

# **ASSOCIATION OF DIRECTORS OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES Ltd**

## **SAFEGUARDING PRESSURES PROJECT: RESULTS OF DATA COLLECTION Executive Summary**

### **1. Introduction**

Safeguarding related pressures on local authority children's services departments has been a subject of much discussion and media attention since the death of Baby Peter was reported in November 2008. At its annual policy seminar in February 2010, the ADCS Council of Reference discussed the disparate information requests made to local authorities from a variety of sources to try and evidence these pressures, as well as recent media coverage which did not always report accurate data. ADCS agreed the importance of having robust, recent, national data to evidence changes in safeguarding activity and supported by the National College, are undertaking a project to evaluate the impact of increased child protection and safeguarding activities and budget pressures associated with those increases. This data report forms the first phase of this work.

### **2. Data Collection Methodology & Response Rates**

ADCS sent a request for data to all Directors of Children's Services on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2010 with a short deadline for response and additional communication to maximise response rates was undertaken. The request centred on intake and referral work as well as child protection, looked after children numbers, court work and staffing, to evidence what changes there have been in the volume of safeguarding work since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2007. Collection of other data was desirable but the size of request was kept as minimal as possible for a number of reasons.

Responses were received from 105 local authorities in England (69%), covering 73% of the England Under 18 population<sup>1</sup> – just over eight million children and young people.

### **3. Results**

The full initial report provides national analysis of the data collected. Additional analysis by region and type of authority will follow with any further analysis required. When looking at change over time (eg increase in referrals), the two quarters Oct-Dec 2007 and Oct-Dec 2009

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<sup>1</sup> Source: ONS, Population Estimates Unit.

have been used to take into account a wide enough period pre- and post-reporting of the Baby Peter case and limit any effect of seasonal variances. Not all authorities provided full 3 year data for every activity and the number of authorities included in analysis is given after each activity below.

**Initial Contacts:** There was an increase of 24.6% in the number of initial contacts in the two years from Oct-Dec 2007 (155,921) to Oct-Dec 2009 (194,286). Only 18 authorities have shown a decrease in number of initial contacts, often by very small variances. 53 local authorities had an increase of more than 10%. (*76 local authorities*)

**Referrals:** There was a 16.5% increase in the number of referrals between Oct-Dec 2007 (74,722) to Oct-Dec 2009 (87,026). This represents an increase per 10,000 Under 18 population from 467 in 2007/8 to 497 in 2008/9 and 406 in the first nine months of this year. 23 authorities saw a decrease in number of referrals and one authority reported a 269% increase in referrals. The total number of referrals in the first three quarters of 2009/10 across the 93 local authorities is 283,143. A rough aggregation<sup>2</sup> to all England gives an estimate of 447,265 referrals in England for the first nine months of 2009/10.

**Section 47 Enquiries:** The number of Section 47 Enquiries increased by 21.3% in the two years from Oct-Dec 2007 (10,371) to Oct-Dec 2009 (12,575). This represents an increase from 68 per 10,000 Under 18 population during 2007/8 to 74 in 2008/9 and 61 in the first nine months of 2009/10. Some local authorities saw a significant increase with 16 local authorities reporting in excess of 100% increase in the two years. (*86 authorities*)

**Initial Assessments:** There was a 23.4% increase in the number of initial assessments completed from Oct-Dec 2007 (48,150) to Oct-Dec 2009 (59,438). 11 local authorities show a decrease between the two time points but most of these report an increase overall in the past three years. 10 local authorities report an increase of over 100%. The number of initial assessments per 10,000 Under 18 population has risen from 287 for the full year 2007/8 to 317 in 2008/9 and 268 for the first nine months of this year (*92 authorities*)

The total number of initial assessments in the first three quarters of 2009/10 across 93 local authorities providing data for this period is 177,663. A rough aggregation<sup>3</sup> to all England gives an estimate of 294,622 in England for the first nine months of 2009/10.

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<sup>2</sup> Calculation: total respondents population to total England population (ONS mid year estimates 2008).

**Children subject of Initial Child Protection Conference:** There was an increase of 20.0% in the number of children who were the subjects of an initial child protection conference from Oct-Dec 2007 (7,017) to Oct-Dec 2009 (8,420). Eight authorities show a decrease of more than 20%. National data is slightly skewed by one local authority which reduced the number of children who were the subjects of an initial child protection conference from over 1000 in 2007/8 to 362 in the first nine months of 2009/10 and a reduction of 65% between the two analysis periods. (92 authorities)

**Children subject of a child protection plan:** There was an increase of 32.9% in the number of children who were subjects of a child protection plan at December 2009 (from 17,731 to 23,559). 72 local authorities reported an increase of more than 10% and 28 local authorities showed an increase of more than 50%. Only five local authorities show a decrease of more than 10% and none of these display significant variances overall. The total number of children subject to a child protection plan per 10,000 Under 18 population at the end of the period showed an increase from 25.4 to 33.7. (95 authorities)

**Legal orders & legal status:** Across 83 local authorities there was an increase in Police Protection (39%), Emergency Protection Orders (32%) and Interim Care Orders (38%) between Oct-Dec 2007 and Oct-Dec 2009. However, the number of Full Care Orders reduced by 8%. This reduction is significant when considered against CAFCASS Quarter 2 2009/10 figures which indicates a sharp rise in care applications in July to September 2009.

**Children starting to be looked after:** There was a 17.2% increase in the number of children starting to be looked after in the quarters Oct-Dec 2007 and Oct-Dec 2009 (4,315 and 5,057 respectively during each of the three month periods). 45 authorities had increases of 20%+, with 19 reporting increases in excess of 50%. The 16 authorities with a reduction are generally smaller authorities whose numbers fluctuate between quarters. 15,001 children and young people started to be looked after in 92 responding authorities in the first nine months of this year equating to a rough aggregating to all England of 23,848. (92 authorities)

**Children looked after at end of period:** The number of children looked after at 31 December 2009 (39,585) was 8.1% higher than at 31 December 2007 (36,625). Only five local authorities reported a decrease of more than 10%. 39 authorities increased by more than 10% and five show an increase of more than 20%. (93 local authorities). There were 39,585 children looked after at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2009 within 93 local authorities.

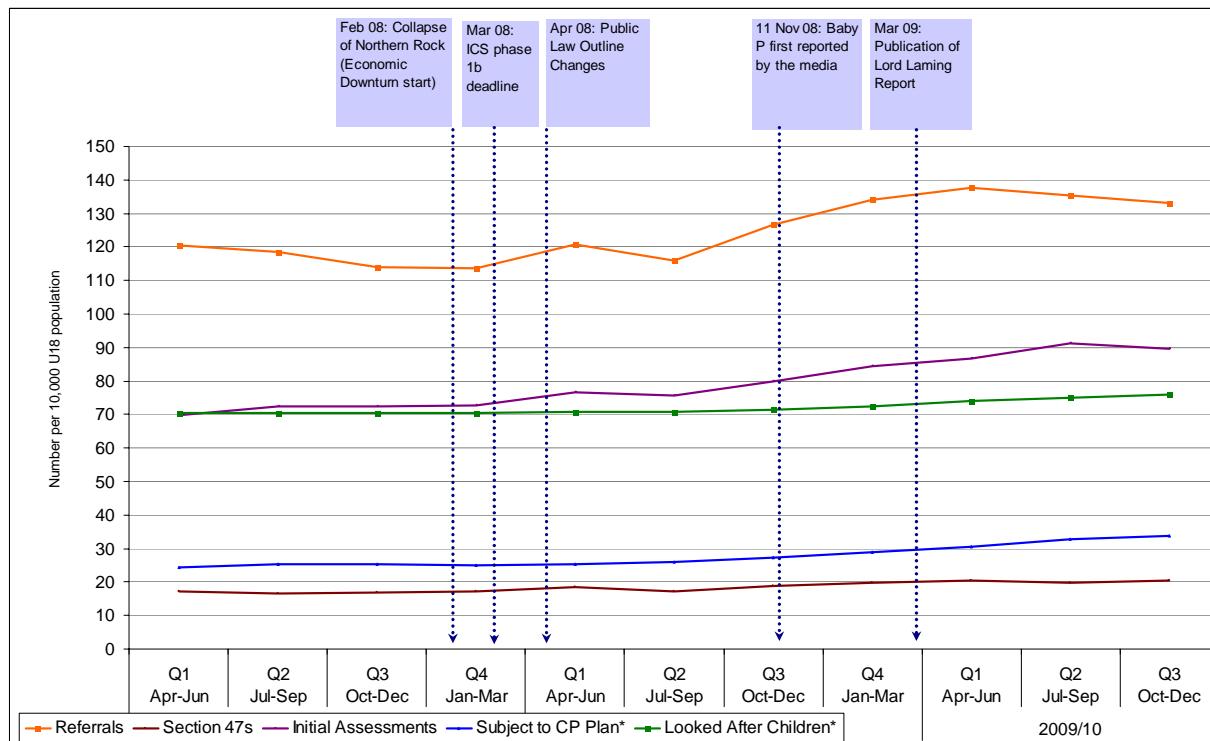
**Staffing:** 23 local authorities had difficulty providing staffing data for a number of reasons and reaching a robust figure for how many staff carry out initial work proved exceptionally difficult. 62 local authorities were able to provide complete quarterly data which showed an increase of 12.9% in the total number of qualified worker posts (team managers, deputy managers and social workers) between 2008 and December 2009. However, these numbers are slightly skewed by nine authorities whose staffing establishment rose by between 50% and 200%, mostly agency staff. At December 2009, 10.5% of team managers, deputy managers and social workers posts were covered by agency staff.

52% of respondents had one or more vacancies of either team manager, deputy manager or qualified social worker and 35% of respondents had non-social work post vacancies (ie social work assistants, administration etc). 12.5% of all posts across the reporting authorities were vacant but it is not clear what proportion of the reported vacancies were covered by the agency staff. In eight authorities, the number of staff decreased between 2008 and December 2009. There has been a 4.2% increase in other worker posts (social care assistants, administration staff etc), between 2008 and December 2009. Local authority respondents report a total aggregated qualified social work and non-social work staff posts increase of 10.6%.

In general commentary, respondents also reflected that there has been an increase in the complexity of the work as well as the increase in the volume of activities. Some reported difficulty in producing some of the data such as staffing and initial contacts, the latter not being part of any statutory reporting requirement. Nine authorities had difficulty reporting during implementation of new IT systems and for a very few, local government re-organisation meant lack of historic data. One respondent commented that the biggest impact on front line teams has been the delay in care applications being completed, although the number has not increased. The authority stated that the average time taken to complete care proceedings is beyond 12 months and is caused by delays in appointing children's guardians and increased use by the Courts of specialist and independent assessments.

A local authority noted the strain that this increased number of children starting to be looked after has put on foster care placements and the financial implications of needing to use agency foster care placements.

The chart below provides a summary of the quarterly safeguarding activity data (the number per 10,000 Under 18 population) together with significant events. However, a health warning must be issued that it would be inappropriate to assign any cause without further investigation.



\* total number at end of period.

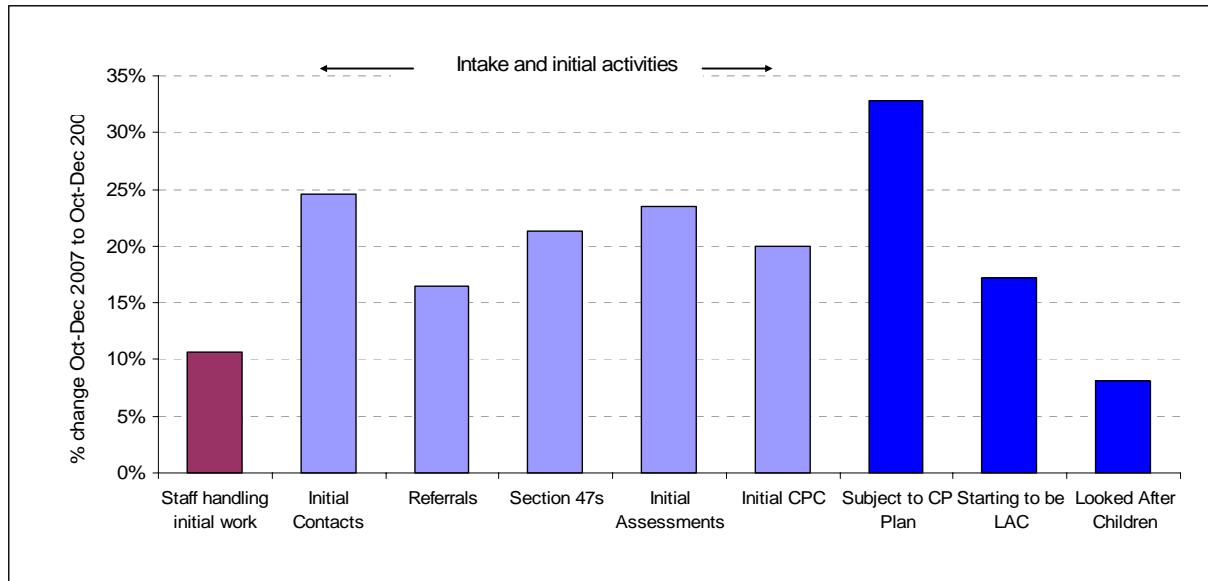
#### 4. Conclusion

The ADCS data collection analysis within this report is robust in terms of representing a good proportion of the England Under 18 population and number of local authorities. However, although we can make assumptions about the whole of England but cannot truly represent the findings of the survey to an England total.

There has been a significant increase in all activities with no apparent pattern to geographic location or type of authority, except granting of Full Care Orders, over the period covered by the data collection, against a relatively static population (0.1% increase from 2006 to 2008 mid-year population estimates and a projected growth of 0.01% in 2009)<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup>

2008-based National Population Projections Published 18 November 2009



Although reporting staffing across authorities is complex, it appears that the average rate of growth of social work teams included in the survey to undertake the work required (10.6%) has been insufficient to meet the additional demand.

We have provided robust evidence of a national increase across a wide range of initial children's social work activities through this study and initial work already undertaken on calculating resource implications will be expanded in the next phase of work by ADCS. This will bring together knowledge from other work in this area; explore in more detail resource implications, test some of the hypotheses to identify reasons for the increases and subsequently how it can be effectively addressed.

HM Governments (2010 p25) state that "Access to high quality data is fundamental in supporting planning, performance and improvements for safeguarding". The data provided by this survey will assist the ADCS in taking these next steps.

C Brooks

15 April 2010