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Developing an effective local youth offer

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this research, commissioned by the Local Government Association (LGA) in May 2019, is to better understand the factors that facilitate or hamper the development of an effective local youth offer. The project seeks to build on the *Vision for Youth Services[1]* published by the LGA in 2017 which emphasised the importance of the local authority's role in overseeing and co-ordinating a local youth offer. In this report we define the youth offer as the full range of provision in a local area to support youth related activity including both formal youth services as well as provision delivered by the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and other partners.

The context for the research is the ongoing statutory duty that local authorities are under to provide equitable access to developmental activities and spaces for young people "as far as is reasonably practicable". There are also recent national developments which have placed a greater focus on youth services and the youth offer: the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) are consulting on youth services statutory guidance and the Government has announced a £500m Youth Investment Fund aimed at investing in youth-related schemes.

The research involved a literature review of existing publications, data and research relating to youth services; fieldwork visits or telephone interviews with nine local areas to look at their delivery models in more detail; and a workshop to bring the participating local authorities together – to further test their delivery models and the key enablers to developing an effective local youth offer.

Each local area in our field work had made a series of choices reflecting their own contexts to decide on their local delivery model for the youth offer. We broadly categorise the range of delivery models we came across on a spectrum from local authority-led to commissioned models, with a combined approach in the middle. Within these categories there were variations in the role the local authority played, its interaction with the VCS, and the diversity of provision and funding. We analyse the choices available to local areas and some of the advantages and disadvantages of each approach.

Despite these differences in delivery models, we identify a number of common enablers across all areas that contributed to the development of an effective local youth offer. We summarise these as:

1. **Vision and leadership** - Local areas must be clear about their purpose and how they intend to achieve the desired outcomes for young people
2. **Commissioning** – Local areas must articulate the rationale behind different partners' involvement in order to best leverage resources
3. **Provision and delivery** - The programme of provision must be practicable for young people and suitable for a set of evolving needs
4. **Partnership and capacity building** - Partners must be able to have a clear way of engaging with and shaping the local youth offer
5. **Workforce development** - There must be a long-term plan behind recruitment to ensure a broad representation of people can be supported into the profession
6. **Demonstrating impact -** Local areas must be able to tell the story about what the youth offer is for, why it matters and the impact it has made

We also identify a theme of building in the voice of young people into everything a local area does.

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[1] LGA Vision for Youth Services, Bright Futures (2017) <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/bright-futures/bright-futures-childrens-services/bright-futures-our-vision-youth>

Introduction and context to the research

In 2017, the Local Government Association (LGA) published their *Vision for Youth Services*. The vision sought to provide local authorities with a framework to consider how they can work with local partners, providers and young people in order to develop and deliver an effective local youth offer given the budget pressures facing them.

The *Vision for Youth Services* emphasised the importance of the local authority role in overseeing and co-ordinating a local youth offer – including setting out the vision and direction for youth services in their area, identifying local needs and co-ordinating provision to meet these needs and deliver the outcomes that matter to young people.

This research project seeks to build on the *Vision for Youth Services* to examine in further detail the factors that facilitate or hamper the development of effective local youth offers.

Local authorities have a statutory duty "to secure, as far as is reasonably practicable, equality of access for all young people to the positive, preventative and early help they need to support their well-being"[2]. Given the funding pressures that local authorities have faced in recent years the "reasonably practicable" element of the statutory duty has meant that many local authorities have had to make difficult choices about what youth services they are able to maintain or commission. In many cases, this has meant a shift away from universal provision to more targeted provision to meet specific needs.

Throughout this report, we refer to both youth services and the youth offer. There is no clearly agreed distinction between these terms, but for our purposes when we refer to youth services we are talking about those services directly delivered by the local authority or commissioned by the local authority for another provider to undertake on their behalf. Typically, they will be delivered by qualified youth workers and in many cases delivered in local authority owned youth centre spaces.

In contrast when we refer to the youth offer we are talking about all of the provision in a local area that is aimed at supporting youth related activity. This will include the youth service provision referred to above, but will also include all of the provision from the Voluntary and Community Sector as well, whether that has been commissioned by the local authority or not. It may also include any wider provision that might be supporting youth being provided by other local agencies e.g. the health service and police.

Developing an effective local youth offer is challenging given the need to coordinate numerous partners and funding pots. Given that the youth offer is likely to touch on the involvement of teams across different services and agencies, both in and outside the local authority, including the police, health, voluntary and community sector, the private sector and even provision that is not specifically youth services (such as housing and transport) there is a need to engage a wide range of partners.

Another challenge for youth services is that they are not typically designed to respond to or solve singular, discrete problems or policy issues – rather as a service they are being asked to address the multiple factors that can lead to educational disengagement, youth crime, lack of aspirations, and issues with young people's mental health and wellbeing. This means that demonstrating the impact of their work can be more challenging and they need to be closely linked into wider local authority children's services and other preventative work to meet these challenges.

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[2] Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities on Services and Activities to Improve Young People's Wellbeing (June 2012), Department for Education

Youth services and the wider youth offer, therefore, are a complex area of policy, funding and provision, but they are arguably an increasingly important area for local authorities to focus on. The most recent report published by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime[3] argues there is a clear link between the areas with the largest cuts to youth spending and the biggest increases in knife crime. The report argues a trusted youth worker role and physical youth centre are instrumental in de-escalating conflicts, supporting young people at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), providing a safe space and building resilience and self-esteem.

There are a number of other developments at a national level which are also increasing the focus on youth services and the youth offer. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) are currently undertaking a consultation on youth services statutory guidance, focusing on the positive role local authorities can play in the provision of youth services. The consultation recognises that local areas have developed new models of delivering and commissioning services and is seeking to provide greater clarity of government's expectations as the youth services landscape has changed considerably over the past 10 years.

More recently, the Government has announced a £500m Youth Investment Fund aimed at investing in youth-related schemes. The funding will go towards the creation of 60 new youth centres, refurbish 360 existing youth facilities and provide more than 100 mobile youth facilities for harder-to-reach areas[4].

We hope this research, alongside the developments at a national level, provide an opportunity for local authorities to reflect on their own youth offer and consider the learning from what other areas are doing. We recognise local authorities all face different contexts and have to make their own choices about levels of investment in youth services and the delivery models that will work best for them. The report is not recommending any one model over another. We do identify however a number of factors that might help local authorities to reflect on and decide their own approach.

Research methodology

Isos Partnership were commissioned by the LGA in May 2019 to carry out a research project to better understand the factors that facilitate or hamper the development of an effective local youth offer. Specifically, we were asked to draw out an understanding of these factors through an action-oriented approach grounded in the experience of key partners in local areas. The project was not designed as an evaluation of the effectiveness of particular youth interventions or approaches.

We carried out the research in three phases. Initially we conducted a literature review of existing publications, data and research relating to youth services (see Annexe 1 for a full list). We used the key points that emerged from this review to develop our lines of enquiry for field work. The key lines of enquiry that emerged from the literature review can be summarised as followed:

1. The importance of a clear vision – understanding what impact the local youth offer is aiming to have on young people and clearly articulating how all partners across services, directly or indirectly related, can play a part in the delivery and impact

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[3] APPG on Knife Crime, March 2019, viewed November 2019 https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/APPG%20on%20Knife%20Crime%20-%20Young%20people%27s%20perspectives%20May%202019.pdf

[4] Third Sector n.d., viewed November 2019, <https://www.thirdsector.co.uk/money-500m-youth-investment-fund-will-available-charities/policy-and-politics/article/1661204>.

2. Clarity about the role of the local authority - given diminishing resources and changing demand, what is the balance the local authority wants to take on between direct provision, commissioning and co-ordination of partners
3. A range of delivery models - there are a range of new delivery models emerging, including Young People's Foundations and Youth Service Mutuals. Local areas need to consider their context and expertise to understand what setup is best suited for them
4. Funding of youth services – what does the local authority continue to invest in youth services; how can they make the case for investment and diversify their sources of funding?
5. Workforce development – in order to deliver high quality youth work and achieve the desired outcomes for young people, how can the professional identity of youth workers be recognised as valuable and how can local authorities continue to attract youth workers?
6. Impact – how can local areas tell the story of the impact their youth offer has – for the benefit of the young people involved, youth workers, providers and their political backers?

Following the literature review we then identified a number of local areas to visit to look at these issues and delivery models in more detail. Local areas were selected to achieve a geographical spread, political balance, differing levels of deprivation and a mix of county councils and unitary authorities. We were also deliberately attempting to look at the range of different delivery models. Therefore, we also used the LGA's intelligence, and our own, of what local authorities were doing to inform the selection. The local areas that we engaged in the research were as follows:

Field work areas:	
Devon	Knowsley
Essex	Lambeth
Harrow	Leeds
Hertfordshire	Salford
Kingston-Upon-Hull	

The field visits were set up in a way to gain a broad understanding of the youth offer. We engaged senior children's services leaders (the Director of Children's Services, Lead Member, Assistant Director and Head of Service) to understand the strategic context for their youth services and the detail of their offer. Then, we engaged partner agencies (police, health, education, employment services and VCS) to understand how the local authority had built relationships with them and developed the local youth offer. After the field work, we conducted an action learning workshop to bring the participating local authorities together – to further test their delivery models and the key enablers to developing an effective local youth offer.

In this report we look at the findings from our research, starting with an explanation of the range of approaches to delivery in different local areas. We analyse the factors affecting the choices made by local authorities before moving on to consider six key enablers to developing an effective youth offer, reflecting on some of the good practice we saw and the challenges facing local areas.

Part 1: What were the range of delivery models we encountered?

Throughout our research, we came across the different ways local areas were developing and delivering their local youth offer. Each local area had made a series of different choices reflecting their own particular contexts to reach their respective positions. We have summarised the approaches we saw into three main types: local authority-led, combined and commissioned models

(as shown in Figure 1 below). We explain each of the models in more detail, and the factors affecting the choices made by local authorities, below.

We asked each local area to place themselves on the spectrum at our action learning workshop to confirm our understanding of their approach. What is presented in

Figure 1 is therefore a combination of our view and theirs. For those who did not attend the workshop (marked with a star), we have placed them on the spectrum based on our own understanding of their approach.

Figure 1 - Spectrum of delivery models
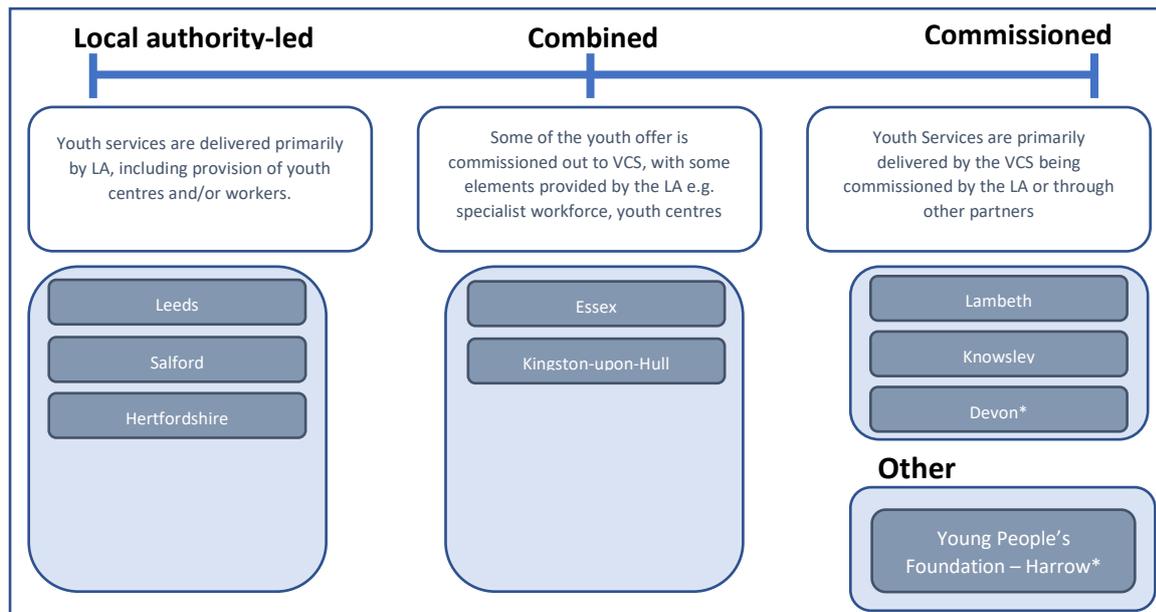
Local authority-led

On the left-hand side of the spectrum for local authority-led models, it was often a political choice that meant the authorities had decided to preserve a strong in-house local authority youth service and in many cases, physical youth centres. In many of these examples it was elected members who attached such importance to maintaining a strong local authority-led youth offer. They saw this as being critical to the council maintaining a physical presence in their local communities and having an ability to reach out to young people that they worried would otherwise be missed by other services. As one lead member put it to us '*We have made an active choice to prioritise investment in youth services because we see it as critical to maintaining a visible presence and connection to local areas*'. For many local authorities this was also about using youth services to help respond to other priorities and challenges they were facing such as youth crime, mental health and disengagement.

Combined

For those local authorities in the middle of the spectrum, many of them shared this ongoing commitment to the importance of a local authority-led youth service. The key difference was that they had also adopted a deliberate strategy to make the Voluntary and Community Sector a key part of their local youth offer. In some cases, this reflected the fact they already had a strong and committed VCS who already wanted to play an active role and it was more about channelling and co-ordinating their efforts (Hull). In other cases, it was more of a deliberate political choice to actively try to build and grow the capacity of the voluntary sector to play a greater role in the delivery of the

youth offer. In those instances, much of the local authority resource and effort was targeted at working with, and building the capacity of, the VCS sector (Essex).

Commissioned

On the right-hand side of the spectrum were those local authorities who had opted for a different delivery model entirely by fully commissioning out the delivery of their youth services or establishing a new partnership arrangement to lead delivery. Often financial pressures had been the initial driver in seeking to establish a new delivery model and this was an approach the Council had explored in other areas as well as youth services. Even within this side of the spectrum though there were differences in the approaches and models chosen by local areas. There were three main detailed delivery models seen on the right-hand side of the spectrum: Young People's Foundations, such as Harrow, Youth Service Mutuals, such as Devon and Knowsley, and a broader VCS provider-led model in Lambeth. They are described in more detail below:

- Young People's Foundations are an initiative developed by the John Lyons Foundation and City Bridge Trust, based on a consortia approach to securing new investment by bringing together all local VCS and private providers, housing associations, and the local authority. They involve a central hub that bids for funding from a variety of sources including commissions from the local authority and corporate sector engagement, to then share it out amongst the partnership.
- Youth Service Mutuals such as Devon and Knowsley are set up as a separate legal entity to the local authority. In both local areas the main commission for their work still comes from the local authority although they were both seeking to diversify the range of funding they could draw on and had won contracts from the Big Lottery already, for example.
- The Lambeth model has the local authority acting as the direct commissioner of the VCS sector, but they do so by asking a lead VCS provider to act as a locality coordinator of other VCS providers. Lambeth was an example of an area whose overall approach had remained constant but whose detailed delivery model had changed, as the local authority had reassumed direct responsibility for commissioning from a separate organisation that had previously led this on their behalf.

It is important to stress where a local area is placed on the spectrum is not fixed permanently. There were some local areas that we visited who had moved further to the right on the spectrum and then moved back to the centre, as well as those who had stayed broadly in the same place but where their detailed delivery model and approach had changed. The spectrum should be thought of as a way to understand your broad overall approach as a local area and what you can learn from other parts of the spectrum, particularly if you wanted to move along the line.

Relationship between youth services and the wider youth offer, including the VCS

One of the key variants in the delivery models and approaches seen is the relationship between the youth service and the broader youth offer involving the voluntary and community sector. As noted above some local areas had deliberately chosen to try to build on and expand the role of the VCS, whilst others felt they already had a strong VCS and simply needed mechanisms to co-ordinate and join up the VCS offer with their own to ensure there was a coherent area wide offer.

As well as thinking about where they want to be on the overall spectrum to develop their youth offer, local areas might also want to think in more detail about the precise relationships they want to develop with the VCS and the mechanisms for doing this. We say more about this throughout the

report. At this stage, we have just captured some of the differences in the relationships between the local authority and the VCS we saw within the different delivery models.

In general, those areas on the left-hand side of the spectrum exhibited a strong local authority presence and a minor role for the VCS. One difference between these areas depended on the context of the local authority, in particular their geographical size. For example, Hertfordshire, a large shire local authority, had a more developed locality-based model for managing conversations with the VCS than other unitary, local authority-led models we came across, such as Salford and Leeds. In some instances, the local authority had attempted to work with VCS more closely but this was limited by the interest and willingness of the VCS to engage. One way that some local areas reflected they might be able to strengthen their engagement would be to have a regular forum or meeting that brought all providers together to discuss needs and the local offer in different areas.

Local authorities who were in the middle of the spectrum still often had a youth service directly delivered by the local authority but had developed a larger role for the VCS either by formally commissioning them to deliver services or by building their capacity and asking them to deliver services in localities wherever they judged there was a need.

Figure 2 below captures this difference between local authority led models and combined models. One way of thinking about this for local areas would be to think about the size of the respective circles you want within the local area – e.g. what proportion of the local youth offer do you want to be local authority led and what proportion do you want to be delivered by the VCS. This would then affect the size of the relative circles and affect where you were on the spectrum.

Figure 2 - Local authority-led model vs combined models, and their engagement with the VCS

Largely LA-run
LA involved in direct provision, with some commissioning of VCS

VCS as main provider
*Minor LA involvement in direct provision, largely commissioned out to VCS*
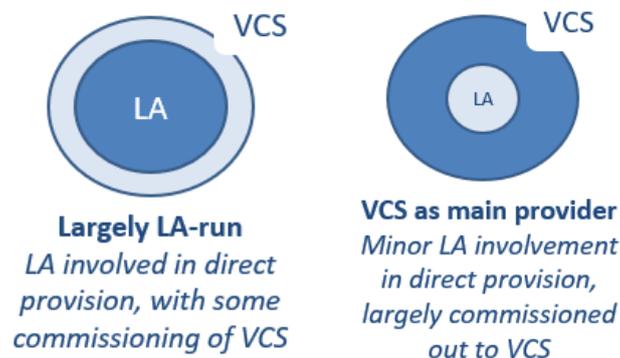
Figure 3 below then captures one of the differences in the delivery models on the right hand side of our spectrum. The first diagram represents either a Youth Mutual or a Young People's Foundation. Typicall,y in the case of Youth Mutuals, they are being commissioned directly by the local authority to provide youth services and the Youth Mutual itself and/or the local authority may also be commissioning VCS providers for additional youth projects. In the case of a Young People's Foundation they are not being commissioned by the local authority directly or commissioning the VCS themselves but rather they support the local authority's commissioning process through communicating with the VCS sector. The Young People's Foundation also supports VCS providers to bid for and access other national funding but does not commission the VCS sector itself for these projects. In the right-hand diagram, there is no body in between the LA and the VCS with the LA commissioning directly with a lead VCS provider in each locality to co-ordinate the offer from a range of other VCS providers (the Lambeth model described above).
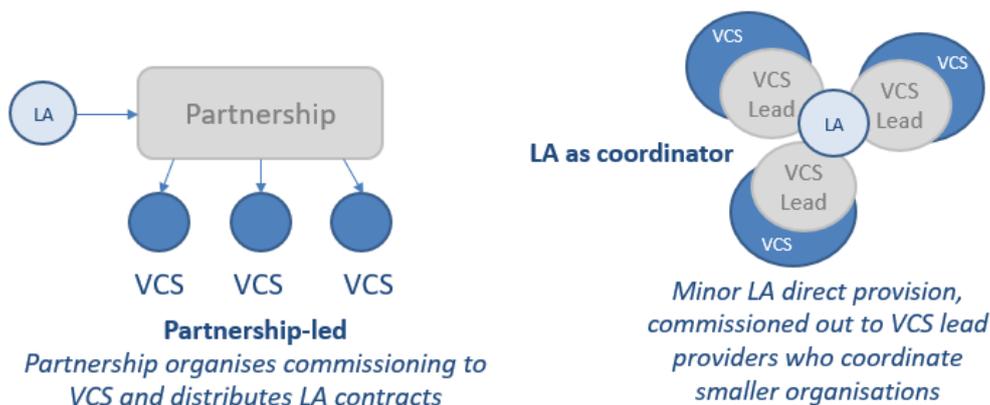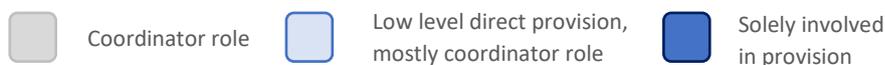
Summary of choices facing local areas about their delivery approach and model

Local areas have different choices to consider when developing local area youth offers. The first is to consider where the local authority wants to be on the broader spectrum (

Figure 1), based on their political context, budgetary priorities and strength of the VCS. Then there is a choice about the detailed delivery model to adopt and the way the local authority or partnership intends to engage with the VCS and how far it wants to diversify the range of providers and funding for its offer.

Part 2: Enablers to developing an effective local youth offer

In addition to the different choices facing local areas about the delivery models and the way local authorities relate to VCS partners set out in Part 1, we would argue there are also a number of enablers local areas need to think through wherever they are on the spectrum. Through our research, we have identified the following six enablers (Figure 4) as key to developing an effective local youth offer. Each enabler is underpinned by a further common theme – the importance of building in the voice of young people to everything a local area does.

Figure 4 - Six enablers to developing a local youth offer

For each enabler, the report summarises:

- Any good practice and differences in approach between different delivery models
- How the voice of all young people is being built into what local areas do
- Any challenges to developing an effective local youth offer, and
- Key questions local areas might want to ask themselves when building their local offer

We have also pulled together all of the key questions identified under each enabler into a self-evaluation tool that local areas can use to consider where they are now and what they might need to do next to further develop their own approach. This tool is included at Annex 2.

1. Vision and leadership

Our research has confirmed the importance of developing a clear overall vision for youth services and garnering support amongst senior leaders for a local youth offer. As stated in the LGA *Vision for Youth Services*, *"a joint vision that genuinely responds to young people will stand a far better chance of being delivered and being successful than a vision developed by the local authority alone"*. We have also seen how strong political leadership can enable longer-term investment and a clear direction for youth services.

Developing a clear and compelling vision

There are clear steps to achieving an easily communicable vision for a youth offer. In most of our case studies, a compelling vision involved a well-told story, that articulated the added value youth services brought and where they fitted within the local authority with regards to tackling broader systemic issues for young people. These broader issues generally included the following areas:

- mental health and wellbeing,
- tackling loneliness,
- educational attainment,
- employability, and
- reducing youth violence

Linking to these priorities helped to articulate the value of youth services but also helped connect them to other services within the local authority as well.

Creating a strong and positive vision for what a local area's youth offer is there to do and who it is there to serve is also important to ensure all partners know how they can contribute. In general, those areas that had developed an effective vision for youth services saw it as having three elements:

- it was built on consultations with all partners;
- it was intelligence-led; and
- its strategic role in contributing to the wider local authority children and young people's strategy and priorities was articulated.

Broad consultation was seen as vital in the development of a unifying vision to understand what all partners think are the problems on the ground, what interventions young people respond to and what role the youth offer can play. Colleagues emphasised the importance of *engaging* all partners (lead members, local authority officers, partner agencies), not just consulting with, in the process.

For example, Leeds shared how in their own vision-setting process, they were intent on having a broad ranging conversation, not focusing on money. They therefore deliberately excluded conversations about finances at the start. Partners were encouraged to start with a vision of what they wanted to achieve and why. Otherwise partners did not feel like they could be honest about their purpose as this made them fearful of losing funding.

A number of local areas had worked on ways to achieve a vision that was grounded in needs-led analysis. This was particularly common for those to the middle and right of spectrum as this was often an important part of the commissioning relationship. Such analysis was then used to identify specific priorities across the local area that all partners were asked to work towards in their projects – an example of this from the Young Harrow Foundation is shown below. Partners described the benefits of this approach in being clear about how they could contribute best and not feeling like they were retroactively trying to fit with existing local authority strategies.

Young Harrow Foundation: Intelligence-led needs analysis

Young Harrow Foundation, a Young People's Foundation, was set up with the support of DCMS and John Lyons Foundation - its role is to act as a partnership to get funding into the right local VCS organisations, and not as a youth service delivery organisation.

In order to develop a clear set of priorities, the partnership undertook a needs analysis exercise. Firstly, they consulted 51 charities through questionnaires and focus groups with their staff and participants over a 10 month period. Secondly, they developed a Joint Strategic Needs Analysis through the Directors of Data from the Council, Health, Police and the NHS on data evidence and predictions of need. They had also trained up two youth advocates per school to conduct 'needs analysis questionnaires' of 100 questions, that was successfully completed by 15% of the borough in the age group 11-20 years. The output resulted in 5 key areas of focus, with the accompanying data in a digestible format. The idea was all partners had contributed to the priorities; the output was now in a format that could be used by all partners when applying to funds; the data can also be used when partners design services to ensure they are built on a firm understanding of what the need is and the opportunities that are available; and the information available also facilitates better partnership working as partners are more aware of what others are doing. All organisations now have a tool to help them feel more aware of how their efforts fit in to one or more of the priority areas.

Another challenge in getting buy-in to the vision was ensuring other teams within the local authority fully understood the vision too. This is arguably easier to do if a local area is on the left-hand side of the spectrum. Most of our local areas argued that youth offers should be viewed as part of the wider Early Help offer but still as a distinct and specialised service. This ensures a respect for youth work's professional identity and value add that youth work can generate from deeper relationships with young people that other services might not have. Articulating its place within a broader Early Help offer helped both the youth service and other parts of the local authority to build more effective links and pathways between youth services, early help and social services.

Leadership

Committed leadership is also crucial to ensuring an effectively built local youth offer. In local areas where youth offers were most embedded, senior leaders including elected members, local authority officers, leaders of partner agencies and leaders of partnership arrangements, all exhibited a compelling understanding of the youth offer in their area, how it linked to other services and the risks that might occur if that was threatened by funding cuts. In local areas considered more 'local authority-led' as in

Figure 1, elected members had either been brought onside as key community leaders or were key drivers themselves who could provide an understanding of how youth services can develop solutions to local endemic and entrenched issues in their constituencies, such as exclusions, mental health and young people 'not in education, employment or training'. Having a good understanding of the importance of youth work at leadership level can further shed light on priorities youth services should address but is also incredibly beneficial in potentially preserving longer-term, sustainable funding.

Even if local areas are on the right-hand side of the spectrum, they still need strong political commitment and quality leadership. Local areas who had moved towards Youth Service Mutuals and Young People's Foundations spoke at length about the work they had done to build the trust of community partners. The ability of leaders in this context to bring partners together and facilitate their understanding of their role in supporting young people is a crucial leadership quality in this context. One colleague shared how they had used rising concerns around gang violence and knife crime as a catalyst for partners to realise they needed to work differently and creatively. In the example below, Knowsley had spent a considerable amount of time and effort in articulating their core role and purpose and describing the USP of their youth service.

Knowsley Youth Mutual: Developing a new vision for the role of Youth Services

Knowsley Youth Mutual was set up in 2014 when the Local Authority youth service span out of the Council. Most staff who had worked within the Youth Service moved across to the new organisation. With ongoing support from Knowsley Council and other funders including The National Lottery Youth Investment Fund, the Youth Mutual currently provides a range of services to young people in Knowsley, including universal, targeted and outdoor education.

Over the last 18 months the organisation has undergone significant changes in leadership and staffing and developed a new vision for its work. As part of this exercise they have undertaken a wide ranging consultation across Knowsley including engaging with young people on what they want from Youth Services and debated what it is that they can offer that other services cannot. This has resulted in a re-branding and name change for the organisation to appeal more to young people but most importantly a new clarity about their vision and mission. This new vision is built around the importance of building and strengthening youth relationships. They want to be seen as a national centre of excellence for teenage relationships. The new brand Vibe will be launched in 2020.

Building in the voice of all young people into everything we do

The areas with most compelling **visions** that seemed to capture the young person's voice aptly and regularly had multiple forums and mechanisms for capturing young people's ideas. Most of our case study areas used Youth Parliaments or Councils to engage children and young people in the development of the vision, but the most compelling examples showed creative thought around how voices were captured. In one area, two young people in every school were trained up to act as a youth service advocate who would conduct consultation exercises themselves. In another area, it was the youth worker who conducted the consultations. Colleagues felt the trusted relationship between a youth worker and the young person would drive more insightful feedback.

Within **leadership**, it was good practice to see leadership posts set up for children and young people. These could be termed as 'Youth Champions' who would attend key leadership and strategic meetings (such as grant panels and trustee boards). Sometimes, young people in these positions would be involved in key appointments of leaders within youth services. As one colleague put, "There is a difference between youth-led and youth-informed". Colleagues cited the real benefit and extra insights brought by being genuinely jointly *youth-led*.

Challenges and key questions to consider

Creating a persuasive vision with the support of key leaders requires time and broad consultation. Colleagues emphasised the patience that is required to ensure the vision genuinely builds in all partners, young people, families and the community to ensure it both leverages their skillset and capacity, but also avoids them feeling 'done to'. Key challenges colleagues shared with us when it comes to vision and leadership were:

- The importance of genuinely engaging all partners, rather than just consulting them – this will create a co-produced vision
- The need for regular reappraisal of the vision to ensure it is up-to-date and relevant
- For more devolved models, how is the youth offer still made visible amongst local authority services and other partners (e.g. social care, police and health)?
- How can you tell the story about youth services in a compelling way to show how the youth offer also meets wider priorities in the local area?

> **Key questions for local areas to consider:**
>
> - How clear are you about your vision for local youth services?
> - How involved do all partners feel in the creation of the local youth offer?
> - How well have young people been engaged in the development of the local offer?

2. Commissioning

Establishing a clear commissioning process was a big enabler to a strong offer for those local areas that are in the middle or to the right of the spectrum, in particular. Good practice we identified across our areas included commissioning frameworks that were needs-led, involved a rigorous and visible process and had clear management and governance. Effective commissioning can also play an important role in leveraging additional resources from local partners - police, NHS services and schools – to provide services beyond what a local authority might be capable of providing on its own.

Needs-led commissioning

Local areas with clear commissioning frameworks stated the importance of ensuring they were clear about how the framework linked to the broader priorities and wider strategy of the local youth offer. They had found that by commissioning on a locality basis against a set of locally identified needs and priorities, it had helped to build in the voice of local partners effectively. It also meant that local partners were clearly involved in the process; aware of how they could engage with it; and were encouraged to form joined-up responses to bids. By bringing together locally-produced priorities and matching them to the broader strategy, colleagues found that the youth offer became clearly joined up top-down and bottom-up and all parties felt they were clearly played in.

Rigorous and transparent process

In areas where there was a strong VCS presence, local authority colleagues thought it important to have a rigorous and visible process to ensure all VCS partners had a clear and transparent process that they could engage with. It was thought this would prevent smaller partners being overlooked and also enable collaborative local responses between partners. If the process is transparent and easy to engage with, it encourages providers to apply. Similarly, from the perspective of the local authority, it was thought that a transparent process makes it easier to spot opportunities to pool budgets. We saw some examples of pooled budgets across the local authority, Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) and the Police for distinct projects such as Community Safety.

> **Hull: Working in partnership with the VCS through effective commissioning**
>
> Hull Council have remained committed to a locality based youth service and have continued to invest significant resources (£1.75m annually) in a local authority youth service team and local youth centres. Leadership is also committed to close working with the VCS, with a focus on developing long-term relationships built on in-depth community knowledge. This is supported by the investment of an additional £750,000 in a commissioning budget of locality services from the VCS. Commissioning priorities are informed by locality based meetings which bring together youth workers, VCS, police and locality area teams to discuss specific needs. Schools are also now being invited to attend these locality meetings.
>
> The commissioning of VCS providers is on a five-year basis and the budget comes from the local authority, CCG and Police and Crime Commissioner which has helped to get their buy-in to the importance of the local youth offer. The process is deliberately designed to engage and encourage local VCS providers to apply – the local authority runs a market engagement event to explain the priorities to the VCS and help them to understand the process and to introduce them to other VCS providers where a joint offer might be the best option in a locality. The commissioning process explicitly asks for evidence of local capacity and the ability to work jointly with other local VCS providers to encourage this further. Local VCS providers were very positive about the process – they thought it was professional and treated them with respect. It gives them access to local funding but they also have to show how they are helping to meet local priorities and what impact they can have.

Appropriate management and oversight

Central to strong commissioning frameworks was the understanding on the part of the local authority or partnership of the need for an appropriate level of management and oversight of providers. Some areas had found in the past that a contract management process with too many detailed Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) was putting off some VCS providers from getting involved, as they did not have the capacity to cope with the reporting requirements. Some areas had spent time reviewing what level of reporting they required from providers. In the example from Hull, for instance, they held conversations with VCS providers to discuss their targets and milestones and had then agreed a reporting cycle that asked providers to submit each quarter a small selection of output data alongside a key case study that summarised their impact for those months.

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>
> In some local areas, there were examples of Young Commissioners being used as a formal part of the commissioning process. Small pots of money would be put aside for Young Commissioners, who would then choose the criteria for how this money would be spent; allocate money to youth-led initiatives based on how well they aligned with these criteria; and then monitor impact of the delivery. Other areas included young people in the consultation process to ensure the priorities underpinning the commissioning process were in line with their own priorities and the broader strategy behind the local youth offer. A good example of this was in Essex where they appointed a *Young Commissioners Programme* lead who worked with groups of children and young people to train them for the role. These young commissioners are working with senior councillors and community leaders to commission services for young people.

Challenges and questions to consider

Local areas highlighted two big challenges within their commissioning arrangements:

- how to ensure it was sufficiently open and visible to encourage as many organisations (new, established, big, or small) to engage with it as possible; and
- how to ensure partners are part of the process for setting the commissioning priorities.

The Youth Violence Commission[5] touches on the particular problem within the voluntary and community sector, where larger, national organisations with strong brands tend to be more likely to get funding than smaller groups. Having a commissioning process clearly underpinned by locally-developed priorities reduces the risk of only commissioning larger VCS players that perhaps are not aware of the specific needs or unique culture of an area.

> **Key questions for local areas to consider:**
>
> - How confident are you that your local commissioning process responds effectively to identified needs for youth priorities?
> - How well does the commissioning process allow all types of VCS providers including local and smaller providers to bid for provision?
> - How well do you use data and other information to manage providers?

3. Provision and delivery

The inquiry into youth work conducted by the APPG for Youth Affairs (2018) showed that much of the funding for youth services has become short-term which in turn, has caused interventions to become more targeted, moving away from universal services. Despite these funding challenges, throughout our research we heard the message from areas that they felt it it was still vital to maintain an element of open access universal provision, built cohesively and strategically into the local youth offer.

Targeted support

The most common areas that targeted youth support were being aimed at included supporting young parents, tackling mental health and loneliness, addressing youth violence, child sexual exploitation, supporting LGBTQ+ groups, and supporting young people into employment or training. Inevitably, youth workers providing this support would encounter many young people with multiple vulnerabilities and needs, so having opportunities to link them back into other broader services within the local authority if escalation was required was seen as critical.

One challenge some of the youth workers we spoke to identified was how to maintain the link between the youth worker and the young person if they have been referred to other services. They stressed that maintaining this link is crucial to keeping the trust of young people. It also allows youth workers to continue to support them and to understand whether further support and intervention is working for the young person. As one youth worker put it, *"If the referral is not suited and the youth worker has not maintained their link with the young person after the referral, that trust has been shaken and the young person might not interact with formal support services again."*

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[5] Youth Violence Commission (2019), viewed November 2019, <http://yvcommission.com/interim-report/>.

> **Salford: Strong joint working between a Youth Service and wider Children's Services**
>
> Salford has a local authority-led and run youth offer, with strong political backing that has wanted to retain an in-house youth service. Salford have been able to make the case for preserving local authority-run services by demonstrating close links to other services in the local authority to show they are responsive to need and can escalate cases quickly if needed. The flow of escalation and de-escalation is able to work both ways as youth workers are able to support young people who do not reach the thresholds in other services through targeted work. In order to achieve this understanding and fit with other local authority services, much work has been undertaken with staff across children's services to articulate the youth service role in the broader children's services strategy to show how it is both distinct and embedded within the council.
>
> Salford have also recognised the value of having locality based youth workers who can respond immediately when issues arise. Salford has retained detached units and specialist youth workers as they are key resources that are able to link into areas where there have been reports of youth related anti-social behaviour. These workers are able to consult with young people in their own environment, offer opportunities and sometimes advocate on their behalf. This mobile, detached work has done much for community cohesion and reducing anti-social behaviour.

This was why many of the local areas spoke about the importance of strong links between youth services and other Children's Services such as Early Help and the need for them to work closely together whilst respecting the skills and specialisms of each other. A number of local authorities had spent significant time and effort ensuring youth workers understood the broader early help strategy and systems and could play into them effectively – see the example from Salford above. They had also found that by encouraging youth workers to play this role other services within the local authority had also built a stronger understanding of what youth services could do and would look to use them more often as a result.

Open access and physical spaces

All of the local areas we visited as part of the research still thought there was value in having some element of open or universal services and for many, this required physical space. By retaining an element of open access, the youth offer has a public face in the local community and can break down barriers for harder to reach families. Facilities such as youth centres ensure accessibility and prioritise the end user – they can act as a point of information to understand what is available for them in their area as well as an opportunity for youth workers to identify at-risk young people. Some areas, as touched on in the Salford example, have invested in detached youth work where some youth workers go out into the communities. This also helps boost engagement and access with harder to reach young people.

When it came to physical spaces, most local areas felt the quality of the physical space mattered less than having the space. When faced with the option of closing down multiple, locality-based youth centres to renovate a central location, many areas were hesitant explaining that locality-based youth centres reduced distances (and cost) young people had to travel and therefore, increased the likelihood they would attend. For more urban areas, some said that due to gang violence and tensions, it was both dangerous and counterproductive to invest in a single setting as children or young people from different estates might be less likely to socialise together in a central location.

Coordination of the offer

In addition to thinking about their own targeted and universal service local areas also need to consider the wider provision that might up make a local youth offer. This is likely to involve working

with and across a range of partners to ensure that particular specialisms and expertise are leveraged and resources are used in the most effective way to meet needs.

The local areas in this research that had built the most cohesive offers had clear mechanisms in place where all partners, and sometimes young people, came together to plan local offers and programmes that didn't duplicate. In the example from Hull above for instance, locality-based Youth Networks were set up specifically for this purpose. Local partners came together to outline what activities would happen, when, to understand if there was overlap or gaps. Another good example of the way local provision was being co-ordinated in many areas was around the development of summer-holiday offers or programmes where local areas had mapped all of the activities that were available across any area. This had then become the basis for starting to consider year-round offers.

This co-ordination and flexibility in adapting the offer to locality needs was particularly important in large county areas because they had often had a greater diversity of needs. In the example below from Hertfordshire, for instance, they had very different needs and capacity from partners in different parts of the county, so they had to deliver the youth offer on much more of a locality basis.

> **Hertfordshire: A co-ordinated and flexible youth offer managed through locality partnerships**
>
> YC Hertfordshire (YCH) is a distinct and visible brand and an integral part of Hertfordshire County Council Children's Services. It provides a range of targeted youth work projects and programmes, information, advice and guidance, work-related learning, outdoor education and other services. Its operational delivery model is based around the 10 districts and boroughs in the county which avoids duplication and allows it to tailor its offer to the specific needs of each locality and react to local issues as they arise. This is particularly important in a county the size of Hertfordshire which has both urban towns, borders with London as well as large rural areas.
>
> The local delivery model also allows YCH to play a key strategic role in the delivery and development of other key local networks, such as locality based Joint Action Groups, Community Safety Partnerships and Youth Action Panels. They talked about the way the locality model had helped them respond quickly to emerging issues around county lines, gang crime and sexual exploitation in different parts of the county and establish new provision quickly to meet needs. With YCH youth workers operating in local communities daily, they are able to spot the signs of any difficulties and developing needs, and work with young people to deliver targeted prevention and early intervention - with good connections back into wider early help services.

> **Building in the voice of all young people into everything we do**
>
> Local areas said that it did not matter if a local youth offer worked operationally if it did not suit the timetables or lives of the young people it was intended for. Therefore, when considering the coordination of the local offer, it was sensible for local areas to build young people into the process for developing weekly timetables or summer programmes. This was done through consulting with young people already attending youth projects to understand what enabled them to attend; building young people into the programme design; and consulting young people in schools to understand the barriers to attendance. This was where some areas had found it particularly beneficial to have an allocated youth worker in schools to act as their advocate and bring back feedback from a wider group of students.

Challenges and questions to consider

One challenge many local areas were grappling with was the quality of and lack of investment in physical youth centres or spaces. As we noted above, most local areas in this research believed that having multiple locality-based youth centres, (even if they were not housed in high quality facilities) was more effective than a single high-status setting, even if that setting had better facilities.

However, many of these areas also reflected on the challenges of engaging young people overall and that getting them out of their bedrooms and away from social media to engage in positive activities was an ongoing challenge. There were concerns about the quality of some physical spaces that had not seen investment for a number of years and there was interest in exploring new funding opportunities including the new Youth Investment Fund. Many local areas were also actively exploring other facilities they might have available to them and how they can use existing premises creatively, such as through the engagement of schools and wider access to their facilities.

Key questions for local areas to consider:

- How clear are you about the range of youth provision in the local area and any gaps in this provision? How well is this provision co-ordinated across the local area?
- How well is the current mix of provision suited to young people's needs?
- Do you have the right mix and quality of physical youth centres/spaces to meet the needs of young people?

4. Partnership working and capacity building

We identified in Part 1 of this report the importance of the relationships between the local authority or local partnerships and the wider VCS in the planning and delivery of the wider youth offer. In this section we look at how wider youth offers are coordinated across local areas and the partnership working between local authorities and the VCS, police, health and schools. As the LGA *Vision for Youth Services* suggests, "genuine collaboration can help to deliver the local vision, with improved…coordination more likely to lead to better outcomes".

Voluntary and community sector

Wherever local authorities found themselves on the spectrum in

Figure 1, the voluntary and community sector was an important partner in the local youth offer. Local areas were at different stages on the journey in understanding and articulating the difference in role they wanted the VCS to play but most were at least considering how to effectively build them into the offer. As we noted in Part 1, as local areas moved from left to right on the spectrum the role played by the VCS typically grew and became more formalised with commissioning arrangements often making them a formal part of the local offer. This was not always the case though with some of those areas with different delivery models on the right-hand side still having limited engagement with the local VCS.

One common feature of local areas who had actively tried to create space for the VCS to play a greater role in the Youth Offer was to deliberately try to generate a non-competitive environment between the local authority or partnership and the VCS. They often did this by seeking to agree with the VCS the areas where they had strengths and specialisms and deliberately creating the space for them to play that role. In Leeds, for example, they clearly differentiated the roles and expertise of the local authority and the VCS as part of developing their new vision for Youth Services. In Devon,

the Youth Mutual has tried to formalise this non-competitive environment by encouraging other VCS organisations to submit supporting statements to their bids and to do the same in return when others are applying. They said they had only been able to reach this point through close-working and mutual understanding of their respective expertise.

In other cases, there had been a very deliberate effort and strategy to build the capacity of the VCS and grow the number of VCS providers who were playing a formal role in delivery of the local youth offer. For example, in the case study from Essex below, they have shown a very deliberate strategy to grow and develop the local VCS by strongly building the voluntary capacity and sharing local authority assets. In Hull, as we identified above, the local authority has identified the strengths of their internal services and the areas and priorities where the VCS would be better placed to take the lead role. This was the starting point from which they built their commissioning framework for VCS providers. In most of these best practice engagements with the VCS, there was a clear forum for bringing together the VCS on a regular basis. Balancing interests and resources in these settings can be challenging but it generates the feeling that everyone has had a chance to engage and be involved.

> ### Essex: Strong partnership working and capacity building with the VCS
>
> The large-scale reductions in budgets for youth services in Essex earlier in the decade had caused them to think differently about how to provide the youth offer and interact with VCS partners. Whilst Essex have preserved elements of targeted work with a team of flexible youth workers who can be deployed across the county, the main focus of their efforts has been on growing and developing the capacity of the VCS sector to lead delivery at a locality level in what they call a 'Community Capacity Building Model' (CCB).
>
> The support provided assumes multiple forms from physical resources, such as the free use of local authority-owned youth centres and mobile units, curriculum resource libraries as well as advice to help volunteers set up a community-interest company, develop policies and access funding; to more formal youth work training and qualifications and DBS checks. Each group receives regular visits from ECC youth workers, who offer support with data management, deliver issue-based sessions and share their expertise and ideas. Once a year each group receives a complete quality check, this process goes a long way to ensure that VCS clubs are safe and deliver a good quality youth offer.
>
> The local authority also does work to bring the VCS partners together through stakeholder events and community breakfasts to support them to build their own networks, understand their respective roles in the youth offer and identify opportunities to jointly deliver projects. The Council have occasionally had to take the tough decision to decline a partnership agreement to ensure safety and quality of services are maintained, but overall, they have seen a significant growth in the capacity and expertise of the local VCS over the last 5 years.

No matter the role the VCS played in a local offer, colleagues were keen to emphasise the dedicated support required to upskill VCS partners, and the appreciation that this may take time. This upskilling and support are particularly important when transitioning to another delivery model, such as from local authority-led to more of a partnership arrangement.

Other partners

Schools and education are also key partners in developing a local youth offer and there were a variety of different ways local areas were trying to engage schools in the local youth offer. In Salford,

for example, they had kept dedicated youth workers allocated to specific schools who provide the key point of contact between the youth service and schools; in other areas schools were being engaged through locality meetings to contribute to the identification of specific needs and discuss how the local youth offer could work with schools to meet them. Some areas had engaged school leaders in strategic conversations about priorities for local areas and were trying to take this conversation to more strategic forums that could engage Multi-Academy Trust CEOs as well.

In the changing education landscape, it is crucial that schools are linked into the development of the local youth offer early on to ensure they have an understanding of how they can contribute through initiating projects themselves, linking young people up with the local offer, or by providing access to their own facilities for other providers. It means they can also influence the development of local priorities and ensure it is helping them meet the needs of their students.

Other partners that were involved in local youth offers were Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC) and Health services. PCC tended to be involved through community safety partnerships and tackling gang violence. Health colleagues were frequently involved in projects that required more specialist interventions often around issues with mental health. Some colleagues had found pooling budgets with such partners on specific projects was a key enabler to bring shared commitment to the youth offer. In Hull for example, where the Police and Crime Commissioner, Health Services and the local authority all put money into the commissioning pot for VCS partners the Youth Service manager felt this had been one of the most powerful ways of building genuine engagement of partners in the development of the local youth offer.

Building in the voice of all young people

Local areas that had tried to build in the voice of young people understood that young people were part of the partnership, and were not a stakeholder who could be intermittently consulted. Some local areas had trained up young people who were otherwise not involved in Youth Parliaments or Councils to become advocates for youth services. These advocates would then work closely across schools and VCS partners to boost the visibility of the offer. This is also something that UK Youth undertakes. Similarly, one area (Harrow) had recruited young people with lived experience of their priorities to act as champions. These young people would then attend strategy meetings, panels and commissioning meetings to ensure the offer was always grounded in real life experience.

Challenges and questions to consider

A partnership approach is key to youth services, particularly in the context of diminishing resources. Local authorities spoke about the challenge of reviewing their partnership working and ensuring all voices were being heard or represented. Local areas specifically spoke about the challenges of:

- Ensuring partners and VCS providers saw themselves as part of the broad youth offer i.e. aligning provision that was not explicitly youth services (schools, police, health services, parks, housing, transport) to the youth offer to ensure they understood the role they played in meeting the outcomes as part of a systemic approach to supporting young people
- Working and engaging with their VCS partners, specifically some smaller, specialist VCS providers, who might not want to adapt what they are doing to fit within the broader offer
- Access to funding - Partnership working can be difficult if the local authority determines how the budget is being spent because this can make VCS partners feel that they do not have a

route into funding. This can be where a commissioning model is powerful, where its priorities are co-produced with VCS partners and its processes are transparent.

> **Key questions for local areas to consider:**
>
> - How well are partners engaged in the development of the local youth offer?
> - How effectively does the governance of the partnership work currently?
> - How transparent and open is the partnership about how decisions are made?

5. Workforce development

One of the key challenges which many local areas identified was how to ensure youth work remains a valued profession and how to avoid simply replacing qualified staff with unqualified staff or volunteers. This has been a longstanding issue in the sector and the National Youth Agency (NYA) has long campaigned for the importance of a skilled workforce and ongoing professional development. This is supported by the APPG for Youth Affairs who identified large numbers of people leaving the profession, due to limited progression and/or support. The APPG argued for a coherent workforce strategy and a renewal of the national occupational standards by 2020 so that it includes a national curriculum for youth work training – something the NYA are currently developing. Whilst this is being developed local areas are focused on two main areas to support the continued professional identity and development of youth workers.

Maintaining the professional identity of Youth Work

Just as it is key to ensure the youth offer is linked into but remains distinct from the early help offer in a local authority, local areas felt it was also important that youth work retained a distinct professional identity from other services. They recognised the importance of connections between staff working in different areas but argued that youth workers had a specialist set of skills and a unique and different relationship with young people. In particular, they emphasised the unique relationship of trust that a youth worker has with a young person, in that they gain insight into a young person's life in ways that other services might not.

Local authorities had worked hard to retain this professional identify and ensure it was recognised and respected by other services within the local authority. Some areas had chosen to continue to adhere to the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) framework to maintain this professional identity. They found this helped make the case to continue to invest in youth work as the JNC accreditations provided a quality guarantee that youth work practitioners could meet the needs of young people. Other areas that had chosen to opt-out of JNC had tried to continue to develop this sense of professional identity by having clear career progression and training opportunities. One colleague argued there was a need *"to be ambitious about what a youth worker could be in 2019",* speaking of the need to support youth workers to increase and broaden their skillsets wherever possible.

Developing pathways to Youth Work

The other key aspect to preserving youth work's professional identity was the importance of long-term planning around training and recruitment. If areas wanted to maintain a skilled youth workforce, they need to ensure they have a long-term recruitment strategy. One local area, Salford, has undertaken considerable work on apprenticeship pathways to support potential future youth workers (including some who are users of the services currently) into training. Similarly, as the case study below shows, Leeds has worked closely with Leeds Beckett University to enable flexibility across social care and youth work qualifications so that in students' first year of study, they study

each module alongside each other to help them understand the expectations of each profession better. For areas that valued the professional identity of youth workers, having a long-term plan was integral to their offer.

Leeds: Developing a long term strategy to recruit and develop Youth Workers

Leeds are currently in the process of reviewing their approach to Youth Services, learning from the recent transformation of their social care work. As part of this review, workforce development has become a big priority, with much learning applied from the social care experience, such as the need for succession planning and career progression programmes.

A course at Leeds Beckett University has been developed closely with the local authority and local youth partners to facilitate a long term recruitment pool of youth workers. The course has been set up flexibly so that students study alongside other professional groups – those who work with children and families, and those studying social care. This helps promote visibility of the youth work degree and perhaps as a result, currently, Leeds Beckett has one of the biggest cohorts for youth work qualifications in the UK. Discussions are already underway to support the delivery of pre-degree level qualifications and degree apprenticeships.

Once youth workers are recruited into the local youth offer, the local authority advocates a strong message around preserving the professional identity of the youth workers. They have kept the JNC because it was felt it both recognises the value of youth workers and guarantees quality of work. But they also spoke about the importance of supporting the wellbeing and progression of frontline staff, with regular supervisions and training for youth workers to develop their vocational and professional capabilities.

Building in the voice of all young people into everything we do

There are two clear ways that young people can be built into workforce development: by giving participants in youth services themselves the opportunity to become youth workers and by involving young people in recruitment decisions. With the right training and support, young people with experience of youth services are an incredibly well-placed cohort to become youth workers. Likewise, some areas we spoke to had a Youth Champion post who was involved in panel decisions for recruitment of key strategic posts.

Challenges and questions to consider

Key challenges for local areas when addressing workforce development include the importance of ensuring recruitment plans are sufficiently long-term to facilitate succession planning; the development of pathways to ensure enough people are supported effectively into qualifications; and the importance of making training current and responsive to the needs on the ground. For areas with culturally diverse communities, having culturally-sensitive training and/or a workforce reflective of the local communities was also seen as integral to building trust with young people.

6. Demonstrating impact

All of the local areas recognised the importance of evaluating the impact of their youth offer in order to hold their services and partners to account but also to make the case for investment in youth services to politicians. This was also an enabler that all areas had found particularly challenging given the range of priorities that their youth offer was contributing to and the lack of direct correlation between youth work and the outcomes they were seeking to achieve.

One way local areas had found it helpful to think about outcomes and impact was to ask themselves why they were evaluating impact and who they are doing it for. This had helped them to break it down and think about measuring impact at a number of different levels, by collecting participation data and case study evidence as well as measuring their wider impact.

Participation data

Local areas thought that collecting simple input and output data is important when monitoring impact of youth interventions as providers must be aware of the numbers they are reaching, who they are engaging and the length of engagements with young people. These are simple metrics that can track engagement with a local youth offer but they are an important illustration of the reach of youth services and the young people they are engaging that other services may not be. Monitoring this input and output data requires adequate data systems and a process for making sense of these numbers in a comparable way across partners. Local authorities or partnerships should be prepared to work with and build the expertise of VCS providers to collect this information in a consistent way - if necessary, for example, they might want to develop systems or templates for others to use.

Case study evidence

Some local areas involved in our research felt it was crucial to tell the story of impact from the young person's perspective – they saw this as the best way for the true multi-disciplinary nature of youth work to be captured. Telling the story of the impact of a youth offer in this way can be motivating for all involved: for the youth workers to make them feel more confident in their work; for stakeholders to create a strong link with impact on the ground; and perhaps most importantly, it speaks to the young person in their own language about their own progression which is something they can be proud of. Putting the young person's voice at the heart of impact evaluation creates a powerful message of the change an intervention has brought. The example from Devon below shows one way in which a local area is trying to tell the story of their work through the voices of young people and youth workers.

Measuring broader impact

On their own, participation data and case study evidence are likely to be insufficient to evidence the wider impact of youth offers. Some of our local areas thought they needed to be more confident in demonstrating their broader impact on the wider priorities, such as reducing youth violence, supporting mental health and wellbeing and assisting young people into employment. One colleague

emphasised, *"We all believe that youth work works and therefore, we should not be afraid to name and articulate the rationale behind an intervention and why we think that has caused change"*.

To make this case for their broader impact, local areas may need to identify appropriate proxy measures that can show the progress individual and groups of young people have made. Some areas were using measures of increased resilience and 'outcomes stars' as tools to do this. It can also be beneficial for all partners to work in the same way and report in a consistent fashion. For example, Harrow has done considerable work to ensure that the language used at all levels to talk about impact (from small VCS providers to local authority to macro impact) is the same.

Devon: Using Young Peoples Voice to support the evaluation of the impact of their work

Devon's Youth Mutual, Space (DYS Space Ltd) started in 2017 when it spun out from the local authority. Central to Space's creation was the voice of the young people. More recently, Space has championed the voice of the young person in their impact evaluation. As part of a programme called *Transformative Evaluation*, the youth mutual follows a four-stage process to capture stories of impact in a meaningful way. The process starts with the young person who has been supported by youth work. A youth worker facilitates a reflective dialogue with the young person, where they are asked, "What been the most significant change you have felt/experienced since you have been using our service?".

The youth worker then dissects the change the young person has identified – outlines the rationale behind why the intervention was put in place and how they think it made a difference to the young person. Then the youth workers come together and organise their stories into themes. In the third stage, these themes and stories are taken to the broader stakeholder group who select the most representative, impactful story per theme. These themes and key stories are then evaluated in the final stage to understand the impact of interventions, improvements to be made, strengths of the system and are used to tell the story of the offer.

Space has found this process powerful because it comes directly from the voice of the young person. Therefore, it does not involve retro-fitting stories to strategic priorities because the themes emerge out of the stories themselves. It is also beneficial in creating a strong link to and involvement of stakeholders which builds their understanding of provision on the ground. And finally, it generates self-reflection at all levels: for the young person to understand their own progress; for the youth worker to understand their impact and areas for improvement; for stakeholders to understand the outcomes for the broader system. In this way, colleagues have found this an incredibly motivating tool as those involved in the offer at all levels are able to see how they fit in.

Building in the voice of all young people into everything we do

The key way to capture the voice of young people in impact evaluation is by getting them to tell their own story. As the Devon example above shows, providers need to be creative with how young people's voices are captured, they need to be captured by people the young person trusts (e.g. youth workers, trusted adults or peers) and these voices need to be captured in a way that helps the young person to understand their own progress too.

Challenges and questions to consider

The crucial element of impact evaluation that tended to be lacking in local areas was measuring the broader impact of the youth offer. Local areas emphasised the challenges they faced in linking the impact of smaller projects to the broader local authority-held priorities. This link can be tackled earlier on in the process if the link between the youth offer's vision and strategy has been made to the local authority's priorities. However, if this has not been made early enough, it can be hard to retrospectively do so.

Another key area for a local area to get right is in creating a culture of measuring progress in a way that is mutually beneficial - for lead organisations to ensure accountability and progress and for providers to grow and develop. Some areas had found it challenging to create a process that did not become too bureaucratic or did not ask for too much data that would then go unused. Creating a common language to tell the story across all levels helped with this understanding and helped partners to understand why local areas needed the data. Many areas spoke positively of the resources provided by Centre for Youth Impact in considering how to measure impact.

Key questions for local areas to consider:

- How clear are you about the key performance indicators/measures of success for your youth offer?
- How are you using the voice of young people to evaluate the impact you are having?
- How well can you articulate how you are meeting the needs of the young people you are set up to support as well as the broader impact the youth offer is having?

Conclusions and looking to the future

Given the rising national concerns around youth violence, exclusions and children and young people's mental health and wellbeing, the role of a strong local youth offer is ever more crucial in supporting young people to reach their full potential, develop positive relationships and make good transitions to adulthood.

Local areas face a series of choices on how to deliver their youth offer most effectively – what role they want the local authority to play, how to work with and commission VCS partners, and whether to introduce a different delivery model entirely. This research has shown the importance of local flexibility in local authorities being able to choose the right approach to fit local context and best meet the needs of children and young people locally.

Whatever choice local authorities make about their overall approach our research has identified six common enablers to an effective local youth offer that we would encourage all local areas to consider when developing their local youth offer:

1. **Vision and leadership** - Local areas must be clear about their purpose and how they intend to achieve the desired outcomes for young people
2. **Commissioning** - They must articulate the rationale behind different partners' involvement in order to best leverage the full range of resources to support the youth offer
3. **Provision and delivery** - The programme of provision must be practicable for young people and suitable for a set of evolving needs
4. **Partnership and capacity building** - Partners must be able to have a clear way of engaging with and shaping the local youth offer
5. **Workforce development** - There must be a long-term plan behind youth work recruitment to ensure a broad range of people can be supported into the profession
6. **Demonstrating impact -** Local areas must be able to tell the story about who the youth offer is for, why it matters and the impact it has made

They should also be regularly reviewing how they are building in the voice of young people into everything they do across these six enablers.

In the context of the review to statutory guidance for youth services and potential new national investment and funding available through the new Youth Investment Fund, there may be new opportunities for local areas to consider how best to develop their local youth offer. We would argue it will be easier for local areas to make the case for their local youth offer and take advantage of any new funding if they can show they have reflected on their existing youth offer, can tell a clear story about why it has developed in the way that it and the impact it has had to date. To help them to do this we would encourage all local areas to consider the key questions under each enabler which are summarised in Annex 2 of this report. We hope these questions could provide a helpful way of reviewing your own current local youth offer with partners and seeing if there are ways it could be further strengthened.

Annex 1 – Studies considered in literature review

Contextual research studies and commentary

- Local Government Association (2018). *Bright Futures: One year on.* Available at: https://local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/15.45%20Bright%20Futures%20One%20Year%20On_v10_WEB.pdf (Accessed: October 2019)
- Centre for Youth Impact (December 2018), *A framework of outcomes for young people 2.0.* Available at: http://www.youthimpact.uk/uploads/1/1/4/1/114154335/a_framework_of_outcomes_for_young_people_2.0_-_executive_summary.pdf (Accessed: May 2019)
- Barnardo's (March 2019), *APPG on Knife Crime: Young people's perspectives on knife crime.* Available at: https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/APPG%20on%20Knife%20Crime%20-%20Young%20people%27s%20perspectives%20May%202019.pdf. (Accessed: May 2019)
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- YMCA (2018) *Youth and Consequences - report on youth services expenditure in England and Wales.* Available at: https://www.ymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Youth-Consequences-v0.2.pdf (Accessed: May 2019)
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- Local Government Information Unit (2017), *Youth services and emerging models of delivery.* Available at: https://www.lgiu.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Youth-services-and-emerging-models-of-delivery-round-up-and-targeted-services-for-vulnerable-young-people.pdf (Accessed: May 2019)
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- National Youth Agency (2012). *What is a sufficient youth offer?* Available at: http://www.nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/NYA-Commission-into-%E2%80%98what-is-a-sufficient-youth-offer%E2%80%99.pdf (Accessed: May 2019)

Campaigns

- Unite (2017), *Youth Work: Professionals Valued.* Available at: http://www.youthworkunit.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Professionals-Valued-November-17.pdf (Accessed: May 2019)
- National Youth Agency (2014), *Vision for Youth Work in England until 2020.* Available at: http://www.nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/NYA-A-Vision-for-Youth-final-low-res.pdf (Accessed: May 2019)

Evaluations and Case Studies

- Centre for Youth Impact (Ongoing), *Resource Hub.* Available at: https://www.youthimpact.uk/resource-hub.html (Accessed: May 2019)

- Local Government Information Unit (2017), *Briefing: Youth Services and Emerging Models of Delivery: Youth Service Mutual*. Available at: https://lgiu.org/briefing/youth-services-and-emerging-models-of-delivery-youth-service-mutuals/ (Accessed: May 2019)
- Local Government Information Unit (2017), *Briefing: Youth Services and Emerging Models of Delivery: Young People's Foundations*. Available at: https://lgiu.org/briefing/youth-services-and-emerging-models-of-delivery-young-peoples-foundations/ (Accessed: May 2019)
- Local Government Information Unit (2017), *Briefing: Youth Service: the Delivering Differently for Young People (DDYP) programme*. Available at: https://lgiu.org/briefing/youth-service-the-delivering-differently-for-young-people-ddyp-programme/ (Accessed: May 2019)
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Annex 2 – Self-Assessment Framework

Theme		Sub-questions	Rating	What are the main strengths?	Priorities for improvement?
1	Vision and leadership	- How clear are you about your vision for local youth services? - How involved do all partners feel in the creation of the local youth offer? - How well have young people been engaged in the development of the local offer?			
2	Commissioning	- How confident are you that your local commissioning process responds effectively to identified needs for youth priorities? - How well does the commissioning process allow all types of VCS providers including local and smaller providers to bid for provision? - How well do you use data and other information to manage providers?			
3	Provision and delivery	- How clear are you about the range of youth provision in the local area and any gaps in this provision? How well is this provision co-ordinated across the local area? - How well is the current mix of provision suited to young people's needs? - Do you have the right mix and quality of physical youth centres/spaces to meet the needs of young people?			
4	Partnership working and capacity building	- How well are partners engaged in the development of the local youth offer? - How effectively does the governance of the partnership work currently? - How transparent and open is the partnership about how decisions are made?			
5	Workforce development	- Does the local area have a long-term strategy to support the recruitment and retention of qualified youth workers? - Are youth workers well supported in their ongoing training and development? Is the training relevant and up to date to help meet the evolving needs of young people? - How broad a cross-section of people is attracted and brought into youth work?			
6	Demonstrating impact	- How clear are you about the key performance indicators/measures of success for your youth offer? - How are you using the voice of young people to evaluate the impact you are having? - How well can you articulate how you are meeting the needs of the young people you are set up to support as well as the broader impact the youth offer is having?			