



Executive Summary

SAFEGUARDING PRESSURES PHASE 6

November 2018

The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd



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Views expressed in this report are based on evidence provided by local authorities and other sources during the project. Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the precision of the information contained in the report, we cannot guarantee its accuracy or currency.

With many thanks, yet again, to all local authorities and individuals who participated in this research

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Safeguarding Pressures: Change over the last ten years and forecasts to 2023

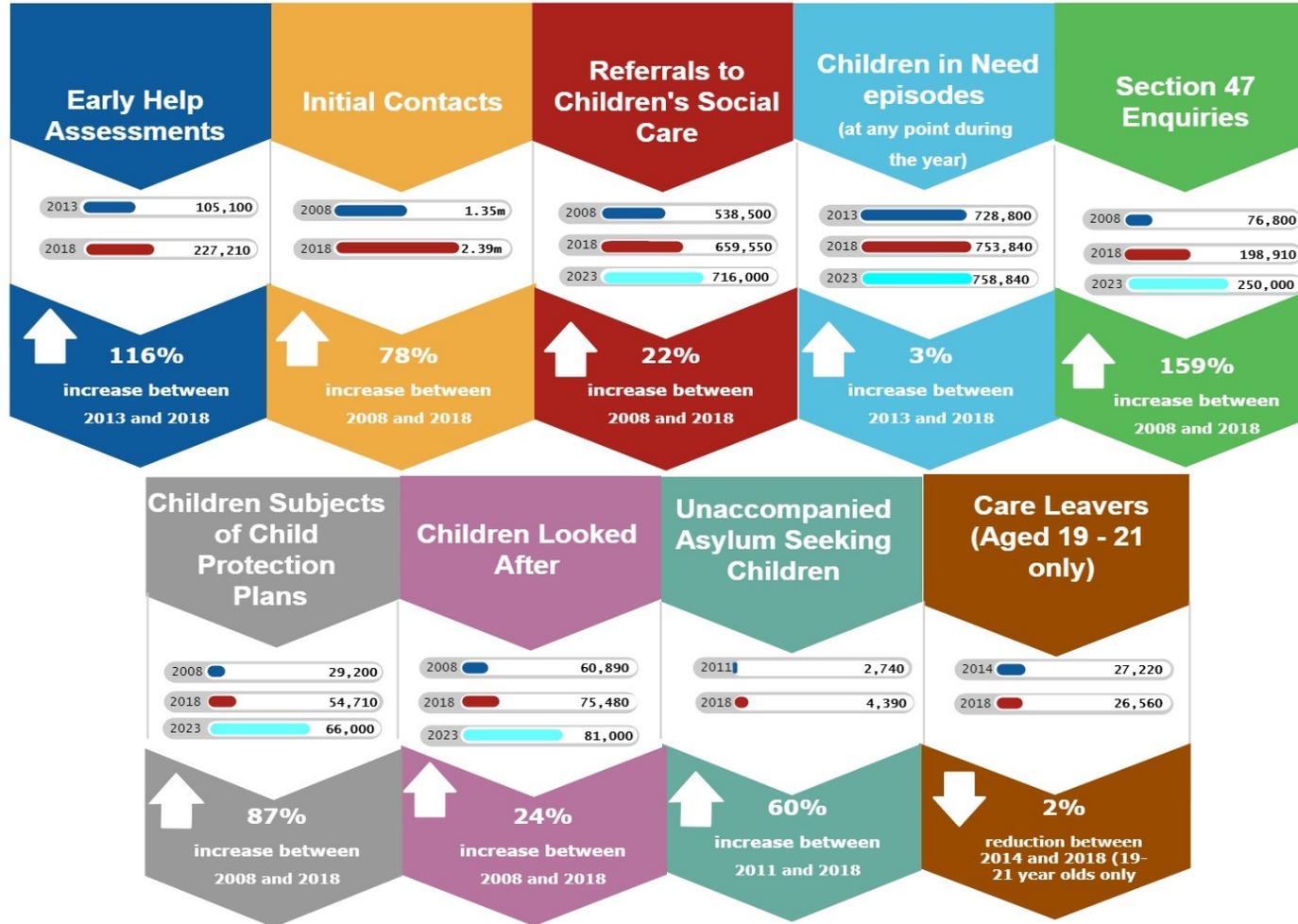


Figure 1 - Safeguarding Pressures – Change over the last ten years and forecasts to 2023 (Source: ADCS safeguarding pressures research respondents and DfE statistical returns. Data not available to 2008 for some activity and forecasts)

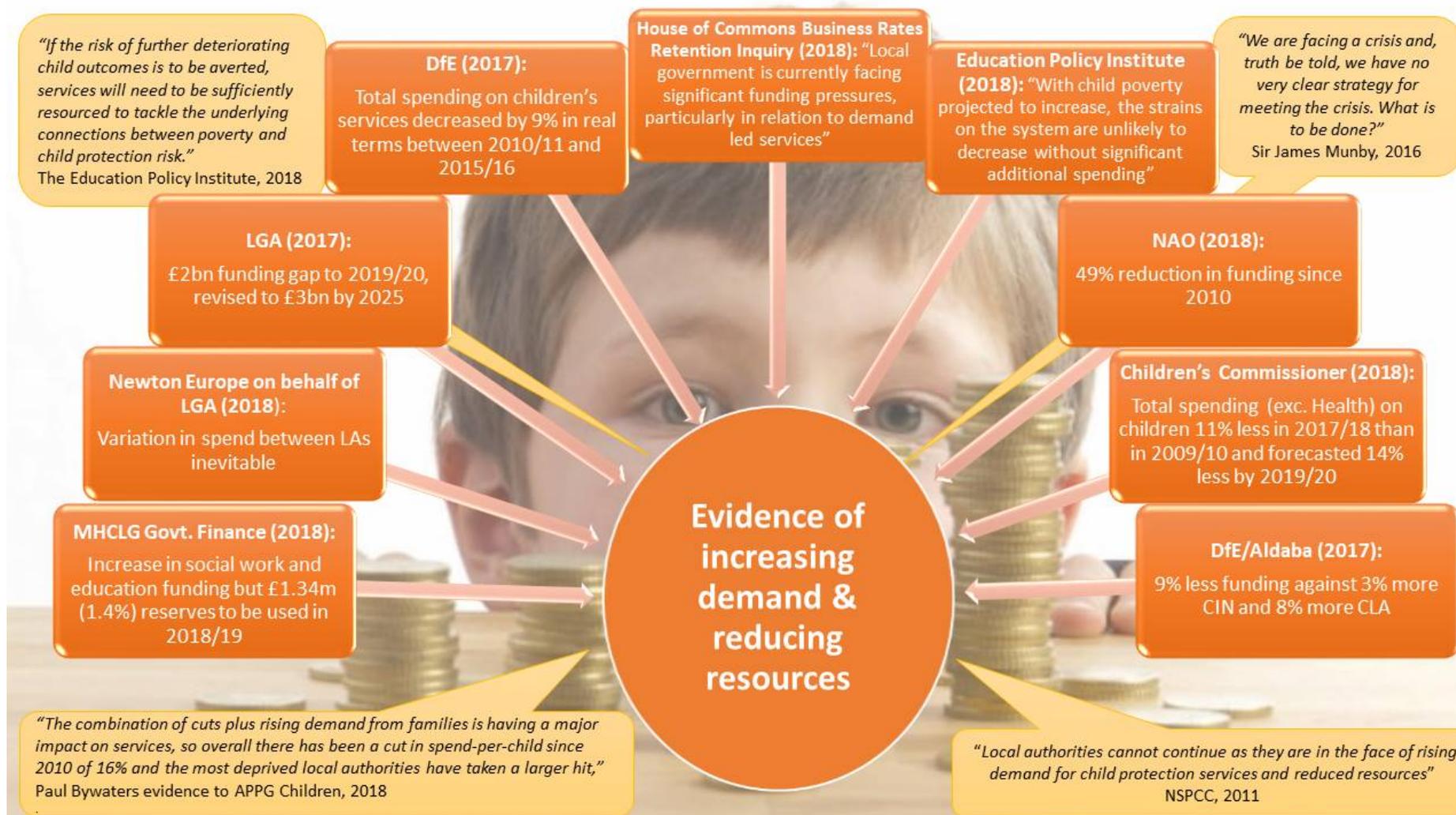


Figure 2 - Evidencing increasing demand and reducing resources

Introduction

ADCS Safeguarding Pressures research has provided evidence of changes in demand and delivery of children’s early help, social care and associated services since 2010 (ADCS, 2010a). Phase 6 now brings the evidence base up to date in the current context in which children’s services are operating. Evidence has been collected from 140 local authorities; 21 interviews with directors of children’s services or assistant directors and four case studies. Data have been extrapolated from responses to provide estimates across all local authorities in England. We evidence that in the past ten years (2008 to 2018) there has been a growing interdependence and converging of pressures on children and families resulting in their need for support from statutory services.

Context

Consideration of the nation-wide context, the common drivers apparent to some degree everywhere, and local authority specific pressures is critical to understanding changes in the needs of children and their families, in demand for services, and the delivery of services.

A national policy timeline from 2007 to 2023 on the ADCS website illustrates the complex and ‘busy’ landscape of events, reviews, and legislation which impact upon children’s services.

www.adcs.org.uk/safeguarding/article/safeguarding-pressures-phase-6

Demographic and Economic Factors

There were 11.87 million children aged 0-17 in England in 2017, just under three quarters of a million children (6.4%) more than ten years ago (ONS, 2018a). Growth in population accounts for some, but not all, of the increase in demand for services. Population is projected to increase further to 12.5 million children in 2025, but there are regional variations.

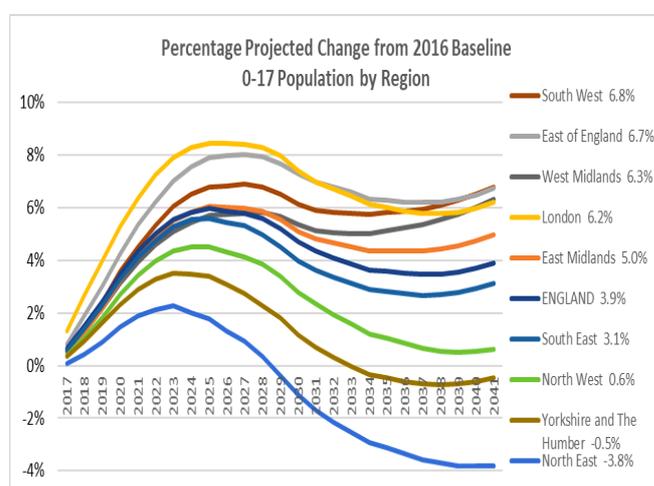


Figure 3 – Projected population change by region

In addition to the child population, there are 4.8 million young people aged 18-24 in England and although population predictions show an overall 7% decrease between 2016 and 2025, it is likely that the proportion of young people who are supported by children’s services in this age group will increase. This will be driven by the increase in numbers of children looked after (including Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children) who go on to become care leavers, and the number of children with an Education Health and Care (EHC) plan, the education component of which continue until the age of 25.

Changes in population due to people moving into and out of a local authority area, either through internal or international migration is also a factor affecting demand for children’s services, most notably a high proportion of families in temporary accommodation migrating out of London.

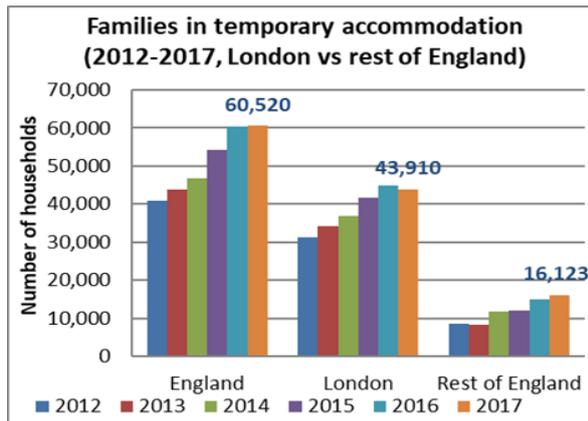


Figure 4 - Families in temporary accommodation

66% of all children in relative poverty are living in working households. Welfare reforms, and the lack of affordable, secure housing are having a disproportionate impact on vulnerable families and have increased the numbers of children living in poverty and at risk of adverse childhood experiences.

These factors are reported by respondents to be a primary cause of increased demand for early help and social care services.

Kelly *et al* (2018) conclude that benefit reforms implemented since 2015 (including the forthcoming roll-out of Universal Credit) will, if fully implemented, further reduce the incomes of low-income families with children by between 10% and 15% relative to a situation where no reforms are made.

Parental Needs

The unmet needs of parents are adversely impacting upon the safeguarding and wellbeing of children. The impact of, and increase in, factors affecting parenting capacity was reported by respondents to be one of the biggest changes in the last two years, often resulting in highly complex work to redress acts of omission in parenting. Adults experiencing domestic violence, mental health difficulties or substance misuse, formerly known as the ‘toxic trio’ and now ‘trigger trio’, remain prevalent risk factors in children’s lives.

“This remains a long standing issue. The ‘toxic trio’ of parenting capacity factors continues to be our main challenge in terms of the numbers of children experiencing neglect. We also find it difficult to achieve sustainable change for some children so children subject to repeat referrals and child protection plans are often children living in households with these factors”. – London LA

Parental mental ill-health and parental alcohol and drug misuse are increasing. Of all parental factors, domestic abuse was cited as the most prevalent, and is a prominent factor in re-referral of children to children’s social care services.

Where authorities had quantified the change in domestic abuse:

- 22% increase in the last year
- 20% increase in incidences of domestic abuse as a primary factor in assessments
- Present in 50% of referrals
- 69% of the children becoming looked after had experienced domestic abuse whilst living at home
- The numbers of calls recorded as a crime by police has doubled in the last two years.

Universal Services

There is evidence of a clear ripple effect felt by local authority children's services stemming from changes to universal provision, such as schools and other partner agencies, who are also experiencing significant pressures. School academisation, together with severe reductions in funding and subsequent cuts in services provided by other agencies have resulted in increased demand for local authority children's services.

Authorities reported that national Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) reforms, and schools 'off rolling' pupils add to pressures in children's services and are an increasing concern. Some, but not all, children who are electively home educated were also cited as being of significant safeguarding and academic concerns.

Early Help

The current framework for the inspection of local authority children's services (Ofsted, 2018) describes the evaluation criteria for early help as: *"Children, young people and families are offered help when needs and/or concerns are first identified. The early help improves the child's situation and supports sustainable progress. The interface between early help and statutory work is clearly and effectively differentiated"*.

Early help has a significant part to play in supporting children and families although the rate of early help assessments declined in 2017/18. More notably, there were the equivalent of 164,400 cases open to early

help at 31st March 2018. 78% of respondents stated that they have experienced an increase in early help activity while 13% reported a decrease.

The biggest changes in early help activity in the past two years were largely similar to those experienced in children's social care in terms of the presenting issues and increased complexity. The reconfiguration and refocusing of early help services continue to be a key part of wider organisational transformation for many local authorities.

Nearly half of respondents stated that they have remodelled or changed their early help provision in the last two years, either to better align with children's social work, reduce costs and to maximise efficiency, in order to provide improved and more targeted support to children and families. But, there were also examples of authorities where a reduction in local authority funding has meant that there has been a reduction in, for example, single agency early help.

Work with children and families happens in complex multi-agency systems, with many variables making it very difficult to evaluate the impact of early help across the system, as well as the impact of specific interventions on improving outcomes for children and their families (Ofsted, 2015).

Respondents were clear that early help is not a quick fix, there is a general consensus that it takes 18-36 months to see any positive signs of sustainable change for children and families. Thus, short term, cashable savings are not realistic. Early help is not simply a demand management tool to reduce children's social care statutory

interventions. Rather, it provides a much wider range of support to families who otherwise may never come to the attention of children’s social care, but for whom positive impacts on life chances and outcomes may be seen later in adulthood – as one respondent put it – ‘early help for life’.

Of those authorities who reported some specific impacts of early help (in addition to improving immediate and longer term outcomes for children and their families), the majority cited: diverting referrals from social care; reducing re-referrals; diverting children from care or child protection; and, edge of care services or other services provided below the threshold for statutory work.

Children’s Social Care Activity

Rates per 10,000 children, as well as the number of children known to children’s social care, have increased. This signifies that the rises in activity are over and above that which might be expected from the growth in the child population alone.



Figure 5 - Rates per 10,000 0-17 population in 2017/18

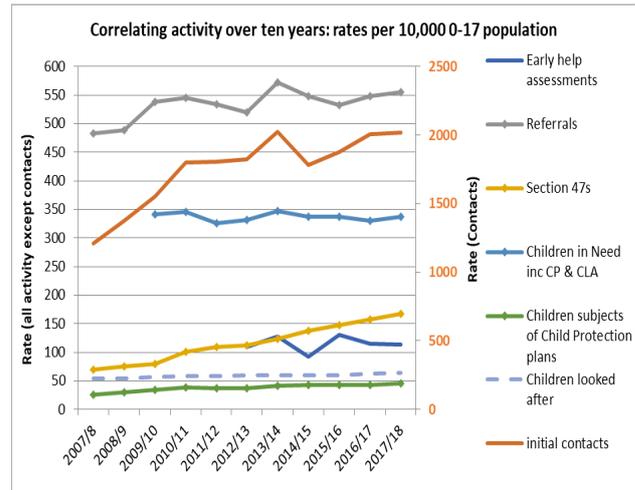


Figure 6 - Correlating activity over ten years

Over the ten-year period covered by the six phases of ADCS Safeguarding Pressures research, there have been significant increases in initial contacts (+78%), referrals (+22%), section 47s (+159%), children subjects of child protection plans (+87%) and children looked after (+24%) (see figure 1). Increases in 2017/18 have been greater than the previous year.

Nationally published data (DfE, 2017) evidences that approximately twice as many children will be receiving services at any time during the year than the commonly used snapshot figure at 31st March. As with all ‘snapshot’ figures about service users, the number at 31st March does not represent the volume of work undertaken across children’s social care during the 12-month period.

Initial Contacts

An estimated **2.4 million initial contacts** were received in England 2017/18. Both the number, and the rate per 10,000 of the 0-17 population, have increased across social care activity.

Referrals

We estimate that **659,550 referrals** were made to children's social care in 2017/18.

Police remain the largest referrers (28.6%) to children's social care, although referrals from Education have almost doubled in the past ten years, with fewer 'self-referrals' from a child/parent. The most prevalent reasons for referral are abuse or neglect (55%), which have almost doubled in the past ten years as well.

In the 137 responding authorities, the most prevalent factors in assessment following referral were:

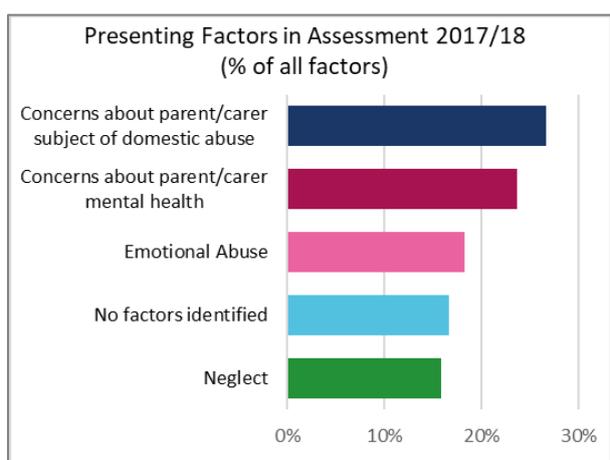


Figure 7 - Presenting factors in assessment

Children in Need

There were an estimated **400,300 children in need** in England at 31st March 2018.

In responding authorities, 64% of children in need episodes in the year were closed within three months of being referred. Many authorities are funding families in need because the family has no recourse to

public funds; 37 authorities reported a collective spend between them of £29.4m on 1,867 such families in 2017/18.

Child Protection

There were an estimated **198,900 section 47 enquiries** during the year and **54,700 children subjects of a child protection plan** in England at 31st March 2018.

Section 47 enquiries and the number of children who are subjects of child protection plans continue to increase year-on-year. There are variations between authorities, although twice as many saw an increase rather than a decrease in the number of plans. There are now more older children (age 16-17) becoming subjects of a plan. Half of all child protection plans are categorised as Neglect, an increase from previous phases of this research.

This demand for services is a result of various and often entrenched societal and individual factors that authorities cannot stem, despite creative transformation programmes, new ways of working and a clear focus on 'getting it right' for all children.

Children Looked After

There were an estimated **75,480 children looked after** in England at 31st March 2018.

Legislative changes, new case law and insufficiency of placements for children

looked after have been challenging for local authorities.

Transformation programmes, including edge of care services, were reported to be effective in meeting children’s needs earlier, although there is recognition that change takes time, and there will always be some children and young people for whom care is the best option.

Not all local authorities experienced an increase in the number of children looked after in 2017/18. Of the 119 authorities providing data in both phases 5 and 6, the number of children looked after at 31st March increased in 88 authorities (74%) and reduced in 31 authorities (26%).

12.7% of children starting to be looked after in 2017/18 had been looked after previously. More children are looked after due to Abuse or Neglect than for any other reason.

Placements

Almost three quarters of all children looked after at 31st March 2018 lived with foster carers. 53% of all children looked after were in placements provided by their own local authority, and 34% in private provision such as external residential and Independent Fostering Agency placements.

The cost, and lack of suitable placements is one of the biggest challenges and financial pressures cited by respondents, despite commissioners continuing to develop partnerships and find solutions. This is particularly the case for older children, who often have more complex needs and

interlocking vulnerabilities, sometimes resulting in need for welfare secure or tier 4 mental health placements – the availability of which are severely limited.

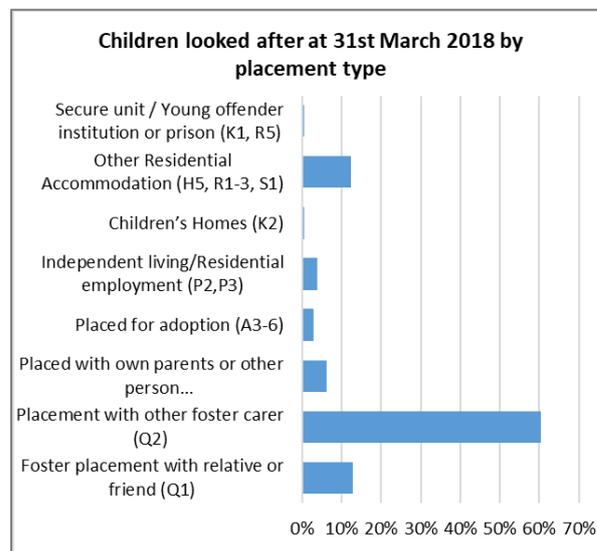


Figure 8 - Children looked after by placement type

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

There were 3,987 UASC in 133 responding LAs, which extrapolates to **4,390 UASC** in England and represents an increase of 60% from 2010/11.

The variation between local authorities in the numbers of UASC supported is evident in the age profile of children looked after; the majority of UASCs are aged 16 or 17 when they arrive in this country.

Some local authorities have seen a reduction in UASCs and some an increase in numbers due to the implementation of the voluntary National Transfer Scheme. Spontaneous arrivals of UASC continue, with new entry points emerging, such as Poole and Portsmouth, bringing new pressures for those local authorities affected.

For the first time in phase 6, we collected information about the number of UASC who are care leavers at 31st March 2018. 124 authorities reported 4,202 care leavers – a rate of 4.34 per 10,000 and **5,150** extrapolated to all England. UASC care leavers numbers were reported by respondents to represent a huge pressure given that Home Office funding level for UASC care leavers is significantly lower than for UASC aged 0-17.

The challenges of meeting the specific and often complex needs of asylum seeking and refugee children have been exacerbated by insufficient levels of Home Office funding. LGA evidenced that in 2015/16, local authorities spent £113m on support for UASC which is £48million over budget. ADCS estimated that the level of under-funding is in the region of £3.4m per 100 UASC per year (ADCS, 2016). This represents an unsustainable financial burden on local authorities which is affecting their ability to participate in the voluntary National Transfer Scheme now and in the future despite a desire to help.

Permanency

There were an estimated **4,000 children adopted**, and **4,720 children made subjects of a Special Guardianship, Residence or Child Arrangement Order** in England during 2017/18.

Whilst timescales for care proceedings have improved over recent phases of this research, respondents reported differences between the court's view and local authority plans for children, which sometimes meant

less time was available to undertake robust assessments of prospective permanence carers, particularly special guardians.

Children Ceasing to be Looked After and Care Leavers

More children leave care to return home to live with parents than for any other reason (26%). However, the proportion of children who do so has reduced by a third since 2010/11. Fewer children are adopted (12.8%) but a greater proportion (15.1%) found permanence through Child Arrangement Orders (CAO) or Special Guardianship Orders (SGO).

An estimated **36,000 children are supported on either a CAO or SGO**. The rate per 10,000 of the 0-17 population for children supported on either Order has increased by 81% between 2012/13 and 2017/18. Rates vary considerably between authorities and regions. For example, the North East supports the highest rate of SGOs (41) and the West Midlands the lowest (13) per 10,000 of the 0-17 population.

There were an estimated **36,672 care leavers aged 18 to 21** at 31st March 2018.

Local authorities estimate there are a **further 3,247 care leavers aged 22 to 25** (extrapolated to all England). However, the actual number of care leavers aged 22 to 25 to be supported under the new duties in the Children & Social Work Act 2017, is likely to be significantly higher, as these data relate to those that the authorities were supporting at 31st March 2018, prior to the new legislative provisions coming into effect.

Whilst the principles of the Act are welcomed, the level of new burdens funding from government was insufficient.

Adolescents

115 respondents described the changing needs and demand on service provision in their local authority for adolescents, stating that children as young as 11-15 appear to be at risk of, or are experiencing abuse generally associated with an older age group. Better identification and understanding of risk factors have contributed to the continued, and in some cases escalating, concerns around adolescents. Young people are presenting with multiple and increasingly complex needs including challenging behaviour; emotional distress; mental ill-health, alcohol and substance misuse.

Adolescents coming to the attention of early help and social care services principally do so due to child criminal exploitation, sexual exploitation, going missing from home or care, contextual safeguarding risks, online abuse and exploitation and homelessness.

Of particular concern is the increase in the number of young people at risk of CSE. There were an estimated **21,685 children potentially at risk of CSE** in 2017/18 equating to a rate of 18.3 per 10,000 of the 0-17 population compared to a rate of 15.7 in phase 5. Local authorities are developing specialist services to reduce risk and better meet the needs of vulnerable adolescents.

The impact of the loss of youth services over the last ten years as a result of funding cuts to local government, was cited as a reason why local authorities are seeing increased demand for services.

Repeat Activity

There was evidence from local authorities of reasons for increases or decreases in repeat activity (known as the 'revolving door') stemming from both child's need and systemic factors.

Many authorities described a regime of routinely undertaking audits and analysis to understand trends, factors and practice behind repeat activity (such as re-referrals, subject of repeat child protection plan, re-entering care, etc), and putting appropriate strategies in place, where possible.

Reasons for the revolving door of repeat activity were often as a result of neglect, domestic abuse and other trigger trio factors indicating that families with chronic difficulties are returning to the local authority repeatedly for help.

Despite best efforts, tackling domestic abuse in a meaningful and sustainable way remains elusive. It is clear that much of the 'revolving door' repeat activity is a result of parental needs not being met. Adult disadvantage continues to impact upon children's outcomes and life chances.

Workforce

Sufficiency of experienced social work staff is one of the biggest challenges for local authorities, despite a great deal of positive activity to recruit, retain and provide professional development for new staff. DfE (DfE, 2018a) state that at 30th September 2017 social work vacancies had increased from 15% in September 2014 to 17% in September 2017, and agency staff rates have remained fairly stable at 16% nationally. These two snapshot figures mask a significant range between authorities from 1% to 50%, due to a range of influencing factors, including inspection outcomes.

Finance

Two years ago, the phase 5 report gave examples of the quantum of budget cuts reported by authorities, and a general view that financial pressures would get worse. There is a growing body of national research which clearly illustrates the pressures local authority children’s services are facing (figure 2).

Local authorities are likely to overspend against the net planned expenditure of £8.03bn in 2018/19 for the totality of children’s services excluding education (DfE, 2018b). The impact of transformation programmes takes time, leadership tenacity and investment to bear fruit.

Whilst time-limited grants such as the DfE Innovation Programme (IP) funding and its Partners in Practice programme are valued, 54 authorities received no additional grant funding from the DfE in this period. There

are concerns about the growing inequality of funding between authorities.

This short-termist approach to children’s services funding is unsustainable, and there is significant concern about what will happen when these time-limited pots of money cease. For example, 75% of respondents stated that their early help services would be cut or reduced, in some instances significantly, in 2020 when the Troubled Families programme and its funding are due to cease.

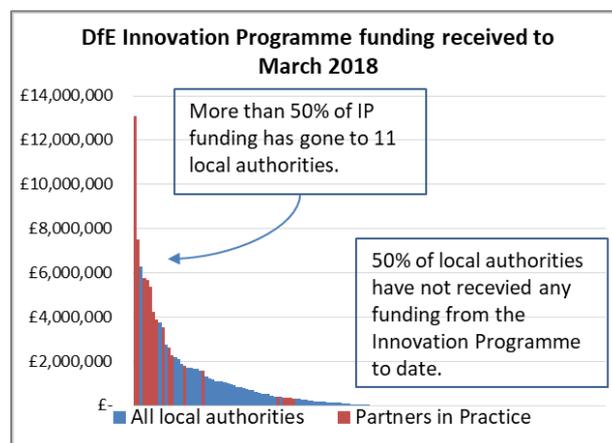


Figure 9 - DfE Innovation Programme funding

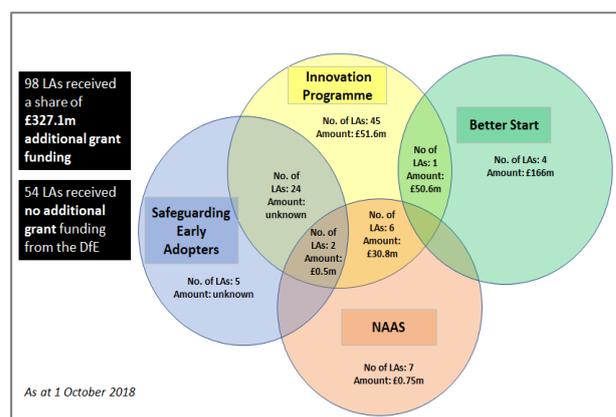


Figure 10 - Summary of four main grants and their recipients

The majority of local authorities have protected children’s social care funding to date. Without that commitment and investment from local Elected Members and Council Leaders, which has sometimes been

to the detriment of other council services, the financial crises for children’s services would be even worse.

For 2018/19, local authorities have an estimated shortfall of an average of 10.4% in their children’s services budget. Set against the 2018/19 published S251 budget of £8.03 billion, this would mean an additional £840 million each year before inflation is required simply to ‘steady the ship’. This budget shortfall is current, very real, and is not going away as it is driven by demand-led services which local authorities must fund by law.

Top four current funding pressures (in order) are:

1. Placement costs for children looked after. For one authority, one placement for one young person cost £1million this year.
2. SEND and High Needs Block spending pressures, including transport. A small unitary authority was predicting an overspend of £1million on transport alone due to increases in the number of children eligible and unit costs.
3. High number of families who were ‘tipping over’ into the threshold for children’s social care due to the impact of welfare reforms.
4. Continued spend on agency social work staffing due to lack of experienced social workers. One authority is spending £3.5million on agency staff despite a 30% reduction in use.

Direction of Travel – What Next?

There is less optimism about the future than in phase 5. Of the 109 respondents, 64% predicted a general continued rise in safeguarding activity and numbers of children, young people and families needing the help of children’s services. This compares to 40% two years ago, despite examples provided as part of the research of some innovative and enabling approaches within local areas and regions to manage demand and improve outcomes.

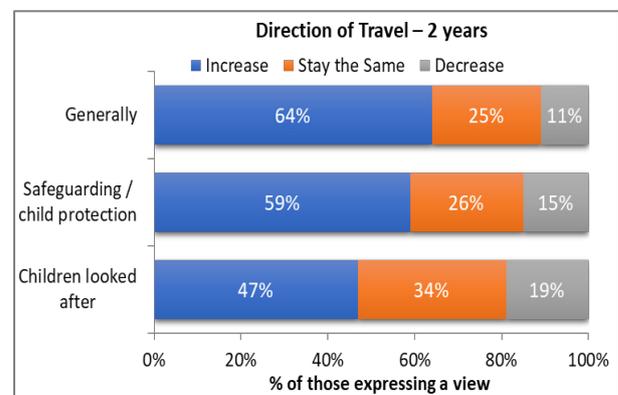


Figure 11 - Direction of travel

There is no evidence to suggest that levels of need will reduce across safeguarding and looked after children’s services across England. Authorities said that future demand would depend on the ability to stabilise and re-build early help, maintain strong leadership and system-wide approaches.

“The optimist in me says we have a transformation programme in place that in two years time will deliver ...That’s the best-case scenario. The worst-case scenario is just about the opposite of that. If we can’t secure partner buy-in, if there are other pressures in the system that we don’t know yet it leaves the Council in very significant difficulties – South East LA

We can predict from analysis of historical trends and population projections, new burdens and new duties and that the pressure on existing services will increase at a higher rate than previously experienced.

Current and projected prevalence

The forecast calculations below are based purely on linear regression of historical data as the most basic and commonly used predictive analysis (i.e. a forecast based on trends).

- **An increase in referrals to children's social care**

Although numbers have fluctuated there could be 716,000 referrals by 2022/23, over 100,000 more than there were in 2007/8. However, greater changes in the number of referrals between local authorities more recently makes forecasts less accurate.

- **There will be more children in need**

There could be over 750,000 children in need at any point in the year by 2022/23. Whilst there does appear to have been a stabilising of numbers of children in need over the past three years, the increase in population, diminishing ability to step down to early help because of cuts to services, and contributory factors above would appear to suggest that this 'levelling' over the past three years is unlikely to continue. Given the increase in the number of children within this CiN cohort (which includes child protection and looked after), we could assume that those children in this cohort who are receiving services under Section 17 only may reduce.

- **We will have more children who are subjects of Section 47 enquiries**

The increase in the number of Section 47 enquiries is the most dramatic change in historical and projected further increase. It is also the most accurate forecast (R^2). A forecast of over 250,000 in 2022/23 – over 180,000 more Section 47s being completed based on this trajectory of consistent year-on-year increases.

- **We will have more children subjects of a child protection plan**

The predicted increase in the number of children who are the subjects of a child protection plan at the 31st March each year is forecast to be 56% from 2008/09 levels. There could be over 66,000 children who are subjects of child protection plans by 31st March 2023.

- **We will have more children looked after**

There could be 81,000 children looked after at 31st March 2023 – 20,000 more than there were at the beginning of Safeguarding Pressures research in 2007.

These basic forecasts, based purely on historical trends, confirm a national picture of more children in the system without factoring in the demand variables described above. These forecasts also assume no change (for better or for worse) in the wider societal determinants of family distress.

However, the complexity and differential influence of these factors between local authorities cannot be under-estimated. For example, the Institute of Fiscal Studies (Hood and Waters, 2017) estimates that the total number of children living in poverty

will increase to five million by 2020/21, but the impact will be to differing extents in different local authorities.

Conclusion

The evidence within this report provides a compelling picture of historical, current and projected demand pressures based not only from a local authority children's service perspective, but triangulated and summarised with a significant amount of other published research and evidence.

We conclude, in line with much other research and evidence, that the increase across all aspects of children's social care, despite early help services, arise from:

- Wider societal determinants linked to poverty
- New and greater risks to children and young people such as County Lines and other contextual safeguarding risks
- An increased number of UASC
- More care leavers as a result of the increase in the number of children looked after and extended care leaver duties to age 25
- A growth in the overall child population
- Additional new duties from legislation and policy.

These wider societal determinants, such as poverty driven by the cumulative impacts of welfare reform, insecure work, and lack of affordable housing, lead to an increased risk of strained, poor-quality family relationships, which in turn increases the risk of poor-quality parenting, parental mental ill-health and emotional distress. The cumulative

impact of these factors affect children's wellbeing, which in turn affect their outcomes and life chances. If these factors are not addressed, and taking into account the projected continued growth in population, then we can expect the number of children and families who require support to continue to grow, unabated.

The ripple effect of pressures in one part of the system, e.g. the pressures experienced by universal services, such as schools or health services, in turn impact on the lives of children to such an extent that they require more intensive levels of support.

Whilst attention is paid nationally to some of these issues, including mental health, national legislation and policy continue to focus in an atomised way on tackling single issues and risks affecting children and families. This disjointed approach at a national level does little to alleviate the risks and disadvantages that children and their families face.

Critical issues which authorities are tackling in their efforts to meet these needs include: difficulty in recruitment and retention of experienced social workers; insufficiency and the cost of placements for children looked after; meeting duties and additional demand from SEND reforms; and, unprecedented funding pressures.

Some authorities, particularly those which have received additional funding from DfE Innovation Programme, have achieved system change and many are implementing innovative and more cost-effective ways to deliver services, which is welcome, but takes time and is not achievable everywhere.

Local authorities have protected and invested in children's services despite devastating cuts to their budgets using reserves or diverting funds from other services, yet we hear that worse impacts may yet be to come. This situation is simply not tenable with many respondents and other sources stating that services can no longer be protected going forward. The tipping point has been reached.

In terms of the future, there is a sense that authorities have been constantly re-designing and re-configuring services to meet needs and manage the growth in demand. They have done so whilst maintaining, passionately, a clear focus on children and their families at the heart of services. In order to stop the cycle, we are seeing, and start to reduce demand and support children and families when they need it most, local authority children's services must be resourced to allow for a focus on prevention. Change of this magnitude takes time, more time than a parliamentary cycle. This is a challenge that the government cannot ignore as we enter the next Spending Review period.

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

ADCS is the national leadership
association in England for statutory
directors of children's services and
their senior management teams



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