



# West Yorkshire faces a critical funding shortfall for children and young people's services

West Yorkshire, with nearly 25% of its population aged under 18, experiences **higher levels of deprivation** when compared to England as a whole.

The Integrated Care System urges the Government to provide comprehensive, collaborative funding so West Yorkshire can have **equitable access to services for children and young people**, address root causes and invest in the wellbeing of our future generations.



Thursday, 18 January 2024

## **West Yorkshire rings alarm bells over funding for children and young people's services**

The provisional [local government finance settlement for 2024/25](#) poses a threat to children and young people's services in West Yorkshire. The financial strain on local councils, coupled with increased spending on children's services, is jeopardising the positive position in local councils currently rated 'outstanding' for services, and risks improvements in other areas.

The region's health and local government leaders are actively participating in the [Government's consultation process](#) to address this critical issue.

The rise in children's social care spending, reaching £11.1 billion in 2021/22, indicates a 41% increase since 2009 (Association of Directors of Children's Services, ADCS, 2023). Increased spending on late intervention forces difficult budget-balancing decisions, exacerbating financial strain.

Projected spend on adult and children's services, for example in Bradford this year, is equivalent to 87% of the budget agreed for 2023/24. Safeguarding pressures and complexities are on the rise outside the home, online and in ever more distressed family circumstances.

This complexity results in more children presenting at later stages with higher risks, leading to an 8% increase in section 47 [urgent child protection investigation] inquiries and a 16% rise in early help assessments [between 2019/20 and 2021/22, ADCS, 2023].

With nearly 25% of people under 18, West Yorkshire experiences higher deprivation compared to other parts of England. Among the young population, 29% live in the 10% poorest areas in England, and 44% live in the top 20% [as per 2020 population stats and the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation].

West Yorkshire emerges as an area where children are vulnerable to the rising cost of living, lacking adequate protection from the ongoing crisis.

The challenges extend to 4,600 children in care [as of 31 March; Children looked after in England National statistics], increasing need for mental health support, and prolonged wait times for autism or ADHD diagnoses.

Worryingly, 4,700 young carers (age 5-17 years old) in the region also lack sufficient support [Census, 2021].

A 2020/21 Ofcom survey on media use reported that 9% of households with children did not have home access to a laptop, desktop PC or tablet, and we are seeing unemployment among young people rising more rapidly than any other group. For West Yorkshire young people aged 16-24 it remains higher than before the pandemic.

### **Investing in services for children**

Early childhood influences later life outcomes and insufficient support during early years can lead to negative long-term consequences [\[Marmot Review 10 Years On, 2020\]](#). In this context, West Yorkshire's good practices and evidence-based working of effective early interventions, such as whole family safeguarding approaches, are hindered by financial constraints. The urgent need for increased funding and early interventions is paramount to break the harmful cycle and safeguard the well-being of children and young people in West Yorkshire.

### **Growing challenges**

West Yorkshire local authorities are also grappling with financial challenges to meet the needs of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities [SEND]. This strains the entire SEND system, leading to budget overspending for local councils. The increase in children with Education, Health and Care Plans [EHCPs] in West Yorkshire, with figures such as 6,200 in Bradford, approximately 4,500 in Kirklees, and around 2,500 in Wakefield, has created substantial pressure on education, health, and care services.

This is resulting in significant overspending on the [High Needs Funding](#) for educational provision and on broader local authority budgets for respite and short breaks for children with a disability.

The Association of Directors of Children's Services [ADCS] underscores agency workforce issues in social work. Education faces shortages in teachers, teaching assistants, and educational psychologists, as highlighted by the National Foundation for Educational Research (2023) and Department for Education [2023]. Additionally, health services are strained with shortages in health visitors, school nurses, and speech and language therapists, as reported by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists [2022].

Council public health teams in West Yorkshire remain steadfast in their commitment to allocating the Public Health Grant to services vital for children's well-being and the prevention of illness. These encompass health visiting, school nursing, support for healthy pregnancies, infant feeding, and the creation of healthy environments in schools and early years settings.

Despite these ongoing efforts, [a report by the Health Foundation](#) [2023] reveals a concerning 26% real-terms reduction in the grant's value over the last decade. This alarming decrease is placing unprecedented pressure on public health services for children, leading to genuine concern across Directors of Public Health in West Yorkshire.

### **Children and young people's needs**

Referrals for West Yorkshire's children and young people's mental health have more than doubled since 2019, reaching over 5,000 per month in 2023. West Yorkshire has seen an increase in children and young people requiring specialist inpatient care in the last four years, particularly in relation to eating disorders, self-harm, and neurodiversity [over 50%].

Referrals for neurodiversity and ADHD assessments have increased significantly, between October 2018 and August 2022 [[NHS West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board, November 2023](#)] causing unprecedented wait times exceeding a year for autism or ADHD diagnoses.

For many children who are entering waiting lists now, it will be years before they are able to receive a diagnosis. Following diagnosis there is limited funding available to provide support for children and their families.

[NHS West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board](#) has identified that over £2m additional funding will be needed to support neurodiversity diagnosis pathways for children and young people outside of commissioned services during 2023/2024. This will increase to at least £3.5m during 2024/2025.

Adversity and trauma are also prevalent among children facing health, poverty, and other inequalities in West Yorkshire. Despite a decrease in the number of children entering the criminal justice system, the severity and violence of offences have risen.

Disturbingly, higher hospital admissions for substance misuse and a significant proportion of knife crime victims under 18 in certain areas highlights the urgency for increased funding and early interventions.

Sexual grooming and exploitation incidents involve a significant number of girls and boys under 16, which also emphasises the costs of adversity and trauma increase across the life-course. An increasing number of children in acute emotional distress are coming to our accident and emergency departments.

West Yorkshire children are present in a significant number of domestic abuse incidents, with a 50% increase in children displaying abusive behaviour towards parents. There were over 54,000 recorded domestic abuse offences in West Yorkshire between October 2020 and September 2021.

There has been a rise in numbers of children and young people not in school or persistently absent (off for at least 10% of the year). We know these young people are vulnerable and more likely to be victims of harm, exploitation etc. and more susceptible to poor emotional and mental wellbeing in the short and long term.

### **A plea for comprehensive, collaborative funding in support of joined up services**

Work by social workers, school staff, the NHS and others has long been motivated by supporting these children, knowing what it takes to help them succeed. Many work long hours, with substantial caseloads alongside recruitment and retention pressures.

In response to these funding challenges, the [West Yorkshire Integrated Care System](#) [ICS] urgently calls upon the Government to improve funding for children's services so that it can continue improvements and focus on early intervention.

Increased funding, as recommended in the [Government's Children's Social Care Review](#) [2022], emphasises the importance of early intervention to mitigate future high-cost needs. Whole family support with the needs of parents addressed alongside their children, offers the best opportunity to shift the gear on the intergenerational crisis which exists.

Investing in children's services fosters a collaborative prevention system in health and social care, aligning with family-based approaches. This supports the delivery of NHS targets, helps reduce acute pressures, and addresses regional ICS needs like West Yorkshire. It also eases local government funding challenges, and, crucially, enhances the life chances of children and families by addressing unmet social, emotional, and economic pressures. Different solutions exist with the right investment.

Short-term savings and drastic cuts will have lifelong consequences that West Yorkshire cannot afford in the future. The ICS advocates for a comprehensive, collaborative approach to safeguarding the well-being of children and young people, ensuring equitable access to services and addressing the root causes of health inequalities and trauma – backed by investment fit for now and for future generations to come.

Immediate action is crucial to secure a fulfilling future for every child in West Yorkshire. Ensuring they thrive as adults and attain the necessary support for independent living requires sustained and increased funding. Every child and young person in West Yorkshire deserves the opportunity to build a fulfilling life, regardless of their background.

We have the commitment here in West Yorkshire and the collaborative vehicles to deliver change. We need the means to do so.

**Further information:**

- Children born into the poorest fifth of families are almost 13 times more likely to experience poor health and educational outcomes by the age of 17, with child poverty, including fuel poverty and food insecurity, more prevalent in the North than in other regions [[Northern Health Science Alliance, Child of the North, 2021](#)].
- The [All-Party Parliamentary Group Child of the North's January 2023](#) report on the cost-of-living crisis underscores the prevalence of child poverty, including fuel poverty and food insecurity, being higher in the North than in the rest of England.
- The [West Yorkshire trauma-informed perspective](#) encourages addressing challenges faced by children, youth, and families through key principles like safety, trust, transparency, peer support, collaboration, voice, choice, empowerment, and cultural humility. Emphasising relationships and community as crucial protective factors.

**ENDS**






**A partnership made up of the NHS, local councils,  
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