



Youth sector policy and violence prevention

System guidance for policymakers in England
and Wales on preventing children and young
people's involvement in violence

July 2026



About the Youth Endowment Fund

The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) is a charity with a mission that matters. We exist to prevent children and young people from becoming involved in violence. We do this by finding out what works and building a movement to put this knowledge into practice.

The charity was established in 2019 with a 10-year, £200 million endowment from the Home Office.

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The report is authored by Chloe Lowry.

Introduction

This guidance provides policymakers across England and Wales with six evidence-based recommendations to strengthen the youth sector's ability to prevent 10–17-year-olds¹ from becoming involved in violence. The six recommendations sit within three broad themes: reforming youth sector funding, shaping the rollout of existing policy commitments to better support vulnerable children and young people and strengthening youth workers' role in safeguarding from extra-familial harm.

Why focus on preventing violence?

Violence is the use or threat of intentional physical force.² It includes murder, physical assault, sexual assault, harm with a weapon and robbery.³ Violence is, unfortunately, far too common amongst children and young people. The Youth Endowment Fund's (YEF's) recent survey of 11,000 13–17-year-olds across England and Wales found that, in the last year, nearly one in five had been victims of violence and one in eight had committed violence. Much of this violence is serious: nearly three in ten victims needed professional medical attention. More broadly, half of teenagers (50%) told us they had witnessed violence being committed against someone else.⁴

Why focus on the youth sector?

All services that impact children and young people's lives have a role in keeping them safe from violence. The YEF is producing guidance for children's services, policing, youth justice, education, and health, as well as for the youth sector. The youth sector plays a critical role by engaging children and young people on their own terms, taking their interests and priorities as the starting point for support.⁵ It is important for violence prevention because:

- **The youth sector engages children and young people who are vulnerable to violence.** Children and young people who report committing violence are almost twice as likely to attend a youth club as their peers (65% vs 35%).⁶ They are also more likely to report trusting a youth worker, sports coach or mentor, highlighting the sector's potential to reach those who need it most.⁷
- **Universal youth provision can protect children and young people from violence.** The kinds of support that universal youth provision delivers day to day – helping children and young people build social and emotional skills, engage in positive activities and develop trusting relationships with safe adults – can prevent violence.⁸
- **Targeted youth provision can deliver effective specialist support.** For children and young people at particular risk of involvement in violence, specialist youth services can deliver effective support, such as formal mentoring and structured positive activities.⁹

This guidance focuses exclusively on violence prevention. There are many other reasons to invest in youth provision, and the goal of youth provision is not violence prevention. Nevertheless, the evidence shows that protecting children and young people from violence is one of the benefits of youth provision.

Why are we publishing system guidance?

In January 2026, we published our [Youth Sector Practice Guidance](#) for local funders and commissioners of youth provision across England and Wales, which outlined eight evidence-based recommendations to help prevent children and young people from becoming involved in violence. But we know that commissioners are constrained by the systems they operate within and the broader challenges facing the youth sector.¹⁰ This guidance report aims to address these systemic challenges by setting out six key policy changes that would make it easier to deliver 'what works'. These system recommendations are deliberately pragmatic, focusing on changes that are achievable within the current policy landscape and that could make a practical difference now. Because that landscape is evolving, the recommendations do not all follow a single model of reform, and they use different policy levers depending on the problem at hand. For each recommendation, we outline the estimated additional cost to central government beyond existing plans.

Do these recommendations apply to England and Wales?

Youth provision is a devolved policy area, so the systems in England and Wales differ. Half of the recommendations apply equally to England and Wales. Recommendations focused on England include a 'What about Wales?' box, setting out specific actions for the Welsh Government. This report contains fewer standalone recommendations for Wales because Wales has already made substantial progress in building the infrastructure needed for high-quality youth provision.^{11,12}

Why must we address racial disproportionality?

Most children and young people involved in violence are White. However, relative to their share of the population, some minority ethnic groups are disproportionately affected, both as victims and perpetrators. Black children and young people are particularly affected: relative to their share of the population, they are six times as likely to be victims of homicide.¹³ The youth sector is well-placed to help tackle this disproportionality: across England and Wales, children and young people from Black and mixed ethnic backgrounds are more likely to attend youth clubs and to have a trusting relationship with a mentor than those from White ethnic backgrounds.¹⁴ The 'Racial Disproportionality' boxes in this report explain how the recommendations address these disparities. For example, because Black children and young people are over-represented in youth clubs, recommendations on dedicating funding for youth clubs (Recommendation 2), opening new youth clubs in youth club deserts (Recommendation 3) and incorporating 'what works' evidence into Young Futures Hubs guidance (Recommendation 4) should particularly benefit Black children and young people.¹⁵

What evidence underpins this guidance?

This guidance draws upon the best available global evidence on preventing children and young people's involvement in violence. This includes the [YEF Toolkit](#): a rigorous, independent summary of over 40 different violence prevention strategies that draws on the findings of more than 2,000 existing studies. This guidance also draws from new YEF-funded research, including four reviews of youth sector practice, our annual survey of over 10,000 13-17-year-olds and insights from children and young people collected by our Peer Action Collective's peer researchers.¹⁶

Definitions

- ♦ **Youth services:** the local offer of leisure-time activities, facilities and support for children and young people's well-being and their personal and social development.
- ♦ **Youth provision:** the specific activities, facilities and support available to children and young people within the wider youth services offer.
- ♦ **Youth work:** a distinct practice based on voluntary engagement and trusted relationships that supports children and young people's personal, social and educational development.
- ♦ **Open access:** universal provision that children and young people can attend without a referral.
- ♦ **Targeted:** specialist provision for children and young people with identified needs, usually accessed through referral and eligibility assessment.
- ♦ **Youth club:** an open-access setting (in a youth centre, school, faith building, or other community space) that children and young people can attend for activities, social connection and informal support.
- ♦ **Youth hub:** a one-stop model bringing together multiple forms of support, such as youth work, mental health support and employment advice.

Recommendations summary



Reforming funding

1 Consolidate funding through the *Thematic Value for Money Review on Youth* to create a dedicated youth services pot for local authorities allocated using a needs formula

Why?

- Fragmented, time-limited government funding for youth services creates complexity and inefficiency.
- Local authority spending on youth services varies widely, with little link to deprivation or violence risk.
- Youth services are crowded out by more immediate statutory funding pressures.

COST
£0

FOCUS
England

2 At the next spending review, introduce new, dedicated funding for youth clubs as a key preventative service (conditional on 2027 study findings)

Why?

- Local authority spending on youth services has fallen by three-quarters in England and over a quarter in Wales since 2010, with open-access provision hardest hit.
- Youth clubs reach children and young people who are vulnerable to involvement in violence.
- Evidence that youth club closures increased crime and violence necessitates strategic reinvestment.

COST
TBC

FOCUS
England & Wales



Shaping rollout

3 Use the *Better Youth Spaces* fund to open new youth clubs where existing provision is weakest and violence vulnerability is highest

Why?

- Youth club deserts put children and young people at risk of involvement in violence and crime.

COST
£0

FOCUS
England

4 Incorporate evidence on 'what works' into guidance for Young Futures Hubs

Why?

- Without grounding in evidence, Young Futures Hubs could adopt violence and crime prevention approaches that are unproven or harmful.
- Impact depends not only on what Hubs offer, but on how support is targeted, designed and delivered.

COST

£0

FOCUS
England

Strengthening safeguarding

5 Ensure training reforms prepare youth workers to respond to the range of violence involving children and young people while working alongside partner agencies

Why?

- Youth workers encounter overlapping forms of violence, including violence against women and girls (VAWG).
- Youth workers provide trusted support to vulnerable children and young people whilst navigating complex multi-agency systems.

COST

£0

FOCUS
England &
Wales

6 Update statutory safeguarding guidance to strengthen youth workers' role throughout responses to extra-familial harm

Why?

- Youth workers are too often left out of multi-agency responses to extra-familial harm affecting the children and young people they support.
- Existing safeguarding guidance gives limited and inconsistent attention to the youth sector's distinct role.

COST

£0

FOCUS
England &
Wales



Recommendation 1.

Consolidate funding through the *Thematic Value for Money Review on Youth* to create a dedicated youth services pot for local authorities allocated using a needs formula

Why?

- Fragmented, time-limited government funding for youth services creates complexity and inefficiency.
- Local authority spending on youth services varies widely, with little link to deprivation or violence risk.
- Youth services are crowded out by more immediate statutory funding pressures.

Fragmented, time-limited government funding for youth services creates complexity and inefficiency.

Unlike education, health and early years, youth services in England have no dedicated, recurrent funding stream. Instead, a 2025 review identified 30 different streams from eight government departments that are used to fund youth services to varying degrees, including the Local Government Finance Settlement. Most of these streams were fewer than five years old.¹⁷

Across government, such funding fragmentation creates avoidable administrative costs. The government's Fair Funding Review 2.0 reports that in 2025–26, over 300 grants were delivered to local government, “often with stringent reporting requirements”, wasting local capacity.¹⁸ The Local Government Association estimates that each council spends c. £2.25 million annually pursuing various Whitehall funding pots.¹⁹

These pots are typically short-term and tightly constrained, causing further challenges. The Institute for Government finds that this creates uncertainty for local government, undercuts strategic, long-term planning and offers limited flexibility to align spending with local priorities.²⁰ Instability is passed on to youth service providers through short-term, tightly restricted grants/contracts, undermining their ability to retain and develop staff, build infrastructure and maintain continuity of support.²¹ In the 2025 National Youth Sector Census, one in three providers reported having less than six months of funding in reserve.²² Together, these pressures make it hard to sustain a stable, balanced and joined-up local youth offer.

POLICY CONTEXT

It is encouraging that the UK Government has pledged to simplify English local government funding, improve stability and reduce waste.²³ The 2025–26 Local Government Finance Settlement consolidated almost £700m in revenue funding as a “first key step” in simplifying the local government funding landscape, including combining six children’s social care programmes into a single £414m Children and Families Grant.²⁴ This recommendation encourages the UK Government to take a similar approach to youth services funding.

Local authority spending on youth services varies widely, with little link to deprivation or violence risk.

An analysis of local authority data found that regional spend on “services for young people” in 2024–25 ranged from £26 per 5–17-year-old in the West Midlands to £101 per 5–17-year-old in Inner London.²⁵ This fourfold difference masks even greater variation at the local authority level: a separate analysis of 2023–24 data found that Westminster spent £503 per 13–19-year-old on youth services, whilst Shropshire spent just £7, a roughly 72-fold difference.²⁶

This variation in local authority spending does not appear to reflect differences in the need for public investment. An analysis that mapped 2023–24 youth services spend across England and Wales against rates of children cautioned or sentenced in each area found that there was no correlation between the two: less than 1% of the variation in youth expenditure was explained by the variation in offending rates. Levels of deprivation were found to explain only 1% of the variation in youth services spend. The analysis also mapped wider youth provision grants recorded in the 360Giving database. It found that lower local authority spend was not offset by higher levels of grant funding from other sources; if anything, areas with low local authority spend tended to receive slightly less grant funding.²⁷ This highlights the urgent need to reform youth services funding so that investment flows to the areas where children and young people’s needs are greatest.

Youth services are crowded out by more immediate statutory funding pressures.

The current funding model makes youth services structurally vulnerable to cuts. Local authorities fund youth services out of their wider budgets, underpinned by the Section 507B statutory duty to secure “sufficient” youth services “so far as reasonably practicable”.²⁸ However, in the face of rising demand and financial pressures, councils tend to prioritise more immediate and enforceable statutory duties in areas such as adult and children’s social care.²⁹ Within local authorities’ wider children’s services budgets, the Institute for Government calculates that the share spent on preventative services (including services for young people) fell from around a third (32%) in 2009–10 to just 6% in 2024–25.³⁰ This highlights the structural incentive problem: youth services are easy to cut when budgets are tight, even though reducing them risks increasing costs over the longer term.³¹ Without a protected funding baseline, preventative services for children and young people will remain exposed.



WHAT ABOUT WALES?

Unlike England, Wales already has some dedicated youth services funding. The 22 Welsh local authorities receive a dedicated annual Youth Support Grant from the Welsh Government to support youth services, worth c. £12m in total. The grant is allocated with the intention that it is spent supporting open-access and targeted youth work activities, youth homelessness prevention, and emotional health and well-being support through youth work. It sits alongside other sources of funding, bringing the total income for statutory youth work to c. £50m.³²

Overall, youth sector funding in Wales is significantly less fragmented and uneven than in England.³³ In 2023–24, variation in reported spend across Welsh local authorities was much lower than across English local authorities: the standard deviation (a measure of how spread out spending levels are from the average) was almost three times higher in England (£81k) than in Wales (£28k).³⁴

Nevertheless, challenges remain: the overall volume of funding remains limited and annual funding cycles continue to generate uncertainty. The shift from an annual to a multi-year settlement in the 2025 UK Spending Review gives the Welsh Government greater certainty over its own resource budget; the Welsh Government should pass this on by offering the Youth Support Grant on a multi-year basis.

Through the Thematic Value for Money Review on Youth, bring together fragmented funding streams into a single, dedicated youth services pot for local authorities, allocated using a needs formula.

The *Thematic Value for Money Review of Youth* offers a unique opportunity to address these problems and deliver the National Youth Strategy's aims of consolidating funding, improving sustainability and making funding flow more strategically to local areas.³⁶ His Majesty's Treasury (HMT), the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) should use the review to ensure that there is baseline funding for youth services in every area. This should be done through three linked steps: consolidating existing central and local government funding into a dedicated youth services pot, allocating that pot according to need, and setting expectations for local funding practice.

The pot should be distributed to local authorities on a multi-year basis through the Local Government Finance Settlement (for example, as a separate protected youth services component within the Children, Families and Youth Grant). Local authorities would be free to choose the mix of youth services in line with local priorities, including open-access and targeted youth work, mentoring, sports, cultural activities, school enrichment, holiday activities, adventure and wilderness activities, volunteering, social action, and uniformed youth groups. They could use the funding to deliver provision directly, commission services or support voluntary and community sector (VCS) partners.

1. Consolidating existing central and local government funding

The baseline youth services pot should be made up of two sources: relevant central government funding streams for youth services and a modest contribution from existing core local government funding.

Central government funding: The review should map the landscape of government spending on youth services and identify which existing central government funding streams should be pooled to create the new pot. Funding streams designed to support recurrent local provision are strong candidates. A few examples are the Richer Young Lives Fund (£60m), the Holiday Activities and Food programme (£623m), and the school enrichment offer (£22.5m).³⁷ Funding streams dedicated to delivering specialist responses to serious harm – including Youth Justice Teams, Violence Reduction Units and specialist child criminal exploitation (CCE) support – should be retained separately.

Local government funding: HMT and MHCLG should set aside a modest proportion of the Revenue Support Grant – core, unringfenced funding that central government provides to councils to support local services – to form part of the new youth services pot. This should be done through the Local Government Finance Settlement, before the funding is distributed to local authorities. The aim would be to create a protected minimum baseline for youth services in every area, supporting local authorities to meet their statutory youth services duty. This would be a floor, not a cap: local authorities would retain discretion to supplement it through their wider budgets.

POLICY CONTEXT

The *Thematic Value for Money Review on Youth* is a live, cross-government review of more than £1b out-of-classroom spending for 10–21-year-olds. Led by HMT, it aims to address fragmentation and inefficiencies, tackle departmental silos and encourage preventative approaches to “create downstream savings”. The review will consider whether youth funding could be further devolved to local government “to maximise impact for the government’s priorities and missions.” It will make recommendations for the 2027 Spending Review.³⁵

WIDER RESEARCH

Local authorities remain a major source of youth services funding. A recent review found that English local authorities reported around £475m in youth services spend in 2023–24. A rough estimate suggests that, after allowing for national programme funding routed through councils, local authorities contribute around £230m a year from their own core budgets.³⁸



2. Allocating the pot according to need

Funding should be allocated to local authorities using a formula that supports a universal local offer whilst targeting additional need and key government priorities. We recommend building it around five core domains:

- **Youth population** – this ensures the formula supports universal access to youth provision, reflecting the National Youth Strategy’s emphasis on giving more young people access to trusted adults and positive activities.
- **Child poverty** – using a measure of child poverty (such as Children in Low Income Families statistics) would align the formula with the Opportunity Mission. Poverty is also an underlying driver of many other needs and is less vulnerable to variation in local practice than many other metrics.
- **School disengagement** – using a measure of school disengagement (such as a multi-year composite measure of persistent/severe absence, temporary suspensions and permanent exclusions) would support the government’s focus on keeping children in education. It would also align with the evidence youth provision can support educational outcomes.³⁹
- **Mental health needs** – using a measure of poor mental health (such as official school census indicators of social, emotional and mental-health-related needs) would support the government’s commitment to improving children’s mental health and align with the evidence that youth provision can improve mental health and emotional and behavioural difficulties.⁴⁰
- **Serious harm** – using a measure of serious harm risk (such as a multi-year composite of violence-related hospital admissions, youth offending and exploitation indicators captured in children’s social care data) would support the Safer Streets mission and align with the evidence that youth provision can reduce crime and violence.⁴¹

The exact proportions of the formula should be developed through modelling and consultation, including with regional bodies who can provide a unique city or region-wide perspective. The formula should include a separate area-cost and access adjustment so that places facing higher delivery costs (for example, because of rurality, sparsity or transport barriers) are not disadvantaged. It should not penalise areas that attract wider funding for youth services (for example, from mayoral authorities, philanthropic funders or statutory partners), as this could deter such investment. Rather, local authorities should be encouraged to coordinate with other funders to align provision, address gaps within the local youth offer and share learning. This is particularly important where there are regional or city-wide structures that provide substantial funding for youth services (for example, the Greater London Authority).⁴²

3. Setting expectations for local funding practice

To ensure the benefits of the new funding model translate into a stronger local youth offer, guidance and conditions attached to the pot should set out expectations for its use. Local authorities should be required to offer funding that is:

- **Stable** – offering multi-year funding for all grants/contracts that cover day-to-day operating expenses for ongoing provision on a comply-or-explain basis.⁴³
- **Sustainable** – including a reasonable contribution towards providers’ core costs (such as infrastructure and workforce development).⁴⁴
- **Balanced** – spending at least 20% of the total value on open-access services and 20% on targeted services.
- **Transparent** – publishing award-level open data, including provision type, award length and beneficiary location to support accountability and facilitate the mapping of services and targeting of support.

By replacing multiple funding streams and reporting requirements with a single multi-year fund, this recommendation is expected to reduce the overall burden on local authorities.

Recommendation 2.

At the next spending review, introduce new, dedicated funding for youth clubs as a key preventative service (conditional on 2027 study findings)

Why?

- Local authority spending on youth services has fallen by three-quarters in England and over a quarter in Wales since 2010, with open-access provision hardest hit.
- Youth clubs reach children and young people who are vulnerable to involvement in violence.
- Evidence that youth club closures increased crime and violence necessitates strategic reinvestment.

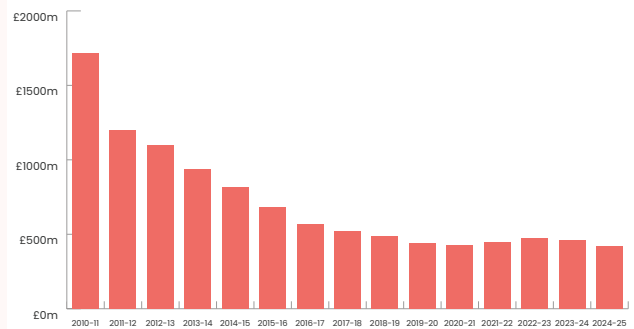
Local authority spending on youth services has fallen by three-quarters in England and over a quarter in Wales since 2010, with open-access provision hardest hit.

Between 2010–11 and 2024–25, local authority spending on youth services fell by three-quarters (76%) in England and over a quarter (29%) in Wales in real terms. The real-terms spend for each 5–17-year-old in England fell from £182 to £46. For each 5–17-year-old in Wales, it fell from £121 to £97. Across both nations, £1.3bn less was spent on youth services in 2024–25 than 14 years previously.⁴⁵

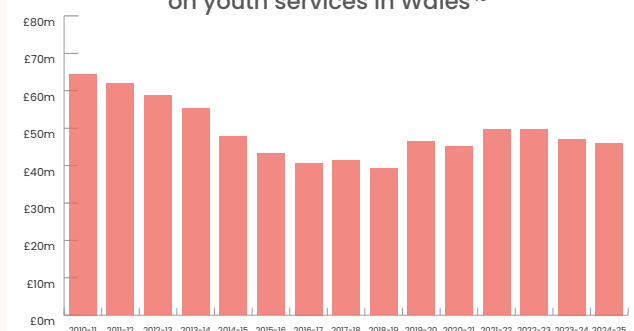
This has led to widespread gaps in access to provision, including for some of the most disadvantaged children and young people. Recent mapping of access to youth provision relative to child poverty and antisocial behaviour found that half of English local authorities have at least one neighbourhood in the top 10% of need with low or no youth provision.⁴⁷

Children and young people’s access to open-access provision has been disproportionately affected. A DCMS report found that between 2014 and 2021, local authority funding for targeted services was reduced by a third, whereas funding for open-access services was reduced by half.⁴⁸ By 2024–25, the number of local authority–run youth centres had fallen by 60% in both England and Wales compared to 2011–12.⁴⁹ One in 12 local authorities now report that there are no youth centres in their area, whether run by themselves or others.

Total real-terms spend by local authorities on youth services in England⁴⁵



Total real-terms spend by local authorities on youth services in Wales⁴⁵



YOUTH VOICE

“There were people that I grew up with who turned to the youth club and actually – I don’t want to say ‘found a way out’ – but, in a way, they did. They saw something that they may like and now they’re actually living pretty good lives. But now, when I walk past that place where the youth club was ... the only place that those kids can turn to is the street corner.”

Young person interviewed by the Peer Action Collective.⁴⁶



Youth clubs reach children and young people who are vulnerable to involvement in violence.

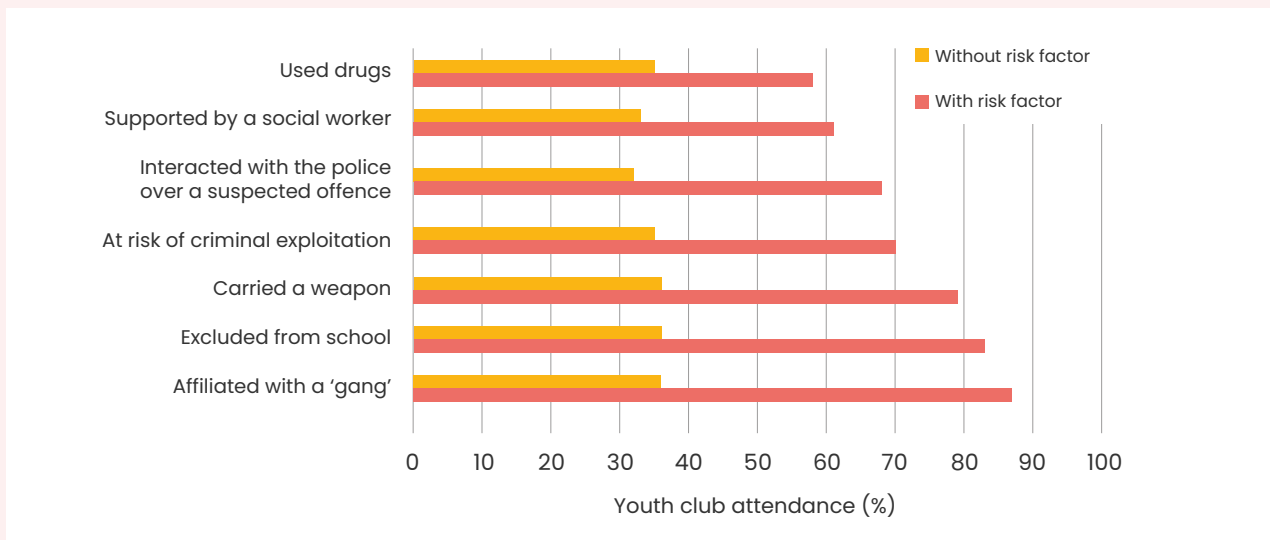
Although youth clubs are open-access settings, they serve a highly vulnerable cohort of children and young people. One in four 13-17-year-olds who attend a youth club report perpetrating violence in the last 12 months, compared to one in 11 non-attendees.⁵⁰

YOUTH VOICE

Vulnerable children and young people attend youth clubs

The YEF’s 2024 survey of 10,000 13-17-year-olds across England and Wales found that those who are vulnerable to violence are much more likely to attend youth clubs than their peers. Sixty-five per cent of children and young people who had perpetrated violence in the last year attend a youth club, compared to 35% of those who had not perpetrated violence. Attendance is even higher amongst those who had perpetrated serious violence requiring medical treatment (84%).⁵¹

These figures describe who youth clubs are reaching, not the impact that they have on the children and young people who attend them (described in the next section). As the graph below shows, youth club attendance is higher amongst children and young people with a range of markers of vulnerability to violence, not only amongst those who have already perpetrated it. This suggests that youth clubs – despite being open-access settings – are succeeding in engaging the children and young people who are most in need of support.



YEF (2024), *Children, Violence and Vulnerability 2024, Positive activities, youth clubs and trusted adults.*

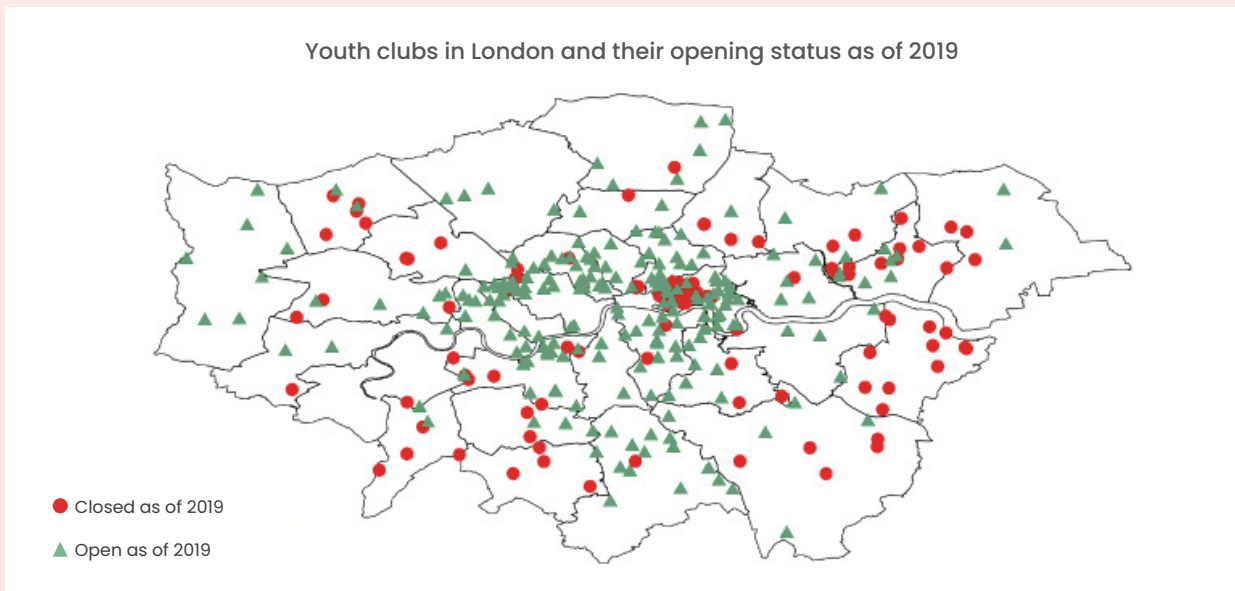
Evidence that youth club closures increased crime and violence necessitates strategic reinvestment.

The YEF Toolkit indicates that youth clubs have a moderate impact on preventing violence, reducing offending by 13% on average. They also improve school engagement by an average of 6% and community connectedness by an average of 15%.⁵² One of the two studies which informed these impact estimates was a quasi-experimental study of the impact of youth club closures across London (see below).

WIDER RESEARCH

London youth club closures⁵³

A study of youth club closures across London from 2010 to 2019 found that youth offending increased when youth clubs closed. Children and young people living in areas where all nearby youth clubs shut became 14% more likely to commit crimes than their peers in areas where all youth clubs remained open. Violent crimes committed by children and young people were around 20% higher in affected areas, and affected children and young people performed slightly worse in national exams.



An accompanying cost-benefit analysis found that closing youth clubs was not cost-effective: for every £1 saved from closures, there were associated losses of nearly £3 due to crime costs and reduced educational attainment.

The YEF is currently funding a much larger study which will apply the same method to assess the impact of youth club closures on violence and crime across England and Wales. The study is due to be published in spring 2027. If the impact on children and young people's involvement in crime and violence is found to extend beyond London, this will provide a clear justification for urgent reinvestment in youth clubs as a key preventative service.

CAUTION

This recommendation depends on the findings of the YEF's forthcoming study on youth clubs, which will be published in spring 2027. Two previous UK studies have found that youth clubs can reduce children and young people's involvement in violence and crime. The analysis for the new, larger study has not yet been conducted, and it may have different results. Once the study is published, we will set out what the findings mean for this recommendation.

At the next spending review, introduce new, dedicated funding for youth clubs as a key preventative service (conditional on 2027 study findings).

If the 2027 evaluation finds that youth club closures increased violence and crime beyond London, the governments in England and Wales should introduce a new multi-year, dedicated revenue allocation for open-access youth clubs for local authorities. This revenue funding would cover the ongoing costs of running youth clubs. In England, this would align with the National Youth Strategy’s focus on providing more “places to go” and complementing its commitment to spend £350m of capital funding on building or refurbishing youth facilities.⁵⁵ In Wales, this would support the new statutory framework for youth work’s focus on open-access opportunities.

This new allocation should be funded through additional investment and not by displacing existing youth provision spending. The evaluation findings should be used to inform a cost-benefit appraisal, which should guide decisions on the scale of the allocation. Funds should be distributed to local authorities according to the needs formula outlined in Recommendation 1.


YOUTH VOICE

Half (52%) of all 13–17-year-olds say they’d like to try some type of youth club that they don’t currently attend.⁵⁴



How does this apply in England and Wales?

 In **England**, if funding has been consolidated into a single pot as per Recommendation 1, then this recommendation should be implemented by increasing the overall level of investment and the minimum proportion allocated to open-access provision. Otherwise, HMT, DCMS and the MHCLG should work together to introduce a protected open-access youth club component within the Children, Families and Youth Grant for local authorities, aligned with the next local government finance settlement.

 In **Wales**, the Welsh Government (Education) should deliver this as a dedicated open-access uplift within the existing Youth Support Grant, aligned with the new statutory youth work planning framework.

New youth clubs could be based in youth or community centres, schools, or religious organisations, and provision could be either commissioned out or delivered directly by local authorities.⁵⁶ Accompanying guidance should encourage local authorities to maximise the potential of the new allocation, drawing on Recommendation 2 of the [YEF’s Youth Sector Practice Guidance](#) for commissioners. This should include encouraging local authorities to:

- Establish new youth clubs in youth club deserts, prioritising access for the most vulnerable.
- Increase funding for existing youth clubs.
- Enable new and existing clubs to:
 - Open every weekday after school (4–8 pm), a time period when violence risk increases.⁵⁷
 - Maintain high staffing levels and train staff well.
 - Offer additional evidence-based, targeted support.

RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY

To achieve our mission, we must tackle the racial disproportionality in who is affected by violence. This recommendation will help do that by expanding access to a type of strengths-focused, evidence-based violence reduction support that is disproportionately attended by children and young people from minority ethnic backgrounds: youth clubs. The YEF's 2024 survey of 10,000 13-17-year-olds found that children and young people from Black (64%), mixed (52%) and Asian (48%) ethnic backgrounds were much more likely to attend youth clubs than White children and young people (36%).⁵⁸ With their focus on youth clubs and hubs, Recommendations 2, 3 and 4 are all expected to disproportionately benefit Black, Asian and other minority ethnic children and young people, helping to reduce racial disproportionality in violence risk.





Recommendation 3.

Use the *Better Youth Spaces* fund to open new youth clubs where existing provision is weakest and violence vulnerability is highest

Why?

- Youth club deserts put children and young people at risk of involvement in violence and crime.

Youth club deserts put children and young people at risk of involvement in violence and crime.

The study (described in Recommendation 2), which suggests that London youth club closures increased crime and violence, illustrates the importance of youth clubs' locations. It found that the increase in crime amongst children and young people which occurred when a youth club closed was offset if there was another youth club in the area – an effect not found for the presence of local parks, sports centres or libraries. A 'what-if' analysis suggested that crime increases could have been almost completely avoided if decision-makers had prioritised children and young people's access to at least one local club when deciding which clubs to close.⁵⁹ The effect is not simply about the number of youth clubs available but also about how those youth clubs are distributed. The most efficient distribution of youth clubs is the one which minimises the number of areas without any youth clubs – youth club 'deserts'.

Based on the study, urban areas without a club within a 40-minute walk can be considered youth club deserts. In practice, young people will travel to the youth club in a variety of ways, and access to and the cost of public transport should be considered. Although the existing research does not provide insight into what might constitute a 'youth club desert' in a rural area, the YEF's 2027 study will.

Use the *Better Youth Spaces* fund to open new youth clubs in youth club deserts in the highest-need areas.

POLICY CONTEXT

The UK Government's plan to halve knife crime highlights the £350m commitment to "refurbish and rebuild up to 250 youth clubs and facilities" in England through a second phase of the *Better Youth Spaces* fund. This money will be dedicated to creating safe, welcoming places for young people "in the places that most need it".⁶⁰

The first phase of *Better Youth Spaces* was a capital fund for small-scale projects in the 42 English local authorities with the highest levels of deprivation. Local authorities and VCS organisations in those areas could apply for funding for equipment or small refurbishments.⁶¹ Plans to distribute Phase 2 funding are already underway: DCMS has already collected expressions of interest for an intermediary to deliver the grant.⁶² On this basis, we've assumed that *Better Youth Spaces* would not be consolidated into the single youth services pot described in Recommendation 1, and we have focused this recommendation on how funding is targeted.

When designing the second phase of the *Better Youth Spaces* fund, DCMS should focus on targeting funding to address youth club deserts in areas with high levels of violence and crime. The way this is done will depend on the design of the fund. For example, if a similar approach to Phase 1 is taken, DCMS could identify eligible local authority areas based on the four needs outlined in Recommendation 1 (child poverty, school disengagement, mental health needs, and serious harm). Within these high-need areas, DCMS (or an intermediary grant-maker) could give priority to proposals that fill youth club deserts in neighbourhoods where vulnerability to violence is highest. Appropriate neighbourhoods can be identified using existing data (see below).

Data on existing youth provision

- Local authorities' own needs mapping and assessments of local youth provision.⁶³
- The National Youth Agency's (NYA's) [interactive map](#) of all organisations in England that have completed the NYA census (create a free account to access the map).
- UK Youth's [map](#) of the 9,000 delivery organisations in its network.
- 360Giving's [database](#) of charitable grants from funders.
- Social Investment Business and the University of Leeds' [dashboard](#) of youth provision across England.

Data on vulnerability to violence

- Strategic Needs Assessments produced under the Serious Violence Duty.⁶⁴ These identify the cohorts most vulnerable to serious violence and priority locations where resources should be focused.
- Local child exploitation or contextual safeguarding profiles (including aggregated data on missing-from-home or care episodes) where available.
- [Police.uk](#) lists the lower layer super output area (LSOA) where every recorded crime took place, as well as the nearest street. Crimes are categorised by type, including "violence and sexual offences". Clusters of adjacent LSOAs with high levels of violent crime should be considered priority neighbourhoods. When deciding where to situate new youth clubs within those neighbourhoods, decision-makers may wish to avoid hyperlocal violence hotspots (i.e. the specific streets where violence frequently occurs).
- Administrative data on risk indicators for involvement in violence, including school exclusions, alternative provision attendance, severe absence from education, care experience and criminal convictions.⁶⁵

More information on where to locate new youth clubs may be found in sub-recommendation 2B of the [Youth Sector Practice Guidance](#). For example, local authorities should take into account transport routes and consult with local partners, practitioners, and children and young people to understand the benefits and drawbacks of potential locations.



WHAT ABOUT WALES?

This recommendation aims to shape the rollout of the *Better Youth Spaces* fund. This fund only applies to England, and there is no direct Welsh equivalent. However, as Recommendation 2 highlights, the issue of youth club closures is not unique to England: the number of local authority-run youth centres fell by 60% in both England and Wales between 2011-12 and 2024-25.⁶⁶ Alongside increasing revenue funding for open-access provision as described in Recommendation 2, Welsh Government should consult on developing an equivalent capital funding programme to improve youth club access in Wales.



Recommendation 4.

Incorporate evidence on 'what works' into guidance for Young Futures Hubs

Why?

- Without grounding in evidence, Young Futures Hubs could adopt violence and crime prevention approaches that are unproven or harmful.
- Impact depends not only on what Hubs offer, but on how support is targeted, designed and delivered.

Without grounding in evidence, Young Futures Hubs could adopt violence and crime prevention approaches that are unproven or harmful.

Not all commonly used violence prevention approaches are evidence-based. For example, most youth clubs (58%) say they offer knife crime education/awareness activities, despite there being no robust evidence of their impact on violence.⁶⁸ Although what these activities involve is likely to vary, there is a risk that some sessions could backfire. If sessions increase fear of knife-related violence, this could make children and young people more likely to carry knives for self-protection – half of 13-17-year-olds who carry weapons say they do so for their own safety.⁶⁹

Some efforts to prevent children and young people from becoming involved in violence can be actively harmful. For example, prison awareness programmes, where current or former prisoners meet children and young people and show them what life in prison is like, can increase the likelihood that children and young people become involved in crime.⁷⁰ By contrast, evidence shows that cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), mentoring and sports programmes tend to be effective in reducing children and young people's involvement in violence and crime.⁷¹ Evidence-based guidance is required to support Hubs to invest in the approaches that work.⁷²

POLICY CONTEXT

The UK Government has committed to opening 50 Young Futures Hubs in areas of England impacted by knife crime over the next four years. These are locally designed, open-access spaces for 10-18-year-olds, which offer additional support to those who need it. Each Hub will aim to achieve three outcomes: supporting access to job opportunities, improving mental health and well-being and reducing vulnerability to being drawn into crime, including knife crime.⁶⁷

Impact depends not only on what Hubs offer, but on how support is targeted, designed and delivered.

Choosing the right type of support is only part of effective violence prevention. Effective implementation is also required. Hubs need to locate provision in areas of unmet need and target support at the children and young people at risk of involvement in violence. They also need to design provision that is of sufficient duration and appropriate intensity and is tailored for different groups. Staff will need the training, support and confidence to identify need, build trusted relationships and deliver evidence-informed support. High-quality delivery also depends on the wider conditions in which support is provided, including stable staffing, continuity of relationships and effective links with local safeguarding systems.

Incorporate evidence on ‘what works’ into guidance for Young Futures Hubs.

To achieve the intended outcomes for Young Futures Hubs, DCMS should ensure the guidance it develops on Young Futures Hubs is grounded in the best available evidence of ‘what works’. **Appropriate content on reducing children and young people’s involvement in violence and crime can be drawn from [YEF’s Youth Sector Practice Guidance](#).**

Young Futures Hubs guidance for local authorities should cover:

1. Getting the right focus on vulnerable children and young people.

Certain evidence-based risk indicators can be helpful in identifying groups of children and young people who may benefit from extra support. Hubs should use these risk indicators (in combination with professional judgement) to help identify children and young people who are vulnerable to involvement in violence. For example, those who have been excluded from school, those who attend alternative provision, those who are severely absent from education, those who have received a criminal conviction, and looked after children.⁷³ See Practice Guidance Recommendation 1.

2. Offering approaches that work to prevent violence and crime.

- **Youth clubs:** Hubs should provide high-quality, open-access youth provision. This should open every weekday after school (4–8 pm),⁷⁴ offer nutritious meals (where appropriate)⁷⁵ and maintain high staffing levels.⁷⁶ See Practice Guidance Recommendation 2.
- **Mentoring:** Hubs should offer mentoring for vulnerable children and young people. Programmes should involve at least six months of weekly one-to-one meetings with trained mentors, each lasting one to two hours.⁷⁷ See Practice Guidance Recommendation 3.
- **Positive activities:** Hubs should offer targeted positive activity programmes (such as sports and arts activities) to vulnerable children and young people. Programmes should be delivered by trained adults and should follow structured pathways that support ongoing development.⁷⁸ Some programmes may provide high-intensity support over a shorter (but still sustained) period – such as six-week summer job programmes.⁷⁹ Encourage programmes to schedule sessions between 4 pm and 8 pm on weekdays after school and focus on developing social and emotional skills.⁸⁰ See Practice Guidance Recommendation 4.
- **Psychological therapy:** Hubs should offer vulnerable children and young people prompt access to evidence-based psychological therapy, such as CBT. Therapists should receive clinical supervision and have clear referral pathways into specialist services. Hubs should offer children and young people more than one session per week and put rigorous monitoring in place to check this.⁸¹ They should put in place strategies to support Black, Asian and other minority ethnic children and young people to access therapy, such as adapting content to make it more culturally relevant, training therapists to better understand the cultures and beliefs of minority ethnic communities and encouraging a diverse workforce.⁸² See the [YEF Toolkit strand on CBT](#).

RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY

This recommendation helps tackle the racial disproportionality in minority ethnic children and young people’s access to timely mental health support, which is a potential contributor to racial disproportionality in violence risk.⁸³ NHS England data shows that children and young people from Black backgrounds are a third less likely to be referred to mental health support than those from White backgrounds, and those from Asian backgrounds are half as likely to be referred.⁸⁴ Black and Asian children and young people are also less likely to access mental health services voluntarily through primary care and are, instead, more likely to access them via social care or the justice system, which is more likely to be compulsory.⁸⁵ As children and young people from Black, Asian and mixed ethnic backgrounds are more likely to attend youth clubs, offering psychological therapy through Young Futures Hubs may be a key way of reaching these children and young people with this effective type of violence prevention support.

- **Other effective approaches:** Hubs should consider delivering wider violence prevention approaches which have been found to be effective in other settings, such as schools.⁸⁶ For example, relationship violence prevention activities, bystander interventions to prevent sexual assault, and social skills training programmes.

3. Establishing strong foundations for high-quality provision.

- **Funding:** Local authorities should provide multi-year funding for Hub delivery partners. This could involve awarding three- to five-year grants/contracts, subject to annual budget, where required. Funding should cover core organisational costs, including high-quality monitoring and data collection.⁸⁷ See Practice Guidance Recommendation 6.
- **Training and supervision:** Local authorities should deliver joint, in-person specialist training for Hub staff from different professions, covering violence, relationship abuse, CCE, and local system responses to these harms.⁸⁸ Local authorities should also ensure that Hub staff and volunteers receive regular supervision. See Practice Guidance Recommendation 7.
- **Safeguarding systems:** Local authorities should involve youth workers from the Hubs in local multi-agency responses to extra-familial harm.⁸⁹ For example, by giving them the opportunity to contribute to safeguarding assessments for the children and young people they support, inviting senior youth workers to safeguarding or crime prevention meetings, and developing information-sharing agreements between services.⁹⁰ See Practice Guidance Recommendation 7.



WHAT ABOUT WALES?

In Wales, the relevant route for applying this evidence is different. Rather than a discrete youth hub programme, Wales now has a system-wide statutory framework for local youth work planning.⁹¹ As that framework is implemented, the Welsh Government should integrate relevant content from the YEF's Youth Sector Practice Guidance into supporting materials to ensure that evidence on "what works" informs local youth work plans.

The Practice Guidance can help translate the framework's broad aims into practical decisions about targeting, provision and delivery quality. Each of the three themes is highly relevant:

1. **Right focus:** the new statutory youth work framework requires local authorities to produce five-year youth work strategic plans, with objectives "rooted in evidence of need" and plans judged partly on the "quality and breadth of evidence" used. YEF's evidence-based risk indicators and guidance on getting the right focus on vulnerable children and young people can help local authorities meet this requirement (see Practice Guidance Recommendation 1).
2. **Approaches that work:** the framework also encourages local authorities to "learn from academic studies and evaluations" to improve the youth work offer. The YEF's guidance summarises the best available international evidence on youth sector approaches that work to reduce vulnerability to violence and crime (see Practice Guidance Recommendations 2–5).
3. **Strong foundations:** the framework focuses on the sustainability of provision, practitioner development and "robust safeguarding systems". The YEF's guidance on establishing strong foundations for the sector sets out the commissioning practices, safeguarding training and multi-agency working needed to support stable, sustainable provision and involve youth workers in safeguarding systems effectively (see Practice Guidance Recommendations 6–7).

Recommendation 5.

Ensure training reforms prepare youth workers to respond to the range of violence involving children and young people while working alongside partner agencies

Why?

- Youth workers encounter overlapping forms of violence, including VAWG.
- Youth workers provide trusted support to vulnerable children and young people whilst navigating complex multi-agency systems.

POLICY CONTEXT

The UK Government's plans to halve knife crime and its VAWG strategy both include welcome commitments to strengthen training for youth workers in safeguarding children and young people from violence. The knife crime plan pledges that "all national youth worker qualifications and safeguarding training will ensure practitioners can identify indicators of CCE and community violence", supporting youth workers to make referrals and provide "direct support appropriate to their role". It also commits to introducing "specialist training for those working in high-risk environments".⁹² The VAWG strategy pledges to make VAWG training available to paid and volunteer youth workers and to develop "online resources and practical guidance" on recognising and tackling harmful behaviour.⁹³ These pledges align with the £15m dedicated by the National Youth Strategy to upskill the youth sector workforce, including through safeguarding support.⁹⁴ In this recommendation, we set out ways to maximise the impact of these commitments.

Crucially, we recommend that these training commitments be implemented across both England and Wales. Both government plans state that pledges relating to devolved matters apply only to England. However, youth work qualification arrangements operate across England and Wales in some respects, meaning that the reforms may already have implications for Wales. The aims of these commitments align with work already underway in Wales to strengthen the youth work workforce, improve safeguarding responses to CCE, and strengthen responses to VAWG, domestic abuse and sexual violence affecting children and young people.⁹⁵

Youth workers encounter overlapping forms of violence, including VAWG.

VAWG and relationship abuse are alarmingly common amongst adolescents, the age group that youth workers support. The YEF's survey of over 10,000 13–17-year-olds found that nearly half of teenagers in relationships (47%) report experiencing or perpetrating some kind of relationship abuse over the last year. One in seven teenagers in relationships (15%) said they had been subjected to physical or sexual abuse – such as being forced or pressured into sex (10%), being physically hurt (7%) or having explicit images of them shared online (5%). Girls were more likely than boys to say a partner made them feel they could not leave, made them afraid to disagree or pressured them into sex.⁹⁶ The 2025 Crime Survey also found that nearly one in five 16–19-year-olds (18%) reported being victims of domestic abuse in the last year – the highest prevalence of any age group.⁹⁷ Meanwhile, an analysis of police-recorded child sexual abuse and exploitation offences found that half of the offences in 2024 involved child perpetrators, most commonly aged 14–15 years.⁹⁸

VAWG and relationship abuse overlap with wider patterns of violence. Amongst teenagers in relationships, nearly three-quarters (73%) of those who had perpetrated serious violence had also committed emotional or physical relationship abuse – compared to less than a quarter (23%) of those who hadn't perpetrated serious violence.⁹⁹ Young people's own accounts suggest that sexual violence and relationship abuse can be part of the same peer cultures of status, control and hypermasculinity that are bound up with wider involvement in serious violence.¹⁰⁰ As with other forms of violence, youth work tends to reach the children and young people most in need of intervention: 85% of children and young people who have perpetrated sexual violence attend a youth club.¹⁰¹ This highlights the importance of an integrated training offer that addresses VAWG and relationship abuse alongside community violence and criminal exploitation, and in comparable depth.

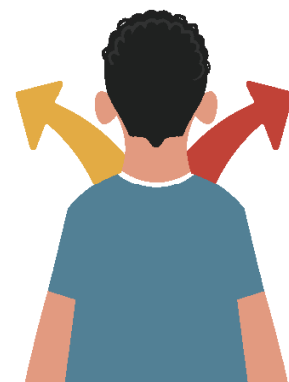
Youth workers provide trusted support to vulnerable children and young people whilst navigating complex multi-agency systems.

Youth workers do not just recognise and report harm: they actively support children and young people affected by it. A 2025 YEF-funded survey of over 300 youth workers across England and Wales found that 73% had informally mentored children and young people at risk of involvement in violence or crime, 65% had de-escalated conflicts that could have erupted into violence, 55% had tackled dangerous misinformation and 38% had engaged in violence interruption or 'gang' exit work.¹⁰² This work already forms a core part of many youth organisations' delivery: the 2025 NYA Census found that nearly half (47%) of youth work organisations in England offered targeted support responding to violence, VAWG, and crime, while four in ten (39%) offered targeted support for criminal or sexual exploitation.¹⁰³ Despite this, only a quarter (24%) of youth workers in the YEF survey reported receiving violence prevention training. This was only slightly higher amongst degree-qualified youth workers (31%) and youth workers primarily delivering targeted provision (35%).¹⁰⁴

In providing support to children and young people affected by violence, youth workers often have to navigate complex local multi-agency responses to violence.¹⁰⁶ A 2026 YEF-funded review of youth workers' involvement in safeguarding across England and Wales found that there was "no typical safeguarding pathway" for children and young people affected by violence; rather, responses were variously divided between children's social care and community safety systems. This leads to complex and varied local responses to violence, and youth workers can end up being drawn into children's social care case management systems or crime-reduction practices, such as dispersal, mapping or surveillance. The review concluded that existing safeguarding training for youth workers was "insufficient" to enable them to interact with these complex systems effectively.¹⁰⁷

"Sometimes [at a multi-agency child exploitation (MACE) panel] I think there's almost an ask to go and seek intel, to go and find information and, almost like, put surveillance on young people, which I think is sometimes an easy ask, but because people don't recognise actually ... that's not what we do. ... We know that we need to understand the context and the young people's peers ... but it's not about us going and doing that and then just reporting it back to the MACE process".

Focus group participant in YEF-funded research on safeguarding partnerships.¹⁰⁵



Ensure training reforms prepare youth workers to respond to the range of violence involving children and young people while working alongside partner agencies.

DCMS and the Welsh Government should offer funded training that:

- Covers the overlapping forms of violence affecting children and young people, including VAWG.
- Equips youth workers to support affected children and young people, not just recognise risk.
- Enables youth workers to work effectively alongside statutory partners.

Here, we set out a three-tiered approach to training that could meet these requirements while providing training to adults with various levels of expertise. All training should be designed in collaboration with national youth work infrastructure bodies, safeguarding partnerships, VCS youth organisations, and children and young people with lived experience of the harms covered.

Tier 1: universal safeguarding basics

Tier 1 could focus on equipping all staff and volunteers who deliver youth services (in youth centres, sports clubs, schools, outreach settings, religious organisations and other local provision) to recognise signs of harm and report this to an appropriate person.

Suggested Tier 1 content

- **Violence:** types of violence affecting children and young people (including VAWG) and their prevalence;¹⁰⁸ warning signs for current violence involvement.
- **Relationship abuse:** types of relationship abuse affecting children and young people (including technology-facilitated abuse) and their prevalence;¹⁰⁹ warning signs for current relationship abuse involvement.¹¹⁰
- **CCE:** what exploitation means;¹¹¹ common types of CCE (including county lines, cuckooing and online exploitation);¹¹² warning signs for current criminal exploitation.¹¹³
- **Local pathways and partnerships:** how to record and share concerns promptly with the right person.

Tier 1 training could be delivered through standardised, self-paced online learning without requiring live delivery or accreditation. To minimise costs and release time requirements, it could be integrated into existing safeguarding induction and refresher training.



Tier 2: core youth practitioner skills

Tier 2 training could focus on equipping the professionals who regularly support children and young people to understand why they might be affected by these harms, recognise what might reduce or compound risk and navigate local system responses effectively. Training in these key skills should be incorporated into youth worker and youth support worker qualifications and offered to current practitioners through continuing professional development (CPD). Existing qualifications already include important foundations in safeguarding, equity and inclusion, conflict management, partnership working, and, at higher levels, specialist units on violence, gangs and exploitation. The priority here is to strengthen qualification content on violence, exploitation and relationship abuse by updating learning outcomes, indicative content and assessment strategies as appropriate, as well as make this content more accessible to the existing workforce.

Suggested Tier 2 content

- **Violence:** how violence tends to concentrate in particular times, places, age groups and social groups;¹¹⁴ how conflict can escalate across online and offline contexts;¹¹⁵ wider vulnerabilities associated with violence perpetration and victimisation (such as care experience and substance misuse);¹¹⁶ and which violence-prevention approaches are supported by robust evidence of impact.¹¹⁷
- **Relationship abuse:** how adolescent relationship abuse works, including coercion, dependency, peer norms, gendered patterns and technology-facilitated abuse;¹¹⁸ wider vulnerabilities associated with relationship abuse perpetration and victimisation;¹¹⁹ and which relationship abuse prevention approaches are supported by robust evidence of impact.¹²⁰
- **CCE:** how exploitation works, including common recruitment, grooming and control tactics;¹²¹ wider vulnerabilities associated with CCE victimisation;¹²² and how to recognise exploited children's safeguarding needs and possible legal protections, even where they appear to be committing offences.¹²³
- **Local pathways and partnerships:** how local safeguarding and community safety systems have developed to respond to extra-familial harm, including their respective roles and aims, and variation in local procedures and pathways;¹²⁴ how youth workers can maintain a child-centred, relationship-based stance within multi-agency responses whilst managing tensions around trust, confidentiality, safeguarding and information sharing;¹²⁵ and racial disproportionality in exposure to violence and statutory responses.¹²⁶

Tier 2 CPD for existing practitioners could be delivered through live, interactive online or blended training using case studies, scenario-based exercises and facilitated reflection. Quality assurance mechanisms could include completion records and structured professional discussions with a supervisor.¹²⁸

Crucially, funding for this training should cover release time and reflective supervision as well as course fees. A 2025 evaluation of the Youth Worker Bursary Fund found that across the first four bursary rounds, only 59% of recipients completed their qualification. The evaluation found that barriers to completion included competing time commitments, lack of supervision and line-management support, and limited opportunities to collaborate with other practitioners.¹²⁹ CPD for existing youth workers must be designed in a way to ensure attendees can access and apply it.

WIDER RESEARCH

One third of youth workers say they have not received any support (such as supervision, mentoring or case discussions) to assist them in safeguarding children and young people at risk of violence or crime.¹²⁷

Tier 3: specialist high-risk practice

Tier 3 should focus on equipping specialist practitioners who routinely provide targeted support to children and young people affected by these harms to assess and manage complex risk, understand the relevant legal and safeguarding frameworks, and advocate effectively for children and young people. This should include practitioners in specialist exploitation, serious violence and relationship abuse services; A&E navigators; custody navigators; and safeguarding leads or managers in youth services who are expected to oversee cases involving these harms.

Suggested Tier 3 content

- **Assessing and managing risk:** identifying patterns of harm across violence, relationship abuse, and CCE;¹³⁰ assessing and responding to changes in risk (including missing episodes, weapon carrying, organised crime influence, retaliation, technology-facilitated monitoring, and coercive or controlling behaviour in relationships); strengthening protective factors and supporting children and young people to move away from exploitative relationships or networks; developing safety plans and addressing barriers such as housing, education, debt, and family safety.¹³¹
- **Local pathways and partnerships:** understanding the legal and safeguarding frameworks relevant to violence, relationship abuse and exploitation (including child protection processes, the National Referral Mechanism, the Section 45 defence, and the legal framework for domestic abuse and coercive control involving older teenagers);¹³² advocating for children and young people within multi-agency settings (including challenging victim-blaming, adultification, or inappropriate criminal justice responses and escalating concerns when risk is not addressed).¹³³

Tier 3 training could be delivered through intensive blended learning, combining preparatory online content, in-person, case-based training, and follow-up reflective practice or supervision. It should be accredited and should only be available once practitioners have completed Tier 2 training (or can demonstrate equivalent prior learning). For Tier 3, funding should cover release time, specialist supervision and organisational support to apply learning.

Recommendation 6.

Update statutory safeguarding guidance to strengthen youth workers' role throughout responses to extra-familial harm

Why?

- Youth workers are too often left out of multi-agency responses to extra-familial harm affecting the children and young people they support.
- Existing safeguarding guidance gives limited and inconsistent attention to the youth sector's distinct role.

Youth workers are too often left out of multi-agency responses to extra-familial harm affecting the children and young people they support.

Youth workers play a critical frontline role in supporting children and young people who are vulnerable to violence. However, a 2026 YEF-funded review of youth workers' role in safeguarding children and young people from violence found extensive variation in their involvement in safeguarding systems. A survey of local authorities across England and Wales (to which over half responded) found that it was relatively common for youth workers to contribute to formal safeguarding systems anywhere from multiple times per week (27% of local authorities) to once a month (24%). One in eight local authorities (13%) reported that youth workers' involvement was rare or non-existent.¹³⁵

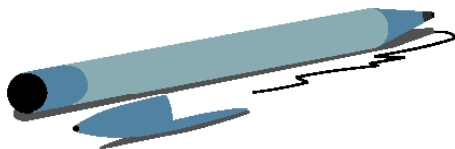
Even when youth workers were involved in multi-agency responses, their contributions could be marginalised. The researchers' observations of inter-agency meetings captured examples in which youth workers made minimal verbal contributions, were not listened to or were contradicted, particularly by police and social care representatives. They also found evidence that youth workers' contributions were often left out of formal documentation. For example, their review of 144 serious case reviews found only 17 instances in which youth work was cited as directly contributing to the specific case at hand.

WIDER RESEARCH

In the NYA's National Youth Workforce Survey, almost two-thirds of respondents reported increased (or new) demand for support in addressing crime and antisocial behaviour (62%). Over half (55%) had seen an increase in exploitation of young people they engaged with.¹³⁴

"I've been in [multi-agency] meetings before and the [social worker] that is leading the meeting just reads out all my notes about a particular child to the group, rather than saying, 'I'm not the best person to answer' and call on me - who has been seeing that young person three times a week - to lead the discussion."

Youth work manager interviewed by NYA and University of Durham.¹³⁶



Existing safeguarding guidance gives limited and inconsistent attention to the youth sector’s distinct role.

Existing safeguarding guidance and legislation fail to set out a clear framework to assist Local Safeguarding Partnerships (England) and Regional Safeguarding Boards (Wales) in involving youth workers in multi-agency responses. In England, *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026* includes only passing references to youth workers as optional contributors to particular processes – for example, as possible community partners or attendees at strategy discussions – rather than as a sector whose role is consistently embedded. This reflects wider safeguarding legislation: youth work providers are not explicitly named in the list of relevant agencies that may be involved in arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of local children; any coverage is indirect.¹³⁷ Whereas *Working Together* sets out in detail how schools, colleges, and early years settings should contribute to local safeguarding arrangements and describes them as having a “pivotal role”, it says that Local Safeguarding Children Partnerships should merely “consider” including VCS organisations and sports clubs. Whilst schools and early years settings each have their own statutory safeguarding frameworks, youth work providers must rely on non-statutory guidance for out-of-school settings directed at a broad “community activities” audience.

In Wales, the statutory position is somewhat stronger than in England, but the role of youth work is not clearly articulated within formal safeguarding arrangements. The *Code of Safeguarding Practice* applies to organisations offering activities or services to children and adults in Wales and explicitly covers youth clubs,¹³⁸ whilst the *All Wales Practice Guide: Safeguarding Children from CCE* includes practitioners in “youth, community and family support services”.¹³⁹ However, under *Working Together to Safeguard People: Volume 1*, safeguarding board partners are a prescribed set of bodies, and any wider membership is discretionary, with youth work not explicitly named.¹⁴⁰ *Volume 5* expects multi-agency working, including key agencies and the third sector, but does not clearly define the role of local authority youth services or VCS youth work providers within case-level safeguarding processes.¹⁴¹ By contrast, education settings in Wales have their own dedicated statutory safeguarding guidance.¹⁴²

Unlike statutory services, youth work relies entirely upon voluntary relationships and the trust that youth workers build with the children and young people they support. This can create tensions when youth workers interact with statutory systems, which are not always consent-based.¹⁴⁵ In the 2025 YEF-funded survey of 300 youth workers, nearly half (45%) either agreed or strongly agreed that tensions often arise between youth workers and other professionals when safeguarding children and young people; only 14% disagreed to any extent. Tensions can relate to youth workers’ lack of formal authority in safeguarding processes and the risk that sharing information without consent or notification could pose to trusting relationships between youth workers and young people (particularly when information is shared to fulfil the priorities of other agencies rather than because it is necessary and proportionate for safeguarding the young person). This risk may be particularly acute for youth workers supporting Black children and young people, whose experiences of safeguarding and justice systems may be shaped by racial bias, adultification and disproportionate policing.¹⁴⁶

WIDER RESEARCH

A 2025 survey of local authorities across England and Wales found that youth workers already contribute to formal safeguarding activities in many areas. Most local authorities reported that youth workers provided referrals into children’s social care (69%), contributed information to safeguarding assessments (72%) and attended extra-familial harm or exploitation panels (77%).¹⁴³

“Previously [at MACE panels], I think there was [an attitude of] ‘you need to go and find out who’s who and where they’re spending time and who they’re with and put it in as intel’ ... I’ve had previous examples of young people then being told ... ‘[Your youth worker] said that she saw you with X, Y and Z’. And then that completely ruins your relationship with that young person”.

Focus group participant in YEF-funded research on safeguarding partnerships.¹⁴⁴

RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY

Recommendations 5 and 6 help tackle racial disproportionality in violence risk by strengthening the safeguarding role of youth workers and youth practitioners – who minority ethnic children and young people are more likely to encounter. Children and young people from Black, Asian and mixed ethnic backgrounds are more likely to attend youth clubs, and those from Black and mixed ethnic backgrounds are more likely to trust a mentor.¹⁴⁷ Greater involvement in statutory systems may also enable youth workers to challenge discriminatory practice where it arises. The review of youth workers' roles in safeguarding noted instances of youth workers questioning statutory professionals' race-related assumptions. For example, a youth worker reported an incident when she had challenged a police officer who made a referral about two young people the youth worker was supporting, suggesting they had been seen with machetes. When the youth worker reviewed the information, she found no evidence that the pair were the ones carrying weapons – but they were the only two Black young people in the group.¹⁴⁸ Professionals across services can and do challenge discriminatory practice, but youth workers may bring particular value because advocacy for children and young people is central to their role.

Update statutory safeguarding guidance to strengthen youth workers' role throughout responses to extra-familial harm.

These problems should be addressed by updating statutory safeguarding guidance and, in England, legislation. The revised guidance in each nation should be developed through a co-production process involving youth work leaders, safeguarding partners, children's social care, policing, specialist exploitation services, and children and young people so that national expectations reflect a shared understanding of how youth work's consent-based ethos should operate within statutory safeguarding arrangements. The following changes should be considered for inclusion in revised guidance:

1. **Invite case-level involvement, where appropriate.** There should be a presumption that youth workers, youth support workers and other trained youth practitioners are invited to contribute to the multi-agency response, where they have an established relationship with the child or young person in question and are operating within clear safeguarding and accountability arrangements. They (or a more senior representative from their organisation with knowledge of the case) should be invited to contribute meaningfully to each stage of the multi-agency response, from referral through to assessment, joint visits, planning and the delivery of the response. Youth workers and other relevant practitioners should be expected to exercise professional judgement about whether and how to contribute based on the best interests of the child or young person and the need to protect the trusted relationship that makes their support effective.
2. **Formalise local procedures.** Local safeguarding arrangements should set out how youth work will be engaged, how contributions will be recognised and recorded, and how this will be supported by information-sharing and inter-agency training.
3. **Ensure appropriate strategic representation.** Local safeguarding arrangements should provide a clear route for appropriately senior youth work representation in strategic discussions about extra-familial harm, such as thematic MACE panels. As well as enabling youth workers' insights to be shared at a strategic level, this should ensure that youth work's consent-based approach and operational realities are considered when multi-agency responses are designed and reviewed.
4. **Set principles for multi-agency work.** Multi-agency work should not lead to youth workers functioning as extensions of the police or children's social care. Updated guidance should set out principles to ensure that youth workers' participation in statutory systems is appropriate to their role and the consent-based relationships they have with children and young people. Collaboration between youth workers and children's social care and between youth workers and the police should be considered separately, as each has been found to pose different challenges.¹⁴⁹

WIDER RESEARCH

A review of safeguarding partnerships (in press) found that youth workers' involvement helped partners to focus on children and young people's welfare, rather than controlling their behaviour or moving them on. In one observed meeting, a youth work manager reminded partners that "we need to remember he's a child, he's 15", prompting the panel to reframe the young person's behaviour as a sign of vulnerability. The research found that youth workers could contribute key insights into patterns of harm linked to groups, places, and local trends – a more appropriate role than monitoring individuals.¹⁵⁰

Following the update to statutory guidance, safeguarding and youth sector bodies should work together to develop model principles, case examples and inter-agency training to help local areas apply the new expectations in practice. Training should cover issues such as consent, advocacy, information-sharing, critical challenge, and statutory and non-statutory partnerships. Sessions should enable participants to critically reflect on – not just comply with – local arrangements and to identify barriers to prioritising children and young people's welfare. Relevant inspection frameworks should assess the quality of partnership working with youth work providers as well as procedural compliance.

How does this apply in England and Wales?

 In **England**, the Department for Education should work with DCMS and the Home Office to:

- Include content on youth workers' role in the next update to *Working Together to Safeguard Children*.
- Align linked implementation guidance, including *Out-of-School Settings: Safeguarding Guidance for Providers* and *The Families First Partnership Programme Guide*.
- Amend the *Child Safeguarding Practice Review and Relevant Agency (England) Regulations 2018* to explicitly include youth work providers as relevant agencies.

These changes should also be reflected in Ofsted's inspection of local authority children's services and, where relevant, joint targeted area inspections of multi-agency safeguarding responses.

After guidance is updated, these changes could be embedded through the existing Families First Partnership Programme, with youth sector input provided through the NYA and wider National Youth Strategy commitments.

 In **Wales**, the Welsh Government should work across education and children's social care to:

- Include this in *Working Together to Safeguard People: Code of Safeguarding Practice* and the *Wales Safeguarding Procedures / All Wales Practice Guides*.
- Use statutory safeguarding guidance under Part 7 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 to make clear that Regional Safeguarding Boards should include or formally engage youth work provider representation.

These changes should also be reflected in Estyn's youth work inspections and, where relevant, joint inspections of child protection arrangements.

Implementation could be delivered through the current review of safeguarding accountability and governance,¹⁵¹ the development of the National Body for Youth Work in Wales¹⁵² and the implementation of the statutory framework for youth work in Wales (for example, in local youth work strategic plans and any supporting guidance or resources).



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