

# Funding and Provision of Local Authorities' Children's Services Inquiry – Submission by the Sport and Recreation Alliance

## The Sport and Recreation Alliance

1.1 The Sport and Recreation Alliance (the Alliance) is the representative body for the sport and recreation sector, with a diverse membership of more than 330 national and local organisations across the sport and recreation sector. As the voice of the sector, we work with Government, policy makers and the media to make sure grassroots sport and recreation grows and thrives. The Alliance launched a new four-year strategy in April 2017, with working with children and young people prioritised within this as one of our four strategic objectives.

## 2. Executive Summary

2.1 The Alliance welcomes this inquiry but is concerned that local authority cuts have left children's services dangerously under-funded.

2.2 We believe that sport, physical activity and recreation can play a vital role in supporting local children's services, and as part of our *#RightToBeActive* campaign<sup>1</sup>, we are calling for a new statutory duty on local authorities to provide all children with the opportunity to be active, and to coordinate and promote sport and physical activity across all local services including health, education, early years and children's services.

2.3 Getting more children active will help to alleviate existing capacity pressures for children's services through alternate service provision, improve children and young people's health and wellbeing and help to build community cohesion, in turn tackling many of the root causes of increased demand for children's services.

2.4 Whilst the Department for Education (DfE) and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) are responsible for the framework and funding for provision of children's services, it is vital that Government prioritises meaningful and measurable cross-departmental collaboration to make sure that children's services are effectively integrated with, and supported by, broader local services and infrastructures.

2.5 Likewise, local authorities should be empowered to pursue a whole-council approach to delivering quality and timely children's services, encouraging greater cross-departmental working and the pursuit of more creative approaches to support service delivery.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sportandrecreation.org.uk/pages/right-to-be-active>

### **3. Is the funding for local authorities' children's services sufficient to enable local authorities to fulfil their statutory duties?**

- 3.1 In August 2018, analysis of Office for National Statistics (ONS) figures by the County Council Network<sup>2</sup> highlighted that local authorities in England overspent on children's services by £816m in 2017/18. This followed the Institute for Fiscal Studies' *Public Spending on Children in England* report<sup>3</sup> in June, which stated that spending per head on children's services is due to fall by 4% in real terms between 2016/17 and 2019/20, despite significant pressures as the number of children needing support continues to increase. In November 2018, the Local Government Association (LGA) went further, stating that these children's services are facing a funding gap of £3 billion by 2025<sup>4</sup>, if authorities are to even keep services running at current levels.
- 3.2 Other parties are better placed to comment on the continued challenges for local authorities if they are to fulfil their statutory duties, but the consensus is clear: funding to provide children's services is not sufficient.
- 3.3 Where there is a statutory duty on local authorities to deliver particular services, it is vital that they are properly funded to do so. Government has increasingly pursued a model of cutting the central funding for local authorities and instead pushing more of the burden for funding local services onto local taxes. With less affluent areas typically raising lower revenues from such taxes, there is a risk that the most disadvantaged communities fall further behind in breadth and quality of local services. This is a real concern for the Alliance, as we know that children from more disadvantaged backgrounds are already less likely to be active<sup>5</sup>.

### **4. What are the financial challenges for local authorities in providing non-statutory services?**

- 4.1 Local authorities have a key role to play in the provision of opportunities for children to be active, however despite authorities' duty to promote healthy lifestyles, there is no statutory duty for the provision of opportunities to be active, and with rising demand and increasing pressures on local authorities' resources, non-statutory services are being side-lined as they prioritise the delivery of their statutory duties.

### **5. How can funding for children's services be made more sustainable in the short and long term?**

- 5.1 The Association of Directors of Children's Services commented in August<sup>6</sup> that to manage rising demand alongside reducing budgets, councils are having to cut the very services that tackle the root causes of the problems children and families face, and which prevent them from reaching crisis point.
- 5.2 Government must take a long-term approach to the health and wellbeing of our children and young people. Helping children and young people to be more physically active can help to solve some of the

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk/councils-in-england-overspend-by-over-800m-on-care-services-as-local-authorities-struggle-to-meet-escalating-demand/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Public-Spending-on-Children-in-England-CCO-JUNE-2018.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/lga-responds-latest-looked-after-children-statistics>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.sportengland.org/activeliveschildren/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://adcs.org.uk/general-subject/article/local-authority-statutory-duties-in-relation-to-children>

biggest challenges facing the next generation, from childhood obesity to mental ill-health, youth crime to community cohesion and resilience, all of which contribute to rising demand for existing services.

- 5.3 The Alliance is calling for a new statutory duty on local authorities to provide all children with the opportunity to be active, and for authorities to coordinate and promote sport and physical activity across all local services, including early years and children's services.
- 5.4 If Government does not put aside their inherent short-term interests and prioritise improving long-term outcomes for children and young people by introducing this statutory duty, the current inactivity, obesity and mental health crises will continue. With mental health services in crisis as they strive to support an increasing number of unhappy, socially isolated young people suffering with poor mental health and only 17.5% of children and young people meeting the Chief Medical Officer's physical activity guidelines<sup>7</sup>, this can only be expected to continue to deteriorate if a long-term approach, with more active children at the heart of the system, is not taken.
- 5.5 Spiralling costs and increased demand for services at the point of crisis is the most likely outcome if Government inaction prevails. Conversely, a long-term approach to the health and wellbeing of our young people, focusing on preventative services and getting the future generation more active, will save the UK billions of pounds, alleviating future service pressures, supporting future productivity and protecting our future economy.

## **6. How can innovative approaches to the design and delivery of children's services support financial sustainability?**

- 6.1 There is a clear role for sport, recreation and physical activities to play in helping to reduce existing pressures on children's services. But in order to deliver this and support local authorities' financial sustainability, effective cross-party and cross-departmental working is essential. Government must commit to DfE and MHCLG working closely to with the Department of Health, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Transport to better support local services and integrate children's services with broader local services, planning and infrastructures. The importance of investing in green spaces and high quality local sport and physical activity infrastructure cannot be overstated.
- 6.2 It is also vital that Government, and in turn local authorities, makes sure that children and young people's voices are at the heart of service design for future children's services. Their opinions should be actively sought via youth panels embedded within local authorities' structures, discussing these with young people to ensure service developments are appropriate to existing needs. Co-production with children and young people, their families and local partners must be the default process for local authorities to ensure that services are collaborative and fit for purpose.
- 6.3 Further to this, there should be recognition that continuous improvement is necessary, with an ever-present need to look forward and learn from others. Where local authorities have driven an improvement in health and social outcomes for children and young people, councils should be encouraged to learn from creative approaches and implement such change themselves. A whole-council approach must be pursued, with bold aspirations for improving outcomes for children and young people, and community resilience and cohesion at the heart of this to help alleviate pressure on existing services.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.sportengland.org/activeliveschildren/>

## **7. Conclusion**

- 7.1 The introduction of a new statutory duty on local authorities to provide all children with the opportunity to be active is crucial to solving some of the most significant challenges facing children and young people. Government must take a long-term approach to the health and wellbeing of our children and young people.
- 7.2 We would be happy to provide oral evidence or any further information to the Committee with regards to our submission to the inquiry.

**Sport and Recreation Alliance  
December 2018**