

# VOICES FROM THE FRONTLINE

THE FUTURE OF YOUTH SERVICES  
BY NORTHUMBRIA POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER

SEPTEMBER 2021



**NORTHUMBRIA  
POLICE & CRIME  
COMMISSIONER**

**violence  
reduction  
unit**

*Improving lives to prevent crime*



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# FOREWORD

By Kim McGuinness,  
Northumbria Police & Crime Commissioner

If we improve lives, we can prevent crime. That's the belief that guides my work as Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner. And that's a belief shared across our region by thousands of people who dedicate their lives to helping others.

In this report I have joined with many of those people to set out the scale of the challenge facing us and the solutions we need to see implemented as we seek to improve the lives of our young people, hand them access to opportunity and divert them away from criminality.

Ensuring all young people have an equally good start in life has never been easy. It needs strong public services and a third sector that is backed to deliver. There has probably never been a golden era of youth services, but there has certainly not been a tougher time for the sector in recent generations.

I'm proud to stand by Northumbria Police in their fight against crime. But if you ask any police officer, they will tell you the solution to crime cannot just be arrests and prison sentences. We need prevention, and we need everyone working together on that aim.

Yet even as the need for youth services, diversionary activity and strong role models increases, the resources become ever more scarce.

***After ten years of budget cuts, we hear in this report of young people in deprived neighbourhoods who have simply never heard of a youth centre. We must change that.***

If we are going to turn lives around we have to do so at the earliest opportunity. That's why this report sets out the steps needed to intervene in young lives before they're trapped in a cycle of hardship and crime.

I'll be taking these findings to government. If ministers are serious about levelling up the north, they need to remember that investing in people is the only way to achieve lasting change.

I look forward to working with people across our region on securing a better future for our young people.

**KIM MCGUINNESS**

NORTHUMBRIA POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A decade of austerity has led to local authority annual expenditure on youth services in England and Wales to drop by £1bn in real terms over the past decade. Youth services across England and Wales are struggling but the Northumbria police force area, comprising 6 local authorities, has been hit disproportionately hard, in particular the rural areas in Northumbria and elsewhere. There has been a 75% decrease in local authority spending on youth services in Northumbria since 2011.

In 2021, the Northumbria Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (NOPCC) conducted some research into the state of the youth services sector in Northumbria, following such hefty cuts to funding. 111 organisations responded to a survey and/or attended a 'launch' event to share their views on past, present and future concerns for their organisations. The findings of this research are concerning, painting a picture of youth services struggling to cope. This report sets out the key findings from the research, contextualised in the national picture of ongoing austerity measures.

In summary, we found that:

- **Funding:** 71% of the youth organisations who responded to our survey have seen their funding cut or reduced since 2011, with (largely rural) Northumberland being the hardest hit.
  - **Alternative funding streams:** The majority of organisations surveyed in Northumbria now rely on grants from alternative funders as their main source of income, as local authority funding has been cut so drastically. This is leading to competition within the sector, based on the ability to meet short-term outcomes which are not suitable for youth work.
  - **Staff:** Short-term funding grants are creating difficulties it creates in recruiting, and retaining, quality staff.
  - **Demand:** 57% of the Northumbria organisation we surveyed said that are supporting more young people than 5 years ago, despite most (29%) of those organisations being in a worse financial position, and having staffing issues.
  - **Mental health:** 78% of respondents to our survey told us that they are dealing with more young people displaying mental health concerns now than in 2011.
  - **County Lines:** Most organisations who responded to our survey told us that they are aware of young people in Northumbria who have fallen vulnerable to County Lines. 5 organisations told us that between 61-100% of the young people they engage have either been involved in, or are vulnerable to falling into County Lines.
  - **Covid-19:** The majority (70%) of Northumbria youth services who responded to our survey reported a reduction in services offered, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As we move out of lockdown restrictions, 68% of respondents to our survey stated that it is very likely that referrals and service demand will increase to support the additional vulnerability amongst young people. 40% stated that the main impact in the short to medium term would be financially – either caused by lack of income generation, the challenges around securing grant funding, or the additional costs incurred from operating during Covid.
  - **Future concerns:** 78% of respondents told us that they are concerned about securing future funding, with some stating that if funding is not secured in short term, the organisation will struggle to continue. 43 organisations are concerned about being able to recruit volunteers and maintain staff in the future. 64 organisations told us that they are concerned about meeting future service demand. 64 services are concerned about increased service user mental health concerns, particularly when many are struggling to stay financially afloat, and/or recruit/maintain staff and volunteers.
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We make the following recommendations:

1

The Government should **appoint a minister** who has a portfolio focussed on youth services.

2

Youth services should be backed with **urgent Government investment** in the next Comprehensive Spending Review. Funding should be provided in long-term settlements, to allow for proper embedding of services and the maintenance and development of staff and their relationships with young people.

3

The Government should devolve the funding and powers needed to **create localised youth strategies** in collaboration with young people themselves. These should clearly define the local minimum level of youth services young people can expect. This would make a real commitment to 'levelling up' across all areas of England and Wales.

4

The Government should make a long-term commitment to **Violence Reduction Units**, ensuring all Police and Crime Commissioners can play a role in supporting youth diversionary activity. These VRUs should be locally-led and able to reflect differing local priorities.

5

At a national level, the Government should develop a **workforce strategy** including expectations for the ratio of professional youth workers, trainees and volunteers, and the level of qualification they should hold. We refer Government to the National Youth Agency on this issue, who already set standards on the number of professional qualified youth workers each service should have. [1]. We further support the recommendation of the NYA who state that such a strategy should facilitate the recruitment, training and deployment of 10,000 FTE qualified youth workers, alongside current targets for 20,000 additional police officers.[2]

6

The Government, in collaboration with local authorities, frontline services and young people, should create a **Rural Action Plan**, setting out its intention to radically transform the provision of youth services in rural areas, which in some areas is largely non-existent. On this issue we echo the calls of the NYA.[3]

# INTRODUCTION

National Occupation Standards set out that the key purpose of youth work is to “enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential... This statement refers to the holistic development of young people, recognising that personal, social and educational development can also include, for example, physical, political and spiritual development”.<sup>[4]</sup>

Youth services support young people through adolescence, from ages 8 to 25, but are predominantly funded for young people aged 11 to 18 years of age. Youth work has “its own curriculum, pedagogy and professional practice supporting a broader base of trusted adult volunteers, working in community settings and across sectors to improve young people’s life chances and healthy choices”.<sup>[5]</sup> The benefits of youth services cannot be underestimated, providing young people with informal education, relationship(s) with trusted adult(s), life skills, diversionary activities, and more targeted support.

‘Youth work’ broadly encapsulates two types of service:

1. Open access, or ‘universal’ services, including a range of leisure, sporting and cultural activities which are accessible to all.
2. Targeted provision for vulnerable young people, including drug and alcohol misuse services and youth justice teams.

It is widely acknowledged that a combination of both types of service are required in every locality, in order to provide a holistic service for young people. Universal services allow youth workers to intervene early where issues arise for young people, and direct them to more targeted provision where necessary. However, there is consensus that this holistic role of youth work has been heavily eroded, due to the loss of many universal services; particularly detached services which go out into communities to reach ‘hard to reach’ young people. This is as a result of central and local Government funding cuts which have disproportionately impacted youth services.

The cost of late intervention has recently been estimated at £17bn per year in England and Wales,<sup>[6]</sup> but the impact of late intervention due to the absence of youth services goes beyond economic calculations.

This report analyses the findings of a survey of youth work professionals in the Northumbria police force area, and contextualises those findings in the current national picture. Funding for youth work has been cut year on year for over a decade. Services are on the brink of closure and young people are struggling to access the support they need, leading to more young people suffering mental health and wellbeing issues and becoming involved in criminality due to vulnerabilities which are not being addressed by appropriate services.

This report concludes with a plea to Government to reassess the current situation and save much-needed youth services from decimation, before it is too late. Recommendations are made throughout the report and summarised at the end.

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# OVERVIEW OF PROGRESS TO DATE

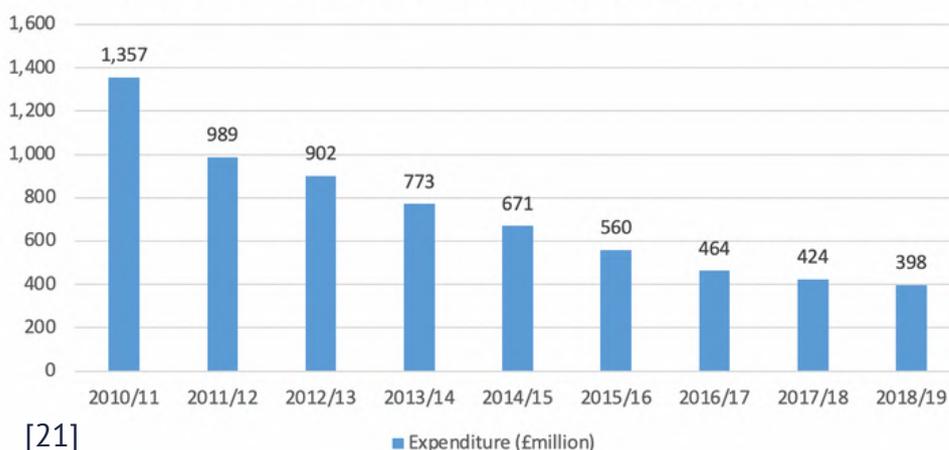
Within the UK, the relationship between central government, local authorities and youth work dates back to the 1940s, where youth work was politically supported as a means of helping young people through the disruption created by the Second World War.[7]

The £420m Connexions Service was established in 2001, with the aim of providing integrated support for young people between the ages of 13 and 19, 'improving the coherence' of what was currently being provided by organisations such as the Careers Service and the Youth Service.[8] Labour policies in the following years saw the responsibility for youth provision move away from central government towards local authorities, giving local authorities a considerable level of discretion in deciding how their Connexions Service was funded and delivered.[9] This was accompanied by ring-fenced funding which was distributed to local authorities through the Youth Opportunity Funds (YOF) and Youth Capital Funds (YCF) – the first capital funding for youth work in over 30 years.[10] The overall aim of these funds was 'to improve the provision of positive activities for young people, by giving young people the power to decide how this funding should be spent in their area'.[11]

However, as the Coalition government came to power in 2010, so did challenges for youth practitioners. The Positive for Youth policy paper[12] brought together all of the government's policies for young people aged 13-19, emphasising a new partnership approach between voluntary and community groups and local businesses as the partners now responsible for the provision of youth services. This policy document set out central government's intention 'to play down, if not actually write out, the state's direct role in providing or even funding' youth services,[13] packaging the Coalition government's economic withdrawal within the rhetoric of the 'Big Society'.[14] One year after the publication of the policy paper, local authority leads were confirming large budget reductions for youth services,[15] despite Government expectations that local authorities will continue to provide, and evidence, successful youth services, increasingly under 'payment-by-results' schemes[16]. This has put huge pressure on youth services, most of which are now funded by private funders through grants, rather than through local authorities who have less funding than ever to provide multiple services for their communities.

Without any ring-fenced funding for youth services and decreasing budgets for local authorities, public spending is "increasingly distributed towards statutory areas that focus on safeguarding risk or short-term interventions targeted at vulnerable groups",[17] rather than youth services, particularly universal youth services which provide opportunities for early intervention.

Table 1: Total annual expenditure (£million) in real terms by local authorities in England on services for young people.



Local authority annual expenditure on youth services in England and Wales has dropped by £1bn in real terms over the past decade[18] - a reduction of 73%.[19] It is estimated that for every £16 cut on local services, £1 falls on youth work.[20] Since 2012, over 750 youth centres have closed.

# STATUTORY RESPONSIBILITIES OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO PROVIDE YOUTH SERVICES

Whilst there exists a statutory duty on local authorities to provide youth services, it essentially provides an empty promise. It states:

**507B**  
**(1) A local authority in England must, so far as reasonably practicable, secure for qualifying young persons in the authority's area access to –**

- **Sufficient educational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of their well-being, and sufficient facilities for such activities, and**
- **Sufficient recreational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of their well-being, and sufficient facilities for such activities.**[22]

'Qualifying young persons' are those aged 13–19, and up to 24 for young people with a learning difficulty or particular disabilities. In revised statutory guidance introduced in 2012 (and not since reviewed) the Act also placed new responsibilities on local authorities to ascertain young people's views on positive activities, publicise positive activities, and consider alternative providers.[23]

There are several issues with this statutory duty and its accompanying guidance:

1. There is no indication as to what constitutes a 'sufficient' level of activities.
2. Providing a 'sufficient level' of activity is qualified by 'so far as reasonably practicable'.
3. There is no regard for the quality of provision provided, only the quantity.
4. There is no ring-fenced funding to support the fulfilment of this statutory duty.

Coupled with significant cuts to local authority budgets, this statutory duty reads more like a 'get out' clause[24], which has led to some local authorities considering that their statutory responsibilities to provide youth services are fulfilled by 'alternative' providers who can be deemed to be providing a 'sufficient' level of provision, leaving them free to focus on other areas that need funding from increasingly shrinking budgets.[25] This has led to a postcode lottery, with huge variations in the level of services young people can access across England and Wales and no accountability or strategy to ensure an appropriate offer of youth services nationally.

# CURRENT SITUATION

Whilst Government have signified their intention to review the statutory duty on local authorities and accompanying guidance, their initial consultation closed in October 2019 and results are yet to be shared, let alone any action taken.

Meanwhile:

- **95% of central government spending on youth services goes to the National Citizen Service, [26]** rather than on ensuring adequate universal and targeted youth provision across all localities. Whilst the NCS programme provides some benefit to some young people, the APPG on Youth Affairs recently recognised that “it is not providing ‘sufficient’ services, cannot replace wider youth services and exemplifies the shift towards short-term, targeted interventions, especially in terms of reach, value for money and time spent with participants”. [27] The programme is unable to provide the long-term, trusted relationships that local services can. Spend per head is estimated to be £1,863 for every participant who completes the NCS programme, [28] compared to around £62 per head spent on youth services in urban areas (a decrease from £154/head in 2011). [29]
- **Young people in rural areas are disproportionately impacted by cuts to youth provision.** Whilst average net expenditure on youth services is currently £62 per head in urban areas, in rural areas it is £47 per head (a decrease from £108/head in 2011). For open access services, this figure plummets to just £16 per head. [30] Rural areas have a wide catchment area and fewer public transport links, making universal services the most appropriate service to ensure more young people receive some support, however, as in urban areas, universal services are impacted more heavily than targeted services by budget cuts. [31] The NYA recently found that despite England's 10,000 village halls being at the heart of rural communities, “in the year up to April 2020 over one third of village halls had reduced their youth work offer”. [32] Many local parishes are attempting to pick up the slack and many rural youth services rely on local volunteers, [33] however volunteers do not have the qualifications, experience and knowledge that qualified youth workers do (as explored later in this report), meaning that young people are missing out on the expertise they deserve.
- **Youth services increasingly rely on short term funding grants which require evidence of short-term outcomes.** [34] This is uncharacteristic of youth work, which demonstrates its utility and benefits in the long-term through providing a trusted adult, informal education and diversionary activities, preventing young people falling into criminality or exploitative situations. These short-term funding cycles also lead to huge administrative burdens on staff, to the detriment of service delivery.
- **There is a shift to fund more targeted youth provision rather than universal provision.** This has led to there being “little opportunity for some young people to work through their ‘issues and challenges’ with a youth worker, before their difficulties worsen or become entrenched. The shift towards targeted services was seen as both a cause and a consequence of the loss of central funding streams. Funding streams increasingly pursue short-term outcomes against narrow targets, suggesting an iterative and self-vindicating cycle”. [35]
- **The voluntary and community sectors are increasingly filling the gaps** [36] left by cuts to local authority budgets, leading to a largely voluntary-run sector and patchy local provision, as well as regional variation.
- **Staff recruitment and retention are becoming increasingly difficult** as funding cannot be guaranteed beyond short-term cycles, and money for qualifications and CPD is scarce. Since 2008 14,500 youth and community worker jobs have been lost. [37]

# METHODOLOGY

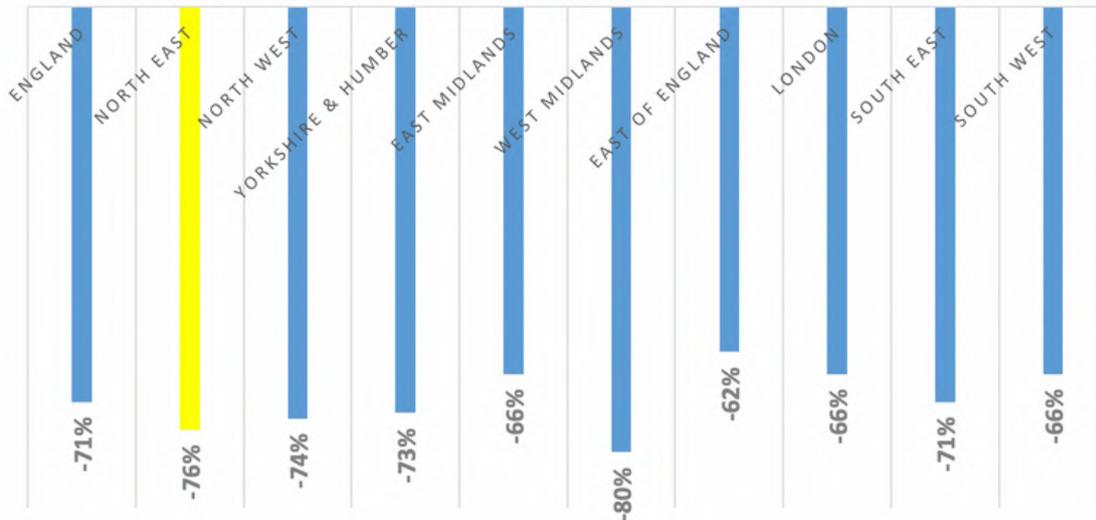
The Northumbria Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (NOPCC) conducted a survey to seek the views of youth work organisations across Northumbria on topics such as funding cuts, staffing levels and other issues. The survey was open and shared with the youth sector between 1st July to 30th July 2021. 99 different organisations responded to the survey. Questions asked can be found at Appendix 1.

In addition, NOPCC held an online 'survey launch event' on Wednesday 7th July 2021. 12 representatives attended from 11 different youth work organisations to discuss past, present and future challenges facing the sector. Quotes from these participants are included throughout the report, along with survey data.

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# 1. FUNDING CONCERNS & CUTS

**TABLE 2: PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN EXPENDITURE BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN ENGLAND ON SERVICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE BETWEEN 2010/11 AND 2018/19 BY REGION**



[38]

Whilst austerity and budget cuts have been felt by local authorities across England, Wales and beyond, the North East has been hit second hardest of all, behind the West Midlands. Local authorities in the North East cut spending by 76% between 2010/11 and 2018/19.

We spoke to youth organisations operating across the Northumbria police force area who told us about the real-life impact of funding cuts. Key findings are set out below.

As set out in earlier, funding for youth services all over the country has been slashed in the past decade. The picture in Northumbria is no different. 71% of the youth organisations who responded to our survey have seen their funding cut or reduced since 2011, with Northumberland being the hardest hit (Table 3).

**Table 3: % of youth organisations in each Local Authority who stated that they had funding cut/decreased since 2011.**

<b>Gateshead</b> 72%	<b>Newcastle</b> 75%	<b>N.Tyneside</b> 66%	<b>Northumberland</b> 85%	<b>S.Tyneside</b> 75%	<b>Sunderland</b> 66%
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One organisation told us that they no longer receive any central or local government funding. Another stated that “we had a 100% cut [to funding] in 2014”.

This is a concerning picture, which is made even more stark when supported by data reported by local authorities. Table 4 shows the amount of funding spent on youth services by each local authority area, and within Northumbria as a whole force area, between 2010/1 and 2019/20. In that period, Northumbria has seen a 75% cut in local authority spending on youth services – over £31 million – higher than the average cuts to services across England of 73%[39]. Gateshead local authority area alone has seen 96% less investment in youth services, equating to a loss of almost £7 million.

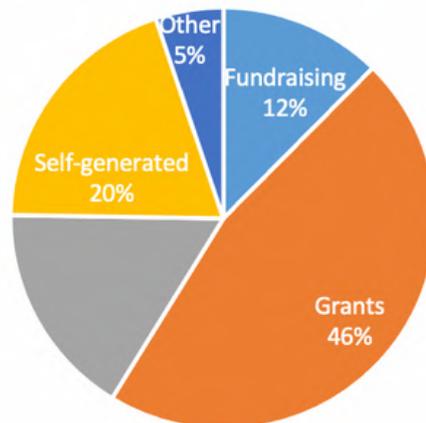
Table 4 showing Total Expenditure on services for young people in Northumbria between 2014-15 and 2019-20 (per local authority area) <sup>40</sup>								
Total services for young people expenditure (£)								
	Gateshead	Newcastle	North Tyneside	Northumbria	South Tyneside	Sunderland	Northumbria	England
2010-11	6,958,000	8,016,000	4,082,000	6,692,000	4,215,000	12,196,000	42,159,000	1,184,122,000
2011-12	5,207,000	4,274,000	2,825,000	5,671,000	3,485,000	7,386,000	28,848,000	876,608,000
2012-13	5,162,000	4,631,000	3,090,000	5,780,000	2,244,000	6,945,000	27,852,000	815,910,000
2013-14	5,087,000	3,644,000	3,051,000	2,673,000	1,679,000	5,896,000	22,030,000	712,771,000
2014-15	5,981,000	3,235,000	1,966,000	2,092,000	2,867,000	4,581,000	20,722,000	627,070,000
2015-16	3,426,000	2,243,000	1,614,000	2,944,000	2,975,000	4,494,000	17,696,000	527,980,000
2016-17	2,308,000	1,474,000	1,321,000	2,319,000	2,487,000	4,487,000	14,396,000	447,530,000
2017-18	2,077,000	1,285,000	1,255,000	2,329,000	2,523,000	3,398,000	12,867,000	415,930,000
2018-19	264,000	1,488,000	1,422,000	2,668,000	2,480,000	2,685,000	11,007,000	397,920,000
2019-20	260,000	1,594,000	1,426,000	2,121,000	2,575,000	2,661,000	10,637,000	372,120,000
% change from 2010-11 to 2019-20	-96%	-80%	-65%	-68%	-39%	-78%	-75%	-69%
£ change from 2010-11 to 2019-20	-£ 6,698,000.00	-£6,422,000	-£ 2,656,000	-£ 4,571,000	-£ 1,640,000	-£ 9,535,000	-£ 31,522,000	-£ 812,002,000

These funding cuts are not made through the choice of local authorities themselves. But with Conservative austerity policies meaning that local authorities are handed less and less money each year, tough choices must be made. As set out on page 8, legislation exists which places a statutory duty on local authorities to provide sufficient youth services, but only ‘so far as reasonably practicable’.[41] In the context of extreme cuts to local authority budgets, it is clear that only a minimal level of youth service provision is practicable for many local authorities who have competing funding demands to prioritise. Recent analysis shows that “in the long term, overall spending on young people has remained largely constant, but has been redistributed in favour of protected statutory services. Education spending has largely been protected, whilst within children’s services increased demand for spending on looked after children has come at the cost of big reductions in spending on non-statutory services for families with young children and programmes for young people”.[42]

# 1. ALTERNATIVES TO CENTRAL/LOCAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Due to the cuts made to local authority funding by central government, the voluntary sector has stepped in to fill the gaps left[43]. Most youth services must now rely on alternative funding streams to survive. The majority of organisations surveyed in Northumbria now rely on grants from alternative funders as their main source of income (Table 5).

**Table 5: Survey respondents' answers to 'What is your organisation's main source of income?'**



Respondents to the survey told us:

*"We fundraise for every penny that comes into the charity".*

*"All our funding, with the exception of a grant from the PCC's VRU [Violence Reduction Unit] in 2020, has been donations from charitable trusts and foundations and some private donations via our online fundraising page".*

Whilst it is a source of relief to some to know that youth services are continuing to operate via alternative funding streams, this shift in funding model has not led many organisations to be in a better financial position.

**Table 6: Survey respondents' answers to the question of how their financial position has changed since 2011.**

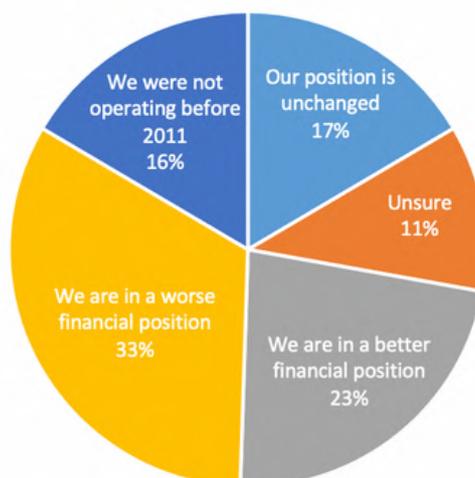


Table 6 shows that 53% of survey respondents stated that they are in a worse financial position since 2011. Of those that stated they are in a better financial position, the majority (59%) of organisations reported their main source of income came from grants. However, these organisations have highlighted that the shift to a largely grant funded financial model has not occurred without causing its own issues.

Youth organisations in Northumbria highlighted 3 key issues with relying on grants:

### Competition within the youth sector based on short-indicators

With youth services now relying more heavily on charitable grants, services are competing against each other for funding from the same providers. One survey respondent told us:

*“Grant funding is now much harder to generate. This has created division within the voluntary sector”.*

This sentiment was echoed by many organisations across Northumbria. Another organisation told us that since local authorities all but stopped funding youth services, “competition has increased between local organisations, which has driven organisations from being there for the needs of people, to being able to hit targets and high numbers”. With many funders now prioritising organisations who can deliver the most intervention to the greatest number of recipients, there is a concern that the needs of young people are no longer the main focus. As one organisation stated:

*“We are in survival mode, not development mode currently. I worry about it being a political agenda, not focusing on the needs of young people”.*

By its very nature, youth work does not usually provide instant results that can be recorded on a quarterly or annual monitoring return, and short-term indicators cannot easily measure the impact of quality youth work. Youth work brings about a long-term impact on young people. The Audit Commission report into the benefits of sport and leisure activities in preventing anti-social behaviour by young people estimates that a young person in the criminal justice system costs the taxpayer over £200,000 by the age of 16. But one who is given support to stay out costs less than £50,000.[44] As set out by Unison: “it is difficult to measure social and personal development, empowerment, confidence and resilience. In addition, youth work operates in a multi-agency setting – isolating the impact of a simple intervention ignores the fact that there might be several influences. The best measure is the fact that the young person wants to access the service and engage”[45].

As one organisation in Northumbria told us:

*“It is hard to measure success as doesn’t happen until 10-15 years later”.*

Youth services then, are left with the impossible task of competing against many other organisations for funding, all of whom are expected to demonstrate how they will impact on as many young people as possible in a short space of time, whilst also delivering interventions that are meaningful to the young people they are there to serve. This has led to organisations across England and Wales feeling trapped by what they are able to offer. The APPG on Youth Affairs found that “increasing reliance on short-term funding streams has caused a shift to short-term and targeted interventions. This is one of the main reasons why respondents feel that youth work is no longer able to properly address young people’s issues and challenges over sufficient periods”.[46] Indeed, one organisation in Northumbria told us:

*“Previously we had a lot more freedom to try new things, see what works and what young people would like - now it’s a lot more prescribed and we have less freedom”.*

### Administrative burdens

Grants are usually made on annual funding cycles. Not only does this leave little time to show any impact, it also places a huge administrative burden on organisations, most of whom must rely on more than one funder to obtain enough monies to meet their delivery costs. Each funder requires its own bids, monitoring returns and outcomes. Organisations in Northumbria told us:

*"My team aren't working with anyone who has one core significant funder - they are all small spread out pots".*

*"We have gone from [having] 8 funders pre-2010 to 30 different funders in 2021 - all requiring separate reports, returns, targets etc. [We do] more paperwork than delivery".*

*"Youth work was previously commissioned by the local Council without having to worry about writing bids, writing reports, targets etc."*

*"Balancing funding/development vs actual delivery that funding allows, is very difficult".*

However, most funders will not fund the 'back office' administrative work that goes into securing grants and monitoring returns. Organisations are expected to cover this themselves. In addition, we were told that services are increasingly funded only for delivering interventions, not the development and planning that is required to deliver. One organisation told us:

*"Funding isn't there to cover development and planning time - people will fund the 2hrs per night per staff [only and this is] not enough to do it properly".*

### Staffing issues

A further impact of short-term funding grants is the difficulties it creates in recruiting, and retaining, quality staff. Organisations told us:

*"The hardest thing is maintain consistent funding to maintain quality youth workers".*

*"Youth workers have to do 3 or 4 jobs to keep themselves afloat".*

*"It is difficult to keep good quality youth workers in Newcastle - developing their skills, providing continuous CPD, not losing them to other industries".*

*"We struggle to make youth workers feel safe, value and supported".*

Several organisations told us that there are many vacant youth work positions in the North East, but these are not getting filled due to low pay, short term and insecure funding contracts, pressure to meet targets from external funders, unsociable hours etc. Many organisations also told us that the nature of youth work has also changed, due to increasing and differing needs of the young people they service (see further discussion on page 17), which puts people off accepting these low paid roles. Further, due to the nature of funding grants, there is rarely any money spare to be invested in workers' development through qualifications and courses.

These issues are not exclusive to Northumbria. Previous research has found that youth work managers nationally are struggling to "develop professionally capable staff teams on shoestring budgets".[47] Whilst the NYA sets out best practice guidance on the number of youth workers each organisation should have, and to what level they should be qualified,[48] Unison members report that they are having to reduce the number of valuable JNC qualified youth workers their organisations employ in order to save money.[49] Youth workers roles are demanding and require intricate knowledge of safeguarding issues, as well as how to develop trusted relationships with various communities of young people. However, funding is rarely available for development of staff, and organisations are increasingly relying on volunteers without the relevant qualifications.

As found by Mason in previous research: “for private investors the value of funding youth services lay in its potential to evidence their social, philanthropic activity. This require[s] particular outcomes, such as attendance figures or emotive photographs, which staff training sessions could not deliver”.

Even where cheaper, in-house training alternatives can be found, there is a lack of incentive for staff and volunteers to attend, as funding rarely covers staff pay for these additional hours, and volunteers struggle to free up the additional time. Coupled with the increasingly common perception of youth work as a financially unsuitable career choice[50], the inclination of staff and volunteers to attend training courses is reduced yet further, suggesting that “the challenges facing youth work managers, in terms of staff development and retention...are likely to be associated with the diminishing professional status of youth work, imposed by the dissolution of sustainable funding opportunities”.[51]

THE VIEW FROM NORTHUMBRIA

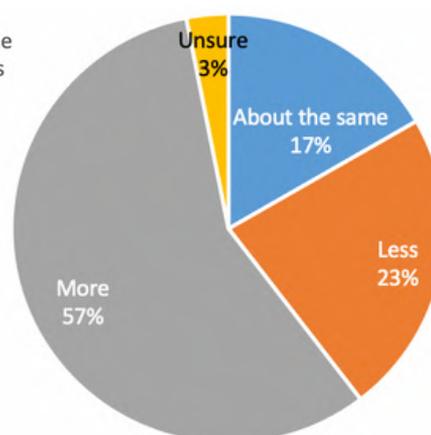
## 2. THE CHANGING NATURE OF YOUTH WORK

In addition to the challenges set out above around funding, staffing and administrative burdens, many organisations report that the nature of youth work itself is being forced to change to accommodate the increasingly complex and varied needs of young people, as well as an increased numbers of referrals.

We asked youth work organisations in Northumbria whether they are supporting more or less young people now than 5 years ago. 57% said more (Table 7), despite most (29%) of those organisations being in a worse financial position, and having staffing issues. One organisation told us:

*“Our demand exceeds our capacity but we continually think creatively about how to respond to young people’s needs and requests”.*

Table 7: Survey respondents’ answer to the question ‘are you supporting more or less young people now than 5 years ago?’



Many organisations told us that they are seeing more young people due to less provision being available elsewhere, for example mental and sexual health services. Organisations told us:

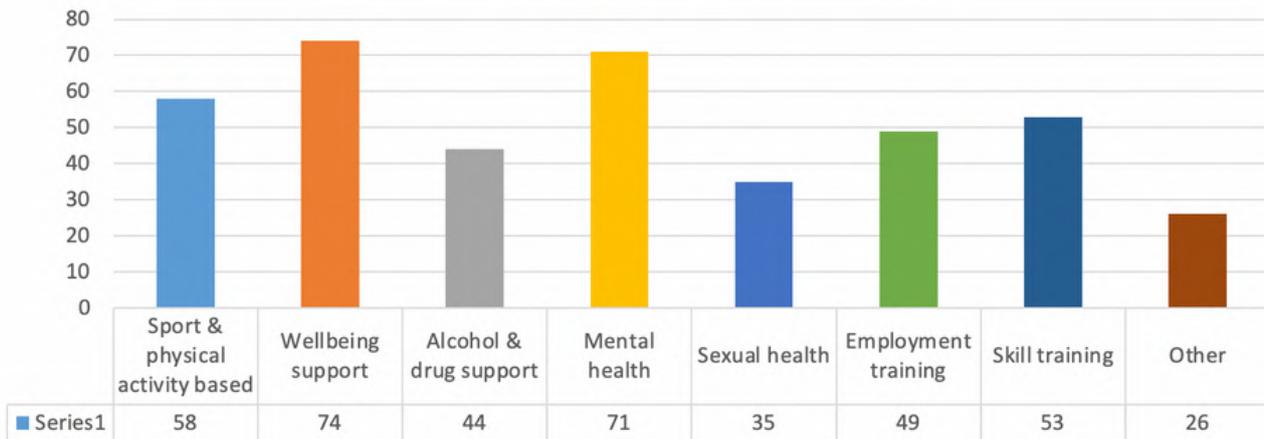
*“The demand for our type of support for young people has increased, partly because of gaps in service and mostly because of lack of trust in the services by young people”.*

*“People go to their GP when they have issues but they only have 7 minutes to discuss, refer and support”.*

*“Schools are doing a great job, but they aren’t mental health / sexual health workers”*

Increasingly, youth work organisations are stepping outside of their traditional remit to offer a myriad of services to young people, including support around mental health, drugs and alcohol and sexual health. Young people need support and education on all of these issues, but it is increasingly becoming the job of youth workers wearing several hats to provide all of it, with ever decreasing funding. Table 8 shows the range of services provided by youth organisations across Northumbria, all of which are seen as necessary to address young people’s vulnerabilities.

Table 8: Survey respondents' answers to the question 'thinking of both the services you deliver, and others across the region, which do you feel have the biggest impact on reducing vulnerability and supporting young people?'



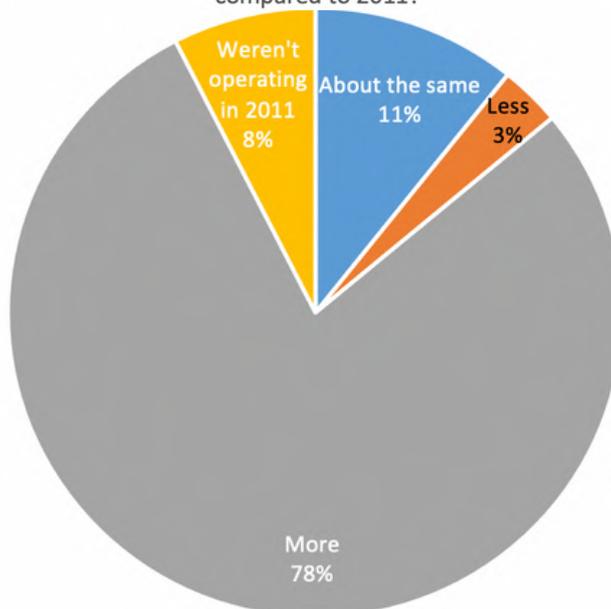
*“We are trying to cover all the bases with very little support”*

**MENTAL HEALTH**

In particular, youth services told us that they are increasingly being required to provide support to young people with increasingly complex mental health issues. 78% of respondents to our survey (73 organisations) told us that they are dealing with more young people displaying mental health concerns now than in 2011 (Table 9). Of these 73 organisations:

- 75% have seen their central/local Government funding cut/decreased
- 45% have seen their staffing levels decreased since 2011
- 41% report being in a worse financial position than in 2011

Table 9: Survey respondents' answers to the question 'Are you dealing with more or less young people displaying mental health concerns now than compared to 2011?'



Organisations told us:

*"[The] majority of our referrals have anxiety and emotional well-being [issues] underpinning their current circumstances"*

*"We are already dealing with young people on huge waiting lists for mental health services and find ourselves more and more becoming counsellors for young people who are really struggling"*

*"There is a lack of community, youth...and supportive work, we've got [many young people with] long term embedded complex issues often waiting 12 to 18 months to see someone about their mental health issues. It is community organisations holding and looking after these people, who don't have the skills".*

*"There is a mental health crisis happening, with very few trained counselling staff".*

These concerns are echoed across the country. For example, the APPG on Youth Affairs found that "rather than acting as early identifiers of young people's 'issues and challenges' through a comprehensive provision of universal youth work, youth workers now more often start from a position of late intervention on more acute issues. This is a problem compounded by their not having an established relationship with the young people in question, impacting negatively upon the efficacy of youth work...As a result of the shift towards targeted interventions, the current levels of 'early' and 'preventative' services are insufficient...compounding this lack of early and preventative youth services were increasingly high 'thresholds' which prevented some from engaging with specialist services due to not having a high enough 'need', leaving some vulnerable young people with little or no support".[52]

Youth workers are not trained mental health practitioners, but are increasingly holding young people who require such support. Not only are there barriers to accessing appropriate mental health services, such as lengthy waiting lists and higher thresholds for access to support services (one organisation told us that young people have to say that they have attempted suicide to get the help they need), but youth services also report that some young people do not trust mental health and other formal services. One organisation told us:

*"Many [young people] would not access [these] services as they often do not trust agencies...Neighbourhood-based youth work builds that trust and can feed young people into other services".*

This highlights the crucial place of youth workers in the lives of young people, as trusted adults. However, it is concerning that rather than these trusted youth workers signposting young people into appropriate mental health services, the workers themselves are having to provide the support, without the appropriate qualifications. Not only does this impact on young people who are lacking appropriate support, but the youth work profession itself. As set out above, youth services told us that it is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit and retain youth workers. This is exacerbated further by the changing role of youth workers. Organisations told us:

*"Youth work positions are not getting filled, [due to] low pay, it not being a nice job... there are so many hats to fill"*

*"It's not attractive to be a youth worker now - it's not just youth work, it's mental health, homelessness, trusted adult etc."*

# 3. THE IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLE

Youth workers are the most trusted adults in some young people’s lives, likely due to the relationships that youth workers aim to build with young people over an extended period of time. Yet funding for youth work is being decimated, without any acknowledgment of the importance of this constant, trusted adult in a young person’s life. Youth work can build young people’s resilience and social skills, which are key to preventing young people falling victim to crime, or coercive and controlling behaviours, or becoming involved in criminality themselves. Perhaps not coincidentally, youth organisations report an increase in young people being exploited, or becoming involved in criminality, in the past decade. One organisation told us:

*"Since 2009, the needs of young people has drastically changed - a lot more is online; 11-12yrs being exploited for County Lines. A massive increase."*

With less investment into youth services, and lengthy waiting lists for mental health and other forms of support, it is not surprising that young people are not receiving the support they need until it is too late, if at all.

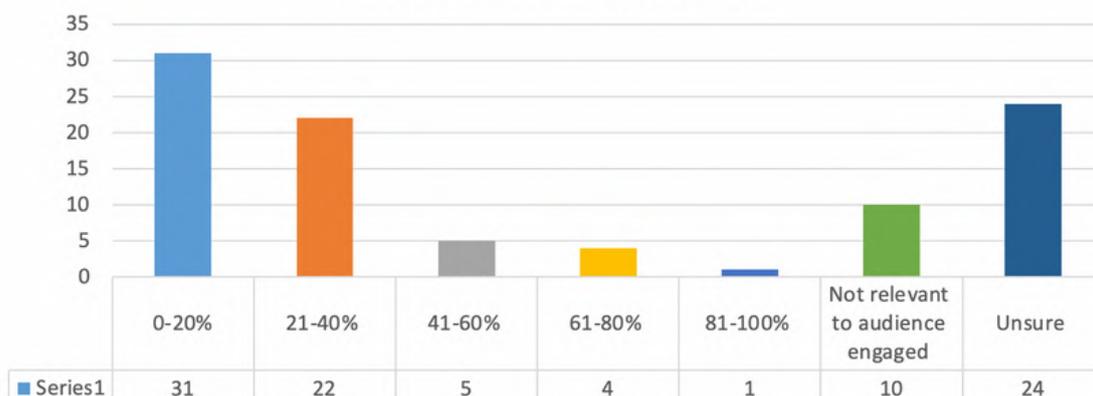
## COUNTY LINES & INVOLVEMENT IN CRIMINALITY

The National Crime Agency define County Lines as “where illegal drugs are transported from one area to another, often across police and local authority boundaries (although not exclusively), usually by children or vulnerable people who are coerced into it by gangs. The ‘County Line’ is the mobile phone line used to take the orders of drugs. Importing areas (areas where the drugs are taken to) are reporting increased levels of violence and weapons-related crimes as a result of this trend”.<sup>[53]</sup>

National research has found that over 27,000 young people are involved in over 2,000 County Lines across the UK, with a further 450,000 young people at risk of becoming involved.<sup>[54]</sup> Despite successful police efforts to shut down County Lines, gangs are becoming more sophisticated and adapting to avoid police detection, targeting young people through social media in both urban and rural areas, from all socioeconomic backgrounds.

Most organisations who responded to our survey told us that they are aware of young people in Northumbria who have fallen vulnerable to County Lines (Table 10).

Table 10: Survey respondents' answers to the question 'Of the young people that you engage, what percentage have either been involved in, or are vulnerable to falling into County Lines?'



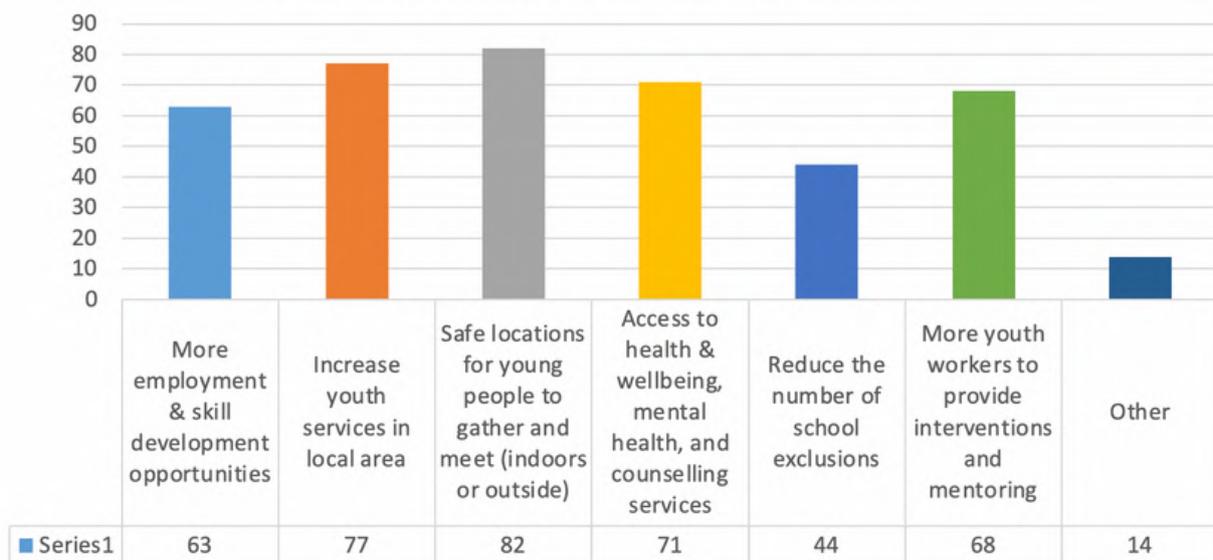
We asked Northumbria youth organisations how young people who are involved/at risk of becoming involved in crime can be best supported (Table 11). In summary:

- 82% of respondents believe safe locations for young people to gather and meet would help prevent those involved from falling into a life of crime
- 77% stated that there needs to be an increase in youth services in their local area
- 71% stated that access to health and wellbeing, mental health and counselling services would help prevent young people from falling into a life of crime
- 68% said that more youth workers are needed to provide interventions and mentoring
- 63% said that more employment and skill development opportunities were required to prevent youth criminality
- A lot of respondents also felt that all of these options were important in developing and supporting young people, but there was need for a greater quantity and quality of these services to be provided

National research supports these findings. Youth services provide a safe space for young people, as well as diversionary activities to steer young people away from criminality. “Outreach and street-based youth workers know their area, and are known and trusted by the young people in them. They are well placed to identify early and support young people at risk from county lines. Yet there is a distinct lack of adequate youth provision in many county towns and rural areas. There is little or no co-ordination between youth services across county borders”.[55]

Violence Reduction Units (VRUs), such as the one run by the NOPCC, provide meaningful youth engagement to deter young people from involvement in County Lines, however there is a need for an increase in open access youth services in particular, as well as “cross-boundary cooperation between youth services, through VRUs working with local authorities. This includes building the capacity and up-skilling of youth and community groups, including outreach across county towns and rural areas, working with young people ‘where they’re at’...youth services must be embedded in a public health approach for County Lines, not simply a policing or social care response”,[56] to be truly effective in the fight against the criminal exploitation of young people.

Table 11: Survey respondents' answers to the question 'How do you think we could better support those young people you are engaging who are either involved in, or at risk of falling into a life of crime?'



## INVOLVEMENT IN OTHER FORMS OF ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION

As well as involvement in County Lines, organisations told us:

*“The young women we work with are more at risk from domestic abuse and sexual harassment and assault in their intimate relationships or families than County Lines”.*

*“Of our current cohort we support members of the LGBTQ community and young people who go missing from home, care or education - we know these cohorts are additionally vulnerable to child exploitation”.*

With less youth provision available to young people, there is less diversion into safe activities, and less opportunity to educate young people and improve their resilience and knowledge on topics such as healthy relationships and drugs and alcohol. This naturally leads to more young victims falling under the radar. As one organisation told us:

*“[There is a] lack of opportunity...no specific young person space, no specific service in operation. No access to informal education apart from online...a lack of social groups, lack of innovation, creative and sporting opportunities. [This has led to an] Increased use of drugs [and] alcohol, CSE, County Lines anti-social behaviour and knife crime”.*

## THE VIEW FROM NORTHUMBRIA

# 4. THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

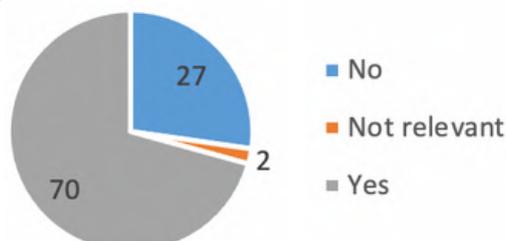
As is the experience in most sectors, the restrictions imposed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic have exacerbated existing issues for young people and the youth work sector, making the current situation even more urgent. In the national lockdown in March 2020, many youth clubs and services closed or moved online. Eventually, youth services were recognised as essential services and were able to begin operations again as of September 2020, but by that point over one million young people had fell off the radar of services that were previously supporting them.[57]

As a result of the pandemic, youth services in Northumbria reported a reduction in service provision, loss of funding, increased demand from young people, increased vulnerability of young people, an impact on staff wellbeing and withdrawal of some service users.

## REDUCTION IN SERVICE PROVISION

The majority of Northumbria youth services who responded to our survey reported a reduction in services offered, due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Table 12).

Table 12: Survey respondents' answers to the question 'Due to challenges faced during the Covid pandemic, did you have to reduce services?'



Whilst some organisations were able to continue pre-Covid service levels, for example through moving to online work, most were unable to and were forced to reduce service provision. This led to many young people missing out on the support usually provided by youth services, and the opportunities that involvement with such services bring. Some young people, as result, ‘fell under the radar’, leading to concerns about their welfare throughout the Covid-19 lockdown period. Organisations told us:

*“We tried to [deliver]...remotely but didn't attract those most in need”.*

*“Extroverts really struggled during Covid - going to ground instead [making them] vulnerable to exploitation - didn't have that opportunity to mix in with people...”*

*“200-300 young people did not return to projects that were previously regulars...[we are] conducting an exercise to find out where they are”.*

*“Young people felt invisible during pandemic...went into survival mode...lack of connection...schools not checking in with them, young people's groups not taking place...”*

Another organisation, in recognition of the lack of support available to young people throughout the Covid-19 lockdown periods, told us that: “Youth workers had to step in during pandemic to provide support to young people that should have been receiving from professionals – [they] had nowhere else to go” – highlighting the importance of youth workers in young peoples' lives.

At least one organisation expressed frustration at the way the Government eventually began to ease lockdown restrictions, stating:

*“Pubs reopened before mental health and youth services – [people continually asked us] when are you reopening?”*

## **DIGITAL INCLUSION**

The Covid-19 pandemic made stark the existing digital inclusion issues faced by many young people. It is often assumed that young people will most easily be able to access online services, as they have a better understanding of technology, having grown up using it. However, for many, and especially those in rural areas, access to IT is an issue.

National research found that “in England, 11% of rural premises have no access to decent broadband and 26% have no access to ‘superfast’ broadband (compared to 1% and 3% respectively for urban areas). A good 4G data service is available to only 41% of rural premises, half that of their urban counterparts (83%)...This lack of connectivity is both a social disadvantage and an obstacle to developing services that may be able to cope with periods of social distancing measures or lockdown as well as improving accessibility across geographically dispersed areas”.[58] It is not surprising then that many youth services lost touch with many young people during the period of national lockdown, leading to concerns about their welfare.

Organisations in Northumbria also highlighted the issues young people from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds have in accessing technology:

*“Some households had one computer that was being used by someone else or had the computers/digital units but not the data”*

*“Due to low income homes often young people do not have access to the internet”*

“Most of our service users live in poverty so have barriers to affordability of equipment, their parents often don't have the capacity or will to help them”

“We identified 105 young people and families with no device in their house”

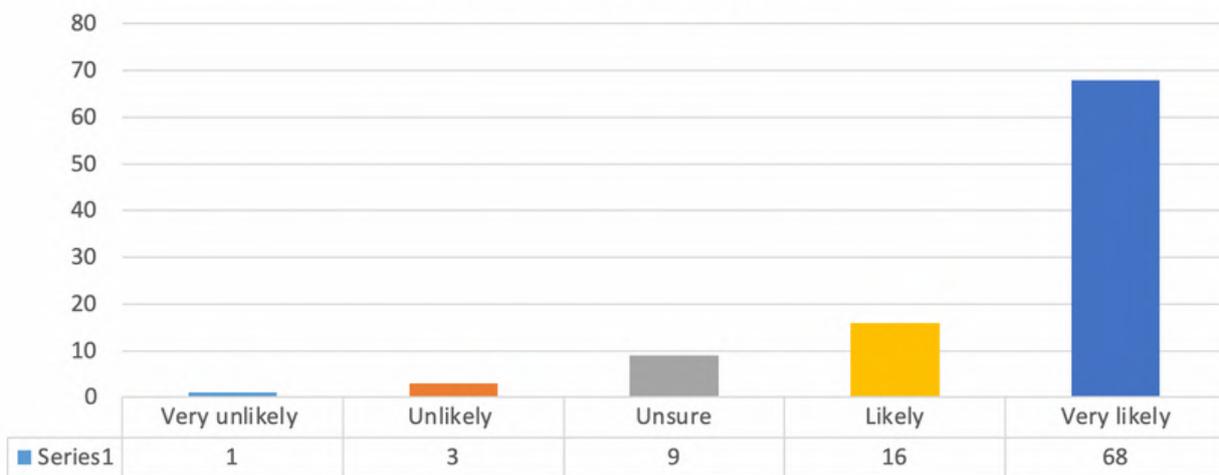
“There is a misconception that young people have and can use IT - mostly use their mobile phones and not all organisations support material can be accessed by mobile”

Schools, charities and youth organisations have tried to support young people to access online services/material where possible, providing equipment and data packs to keep young people digitally connected. However, even with the correct technology, young people may not always engage, or be able to engage in a safe space. Increasing access to technology also raises concerns about online safety and the lack of support that some parents can provide in monitoring their children's online activity. With gangs increasingly targeting young people via social media,[59] these concerns are even more urgent and throw into sharp relief the need for quality youth work and services for young people.

**INCREASED VULNERABILITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE**

As organisations emerge from the pandemic restrictions, there is concern about the increased vulnerabilities and needs of young people, and the impact on youth services. 68% of respondents to our survey stated that it is very likely that referrals and service demand will increase to support the additional vulnerability amongst young people (Table 13). 59% of organisations who selected ‘very likely’ are already dealing with more young people than they were 5 years ago, and as set out above, most organisations are receiving less funding than in previous years.

Table 13: Survey respondents' answers to the question: 'As we come out of Covid and lockdown restrictions, how likely do you think it will be that referrals and service demand will increase to support the additional vulnerability amongst young people?'



Organisations told us:

*“We are already experiencing an increase in demand, we witnessed a 45% increase in referrals from young people impacted by sexual assault and/or domestic violence in the past 12 months”*

*“We've already seen CAMHS experience increased referrals; 36% increase over the past 9 months”*

National research has also found that, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the closure of youth services, “more young people are now in potentially unsafe environments, groomed online and hidden from view. The return to school for all children, from September 2020, ensured many had contact with their teachers, after a prolonged six month absence. However, others have gone missing, often unknown to other services or where those services are understaffed...Around 27,000 children at high risk of gang exploitation have not been identified by formal services, falling through gaps in education and social care...The pandemic has seen a drop in referrals to children’s services, in spite of increased risks...Once involved in and exploited by gang activity, it is difficult to reach them”.[60]

The challenges for young people are likely to increase as we emerge from the prolonged lockdown, as more families struggle with finances following period of lost work/furlough, debt, insecure/lost employment, making young people even more vulnerable to gangs who seek to criminal exploit them in exchange for cash. Whilst there have been more young people being identified under ‘rescue and respond’ programmes, which support young people exploited through County Lines, “there is a lack of early intervention identification and support due to a lack of appropriately skilled frontline practitioners, and qualified youth workers. A policing response alone is not sufficient, and a multi-agency approach is more likely to work with young people known already to formal services. What is missing is a consistent and coherent approach to youth services, in particular prevention, diversion and support for young people at risk”.[61] A youth work response is required.

### **THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON OPERATIONS IN THE SHORT-MEDIUM TERM**

We asked Northumbria youth services about the impact of the pandemic on the short-medium term operation of their services. Whilst some were positive about the short-term impact, due to their ability to adapt to new ways of working, finding alternative ways to deliver their sessions and engage with young people, many were despondent about the future:

- The majority of respondents (40%) stated that the main impact in the short to medium term would be financially – either caused by lack of income generation, the challenges around securing grant funding, or the additional costs incurred from operating during Covid
- Organisations also stated the impact of not being able to use their usual facilities due to risk assessments, social distancing, or the building owner not allowing group activities and sessions to resume
- Organisations flagged significant concerns about meeting the increased demand presented by young people and the knock on wellbeing effect this has on staff
- Organisations have struggled to re-engage with some of the service users who have not returned following the reopening of some youth services

One organisation told us:

*“Staff are currently experiencing PTSD and are not able to return to same standard of work before Covid”.*

Others have had to lose staff in order to survive. One organisation told us:

*“We had to make a post redundant to save costs to increase our chances survival post-Covid”.*

# 5. LOOKING AHEAD

This report sets out multiple issues faced by youth services across Northumbria since Conservative funding cuts began over a decade ago. The Covid-19 pandemic has entrenched issues yet further. Youth work services are consequently, and understandably, concerned for the future.

## FUTURE CONCERNS

We asked Northumbria youth services if they have any concerns going forward (Table 14). Organisations highlighted 4 main concerns which mirror the issues discussed throughout this report:

### **A. Funding**

- 78% of respondents (74 organisations) are concerned about securing future funding, with some stating that if funding is not secured in short term, the organisation will struggle to continue. Of these 74 organisations, 56 stated they have had their central/local Government funding cut since 2011
- One service told us: “Finances are tight and we will soon be at a point where we need to start an exit strategy, if no additional funding is found by October 21”
- When asked what needs to change moving forward, most organisations stated that they would like to see changes to current funding arrangements. Sustainable, long-term, adequate funding which covers all elements of work required by youth services (including ‘back office’ functions) is urgently needed. Organisations told us:

*“We need unrestricted core funding. There is no funding for the managers, CEOs etc. and we have to fundraise for those positions, which takes up a lot of time”.*

*“We need a national programme of core youth funding, weighted properly for areas of deprivation”.*

*“[We need] direct funding for project[s] so we can spend more time delivering face to face work”.*

*“[We need] Localised budget distributed proportionally across the county, taking into account not just population density, but also additional factors, like access issues in rural areas, that require additional resources to address. This would provide all youth services with a secure foundation from which to deliver their provision”.*

*“Better Local Authority support and funding [is required]...More contracts or grants to target work with young people”.*

*“Need more sustained funding over at least 3 year period, flexibility in contract to manoeuvre delivery depending on need rather than funding being 12 month/short term. Latter would encourage recruitment and sustain employment. Also demonstrate continuity and value to young people”.*

### **B. Recruiting/maintaining staff and volunteers**

- 43 organisations who responded to our survey stated that they are concerned about being able to recruit volunteers and maintain staff in the future. As set out in section 1, many organisations now rely on short-term grants. Grant funding is usually offered for no more than one year at a time, meaning staff face a lack of job security
- Even where organisations are able to recruit staff/volunteers, it can be hard to maintain them as the roles can be tough and not compensated enough. As outlined earlier, the nature of youth work is changing, with workers increasingly being required to wear several hats and provide support around various issues, including complex mental health needs

- Even with some organisations relying more heavily on volunteers to meet service demand, organisations are struggling. As one service told us: “It still costs money to get volunteers to be DBS checked and through the appropriate courses to become youth leaders”
- Organisations told us:

*“Better pay and working conditions would lead to improve staff wellbeing, morale and retention, and would also make the job propositions more appealing to applicants”.*

*“We have no future as a service if we do not attract workers and create a skilled work force, [we are currently] struggling to recruit a 12 hour youth worker”.*

*“Longer-term funding [is required] to create more full time permanent youth work jobs”.*

### **C. Meeting service demand**

- 64 Northumbria services told us that they are concerned about meeting future service demand.
- Not only has service demand increased in general over the last decade, as a result of cuts to other specialist services, including mental health services, but the Covid-19 pandemic is expected to have had an unimaginable impact on young people who require more support than previously. As set out onwards from page 20, youth organisations are already seeing increased demand for services since the lifting of pandemic restrictions. There is a fear amongst youth services about their ability to handle further increases in referrals in the near future
- A lack of sustainable funding makes dealing with increased referrals even more difficult
- Organisations told us:

*“We need to find out what issues are currently facing young people - they've changed since pre-Covid – but restricted budgets focussed on obtaining hard outcomes take the focus off of giving young people what they want”.*

*“Demand has increased and funding has not increased and is unlikely to do so. Young people need long term interventions and without adequate multi-year funding we won't be able to help them in a sustainable way”.*

### **D. Increased service user mental health concerns**

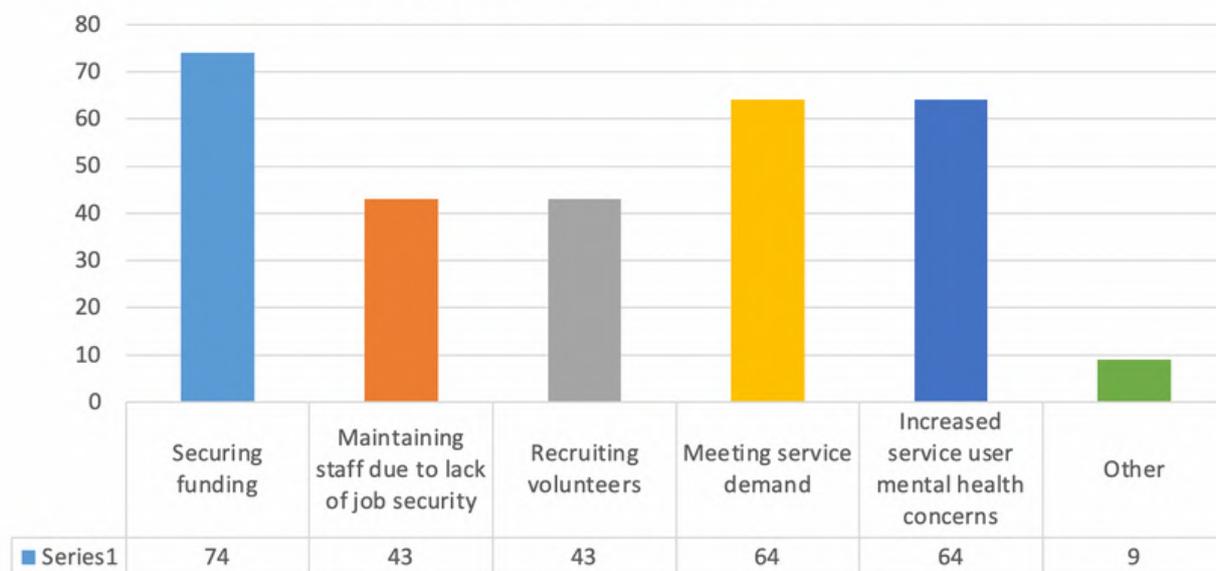
- Youth services are increasingly being relied on to provide mental health support for young people who are unable to access the appropriate mental health services (either due to lengthy waiting lists, higher thresholds for accessing support, or a lack of trust in the services on offer)
- It is no surprise then that 64 services who responded to our survey are concerned about increased service user mental health concerns, particularly when many are struggling to stay financially afloat, and/or recruit/maintain staff and volunteers
- Organisations told us:

*“We have constantly completed funding applications to increase and sustain our provision to cope with increased demand for mental health services and activities”.*

*“We are a mental health charity that has witnessed an increase [in referrals] annually, together with more increases due to Covid-19 and the impact on families.*

*“[We need to] Make it [youth services] a priority area again, mental health and anxiety are on the increase, and there has been fewer support agencies out there to cope”.*

Table 14: Survey respondents' answers to the question 'Do you have concerns about any of the following going forward?'



## **FUTURE OUTLOOK**

Overall, the future outlook for youth services in Northumbria, and indeed across England, is bleak. Over half (62%) of respondents to our survey had a negative view about the future of support for young people in their area, compared to 21% who had a neutral view, and just 17% who had a positive view. 75% of those who had a negative view about the future also stated they had concerns about meeting service demand going forward. 73% of those with a negative view of the future have also seen their central/local Government funding cut/decreased since 2011. Organisations told us:

*“I feel the desire to support young people is very strong. However, donors need to stop being so precious about preferring to fund mainly “new, innovative and exciting projects”. If the core costs aren't provided to keep charities going (essential as local government youth services are reduced constantly), staff paid, maintained, appointed, trained etc. - then there will never be enough of us on the ground to provide the “new, innovative and exciting projects” that so many grant makers constantly demand”.*

*“[I feel] Pessimistic, despondent [about the future]. I doubt anything will change much in the near future. Groups and clubs will be able to meet again and that will be good but overall I think youth support services will continue to be under-funded”.*

*“[Youth services are] at breaking point. [There is] not enough money to support the essential services never mind the more specialised help some young people need”.*

# CONCLUSION

As this report evidences, youth services in Northumbria and across England and Wales, are struggling to survive, let alone thrive. A decade of austerity, coupled with empty statutory duties placed on local authorities has led to the destruction of youth services, in particular universal services. Thousands of qualified staff have been lost, recruitment is difficult, and young people in rural areas in particular are finding that they have little, if any, access to youth provision. The Covid-19 pandemic, with its accompanying periods of national lockdown, has led to thousands of young people falling off of the radar of the minimal services they did have contact with. Left unprotected by government, youth services have already been cut by 75% in less than a decade in Northumbria alone, and this figure will continue to rise unless urgent action is taken.

*“In the contemporary political and socio-economic context youth workers and volunteers are faced with the dichotomy of meeting targeted, intervention based policy agendas and ‘maintaining the core principles that form the foundation of youth work’. At the same time, government funding cuts compromise the capacity of the youth work sector, whilst expectations of youth work delivery seem to perpetually increase”. [62]*

Whilst the day-to-day impact of cuts to youth services often go unnoticed by the public, the consequences are beginning to be seen in the mainstream media. Scores of young people are presenting with increased and increasingly complex mental health issues, and being drawn into criminally exploitative situations. “Cases of knife crime, mental health difficulties and social isolation among young people continue to rise, while the number of services available to positively intervene and prevent such cases continue to decline”. [63]

We make the following urgent recommendations to Government to rectify the situation.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Building on the recommendations of numerous previous reports<sup>[64]</sup> detailing the crisis in the youth sector, we make the following recommendations to Government:

1

The Government should **appoint a minister** who has a portfolio focussed on youth services.

2

Youth services should be backed with **urgent Government investment** in the next Comprehensive Spending Review. Funding should be provided in long-term settlements, to allow for proper embedding of services and the maintenance and development of staff and their relationships with young people.

3

The Government should devolve the funding and powers needed to **create localised youth strategies** in collaboration with young people themselves. These should clearly define the local minimum level of youth services young people can expect. This would make a real commitment to 'levelling up' across all areas of England and Wales.

4

The Government should make a long-term commitment to **Violence Reduction Units**, ensuring all Police and Crime Commissioners can play a role in supporting youth diversionary activity. These VRUs should be locally-led and able to reflect differing local priorities.

5

At a national level, the Government should develop a **workforce strategy** including expectations for the ratio of professional youth workers, trainees and volunteers, and the level of qualification they should hold. We refer Government to the National Youth Agency on this issue, who already set standards on the number of professional qualified youth workers each service should have. We further support the recommendation of the NYA who state that such a strategy should facilitate the recruitment, training and deployment of 10,000 FTE qualified youth workers, alongside current targets for 20,000 additional police officers.

6

The Government, in collaboration with local authorities, frontline services and young people, should create a **Rural Action Plan**, setting out its intention to radically transform the provision of youth services in rural areas, which in some areas is largely non-existent. On this issue we echo the calls of the NYA.

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[1] See note 45

[2] See note 51

[3] See note 2

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- [24] See note 16
- [25] [26] [27] [28] See note 3
- [29] [30] See note 2
- [31] See note 3
- [32] [33] See note 2
- [34] [35] [36] See note 3
- [37] See note 16
- [38] See note 18
- [39] See note 16
- [40] See note 18
- [41] S6 Education and Inspections Act 2006
- [42] Kelly, E., Lee, T., Sibieta, L. and Waters, T. (2018) IFS and Children's Commissioner: Public Spending on Children in England: 2000 to 2020
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- [46] See note 3
- [47] See note 7
- [48] National Youth Agency. (2020). Guidance for Local Authorities on Providing Youth Services
- [49] See note 42
- [50] [51] See note 7
- [52] See note 3
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- [55] See note 2
- [56] See note 51
- [57] See note 17
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- [59] [60] [61] See note 51
- [62] See note 7
- [63] YMCA. (2020). Out of Service: A report examining local authority expenditure on youth services in England and Wales
- [64] See for example: National Youth Agency. (2021). Overlooked: Young people and rural youth services; APPG on Youth Affairs. (2019). Youth Work Inquiry: Final report including recommendations and summary; Unison. (2014). The UK's youth services: how cuts are removing opportunities for young people and damaging their lives; YMCA. (2020). Out of Service: A report examining local authority expenditure on youth services in England and Wales.
- [65] See note 45: "Each service requires at least two full-time equivalent, professional qualified youth workers located in each secondary school catchment area for access, with a team of at least four youth support workers (level 3) and assistants (level 2), alongside skilled volunteers with relevant training, including safeguarding. This will be supported by a youth workforce strategy for recruitment and training across local authority, voluntary and community sector organisations and other agencies as part of that offer".
- [66] See note 51
- [67] See note 2

# APPENDIX 1: NOPCC SURVEY QUESTIONS

## The Past

To help understand the scale of changes to youth services, the following section will seek to understand the impact the past 10 years has had on your organisation.

Since 2011 have you seen your central/local government funding cut/decreased?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not sure

If you wish to expand on your previous answer and provide anecdotal feedback, please do so here:

What is your organisation's main source of income?

- a. Self-generated
- b. Grants
- c. Fundraising
- d. Investments/Assets
- e. Local Authority/Government Commissioned Services
- f. Other

If you wish to expand on your previous answer and provide anecdotal feedback, please do so here:

If your funding has reduced, have you had to make changes to your staffing levels since 2011?

- a. Staffing levels have increased since 2011
- b. Staffing levels have decreased since 2011
- c. Staffing levels have stayed the same since 2011
- d. Our funding has not decreased
- e. Unsure

If you wish to expand on your previous answer and provide anecdotal feedback, please do so here:

How has your organisation's financial position changed since 2011?

- a. We are in a better financial position
- b. We are in a worse financial position
- c. Our position is unchanged
- d. We were not operating before 2011
- e. Unsure

If you wish to expand on your previous answer and provide anecdotal feedback, please do so here:

Roughly, what percentage of your yearly spend comes from funds provided through Central or Local Government?

- a. 0-25%
- b. 26-50%
- c. 51-75%
- d. 76-100%
- e. Unsure

If you wish to expand on your previous answer and provide anecdotal feedback, please do so here:

How many months operating costs do you currently hold in reserves?

- a. 0-3 months
- b. 4-6 months
- c. 7-9 months
- d. 9-11 months
- e. 12 or more months

If you wish to expand on your previous answer and provide anecdotal feedback, please do so here:

## The Present

A lot has changed in the last 10 years – the way we engage with young people, the societal challenges they face and the activities in which they engage. What has not changed, is our commitment to reduce vulnerability and provide life changing diversionary activities for the regions young people.

Are you supporting more or less young people now than 5 years ago?

- a. More
- b. About the same
- c. Less
- d. Unsure

If you wish to expand on your previous answer and provide anecdotal feedback, please do so here:

What do you feel is the single biggest challenge that young people face currently?

Thinking of both the services you deliver, and others across the region, which do you feel have the biggest impact on reducing vulnerability and supporting young people? (Select all that apply)

- a. Sport & physical activity based
- b. Wellbeing support
- c. Alcohol & drug support
- d. Mental health
- e. Sexual health
- f. Employment training
- g. Skill training
- h. Other

If you wish to expand on your previous answer and provide anecdotal feedback, please do so here:

If you are funded by any of the below, do you have a direct line of support provided by the funder?

- a. Central Government
- b. Local Authority
- c. Police Force
- d. Police & Crime Commissioner
- e. Community & Voluntary Sector Organisation
- f. Not funded by any of the above

If you wish to expand on your previous answer and provide anecdotal feedback, please do so here:

Are you dealing with more or less young people displaying mental health concerns now than compared to 2011?

- a. More
- b. Less
- c. About the same
- d. Weren't operating in 2011

If you wish to expand on your previous answer and provide anecdotal feedback, please do so here:

Of the young people that you engage, what percentage have either been involved in, or are vulnerable to falling into County Lines?

- a. 0-20%
- b. 21-40%
- c. 41-60%
- d. 61-80%
- e. 81-100%
- f. Unsure
- g. Not relevant to audience engaged

If you wish to expand on your previous answer and provide anecdotal feedback, please do so here:

Due to challenges faced during the Covid pandemic, did you have to reduce services?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not relevant

If you wish to expand on your previous answer and provide anecdotal feedback, please do so here:

How will the pandemic impact your organisations operations in the short to medium term?

What percentage of those you engage with identify as a Black or ethnic minority?

- a. 0-20%
- b. 21-40%
- c. 41-60%
- d. 61-80%
- e. 81-100%
- f. Other

## The Future

The past 14 months have shown us how quickly society can change, and how we need to adapt to new ways of supporting our communities. Going forward, what do you as an organisation need to best support the regions young people?

As we come out of Covid and lockdown restrictions, how likely do you think it will be that referrals and service demand will increase to support the additional vulnerability amongst young people?

- a. Very likely
- b. Likely
- c. Unlikely
- d. Very unlikely
- e. Unsure

If you wish to expand on your previous answer and provide anecdotal feedback, please do so here:

Do you have concerns about any of the following going forward?

- a. Securing funding
- b. Maintaining staff due to lack of job security
- c. Recruiting volunteers
- d. Meeting service demand
- e. Increased mental health concerns

If you wish to expand on your previous answer and provide anecdotal feedback, please do so here:

If you could change one thing locally about how youth services operate or how they are supported, what would it be?

How do you think we could support those young people you are engaging who are either involved in, or at risk of falling into a life of crime?

- a. More employment & skill development opportunities
- b. Increase youth services in local area
- c. Safe locations for young people to gather and meet (indoors or outside)
- d. Access to health & wellbeing, mental health, and counselling services
- e. Reduce the number of school exclusions
- f. More youth workers to provide interventions and mentoring
- g. Other

If you wish to expand on your previous answer and provide anecdotal feedback, please do so here:

Do any of your service-users face digital inclusion challenges? E.g: Do all your users have access to appropriate devices and internet at home? Are they confident using said devices for online sessions, accessing support etc.

Overall, what do you feel about the future of support for young people in your area?

### **Working Together**

The more support and opportunities that we can provide to young people, the better. It is crucial that those on the frontline, working with young people, know what support is available and where they can signpost young people into.

Organisation name

Which Local Authorities do you work in?

- a. Gateshead
- b. Newcastle
- c. North Tyneside
- d. Northumberland
- e. South Tyneside
- f. Sunderland

Summarise what your service does for young people (3 sentences max):

Your email:

Would you be happy to be contacted by the OPCC following the outcome of the survey, and other relevant matters?

- a. Yes
  - b. No
-

SEPTEMBER 2021

# VOICES FROM THE FRONTLINE

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