1.0) I am writing on behalf of YoungMinds to provide a written submission to your Committee’s inquiry into Local Government Finance and the 2019 Spending Review.

1.1) We are pleased that your committee has chosen to examine the important issue of local government funding and this submission will focus on the impact of local government spending on children and young people’s mental health.

1.2) YoungMinds is the leading children and young people’s mental health charity in the UK, and we put the experiences of children, young people and families at the heart of everything we do.

1.3) This submission will draw on the insights and lived experiences of the children, young people, parents, carers and professionals that we work with, in addition to research that we have carried out to evaluate local authority spending on children’s mental health services.

2.0) The incidence of children and young people experiencing poor mental health is one of the biggest challenges facing the country. One in eight children (aged 5-19) has a diagnosable mental health disorder, which equates to roughly three children in every classroom. However, this is just the tip of the iceberg, as many more children and young people will experience emotional distress or have an identified mental health need, and almost half of all young people will experience some form of adversity or complexity in their childhood or adolescence.

2.1) Children who have had the most difficult and complex starts in life – for example, experiencing abuse, neglect, bereavement, discrimination or growing up in poverty – are at an increased risk of engaging in health-harming behaviours, and experiencing poorer mental and physical health outcomes in adulthood. Research has shown that one in three adult mental health conditions relate directly to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Concurrently, adults who experienced four or more ACEs in their childhood are four times more likely to experience mental health problems.
3.0) Local authorities play a key role in commissioning and funding services that benefit children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing. Traditionally, local government has mainly funded universal services that can help prevent the development or escalation of mental health problems, and early intervention services that provide crucial early support when problems first emerge.

3.1) At YoungMinds, we hear consistently from children and families that preventative and early-intervention services, such as the support provided by school nurses or counsellors, drop-in centres or online counselling services, can be a lifeline for young people experiencing mental health problems. These services can play an integral role in supporting young people and families to build their skills, knowledge and confidence to be able to look after their own mental health, self-regulate or manage emotional distress. Additionally, early access to practical support can prevent an escalation of need and reduce the likelihood of young people needing more specialist care or reaching crisis point.

3.2) In addition to funding universal or early intervention services, which are now mainly funded through public health departments, many local authorities also commission or deliver bespoke and crucial services for children and young people from different vulnerable groups, who may statistically be more at risk of developing mental health problems. It has been suggested that around two in five victims of child sexual exploitation experience mental health problems (including Post Traumatic Stress) and are 17 times more likely to experience a psychotic episode than their peers. Research suggests that two in five young carers have a mental health problem, and bereaved children are 1.5 times more likely than their peers to be diagnosed with a mental health condition.

4.1) Despite the important role that local authorities play in providing mental health services, there have been significant cuts to their budgets in recent years. In 2018, the National Audit Office reported that Government funding for local authorities has fallen by an estimated 49.1% in real terms from 2010-11 to 2017-18. Further, it was found that between 2016/17 and 2019/20, the ring-fenced public health grant to local authorities in England has reduced by 7.5% (or 12.7% in real terms), from £3.387 billion to £3.134 billion.

4.2) In 2018, YoungMinds sent a freedom of information request to every CCG and local authority in England to provide information about the total amount that they had spent on services that they provide or commission relating to children and young people’s mental health or emotional wellbeing. Our findings showed that over half of local authorities had cut their CAMHS budgets in real terms between 2013/14 and 2017/18.
4.3) YoungMinds have been monitoring the trends in spending on children and young people’s mental services for the past five years, and our research has shown that services have been affected by cuts to local authority budgets. Our analysis of FOI responses in 2015/16 showed that one in five local authorities cut or froze their spending on children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing every year from 2010/11 to 2014/15.

4.4) Our findings have recently been reinforced by research carried out by the Office of the Children’s Commissioner, which showed that 60% of local authorities had seen a real-terms reduction in spending on preventative or early-intervention services for children’s mental health or wellbeing between 2016-17 and 2018-19.

4.5) This decline in local authority budgets and spending on children and young people’s mental health is a worrying trend when considering the significant pressure that NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are increasingly under. Research by the Education Policy Institute found that the number of referrals to child and adolescent mental health services in England increased by 26% between 2013 and 2018. Currently, less than one in three children and young people with a diagnosable mental health condition get access to NHS care and treatment.

4.6) Young people and parents consistently tell us that they find it difficult to access services when they first experience mental health problems, which can lead to unnecessary escalation in their needs. In a YoungMinds survey, three-quarters (76%) of parents said that their child’s mental health had deteriorated while waiting for support from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

4.7) The research that we carried out, alongside that carried out by the Children’s Commissioner, raised two significant concerns.

4.8) Firstly, there is no published national data about the amount of money spent by local government on services that benefit children and young people’s mental health or wellbeing, or the numbers of young people who benefit from these services. This means that there are no accurate, up-to-date or robust figures about total public spending on children and young people’s mental health, just the contribution from the NHS and CCGs. This is a significant barrier to developing effective public policy on this important issue.
4.9) Secondly, the reductions in local authority spending in some areas further put at risk the effective implementation of Future in Mind (FIM)xv, or the Five Year Forward View for Mental Healthxvi. In 2015, the Government provided £1.4 billion to CCGs over a five year period to implement Future in Mind, and to transform children and young people's mental health services.

4.10) Our research has shown that not all CCGs are increasing their overall spending on CAMHS by as much as they are receiving in additional investment to implement FIMxvii. In addition to this, as some local authorities have also reduced spending on children's mental health, there is a real risk that some of the Future in Mind monies are being used to replace previous service provision, rather than funding additional service provision.

5.0) Mental health problems in children and young people have been shown to have an impact across the life course on educational outcomesxviii xix, employmentxx xxi, an ability to maintain relationshipsxxii, likelihood of engaging in risky behaviours such as self-harmxxiii, and a reduced life expectancyxxiv. Additionally, mental illness has been estimated to cost the English economy at least £105 billion a yearxxv.

5.1) When considering that half of all mental health problems manifest by the age of 14, with 75% by age 24, it is essential that there is promotion of good mental health among children, interventions to prevent mental health problems from developing, and opportunities for young people to access help quickly when problems first emerge.

5.2) The Spending Review must ensure that local authorities are adequately funded to provide preventative and early intervention children and young people's mental health services. Equally, to ensure that children and young people have the best opportunity to live happy, healthy and independent lives, the Government’s upcoming Green Paper on Prevention must prioritise the promotion of good mental health and resilience for children and young people.

5.3) During the course of your Committee’s inquiry, we recommend that you consider the following as part of your review:

- The impact that services funded or delivered by local government can have in promoting resilience, good mental health, prevention and early
intervention for children and young people, and the impact that a reduction in these services has.

- The benefits of developing a coherent promotive and preventative approach to children’s mental health for individuals and wider society, and the role that local government should play as part of an integrated approach.

- The impact that cuts to wider early-intervention and universal services, such as youth provision and early-years centres has had on the wellbeing and mental health of children and young people.

- The relationship between health and local authority spending on services that impact children and young people’s mental health and wellbeing.

- The scale of unmet need for children and young people experiencing emerging or enduring mental health problems.

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6.0) If you would like to discuss any of the points raised in this submission or for a representative of YoungMinds to provide further evidence to the Committee, please do not hesitate to get in contact.

June 2019

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vi YoungMinds, *Beyond Adversity* (2016)


ix YoungMinds, *Children's Mental Health Funding: Where is it going?* (2018)


xvii YoungMinds, *Children’s Mental Health Funding: Where is it going?* (2018);


