

Youth services and youth offending teams



Must knows Children

Key messages

Councils have a statutory duty to 'secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, equality of access for all young people to the positive, preventative and early help they need to improve their well-being', and to enable young people to lead their local offer. There are no longer separate inspections of local authority youth services.

Local government faces a huge challenge in providing youth services whilst absorbing budget reductions of around 40 per cent from 2010 to 2015. Local authorities have responded in different ways, such as looking into new delivery models (like mutuals), integrating youth services with other support for young people and their families, and by targeting limited resources on more vulnerable groups.

Despite councils' statutory duties and reductions in funding, government nationally funds programmes providing opportunities to young people over which councils have no formal influence, such as the National Citizen Service.

Local government also has a statutory duty to act 'in cooperation with partner agencies (who are under a duty to cooperate with the local authority), to establish for their area one or more youth offending teams (YOT)' with a responsibility for young people between 10 and 17 years old. Youth remand budgets are also devolved to councils, to focus on prevention and finding alternatives.

The locally led partnership approach that focuses on early intervention has been highly effective. The number of first time entrants into the youth justice system fell by 67 per cent between 2002/03 and 2012/13.

Youth policy

The Cabinet Office became the lead department responsible for youth services in 2013.

Before the transfer, the Department for Education published 'Positive for Youth', which confirmed the government's intention to retain the duty on local authorities to secure, as far as is practicable, sufficient services and activities to improve the wellbeing of young people (section 507B of the Education Act 2006).

The guidance suggests principles for councils in planning and commissioning services for young people, with flexibility to respond to local needs and priorities. The guidance promotes transparency and accountability, suggesting young people should be involved in making decisions about services and in judging the quality of provision.

The guidance links to related developments such as Raising the Participation Age, Health and Well-being Boards and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. Youth work methodology is increasingly being used in targeted programmes such as Troubled Families.

Measuring impact of youth services

As part of the policy ambition, an Outcomes Framework for Young People's Services was developed by the Young Foundation, in conjunction with various youth organisations and funded by the Department for Education.

The framework emphasised the significance of personal, emotional and social development and was aimed for use by the wider sector delivering youth services to benchmark and improve outcomes.

Youth services are often the first point of contact for identifying problems in young people early. However, the evidence base for outcomes in youth work is very limited, and outcomes for these services are notoriously difficult to measure.

The Cabinet Office provided start-up funding in 2014 for the Centre for Youth Impact (CYI). The initiative aims to help organisations that work with and for young people to measure and increase the impact of their services.

The Cabinet Office is currently developing an Outcomes Framework to support councils to measure and assess the outcomes delivered by youth services. It has also launched a Delivering Differently programme, inviting bids from councils wanting to explore new service delivery models.

National youth programmes

The National Citizen Service (NCS) is a three week residential programme open to all 16 and 17 year olds in England, originally launched in 2012 it is due to expand up to 2015 at an annual cost of £100 million (or £50 per hour volunteered by young people).

It runs in spring, summer and autumn across different areas in England. Participants develop a social action project to deal with a local issue they're passionate about, and spend 30 hours putting the project into action in their community. It also gives the young people involved the chance to spend a short time away from home on team building activities.

Many areas support the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme, and the work of the Princes Trust, both of which provide accredited experiences for young people which help to build skills for work and life, while taking on new challenges and adventures, and making new friends.

Youth offending and justice

Section 39 (1) of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 requires the co-operation of the named statutory partners to form a Youth Offending Team (YOT). There is a duty for named partners to cooperate in order to secure youth justice services appropriate to their area. These statutory partners are: the local authority, the police, the probation service and health.

To support the YOT, additional partners may also be recruited to the joint strategic effort to prevent offending by children and young people. There may be one or more teams in each area, or a team covering a number of local authorities.

Funding for YOTs is provided by councils and their partners, with additional grant funding from the Youth Justice Board which oversees YOT activity. Prevention funding has been transferred to police and crime commissioners, who are increasingly taking an interest in youth offending services.

There are three main aims for youth offending services:

- to reduce first time offenders
- to reduce repeat offending
- to reduce entrants to custody.

Youth Offending Services (YOS) must work closely with young people and families to identify and address risk factors, and encourage restorative justice and attention to the needs of victims of crime. YOS link closely with social care and education, aiming for positive diversion from crime and improving life opportunities through skills, routes to training and employment.

YOS are inspected by HMI Probation, and a programme of short screening inspections of initial referral, assessment and preparation of court reports is underway.

Youth Offending Services are proposed to be a part of the integrated inspection regime for children in need, looked after and care leavers, from 2015.

Young offenders who are remanded into custody are designated as 'looked after', and funding has been transferred to local government, to provide a further incentive to prevent problems escalating.

Finally, some councils have a significant number of young refugees or asylum seekers. If their claims are assessed as valid, they become looked after by the local authority.

This requires a close relationship with the Borders Agency to assess their needs and secure funding until they are 19 and a full assessment of their entitlement to remain or be deported.

The overall YOT model has been very successful. The number of first time entrants into the youth justice system, the number being proceeded against in magistrates' court and the number sentenced to immediate custody have all fallen by over 60 per cent in the last ten years. Importantly, the drop in numbers means YOTs are increasingly working with a smaller but harder to help group of young people.

Youth homelessness

Family relationships and breakdown can be a particular issue during adolescence, which may lead to homelessness or entry into the care system.

According to Homeless Link more than half of young people become homeless because of a relationship breakdown, mainly with their parents.

This group of young people faces a range of complex problems – more than 40 per cent are not in education, employment or training for example. Many organisations who support homeless young people suggest that there is not enough youth-specific emergency accommodation available in their local areas.

As a result of the complex needs of this group, children and young people's services need to work closely with housing colleagues to be clear about their respective responsibilities, and to agree a coordinated approach to youth homelessness.

The Fair Chance Fund is a £15 million payment by results scheme that was launched by the Department of Communities and Local Government and the Cabinet Office in February 2014.

The fund is a three year scheme aiming to improve accommodation and work outcomes for homeless young people in the 18 to 24 year old age group. Initial bidders to the scheme required local authority endorsement and plans for a robust referral mechanism between the council and the proposed provider.

Useful resources

Positive for Youth

www.gov.uk/government/publications/positive-for-youth-a-new-approach-to-cross-government-policy-for-young-people-aged-13-to-19

A framework of outcomes for young people

<http://youngfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Framework-of-outcomes-for-young-people-July-2012.pdf>

Revised guidance for local authorities on services for young people

www.gov.uk/government/collections/positive-for-youth

About the youth justice board- on the youth justice board website

www.justice.gov.uk/about/yjb

National Citizen Service

www.ncsyes.co.uk/

DfE Longitudinal study of 13-20 year olds from 2004 to 2010, and the Our Future study, following 13,000 young people in England from 13-20 from 2013 to 2019, with annual information updates.

www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/youngpeople/ourfuture

Homeless Link

www.homeless.org.uk/facts/our-research/young-and-homeless-research

YMCA

www.ymca.org.uk/policy

National Council for Voluntary Youth Services

www.ncvys.org.uk/

Modern Youth Offending Partnerships, Youth Justice Board, Ministry of Justice

www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/youth-justice/monitoring-performance/yot-management-board-guidance-consultation/youth-offending-partnerships-guidance.pdf?type=Finjan-Download&slot=00000019&id=00003818&location=0A640210

Barnardo's Beyond Care Councillor Guidance

www.barnardos.org.uk/beyond_care_councillor_guidance.pdf

The Fair Chance Fund

www.gov.uk/government/publications/fair-chance-fund-full-bid-specification-and-application



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