

# Letter to the Mayor about youth services in London

## Key information

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Dear Sadiq,

I am writing to you following on from our discussion yesterday at Mayor's Question Time (Thursday 20 November) where I mentioned I would follow up with you with more information.

You mentioned the work of my predecessor on the London Assembly, Siân Berry, who wrote numerous reports about the difficulties facing the youth sector in London and in particular tracking the decline in funding that the sector experienced. She published reports in 2017[Reference:1](#) [Reference:2](#), 2018[Reference:3](#), 2019[Reference:4](#), 2020[Reference:5](#), and 2021[Reference:6](#), culminating in her report 'London's Youth Service Cuts 2011-2021: A Blighted Generation'[Reference:7](#) which found over £36 million has been cut from annual youth service budgets between 2011-12 and 2021-22, a fall of 44 per cent.

Your funding provided through the Young Londoners Fund, and particularly the £25 million of new money in February 2020, following the City Hall Greens budget amendment 2020-21, was greatly appreciated by us and the youth sector.[Reference:8](#)

I have sought to continue this work by championing the youth sector. In 2024, I conducted my own research into the state of youth service budgets in London[Reference:9](#), and this year I have continued that work by holding a roundtable with several Black leaders of youth organisations in London.

As we talked, there were several recurring themes regarding how they interact with organisations such as MOPAC.

Many of the attendees stressed to me how they felt that they and the youth sector were "holding back the tide" on youth violence.

They told me how they felt that Black-led youth work was distinctive from other kinds of youth work, highlighting how their work extends beyond just interacting with the young person themselves and instead also incorporating working with families and the wider community network of the young person. They said they felt that this approach is a **hallmark of Black-led youth work** but is rarely recognised or valued in the current funding models, despite the fact it is this deep relational work can be very effective at keeping young people safe.

In addition, they also said that they feel that Black youth workers are often brought in by larger mainstream organisations as **community ‘intermediaries’** because their cultural reach and trust are essential for delivery, but their contribution is not meaningfully recognised. This means that the true impact of Black-led practice becomes obscured in reporting and evaluation, and they said the current funding framework can inadvertently reinforce this imbalance.

Several also told me how funding applications ask you to bare your soul and how the **applications process** wants to hear the details of the violence the youth people they support face. They told me how they feel funders are looking for the ‘worst, baddest gangsters’ but that the youth sector is trying to prevent that from happening.

Another recurring theme was that funders want metrics that they can track to know that they are getting value for money when they provide grant funding. While this is partly understandable, the organisations I spoke to told me that they feel that **funders don’t fully understand the problem and so they cannot set the parameters in order to get the best outcome** for young people and London as a whole. Youth sector organisations told me how they know that the deep, long term work they do is valuable and does make a difference in the lives of young people.

Some headline stats from the **survey** we ran in October 2025:

- 80% said they were not confident their ideas were protected and would not be reused without consent
- 50% strongly disagreed that “the feedback they were provided reflected a genuine understanding of their community’s needs”
- 80% said they were not offered any follow-up support or guidance after rejection.

The survey also revealed that:

- Most people felt Black-led organisations were not fairly represented among the Mayor’s funded groups
- Most people did not feel the application process accounts for the capacity challenges faced by grassroots organisations
- Some people found it hard to navigate the Mayor of London website and discover which grants are available and which projects have been funded.

Organisations also said in the meeting I had with them that to rectify the feeling that Black-led organisations were not fairly represented among the Mayor’s funded groups that a possible solution would be to provide proportional allocation of funding to Black-led organisations. They said this was due to the fact they disproportionately serve the communities most affected by violence and that proportional investment is not only fair but necessary for effective prevention.

When asked what changes survey respondents would recommend in order **to make the funding process more equitable** responders said:

- Funders should set aside proportional funding for Black-led organisations

- Make application processes transparent both for winners and losers and much more accessible.
- Greater value needs to be given to grassroots insight and offer real capacity support
- Commit to long-term partnerships and include us in shaping priorities and decision criteria as well.
- More plain, commonly used language and less emphasis on forms and more on discussions and observations
- Giving young people a voice when it comes to choosing who receives funding so projects for them are chosen by them.

In addition to the above, what I heard from the sector time and time again was the need for **longer term funding**. These are organisations who are constantly working within the short-term cycles of funding that is provided to them, always unsure of their stability which will no doubt have knock on effects for the services they provide and the young people they support. Some told me about how they felt that a short burst of funding would appear after high profile incidents, but that this funding and attention would soon disappear leaving them back in the same place once the TV cameras had left. People also spoke about how continually revisiting traumatic incidents within their communities simply to justify funding was a great emotional stress which they felt was not recognised or compensated in the existing funding structures.

**Extending funding cycles** so these organisations have certainty for much longer periods of time would allow them to focus much more on the deep valuable work that only they can provide, and let them spend less time hunting around for funding opportunities and filling out funding applications. Reducing this administrative burden and providing them with much needed long-term stability will have significant positive effects and returns on investment. If you can explore the possibility of yourself and the government being able to provide real long term funding certainty to these groups, it would go such a long way to improving the quality of the youth sector and the fantastic preventative and life enriching work that they provide.

The other change that is needed is to go beyond what can be measured simply and easily. I fully understand the want and desire to have easily trackable and contrastable metrics that you can feedback to the public and scrutiny bodies like the Assembly to show that Londoner's money is being put to an effective use, but the true value of the kinds of long-term work that the Black-led youth sector provides is hard to quantify. I urge you to both **explore new and innovative ways that the impact of the great work these organisations do can be quantified** and also to look beyond and find ways of valuing work that cannot be quantified as easily.

As we touched on in my discussion with you today, it's great that so many young people have been supported by your Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) in some way, I'm sure each one has benefited, but to make real, deep and lasting change it takes intensive, wider work with the young person their family and community. I am seeking reassurance that you will respond to the concerns from Black-led youth organisations and the need for both long term funding and an appreciation for the kinds of deep long term youth work that can make lasting change.

Given the role you and MOPAC play in both the procurement process and funding decisions surrounding youth organisations in London I ask you to:

- Increase the transparency regarding what youth organisations yourself, MOPAC and the VRU are funding
- Provide actionable feedback to all bidders for funding
- Provide longer term funding to give organisations more certainty
- Increase the funding that you provide to Black-led youth organisations and recognise the unique and high-quality work that they do.

You've done this before, you've responded to the desperate need of the youth sector, I hope you will take on the points I raised constructively and listen to the calls that have come from the Black-led youth sector representatives that I have spoken to. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Yours sincerely,

**Zoë Garbett**

**Green Party Member of the London Assembly**

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## **References**

- [Reference:1](#)London's lost youth services, January 2017
- [Reference:2](#)Youth service cuts in London – what next?, June 2017
- [Reference:3](#)London's Lost Youth Services 2018, March 2018
- [Reference:4](#)London's Lost Youth Services 2019, March 2019
- [Reference:5](#) London's Lost Youth Services 2020, August 2020
- [Reference:6](#)A lost year for youth work?, March 2021
- [Reference:7](#) London's Youth Service Cuts 2011-2021: A Blighted Generation, August 2021
- [Reference:8](#)News from Siân Berry: Mayor agrees to Sian Berry's call for £25m investment in youth service | London City Hall
- [Reference:9](#)Zoë Garbett AM: "youth services shouldn't be a postcode lottery" | London City Hall