



D£VALUED

A decade of cuts to youth services

A report examining local authority
expenditure on youth services
In England & Wales

February 2022



Introduction

As the longest provider of youth services in England and Wales, YMCA has seen generations of young people grow, explore and develop with the help of youth workers and as part of their communities. The methods, techniques and delivery of youth services may have changed somewhat over the years, but their importance for young people has not. What has changed, however, is the precarious nature of how these vital services can continue to operate on fewer resources.

Despite the importance of youth services as part of forming communities and enriching children's lives, government funding for the sector has been gutted over the past ten years. Although many public services too were on the receiving end of cuts as a result of austerity-led economic policies in the wake of the 2007–8 Global Financial Crisis, the hit to youth services has been particularly deep.

YMCA has tracked the real-terms decline in youth services funding over the past several years: that is, adjusting funding amounts over previous years for inflation. Historic figures are then directly comparable to the most recent years to better grasp the decline of money spent relative to its current value. With annual inflation at 5.4% at the time of writing,¹ the importance of comparing figures at their real-term value is particularly stark.

The latest figures from 2020/21 are significant as a showcase of a decade in change, but also the immediate and localised fallout of a new global crisis. The Covid-19 pandemic meant a shift in how youth services operated throughout many months of this financial year: from a closure of centres to shifting services online, to safely providing vital social and recreational time for young people outside of the house.

As youth services resume to business-as-usual clubs and services, the needs of young people they seek to welcome through their doors will be more complex than prior to the pandemic. National lockdowns, school closures, virus contagion and isolation all shifted how young people were able to live, learn and play. Loneliness and low-level mental health concerns were longstanding prior to the pandemic. Now these issues have been exacerbated, with fewer resources to build friendships and resilience.

This report analyses the fall in youth services spending over the past ten years. It looks not only at the national picture but the regions where young people have been most affected in recent years, for better or worse. This includes, for the first time, analysis on how widely spend per 5- to 17-year-old differs across local authorities, exposing the disparity in opportunities available for them depending on where they live.

¹ Office for National Statistics, Consumer price inflation, UK: December 2021, 19 January 2022

Methodology

This report follows YMCA's previous *Out of Service* research, which investigated changes in local authority spending since 2010/11.²

The analysis was conducted by taking the individual datasets of local authority spending on youth services for each financial year since 2010/11 and then converting these costings into real terms to make them comparable with 2020/21. The financial and cost difference were then analysed at a national level (in this report, England and Wales have not been combined for an overall total, given the distinct spending patterns between the countries), at a regional level and at a local level with the highest and lowest levels of cuts.

In this report, data was selected from the Office for National Statistics' estimates of the population for England and Wales from mid-2010 to mid-2020. Local authority population counts of 5- to 17-year-olds were compared against local authority spend on youth services to generate a per-head figure.

Wales

Data for the Isle of Anglesey has been excluded from the dataset and report due to a number of years' data being missing.

Powys did not report its data for 2018/19 and so the figure from 2017/18 was used, and then adjusted using an average of the percentage change for all declared local authorities between 2017/18 and 2018/19. This equated to a 2% reduction on the 2017/18 figure.

Real-terms increases

The spending referenced in this research has been converted into real terms. This conversion takes the latest gross domestic product (GDP) deflators provided by HM Treasury and is used as a measure of general inflation in the domestic economy. This allows a true reflection on how much spending in 2010 would be equivalent to now.

Youth services definition

For the purposes of this research, 'youth services' broadly encapsulates two types of service: 'open-access' (or 'universal') services, including a range of leisure, cultural, sporting and enrichment activities often based around youth centres; and more targeted provision for vulnerable young people, including teenage pregnancy advice, youth justice teams, and drug and alcohol misuse services.

² YMCA, *Out of Service*, January 2020

England

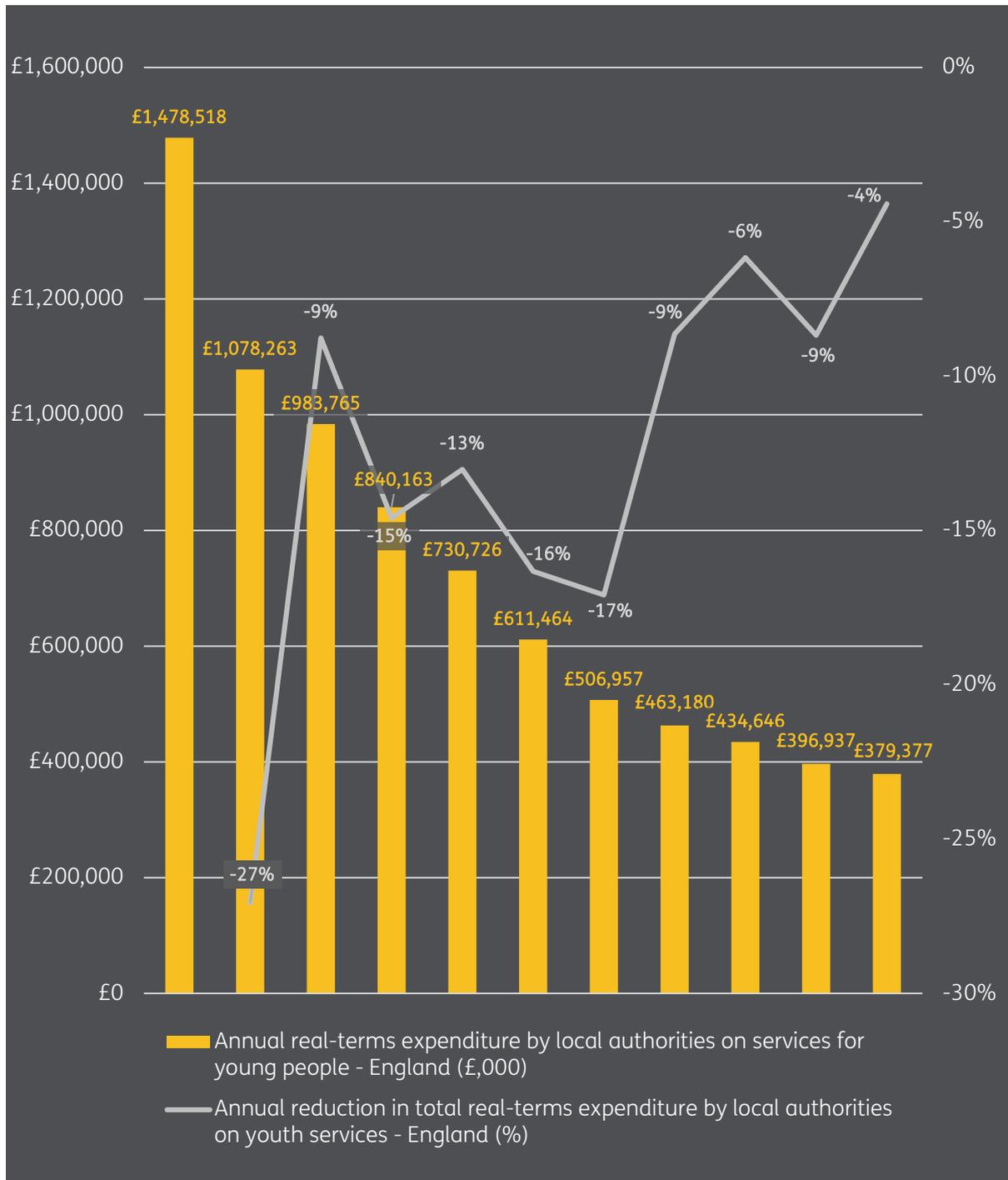
In 2020/21, local authority spending on youth services in England totalled £379m. This represents £1.1bn cut in youth services funding over the past ten years in England, with real-terms expenditure down 74% from 2010/11's £1.48bn spend.

In the last year, real-terms local authority spending on youth service fell by 4% from £397m in 2019/20. This represents a slow-down in cuts over the past few years, with the lowest rate of annual decline in the past decade.

On the ground, this reduction in funding for the delivery of youth services (such as through youth worker salaries, staff support and the running of projects) means fewer young people can be supported. In a handful of local authorities, this vital funding has been wiped out entirely, with seven declaring that no money had been allocated to youth services in 2020/21.

Local authority budgets for youth service provision plummeted under the Coalition government's policy of austerity following the Global Financial Crisis, with financing halved between 2010/11 and 2014/15. Although the depth of year-on-year cuts have stayed single-digit since 2017/18, the substantial stripping back of services at the start of the decade gave little room for any further heavy declines.

Total real-terms expenditure by local authorities on youth services in England and year-on-year decline in expenditure, 2010/11 – 2020/21



Wales

Welsh local authority spending on youth services has decreased over the past decade, albeit not with the same ferocity as in England. In 2020/21, local authorities in Wales (excl. Isle of Anglesey) spent £37.7m on youth services, representing a 32% real-terms decrease from £54.5m in 2010/11.

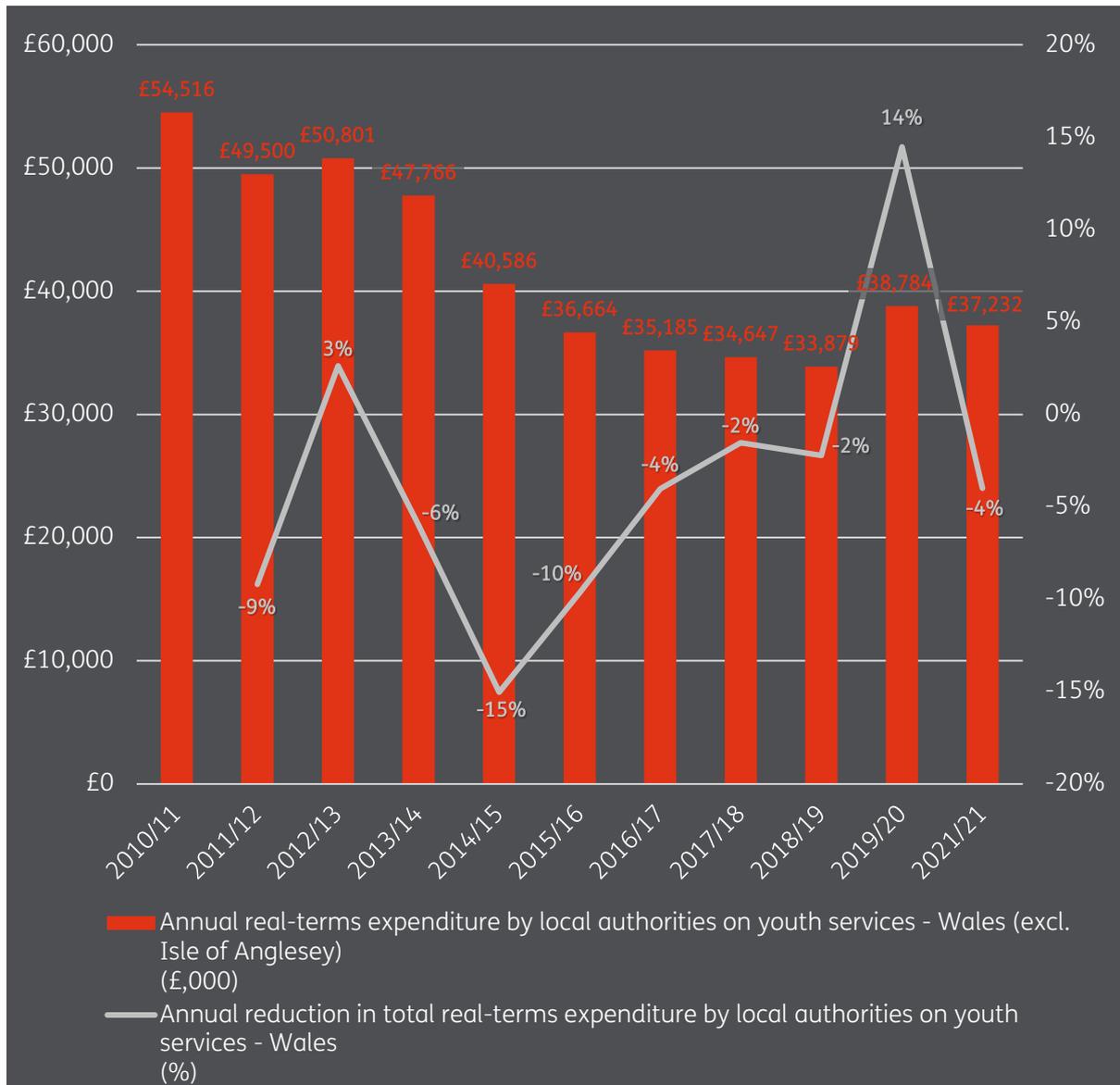
Although real-terms spending fell 4% year-on-year from 2019/20 (£38.8m), this was on the back of a 14% annual increase in spending between 2018-19. This jump in budget in 2019/20 came from a 72% increase in income from national sources, such as the Youth Work Strategy Support Grant and Families First. This level was maintained in 2020/21, despite declines in income from local authority departments and the Core Youth Service budget.

The Welsh Government has instigated a rights-based approach for children and young people in recent years, guiding its policy-making.³ In 2019, for example, it introduced the Youth Work Strategy for Wales to re-engage young people through accessible services with a sustainable model for delivery.⁴

³ CWVYS, Youth work in Wales: Principles and purposes, November 2018

⁴ Education Wales, Youth Work Strategy for Wales, June 2019

Total real-term spend by local authorities on youth services in Wales (excl. Isle of Anglesey) and year-on-year decline in expenditure 2010/11 – 2020/21

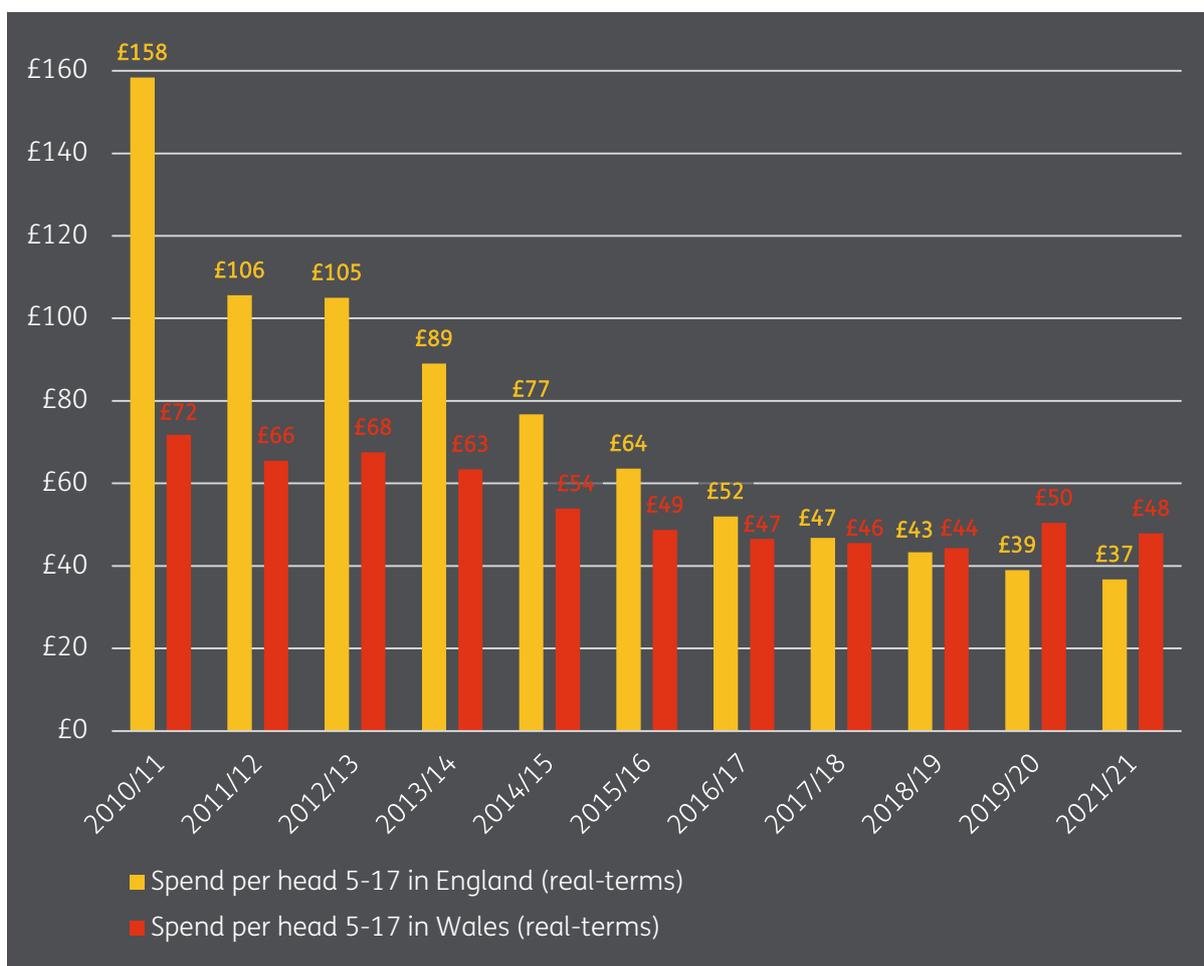


Spend per head in England and Wales

Cuts to youth services spending in Wales have been less severe than seen in England. However, in 2010/11, the money spent per young person aged 5-17 in Wales (£72) was less than half than in England (£158).

This per-head spend levelled out in 2017/18, and since then has been higher in Wales. In 2020/21, the amount per-head in Wales (£48) was 30% higher than in England (£37). Over this time, per-head spend has fallen 77% in England, compared to 33% in Wales.

Real-terms local authority spend on youth services per 5- to 17-year-old in England and Wales, 2010/11 to 2020/21



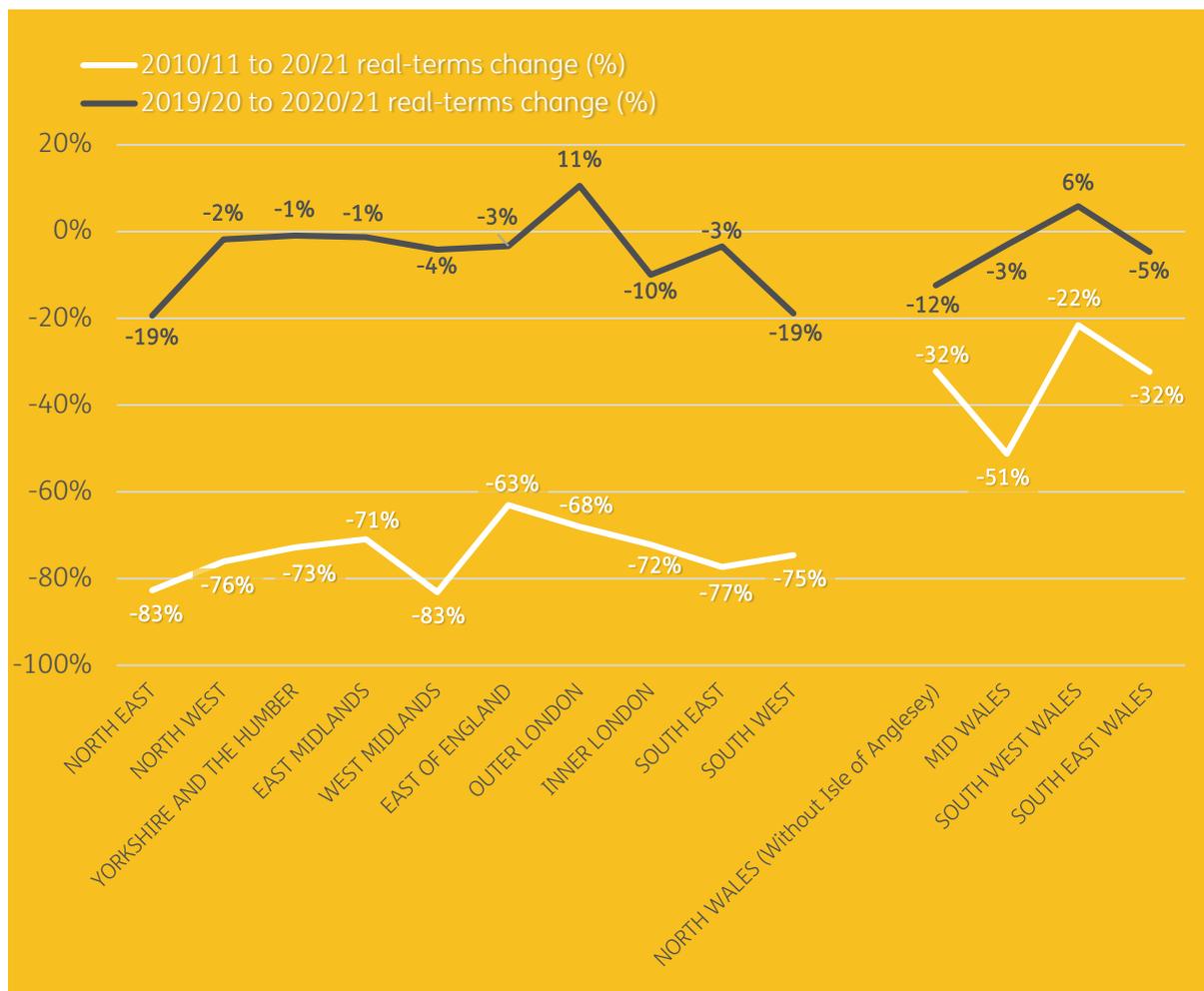
Regional variation

Over the past ten years, certain regions have had expenditure tightened more than others: in East of England this fell in real-terms by 63% and by 68% in Outer London. Comparatively, expenditure has fallen in real-terms by 88% in the West Midlands, 83% in the North East and 77% in the South East since 2010-11.

Year-on-year, however, only Outer London had an increase in expenditure from 2019-20 (11%). The North East (19%), South West (19%) and Inner London (10%) had double-digit falls.

In Wales, funding in Mid-Wales fell by 51% between 2010/11 and 2020/21, while South West Wales experienced a 22% decline. In the last financial year, South West Wales had funding increase 6%, while North Wales and South East Wales both fell (12% and 5% respectively).

Real-terms change in local authority expenditure on youth services between 2010/11 - 2020/21, and year-on-year change between 2019/20 – 2020/21, split by region



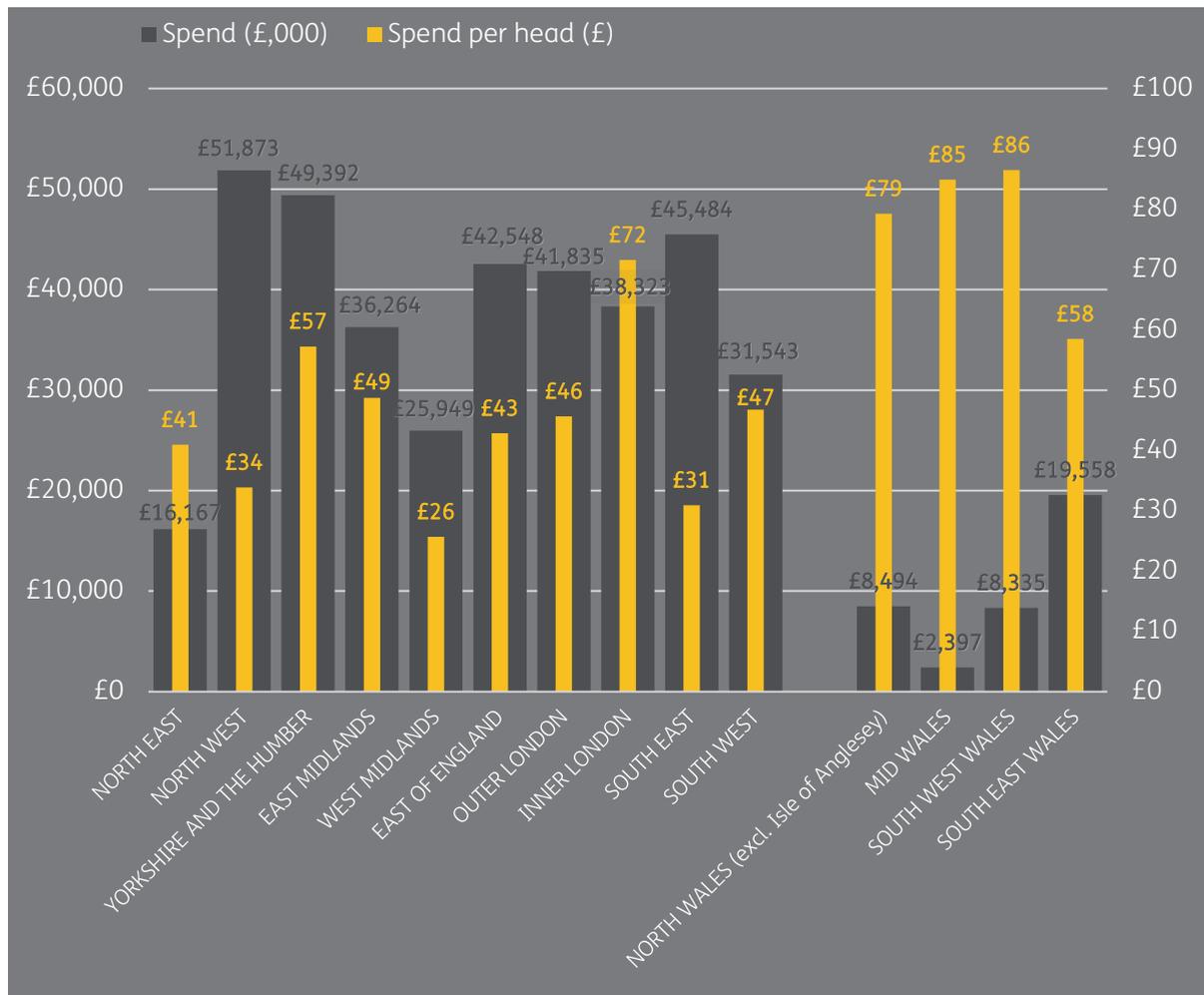
The chart below outlines how far the different amounts of spending by regions actually goes, comparing the regional total with regional per-head spend for 5- to 17-year-olds.

While local authorities in the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber spent comparatively similar amounts on youth services in 2020/21 (£52m; £49m), the population of young people in these areas translates to expenditure of £34 and £57 per 5- to 17-year-old respectively.

The South East, meanwhile, had the third-highest spend among regions at £45m, however the second-lowest spend-per-head at £31. While the North East had the lowest overall regional spend at £16m, this translated to £41 per young person, higher than the national average.

In Wales, general lower population sizes per region and higher spend per local authority shows the high level of investment in young people compared to England. In South East Wales, the region with the highest population, its £20m spend equates to £58 in youth services funding per 5- to 17-year-old in 2020/21. Mid-Wales, formed of only two local authorities with a combined £2m spent, equates to £85 per young person.

Total local authority expenditure on youth services (£,000) and spend per 5- to 17-year-old in 2020/21, split by region



Local investment gaps

The figures analysed in this report are based on local authorities' financial reporting and outturn surveys submitted annually to the Department for Education. Seven local authorities in England did not report any expenditure on youth services 2020/21: Trafford, Worcestershire, Kensington and Chelsea, Westminster, Medway, Slough and the Isles of Scilly. Several more spent less than £15 per 5- to 17-year-old. Aside from Manchester, all of these local authorities have reduced spending by 90% or more since 2010/11.

Local authorities with lowest youth services spend per 5- to 17-year-old, 2020/21

Local authority	2020/21 spend per 5- to 17-year-old	Change since 2010/11
Trafford	£0	-100%
Worcestershire	£0	-100%
Kensington and Chelsea	£0	-100%
Westminster	£0	-100%
Medway	£0	-100%
Slough	£0	-100%
Isles of Scilly	£0	-100%
Herefordshire, County of	£2.05	-98%
Buckinghamshire	£3.23	-99%
West Berkshire	£3.58	-97%
Derby	£5.51	-98%
Somerset	£5.77	-97%
Norfolk	£6.65	-94%
Northamptonshire	£7.38	-94%
Gateshead	£8.06	-97%
Manchester	£8.38	-78%
Walsall	£9.55	-96%
Wokingham	£11.49	-90%
County Durham	£12.08	-94%
Shropshire	£12.96	-92%
Staffordshire	£14.07	-90%
Bedford	£14.52	-90%
Solihull	£14.64	-91%

Cardiff was the lowest-spending local authority in Wales at £18.81 per head, with Newport in second-lowest at £50.54.

At the other end of the spectrum, 15 local authorities spent more than £100 per young person aged 5-17 in 2020/21 – with five of these within Wales, and six within London.

Local authorities with highest youth services spend per 5- to 17-year-old, 2020/21

Local authority	2020/21 spend per 5- to 17-year-old	Change since 2010/11
Blaenau Gwent	£184.36	-13%
Kingston upon Hull, City of	£169.38	-58%
Merthyr Tydfil	£163.76	-30%
City of London	£163.28	-69%
Camden	£151.74	-46%
Blackpool	£141.84	-49%
Isle of Anglesey	£128.99	-35%
Islington	£125.45	-52%
Wrexham	£123.07	-29%
Stockport	£122.74	-64%
North East Lincolnshire	£111.53	-71%
Hackney	£108.67	-55%
Wandsworth	£108.25	-40%
Monmouthshire	£101.99	-30%
Waltham Forest	£100.20	-46%

The services available for a young person is a postcode lottery dependent on where their family lives. Even within neighbouring local authorities, these differences can be substantial: spending per 5- to 17-year-old in Wandsworth in 2020/21 was £108.25, while in neighbouring Merton this was £29.77. Trafford's £0 expenditure and Manchester's £8.38 per young person compare against bordering Stockport's £122.74.

Conclusion

Young people have spent two years adjusting to periods of staying at home, limited spaces for social mixing outside of school and with a host of worries a generation has not had to face before.

Youth services provide a place where young people can explore their interests, be with friends and grow in a supportive environment. Providing these services is essential, but the funding to do so has crumbled away at best and depleted entirely in some areas.

The severity of cuts has softened in more recent years since the double-digit decreases in the first half of the decade, when austerity policies were at their height. However, after year-on-year budget-curtailing, there arguably is little money left to take much more away from. Instead, youth service providers are kept in survival mode each year in case their vital funding stream is squeezed, or worse still, dries up entirely.

As the Government releases the first £10m tranche of its long-awaited £500m Youth Investment Fund to wards in England deemed the most in need, YMCA is glad to see this vital injection to services stripped back over the past ten years. It should be noted that this initial funding can only be spent on capital projects, and by the end of this financial year (March 2022).

Yet, youth services desperately need sustainable revenue funding to deliver, with understanding from government on the necessity of the sector in young people's development. The higher spend per head in Wales and accountability of providers is no surprise: its Government's initiation of a Youth Work Strategy and an Interim Youth Work Board is driving the framework for a sustainable model for youth work in the country. Such an approach in Westminster could ensure young people now and for generations to come have somewhere safe to belong, contribute and thrive.

References – Methodology

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- ▶ Department for Education, [LA and School Expenditure: 2014 to 2015 financial year](#), 10 December 2015
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- ▶ Stats Wales, Education and skills, Youth Work, Finance, [Expenditure summary by local authority](#), October 2021

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- ▶ HM Treasury, [Guidance: How to use the GDP deflator series](#), March 2013
- ▶ HM Treasury, [GDP deflators at market prices, and money GDP October 2021 \(Budget and Spending Review\)](#), 28 October 2021

Population

- ▶ Office for National Statistics, [Estimates of the population for UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland](#), 25 June 2021

YMCA ENGLAND & WALES

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YMCA enables people to develop their full potential in mind, body and spirit. Inspired by, and faithful to, our Christian values, we create supportive, inclusive and energising communities, where young people can truly belong, contribute and thrive.

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