SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

The shock of devastating riots on the streets of London in the summer of 2011 should have prompted investment in tackling the causes of this level of alienation and disturbance. Instead, austerity policies already under way were allowed to intensify, squeezing council budgets even harder in the years that followed.

This report looks back at the last decade of cuts to council youth services in London, looking at a period from 2011-12 up to the present day.

I have been researching cuts to youth services in London since 2016 as a London Assembly member, 1 prompted by a campaign from young people working with Change.org and the Rio Ferdinand Foundation, who had seen cuts affect their lives over the previous five years.

I have uncovered new evidence and spoken to the people on the ground who are using and running youth services to inform my work.

The information on budgets, staffing and youth centres I have received from councils now covers a decade, and it is time to reflect on the long-term impact of the deep cuts that my data reveals.

Now, the young people who first pushed me into this work are adults. A 16-year-old in 2016 is now 21, and those who were in their late teens in 2011 are now nearing their thirties. A whole generation of young people has been let down and deserved better.

My research shows that budget cuts have levelled off in recent years, with some councils reinvesting since 2017-18 and the Mayor creating the Young Londoners Fund – worth £70 million so far – to boost youth services.

However, many councils are still cutting back on youth workers and youth centres, with over 130 youth facilities closed in the past decade.

There are some bright spots on the ground, including this year the reopening of the Grove Park Youth Club in Lewisham, which closed in 2013 and which I visited in 2017. The club’s
shuttered building featured on the cover of my first report on youth service cuts.

Sadly, one of the youth centres that closed its doors this year was Sutton’s last remaining facility. The council has now switched to a ‘referral-only’ youth service model. Sutton joins Waltham Forest, which has been without universal youth centres for several years.

The last 18 months have been dominated by the coronavirus crisis, which has brought further pressures on London’s young people. Many have lost time from education, and lost many chances to develop as citizens, through social lives, friendships and job and training opportunities, as well as crucial lost opportunities for support and mentoring from youth workers.

As we slowly emerge from the pandemic, we must not forget that, beneath its effects on the lives of our young people, London’s youth services are still bearing long-term losses.

These cuts in vital and valuable services will continue to have an impact unless new investment in youth work is part of both the Mayor and the Government’s priorities for recovery funding.

Sian Berry AM
August 2021
We now have a decade of evidence to review since, in 2016, I first began asking councils for data starting in 2011-12.

As in previous years, this report is based on extensive Freedom of Information requests submitted to every London council. Each year, my requests have consistently asked for data on youth service budgets, youth worker employment and youth centre provision.

For each report I have also reviewed at least one further aspect of youth work with additional questions to councils. For example, I have asked about external grant provision and, last year, I looked at services for LGBTIQA+ young people.

A new question was added for 2021 asking about the provision of specific projects for girls and young women.

The impetus for this came from conversations with youth workers who have told me that offerings are not always equally available for young men and women.

Many youth clubs are very well integrated spaces, but I have also seen and heard about some facilities where traditional options, such as boxing clubs, are provided primarily for young men, or where spaces set aside for young women are smaller or focused on stereotypically gendered ‘beauty parlour’ activities.

While it is important to remember that councils are struggling against huge challenges, we need to make sure the resources they do have are able to be accessed equally and fairly, and that is why I wanted to study this aspect of provision.

The responses I received this year on budgets and services took longer to be provided in many cases. Several councils cited pandemic delays or issues with confirming budgets and final budget out-turns for 2020-21.

However, the overall final response was good, with 27 councils able to provide data for 2020-21 and 17 councils providing 2021-22 spending plans.

Youth worker employment data was less comprehensive, but 15 councils were able to give me data that could be used to compare job cuts through the decade.
TEN YEARS OF DATA: AUSTERITY’S BITE PERSISTS

The time series of net change in budgets below shows there have been small amounts of reinvestment in youth services in recent years.

During the period 2018-19 to 2020-21 the overall net change was positive, after deep cuts during the years from 2015-16 to 2017-18.

However, the chart below shows the overall change each year over the decade, and it is critical to note how far behind pre-austerity levels these figures remain.

Across London the average net loss in youth service funding is now 44 per cent compared with 2011-12.

The average council budget for youth services in 2011-12 was £2.6 million, and this fell to just £1.1 million by 2020-21.

If all councils had been able to maintain budgets at 2011-12 levels, Londoners would have seen at least £242 million more invested in support for young people over the past ten years.

### London Youth Service Budget Cuts Since 2011-12

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>£m</td>
<td>-1.7</td>
<td>-3.2</td>
<td>-4.2</td>
<td>-7.8</td>
<td>-14.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>-4.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>-9.0</td>
<td>-16.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average cut 2011-12 to 2021-22:</td>
<td>-44%</td>
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2021-22 cuts data so far (17 councils)
Looking at the current year, the 17 councils who were able to tell me about their planned budgets were almost all forced to keep them level or cut them further, with the biggest cuts in Tower Hamlets and Sutton (which is cutting its general youth service budget completely).

Only Camden Council has reported a planned increase in spending this year.

On top of the losses we have already seen, at least a further £3.4 million is being cut from budgets across London in 2021-22.

### CHANGES IN YOUTH SERVICE BUDGETS FOR 2021-22

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Borough</th>
<th>Change in budget from 2020-21 to 2021-22</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barking and Dagenham</td>
<td>£0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brent</td>
<td>-£130,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camden</td>
<td>+£45,574</td>
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<tr>
<td>Croydon</td>
<td>£0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hammersmith &amp; Fulham</td>
<td>-£49,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Haringey</td>
<td>-£187,790</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hillingdon</td>
<td>-£168,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hounslow</td>
<td>-£30,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islington</td>
<td>£0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lambeth</td>
<td>£0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewisham</td>
<td>-£100,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Merton</td>
<td>-£12,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newham</td>
<td>£0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redbridge</td>
<td>£0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sutton</td>
<td>-£1,242,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tower Hamlets</td>
<td>-£1,517,964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wandsworth</td>
<td>£0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>-£3,392,280</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VARIATION BETWEEN BOROUGHS

Boroughs have varied in the past decade in how much, and by what proportion, they have cut or boosted their youth service budgets.

The map below shows the change per borough between the most recent budget data I have received and what it was originally. It is shown as a percentage of the 2011-12 budget (or the most recent year available).

Only two boroughs have completely removed their dedicated youth service budget: Waltham Forest council moved to a targeted model of youth support within other budgets, without general open-access youth services, some years ago, and now Sutton council has made the same change.

Merton and Islington councils have both maintained broadly stable youth service budgets over this time, while three boroughs have increased their budgets, all from a below-average baseline.

The largest cut in budget terms has been in Tower Hamlets, which invested £8.7 million in 2011-12, but has cut this to just £2.1 million this year.

Although it has cut budgets by 19 per cent since 2016-17 (the earliest data provided), Hackney Council currently has the largest annual youth service budget of any borough, at over £6 million.

Lewisham since 2013-14; Islington, H&F and Croydon since 2016-17; Barnet to 2018-19; Harrow to 2019-20; Kingston, K&C and Richmond 2016-17 to 2020-21; Bexley, Bromley, Ealing, Enfield, Greenwich, Southwark and Westminster to 2020-21.
TEN YEARS OF DATA: YOUTH WORKER STAFF CUTS

Staff are the cornerstone of youth work. From running group sessions, to intensive one-to-one support, to doing simple welfare check-ins, their work is crucial to giving young people the support they need.

This year, 15 councils were able to provide data to cover all years to 2020-21, with 12 councils providing information on youth worker employment for 2021-22. The decade shows a consistent picture of overall cuts that match the budget pressures shown in the previous section.

For the 15 councils for which we have consistent data, there are 611 fewer youth workers in 2020-21 than there were in 2011-12.

Data from 12 of those 15 councils show a further six job losses this year.

Averages can help to illustrate the impact of these cuts at borough level. In 2011-12, the average council in London employed 48 full-time equivalent (FTE) youth workers, but by 2020-21 this had fallen to just 15.

Rebuilding London’s youth services will mean at the very least re-establishing pre-austerity full-time staffing levels and providing every young person with access to a trusted youth worker who is able to give long-term support.
2021 DATA: COUNCILS ARE STRUGGLING TO PROVIDE ROUNDED SUPPORT FOR YOUNG WOMEN

Girl-specific projects are needed to address the unique issues facing many young women. They should be also based on activities that can expand horizons and challenge gender expectations. We need to give all young people the opportunity to be exposed to broad activities, creative pursuits and careers.

At the same time, we need to make sure that spaces provided for young people are equally available for all genders. This has been more important in the pandemic when the size and capacity of physical spaces has directly affected the services councils can safely provide.

This was the first year I asked councils about projects specifically targeted for girls and young women.

The data I received, from the 26 councils who responded to this question, paints a mixed picture. Across London, I found 40 girl-specific services, however ten councils (Camden, Enfield, Hammersmith & Fulham, Islington, Kingston, Lewisham, Newham, Redbridge, Richmond, and Southwark) said they offer no specific services like this.

At a time when young people have been put under extraordinary pressure, it is troubling to think that councils have been unable to provide a network of tailored support to young women across London.

Tower Hamlets is doing the most to engage girls and young women direction, with six projects. Croydon also did well, providing four projections, and this is on top of bespoke short-term projects the council runs throughout the year.

The responses also show that, where specific projects for girls and young women are available, they are often limited in scope. For example, in Hounslow the only targeted service is This Girl Can, a Sport England campaign to encourage women to be more physically active. Similarly, Haringey’s only girl-specific service is a fitness group which is only open during term time and closed when restrictions came into force in March 2020.

Though I commend these councils for providing what services they can, it is clear that councils across the city need additional funding and guidance, in order to give girls and young women the tailored support they need.

Many more girl-led and girl-specific projects need to be developed to meet these needs. My recommendations include:

- Ring-fenced funding for projects and support for girls and young women
- Projects for girls and young women in every borough that expand the horizons of women, and do not add to gendered expectations.
A decade ago, London boasted at least 299 youth centres. Now my research shows that the total number of youth centres has been cut by 133 across the city.

The worst-affected borough is Newham, which has now lost 13 of its 18 centres that were open in 2019-20. The council hopes to regain four centres for 2021-22, and the Mayor of Newham has also told me they are investing in a programme of upgrading youth spaces.

I was also alarmed at Sutton closing down its last remaining youth centre. The council is now operating on a referral-only delivery model and no longer provides universal youth services.

It is extremely concerning to learn that councils are continuing to lose services, and that those councils who have cut back remain largely unable to re-establish them.

However, one bright spot is Lewisham’s Grove Park Youth Club, which reopened its doors in late July 2021, after closing eight years ago. Thanks to campaigning by local residents, the youth club, which was first built in 1966, has not just been saved from demolition but has also been refurbished too, with new services moving in this summer.

Data shows net loss from earliest year of data available to latest year.
WHAT DO YOU THINK?

I would like to hear more from Londoners about their views the impact of on youth service cuts over the past decade on their lives, and what councils, the Mayor and Government can do to help.

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

Sian Berry AM, Green Party Member of the London Assembly

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

References


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