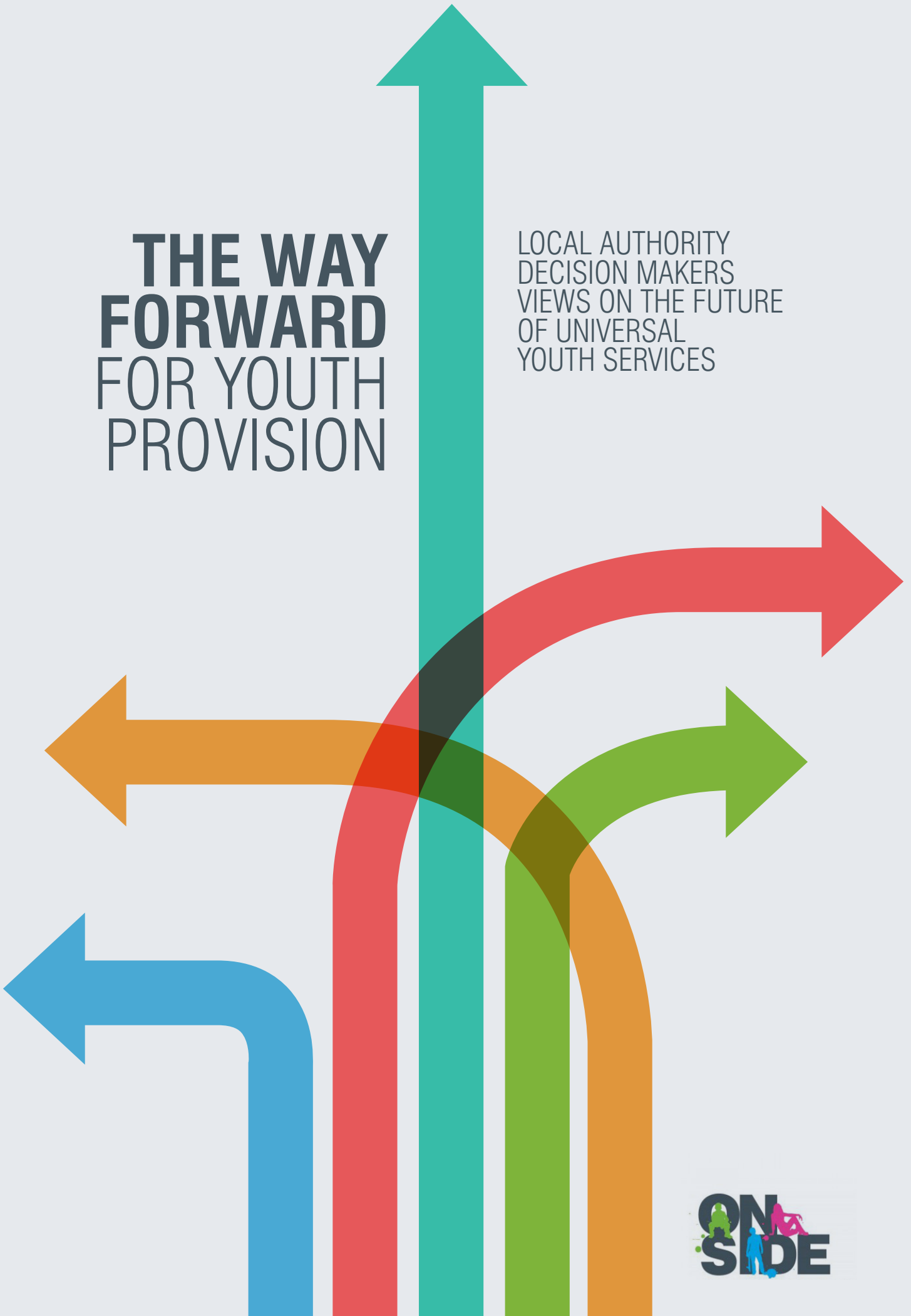


THE WAY FORWARD FOR YOUTH PROVISION

LOCAL AUTHORITY
DECISION MAKERS
VIEWS ON THE FUTURE
OF UNIVERSAL
YOUTH SERVICES





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ONSIDE YOUTH ZONES

OnSide Youth Zones is a national charity, which has an established network of 10 state-of-the-art youth facilities and is currently progressing projects in a number of other locations nationally.

Youth Zones provide local young people aged between 8-19 (up to 25 for those with a disability) with access to a range of high-quality sport, arts, health and employability services.

Our charity has developed a diversified funding model based on a philanthropic community partnership.

By combining contributions from local authorities, the private sector, charitable funds and operating revenue generated by the facilities themselves, the proven approach enables the creation of high-quality, sustainable universal youth services.

Since 2008, we've helped to secure over £100m of investment and the Youth Zone network supports the health, wellbeing and aspirations of over 35,000 young people.

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

The findings in this report are from a survey conducted by Coleman Parkes Research on behalf of OnSide Youth Zones. The team interviewed senior decision makers for universal youth service provision in 100 local authorities across the UK. The survey was conducted in June and July 2017. All interviews were conducted in accordance with the rules set by the Market Research Society.

WELCOME

WHERE NOW FOR YOUTH SERVICES?

Local authority-funded universal youth services have seen an estimated 600 youth centres close since 2013.

With no funding increase on the horizon, many local providers will continue struggling to meet demand and some will remain in precarious positions.

Many argue today's underinvestment could lead to much higher costs to the public purse in the long run. This is because of the key role universal youth services play in raising aspirations, motivating young people to achieve in education and employment, and reach their potential in adulthood.

Given this context, we thought it was important to understand how local authorities view the future of universal youth services and their role within it.

Innovation and cross-sector collaboration are terms referenced freely, but what do decision makers and budget holders in local authorities see as the best way forward for the sector?

This research aims to provide a platform for a national debate on what needs to be done to reverse the current trajectory and ensure high-quality provision is delivered at scale.

We'd welcome the opportunity to discuss the findings in more detail and share our experience of how, despite launching at the height of the financial crisis in 2008, we've managed to help local authorities increase universal youth services provision for the good of future generations.



Kathryn Morley, CEO of OnSide Youth Zones

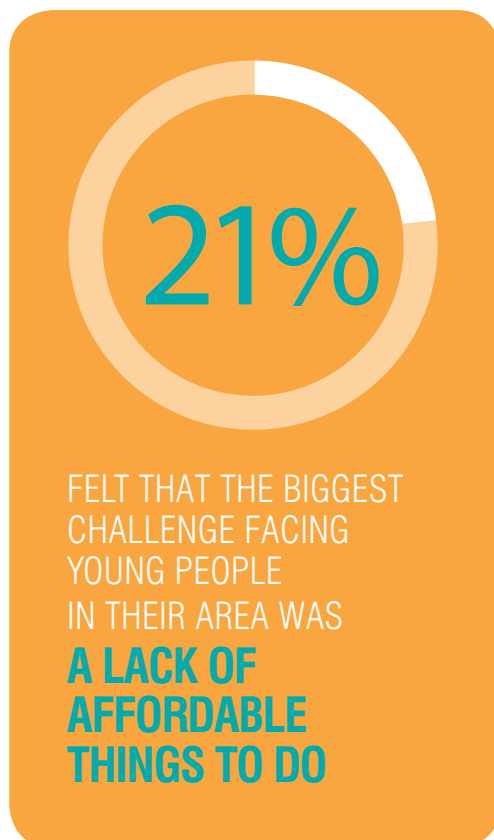
CHALLENGING TIMES

TACKLING THE BIG ISSUES & PLAYING OUR PART IN SOCIETY

We wanted to know what senior decision makers in local authorities thought was the biggest challenge facing young people in their area.

Unsurprisingly, out of a whole range of issues, the one that ranked highest was **drugs or alcohol misuse**, with 22% of those surveyed stating this was their principal concern.

However, fractionally behind that was an issue directly related to universal youth services... access to facilities and services:



Our research indicates that local authorities are rightly concerned about the broader impact a lack of positive, social activities for young people has on other areas such as health, anti-social behaviour and attainment.

After drugs or alcohol misuse and a lack of affordable things to do, 13% of respondents believed the biggest challenge was a **lack of aspiration**.

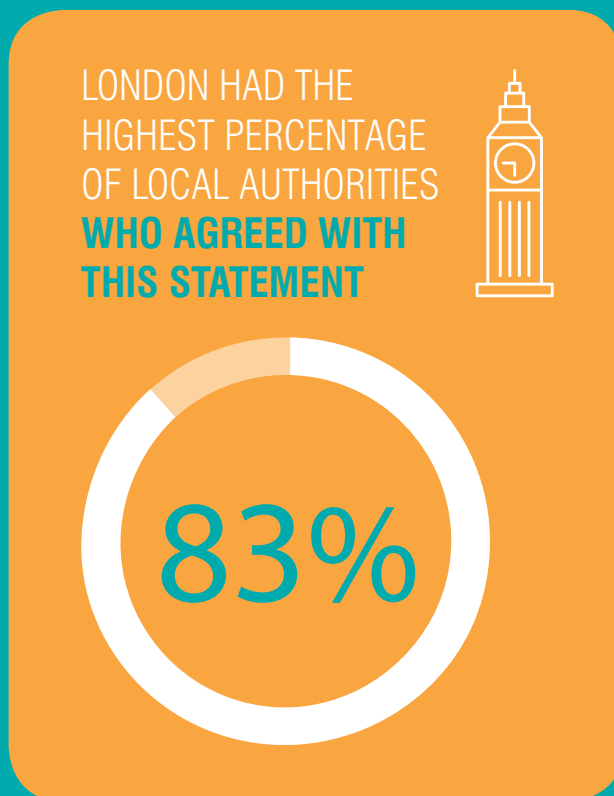
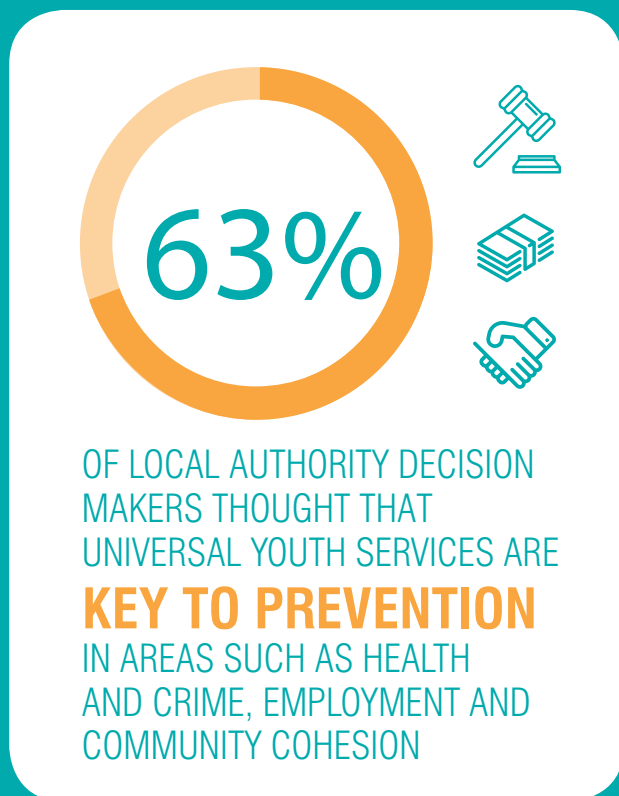
It's interesting to see this, as sometimes it can be overlooked. Young people need to be inspired and feel that their community, and society more generally, values them and will help them achieve their potential.

Universal youth services embodies this commitment. Diminish it and we risk sending out entirely the wrong message to future generations.

THE ROLE AND QUALITY OF UNIVERSAL YOUTH SERVICES

When we undertook a detailed [study](#)* to define the social impact of Youth Zones, we were able to quantify the value of early intervention across health and wellbeing, relationships and social skills and aspiration and attainment.

It was therefore encouraging to see this survey reveal:



Whilst the majority of local authorities recognise universal youth services' role in prevention, it's clear that there is an awareness that quality levels could be higher.

Our research found:

- Only 28% of decision makers believe their provision **'meets expectations'** while 18% believe it **'needs improvement'**.
- No respondents felt they were offering **'excellent'** universal youth services.
- The most common term for describing the strategy for supporting young people in their area was **'Needs work'** (26% of all those surveyed).

It's likely this honest appraisal reflects the impact of sustained underinvestment.

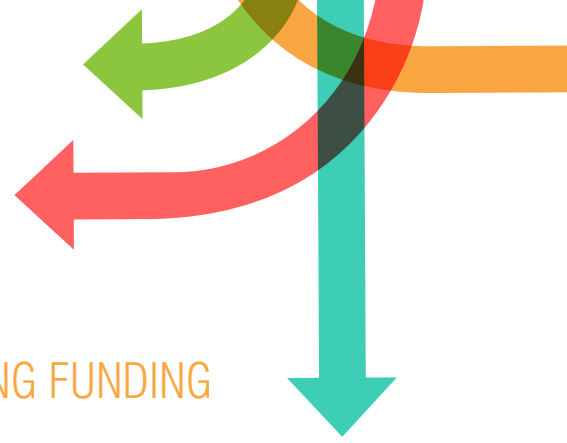
These findings chimed with our 'Places to go... things to do' [report](#) which found that 38% of young people felt that **options were too limited**, whilst 29% said they were **dated or poor quality**.

Access and quality are crucial to universal youth services, so facilities and services need appropriate levels of investment if they are to succeed.

In turn, this means new funding solutions need to be found if local authorities are to expand and improve provision over the coming years.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

GETTING OUR PRIORITIES STRAIGHT & FINDING FUNDING



Given that such a high proportion of decision makers can see the importance of universal youth services in prevention, and that they recognise quality levels could be improved, you'd probably expect it to be high on local authorities' agenda?

Surprisingly, our research found that:



This disconnect suggests that, despite fully appreciating the importance universal youth services plays in the prevention agenda, limited funding and competing interests means that local authorities are prioritising immediate needs.

This is entirely understandable given the scale of the funding challenge. However, it brings into sharp focus the need to find new ways of overcoming these shortfalls to ensure communities are not storing up problems for the future.

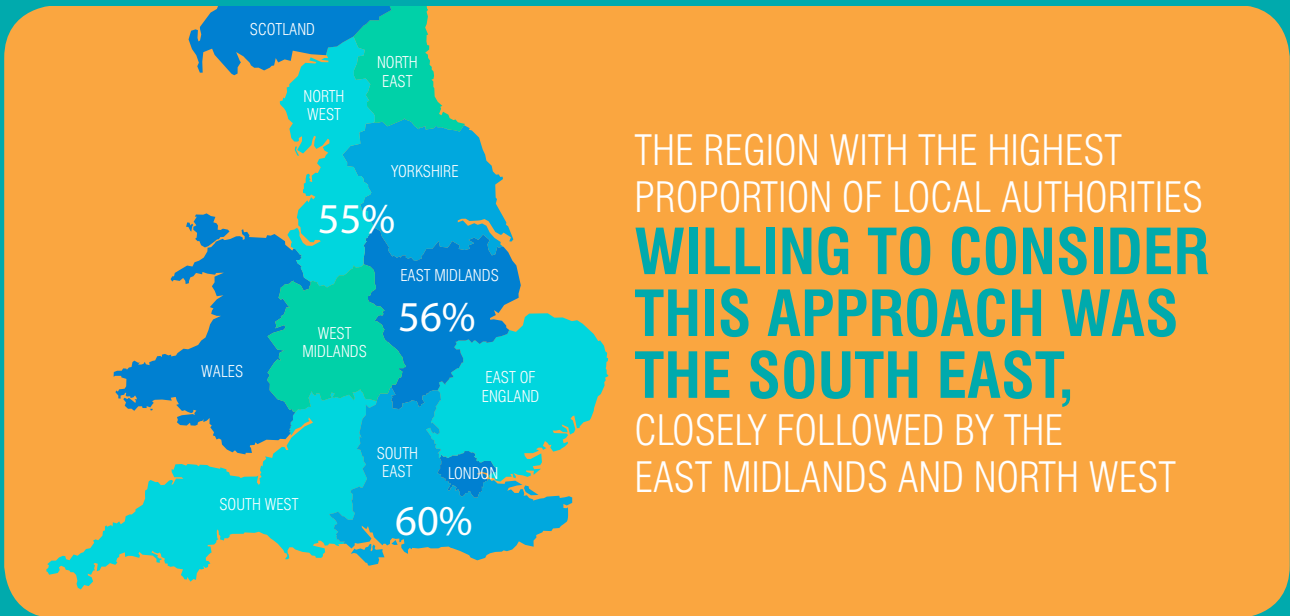
REMOVING FUNDING BARRIERS

So, with little funding available to increase the scale and quality of universal youth services, what options do decision makers have left?

Whilst money is clearly needed for statutory duties, it was encouraging to see that:






Nearly half of those decision makers questioned (47%) said they would be willing to consider **diverting a proportion of local authority budgets** (e.g. health or education) to support universal youth service provision where there are shared outcomes.



This re-appropriation of existing budgets could help ease some of the downward pressure. However, our research also indicates there would be challenges to achieving this.

Aside from an overall lack of funding, respondents said the three biggest barriers to diverting budgets to support universal youth service provision would be:

-  Public opinion of youth services (33%)
-  Administrative challenges (27%)
-  Resistance from other budget holders (21%)

This indicates that the wider universal youth services sector has a perception issue which needs to be addressed.

It's disappointing and concerning that messages about investment in prevention, community cohesion, wellbeing and aspiration are felt to be lost on the general public. This in turn makes it harder for local authorities to consider innovating in the way they assign budgets.

Providers clearly have to do more to [articulate the importance of these services](#) and demonstrate impact and return on investment to the public purse.



THE NEED FOR INNOVATION

FINDING ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF FUNDING

As our research reveals, local authorities clearly understand the importance of universal youth services to prevention but, in the context of limited funding, overcoming the challenge of delivering quality provision at scale is not a strategic priority.

Whilst there is a willingness to look at diverting budgets, we wanted to know what other innovations decision makers are looking at to increase funding for provision?

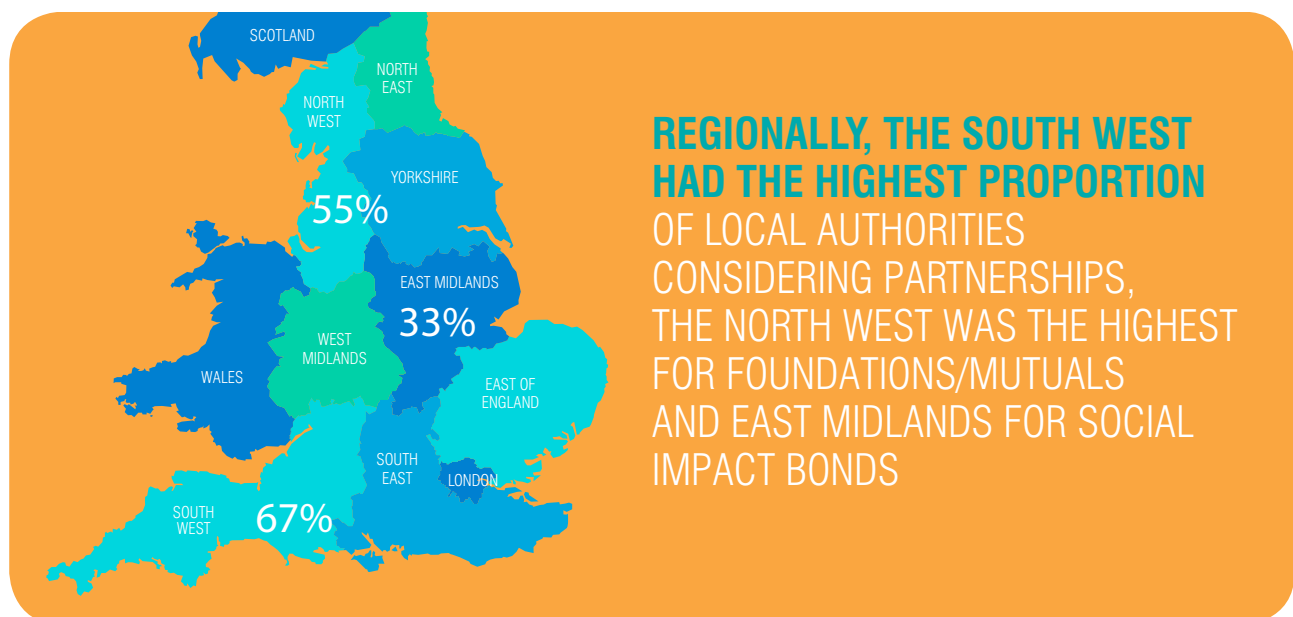


The option most local authorities are considering is entering into **partnerships with other organisations that have a track record of raising funds (42%)**



Others are looking at **foundations or mutuals (39%)**

ROI Some are considering **social impact bonds (19%)**



The fact that the vast majority (81%) are considering establishing new vehicles to increase funding should be celebrated and indicates the direction of travel.

It also suggests that, whilst there is a willingness to innovate, there is no single, proven approach that has established itself as the principal model to follow.

BARRIERS TO ADOPTION

Our research demonstrates an appetite amongst decision makers to explore their options, with only 10% of those surveyed showing concern about the **unproven nature of innovative approaches**.

Instead, when we asked what the main perceived barriers to adopting innovative approaches were:



SAID
**INADEQUATE
GOVERNANCE
FRAMEWORKS**



SAID IT WAS THE
COMPLEXITY
ASSOCIATED WITH
ADOPTION



FELT THAT THAT IT WOULD BE
**RESISTANCE FROM
EXISTING STAKEHOLDERS**

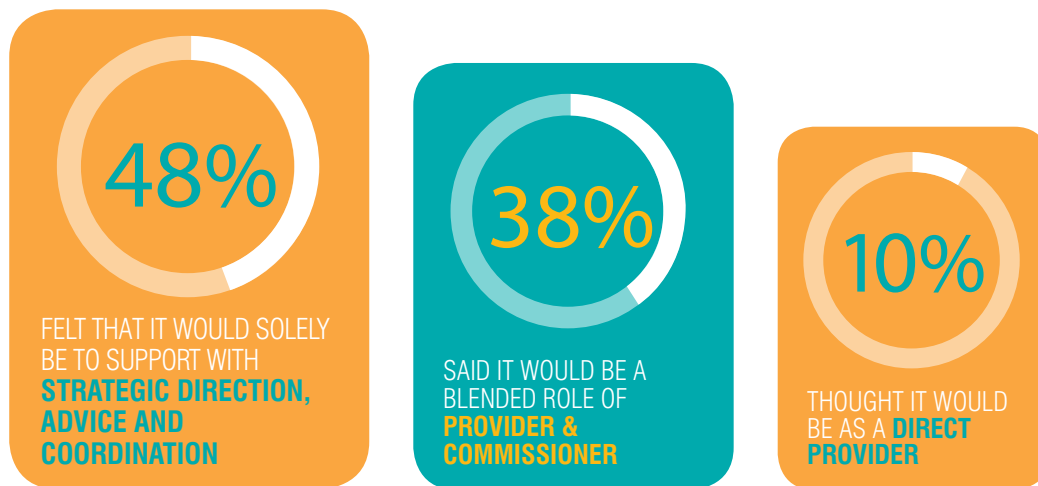
This suggests more work needs to be done at all levels to develop robust funding, delivery and governance frameworks that support the successful adoption of innovative models.

A JOINED UP APPROACH...

FUTURE ROLES

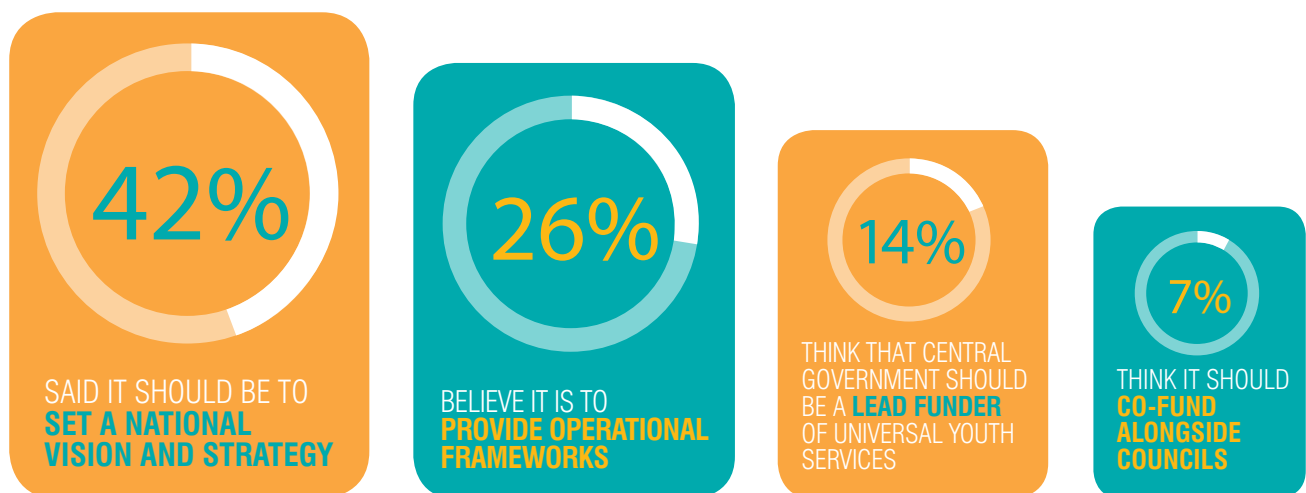
The findings of our research point to how senior decision makers see the evolution of local authorities' involvement in universal youth services.

When asked what their principal role will be in the future:



We also thought it was important to understand what expectations there are on wider public-sector stakeholders.

When asked what role central government should play in universal youth services:



It's clear from our findings that local authorities feel services need to be planned, delivered, managed and funded at a community level, but there is appetite for more overarching co-ordination and support.

Whether that is a national youth strategy or a mechanism for developing and sharing innovative frameworks and best practice, it appears that decision makers are looking to central government for some insight, inspiration and guidance.

COLLABORATIVE CHALLENGES

Our research reveals an interesting picture around collaboration. When asked which universal youth services model would be the most effective at delivering outcomes in the future, opinion was divided:



This indicates that, while many decision makers believe local authority services remain the most effective, funding restrictions will limit their future role to strategic direction, advice and coordination rather than direct delivery.

Our research also revealed that the majority (52%) of decision makers feel that any innovation would require the council to maintain an **appropriate degree of influence** over the quality and direction of universal youth service provision.

The finding suggests that, no matter what innovative model they choose to follow, maintaining checks, balances and control over service delivery will be vital.

This uncertainty is also reflected in the fact that only 26% of local authorities felt that universal youth services **would benefit from more collaboration** between local authorities and the voluntary and private sectors, whilst the majority (65%) remained undecided.

The finding may in part be explained by responses to two other questions:

- 26% of decision makers thought that universal youth service providers in their area **don't work in a coordinated way.**
- 28% believe that the **fragmentation of providers** is the main barrier to growing universal youth service provision in their area.

All these results indicate more work is needed to develop and promote truly collaborative models that combine and co-ordinate resources to deliver in an integrated and effective way.

The voluntary sector's breadth, depth and diversity is clearly a strength. However, it seems we must prove we can work effectively together, and in conjunction with the public and private sectors, if we are to address any perceived shortcomings.

We would very much welcome the opportunity to discuss in more detail the challenges and opportunities raised in this report. If you would like to know more about the findings, or how our cross-sector funding model works, then please contact us:

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