

London's lost youth services

The dramatic disappearance of support and facilities for young people in London



A briefing by Sian Berry
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Services and facilities to support young people in London have been under threat for some time. Cash-strapped borough councils are facing a huge squeeze in their finances. With youth centres, outreach and after-school activities not a statutory function of local councils, cuts have fallen hard on these services.

My findings in this briefing, using data supplied by borough councils across London, show that our youth services have lost large amounts of funding, buildings and staff since 2011.

The new Mayor's draft Police and Crime Plan says that "prevention is key to protecting young people and reducing crime over the long-term."¹ But can plans for prevention work if council support for young people is fading away?

Data from councils show an average 36 per cent cut in youth service budgets across London. Ten of the councils who responded to my request for information have cut youth funding by 50 per cent or more over five years.

The impact of this level of cuts could be devastating. Unison recently asked young people about the impact youth service cuts had on their lives. In response, 83 per cent said they were having an effect on crime and antisocial behaviour, and 71 per cent said it was now harder for young people to stay in formal education.²

Good quality youth services help prevent young people from falling into crime and also make them less vulnerable to the exploitation of groups like gangs.

The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) funds a range of initiatives targeted at knife and gang crime but many of these depend on general youth services to continue supporting young people once they have completed these programmes.

For example, the successful organisation Redthread works to reach victims of youth violence at the 'teachable moment' of attending A&E. But they need to be able to signpost young people to general youth services once they decide to make changes to their lives.³



My main findings

Since the 2011/12 financial year:

- At least £22 million has been cut from council youth service budgets across London
- The average council has cut its youth service budget by nearly £1 million – an average of 36 per cent
- More than 30 youth centres have been closed
- At least 12,700 places for young people have been lost
- Council youth service employment has been reduced on average by 39 per cent
- Funding to voluntary sector youth work has also gone down – by an average of 35 per cent in councils that were able to provide data
- Half the councils who were able to tell me about future budgets were planning to make more cuts in 2017/18

The figures I have obtained reveal that the steep cuts to local youth services in recent years are set to continue into 2017/18. Five out of the ten councils who were able to state their plans for 2017/18 are looking at further reductions in youth service budgets. All eight councils who could comment on future staffing said they planned more youth worker job cuts.

The GLA's London Crime Prevention Fund (LCPF) has provided grants to local authorities since 2013/14. This fund, with a total of £72 million provided during its first four years, was a positive step, and the Mayor recently announced that he will maintain funding to the same levels up to 2020/21.⁴ But only a fraction of this fund has so far been spent on youth services and projects are mainly focused on those who have already started to get in trouble.

The Mayor has also told me that the Metropolitan Police Service continues to employ police to act as Safer Schools Officers, costing nearly £16 million per year.⁵ I have to question whether this is the most effective use of scant funds while so many specialist youth workers are now without jobs.

With councils finding it hard to maintain even the statutory services they have a legal duty to provide, the strategic obligation to help with this London-wide problem lies with the GLA and MOPAC. I believe that the Mayor should be looking to find ways to plug these gaps with his new budget.

In recent draft strategies, the Mayor has acknowledged that preventing crime and building positive lives for young people depends on the earliest possible intervention, and I believe this must include more financial support from him for the general youth services that are seeing the deepest cuts from hard-pressed councils.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sian Berry', with a long, sweeping underline.

Sian Berry AM, January 2017

My research into council youth service cuts

Using Freedom of Information, I asked each borough council in London to tell me what changes there had been in its youth services between 2011/12 and 2016/17, as well as any plans for further changes within upcoming 2017/18 budgets.

I asked about changes in each council's:

- overall budget for youth services
- number of youth centres supported
- number of council-employed youth service staff (and number of youth workers on the ground if this could be separated)
- number of places in youth services for young people
- level of funding provided to youth work in the voluntary and community sector

From 32 London boroughs I received 22 responses covering 23 boroughs (Kingston and Richmond have merged their functions). The majority of these responses showed cuts to youth provision across overall budgets, youth centre facilities and youth worker jobs. In the future, youth services look set to lose out even more, with further cuts also planned in many councils for next year.

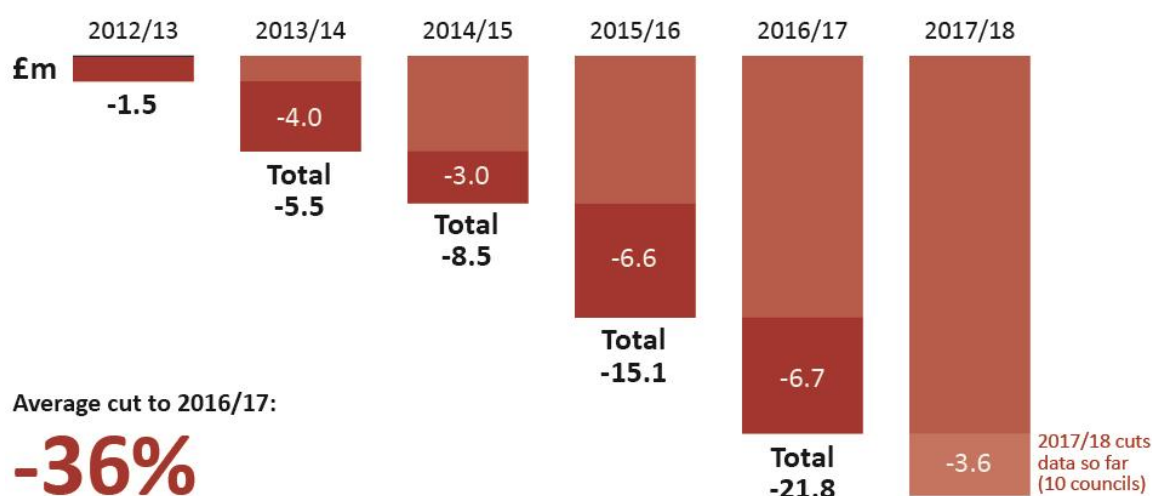
Dwindling youth service budgets

Over five years, the average council reduced its spending on youth work by £990,410 – a 36 per cent cut since 2011/12.

Proportionally, the steepest cuts were seen in Newham (81%) and Hillingdon (72%). Two councils (Redbridge and Bexley) have kept cuts below 10 per cent.

The pace of cuts is increasing, with the highest annual reduction across London of £6.7 million between 2015/16 and the current financial year.

Youth service budget cuts across London (total from 23 councils)



One council, Greenwich, saw an overall increase. In that borough, from 2011/12 to 2014/15 youth service budgets increased, but since then the council has also cut its budget by 23 per cent from its peak up to 2016/17.

For 2017/18, five councils plan to make more cuts in youth service budgets, one plans an increase (Merton, by 13 per cent) and five councils plan to make no change. The average planned cut among these ten councils is 25 per cent (see table 2).

Table 1: Council youth service budgets – responses to my FOI

Borough	2011/12	2016/17	Change	% change 2011/12 to 2016/17
Newham	£2,107,310	£400,000	-£1,707,310	-81%
Hillingdon	£4,242,000	£1,206,900	-£3,035,100	-72%
Havering	£1,100,000	£350,000	-£750,000	-68%
Barking and Dagenham	£2,286,200	£738,200	-£1,548,000	-68%
Waltham Forest	£4,757,854	£1,574,000	-£3,183,854	-67%
Bromley	£2,527,680	£861,220	-£1,666,460	-66%
Enfield	£3,548,353	£1,413,489	-£2,134,864	-60%
Ealing	£1,424,707	£580,657	-£844,050	-59%
Haringey	£1,520,900	£758,903	-£761,997	-50%
Wandsworth	£4,504,939	£2,732,694	-£1,772,245	-39%
Sutton	£1,848,450	£1,276,500	-£571,950	-31%
Camden	£3,185,398	£2,401,699	-£783,699	-25%
Merton	£800,040	£631,100	-£168,940	-21%
Southwark	£2,234,274	£1,768,191	-£466,083	-21%
Islington	£7,114,581*	£6,078,878	-£1,035,703	-15%
Barnet	£1,492,415	£1,320,734	-£171,681	-12%
Redbridge	£1,250,913	£1,138,380	-£112,533	-9%
Bexley	£1,593,000	£1,458,000	-£135,000	-8%
Greenwich	£1,690,181	£3,295,181	+£1,605,000	+95%
Brent	£1,566,243*	£414,394	-£1,151,849	N/A
Lambeth	£4,700,000**	£3,500,000	-£1,200,000	N/A
Richmond and Kingston	£1,938,800***	£1,746,100	-£194,700	N/A
Croydon				No response
Hackney				No response
Harrow				No response
Hounslow				No response
Lewisham				No response
Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, Westminster (shared services)				No response
Tower Hamlets				Refused

*2012/13 **2013/14 ***2014/15 when these boroughs combined their service

Table 2: Planned changes in budgets for 2017/18

Borough	Planned change in budget 2017/18	% change
Barking and Dagenham	£0	0%
Barnet	-£1,210	0%
Camden	-£636,266	-26%
Havering	£0	0%
Lambeth	-£1,400,000	-40%
Merton	+£80,250	+13%
Newham	£0	0%
Redbridge	-£283,000	-25%
Southwark	-£1,346,661	-76%
Wandsworth	£0	0%

Lost youth centres and places for young people

The 16 councils who responded to this question by providing data for all years said that, between them, they have closed more than 30 youth centres and projects.

The cumulative cut in youth centre provision by 2016/17 was on average two per council, across all 20 who provided data for any year. One council (Camden) told me they also propose to close a further three projects in 2017/18.

Drop in youth centre provision (16 councils)

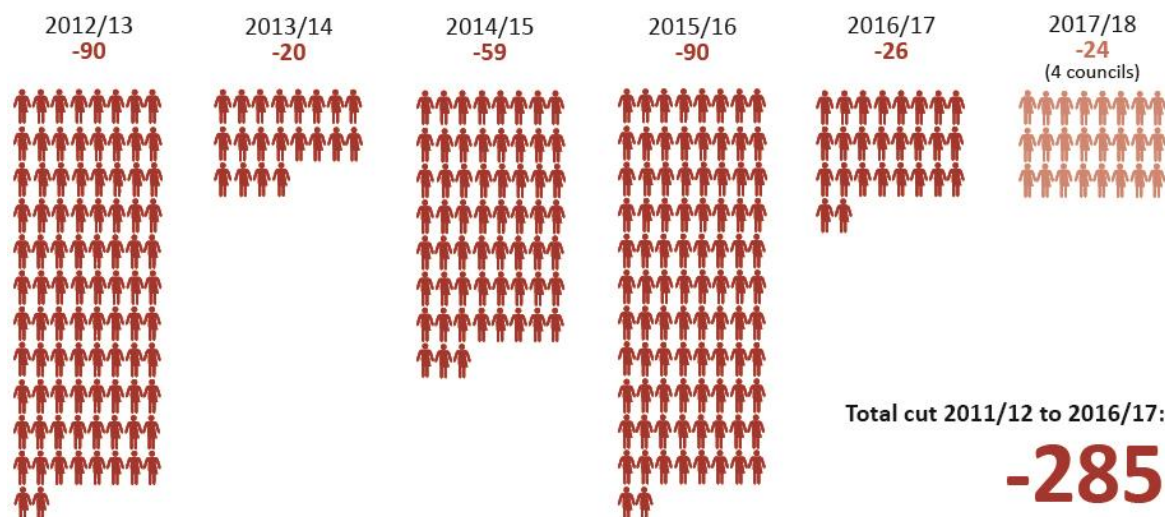


Data on places for young people in youth services were only available from five councils (Ealing, Enfield, Lambeth and the joint Richmond and Kingston service). In these areas, 12,700 places have been lost over five years because of service cuts.

Youth worker job losses

Councils revealed high numbers of job losses among youth workers. From 737 full-time equivalent youth service workers in 2011/12 among 20 councils, total employment fell to just 452 jobs by 2016/17 – a cut in staffing of nearly 40 per cent that mirrors the cut in funding.

Total youth service staff cuts each year from 2011/12 (FTE posts)



Reductions in council grants to voluntary sector youth services

I wanted to find out if cuts in council-run services had been mitigated by higher levels of support for youth work by the voluntary and community sector (VCS). Many councils were not able to supply information on these grants and programmes, and the only results received that allow a comparison over the five years of this research are shown in table 3.

For these councils, grants to support external youth work have been cut by a similar amount to council budgets since 2011/12 – on average 35 per cent. Only Haringey showed an increase in this time. In addition to this data, Redbridge council told me they had introduced a new scheme in 2016/17 with £180,000 of funding.

Table 3: Council support for voluntary sector youth services

Borough	2011/12	2016/17	% change 2011/12 to 2016/17
Bromley	£67,000	£0	-100%
Barking and Dagenham	£331,400	£41,400	-88%
Ealing	£43,000	£10,000	-77%
Bexley	£345,000	£175,000	-49%
Camden	£402,710	£342,612	-15%
Haringey	£235,294	£509,230	+116%
		Average:	-35%

For 2017/18, the boroughs of Bromley and Barking and Dagenham plan no changes, Haringey plans a funding cut of £92,000 (18 per cent) and Redbridge is expecting to increase its funding by 50 per cent.

The Mayor's support for youth services

Through MOPAC, the Mayor provides grants to a range of youth services, via the London Crime Prevention Fund (LCPF).

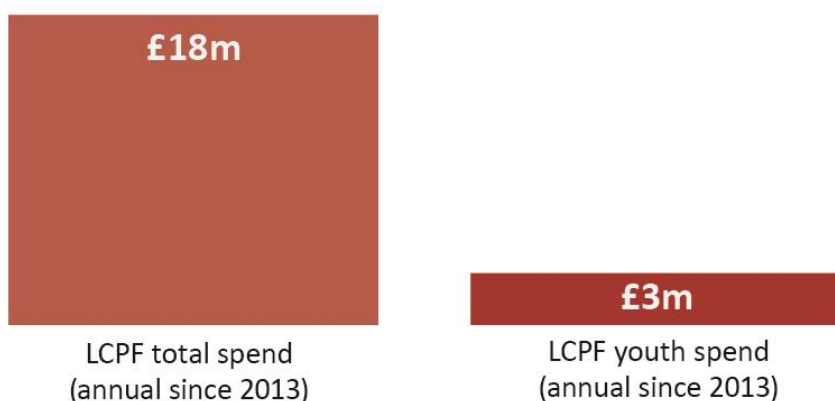
This fund began in 2013 with £72 million in total (£18 million per year) and boroughs were invited to put forward bids for up to four years of funding.

In contrast to local authority funding, the individual services supported by this fund have therefore not seen cuts since the fund started.

However, the Mayor recently told me that only £3 million of the annual LCPF funding is dedicated to projects for young people.⁶

The projects supported are also aimed mainly at those who are already in trouble, such as helping people exit gangs and addressing issues related to knife crime, as well as supporting victims.

London Crime Prevention Fund – support for youth services



Future plans for GLA funding

The LCPF has recently been renewed by the Mayor, and will provide a further £18 million per year to support crime prevention services over the next four years.

This static level of funding from the LCPF will do nothing to fill the growing gaps in general youth services across London, and will put at risk the goal of preventing youth crime.

In the City for all Londoners document the Mayor says:⁷

“My approach will involve a combination of prevention and enforcement – ensuring the right interventions are available to prevent vulnerable young people from being drawn into trouble to begin with.”

This is an important policy, but very difficult to achieve when London's borough councils cannot maintain exactly the kind of preventive, general youth services that enable young

people to spent time building connections, learning skills, being creative and enjoying a social life outside their homes while they grow into adulthood.

Help to mitigate this London-wide problem should be a key responsibility of the Mayor and MOPAC. This could be done through a simple expansion of the LCPF with new funding targeted at the kind of general youth centres and youth worker support that has been lost in recent years.



I visited Grove Park Youth Club on 13 January. This purpose-built 50-year-old facility was closed in 2013 by Lewisham Council as part of budget cuts. The local community has recently formed a charity aimed at taking over and reopening the club. More about the history of this youth centre and the campaign to save it can be found at: www.groveparkyouthclub.co.uk

What do you think?

My sincere thanks go to the borough council officers who have given me such large amounts of information and insight into the problems they are facing trying to fund youth services within strained budgets.

I would like to hear more from local boroughs and Londoners about how the Mayor and the GLA can help improve the situation, and would particularly like to hear from young people who are affected by reduced services.

Please get in touch with me if you have any comments or suggestions.

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This report sets out my views as an individual Assembly Member and not the agreed view of the entire Assembly

References

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⁷ A city for all Londoners. Mayor of London, October 2016

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