

# Cuts lead to closure of youth centres across UK

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18 February 2016

Local councils across the U.K. are slashing millions of pounds from their youth services budgets.

According to a Freedom of Information request submitted to the Department for Education in 2014, the amount of money spent on services for teenagers fell by 36 percent across England in the previous two years (2011 to 2013).

The biggest cuts came in the London boroughs of Kensington and Chelsea and Tower Hamlets, which cut their spending by 78 percent and 65 percent, respectively. Funding dropped by 10 percent across the country the following year.

Between April 2012 and April 2014, over £60 million of funding was withdrawn from youth services across the U.K., leading to the closing of around 350 youth centres, the loss of 41,000 youth service places for adolescents, and the loss of 2,000 jobs.

New cuts to local government spending are to see a further reduction in the funding provided, despite vital youth services having already been decimated over the past four years. In his November 2015 government Spending Review, Conservative Party Chancellor George Osborne announced a 56 percent cut to local government central grants over the next four years. This is funding used to help finance local public services such as libraries, parks and youth centres.

The halving of the grants is expected to leave huge holes in local councils' budgets, disproportionately affecting poorer areas.

Conservative Peer, Lord Porter, felt obliged to warn his co-thinkers in the House of Commons of the widespread opposition that these cutbacks would likely provoke. He said councils would be compelled to protect "life and death services, such as caring for the elderly and protecting children" at the expense of other less "vital" services such as youth work.

On the scale of the cuts the review imposes, he added, "We are not going to see hundreds of councils falling over in the next year or two. But we are close to a dozen nationally, which will, if the spending review goes the way we think it will, be right on the edge and ready to go."

In areas such as Bournemouth in Dorset, the local council is proposing to slash £1 million from its youth services budgets, which would result in a withdrawal of funding from its 22 existing youth centres. Dorset County Council is offering up these youth centres into the hands of other organisations, to either be run by already struggling and underfunded charities, by the young people themselves, or to be outsourced to private organisations. Organisations have only been given until the end of March to come up with plans for the running of these services, and, if nothing is proposed within this timescale, the centres will be closed. A paltry sum of £200,000 will instead be provided for local communities to find "things to do" for young people.

According to a survey carried out by Dorset County Council, although only a small percentage of the county's young people attend youth clubs, many of them are from among vulnerable groups of adolescents such as young carers and young people with disabilities. With the closure of these centres, those who are most in need of it will be deprived of the extra support provided. For these young people, time spent at a youth centre is one of the only opportunities they get to go out and socialise with others their own age.

The proposed cutbacks are widely opposed. In the London Borough of Camden, youth protested outside the local Town Hall at the end of January against planned cuts to the youth services budget. If the Labour Party dominated council's cuts go ahead, £1.6 million of funding will be withdrawn from the area's youth

services, leading to the forced closure of many youth centres and support projects, and the loss of up to 30 jobs. Camden Council aims to mitigate the widespread opposition to these measures by redeveloping three remaining youth centres in Highgate, Kilburn and Somers Town. The result is that youth support will be condensed into only these centres, with services prioritising more vulnerable young people such as those with behavioural problems or disabilities. Many other young people will be cut off from support.

Describing these proposals as “devastating” in an interview with the *Camden New Journal*, two young protesters said that the cuts could leave many young people with nowhere to turn, or drive them into gangs.

Other London boroughs are proposing similar cuts, with the local council in Southwark planning to slash funding to youth services by 73 percent--a £2.5 million reduction.

Not only have youth services been drastically reduced, but the burden of the government’s welfare “reforms” also falls hardest onto the country’s youth. In his July 2015 budget, Osborne announced cuts to allowances for new welfare benefits claimants, including a “youth obligation” for young people aged between 18 and 21 to either “earn or learn”. If they do not take on an apprenticeship or traineeship within six months, young people risk losing their welfare benefits.

Means-tested student loans have also been scrapped, and, coupled with the 2011 axing of Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) grants--which provided financial support to students aged between 16 and 19 from low-income families--these measures will result in many young people being cut off from further and higher education. The National Living Wage (NLW), which will supposedly increase the minimum rate of pay to £9 an hour by 2020, does not apply to workers under 25.



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