



Executive Summary

SAFEGUARDING PRESSURES PHASE 5

December 2016

The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd



1. Introduction

ADCS Safeguarding Pressures research has provided evidence of trends in safeguarding activity and the provision of services to children and their families based on information from local authorities in five phases spanning 2007/8 to 2015/16. Through each phase, significant increases in safeguarding activity have been reported together with the range of contributing factors. Phase 5, consisting of a main report and two special thematic reports on unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children¹, and early help brings the evidence base up to date in the current context in which children's services are operating. Evidence about early help and social care services was provided by 132 local authorities (87%), 19 interviews with directors and assistant directors of children's services, and four case studies.

2. Context

The amount of new legislation, guidance and reviews has continued to increase in volume and scope. A separate document on the ADCS website provides an overview of key recent legislation, policy, reviews and inspections which drive or impact upon children's services².

There are almost 11.7 million children and young people in England (ONS, 2016) compared to 11.5 million two years ago. There is a further projected rise to just over 12.8m by 2039, the majority of which will be an increase of 598,630 children and young people between 2014 and 2020.

3. Presenting Factors and Needs

Respondents provided evidence of factors which led to children and families requiring early help or social care services, and how these have changed over the past two years. Few of these are new, but respondents to Phase 5 of this research describe a panoply of interlocking factors which are becoming more complex and more prevalent.

- **'Toxic Trio':** Respondents confirmed that the effects of "the toxic trio" of domestic abuse, parental mental health and parental substance misuse continue to be a major, and increasingly prevalent, reason for the involvement of children's social care in children's and families' lives. Research undertaken in an Eastern region authority concluded the toxic trio was present in 90% of cases; with other analyses ranging from 65% to 80%

¹ http://adcs.org.uk/assets/documentation/ADCS_UASC_Report_Final_FOR_PUBLICATION.pdf

² <http://adcs.org.uk/safeguarding/article/safeguarding-pressures-phase-5>

- **Domestic Abuse:** DfE states that 49.6% of all Children in Need at 31st March 2016 had domestic abuse as a factor at the end of their assessment – in other words, half of all children in need have experienced or witnessed domestic abuse (DfE, 2016b). Respondents cited this as reaching ‘epidemic’ proportions as a reason why children come to the attention of children’s social care departments
- **Emotional wellbeing and mental health:** Across 111 responding authorities, 98,615 (20%) assessments completed in the year had a presenting factor of mental health: concerns about the mental health of the parent/carer. DfE (DfE, 2016) reports that mental health (of child, parent/carer or other person in the household) is a factor in 36.6% of all Children in Need assessments at 31st March 2016
- **Child sexual exploitation and trafficking:** 100 local authorities supplied data relating to a total of 13,466 children *at risk* of CSE. The majority of authorities and all interviewees felt that the increased awareness of CSE amongst the public, professionals and practitioners had resulted in higher referral rates as recognition of signs and risk improve. One authority reported a 63% increase in cases where CSE was a risk factor in the past year, due to awareness raising and the dedicated focus of a specific multi-agency team
- **Neglect:** In 2015/16, 53.5% of referrals were due to Abuse or Neglect and the proportion of children subjects of child protection plans for Neglect has also increased. Interviewees described the challenges of welfare reforms and poverty and their impact
- **Poverty:** In 2014/15, there were 3.9 million children living in relative low income, 200,000 more than the previous year. There is a projected increase in the proportion of children living in relative low income, from 17% in 2013/14 to 26% in 2020/21 (HM Government, 2016)
- **Housing:** Homelessness and affordable housing were cited as a key presenting need, which is growing. In just three months between 1st January and 31st March 2016, local authorities accepted 10,130 households with dependent children as being statutorily homeless, and at 31st March 2016, 71,540 households were in temporary accommodation, an increase of 11% the previous year
- **More complex problems:** There is an increase in entrenched and more complex problems which children and families are experiencing, planning and service provision is therefore more challenging and resolution takes longer
- **Digital media:** and online abuse via social media, affecting emotional and mental health of young people are also growing factors in some referrals, according to respondents.

4. Summary of Early Help Assessments and Social Care Activity

The table below summarises changes in key safeguarding activity in responding authorities, together with the number extrapolated from the sample to all 152 authorities, based on

population. This evidences a ‘levelling off’ nationally of the steep increases in referrals, child protection plans and children looked after s. However, there are now greater variations between local authorities in both current rates and change over time, in some instances to a significant extent. As many authorities are experiencing reductions as increases, and there does not appear to be any correlation across regions or types of authority, apart from the growing number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children supported in London and the South East.

Activity	Number of LAs responded	Total in Responding LAs	Rate per 10,000 0-17 population	Total in all LAs (extrapolated from SGP5 responses)	% change between 2013/14 (Phase 4) and 2015/16
Early help assessments completed during the year	103	145,234	178	207,636	11%
Initial contacts during the year	111	1.69 million	1875	2.19 million	-7%
Referrals during the year	123	526,445	533	622,635	-7%
Children in Need at 31 st March (excluding CP and CLA)	117	230,891	241	280,871	-3%
Becoming subject of a child protection plan during the year	123	54,279	54	63,021	3%
Subject of CP Plan at 31 st March	123	42,083	43	49,641	0%
Starting to be looked after during the year	123	27,992	28	32,964	0%
Looked after at 31 st March	126	62,211	61	71,239	-1%
Ceasing to be looked after during the year	124	27,431	27	31,923	4%

Figure 1: Summary of activity

4.1 Early help

A greater range of data relating to early help has been submitted by local authorities for Safeguarding Pressures research Phase 5 and a separate thematic report will be published early in 2017 to provide further analysis and information about early help services provided by local authorities and the changes over the past two years.

Three quarters of responding authorities stated that their early help services had changed to a high or moderate degree in the last two years and early help services have generally become more targeted. More authorities described effective early help services that had impact than did so two years ago. There is a significant increase in the rate of early help assessments (EHAs) completed during the year, equal to 225,633 extrapolated to all local authorities.

4.2 'The Front Door' to children's social care

Over the past two years, the number of initial contacts has reduced although there is still a 53% increase from 2007/8. 28% of initial contacts resulted in a referral to social care, 31% had advice/information or signposting provided and 20% no further action.

Approximately 60% of the 70 local authorities providing responses stated that thresholds had not changed in the past two years in their authority. Respondents explained that work had been undertaken to clarify thresholds with partners and providers, to ensure a more consistent application.

Between Phases 4 and 5, there has been a 7% reduction in referrals, but there remains an increase of 12.4% since 2007/8. The rate of 533 per 10,000 0-17 population in 2015/16 masks disparity between authorities where the lowest rate of referrals was 254, and the largest 1,067. The growing divergence of individual authority's numbers is likely to be for a variety of reasons, including: new case recording systems; 'front door' arrangements, such as multi-agency integrated models or MASHs; increase or decrease in children who meet the threshold for provision of services; and, the direct impact of early help in reducing social care contacts and referrals.

Police and Education remain the most prevalent sources of initial contacts and referrals, accounting for just under half of all referrals. 53.5% of referrals were due to Abuse or Neglect (N1) compared to 45.7% two years ago, a continuing year-on-year increase, with 20.2% re-referral rate.

There is an increase in the number of assessments being undertaken. 497 assessments were completed per 10,000 0-17 population in 2015/16, of which 35% were 'no further action'.

4.3 Children in Need and child protection

There were fewer Children in Need *excluding* those who are subjects of child protection plans and children looked after across 119 authorities. As with all 'snapshot' figures about service users, the number at 31st March does not represent the totality of work undertaken during the year. Local authorities reporting reduced numbers suggest this may be as a result of investment in early help services.

Both DfE and ADCS Safeguarding Pressures research data show a steady and continued increase in children subjects of S47 child protection enquiries to a rate of 142.5 per 10,000 0-17 population – an increase of 4.9% in the past year.

The number of children becoming subjects of child protection plans continues to increase year-on-year (3.4% from 2013/14) yet the number of children subjects of child protection plans at 31st March has not increased at the same rate as those becoming subjects of a plan, and has remained fairly constant for the past three years. 38% of responding authorities stated they had experienced an increase; 35% no change; 18% a reduction and 10% either small fluctuations or numbers too small to be significant.

46% of initial child protection plans are due to Neglect. This continues to be the most and increasingly prevalent category of abuse. The proportion of plans in the category Emotional Abuse, which is used to describe a range of things including domestic abuse, has also increased and now accounts for 35% of the total. The proportion of plans for Physical Abuse continues to decrease, whereas there has been a very small increase in the proportion of plans for Sexual Abuse for the first time since 2010/11.

Proportionally, more children aged 5-9 became subjects of a child protection plans in 2015/16 than any other age group. 69% are under 10, and 31% are 10 or over.

4.4 Children looked after

The number of children starting to be looked after has shown a slight increase for the past three years. Whilst there is a roughly equal number of authorities whose number of children looked after have increased as decreased from the previous year, the size of the increases overall outweighs the reductions. According to data gathered from responding authorities in Phases 3, 4 and 5, there has been a 13% increase in the number of children ceasing to be looked after between 2010/11 and 2015/16, indicating that there may be overall a more effective 'flow' of children through the care system. The proportion subject to a Child Arrangement Order, Special Guardianship Order or adopted, has increased from 20.7% in 2010/11 to 31.5% in 2015/16.

Neglect remains the biggest category of abuse (52.9%) of all children starting to be looked after. The recent large increase in the proportion of children starting to be looked after in the category Absent Parenting, to 12.6%, largely relates to the increase in numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC). This is also reflected in the changing age profile of children starting to be looked after, and whilst 28.8% of all children becoming looked after are 10-15 years old, the proportion is diminishing and there is an increase in the older age groups.

Half of all children looked after at 31st March 2016 have a legal status of a Full Care Order, and the proportion has increased year-on-year. 25.7% of children looked after are accommodated under Section 20, this is a consistent picture.

Whilst they account for a relatively small proportion of the overall total, the number of children detained has increased. 900 children looked after at 31st March 2016 in 122 responding authorities were 'sentenced to CYPA 1969 supervision order with residence requirement'. Prior to 2014/15, only a handful of children were looked after under this legal status. This increase may be directly linked to the LASPO Act 2012 which conferred looked after status to children and young people on secure remand, and transfers the cost of remand arrangements to local authorities.

Cafcass reports an increase of 14.6% in all care applications in the last year alone, to 12,787 in 2016/17. The length of time to complete care and supervision applications from when the application is issued to when the application is completed has remained at an average 30 weeks for the last three years (Cafcass, 2016).

There continues to be little change in the type of placement for children looked after since 2011/12 apart from children placed for adoption and in Young Offender Institutions. Foster care as a whole accounts for almost three quarters of all placements (73.5%). Placement sufficiency, most notably in terms of welfare secure, and tier 4 mental health provision, was cited as an issue of concern for many authorities.

The proportion of children ceasing to be looked after who were adopted has reduced from 16.8% in 2013/14 to 15.3 in 2015/16. Fewer children placed for adoption or subjects of a Placement Order at 31st March 2016, together with the increase in the number of reversals where the court did not make a Placement Order (over a quarter).

4.5 Unaccompanied asylum seeking children

DfE indicates that the number of UASC looked after by all local authorities in England more than doubled from 2,050 at 31st March 2014, to 4,210 at 31st March 2016 (DfE, 2016). However responses from 111 local authorities indicated this figure may be higher across the country – 4,500 at 31st March 2016, although far more were supported at some point during the year 2015/16. Recent world events have led to a significant increase in the number of UASC coming into the country through various means. The ADCS special thematic report on UASC which was published on 3rd November 2016, contains further details³.

4.6 Care leavers and adolescents

Data collected by ADCS in Phase 4 evidenced a significant difference across authorities in their rates of care leavers and combined with the variation in the rates of children looked after, would suggest that the number of care leavers will continue to grow. Adequately

³ http://adcs.org.uk/assets/documentation/ADCS_UASC_Report_Final_FOR_PUBLICATION.pdf

meeting the needs of the increasing number of care leavers was a prominent concern in responses from local authorities. The impact of new legislation, the rising intake of UASC and the impacts of the Southwark Judgement and Staying Put duties, continue.

76% of respondents said that they had experienced changes in the level of needs of adolescents and the services required to meet those needs effectively. Most notable changes were an increase in children and young people who were missing (from home and from care) or at risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE); increased incidents of requests by local authorities for welfare secure placement, that can rarely be met given the lack of sufficiency of these types of placements.

100 local authorities supplied data relating to a total of 13,466 children who were at risk of CSE, equating to a rate of 15.7 per 10,000 0-17. Local authorities used their own definitions, and generally provided information about children who have been subject of a CSE risk assessment or where CSE was a presenting factor in assessment. The majority of authorities and all interviewees felt that the increased awareness of CSE amongst public, professional and practitioners had resulted in higher referral rates as recognition of signs and risk improve.

5. Outcomes for Children and Young People

In the two years between ADCS Safeguarding Pressures research Phases 4 and 5, performance improved or remained at a similar level for 11 out of 17 key performance measures (see figure 2). There have been some improvements in the timeliness of single assessments and a fall in the number of children with three or more placements, both of which are positive developments.

Performance Measure	2007/08	2013/14	2015/16	Improved in the two years since Phase 4
	(Phase 1)	(Phase 4)	(Phase 5)	
Percentage of initial child protection conferences held within 15 days of the start of the section 47 enquiries which led to a conference	52.0	69.3	76.7	✓
Single assessment for children's social care carried out within 45 working days of referral	n/a	82.2	83.4	✓
Percentage of re-referrals to children's social care within 12 months of previous referral	24.0	23.4	22.3	✓
Review of child protection cases - Percentage that should have been reviewed that were reviewed	99.4	94.6	93.7	✗
Percentage of children subject of CP Plan who had been subject of a previous plan	13.6	15.8	17.9	✗
Child protection plans which last 2 years or more which cease during the year	5.3	4.5	3.8	✓
Percentage of children looked after at 31 st of March, placed more than 20 miles from their homes, outside LA boundary	13	13	14	✗
Percentage of children at 31 st March with 3 or more placements during the year	12	11	10 (2015)	✓
Percentage of children who have been looked after for more than 2.5 years and of those, have been in the same placement for at least 2 years or	65	67	68 (2015)	✓
Percentage looked after children adopted in year	13	15	17	✓
Percentage of looked after children subject to a conviction, final warning or reprimand during the year	8.8	5.6	5.0 (2015)	✓
Percentage of looked after children with a substance misuse problem during the year	5.1	3.5	4.0 (2015)	✗
Percentage of looked after children classed as persistent absentees	9.3	4.7	4.9	✗
Percentage of looked after children achieving 5+ GCSE at grades A*-C (including English and Maths)	10.2	12.2	13.8 (2015)	✓
Care leavers at 19 in Education, Employment or Training	64.9	58	48	✗
Care leavers in suitable accommodation	88.4	78	81 (2015)	✓
Average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family	625 (2008-11)	628 (2011-14)	593 (2012-15)	✓

Figure 2 : Key performance measures for children's social care

6. Correlating Activity

There is evidence of a continued revolving door of re-referrals, children subjects of second or subsequent child protection plans, and children re-entering the care system. What this pattern does not tell us however, is how much of this subsequent activity is positive for children; or whether the subsequent activity is due to new, different needs.

Region	2015/16 rates per 10,000 0-17 population							
	EHAS	Contacts	Referrals	CiN at 31 st March	CP Plans at 31 st March	Looked after at 31 st March	Care Leavers at 31 st March	
North East	273	2557	609	318	58	82	32	
North West	199	1929	583	257	52	80	29	
Yorks & The Humber	291	1818	622	208	42	65	26	
West Midlands	280	1964	582	292	43	54	25	
East Midlands	211	1463	589	236	43	74	32	
East of England	202	1701	425	215	30	49	28	
London	172	2030	499	262	38	52	39	
South East	105	1853	503	208	42	52	23	
South West	130	1949	490	228	46	55	34	

Figure 3: Correlating deprivation, population and safeguarding activity across regions – rates per 10,000 0-17 population

Based on data from responding authorities, there appears to be a variation in rates per 10,000 0-17 population between regions, most notably in the north of the country where there is significantly more safeguarding activity, including taking children into care, than elsewhere in the country. This cannot be explained by levels of population or deprivation alone.

7. Resources

Nearly all local authorities are experiencing budget reductions generally, although 11 out of 30 authorities specifically describing social care budgets reported an increase in funding, generally short term and grant-based. Some authorities no longer have social care budgets protected and are starting to experience a reduction with others feeling this will occur in the future.

DfE's own research into children's services spending and delivery (DfE, 2016f) concluded that budgets were decreasing against rising demand and the main strategy identified to manage demand among councils participating in the research, was investing in early help. There was evidence of authorities proactively bidding for funds where feasible, and which local authorities reported had a positive impact on their re-design and delivery of services. Using council reserves, savings from reduction in back office and support staff and facilities

are just some of the ways that authorities are attempting to balance budgets, in addition to trying to develop innovative ways to manage and deliver services within budget.

Families with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) are those who have no legal entitlement to financial support or assistance from the state, and children's social care services are approached for support under Section 17 by families with children, or by children or young people themselves who are unaccompanied or separated from their parent or legal or customary caregiver. 32 authorities reported spend of £15m on families with no recourse to public funds in 2015/16.

8. Summary of Factors, Challenges and Enablers

The figure overleaf shows a very busy terrain of interlocking factors, challenges and enablers within a host of different models of service delivery and experiences across local authorities.

CHALLENGES	ENABLERS
<p>Demographic and socio-economic factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population changes • Migration, immigration and the international context • Increase in poverty • Different housing costs in local areas, and homelessness <p>Presenting needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional wellbeing and mental ill health • Continued increase in ‘toxic trio’, especially domestic abuse • Growth in number of children looked after placed by another authority in area • Increase in complexity of needs and demand for services • Increase in opportunities for exploitation and abuse which are difficult to control, e.g. social media, online bullying, CSE, peer on peer exploitation <p>Governance and Profile:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some legislation and national policy (e.g. welfare reforms, DoL). • Mandatory reporting • Increased judicial intervention and challenge in care planning • High profile child deaths and serious case reviews and media attention • Media pressure and public perception <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall reduction in funding • Recruitment and retention of staff • Managing external markets, eg Agency placements and social work • Cost of housing • Non-statutory nature of early help makes it most vulnerable to cuts. • Current child protection system may not fit well with adolescents need • Loss of some services (e.g. youth) <p>Organisational effectiveness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caseloads • Cultural changes in the way service-users are engaged • Pace of change • Risk averse culture • Partnership reforms (police, health, schools) 	<p>Demographic and socio-economic factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping communities to be more resilient and changing approach to delivery • Creative solutions in collaboration with housing sector <p>Presenting needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early help and earlier targeted intervention • Demand management • Better identification of risk (e.g. CSE, FGM, trafficking) <p>Governance and Profile:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some legislation and national policy • Integrated and joint working • Local political support • Increased information/data • The right culture in local authorities <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grants such as DfE Children’s Social Care Innovation Programme • Local authorities’ staff • Technology – mobile working • Rounded approach to developing social work and promoting quality and sufficiency • National fostering stocktake • Better commissioning • Better use of technology • Agile workforce <p>Organisational effectiveness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring different ways of working • Co-location/integration of services • Evidence of ‘what works’ and sharing goodpractice • Ability to innovate and do things differently based on evidence and learning from best practice

Figure 4: Summary of challenges and enablers

71 authorities and 19 interviewees provided information about current and potential enablers for children's services, many of which they were already utilising to manage and minimise demand as well as better meeting the needs of children and their families. These included:

- Strong integrated working either within the local authority, sub-regional or regional bases
- The “excellent, creative and passionate people” working in authorities who are committed, responding to change and innovations and investing in them
- Respondents and interviewees frequently cited the part that early help plays, and must continue to play. An increasing emphasis on and investment in targeted early help services is positive
- Additional funding and freedoms provided by DfE Children's Social Care Innovation programme funding (if successfully bid for) and other grants are enablers, especially for those local authorities seeking to make whole system changes
- The right culture which is less risk-averse, shares responsibility, and is more asset based; exploring new ways of working; learning about and implementing 'best practice' approaches; new technology such as client record management systems; mobile working; and, better data and performance management were also cited as enablers in delivering effective children's services
- Implementation of *Putting Children First* (DfE, July 2016) and the forthcoming national fostering stocktake were also felt to be potential enablers to improving services and outcomes for children and young people.

9. Direction of Travel

Of the 85 respondents who predicted future trajectory of quantity of safeguarding and children looked after activity (i.e. rising or falling numbers), 40% predicted a continued rise, 25% a reduction and 24% a stable picture. Six felt that activity would increase then decrease and four felt it was too early to say and difficult to project in a “fragile” system.

Two thirds of those who predict a reduction stated that this would be due to the impact of 'doing things differently' which will take time to become effective, generally 18 months. Local authorities predicting rises in children looked after largely stated this would be due to UASC, but also more interventionist action by courts, re-introducing delays into the system.

The level of risk and vulnerability of children is likely to increase due to the impact of social and economic pressures on families. Children's needs are becoming more complex at a time when specialist interventions and services, such as tier 4 mental health provision, are depleted. However, efforts are being made to improve early preventative approaches, streamline assessment processes and expand edge of care services in order to reduce the

numbers of children needing intervention through child protection plans or becoming looked after.

10. Conclusion

The picture of rising safeguarding activity since 2007/8 shows some signs of diminishing for particular authorities though overall the trend remains on an upward trajectory. Despite small national increases or no change, there is evidence that more local authorities are reducing numbers of referrals, children subjects of child protection plans and children looked after but there remains significant variation between individual local authorities.

Thresholds to children’s social care were reported to have remained the same in the majority of authorities and there was evidence of the impact of investment in early help services where these were established. The numbers of children who are receiving support from early help or social care services per 10,000 0-17 population, as illustrated in the figure below, remains substantial.



Figure 5: Summary of rates of safeguarding activity per 10,000 0-17 population 2015/16

There are myriad factors outside of the direct influence of the local authority which impact upon the provision of effective services to children and their families, but local leaders and services have managed thus far to contain some of them – a situation which may no longer be feasible. There are examples where additional investment through local political support,

or funding from bids to the DfE Children's Social Care Innovation Programme have provided opportunities to trial and take different approaches to meeting needs.

Local authorities speak about the passion and commitment of their staff to improve the life chances of children and young people despite the dual challenges of rising demand and diminishing resources. However, the root causes of why children are suffering abuse and neglect, or require additional specialist support for reasons such as domestic abuse, or homelessness continue unabated. The prevalence of domestic abuse is of such a magnitude that tackling it requires a public health style approach to examine the reasons why this form of abuse is so common and to understand what the most effective interventions might be to change adults' perceptions and behaviours in order to address better the needs of children and young people who witness or experience domestic abuse.

We cannot simplify this very complex area and the context for those who have a responsibility to safeguard children now are no less stark than they were in 2010 when Phase 1 of this research was published. However, the research now, in 2016, presents a much clearer view of reducing budgets, increasing and more complex needs of children, young people and their families together with a growing sense that a tipping is being reached, despite planned and thoughtful action by authorities. As one interviewee put it - a "perfect storm of increased need, expectations and reduced resources".

The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd (ADCS)

ADCS is the national leadership
association in England for statutory
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