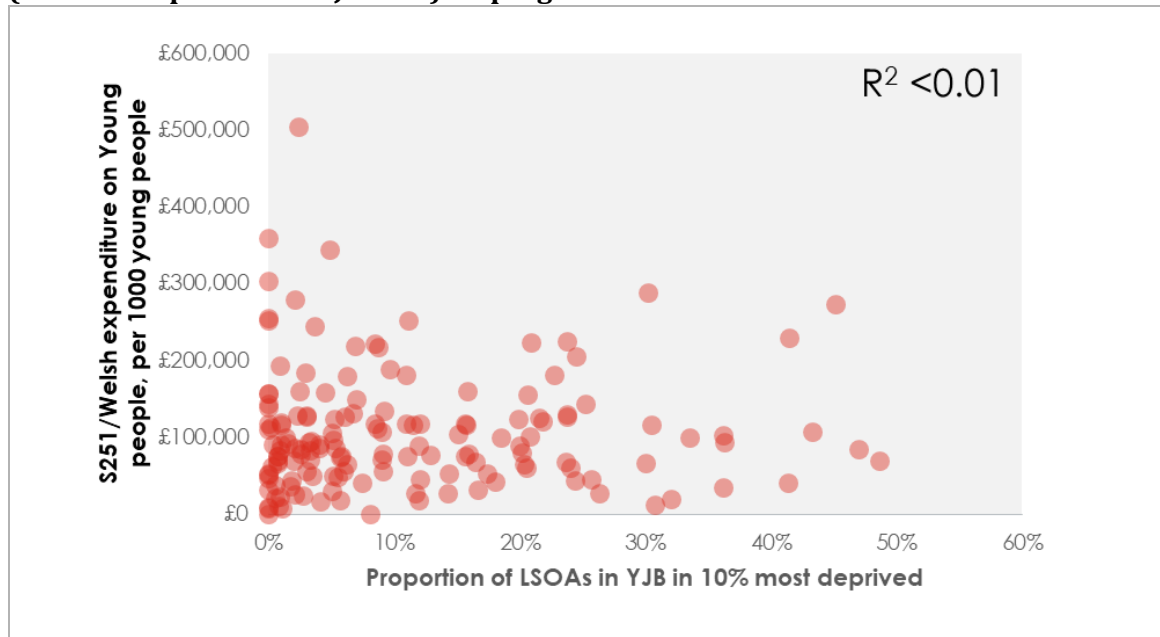
Source: ONS: Section 251; StatsWales: Expenditure summary by local authority; Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (2025) Youth Justice Statistics: 2023 to 2024; ONS (2024) Population estimates for England and Wales: mid-2023  
Note: Areas where no expenditure is reported are listed as 'No data.' Expenditure data is relative to the median for England and Wales separately.

**Figure E-5: Trivariate map showing variation in children cautioned/sentenced and youth expenditure, 2023-24, excluding London data**



Source: ONS: Section 251; StatsWales: Expenditure summary by local authority; Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (2025) Youth Justice Statistics: 2023 to 2024; ONS (2024) Population estimates for England and Wales: mid-2023  
Note: Areas where no expenditure is reported are listed as 'No data.'  
Expenditure data is relative to the median for England and Wales separately.

**Figure E-6: Deprivation versus S251/Wales expenditure on young people, by YJB area (each dot represents a YJB area). Top right = coefficient of determination.**



Source: ONS: Section 251; StatsWales: Expenditure summary by local authority; English indices of deprivation 2019; StatsWales (2019) WIMD 2019

Note: The coefficient of determination ( $r^2$ ) indicates the extent to which the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variable in a statistical model, with a value of 1 signifying a perfect fit and 0 indicating no explanatory power.

# SQW

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