

Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission

Monday 6 October 2025

7.00 pm

Ground Floor Meeting Room G02A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1
2QH

Supplementary Agenda No. 1

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6.	Youth Services and Positive Futures for Young People Fund To receive a report from Councillor Portia Mwangangye, Cabinet Member for Leisure, Parks and Young People and Toni Ainge, Director of Leisure and Eva Gomez, Head of Culture on Youth Services and Positive Futures for Young People Fund.	1 - 8

Contact

Amit Alva on email: amit.alva@southwark.gov.uk

Date: 29 September 2025

Meeting Name:	Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission
Date:	6 October, 2025
Report title:	Youth Services – Overview and update on Positive Futures for young People Fund (PFYPF)
Ward(s) or groups affected:	All
Classification:	Open
Reason for lateness (if applicable):	N/A
From:	Toni Ainge, Director of Leisure / Eva Gomez, Head of Culture

RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. Members are asked to note the overview of key Youth Services in Southwark, and in particular, the Positive Futures for Young People Fund (PFYPF).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. This report provides an overview of Southwark Council's current Youth and Adventure Play service offer and details the Positive Futures for Young People Fund (2024–26). It also notes forthcoming changes to the youth offer commissioning framework, in light of the findings arising from the DCMS funded Local Youth Transformation Pilot gaps analysis report.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

3. **Overview of Youth Service**

3.1 Youth Centres

Southwark Council directly operates three youth centres across the borough (the Damilola Taylor Centre, Brandon Youth Centre and New Venture Youth Centre). These centres provide safe, inclusive spaces for young people aged 11–19 (up to 25th birthday for those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)), offering a range of social, educational and positive activities outside school hours. Each centre runs weekly evening sessions (including a weekly free meal offer) and structured programmes co-designed with young people, covering activities such as sports, arts, mentoring, and skills development.

The council's youth centres have recently expanded services – for example, introducing schools outreach work, weekly targeted sessions and a “Young Leaders” training programme – to engage more young people and help break down postcode-based barriers between communities. In addition to the three directly-run clubs, the council commissions one other youth centre via a grant agreement, (The Blue Youth

Centre), extending the reach of open-access youth provision, and delivers a weekly youth project from the Belair Recreation Rooms in Dulwich.

3.2 Adventure Playgrounds

The council operates three adventure playgrounds (Mint Street, Peckham Rye and Ellen Brown) which offer supervised play opportunities for children and young people. These play sites typically serve ages 8–15 (and up to 25th birthday with SEND), providing safe outdoor spaces for creative, physical, and social play under the guidance of trained playworkers. The focus is on child-led, adventurous play in well-equipped environments, helping youngsters build confidence, stay active, and interact with peers in a safe setting.

Two other adventure play sites in the borough are managed by Trusts (Bethwin Road and Dog Kennel Hill) with the Council as Landlord. These sites are also designed to be inclusive for children of all abilities. Both have plans for investment in the assets.

3.3 One Hub (Digital Youth Platform)

OneHub Southwark is the council's dedicated digital platform for young people. Developed with input from youth users, it serves as a "one-stop shop" for information on activities, opportunities and support available to Southwark's young people. The One Hub website (www.onehubsouthwark.co.uk) showcases all key aspects of the youth offer – including listings for youth centres, adventure playgrounds, "things to do" and "places to go", advice on health and wellbeing, links to jobs and training, and youth engagement channels like the Youth Parliament. By centralising this information in an accessible format, One Hub makes it easier for young people (and their families) to find out what services and activities are on offer in their area. It is continually updated and promoted via schools, youth clubs and social media. Since its launch in 2022, One Hub has seen significant growth in traffic (a 300% increase in web visits was recorded after a recent rebranding push). Despite this significant increase in usage, officers are aware that young people do not always wish to visit a website, and are working with communications colleagues to develop new ways to communicate the offer to young people.

3.4 Southwark Youth Parliament

The Southwark Youth Parliament (SYP) is the borough's elected youth forum, comprising young people aged 14–18 who represent their peers and influence local decision-making. Launched as part of the Youth New Deal, the Youth Parliament replaces the former youth council with a more expansive, borough-wide model. Members of Youth Parliament (MYPs) are elected bi-annually by schools and youth groups across Southwark. The SYP provides a platform for young people to voice their opinions, set priorities, and co-create solutions on issues that affect them. They have a mandate to drive positive change – for example, Youth Parliament input has helped shape funding priorities for youth services and led to the creation of new youth-led projects. Priorities identified for the Youth Parliament 2023 to 2025 are mental health, tackling child poverty, youth violence, climate change and careers and employability. Over the past year, around 50 young people have been actively engaged through SYP, though work is ongoing to broaden its reach beyond the elected members. The Youth Parliament is supported by the council's Youth and Play team and is a key mechanism through which young people's voices inform policy and commissioning, in line with the council's commitment to youth participation.

3.5 Small Grants for Young People

Funding Our Future is a small-grants programme that empowers individual young people to pursue their personal development goals. Launched as a pilot in 2023, this scheme offers grants of up to £500 directly to young people (typically for ages 15–25) to support positive activities such as training courses, start-up projects, educational materials etc., that boost their skills, confidence and future prospects. A unique aspect of Funding Our Future is that funding decisions are made by a panel of trained young people, with support from council officers. Applicants submit their proposals, and a youth panel evaluates them. In its pilot phase, the scheme prioritised certain groups (for example, young carers) and saw strong uptake: in early 2023, 19 young people received grants totaling approximately £6,774. Following this success, the grant has now been established as an ongoing opportunity. This programme not only offers direct financial support for youth-led ideas but also develops the grant-making skills and civic involvement of the young panelists. In the financial year 2024-25 the panel received 178 applications, agreeing to fund 54 of these and spending nearly £20,000.

4. Positive Futures for Young People Fund (2024–2026) – Commissioned Youth Activities

4.1 Current Programme

The Positive Futures for Young People Fund (PFYPF) is Southwark's flagship youth services commissioning programme. Established in 2021 under the Youth New Deal, it consolidates several funding streams into a single grants programme to support local voluntary and community sector organisations in delivering positive activities for young people. The total investment in this programme is just over £1.04 million for 2024-2026, supplemented by a dedicated allocation of £41,250 earmarked specifically to establish a new LGBTQ+ youth provision. (Initially, no suitable provider for the LGBTQ+ lot was identified in the first round, but a targeted re-commissioning led to the grant being awarded to Mosaic LGBTQ+ Young Persons' Trust.)

The current funding round covers the two-year period from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2026. Through this fund, the council invests in a strong, inclusive youth service sector by awarding grants to a range of providers who run youth projects and services aligned with strategic outcomes.

4.2 Commissioning Process and Youth Involvement

The 2024–26 commissioning cycle was designed to put young people's voices at the heart of decision-making. In mid-2023, officers carried out an open application process for PFYPF grants, informed by a youth consultation on priorities. Applications were invited across various lots or themes (ensuring a spread of universal provision and targeted support), and the evaluation involved a multi-stage process: initial eligibility checks, panel scoring of proposals, and applicant presentations.

Crucially, the grant assessment panel – the Positive Futures Programme Board – included young people alongside council officers. These youth panel members were trained to objectively review bids and helped decide which projects best met young people's needs and the fund's criteria. The involvement of young commissioners

ensured that funding recommendations reflected the preferences and insights of the young people themselves, fulfilling the Council's pledge to put the Youth Parliament "in the driving seat" for funding decisions.

Following this rigorous process, a set of funding recommendations was approved by the Cabinet Member in December 2023. Nineteen organisations were awarded grants for 2024–2026, with individual grant awards ranging from £20,000 up to £30,000 per year depending on the project scope.

4.3 Funded activities and services (2024-2026)

The projects supported through PFYPF 2024–26 collectively form a diverse menu of youth services across Southwark. Funded providers include both well-established youth organisations and smaller community groups, ensuring broad geographic and thematic coverage. These commissioned services complement the council's direct provision (youth centres and playgrounds) by delivering activities often in evenings, weekends, and school holidays, free of charge to young residents. Examples of funded activities include:

- **Creative Arts and Culture:** Several projects use creative arts as a tool for engagement. For example, *Art Block* (South London Gallery) runs creative workshops, exhibitions and youth arts programmes for local young people. *Kingswood Arts* provides a programme of theatre and artistic activities for 11–18-year-olds in the Dulwich area, and *Surrey Docks Farm* involves young people in animal care, food growing and environmental education on a working city farm.
- **Sports, Health and Wellbeing:** Many grants fund sports-based youth work, given the popularity of physical activity as a positive outlet. *Fight for Change Foundation* offers a boxing and fitness programme combined with mentoring and personal development for teens. *London Sport* is running weekly **girls' sports sessions** (focusing on engaging more young women in Peckham). Other projects support healthy lifestyles, such as *Coin Street's "Get Fit for Life"* youth gym and football club on Fridays and weekends. Additionally, a community kitchen project with *London Community Kitchen* teaches cooking skills and nutrition to 11–25-year-olds (including those with SEND).
- **Youth Clubs and Safe Spaces:** The fund sustains and extends open-access youth club provision by voluntary organisations. Notably, **Salmon Youth Centre** in Bermondsey – one of the largest youth centres in the area – received a grant to support its ongoing open-access sessions (which include sports, music, social space and a hot meal for young people). **Westminster House Youth Club** in Nunhead is funded to employ a youth worker and run after-school and holiday programmes five days a week. The **Oxford & Bermondsey Club**, another historic youth club, delivers evening sessions 3 times a week with its grant. These projects ensure that welcoming, supervised spaces are available in multiple neighbourhoods, especially in the evenings when teenagers most need safe places to go.
- **Employability and Life Skills:** Several initiatives focus on improving young people's life chances through training, mentoring and enterprise. For example, *The Empowerment People* project offers career-readiness support – CV building workshops, confidence training and job coaching – to help young people into

education or employment. *Active Communities Network* runs the “**Kickstart Youth**” programme in Walworth and Elephant & Castle, combining sports with skills development and mentoring towards positive pathways. There are also specialist schemes like *The Spring Community Hub*, which provides after-school sessions on healthy living and “good food” for young people in the Peckham area, integrating cooking with wellbeing education.

- **Targeted Support for Vulnerable Groups:** A priority of the fund is to reach those young people who face additional barriers or needs. For instance, *Ballers Academy* delivers inclusive sports sessions: separate football groups for girls, for young people with disabilities, and a community session open to all. The *Neurodiversity Family Hub* received funding to create a **safe space for neurodiverse youth** (and their families) to access peer support and advocacy ⁶¹. Importantly, responding to an identified gap, a new **LGBTQ+ youth service** is being established by *Mosaic LGBTQ+ Young Persons’ Trust* with the dedicated grant – this will provide youth clubs, support groups, and summer activities specifically for LGBTQ+ young people across Southwark. Through such targeted projects, the Positive Futures portfolio ensures inclusivity, so that young people who might not otherwise engage have tailored opportunities available.

Across all these commissioned programmes, providers are required to monitor and report on attendance, outcomes and feedback. This allows the council’s Youth and Play Service to track the impact. The previous cycle (2022–24) of the Positive Futures Fund demonstrated significant reach and benefit: in 2022–23, commissioned providers collectively delivered 3,868 youth work sessions, with over 15,600 attendances by around 4,000 unique young people accessing the activities. We expect the 2024–26 projects to continue building on this success, delivering outcomes such as improved life skills, increased physical and mental wellbeing, reduced isolation, and higher engagement in education, employment or training for participants. Quarterly monitoring is in place, and youth commissioners will also be involved in reviewing the progress of these grants. Overall, the PFYPF is enabling the voluntary sector to provide a rich variety of high-quality provision that complements what the Council directly operates, thereby maximising the positive opportunities available to Southwark’s young people.

5. Next Steps – DCMS Pathfinder and Commissioning Framework Review

Southwark has been selected as one of 12 pathfinder local authorities in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport’s Local Youth Transformation Pilot programme. This national pilot (running through summer 2025–summer 2026) provides support and funding to help the selected councils enhance their youth service provision and innovate in meeting the statutory “youth offer” duty.

Participation in the pilot led to external expertise visiting Councils (via the National Youth Agency (NYA) and partners) assessing current services, consulting stakeholders, with a view to co-designing improvements in the youth offer and reviewing the Youth Offer Commissioning Framework - i.e. how we plan and fund youth services. After the 3-day NYA visit in July, Southwark submitted a bid for £471k in early September 2025; it is expected that the DCMS will communicate the outcome of the bid by early October 2025.

As part of this process, and depending on the level of grant awarded, officers will be comprehensively reviewing Southwark's Youth Offer Commissioning Framework – examining what is working well in our current model (both direct provision and commissioned grants like PFYPF) and what could be improved.

The review will consider how to best align with the forthcoming National Youth Strategy and the council's Southwark 2030 vision, ensuring our approach remains innovative, needs-led and youth-centred. We will explore questions such as the balance between universal and targeted provision; geographical coverage and equity of access across the borough; integrating youth voice even more deeply into commissioning; and opportunities for partnership or co-commissioning with other services (e.g. Family Hubs, Community Safety) as part of a whole-system approach. The pilot also emphasizes building longer-term sustainability and investment in the local youth infrastructure, which will inform our framework for funding beyond 2026.

Findings and proposals from the Youth Offer review will be brought back to Members when available. We anticipate formulating a revised commissioning framework or set of options in the coming months (during the pilot), with a view to implementation in time for the post-2026 funding cycle. We would be happy to present a further paper to this Committee with detailed proposals and recommendations once this review is complete next year. This will ensure that Overview and Scrutiny Members can consider the future direction and have oversight of how the Youth Offer in Southwark will be transformed under the pilot. In the meantime, the service will continue delivering the current programme and maintaining strong outcomes for young people, while working with DCMS and sector partners on the transformation agenda.

6. Policy framework implications

All local authorities in England have a statutory duty under Section 507B of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient educational and recreational leisure-time activities for the improvement of the well-being of 13-19 year olds (and those up to 25 with learning difficulties or disabilities) in their area, and to ensure young people have access to sufficient positive activities and opportunities for their personal and social development. This duty also requires local authorities to ascertain and take into account the views of young people when planning and providing these activities.

This is commonly known as the 'Youth Offer' and the work of Southwark Youth and Play Service contributes directly to that offer; with the ambition through the Local Youth Transformation Pilot to strengthen that.

7. Community, equalities (including socio-economic) and health impacts

• Community impact statement

The Youth and Play Service is committed to fostering positive outcomes for young people throughout the borough by expanding access to safe and constructive activities. This report outlines the breadth and effectiveness of initiatives implemented to date.

• Equalities (including socio-economic) impact statement

An Equalities Impact and Needs Analysis (EINA) was conducted prior to the original PFYPF grant programme to assess the positive impacts of the funding and identify

strategies to mitigate any potential adverse effects on local communities. The analysis underscored the necessity of collecting demographic data on young people benefiting from PFYPF, which has since been incorporated into the monitoring framework.

Furthermore, the PFYPF grants provided additional resources for children and young people with SEND, as well as support for gender-specific activities and targeted initiatives for LGBTQI+ youth.

A further ENIA will be conducted across the service to ensure that future activity, programmes and the offer meets the needs of Southwark's young people.

- **Health impact statement**

The Youth and Play Service is designed to provide young people with opportunities to participate in their community, support their personal development, and enhance career prospects. The programme includes efforts to increase engagement, foster communication, and facilitate connections among participants. In addition, funding supports physical activities and sports to encourage physical activity among young people, contributing to their overall health.

8. **Climate change implications**

There are no identified climate change impacts associated with this report.

9. **Resource implications**

The annual cost of the Youth and Play Service, (council delivered and commissioned services) is £2 million.

10. **Consultation**

A consultation was undertaken in 2025 reaching 494 young people including 24 easy reads created to enable young people with special needs to take part. A further 70 young people were consulted as part of the NYA review in July 2025.

The primary finding from the consultation indicated that the majority of respondents (62% of online survey participants) did not attend youth clubs. The leading reasons cited included a lack of awareness regarding their locations (33%), lack of personal interest (20%), and insufficient time (19%). Only 11% stated they had no desire to attend, while just 7% expressed concerns about the safety of youth clubs. The information gained from the easy read and workshop suggested that very few young people with special needs attend a regular youth session. One reason given by the Headteacher of Spa School in Bermondsey, who spoke with officers during the consultation, is the difficulty of accessing local provision, making it difficult for parents/carers to get young people to clubs.

As part of the Local Youth Transformation pilot officers will explore other ways to gain insights into an even wider representation of young people's voices, for example training a group of young individuals as community researchers to gain insight into local young people needs and aspirations.

This insight will inform future commissioning and direction, and quality assurance of the Youth and Play Service.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal briefing: <i>Southwark Youth Offer Overview</i> (2025) Cabinet Member Report: <i>Positive Futures for Young People Fund 2024–26 – Funding Award Recommendations</i> (Dec 2023) Council Moderngov Decision Notice (Leader of the Council, 9 Jan 2024) Youth Service Commissioning Documents 2023 (Grant Specification and Panel Terms) Southwark Youth Parliament update (Feb 2024) London Youth announcement on DCMS Local Youth Transformation Pilot (Aug 2025) 	Leisure Services / on lone	Eva Gomez, head of Culture

AUDIT TRAIL

This section must be included in all reports.

Lead Officer	Toni Ainge, Director of Leisure	
Report Author	Eva Gomez, Head of Culture	
Version	Final	
Dated	29 September 2025	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Assurance	Yes/No	Yes/No
Strategic Director, Finance	Yes/No	Yes/No
List other officers here		
Cabinet Member	Yes/No	Yes/No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team		29 September 2025